

HOW ANCIENT SINHALESE AND TAMIL TIES HAD BEEN CORDIAL

atikana) and others of Tamil origin. This suggests that not only was there a sizeable community of Tamils from such early times but that they also enjoyed the tolerance and friendship of the Sinhalese community.

Consider the profound impact Dravidian language and culture has had on Sinhalese society: Such influences became marked with the Chola conquest of the island under Rajendra 1 in the 11th century and reached its peak during the Kotte period in the 15th and 16th centuries. Dravidian influence was also enhanced during the reign of the Nayakkar dynasty that occupied the Kandyan throne from 1739-1815.

Language is crucial to cultural inheritance. Although the Sinhala language did largely preserve its inherited Aryan vocabulary, it has borrowed vastly from Tamil both at lexical and grammatical levels. In his book "Comprehensive Grammar of the Sinhalese Language"(1891), Abraham Mendis Gunasekera has listed about 400 loan words of Tamil origin in Sinhala. Hisselle Dhammaratna in his " Sinhala Dravida Balapem"(1963) has pointed out the profound impact of Tamil grammatical forms on Sinhala. Common vocables of Tamil origin in Sinhala include 'andu', 'ottu', 'oppu', 'sandu', 'kulapu', 'vilangu', 'tuvakku', 'porondu', 'salli', 'vandi', 'padi', 'poi', 'kuli', 'kodi', 'pali' (revenge), 'kappam', and 'vattam'. Some Tamil forms have entered the Sinhala language as verbs compounded with a Sinhala suffix. An example is 'kolla-kanna' and 'pattu' in 'pattu-karanna'. Many Sinhala kinship terminology such as 'appachchi', 'ayya', 'akka', 'malli', 'nangi', 'massina' and 'munubura' are also of Tamil origin.

In other aspects of Sinhala life, too, Tamil influence is obvious: Even our national costume is of South Indian origin and not the North Indian version. So

is the 'hette' or jacket worn by Sinhalese women. A good part of the jewellery worn by Sinhala women has had their origin in South India. An example is the thali or marriage badge tied round the neck of the bride by the groom. We find this referred to in Sinhalese literature as tella. Then there is the 'todu' or large ear studs and nagawadam or earrings bearing the figure of a serpent worn by Sinhalese women in olden days. Again, take Sinhala cuisine and one sees similar Tamil influences. 'Appa' and 'pittu' is of Tamil origin. Tamils of Jaffna did not much take to this food although in South India they are known as 'appam' and 'pittu'.

There is evidence to show that Buddhist viharas flourished in the Chola country during the medieval period and that Sinhalese Buddhist monks maintained intimate relations with their Tamil co-religionists. According to the Culavamsa, following the Magha invasion in the 13th century many Maha Theras went across to the land of the Cholas and Pandyas and that it were Chola Bikkhus who assisted king Parakramabahu 11 in his efforts to restore Buddhism in the country after Magha's expulsion. An inscription in the Abhagiri complex points out that there had been Tamil Buddhists in ancient Sri Lanka. Hindu religious ideas such as the Pattini cult exerted a lot of influence on Sinhalese Buddhist society. It is strange

I was pleasantly surprised to read recently that Sinhalese-Tamil relations in the past had been more collaborative than distant or hostile. This is something that we must build on if we are to ensure lasting peace in the island.

In our school days, when we read history the emphasis was about Tamil invasions from South India especially under the Chola rulers. We were told how these invaders destroyed Buddhist temples and the great icons of Sinhala civilization. It was made out that King Dutugemunu was the prototype Sinhala hero that saved the Sinhalese nation from the Tamils by slaying the Tamil leader Elara in battle. The Elara-Dutugemunu battle was not a communal one but a simple power struggle where Sinhala soldiers, too, fought on Elara's side and Tamil soldiers fought on Dutugemunu's side.

It is well known that the presentation of history necessarily reflects the bias of the presenter and that it is, therefore, hard to be objective. At least if we were taught this inescapable fact those days, we would have been cautious not to swallow all the rubbish that had been taught in the name of history.

Now we know that the military incursions from the Chola empire in South India beginning from about the 2nd century BC were not targeted at annihilating the Sinhala race from the face of the earth but that they were plain and simple attempts in empire building where the idea was to vanquish everything that stood for those who put up a defence. Throughout world history, invasions of this nature had been a fact of political life. They often led to major demographic, social, and cultural changes that left a lasting imprint in the evolution of the affected societies. That same historical process turned Sri Lanka from a largely Sinhala- Buddhist homogeneity to a multicultural society that it today is.

We are all aware how Sinhala kings went to South India to find brides to fill a harem. That is the lighter side of our historical experience. Let's look at some of the Tamil influences that have been absorbed into Sinhala culture. There had to be a major Tamil influence considering the fact that Tamil presence in our country goes back to very early times. Ancient Brahmi inscriptions in Sinhala Prakrit dated to the 3rd century BC refers to Tamil householders (Dameda gahap-



Shyamon Jayasinghe



that cultural artefacts like the Pattini cult took hold of the Sinhala Buddhist mind whereas they were in opposition to the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhist temples have a place of worship for Hindu gods like Vishnu, Siva, etc.

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For such a large- scale adoption of Tamil cultural forms by the Sinhalese to take place, there must have been considerable cooperation, camaraderie, and friendship between the two communities over the years. The question is what happened to that heritage of cordiality. At what point did it take an opposite turn? Historians and PhD students should research these questions to find the answers. My question is: "Isn't this enough evidence that the Sinhalese and Tamils communities can be forged to live in amity and harmony in the future?" This national exercise would require a bit of social engineering. Without a rebuilding of the ancient heritage of trust and goodwill between the Tamils and Sinhalese nothing can come out of constitutional and other proposals to set things right.

LAKSHMAN WELIVITIYA

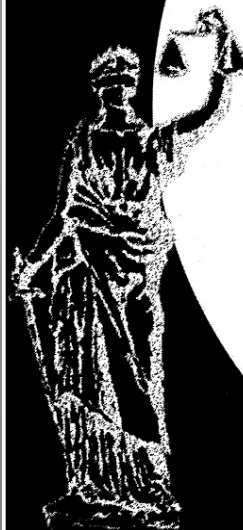
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4/766-768, Springvale Road,
Mulgrave, Victoria 3170
Tel: (03) 9574 8492
Fax (03) 9574 8492
Mob: 0431 685 479
lwelivitiya@yahoo.com.au



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