



RODIYAS IN HISTORY

Of Rodiya life prior to the Kandyan period, we have little exceeding great beauty" is generally spoken of as a Rodiya, the daughter of the chief of Hettoli. Salirajakumara, the son of king Duttagamani, lives in Ceylon history as the prince who "cared nothing for kingly rule", "greatly enamoured of Asokamala devi" in the words of the Mahavamsa. The event having taken place during the reign of king Duttagamani (101-77 B.C.) gives us a definite date . Though Ceylon had become a Buddhist country the social traditions of the earlier Varnashrama Dharma of the Hindu System died hard, and the Asokamala incident sheds on the position which the Chandala the lowest social factor-occupied at the time. The next mention of the Chandala is during the short reign of king Ilanga who ruled from 95-101., when the king in punishment of the misconduct of the clan of the Lambakannas commanded them to make a road to the Maha Stupa; and "he set Chandalas to be their overseers". Centuries later the Chandalas figure prominently the reign of Vijaya Bahu IV (1271-73 A.D.) who in embarking on the rebuilding of Pulathinagara (Pollonoruva) brought together workers including "the Chandalas who undertook work for hire". This reveals them in the role of men were engaged for hire labourers in the modern sense and working for hire as they did, they could not have been despicable, however low they may have been in the social

scale. This is valuable evidence of the condition of the so-called Chandala class in the century A.D. All mention of the name Chandalas vanishes from subsequent Ceylon history. The name itself is an echo of the Social System which had gained a foothold in the Island before the introduction of Buddhism: and though the Chandala has long ceased to exist, on the social horizon has appeared the people now answering to the name Rodiya, the characterization of whom we are left to surmise. Though there has been a disposition to consider the Chandala and the Rodiya as one and the same, I do not think we are justified in jumping to such a conclusion. The Chandalas as such, from the little we are told of them, have had nothing of the cultural outlook of the Rodiya, nor of the latter's tribal mode of life. Let us therefore take leave of the Chandalas. Mahavamsa, which makes no mention of the Rodiya, refers to a class hunters luddako or luddo- in the time of king Duttagamini. What light the term luddako or throws on the subject of the Rodiya will be discussed in its proper place. That the degradation of the Rodiya took place in the remote past is ordinarily assumed, though if we date it from the time of Parakramabahu I (1153-1186 A.D.) as has been surmised, it has an antiquity of only not more eight centuries. And when we find orthodox as expressed in the Janavamsa (about 15th century), against the Rodiya, with theories to buttress its attitude, we may

well conclude that the exiled existence must have been in operation some time before this chronicle was written. The tradition preserved in the Ratnavalli Kavi is our only basis to go upon, and this tradition as you scrutinize it, appears to be more of a religious and cultural character than historical. As I have subjected the Ratnavalli Kavi to a detailed examination elsewhere in this paper, nothing more need be said of it here, except to remark that as a tradition it is one of the best marked traditions of the Island, may be confused but not forgotten, as has been remarked of it. To resume therefore the purely historical aspect, Rodiya is a conspicuous by its scant mention in Ceylon history, apart from legends, until we come to the Kandyan days, when we upon the Rodiya in a hierarchy of occupational social set-up with the Rodiya striking the bottom in the Kandyan feudal system. The little we are told of the mode of handling the kandyan days and their reaction to such treatment, is easily recapitulated mainly based on D'oyly. The existing Rodiya Villages of the Wannai, and of Kurugandeniya, Udugalapitiya and Koskote, in the Kandyan district, and four settlements in Uva, were all Villages enduring from days of old. In the Kandy districts, the administration of the Rodiya Villages was vested in the Adigars, who seem to have exercised their function through the medium of the Chief prison Guard, the Kankanama, and the guards subordinate to him. In his hands rested the appointment of the Huluvaliyas or the chief man of each Rodiya Village, whose responsibility it was to supply ropes for trapping elephants, the best and largest rope being made by the Huluvaliya himself. The lesser Rodyias made ropes of lower standard, and whips for State use.

The Kandyan days were noted for the sumptuary laws. Among such are the which permitted the Rodyias to erect only a sloping shed for a hut, a piassa, and not a fully covered over his head. They could not cross a river by a means of a boat, or walk over King's Villages (gabada gama), or over a bund of a field belonging to the king. The mode of inflicting penalties followed a special technique. A Rodiya on being accused of robbery or cattle lifting, the huluvaliya brought it to the notice of the Chief Guard, who on an appointed day accompanied him up to the ferry, beyond which the Rodiya could not go. The accused being present at the place, the charges were heard and the sentence duly pronounced by the Chief Guard; the punishment usually taking the form of the accused being clubbed with thorny sticks, followed by a term of imprisonment in another Rodiya village. Where a number of men of the same Kuppayama was convicted of serious offences, the punishment often took a severe retaliatory, the whole village being subjected to cruel punishments, such as "turning fierce elephants on their Kuppayamas, burning their huts or shooting them like deer or dogs". That this was no fantasy seems evident from the situation during the early days of Ceylon's colonial history, following the Kandyan Convention of 1815. While the authorities were disposed to deal with the criminal or suspect as they would deal with any other, there was the voice of feudalism pressing hard "for permission to order the people to shoot them, agreeable to the ancient customs of the country" — people who were "unworthy of a trial by law or any punishment whort of death by indiscriminate shooting".

Courtesy : Cultural Anthropology of Rodyias

