

## THE YAKSHAS / YAKKHAS

In an earlier discussion about King Ravana it was mentioned a place called Mahiyangana. It was also to Mahiyangana that Lord Buddha visited to preach His sermons to the Yakkha community. This shows that Yakkhas too have had Mahiyangana as one of their major cities, a place where King Ravana too had a palace during his reign.

It can further deduce that the Rakshasas, after the defeat of their King Ravana and in constant fear of their new rulers hid themselves in the jungles and still further changed their clan name from Rakshasas to Yaksha. It is during this time, and precisely on the day Lord Buddha passed away, that a North Indian bandit Prince Vijaya and his seven hundred colleagues, drifted in their sail ship to land in Lanka. On his landing at Thammenna beach, a seaport on the North Western coast of Lanka, he met a noble woman of the land Kuveni by name. Incidentally, the written history of the island that dates back to 543 B. C. begins with the landing of this bandit prince from North India. According to the chronicles when prince Vijaya met Kuveni, she was spinning cotton. This proves that the Yakkhas the descendants of Rakshasas, were a civilized race who wove their own cloths made of cotton. Kuveni had taken Prince Vijaya to her paddy barn (rice storage) and given him and his men sufficient grain to keep them from starving. The prince who cunningly developed an intimacy with Kuveni knew well that Yakkhas, the descendants of King Ravana's regime, would not accept him as the ruler. The Yakkhas, who well remembered saga of the invaders Rama and Lakshmana would not accept Vijaya as the lover of Kuveni, their regional Regina who would sooner or later be their ruler.

The Yakkhas had their own culture and always desired a king or queen of their own to rule them. Lanka had been a center of commerce ever since the island was known. According to 'Māhāwamsa' and 'Deepawansa', two of the oldest chronicles of the country reported that even before the landing of Vijaya, tradesmen from distant countries have visited Thammenna (the port to which prince Vijaya and his followers landed) in 'Thāmba Deepa' (the name used by the tradesmen during that period) in their trading vessels. The 'Naga' clan (seafaring tribe of the island) that spread from Naga Deepa (a small island off the Northern tip of Jaffna and presently named as 'Nainathivu') to Kelaniya (near the present day city of Colombo) had indulged in commerce with the merchants of these foreign vessels. In addition, the reasons Kuveni has showed Prince Vijaya her paddy barn too could have been that she mistook this young foreigner to be a trader from neighbouring country come in search of Lanka's export commodities. Furthermore, the 'Deepa Vasthu', a story in Saddharmalankara, mentions that even prior to Lord Buddha's first visit to Lanka (during the period when Nebuchad Nazzar II of ancient Babylon waged a bloody war against the Kingdom of Judea

and conquered Jerusalem (605-562 B.C.) and took away the Israelites as slaves) the inhabitants of Lanka were living in their well planned cities of Sri Vasthu, Lanka Pura and many other such major cities. They were engaged in agriculture and had the expertise of making their own clothing of cotton. They established themselves as traders and invented an instrument for measuring grain by the name 'Neliya'.

Kuveni, enthralled in a blind love with Prince Vijaya helped the prince to scheme a secret coup to massacre her own people. The occasion was a wedding of a kinswoman of Lankapura, Princess Polāmitta, the daughter of Māha Kālasena, with a royal prince from Laggala in the neighbouring city of Sirisawāththu. The plan was to kill this royal group of Yakkhas at the palace of Māha Kālasena, the Yakkha King during the gathering. This treacherous act went unhindered and after this ignoble act of the massacre of royal group of Yakkhas, Kuveni was left helpless in the hands of Vijaya. He on the other hand kept Kuveni as only his mistress to save any uprising by the native handful of Yakkhas.

With time Kuveni in this helpless position - a creation of her own folly, gave birth to a son named 'Jiva-hātha' and a daughter whom she named 'Disāla'. Vijaya never wanted matters to go any further. Now having eliminated the Yakkha nobility and established his power and rule in the country, he drove away Kuveni and their two children out of the palace into the jungle. He then invited a Princess from Madhura in India whom he crowned as his own queen and himself as King of Lanka.

Kuveni, thus betrayed by her paramour of her own choice walked out of the palace with her two children only to be stoned to death by the remaining Yakkhas hiding in the jungles. The two helpless children were left to live by themselves all alone in the jungles. The folklore says that the present day Veddha community of Sri Lanka is the descendants of the deserted children of Kuveni.

### WHO ARE THE SINHALAYOS? (SINHALESE)

There are many a notion and a version as to the lineage of the Sinhala people. These conclusions are based on facts written as well as unwritten. Some say that part of the Aryan civilization that took root in the Middle Eastern region migrated to the near by lands including India and Lanka. One such civilization of the past is the 'Helnic Civilization' that existed in modern day Iran (Persia). Based on the name 'Helnic', some historians view that people of the same civilization could have been named 'Hela' and the people as 'Helayao' (the early inhabitants of Lanka were known by this name). They point out that those countries in the Middle East region turned into desserts by the actions of the inhabitants; they could have migrated to the East in search of greener pastures and ended in far lands including Lanka.

One other notion that helps a moderate thinker to accept such a migration is noted in "The riddles of the Three Oceans" written by a Russian Scientist who argues out that a mass of land existed in the past from South Lanka up to Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. Later this mass of land submerged to the sea. To support his arguments and statements the author notes,

- Presence of the shallow seabed around this area
- The composition of the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles islands are granite base and are not of coral origin
- Similarity in the geological composition of the major islands in this region
- Island of Madagascar holding closer geographical similarities to Asia than to Africa and many more such clues within the seabed of the Indian Ocean.

Hence, this could have been a possible land route for easy migration from Persia to Lanka.

Furthermore, Mr. Arisen Āhubudu an eminent Sinhala scholar, writer, poet and philosopher, in many of his articles written on the subject has pointed out that the people of Sri Lanka, were those of descendants of Hiranya Kashyapa, Bāli, Thāraaka, Pulasthi, Ravana and others. They were mighty rulers, great warriors, physicians who from time to time represented the Āsura, Rakshasa, Yaksha and Naga clans. All these four clans being of 'Hela' origin, the combination of the four ('Sivu' in Sinhala) Hela clans brought about the 'Sivu + Hela = Si-hela = Sinhala' race.

He has also stated the fact that Vijaya, the bandit prince having landed in this island and enticing the local Princess Kuveni, massacred the Royal Yakkhas of the land in cold blood while at a wedding reception in the palace precincts of Kālasena the Great. Some historians (majority with Indian influence) depict the ancient Rakshasa and Naga clans of Lanka as cannibals and snakes, ignoring the fact that those same people after listening to the preaching of Lord Buddha built up mighty 'Sthupas' in honour of Him at Kelaniya and Mahiyangana. Such a Rakshasa or a Naga clan could never have been mere demons that devoured human flesh or snakes that devoured frogs and dwelt in anthills.

'Rājawaliya' the story of Kings of Lanka states that during the reign of King Tissa of Kelaniya, the sea stood seven 'Gāuwas' (approximately 28 miles) away from the city of Kelaniya. The God's wrath (for the King's action of burning alive an Ārahath by putting him in a boiling pot of oil due to a mistaken identity) that caused the sea to submerge a good coastal region of the kingdom. This great deluge destroyed one hundred thousand villages, nine hundred and seventy fishing settlements, four hundred and seventy pearl divers' villages (leaving only Mannar and Katupiti Madampe of the interior villages).

-Rajawaliya-compilation by B. Gunasekara.

Also Rajawaliya states that during the time of King Ravana too there was submergence of this nature. Mohendajaro-Harappa, one of the oldest civilizations in the Indus valley in India that existed around 4000 B.C. may have co-existed with the Āsura era of Lanka under King Ravana. May be the archaeological findings of ancient Balangoda civilization are the remnants of this Āsura era of Lanka. After Ravana, the natives survived under the rule of King Vibhishana. Then, later during the time of Buddha and when Prince Vijaya landed in Lanka, those whom he massacred, defeated or drove away are also the descendants of the same people of the Balangoda civilization or in other words the descendants of Rakshasa of Ravana era and later named as Yakkhas.

It is quite conceivable and natural to believe that these original inhabitants were ever in struggle with the foreign intruders for their independence and freedom. Vijaya having got down a queen for himself and spouses for his comrades from India might have laid root to the Aryan rule and culture while holding the Rakshasa, Yaksha and Naga people as slaves under them. This struggle to be free them from slavery ended only with the conquest of King Pāndukabhaya who according to the records has received the assistance of a 'Yakkhini' -Chethiya by name and two Yaksha princes during his war waged against his maternal uncles of this Aryan clan. His stronghold was Ritigala (Āritta Pabbatha, a rock fortress), which was also a gathering place of Yaksha people.

The chronicles say that Prince Pandukabhaya whom his uncles schemed on many an occasion to kill was always guarded and saved by two warriors from the Yakkha clan, Chitraraja and Kalawela. He was raised amongst those descendants of Yaksha community and when reaching the age and during the siege of Anuradhapura it was those of Rakshasa and Yakshasa origin that gathered around him and constituted the majority of his army. After crowning himself the King of the land those of Yaksha, Rakshasa and Naga origin that lived in obscurity in Sabaragamuwa area flocked to Anuradhapura to build up the Sinhala regime in Lanka. In addition, the chronicles further say that those who held the fort at Ritigala on behalf of Prince Pandukabhaya were the Yaksha clan, the rightful descendant owners of Lanka.

to be continued.....



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