**MALAYA: WHAT'S IN THE NAME?**

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*Malaya* is a Sanskrit word meaning a range of mountains. It is used to refer to the range of mountains in and adjacent to the Malayalam country (present-day Kerala) which was called Male by the later Greek and early Arabian geographers.\(^1\) The word appears to have been derived from the Dravidian word *mala* (*mala* in Malayalam and *malei* in Tamil).\(^2\) *Mala* means hill or mountain. The people inhabiting the region west of the mountains originally denoted by the Sanskrit word *Malaya* are called Malayalis and their language Malayalam. The country is sometimes referred to by the inhabitants as *malanādu* (hill country). Some of the Arab geographers called it *Malabar* (*mala + harr*, Arabic for continent, or *mala + bār*, Persian for coast and also for kingdom).\(^3\) The Portuguese seem to have accepted this name and given it wide currency.

*Malaiyūr,*\(^4\) the name mentioned in the Tanjore inscription of Rajendra Chola means a hill town, *mala*, hill and *ūr*, town (in Tamil).\(^5\) In South India *ūr* is a common ending for place-names; for instance, names like Chittūr, Manalūr, Malayattūr, Chengannūr.

Most of the names mentioned in the inscription seem to be Tamil or Malayalam. When Sanskrit affixes appear, they are such as would usually be found in compound words in Malayalam.

It does not seem reasonable to assume that though they were indigenous names, they were given a Dravidian form in the inscription. The Dravidian form may have been due to their Dravidian origin, and one can account for this origin if one may reasonably assume that the

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2) Ibid.
4) Could the *Maleonkolon* of *Geographike Hephegesis* be a corruption of *Malayūrkōši, kōši* meaning a cape, as in Dhanuškōši in South India?
5) In Malayalam it would mean a town or village or any locality.
dominant groups in the population of these countries were Dravidian or that their king was of Dravidian origin. If he were a Hinduized native ruler, inclined to Indianise his kingdom, one would expect to find Sanskrit place-names rather than Dravidian ones. Considering all the relevant circumstances, one may safely say that if the place-names indicate anything, they tend to support the assumption that Rajendra Chola led his victorious army against a Chera king and his people.

We may now consider in some detail a few of the place-names. \textit{Palam} in \textit{Māppālam} approximates to the ending in place-names like \textit{Ottappālam} and \textit{Mundupalam}, where \textit{pālam} means a bridge. It could as well be a contraction of \textit{pālayam},\footnote{This would be more in accord with the penultimate consonantal sound in \textit{Māppālam}. Compare place names like \textit{Mēppalayam}.} a camp. Anyway, there is an unmistakable Dravidian touch about the name. The same may be said of most of the other names also. In \textit{Valaippandūru},\footnote{\textit{Valai} may mean an enclosure. It could also be that \textit{Valai}p\textipa{p}an stands for the name of a person. If so, it would mean the town or village established and/or lived in by Valaippan.} \textit{uru} is the same as \textit{ūr} and connotes a locality (town or village). \textit{Valai} may mean an enclosure. It could also be that \textit{Valai}p\textipa{p}an stands for the name of a person. If so, it would mean the town or village established and/or lived in by Valaippan. \textit{Talai}ttak\textipa{k}olam has in it two, if not three, Dravidian words, \textit{tala} (head) and \textit{kolam} (pond).\footnote{In Malay the word is spelt \textit{kolam}.} \textit{Ittai} is the name of a genus of palms distinguished by their pinnate leaves. If the name is split into \textit{talai} (Tamil, head) and \textit{tak\textipa{k}olam}, the second word may stand for \textit{illicium anisatum}. Probably the division of words given first is to be preferred, as many place names end in \textit{kolam} (or \textit{kulam}), for instance \textit{Kāyamkulam} in Kerala and \textit{Teppakulam} in Madras State. In \textit{Ilāmuridēsam}, \textit{dēsam} (Sanskrit, dēsa) is village and \textit{muri}\footnote{\textit{muri} by itself would indicate a division of a district.} is a Malayalam word meaning piece or division. \textit{Ilai} may stand for land or earth. The name may therefore suggest a village formed by a new division of land. \textit{Ilamuri} with a short \textit{a} will mean a tender piece; it may therefore be applied to a division that is newly effected. \textit{Mānakāvatāram}\footnote{K.A. Nilakanta Sastri translated it as "the great Nakkavaram" in his article "Sri Vijaya", \textit{Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient}, vol. 40, 1940, p. 286.} may correspond to the Necuveren of Marco Polo.
and may be the Nicobar Islands. It is of interest to note that the ending varam may be from the Malayalam suffix varam seen in words like adivaram and malavaram (foothills) or it may be from Sanskrit vāra (region) with the addition of the Dravidian ending am. Ilangāsokam may be Langasuka. Ilango, however, was the name of the author of the famous Dravidian epic Silappadikāram. He was the brother of a Chera king. In spite of its obvious suggestion of Lanka (IJam, Ceylon) and its people Ilavan? it is not improbable that Ilangāsokam had some association with the name of the great poet.

Pañyai in Tamil means 'cultivated land.' But the name Panjai may be a corruption of panyya, that is, salable (goods) and may, therefore, stand for a warehouse. As a place name it may denote a place where there was a warehouse.

A discussion of the name Kadāram bristles with difficulties mainly because of all that has been written about it. It would appear that Kadāram and Kidāram could be equated with Kaṭāhanagaram. Kadāram and Kālagam may also stand for the same place, in spite of Coedè's clear misgivings about it. Coedè points out that it is probably because Kadāram means 'a dark brown colour' and Kālagam 'black', that the author of Dīvākarum was induced to identify the two; and Nilakanta Sastri remarks that the employment of synonyms from one and the same or different languages even in referring to proper names is a well-established practice in India. Wheatley's suspicion that there is some substance in Coedè's objection because in a gloss on the Silappadikāram we find mentioned both Kidāraavan aloeswood and silk from Kālagam, may be removed when it is realised that it is not unusual for Indian poets to refer to one and the same thing by different synonymous names in the same poem and sometimes in the same stanza.14

14) This may sometimes be because of the requirements of metre; but sometimes it seems to be merely for variety.
Kalagam and Kadāram, according to Caldwell, are “poetical equivalents” of Karur, which, as Tamil tradition has it, was the ancient capital of the Chera kings. Karur in Tamil means black town. Seeing that Arabian travellers have used both the names Kalāh and Kalābdār, it is not improbable that in Kalagam, the literary or poetic form of Karur, Sanskrit kala (black) was adopted and Tamil akam (interior) indicating a region was added to it. The resulting compound ‘Kalakam’ appeared to approximate to kalagam and the ingenuity of the poets may have gone further and applied to the place concerned synonyms of the word. The Arabian traveller who referred to the place as Kalābdār was probably translating into Arabic or Persian the Tamil-Malayalam akam as barr or bār and affixing it to kāla.

The abundance of Dravidian words in the names of these places would indicate the predominant position the Dravidians had in the new settlements to which they seem to have given names of their own making. If Kalagam is admittedly a poetic equivalent of Karur, it is probable that the people who gave their new capital that name were Cheras. It is unlikely that the English would call a place in the New World by the name of a Dutch town; in fact, New Amsterdam was re-named New York by the English when they took over from the Dutch. Similarly, Kalagam would be an appropriate and new-fangled name for a capital of the Chera settlers, as, while maintaining separate identity, it would remind them of their far-away homes.

We have already referred to Malaiyūr where the settlers were content with using a Dravidian compound. But some of the kings

15) Generally identified with the town of that name in the Coimbatore district which formed part of the Chera kingdom. See Caldwell, op. cit., p. 94. One may also note that the Tamil dialect spoken in Malabar used to be called Karintamil (black Tamil).

16) Caldwell, op. cit., p. 94.

17) Compare Tamilakam (the Tamil country).

18) In the Journey of the Arab merchant Sulayman in India and in China, written in 851, we read that from Langabalus ships sailed to a place called Kalāh-bār and that the same name bār was given to both a kingdom and a sea coast. Cited in Przyłuski, J., ‘Indian colonisation in Sumatra,’ Journal of the Greater India Society, vol. 1, p. 95.
who held sway over Malaiyur seemed to have preferred, according to
the age-old Indian practice, to call their royal dynasty by a Sanskrit
name. The Sailendras, in all probability, adopted for their dynastic
name a translation of Malayalam mala-arayar (Tamil, māla-arasar),
the kings of the mountain. The Mala-arayar are at present a hill-tribe
inhabiting the Southern Ghats. They

speak corrupt Malayalam in the northern part of the
range where Malayalam is the prevailing language, and
corrupt Tamil, with a tinge of Malayalam, in the
southern, in the vicinity of Tamil-speaking districts.¹⁹

The Mala-arayar in the higher ranges of southern Kerala keep lamps
burning in cairns attributed to Parāsurāma who, according to legends,
reclaimed the land of Kerala from the sea. This, according to V.R.R.
Dikshitar, indicates that they are
directly or indirectly connected with the Parasurāma cult from ancient times... From their association with
the Parasurāma cult and from the name Mala Arayans
we have to conclude that they are part of the so-called
Arayan community who perhaps came in the wake of
Parasurāma’s conquest of Malabar. That this is not
impossible is seen from the fact that both in appearance
and in standard of living they are distinctly apart from
the other hill-tribes who are seen scattered in the dif­
ferent parts of Malabar."²⁰

One may or may not agree with Dr. Dikshitar’s conclusion; but there
can be no doubt about the fact that the name ‘Sailendra, unwittingly
or otherwise, is an exact translation of mala-arayan.“²¹ Considering
the widespread use of Dravidian names for places and for proper
names in South-East Asia during the period, and considering also the
fact that royalty invariably assumed Sanskrit titles, it is difficult to
conclude that the assumption of this title by the Sailendras had nothing

¹⁹) Caldwell, op. cit., p. 38.
²⁰) Dikshitar, V.R.R., ‘Some Hill Tribes of Malabar’ in Kerala Studies, edited
by P.K.N. Pillai, Trivandrum, 1955, p. 139.
²¹) One may also note that in Tamil Porayan (from pora mountain; porraiy in
modern Tamil) was the title of Chera kings. See Gundert, H., A Malayalam-
to do with their origin, especially when the title referred to the dynasty and not to an individual king.

Even if the Sailendra kings had no connexion whatever with the mala-arayar, it is evident that one of the regions over which these kings ruled was called by a name similar to that of the country where the mala-arayar lived. As we have seen, this name, like names of the common folk, retained its Dravidian character. While Malaiyur remained purely Dravidian, names like Palembang and Minangkabau seem to have been formed by a combination of Sanskrit and Dravidian words. It may also be noted that Malabar is the name of a mountain in Java. From these it may reasonably be assumed that the first part of the name is from the Dravidian word mala.

We find in the name Funan the same image of mountain. Funan is the modern pronunciation of two Chinese characters which were pronounced biu-nam in the old days. They are considered to be the Chinese transliteration of the old Khmer word bnam which meant mountain. According to the inscriptions found in Han Chei Temple and at Kuk Pra Kot, the rulers of Funan called themselves by the Sanskrit titles, parvatabhupala and sailaraja, both meaning king of the mountain.

The name Kundunga of the East Borneo inscriptions probably meant chief of the mountain or hill.

It may also be mentioned that the "name Malaya is very com-

From this mountain springs a river called Tarum. Dr. Stutterheim calls attention to the fact that in the Javanese inscriptions of the 4th and 5th centuries a kingdom known as Taruma is mentioned, while a charter of Kulottunga Chola in 1070 mentions a Tarumapura which is said to be situated ten miles north of Cape Comorin.
mon in Sumatra. There are a mountain and a river of that name; there are four villages called Malaya and a tribe of that name.  

The recurrent image of the mountain in the names of dynasties, kings, countries, towns and villages, cannot be ignored as being due to mere chance coincidence. Nor can it be attributed to a prevailing Saiva cult in all these instances. From the inscriptions found in Kutei it is not possible to identify with certainty the religious cult practised by Kundunga and his descendants.  

We are again not sure whether the kings of Funan were Vaiṣṇavite or Śaivite. The Śailendras are known to have been Buddhists, and were therefore unlikely to have assumed a dynastic name which was designed to honour Lord Śiva. We have therefore to look for mundane grounds for the adoption of the name.

According to Vlekke, it was Vishnu's son who assumed the title "Śrī Ṣrī Mahārāja Śailendra-vaṁsa . . ." and Vishnu had married the daughter of a ruler of Funan who was, of course, "king of the mountain" (śailarāja). Could it be that Vishnu's son claimed the dynastic name through his mother?

Apart from these references to hill countries and kings of the mountain, there is at least one reference to a South Indian tribe in the ancient inscriptions discovered in South-East Asia. An inscription found in Cambodia refers to an abode of Brahmins in Kuruṁbānagara. The Kurumbars, after whom the town appears to have been named, are a tribe of nomadic shepherds inhabiting the hilly regions of the present day States of Kerala and Mysore. According to Sir Walter Elliott, "[t]hey are stated to have been engaged in trade and to have owned ships and carried on a considerable commerce by sea". Kurumbar is the Tamil-Malayalam form of the name which

29) Hall, op. cit. p. 49.
30) Vlekke, op. cit. p. 33.
31) Discovered by R. Dalet at Neak Ta Dambang Dek; see note 33 below.
in Canarese is Kurubaru. It is the Tamil-Malayalam form that appears in the inscription. At the date of the inscription Malayalam may not have developed into a distinct language. All over the Chera country it was Tamil that was spoken. The ancient Tamil work, Śilappadīkārām, for instance, was written in Cranganore (Muchiri) by a brother of the Chera king. There are references in Keralotpatti to the Rajas of Kurumbarnād who were powerful in medieval Kerala.

A bronze statuette discovered by Dr. Bosch in Sumatra may also indicate the influence of Malabar in South-East Asia. Commenting on this find from Padang Lawas, Tapanuli, Longhurst wrote: “I should imagine the female figure represents a portrait statuette of a lady who made a gift to the vihāra. The style of the image suggests the 15th century as its probable age. In pose and dress, the figure is not unlike the Sati images of the 16th century and earlier, so common in this presidency, but of course, the style of dress and coiffure were common long before that period, and both may still be seen in Malabar at the present day.”

Dr. Bosch thinks that the image has to be assigned to an earlier period, with the tenth century as the highest limit.

O.C. Gongoly referring to the meru style of temple architecture found in Bali has written: “Somewhat similar slope-roofed temples have survived in Kerala, in the sanctuaries of Cochin and Travancore which, by the way, preserve may early relics of ancient Indian culture which have disappeared from other parts of India”.

The significant mention of Parāṣurāma in a lawbook regarded as of the highest authority in Java during the Majapahit period may

34) See Raja, P.K.S., Medieval Kerala, Chidambaram, 1953, p. 69.
36) Ibid.
point to the impact of Kerala on the people of Java. In this lawbook, *Kuṭāra-mānava-sāstra* by name, one finds the following passage:

The *Manava-sāstra* was communicated by Mahārāja Manu who was like god Viṣṇu. The *Kutara-sastra* was communicated by Bṛhgu in the tretāyuga; he was (also) like god Viṣṇu; the *Kutara-sāstra* is followed by Parasurāma and by the whole world, it is not a product of the present time... 38

In an inscription of 1358 A.D. seven judges are described as being *Kuṭāra-mānavādisāstra-vivecanatātpara*, that is, persons versed in the understanding of *Kuṭāramānava* and other lawbooks. 39 In the Bendasari inscription of the middle of the fourteenth century six judges are said to have decided a civil suit in accordance with the principles laid down in *Kuṭāra-mānava*. 40

Brandes thinks 41 that the lawbook consists of two parts, one the *Kuṭāra-sastra* inspired by Bṛhgū 42 and the other, the *Mānava-sastra* inspired by Manu. 43 He also refers to a Malay Chronicle which states that the lawbook was compiled under the direction of Surya Alam, king of Demak. 44 Surya, in the king's name, may be a Malay version of Chera. 45

The main reason given for the authority attributed to the lawbook, the very name of the book, 46 the mention of Parasurāma in it, the authorship ascribed to it—all these would tend to indicate its Kerala connection.

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40) Ibid., pp. 3-4.
41) Cited in ibid., p. 5.
42) Bṛhgū was the name of an ancestor of Parasurāma.
44) Ibid.
45) Compare : Raja Suvan.
46) Kuṭāra is in all probability from Sanskrit *kuthāra*, an axe. *Kuthāra* was Parasurāma's favourite weapon, one which he successfully wielded in his encounters with Kṣhatriya princes.
One may also note, for what it is worth, the reference in Sejarah Melayu to Sang Sapurba’s travelling to Java, Borneo and Bentan before he became ruler of Minangkabau.47 This account may be purely legendary, but it is significant that at least two of the countries he is said to have visited are those where one comes across references to the kings of the mountain. And Minangkabau happens to be the place where the impact of Kerala can be traced in social institutions.48

When works of art as well as many other things point to Kerala influences in South-East Asia, can we choose to ignore the eloquent evidence of language found in the place names mentioned in ancient inscriptions? And the most prominent among these names is Malaiyūr.

In meaning Malaiyūr is almost identical with Malabar. There is no doubt that Melayu in the Malay language has been derived from Malaiyūr and that Malaya49 is the English equivalent for the Malay Melayu. This equivalent happens to be exactly the same as Sanskrit malaya, the word used to connote the mountain range near the boundaries of Kerala.

49) Malakka, the Dutch name for Malaya, is obviously from the name of the town Malacca which, in turn, appears to be from the name of a tree (Malayalam, Malakkappēra, psidium pyriferum). Malayalam, malekka, as a verb, would mean to grow thick, swell, “perhaps also to lie in heaps, form hills” (Gundert, op. cit., p. 730). Wilkinson, however, traces the name to Arabic malakat (possession) which in Malay means a mart. (Wilkinson, A Malay-English Dictionary, London, 1955, p. 729).