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FOOD FOR SEVEN GRANDMOTHERS: STAGES IN THE UNIVERSALISATION OF A SINHALESE RITUAL

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Writers on Sinhalese religion and culture have noted several different rituals, or classes of rituals, which may be used to avert misfortune and ensure prosperity, rituals which range from Buddhist monks chanting sacred texts to a village magician tying on prophylactic thread and mystical diagrams inscribed on tinfoil. They have recorded the different levels of ritual and belief, all integrated into a Buddhist cosmology, and how the 'highest' level, Theravāda Buddhism, is used to 'legitimate' or justify rituals at lower levels.¹ In all Theravāda Buddhist cultures several systems of belief and ritual co-exist with Buddhism proper, in a logically and practically compatible way. It is convenient, referring mainly to relative parochialism, to call the belief and ritual which stem from the Pali Canon and its commentaries, use the Pali language, and are recognised by the participants as 'Buddhist', the 'highest level' or 'Buddhist' system; to call systems involving more or less widely known gods 'middle level'; and systems dealing with spirits and magic 'lowest level'. In this way a ritual or belief may be called non-Buddhist without thereby implying that it is not the property of Buddhists.

A picturesque middle-level ritual, coming below Buddhist merit-making ceremonies (*pinkam*) on the one hand and above placation of minor demons or spells to avoid the evil eye on the other, has so far not been described: the ritual of giving a free meal (*dānē*) to seven grandmothers, who in this context are called *kiri-ammālā*—'milk-mothers': the *kiri-ammālāgē*² *dānē*.

Besides being picturesque, the ritual is of theoretical interest. When a belief or custom belonging to a lower-level system is reinterpreted and modified so that it is integrated with a higher-level belief system or assimilated to higher-level practice we have what McKim Marriott (1955: 171-222) termed 'universalisation'. In introducing this term he was building upon Srinivas's (1952) concept of 'Sanskritisation'; but his term has a broader scope, for Sanskritisation refers only to adaptation to the top level, namely to the pan-Indian Sanskritic great tradition, whereas universalisation comprehends any change in that direction, from the more to the less local. Moreover, if I understand them correctly, Srinivas stressed the modification of the belief or custom, Marriott its reinterpretation. For both these reasons I have chosen to see the subject matter of this article as a case of universalisation: the ritual has been Buddhicised—the Sinhalese equivalent of Sanskritised—but we can also detect a previous change from a still more parochial form; and though it has been both reinterpreted and modified, it is the former which I regard as cardinal.³

I myself observed the assimilation of the *kiri-ammālāgē dānē* from what one might call the second to the top level. When I had written this up I showed it to Professor Gananath Obeyesekere, and he pointed out to me the likelihood that the ritual's association with level 2 is the result of an earlier similar process, and that it started off on level 3. Though evidence for this earlier shift is sketchier than for the later one, there can be little doubt that we have here a double shift of level, i.e. two successive stages of universalisation.

Level 3 in this case is the religious system concerned with deities, predominantly male and generally with strong local ties, whose worship is known to outsiders (not, so far as I can discover, to its adherents) as 'the *baṇḍāra* cult'. It is mainly found among the Kandyan Sinhalese,⁴ and is the local form of the pan-Indian stratum of worship classically associated with *yakṣas* and well described by Eliade (1958: 345). Deities of this type are usually associated with some striking local natural phenomenon, notably a large rock or tree, and combine with this association the character of either a demon of disease or the spirit of a dead person of importance or both: they tend in this sense to be over-determined. Among the Kandyan Sinhalese these deities are systematised into a group of somewhat floating membership called the Twelve Gods (*doḷos deyiṅḍō*), most of whom are *gambāra deyiṅḍō*, i.e. in charge of a particular village or area, and whose worship reflects purely local and mundane concerns such as harvests and disease. There is very little ethnography on the *baṇḍāra* cult, but its mythology overlaps considerably with the mythology of Ceylon's aboriginals, the Vāddas, as described early in this century by the Seligmans (1911) and Parker (1909). For lack of historical data the direction of the borrowing between these two cultures cannot now be determined.

The Twelve Gods are often said by the Kandyan Sinhalese to form the retinue of Kataragama, a major god. These major gods constitute our level 2. Most of them are Hindu gods imported to Ceylon from India. Despite local strengths and weaknesses their worship is common to all Sinhalese and their influence is considered to be island-wide. Some of them are worshipped by Sinhalese Buddhists at Tamil Hindu shrines in Hindu style, as well as in their separate Sinhalese shrines (where they may also be worshipped by Hindus). Most of them have strong mythological associations with India. Typical in this respect is the only female among the major gods, Pattiṇī, whose rich mythology makes explicit her south Indian origin.⁵ Pattiṇī is the goddess of smallpox and measles, and shares this and other attributes with various female divinities of south India. The number seven occurs often in her mythology; for instance, she was reborn seven times (Wirz 1954: 143-4). Groups of seven goddesses are not a general feature of Sinhalese religion, but are common enough in India; indeed a group of seven divine mothers is found in Sanskrit myth as early as the *Mahābhārata* (first centuries A.D.). In the Sinhalese Low Country, according to Wirz, Pattiṇī is said to command seven female demons called *vaḍuru yakkiniṅḍō* ('female plague *yakṣas*'), 'ready, on their mistress' word, to spread sixty different diseases and epidemics... (1954: 144). Pattiṇī is also sometimes said to have a group of six or seven female attendants known as *kiri-ammālā*, though this is not a very important feature in her mythology. One of the theses of this article will be that these two groups are the same, and that the seven ladies in the rite represent them.

Kiri-ammālā under that name originate at level 3. The Seligmans describe a

class of spirits (*yakku*—derived from Sanskrit *yakṣa*) among the Vāddas who are spirits of the dead and associated with prominent rocks etc. They continue:

Somewhat akin to these *yaku* [*sic*] in their less dangerous forms are the *kiriamma* (literally milk mothers, i.e. grandmothers), the *yaku* of Vedda women, generally the wives of Vedda headmen or chiefs, many of whom are thought of as haunting the sides and tops of hills where there are rocks and springs. They are sometimes jealous of people gathering honey—indeed there is a tendency to avoid rocky mountain tops on their account—but may be placated by a charm, though occasionally a little honey is left for them with a muttered *kapau kiriammala*—Eat O Kiriamma. Although they retain the fondness for children which they felt in their lifetime they not infrequently send sickness, at least among the more sophisticated Vēddas. A few *kiriamma* have become rather important *yaku*... but such *kiriamma* do not appear to be associated with rocky or hilly sites (1911: 140).

Parker (1909: 137), also writing on Vāddas, after discussing a particular *kiriammā* connected with a place called Indigollāva in the North Central Province whom the Vāddas greatly revere and identify with the Hindu goddess Mohinī, continues: 'Seven other Goddesses, who are also termed Kiri-Ammās, are revered collectively in the south. They are stated to have been originally chieftainesses who have been lately deified, possibly in comparatively recent times.' After listing their names he throws doubt on whether this latter claim fits all the cases; it does however fit five of them (1909: 150). He regards 'the deification of the Kiri-Ammās' as one of the few important features distinguishing the religion of the Vāddas from that of the Kandyan Sinhalese (1909: 146). This is because he has rather rigid ideas about what constitutes identity or difference among these gods: a few pages later he writes (1909: 151): 'It is strange that an entirely different group of seven Kiri-Ammās are worshipped by both Kandians and Low-country Sinhalese. They are described as seven manifestations of the goddess Pattiṇī. Pattiṇī is never treated as a Hill Goddess, but is venerated only in her aspects as the Goddess of Chastity and the Controller of Epidemics. The worship of these seven Sinhalese goddesses seems to be an independent cult which has borrowed the nomenclature of the older one, and has ousted it in some districts.'⁶

Parker then (1909: 165) describes a ritual at which food is offered to seven *kiri-ammās*:

To the seven Kiri-ammās of the south, a single offering is made in the same kind of shrine [as for the Indigollāva Kiri-Ammā: a covered altar resting on four sticks under a large tree] when the men are about to leave on a hunting expedition, and also when children are sick or fretful. If they are procurable, it consists of milk-rice (rice boiled in Coconut milk), Jak-fruit, the flower-bud of the Plantain tree (which is used in curries), Betel-leaf and sliced Arka-nut, Sugar-cane, and a little Sandal-wood.

In this case, the shrine is subdivided into seven compartments in which seven leaves are placed on a white cloth, one for each Goddess; and on each of them a small portion of each kind of offering is laid. Water is sprinkled over these articles, and in front of the shrine, and the offering is also purified by incense (a resinous gum which exudes from the bark of the Dum tree), which is burnt on a fire-stick, and waved round it. A wick is then placed near each end of the offering and lit. After the lights have expired, the offerer takes a Betel-leaf in his right hand, between the two first fingers, and waves it from side to side in front of the shrine, and then, still holding it, makes a long prayer to the seven goddesses, which I had no opportunity of writing down.

When children are ill, and the parents do not possess things suitable for giving to these seven deities, or the time is inauspicious, or there is not an opportunity of doing it (as in the

case of a sudden violent attack), they make a vow to present an offering to them; and hang up a *bārē*, a visible token of the forthcoming sacrifice.

There is no evidence that this Vādda ceremony was ever practised by Kandyans. It is very different from the one to be described, especially in that the *kiri-ammālā* do not appear in person or by proxy and so do not eat the food. That the materials used partly coincide with those in the Sinhalese ceremonies is unlikely to be significant, as they are also used in other Sinhalese and Vādda rituals. However, there is an intermediate stage between the Vādda ceremony described by Parker and the second ceremony to be described below, at which seven women are fed after a disease associated with Pattinī; at this intermediate stage actual women are fed, but there is no connexion with Pattinī. Professor Obeyesekere saw such a ceremony about ten years ago when he was doing research in the remote Kandyan area of Laggala; but unfortunately he did not record the details.

The rituals about to be described and discussed illustrate rather the transition from level 2 to the top level, the assimilation of a ritual associated with Pattinī to a ceremony congenial to Theravāda Buddhist ideology. Here first is a full account of a *kiri-ammālāgē dānē* which I attended. In it the explicit connexion with Pattinī is somewhat tenuous, although the principal ritual acts have referents in her mythology. The *dānē* was said by the donors to be given as a result of a vow to Pattinī; however it turned out on closer questioning not to be the result of any specific vow, but rather a family custom, and no visit to a temple of Pattinī had been made in connexion with the ritual. No priest of Pattinī (*pattinī-rāla*) was involved, nor was any image or emblem of hers present, though there were several religious pictures in the room. Pattinī was not even mentioned in the ritual! When I alluded to this afterwards the donor said that Pattinī had been given the merit gained by the ritual: he was referring to the Pali verses (*gāthā*) transferring the merit to the gods which the recipients recite near the end of the ritual. Actually these verses transfer the merit to all the gods indifferently. This doctrine of merit transference (*patti* and *pattānumodanā*) has been much used as a mechanism for Buddhicising initially non-Buddhist rituals. I have tried to show elsewhere (Gombrich in press: ch. 5) that it was in fact devised as a means of legitimising the funeral feasts traditionally given for dead relatives. The doctrine enables one to say that regardless of who receives the material gift, the merit of the donation can be redirected by thought and word to other recipients not visibly present.

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The following account describes a ritual which I saw some twelve miles from Kandy in February 1970. The main donor was of 'good' caste (*goyigama*) and a hire-car driver by profession. He said he gave such a *dānē* annually and had done so all his life, adding that he was thirty-five. His mother, herself a grandmother and dressed in white, was present, and said, 'We do it every year.' The purpose of the ritual is general prosperity, and others assured me that because of it the family were doing very well.

The *dānē* takes place on a Wednesday or a Saturday, Pattinī's 'days' (*kemvara*, locally pronounced *kembara*). It is given early in the morning, not necessarily but contingently, because the ritual foods given—milk-rice, jaggery, oil cakes and

bananas—are more acceptable for breakfast than for lunch; in particular milk-rice is a breakfast but not usually a lunch food. The ritual does not have to start at any particular auspicious moment. The preliminaries—and indeed many of the forms—are like those for a *dānē* for Buddhist monks. But instead of monks the recipients are seven grandmothers. Some time in advance seven grandmothers of 'good' caste are invited from the neighbourhood. Most of the previous day and night are spent in preparing the food; neighbours and relatives help, even if they do not intend to come to the *dānē*. Fifty coconuts were grated for this occasion.

When I arrived at 6.15 in the morning, as it was getting light, several old ladies dressed in white were standing outside the house waiting while everyone was bustling about inside completing the preparations. After a few minutes the old ladies came into the house in single file, the eldest first. At the front door their feet were washed from a bowl of water containing cut limes (a purifying agent) with a coconut shell being used as a dipper. Throughout the ritual the absence of mass-produced utensils was conspicuous: this archaic touch is of course everywhere frequent in ritual, but stands in contrast to the *dānē* for Buddhist monks, in which normal modern utensils are used throughout. The old ladies wore white saris and white Kandyan blouses with puffed sleeves, and carried white cloths—the same dress as women wear for taking the eight precepts at the temple on a *poya* day (quarter-month day in the lunar calendar). They went into an inner room on two sides of which mats had been spread on the floor and covered with white cloth; they sat on these with their legs straight in front of them or turned to the sides and their backs against the wall, and held their white cloths in their laps.

A table on the other side of the room was laden with food, all served in rush baskets. Outside the door of the room a brass lampstand burning coconut oil was lit and burnt with seven wicks. Some glowing coals on a platter were carried round the room and incense (*dummala*) was thrown on them. In front of the old ladies one of the donor's family made an impromptu hearth with three large stones, filled it with small sticks, and put on it a round earthenware cooking pot. Before each old lady was laid a large banana leaf, and the donor's mother sprinkled each leaf lightly with the ritual purifying liquid called *haīdun-kiri-pān*, water with coconut milk and sandalwood in it.

The distribution of the food was begun by the donor himself; he put a large cake of *kiri-bat* (rice cooked in coconut milk) on each banana leaf plate, taking it from a rush basket carried by his mother. The rest of the food was distributed in a similar way by the various members of his family. On each cake of milk-rice went a cake of jaggery (*hakuru*—the congealed sap of the *kitul* palm, locally used like brown sugar), then on top of that a large flat fried oil-cake (*atirasa kāvum*), then a couple of long bananas (*ānamālu kesel*). These ingredients, with slight variations, constituted the whole meal: the categories seemed to be milk-rice, jaggery, oil-cakes and bananas. Jaggery cakes were varied with *kiri kāli*, a concoction of jaggery, coconut milk and spices with the consistency of a blancmange; there were various kinds of oil-cakes and bananas. I think it was these categories that the donor had in mind when he said that everything had to be served three times. In fact some things were served four times, probably just because there was such a lot and people lost count.

After all the food had been served each lady received a betel leaf wrapped

round areca nuts, ready to chew, and another betel leaf with a white square of camphor incense (*kapuru*) on it. Then several things happened together: the donor's wife fetched a lot of copper coins (*paṇḍuru*) and put two on the betel leaf with incense before each lady; someone else lighted the little fire and poured into the pot three bottles of cow's milk (one of them marked 'GIN') till it was nearly full. Before each old lady was lighted a joss stick, stuck in the rice; and a young coconut (*kurumbā*) was placed before each and on it the betel leaf with the disc of camphor, which was also lit and burned for a couple of minutes.

The core of the ritual had been reached. All present now sat or squatted, held their palms together in worship, and recited the salutation of the Buddha ('Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa') followed by the three refuges (taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Order of monks) and the five precepts (undertakings to abstain from sin). The old ladies were perhaps the leaders in this worship, which begins any Buddhist ceremony, but all did it together and there were no responses as there are when monks are present and 'administer' the precepts. At the end of this, after saying three times 'I undertake these three refuges and five precepts' (*Imāni tisarana-pañcasīlāni samādiyāmi*) all went on, with the old ladies now definitely in the lead, to recite the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Order, and then verses from the *Mahā Jayanūgala Gāthā*—all famous Buddhist formulae.

The milk now boiled over, and it was allowed to spill onto the floor for a few seconds before the pot was taken off the fire. As soon as it boiled over the old ladies exclaimed 'Sā' (i.e. 'Amen'), and began to recite the Pali verse transferring merit to the gods, again a proceeding standard to all Buddhist rituals. Translated, it goes: 'May sky-dwelling and earth-dwelling gods and *nāgas* [supernatural serpents] of great power, having rejoiced at the merit, long protect the Teaching [i.e. Buddhism].' Immediately after this they said three times in Pali: 'May this be for your relatives. May your relatives be happy'. Some of the old ladies went on reciting Pali verses *sotto voce*, but the core ritual was plainly at an end.

The donor now went round with a rush basket and collected a little bit of food from each old lady. Each was then served hot milk from the pot in a coconut shell; some did not take milk, but had hot water instead, partaking of the milk only symbolically. With the milk or water they were given jaggery as a sweetener. Each put the food on her lap and tied it up in her white cloth, leaving out only the betel chew, which was used on the spot. They then got up and left in file in the same order as they had come. Just outside the room stood the lamp with seven wicks, and beside it a saucer of *haṇḍun-kiri-pān*. Each old lady in turn extinguished a flame with her hand, then dipped her fingers in the milky water several times, first smearing some on the brows of the donor and his family, then sprinkling it over the rest of those present. They were in the house about forty minutes.

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Before discussing this ritual let me utilise another source, an account gleaned by Professor Obeyesekere from a reliable informant (an old lady) in the Kuruṇḅāgala District some fifteen years ago, unpublished material which he has kindly allowed me to use. This version envisages the *dānē* as taking place in fulfilment of a vow

made on behalf of a patient who has actually been ill, or to help a person during an astrologically inauspicious period (*apalē*). In the latter case the *kiri-ammālā* are given yellow rice cooked with ghee. In both cases the patient is known as 'the beggar of the god(dess)'⁷ (*deyiyangē hiṅgamā*). This account makes clear that the *kiri-ammālā* represent the goddess, and adds that the emotion dominating among them is fear, fear lest the ritual be incorrectly performed. The whole ceremony is punctuated by frequent interjections like: 'The blessing of all the gods!' 'The blessing of the mothers!'

This informant stressed the importance of ritual purity: new pots should be used; all implements (e.g. the coconut scraper) should be purified with incense smoke; the cooking area should be smeared with a fresh coating of cow dung; the old ladies walk up to the entrance of the house on a plank, preferably of margosa wood; the water for washing their feet contains both lime and turmeric; everyone involved in the ceremony has bathed and wears special white clothes borrowed from the dhobi for the occasion; the lamp wicks are made of fresh strips of clean white rag and are extinguished with the fingers not by blowing because human breath is impure. All these prescriptions represent ideals; I am sure most of them were not carried out in the ceremony I saw.

Obeyesekere's Kuruṇḅāgala account makes no mention of boiling milk. On the other hand the 'beggar of the gods' plays a more prominent role. 'He comes begging for food from the mothers with a *vāṭṭi*, a round tray made of cane or coconut leaf or *bata* grass, on which is placed a plantain leaf. The mothers give him something from each variety of food served to them. Bits of food are also placed on another plantain leaf and kept outside for the crows etc. to eat. The "beggar" is seated in a corner alone. Then the mothers start eating. After they have tasted the food they give the "beggar" permission to eat his meal. Having eaten the food, the mothers wrap what remains in the fold of the white cloth (*piruvaṭa*) they wear.' Finally, before extinguishing her wick each *kiri-ammā* holds it over the 'beggar's' head and 'brings it down towards the feet, meanwhile asking . . . the protection and forgiveness of the seven mothers and Pattini.' (Quotations from Obeyesekere's notes.)

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The first point in the ritual which is worthy of discussion is the identity of the *kiri-ammālā*. The only meaning given for *kiri-ammā* by Carter's Sinhalese-English dictionary is 'wet-nurse', and certainly *kiri-mav*, which by etymology should be an exact synonym (*mav* being another word for 'mother', more literary than *ammā*), has this meaning in literary Sinhalese. However, the givers of the ritual which I saw, and Obeyesekere's informant, unambiguously stated the *kiri-ammālā* to be grandmothers (in conversation they were referred to as *attālā*—'grandparents'), and this conforms to their Vādda origin as spirits of old women. It is noteworthy that this meaning has been widely forgotten: *kiri-ammālāgē dānēs* are given by some middle-class urbanites, but, I am reliably told, they invite mothers (not grandmothers) with more than one child. The illustration on the cover of the pamphlet referred to below also shows rather young ladies. As the term *kiri-ammā* is not normal Sinhalese, and grandmothers have no special significance in Sinhalese ritual or society, their place in this ritual has been forgotten.

However, there remains the problem why a grandmother should be called a *kiri-ammā*. To this question no informant was able to supply me with a plausible answer, but I think that I have found one. Parker, at the end of the passage quoted above, describes how the seven *kiri-ammālā* may be promised an offering if they cure children's diseases; and one of the things hung up at their shrine to signify such a promise is a palmyra palm leaf on which 'are written the words "Paṭṭa-Girī, Bāla-Gir, Mōlan-Girī"', probably to indicate that the child is to be specially guarded against the evil actions of the female demons who bear those names'. He goes on:

Among the Kandian Sinhalese, Girī is the feminine form of Śakti or a class of demons, twelve or more in number, called Garā . . . who afflict only women and children. The word *gara* means sickness or disease, and is derived from the Sanskrit root *grah*, to seize; these demons are thus personifications of certain diseases (Parker 1909: 166).

It seems to me that he has supplied all the data necessary to identify the origin of the *kiri-ammā* without noticing it. *Ammā* is a common title of respect for women. *Kiri* must in this case be a corruption of *giri*, so that *kiri-ammā* means 'disease-lady'. Such a change of initial *g* to *k* would not be without parallel in Sinhalese; examples are given in Geiger's grammar (1938: 43), and he remarks that they are probably due to Tamil influence. There is a great deal of Tamil influence in the speech of Parker's Vāddas—and in Kandyan Sinhalese, come to that. Parker's data suggest that *kiri-ammālā* have no connexion with milk, but much with disease. Wirz mentions several female demons of disease called *giri*, and gives the list of twelve to which Parker alludes (1954: 132). Remember also the seven disease-giving spirits dependent on Pattiṇī who are not called *kiri-ammā* in Wirz but parallel another group so called elsewhere. Moreover in the evidence from the Kuruṇāgala District it is still clear that the *kiri-ammālāgē dānē* is a pacification of spirits of disease.⁸

An interesting point about my theory is that, if correct, it illustrates the opposite process to universalisation, namely parochialisation. The term *gara*, of which *giri* is the feminine, is derived as Parker says from Sanskrit *grah*, to seize, but more specifically from the noun *graha*, 'planet', and owes its origin to the old Indian theory that diseases are, or may be, caused by evil planetary influence. The seven evil female spirits have done a kind of round trip from level 2 to level 3 and back. At level 3 they acquired the associations, common also to male *yakṣas*, with prominent natural phenomena and with the spirits of dead leaders.⁹ In this way they become old and dignified. The grandmothers whom I saw no longer suspect that they represent disease deities. But on its passage to a more educated, urban, middle-class environment the name given to these old ladies, *kiri-ammā*, is re-interpreted and identified with the Sinhalese for 'wet-nurse' (a confusion which may of course have facilitated the change from *g* to *k* in the first place), and then this interpretation is acted upon, so that really lactating ladies are substituted in the rite.

Lactating women are presumably symbols of general prosperity and fertility. The same symbolic meaning is expressed by the overflowing milk, while extinguishing flames signifies averting dangers, especially fire. These, the two most distinctive actions in the rite which I witnessed, refer to the same story in the

Pattiṇī mythology: after Pattiṇī had put out the fire which was burning the city of Madurai each household in gratitude boiled a pot of milk before their door.

A pot of milk is likewise boiled to bring prosperity when a Sinhalese family moves into a new house. At the same time the act has a striking external similarity to the core ritual at the meal given to monks in honour of the dead (*mataka dānē*), the one major Buddhist ritual which is more or less sure to be enacted at some time in every Sinhalese Buddhist household. At the *mataka dānē* the donor and chief mourner pours water into a vessel till it overflows, thus symbolically transferring to the dead the merit of his actions, after which the monks recite the Pali line quoted above: 'May this be for your relatives. May your relatives be happy.' The literal meaning of the line does not of course require that the relatives in question be dead. This, besides the external similarity of the overflowing pots, may have stimulated the *kiri-ammālā* to use the line as a general blessing on the donor's household. The portion of food put outside in the Kuruṇāgala District version (but not in the ritual I saw) 'for the crows etc.' is similarly a direct borrowing from the *mataka dānē*, in which it is an optional feature, the portion of the 'crows' having been originally intended for the hungry ghosts waiting outside.

It must be stressed that throughout the ritual which I saw Pali, the language of canonical Buddhism, was alone used; Sinhalese, the language of the worship of the gods, had no place. This aspect of the ritual's universalisation must owe something to the fact that old ladies are its central figures, because old ladies are precisely the lay people who attend the temple most, know most Pali verses, and are fondest of reciting them—of which their continued recitation when the ritual was really over was an excellent illustration. So although the overflowing hot milk symbolises abundance in the same way as the presence of the fertile 'milk-mothers' themselves, such old ladies are bound to be struck by the similarity to the *mataka dānē*, and the introduction of the Pali line about the relatives may well have been the spontaneous innovation of this or another pious group.

The question of who eats the food and when is also interesting. At a *dānē* to monks the food is consumed by monks on the spot, and the laymen do not eat during the ritual, though they usually have a good time afterwards eating the surplus prepared. Monks cannot take any food away with them, and what they leave over from what they have been served is given to animals or thrown away. Obeyesekere's informant told of the patient being given a ritual meal by the *kiri-ammālā*, who themselves eat part of the food and take the rest home. In the ritual I saw the donor collected food from the ladies but did not eat it: his role as a 'beggar of the goddess' had been forgotten. Perhaps this was because the rite I saw was for general prosperity rather than for the cure of a patient. Even more likely to be relevant is another external similarity: monks must leave aside a portion of the food they are given to symbolise their lack of greed; and indeed the donor called the food he collected 'returns' (*āpahu k^mma*).

In the version I saw the *kiri-ammālā* did not eat on the spot any of the food given, but doubtless symbolised their acceptance of it by drinking the milk (or water) and possibly also by using the betel chew. That their consumption during the rite should amount to no more than a symbolic acceptance seems to me probably an original feature. Eating in public or under scrutiny is generally repugnant to the Sinhalese (monks apart), and would be especially unusual for women. Moreover

it is clearly in the interest of the old ladies to take the food home, as they could manage to consume only a fraction of it themselves. It could even be said to be in the community interest, for in this way wealth is redistributed rather than being wasted as in the conspicuous expenditure of a monks' *dānē*. Finally, it is conceivable that this feature is a reminiscence of the Vādda ritual described by Parker, at which there were no embodiments of the *kiri-ammālā* to eat the food at all. We shall see that in two other versions of the ritual, for which the evidence is less complete and in a sense less authentic, this feature is changed, and the ladies eat the food on the spot, while the 'returns' seem to disappear altogether.

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The next version of the ritual is a performance in the same area as the first which took place about a month earlier, but for reasons both internal and external it may be regarded as less authentic. Its entire circumstances were somewhat different, for it happened in a public place, at a shrine of Kandē Deyiyō, one of the Twelve Gods, and under the direction of the priest (*kapurāḷa*) of that shrine. The external reason for dubiety is that the credentials and knowledge of this *kapurāḷa* were convincingly impugned by another local *kapurāḷa*, whose father used to work the shrine; the latter even said that the shrine used to belong to another god called Kīrti Baṇḍāra Deyiyō and that the present *kapurāḷa* is an ignoramus in these matters, both claims which I suspect to be true. The internal reasons for doubt are that the rite had no clear connexion either with Pattinī or with the mythology of level 3; that both the characteristic rituals of the boiling milk and the lamp wicks were missing, the ritual being altogether rudimentary; and that the *Buddha-pūjā* without an image or relic is bizarre. But all social data are grist to the sociologist's mill, and this last deviation is interesting as a further conspicuous piece of Buddhicisation. In our terms, in fact, the ritual for all its shoddiness represents universalisation direct from level 3 to level 1: Pattinī has been elided.

The 'days' of the Twelve Gods are Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. On this occasion a whole Friday morning, approximately from 10 to 2, was devoted to rituals at this shrine under the direction of the elderly *kapurāḷa*. I omit all details irrelevant to our theme; suffice it to say that most of the rituals involved Kandē Deyiyō, through the *kapurāḷa*, diagnosing various ills for visitors to the shrine and prescribing their remedies. All morning the *kapurāḷa*, as the etymology of his name indicates, was acting as a go-between or medium, either interceding with the god on behalf of the laity or being possessed by the god and speaking to the laity.

The shrine consists of a rock, in an imposing position on a hill, shaded by large trees, with a rock slab built up at one side on which there are two altars to Kandē Deyiyō, each with a picture of the god and some of the miniature weapons which are his emblems. To be in the shrine proper one has to step onto the rock. This is only permitted to males. Next to the shrine and separated from it by a low wall was a small lean-to. In this little enclosure a pot of rice cooked on a fire.

The timing of this *dānē* was modelled on that at Buddhist temples, at which the *Buddha-pūjā* (the presentation of food etc. before the Buddha image) is at 11 a.m. and the monks eat at 11.30. At 11 milk-rice had been cooked, and the man who was I think paying for the *dānē* brought into the shrine the rice arranged in two heaps on banana leaves in a rush basket. Under instruction from the *kapurāḷa* he then

divided each heap with his hand, one into four and the other into three parts. A drummer began to beat a two-sided drum (*bera*). The *kapurāḷa* took the basket of rice and, facing the two altars alternately, began to dance on the spot, waving the rice to and fro. This was his general method of dedicating offerings to the god. It only continued for a couple of minutes. The *kapurāḷa* then had the donor offer one lot of rice on one of the altars, and then to my great surprise—nor did the donor seem to have been expecting it—made the donor repeat after him a Pali verse used in *Buddha-pūjā*, thus transforming the offering itself into a *Buddha-pūjā* without the presence of a Buddha image or other relic. The verse in translation runs: 'May the reverend one be gracious and out of compassion accept the excellent food offered.' The term of address, *bhante*, cannot possibly refer to a god.

The *kapurāḷa* then made us all squat and join our palms, and administered the three refuges and the five precepts, acting like a monk. All this was accompanied by low drumming (appropriate to level 3, not to level 1). At the end of it we rose and the *kapurāḷa* proceeded to get possessed and attend to other matters.

The ladies who were to be fed had arrived in the lean-to by this time. They were not specially dressed for the occasion, nor were they all old. They were due to be fed at 11.30 but it got very late, as often happens at Sinhalese events, and I had to leave. However I am reliably informed that when the *kapurāḷa*'s prophecy session was over the *kiri-ammālā* were simply fed the consecrated milk-rice on banana leaves, and the rest of the rice was then eaten without ceremony by the others present. This no doubt was intended to augment the prosperity of the donor of the rice. The *kiri-ammālā*—and no doubt the others present—must have regarded the rice as consecrated at level 3, not at level 1, because as Buddhists they could never have consented to eat food which had been used for a *Buddha-pūjā*. On the other hand eating food which has been consecrated by being offered to a god follows the normal pattern of a Hindu *pūjā* and is appropriate to Sinhalese levels 2 and 3.

* * * * *

My final exhibit is printed evidence: a pamphlet which I bought on a Kandy pavement, entitled *Kiri-ammālāgē dānaya āpagālavīma saha dēva kannalav sahita Set Sāntiya*¹⁰ ('Blessing, with payment of the vow of a free meal for milk-mothers and appeals to the gods'). The cover shows a lady serving food onto banana leaves in front of seven other ladies who are clearly too young to be grandmothers and are not dressed in white, while a lamp with seven wicks burns beside her. Inside there is first a long address in Sinhalese prose to Pattinī, referring to her mythology and asking for her protection. In the mythological section Pattinī is said to be a future Buddha, and exhorted to use the merit from this *dānē* as an occasion for making an aspiration (*prārthanāva*) for Buddhahood.

The pamphlet continues (translated from Sinhalese prose):

N.B. The seven excellent milk-mothers first take the three refuges and the five precepts, and recite the above appeal to the goddess Pattinī. They then consume the meal. They then bless the patients' house and the patients by reciting the following poem; thus the extinguishing of the lamp wicks becomes auspicious.

There follows a Sinhalese poem of blessing in twenty-four stanzas, with content similar to the prose address. The rest of the pamphlet is not relevant.

In a way the version in the pamphlet takes the Buddhicisation of the ritual furthest of all. First the minor point, which it shares with the last ritual described above: the ladies eat the food on the spot, like Buddhist monks, instead of taking it home. But the major point is this: not only does Pattinī now explicitly get offered the merit, but she is to use it to further her advance to Buddhahood, for which she is destined. The attribution of future Buddhahood to a major deity is no novelty in Sinhalese religion;¹¹ but as Buddhahood is reserved for males the creation of a female Bodhisattva in a Theravādin context is striking. Its result is that not only the ritual we have discussed, but even its supernatural referent, has been thoroughly integrated with canonical Buddhist ideology. It will be interesting to see whether in any way—by the introduction of monks, by the complete elimination of both Pattinī and the Twelve Gods, or by some other means—the universalisation of the *kiri-ammālāgē dānē* can be carried any farther.

NOTES

¹ For representative articles describing and categorising the different levels in Sinhalese religion, see Ames 1964; Yalman 1964; Evers 1968; Obeyesekere 1963; 1966. The ideological integration of the system is best expounded by Obeyesekere. My own views, which are close to his, are to appear in Gombrich in press. The only one of the above articles which is exclusively devoted to healing rituals, namely Yalman 1964, is unfortunately riddled with factual errors. Wirz (1954) is devoted to the subject, but his data, all collected in the Southern Province, are not analysed.

² *-lā* is a plural suffix, *-gē* the genitive suffix; *kiri-ammālāgē* is thus genitive plural.

³ The use of technical terms should not conceal from us the antiquity of similar problems and explanations. The Romans consciously assimilated Greek mythology and local cults into their religious system; Jesuits in the seventeenth century advocated the retention and reinterpretation of oriental rituals to facilitate the conversion of their adherents to Christianity; and western historians and theologians have long discussed such questions as the antecedents of Christmas and Easter in pagan festivals, and the cult of saints in Roman Catholic countries (which exemplifies both universalisation and parochialisation).

⁴ Sinhalese are divided by history into Kandyan and Low-Countrymen. The latter occupy the coastal strip which was under European domination from 1505 to 1947. The Kandyan kingdom, independent till 1815, comprised roughly the following modern Provinces: Central, North Central, North Western, Uva and Sabaragamuwa.

⁵ Professor Obeyesekere is preparing a definitive book on the cult of Pattinī.

⁶ A Low-Country Sinhalese list of seven *kiri-ammālā*, which includes Pattinī as one of them, is given in Parker (1909: 667).

⁷ *Deviyangē* is an honorific plural so that 'of the god' is ambiguous, and its referent could be masculine or feminine, singular or plural.

⁸ Dr K. Malalgoda has pointed out to me that I am not the first to suspect *kiri* of being a corruption of *giri*; but my predecessor, Hugh Nevill (1954: 255), did not stumble on the right *giri*: 'Kiri-ammā is no doubt a form of Giri ammā, the great nature goddess, whose name Giri or Kiri, had originally a sense similar to that of Arabic *age*, to roll, or rotate, whence at a later time came by false etymology the sense of *giri*, rock . . .' The alleged great nature goddess need not detain us; but I agree with Nevill that the connexion with *giri* 'rock' (a Sanskrit *tatsama*) would be by a false etymology. Yet the existence of this homophone might possibly have helped to determine the character of the *kiri-ammā*. The same goes for yet a third homophone, *giri* as the feminine of *guru* 'venerable'; Wirz (1954: 96) wrongly believes this meaning to be uppermost for the *bāla-giri*, though he correctly characterises them as 'female demons (*yakkini*) who strike children with illness'.

⁹ The two other words *giri*, meaning 'rock' and 'venerable', would fit this development perfectly, though it is not essential to my theory that they should do so.

¹⁰ Compiled by P. D. Māṭin Appuhami, Colombo; no date.

¹¹ For instance, Viṣṇu is the first of the ten Bodhisattvas listed in an unpublished medieval Pali text, the *Dasa-bodhisattōtpatti-kathā*. The identification of the god Natha with the next Buddha, Maitrī, is comparatively well known.

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