

The Portuguese Burghers of Eastern Sri Lanka in the Wake of Civil War and Tsunami

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The Burghers: Sri Lanka's Eurasian Community

From the colonial period up to the present, two groups with conspicuously non-Asian names have remained fixed categories in the Sri Lankan census: the "Moors" and the "Burghers". The Moors, who are Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Muslims, received their name from the 16th century Portuguese, who tended to call all Muslims they encountered and fought against in their expanding maritime empire *mouros* (lat. *mauru*, from Mauritania). The Burghers, who began as Portuguese-speaking Eurasians, acquired their name from the 17th and 18th century colonial Dutch, who applied the term to locally-married Europeans and their descendants. The irony is that many of Sri Lanka's Burgher families, even those with documented Dutch ancestry, have preserved a significant number of Portuguese cultural traditions up to the present day. The Moors, of course, do not celebrate any Portuguese heritage because they were deadly adversaries from the time of their first encounter, five hundred years ago.

It has been a common practice in discussing the Burghers of Sri Lanka to distinguish between those of Dutch descent, the "Dutch Burghers", and those of Portuguese descent, the "Portuguese Burghers", or more derogatorily, the "Portuguese Mechanics"¹. The Burghers as a whole have never exceeded one percent of the island's population, and the proportion of Burghers with fully documented Dutch pedigrees has always been a tiny fraction of that.

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1 This discussion draws upon my earlier and more detailed treatment of Burgher ethnic identities: Dennis B. McGilvray, "Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24/2 (1982), pp. 235-263.

Nevertheless, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a stratum of successful middle-class Dutch Burghers typically formed the most articulate segment of the Burgher community, seeking special recognition of their Dutch ancestry and, indirectly, special protection of their political and economic interests. The Portuguese were commonly depicted as the great Burgher residuum: poorer, darker, more numerous, and somehow less European. All the Burghers continue to be urbanites or town-dwellers, but while the Dutch descendants have been strongly represented in clerical work and the professions, the Portuguese were, and still are, associated with manual trades like blacksmithing, carpentry, and tailoring. Both the British colonial writers of the 19th century and the Dutch Burgher partisans of the early 20th century emphasized a wide social, cultural, even racial, division between these two categories of Burghers, and to a considerable extent this remains the conventional Colombo-centric view of the Burghers today. However, from the perspective of my own field research in the Ampara and Batticaloa Districts on the east coast of the island, a strict division between the Dutch and Portuguese Burghers is impossible to sustain; traces of Dutch and Portuguese identities are totally mixed and intertwined in all the Burghers I have known.

Portuguese Origins (1505-1658)

As a result of the Portuguese expansion around the African coast and into the Indian Ocean in the late 15th century, Goa had been established as the permanent military and ecclesiastical capital of "Portuguese India" seven years before the first Portuguese naval squadron accidentally reached the coast of Ceylon. Despite the harshness of their religious policy, the Portuguese succeeded in establishing the Roman Catholic faith firmly in Ceylon, not only among their own racially mixed descendants, but among large numbers of the population who were once either Sinhalese Buddhists or Tamil Hindus. The Portuguese also established a dialect of creole Portuguese in Ceylon as a widely spoken lingua franca of government, commerce, and religion.

The mixed (*mestiço*) populations in Portugal's various Afro-Asian colonial enclaves differed considerably, ranging from the semitribal *lançado* mulattos of Upper Guinea to the strongly Europeanized mulattos of São Tomé. Pure-blooded "blacks", either African or Asian, were clearly deemed inferior and were considered suitable for slavery, but mixed-blood offspring of Portuguese unions with blacks were given markedly higher status and

greater responsibility in the colonial system. This was in part because the admixture of European blood was believed to have elevated and improved the nature of these peoples, and in part because the mulattos were themselves inclined to share a European disdain for their native forebears. During the period of Portuguese dominance in India and Ceylon, the local population was enumerated in as many as five separate categories, according to parentage and place of birth. The Jesuit Father Valignano, writing to his superiors in 1580, distinguished between European-born Portuguese, Indian-born Portuguese, *castiços* (offspring of a European father and a Eurasian mother), *mestiços* (offspring of a European father and a native mother), and natives². Another common term for the mixed Portuguese descendants was *topass* (*topaz*, *tupass*, *toepas*, which evolved into the Sinhala expression *tuppahi*), which is derived etymologically from an Indian expression meaning "one who knows two languages".

The basic European elements of society in all of the Portuguese colonies were, on the other hand, quite simple and uniform. There were really only three types of Portuguese: first, the *soldados*, soldiers who were by definition unmarried; second, the *casados*, or "married ones", who were soldiers who had been discharged from the army and allowed to marry locally; and third, the *padres*, Catholic priests who were celibate. European women were totally absent³.

Wives for the Dutch (1658-1796)

The elements of colonial society in Ceylon under the Dutch were similar in many ways to those under the Portuguese, except that in place of the Portuguese military, the sole employer was now the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and the administrative center was no longer Goa, but Batavia on the island of Java. Europeans were classified either as "servants of the Company" (i.e., soldiers or merchants), or as "free burghers" (*vrijburgers*), who were former servants of the company who had decided to marry locally and settle in the colony. Ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church were also present, their activities regulated by the officials of the company. Once again, there were virtually no European women present, at least at the outset, and

2 Charles R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825* (Oxford, 1963), p. 61.

3 *Ibid.*

later efforts to bring women from Holland were never very successful. The vast majority of the free burghers who had left the company's service to settle locally found domestic partners, not among the caste-conscious Sinhalese and Tamils, but among the preexisting population of racially mixed Portuguese who, according to Governor Ryklof Van Goens in 1663, were "swarming" in the port settlements of Galle and Colombo⁴. In fact, one of the conditions imposed at the time of the Portuguese surrender was that widows and unmarried daughters of the Portuguese were to remain in the colony as wives of Dutch personnel, and these women were all either natives or mixed-bloods⁵. Despite a variety of lucrative trading monopolies offered to them by the company, these domesticated Dutch townsmen seem to have done best as landlords, tavern keepers, and casino operators⁶.

Within the general category of "the Dutch" (*Hollandsche*) in Ceylon, distinctions came to be made between the Europeans born in Europe, the Europeans born in Ceylon, and the *mixties*, offspring of a European father and either a native or a *mestiça* mother, but the latter group was always far and away the largest. Meanwhile, the *topasses*, or Portuguese *mestiço* men, were employed by the Dutch as troops and minor employees of the Company. The Dutch colonial enterprise in Ceylon was also dependent upon the use of domestic slaves brought in chiefly from East Africa and from southern India, all of whom knew, or quickly learned, the creole Portuguese lingua franca⁷. Although the Dutch language was the medium of communication for official purposes, creole Portuguese was the primary language of the Dutch *vrijburger* home and of the marketplace throughout the Dutch period. Even diplomatic exchanges with the Kandyan court were conducted in creole Portuguese, which was widely spoken among leading personages in the Sinhalese and Tamil districts. Dutch Burgher children learned creole Portuguese from their

4 Paulus Edward Pieris, ed., *Some Documents Relating to the Rise of the Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1602-1670, from the Translations at the India Office* (Colombo, 1929), p. 280; F. H. De Vos, "Dutch Colonisation of the East", *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon* [hereafter *JDBUC*], 12/1-4 (1920), p. 2.

5 De Vos, "Dutch Colonisation of the East", p. 2.

6 Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658-1687* (Amsterdam, 1958), pp. 197-206; Jacob G. Haafner, *Travels on Foot through the Island of Ceylon* (London, 1821), p. 83.

7 R. G. Anthonisz, "Lansi", *JDBUC*, 14/3 (1925), p. 87; id., "The Dutch in Ceylon: Glimpses of their Life and Times", *JDBUC*, 24/3 (1935), pp. 87-92; *JDBUC*, 24/4 (1935), pp. 129-132; *JDBUC*, 25/1 (1935), pp. 6-14; *JDBUC*, 25/2 (1935), pp. 63-71. See also J. R. Toussaint, "The Burghers in Early British Times", *JDBUC*, 25/2 (1935), pp. 41-55.

Portuguese *mestiça* mothers and from the slave women who were their nurses, some of them Kaffirs from Portuguese East Africa⁸.

Burghers in British Ceylon (1796-1947)

Soon after England snatched control of the island from Holland in 1796, the Reverend James Cordiner, chaplain of the Colombo garrison, estimated the total population of "Dutch inhabitants" in Ceylon at 900, and of "Portuguese" at 5000⁹. Under the British, the official term *Burgher* was eventually applied to all the mixed European inhabitants of Ceylon, and a number of them rose to positions of responsibility and prominence in government and the professions. The greatest number, however, served in the clerical services, which they dominated, in the transportation and communication services, and in various technical departments.

Yet despite the visibility and success of the educated middle-class Dutch Burghers in 19th century Ceylon, there was no overwhelming British sympathy for their cause, and there was even less tolerance shown toward the large number of poorer and less educated Portuguese descendants. In addition to serving in the *burgerij*, or reserve militia, the mixed Portuguese inhabitants of the towns in the Dutch period had taken up a range of petty trades and crafts, such as carpentry, smithing, tailoring, and shoemaking. This sometimes led the Dutch to call them *ambachtslieden*, or handicraftsmen, a designation later translated by the British as "mechanics" and used as an impolite ethnic label for the Portuguese Burghers throughout most of the British period. While all mixed European descendants were enumerated as "Burghers" for census and administrative purposes, the existence of a deep social division between the Dutch Burghers and the Portuguese Mechanics was attested by many colonial observers. The distinction that evolved in vernacular Sinhalese between "lansi" and "tuppahi" reflected this binary logic¹⁰.

8 Ian Russell Smith, "Sri Lanka Creole Portuguese Phonology", Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1977, ch. 1 (published in *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*, 7/2 (1978), pp. 248-405).

9 James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon* (London, 1807), vol. I, pp. 87-89.

10 For an extended discussion of other derogatory Burgher nicknames and epithets, see Michael Roberts, Ismeth Raheem, and Percy Colin-Thomé, *People Inbetween*, vol. I: *The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790s-1960s* (Ratmalana, 1989), ch. 1.

By the middle of the 19th century the vital service of the Dutch Burghers in the colonial administrative system had become too valuable to ignore¹¹. In 1859 Sir Emerson Tennent noted that the Dutch Burghers “form essentially the middle class in all the towns in Ceylon” and that “they fill places of trust in every administrative establishment from the department of the Colonial Secretary to the humblest police court”¹². Their only problem according to William Digby, a newspaperman writing in the 1870s, was a lack of stability and perseverance, aggravated here and there by “continued and everyday moderate tipping”¹³. Such gentle reproach was rarely bestowed upon the Portuguese Mechanics, who were described in most 19th century British accounts as dissolute, degraded, and perennially drunk. The abuse heaped upon the Mechanics in most of the published sources of the period was quite intemperate, much of it reflecting a prevailing European repugnance toward racial or cultural hybridization. “They are the most anomalous people in the island”, said the Reverend James Selkirk, whose comment sums up the perplexed colonial view¹⁴. They could not easily be assigned to one of the “native races”, yet they also violated the prevailing social classifications within the stratified European colonial establishment. They were recognized to have a certain flair for music, dancing, revelry, and bright costumes, although these were scarcely seen as redeeming virtues. Their creole Portuguese language was said to be an ungrammatical mishmash of words which, awkwardly enough, retained its usefulness despite the advance of English. Although skillful in their chosen trades, said Digby scornfully, “no Portuguese Burgher has yet risen to anything beyond a master tailor”¹⁵.

This negative stereotype helps to explain why acquiring the title of Burgher or Dutch Burgher was such an advantageous maneuver for many lower-status urbanites whose disregard for the details of pedigree exploited a surprisingly porous social boundary between “Burgher” and “Mechanic”. In

11 James Selkirk, *Recollections of Ceylon* (London, 1844), p. 72; Charles Pridham, *An Historical Political, and Statistical Account of Ceylon and Its Dependencies* (London, 1849), vol. I, pp. 480-482.

12 James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island*, 3rd edition (London, 1959), vol. II, p. 156.

13 William Digby, “Eurasians of Ceylon”, *Calcutta Review*, 63/125 (1876), p. 185; William Digby, *Forty Years of Official and Unofficial Life in an Oriental Crown Colony* (Madras, 1879), p. 54.

14 Selkirk, *Recollections*, p. 70.

15 Digby, “Eurasians of Ceylon”, p. 183.

the census of 1871, which permitted a choice of self-designations among the racially mixed inhabitants, the prestigious categories of "Burgher" and "Dutch" together accounted for roughly 70 percent of the responses, the more vague "Eurasian" made up 20 percent, while the stigmatized category "Portuguese" garnered only 8 percent, totally inverting the demographic profile offered by previous colonial observers¹⁶.

Mobilizing the Dutch Burgher Elite

It had become an unofficial but accepted practice during the 19th century for one seat on the Governor's Legislative Council to be reserved for an appointed Burgher representative, drawn invariably from the Dutch Burgher civic elites of Colombo and Galle. However, in the discussions leading to the constitutional reforms of 1910, it became evident that the composition of the Legislative Council would soon depend upon voting within communal (i.e., ethnically defined) electorates. As the British had never upheld an official distinction between Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Burghers, the creation of a single generic "Burgher" electorate suddenly posed the possibility that the large number of lower-class Portuguese Burghers might democratically outpoll the less numerous, wealthier, and better-educated Dutch Burghers. Leading members of the Dutch Burgher community tried to lobby (unsuccessfully) for a more restricted electorate, to be comprised solely of pedigreed Dutch Burghers, who, it was said, were the only true Burghers in the island.

It was the founding of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon (DBUC) in 1908 that provided the most effective publicity and organizational support to assert an elite Dutch Burgher identity. The chief objectives of the DBUC, as promulgated in its constitution, were to promote the welfare of Dutch Burghers, to inculcate values of thrift and self-reliance, to dispense assistance to needy members, to foster fellowship, to revive Dutch customs and language among the membership, to maintain a library, to read and publish papers on Dutch Burgher history, and to publish the genealogies of Dutch Burgher families living in Ceylon. The *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon (JDBUC)*, which began publication in 1908 and continues rather intermittently to the present, contains scholarly articles, patrilineal Dutch

16 Census figures for 1871, corrected for arithmetic errors, from Digby, "Eurasians of Ceylon", p. 194.

genealogies, notes and queries, and reports of the internal affairs of the DBUC¹⁷. From the outset, membership in the DBUC was governed by a strict genealogical qualification: members had to demonstrate an uninterrupted line of patrilineal descent from one or more European employees of the United Netherlands East India Company in Ceylon, the only permitted exception being genealogical links through the marriage of Dutch Burgher women to modern European men of any nationality¹⁸. According to the DBUC's renowned genealogist, F. H. De Vos, "the test of a man's race is that of his earliest known ancestor in the direct male line of legitimate descent.... A wife or child follows the racial status of her husband or father, a bastard that of his mother"¹⁹. Possibly the bastards uppermost in Mr. De Vos' mind were those born prior to 1658, when the last Portuguese enclave capitulated to the Dutch. In 1939 the rules of the DBUC were amended so as to expel any Dutch Burgher woman member who married a man unqualified for membership in the DBUC²⁰. This caste-like solicitude for the endogamy of Dutch Burgher women was chiefly focused on the threat of low-status out-marriage, whereas the prospect of producing new members through hypergamous unions with European men had always been warmly applauded. To be sure, the possibility of European ancestry in the maternal line of descent was not totally overlooked by the Dutch Burgher historians, who gleefully adduced every shred of proof that a few European women had indeed married and settled in Ceylon during the Dutch period. For the most part, however, a boast of European pedigree on the maternal side meant elevating the disdained Portuguese *topasses* and the Sinhalese into "the same great Aryan family" as the Dutch²¹, sentiments largely at variance with the exclusive principles of the DBUC.

For all of the articulate publicity and scholarly research activity of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon, this organization always remained a small

17 A contemporary example of this Dutch Burgher tradition of genealogy and historiography is found in a sumptuous volume by Michael Roberts, Ismeth Raheem, and Percy Colin-Thomé, *People Inbetween*, cit. *supra*.

18 "The Constitution and By-laws of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon", *JDBUC*, 1/1 (1908), pp. 52-60.

19 De Vos, "Dutch Colonisation of the East", p. 4.

20 "Proceedings of the Special General Meeting, 18 August 1939", *JDBUC*, 29/2 (1939), pp. 77-79.

21 "The Burghers of Ceylon: A Flash-Back", *JDBUC*, 47/1 (1957), p. 26 [rpt. of a 1903 Colombo newspaper article]; De Vos, "Dutch Colonization of the East", p. 2.

association of middle- and upper-class Burghers, largely centered on Colombo. The DBUC started with 268 members in 1908, apparently never exceeded 500 members at its zenith, and had fallen to scarcely more than 100 full members in 2005. Its founder, R. G. Anthonisz, was for many years Government Archivist of Ceylon, and other leading members were similarly well placed in government, business, and the professions. Consequently, the DBUC was perennially troubled by charges of elitism from the outside and of cliquism from within. Although the pages of the *JDBUC* cautioned members not to behave as though membership in the Union conveyed “a kind of patent of nobility”, at the same time, the members were by no means social equals. A hint of the internal stratification of the DBUC may be gleaned from the fact that membership in the Union did not provide entree to the separate D.B.U. Club until 1926, when the two institutions were finally pressured to amalgamate²².

The reserved ethnic electorate for the Burghers was replaced by universal adult franchise in the Donoughmore reforms of 1931. Although the Burghers were granted special nominated representation in the parliament of newly independent Ceylon in 1948, they quickly felt their vulnerability as neo-Europeans in an era of Sri Lankan ethno-nationalism. The number of people who were officially returned as Burghers in the census was always tiny (0.7 percent of the population in 1901; 0.6 percent in 1946) but in the years since Independence it has become miniscule (0.3 percent in 1971, 0.2 percent in 2001). Some of the reduction may reflect a desire to shed an identity which is no longer politically or socially advantageous, and some of it may also reflect changing birth and mortality rates in the over-all population. However, it is widely acknowledged that many Burghers have emigrated to Australia, where those ponderous Dutch genealogies published in the *JDBUC* have provided handy proof of European descent. Today the membership of the DBU is aged and dwindling, the library is padlocked for lack of interest, and even the current office employees are not genealogically qualified to belong to the DBU. The members' private bar, however, still remains open as a focus of senior Dutch Burgher sociability in Bambalapitiya and Colombo 7.

22 Niemand [pseud.], “Notes by Niemand”, *JDBUC*, 5/1 (1912), p. 22; R. G. Anthonisz, “Presidential Address”, *JDBUC*, 13/1-2 (1921), pp. 27-29; “Remarks”, *JDBUC*, 15/4 (1926), p. 132.

The Enduring Portuguese Tradition

The search for authentic Dutch customs in the island had been taken up enthusiastically in the pages of the *JDBUC* and other antiquarian journals, but the findings were typically modest: a remnant of Dutch wedding “coronets” (*kroontje*) in Jaffna, a brisk trade in “iron-cookies” (*ijzer koekjes*) in the streets of Galle, and various lexical contributions to the native languages, including the names of the suits of playing cards in Sinhalese²³. Yet, what the Dutch Burgher historians and antiquarians eventually discovered – and to their credit acknowledged – was that many of their most characteristic traditions were not Dutch at all, but Portuguese, and that other practices had been borrowed from the Sinhalese and Tamils.

The creole Portuguese language had remained a medium of internal diplomacy, petty trade, and informal sociability throughout the Dutch period. Even Dutch weddings were conducted in creole Portuguese, commonly the language of the bride. Making the best of this anomaly, Dutch Burgher historians boasted that by the end of the 17th century the very best Portuguese in the entire Dutch Indies was spoken in Ceylon. After 1796 the Dutch language no longer enjoyed official status, and it quickly fell into disuse under the competitive pressure of English. Creole Portuguese, on the other hand, remained as the urban dialect of all the Ceylon Burghers, permitting Tennent to say in 1859 that “a corrupted Portuguese is to the present day the vernacular of the middle classes in every town of importance”²⁴. Revealingly, a 19th century Dutch Burgher family recordbook (*stamboek*) first lists the circumstances of a daughter’s illness and death in Dutch prose, then records the final words between father and daughter in creole Portuguese²⁵. Ian Smith has traced the tenacious history of Creole Portuguese in Ceylon into the late 20th century, noting that pockets of native Creole speakers still exist in many of the lesser towns²⁶.

23 Robert J. Pereira, “The ‘Koronchi’ Ceremony”, *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*, 8/2 (1922), pp. 155-156; Louis Nell, “The Archaeology of Ceylon Eurasian Gastronomy”, *Orientalist*, 3 (1888-1889), p. 167; Alfred E. Buultjens, “On some Dutch Words Commonly Used by the Sinhalese”, *Orientalist*, 3 (1888-1889), pp. 104-107 [rpt. in *JDBUC*, 19/1-2 (1929), pp. 96-101].

24 Tennent, *Ceylon*, vol. II, p. 70.

25 R. G. Anthonisz, “The Disuse of the Dutch Language in Ceylon”, *JDBUC*, 1/1 (1908), p. 35.

26 Smith, “Sri Lankan Creole Portuguese Phonology”, ch. 1. See also D. E. Hettiaratchi, “Linguistics in Ceylon, I”, in Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Current Trends in Linguistics*, vol. V (The Hague and Paris, 1969), pp. 747-748.

The Portuguese influence on Sri Lanka has also been strong in religion and music, while the Dutch had little enduring impact in these fields. Catholicism was the faith of the Portuguese *mestiça* women taken as wives by the colonial Dutch townsmen, and there has always been a deep current of Catholicism in the poorer classes of the Burgher community. The musical flair of the Portuguese Mechanics was acknowledged even in the prejudiced accounts of the 19th century writers, although such love of song and dance was allegedly beneath the dignity of the most respectable Dutch Burgher families. Yet, the 20th century reminiscences of even some avowedly "Dutch" Burgher writers express nostalgia for those Saturday night *strom-strom* parties, where guests danced the *kafferina* and the *chikotti* to the accompaniment of the *viaule*, *bandarinha*, violin, and tambourine and became progressively saturated with a local arrack punch called "the Gloria"²⁷. Today's popular *baila* steps represent a Sinhalese transmutation of this Portuguese dance tradition, but there are places, particularly on the east coast of the island, where creole-speaking Burghers preserve Portuguese tunes and ballad fragments from the 16th century²⁸.

Burghers in Colonial Batticaloa

The eastern littoral of Sri Lanka, far from the cosmopolitan centers of Sri Lankan national life today, was the route by which most of the early European contacts were made with the Kandyan kingdom. The nominal control of this coastline by the Portuguese in the early 17th century did not prevent the Dutch from landing in 1602 and sending several parties of emissaries to the Kandyan court. In 1627 the Portuguese erected a fortification at the present site of Batticaloa town which was captured by the Dutch in 1638 as part of their gradual expulsion of the Portuguese from the island. The commander of the Dutch siege, Willem Jacobsz Coster, reported that the

27 Rip Van Winkle [pseud.], "An Afterward on 'Some Exquisite Nonsense'", *JDBUC*, 18/4 (1929), pp. 184-186. See also C. M. Fernando, "The Music of Ceylon, I: The Music of the Mechanics of Ceylon", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, 13/45 (1894), pp. 183-189; and Caroline Corner, *Ceylon, the Paradise of Adam: The Record of Seven Years' Residence in the Island* (London and New York, 1908), ch. 16.

28 Kenneth David Jackson, "'Bela Infanta' of Sri Lanka: Ballad Fragments in Portuguese Creole Communities", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Sri Lanka Branch*, new series, 19 (1975), pp. 17-25; id., *Sing Without Shame: Oral Traditions in Indo-Portuguese Creole Verse* (Amsterdam and Macau, 1990).

vanquished defenders had numbered “about 700 in all, among whom were 50 Portuguese and mestices, the rest being blacks, women and children”. The Portuguese officers and men were deported to Nagappattinam in south India, while the “mestices” and blacks were presumably handed over, along with other native collaborators, to the vengeance of King Rajasinha, the Kandyan ally of the Dutch²⁹.

The Dutch made Batticaloa a permanent VOC outpost in the 1660s, when they rebuilt the fortifications and commenced a modest trade in elephants, areca nuts, rice, and salt, but it was not until 1766 that the Dutch Company controlled much territory beyond the precincts of the fort. However, in the final thirty years of Dutch Batticaloa, when the Company at last governed the entire coastal plain, revenues were greatly expanded and several important irrigation works were constructed which remain in use today. Jacob Burnand’s detailed 1794 memorial on Batticaloa, written for the edification of his successor as chief of the Dutch Company outpost, discusses the civil and military establishment there, including about thirty slave families who had provided craftsmen for the company since Portuguese times, but mentions the Burghers only briefly in reference to the jurisdiction of the local courts³⁰. Evidently some of the Dutch personnel remained in Batticaloa as married settlers after the British takeover, for one finds that among the recipients of the “Batavia money” (i.e., special relief pensions distributed in 1832 by the Dutch government to needy widows and orphans of former VOC servants in Ceylon) were four women whose family names are still extant in the local Burgher community³¹.

Ian Smith examined some of the Batticaloa Catholic church marriage and birth registers for the Burgher “caste”, and he noted that the predominance of Portuguese surnames of the early 19th century gave way to an influx of Dutch surnames in the late 19th century³². Today, older informants connect certain Dutch (and Dutch Huguenot) surnames, like Wambeek, Struys, Van Langenburg, and Toussaint, with a once-aloof stratum of Burgher families

29 J. R. Toussaint, “The Dutch Connection with Batticaloa”, *JDBUC*, 19/2 (1929), pp. 82-84.

30 Jacob Burnand, *Memorial Compiled by Mr. Jacob Burnand, Late Chief of Batticaloa, for his Successor, Mr. Johannes Philippus Wambeek* (English translation of 1794 Dutch document), National Museum Library, Colombo. A partial copy is also in the Colonial Office archives in Kew, London (CO 54/125). The Dutch original is in the Sri Lanka National Archives.

31 J. R. Toussaint, “Batavia Money”, *JDBUC*, 21/3 (1932), pp. 148-155.

32 Smith, “Sri Lanka Creole Portuguese Phonology”, p. 29.

who would not mix socially with the rest, but this distinction has dissolved with the passage of time. The Dutch families who remained in Batticaloa in the British period may have sustained their Protestantism, and their links to the colonial elite, by joining the Anglican and Wesleyan missions, as some of Ian Smith's informants claimed, but there seems to have been a broad turn to Catholicism among them by the end of the 19th century. Despite their best efforts to assert social parity, the Burghers of Batticaloa were systematically kept on the second rung of the British colonial ladder, as reflected in the graduated food rations for inmates of the Batticaloa Jail *ca.* 1850: Europeans, 7 1/2 d. per diem; Burghers 4 5/8 d.; and natives 3 3/4 d³³.

Portuguese Burghers in Eastern Sri Lanka Today

Presently, groups of racially mixed, creole Portuguese-speaking inhabitants are still found in most of the larger towns in the Batticaloa and Ampara Districts, as well as in Trincomalee. The 2001 census lists the combined Burgher population of Batticaloa and Ampara Districts at 3448, with two-thirds of them living in Batticaloa Town and the adjacent seashore neighborhood of Dutch Bar. Recognized Burgher neighborhoods are also found in Valaichchenai, Kalmunai, and Akkaraipattu, with Burgher families residing in smaller clusters in other towns as well. These people are called *paranki* or *parankiyar* (cognate with colonial "Feringhee") in the Tamil language of the region, or Burghers in English. They are all Roman Catholics, usually sandwiched in between Muslim or Tamil streets and wards. In the town of Akkaraipattu, where I have done long-term fieldwork, there were ten Portuguese Burgher families out of a total of fifty-five Catholic households in the 1970s, and there are perhaps 25 Burgher families out of 150 Catholic families living there today. True to the traditional picture of the "Portuguese Mechanic", most of these Burgher households continue to subsist primarily on artisanal or skilled manual trades (carpenters, blacksmiths, and auto/tractor repairmen in particular). In Batticaloa town, the concentration of Burghers has grown substantially over the past 30 years through a resettlement scheme organized by the local Burgher Union. Many Burgher families sold their older homes in the Sinna Uppodai neighborhood near St. Sebastian's Church and resettled on cheaper land across the lagoon closer to the sea at Dutch Bar,

33 Pridham, *Historical, Political, and Statistical Account*, vol. II, p. 859.

in the parish of St. Ignatius. This effort to bring together an otherwise dispersed community has boosted the total number of Burgher families in Batticaloa to somewhere between 300 and 400 by local estimates. Again, the chief occupations are skilled manual trades (ironwork, carpentry, building trades, printing, automotive repair and body work, tire vulcanizing, the railroad), although some Burghers are also found in clerical positions and in the Catholic priesthood.

Practically no distinctively Dutch traditions survive among the Burghers of Batticaloa, except possibly some elements of Dutch cooking. And even here, the last published sighting of an authentic Dutch *poffertje* cake on the verandah of a local resthouse was made in 1917³⁴. However, the number of patrilineal Burgher surnames of clearly Dutch origin (e.g., Wittebron, Outschoorn, Hendrik, Toussaint, Ockersz) is far greater today than the number of Portuguese names (e.g., Rosairo, Andrade). Some modern Burgher names, such as Delima, might be Dutch (the Fresian name Dillema) or Portuguese (De Lima), and names such as Ragel, Sellar, and Balthazar are also ambiguous. The usual mode of dress among the Burghers is trousers and shirt for the men and stitched one-piece dresses or frocks for the women (a commonly remarked Burgher sartorial trait), all of modern European design. The enjoyment of Portuguese songs and dances in a state of convivial inebriation is a well-known part of Burgher domestic celebrations, particularly weddings. Burghers do not tie the Tamil wedding necklace (*tali*), but in other respects they seem to share the sacramental rituals of the Tamil Catholics. After nuptial rites in the Catholic church, the newlyweds come to the bride's house, where they sit as the guests dance the traditional *bailas* around them. At all such celebratory events, according to a post-tsunami report compiled by the Batticaloa Burgher Union, "a liquor bar will be available for the invitees"³⁵.

The creole Portuguese spoken in Batticaloa has been found by Ian Smith to have incorporated some distinctive features of the local Batticaloa Tamil dialect. The initial Indo-Portuguese trade language was brought to Ceylon from Goa, but in the linguistic environment of the island it underwent substantial structural convergence with the local languages³⁶. Despite the

34 A. C. Tutein-Nolthenius, "Old Dutch Custom at Batticaloa", *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*, 3/2 (1917), p. 138.

35 Project Proposal to Develop the Impoverished Burgher Families in Batticaloa District. Prepared by the Burgher Union of Batticaloa, 2005, p. 2.

36 Ian R. Smith, "Convergence in South Asia: A Creole Example", *Lingua*, 48/2-3 (1979), pp. 193-222.

long and tenacious history of creole Portuguese speech in the island, Batticaloa harbors the only significant concentration of creole speakers left in Sri Lanka, and their fluency is strongly threatened by the local emphasis on English and Tamil. There was a time, perhaps a hundred and fifty years ago, when prominent local Tamils and Moors would have needed to know some Portuguese patois in order to transact business. Today, discussions at the meetings of the Batticaloa Burgher Union are partially conducted in creole Portuguese, but the minutes are kept in English.

The kinship terminology of the Batticaloa Burghers is a fascinating mixture of Portuguese, Dutch, and English words, although the Portuguese categories predominate, and a few kinship terms are of uncertain origin³⁷. There are two features which suggest a borrowing from local Tamil/Moorish (Dravidian-type) kinship structure: a distinction between elder and younger siblings, and a separation of cross-cousins (*kozen / neki*) from parallel cousins (*irumam*). This is consistent with Ian Smith's report that cross-cousin marriage, which is preferred among the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Moors, is practiced also by the Batticaloa Burghers³⁸. My own genealogical sample of Burghers in Akkaraipattu from the 1970s corroborates this to a limited extent, although I found no instances of "close" cross cousin marriage. I suspect that cross cousin marriage may not be as widely practiced among the Burghers as among the Hindu Tamils and Muslims, and one of the reasons could be the Catholic ban on marriage within the prohibited degrees of kinship.

The east coast Burghers occupy an unusual position within a larger regional system of castes and ethnic communities, each defined by mixed and overlapping criteria, including caste, religion, language, occupation, unilineal descent, "race", historical origin, and domestic practices. My Tamil friends said that groups like the Burghers were anomalous and difficult to rank on a single hierarchical scale with the local Hindu castes³⁹. For one thing, the Burghers are seen as relative newcomers to the ancient society of Sri Lanka, a group with no charter in the pre-modern ethno-historical traditions of Batticaloa. Despite what one informant admitted was their "Dravidian cut", they are descended from Europeans and are entitled to a degree of consideration as "whitemen" (*vellaikkarar*), people of a separate "race" (*inam*). Their

37 McGilvray, "Portuguese Burghers and Dutch Mechanics", table 1, pp. 258-259.

38 Smith, "Sri Lanka Creole Portuguese Phonology", p. 32.

39 Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, in press), chs. 2 and 5.

religion is Catholicism, which excludes them from the local and regional cycle of Hindu temple festivals and Muslim celebrations where collective status hierarchies are ritually displayed, contested, and ratified. It is not specifically a problem of their Catholic faith, since the Muslims (Moors) recognize it as a "religion of the Book", and the Hindus can interpret the Virgin Mary as an extension of their Shakti cult. Rather, it is their lack of an authorized "share" (Tamil, *panku*) in wider community ritual, coupled with their lack of a hereditary clientship role in the domestic sphere, which makes it difficult for local Tamils to assign the Burghers a clear caste role and caste status. As Louis Dumont might have said, the Burghers are not a true caste because they are not an organic part of a total caste system⁴⁰.

On the other hand, the Burghers do exhibit a number of caste-like features which contribute both to their public image and to their own sense of group identity. While their occupations are not strictly hereditary, the group is very strongly associated with certain skilled manual trades. In the smaller towns, Burghers are most often carpenters and blacksmiths, and my genealogical data indicate considerable occupational continuity across generations and among intermarrying families. The Burghers tend to have their own recognized neighborhoods, which in Akkaraipattu were historically near the Catholic church, often adjacent to those of middle-ranking Hindu artisan castes. However, Burgher residential segregation is seldom as complete as with Hindu castes. A similar observation can be made with respect to the degree of Burgher endogamy: there is a tendency toward in-marriage, but in the genealogies I collected in Akkaraipattu in the 1970s almost one third of the Burgher marriages involved a Tamil or Sinhalese partner. While the rate of endogamy is possibly higher in Batticaloa town, where a much larger Burgher marriage pool exists, my evidence suggests a constant admixture of Tamil and Sinhalese spouses. Both the Tamils and the Moors reckon caste and clan descent matrilineally, while the Burghers are patrilineal (i.e., patronymic), so it is possible that mixed marriages would permit families to tailor their ethnicity by emphasizing one form of genealogical reckoning over another.

If pressed for a ranking, Hindu Tamils in Akkaraipattu assign the local Burghers rough parity of status with the middle-ranking skilled castes (Goldsmiths and Blacksmiths, Climbers) and modest superiority to the lower-ranking service castes (Washermen, Barbers, and Drummers). The

40 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, revised edition (Chicago and London, 1980).

intermarriage of some Burghers with members of the Climber and Barber castes, their residential proximity to these castes, and the fact that blacksmithing and carpentry are the chief Burgher trades, are the chief criteria employed in this ranking. The Moors tend to give the Burghers a higher and more discrete caste rank, placing them clearly with the Blacksmiths and Goldsmiths, but awarding them extra kudos within that rank for being Christians rather than Hindus. With the religious opprobrium toward liquor that has become a significant part of Islamic reformism in recent decades, it is likely that more Moors today would find fault with the Burghers' robust enjoyment of alcohol. However, the distance between the Moorish and Burgher residential areas of the town gives the Moors less firsthand knowledge of Burgher family life, so their ranking criteria tend to emphasize publicly visible factors such as occupation and religion.

In the Hindu and Muslim society of Sri Lanka's east coast, which is strongly infused with assumptions of caste, ethnic, and religious hierarchy, the Burghers have never been able to marshal the wealth and numbers needed to establish and maintain a claim to uniformly high regional status. However, within the ambit of locally concentrated Catholic populations, such as in the town of Batticaloa itself, the Burghers have in the past century asserted a stronger competitive claim to high rank and special distinction within the Catholic community. In this sense, the Catholic Tamils and Burghers replicate the familiar Hindu and Muslim pattern of rivalry for group prestige in the idiom of public religious ceremonial, only in this case, the arena of competition has been the church feast rather than the temple or mosque festival.

A vivid example of this occurred in 1897, shortly after the arrival in Batticaloa of the French Jesuits who took charge of the new diocese. In addition to suppressing the activities of *diableurs* (sorcerers) and concubinarians amongst the Catholic flock, the French fathers had to face the problem of caste rivalry between the two main churches in the town itself. The parishioners of Saint Mary's included Burghers, as well as members of the Velalar Cultivator and Barber castes, while parishioners of Saint Anthony's were exclusively Karaiyar Fishermen. These two caste congregations had frequently quarreled over the smallest questions of ritual precedence, e.g., which group should spread the cloths before the Blessed Sacrament in the Corpus Christi procession, or whether one caste or another had been assigned a better reading in the Easter Passion play. When Saint Anthony's was finally selected to receive the new diocesan bishop, Saint Mary's boycotted the welcoming celebrations. There was even some talk at Saint Mary's about

breaking away from Rome and affiliating with the “Portuguese Catholic Church” of the Goan schismatic, Bishop Alvarez. However, most of the discontent among the Burghers and their allies was channeled into an accelerated, but unauthorized, building program aimed at achieving a decisive architectural victory for Saint Mary’s. The fathers sought to delay this construction project in the hope of erecting a much grander diocesan cathedral for the new bishop, but their motives were highly suspect in the eyes of the Burghers. In a tactical *faux pas*, the French Jesuits organized a nocturnal mission to confiscate the bells from Saint Mary’s, but the bell-lifters were caught red-handed, the bishop’s campaign to impose ecclesiastical authority on the Burghers backfired, and rioting between Saint Mary’s and Saint Anthony’s ensued. The bishop eventually reasserted his property rights over Saint Mary’s in court, but only after the Burghers had clearly demonstrated their strength in the local lay Catholic hierarchy⁴¹.

As illustrated by this rumpus over the church bells in 1897, as well as in some local Akkaraipattu parish disputes I documented in the 1970s, the east coast Burghers have been able to mobilize effectively in localized arenas of conflict, but their identity politics has lacked the elite social class sensitivity of organizations such as the Dutch Burgher Union. From many of their family names, they know they share some Dutch ancestry, but they more strongly embrace the Portuguese traditions in their heritage, especially language, music, and religion. For their part, the surrounding Tamil and Muslim communities seem indifferent to the distinction between these two European genealogies, as reflected by the use of the single Tamil term *parankiyar* to designate members of the local Burgher community.

Recent Adversities: Civil War and the Tsunami

Since the mid-1980s, three of the predominantly Tamil-speaking areas on the east coast of Sri Lanka where local Portuguese Burgher communities have survived for the past five centuries – Ampara, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee districts – have been arenas of bitter armed conflict between Tamil separatist guerrillas of the LTTE⁴² and the Sri Lankan state. A politically autonomous

41 J. W. Lange, S.J., “The Secluded Coast: The Story of the Diocese of Trincomalee-Batticaloa, Ceylon, 1895-1970”, unpublished manuscript, ch. 9.

42 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. *Eelam* is an older Tamil name for the island of Sri Lanka.

Tamil zone – whether configured as a federated Northeastern Province or an independent state – would render the Burghers one of the smallest ethnic minorities in Tamil Eelam, along with the indigenous Veddas and the Kuravar “Gypsies”. Like other communities in the eastern region – Tamils, Moors, and Sinhalese – the Burghers have suffered twenty years of intermittent LTTE guerrilla warfare, Sri Lankan army campaigns, STF security force repression, and military occupation by the Indian Peace-Keeping Force. As historic townspeople, rather than rural farmers, the Burghers have escaped some of the major theaters of war in the east, which have more often been isolated villages overrun by attacking forces. The anomalous classification of the Burghers as European “whitemen” within the Tamil caste and ethnic hierarchy may have shielded them from the harshest forms of Tamil guerrilla conscription, Sri Lankan Army massacres, and Tamil-Muslim inter-ethnic reprisals, but the Burghers have paid a price nevertheless. Their relatively modest socio-economic status has made the Burghers less of a target for large-scale extortion by the LTTE, but their skill as blacksmiths and mechanics is obviously useful to any group carrying weapons. Burgher artisans are forced to pay Tiger “taxes” just like all ordinary Tamil tradesmen, with whom they are generally identified in the eyes of the LTTE. While the idea of Burgher youths flocking to join the LTTE and other Tamil separatist movements seems at first an unlikely possibility, some of them have actually done so over the years, responding to both northeastern regional loyalty and to an identification with the Tamil language and culture which is their encompassing social milieu⁴³. At the same time, other Burghers have pursued professional military careers in the Sri Lankan armed forces, originating more often from the middle class urban Burgher elites of Colombo. It is doubtless true that the violence and dislocation caused by the Eelam conflict has accelerated the emigration of Burgher families from all regions of the island to destinations such as Canada and Australia.

In contrast to the chronic and marginal suffering imposed by the Eelam Wars, the tsunami wave that struck the east coast of Sri Lanka on December 26, 2004, was a direct and devastating blow to the entire Burgher community. Based upon a research visit to Sri Lanka in August 2005, I can offer a brief overview of the post-tsunami situation for the Burghers of Akkaraipattu town

43 Efforts to gauge the participation of Burgher youths in the LTTE by examining family names on the official lists of LTTE martyrs have so far proven unsuccessful, but I hope to continue this line of research.

and Batticaloa town, while the condition of the Burghers in other coastal settlements such as Kalmunai remains to be documented.

Both in Akkaraipattu and in Batticaloa a great many Burgher families had unwittingly placed themselves in harm's way by relocating to more spacious and less expensive residential developments close to the seashore. In Akkaraipattu, the historic Burgher streets and lanes had been located well inland, adjacent to the Catholic Church and the old Police station on the Ampara Road, situated next door to Tamil Blacksmiths and Barbers, as well as alongside intermarried Sinhalese-Tamil households that were also Catholic. However, in the 1970s, real estate values steadily rose in this older part of town, responding to market pressure from the neighboring Moorish wards, as a shortage of building lots for new dowry houses intensified with the influx of earnings from labor migrants working in the Middle East and elsewhere. At some point in the early 1980s the great majority of Akkaraipattu Burghers (38 out of roughly 45 families) made the collective decision to sell their homes in central Akkaraipattu and build new houses at a less expensive seashore site at the 40th milepost on the Pottuvil Road, approximately 3 km south of town. When the tsunami slammed into the shore in three frontal waves from its point of origin 2000 miles due east near the island of Sumatra, it severely damaged the Burghers' small Catholic chapel and wiped virtually every Burgher house away, leaving only coconut trees and domestic concrete well-casings to mark the location of each dwelling (fig. 19). Considering that there were as many as 100 Burghers living at 40th milepost, it is something of a miracle that only sixteen were killed. As was seen elsewhere in the tsunami-stricken regions of the island, the victims were disproportionately women (4) and children (11). One Burgher man lost his life, but a blind Burgher woman was providentially spared.

In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, most of the surviving Burghers fled inland to the Tamil Hindu neighborhood of Alaiyadivembu on the south side of Akkaraipattu, where they were accommodated temporarily in school buildings. Several weeks later, about 15 Burgher families were relocated to a transitional housing site just south of the main Akkaraipattu junction on the Pottuvil Road donated by a local Tamil man, and a generous Sinhalese woman from Colombo provided them with building materials. Because many of the Burghers are carpenters who specialize in roof-framing, they have been able to erect their new temporary quarters to their own standards: cement floors, plank and fiber-board siding, and well-ventilated coconut-frond cadjan roofs overlaid with tar paper. Oxfam has provided

enclosed latrines, and drinking water is delivered to roadside cisterns by bowser trucks. The morning I visited this particular Burgher "refugee camp" (as the signboard calls it) in August 2005, I encountered a friendly and ebullient delegation of Burgher women from Valaichchenai who had come down by bus to pay a social call on their Akkaraipattu cousins (fig. 20). The entire scene was remarkably mellow considering the difficult post-tsunami circumstances of their lives. The long-term future of the Akkaraipattu Burgher community, however, is still in question, since none of these families would care to rebuild their homes at the 40th milepost beachfront settlement even if the Sri Lankan government revoked the 200 meter coastal construction exclusion zone where their houses formerly stood. Where the Akkaraipattu Burghers will eventually find affordable land to sink new residential roots is an unanswered question that leaders of the community are currently facing (fig. 21). On the positive side, because of their skills in carpentry and metalwork, the Burghers are likely to do well economically as the post-tsunami reconstruction efforts intensify and the pace of new construction increases. As Richard Delima, a member of the Akkaraipattu Burgher community, explained to me, their most practical need is to replace their lost carpentry hand tools, preferably with more modern power saws and drills.

In Batticaloa, exactly the same tragedy occurred on an even larger scale. Over the years, nearly 200 Burgher families formerly living in Sinna Uppodai and around the church of St. Sebastian in Batticaloa town, as well as in other scattered locations in the region, had sold their homes in higher-cost neighborhoods and resettled in a new colony at Dutch Bar, east of the Kallady Bridge, on a sandy isthmus separating the Batticaloa lagoon from the Bay of Bengal. When the tsunami hit the eastern shoreline, it washed completely over the densely inhabited isthmus and into the Batticaloa estuary, reducing the Burgher houses in Dutch Bar to rubble. The tsunami wave then propagated across the lagoon and struck the older residential neighborhoods of Sinna and Periya Uppodai on the opposite shore, where upwards of 100 more Burgher families still lived.

The devastation at Dutch Bar, like the post-tsunami landscape elsewhere along the eastern coastline in places such as Maruthamunai and Tirukkovil, has been tidied up in the months since the disaster struck. Bricks and rubble that were once strewn over a vast area have been stacked, piled, and in many cases recycled as new roadbeds and land-fills. Dutch Bar now looks a bit like a barren battlefield park with few visitors. Nicely swept and utterly vacant, it sits in silence between the dramatically upturned and eroded Tiruchendur

Murugan temple that so many foreign visitors come to see and the vanished fishing hamlet of Navalady that was so movingly described in the western press⁴⁴. The parish church of St. Ignatius seems to have been quickly repaired, but today there is only a small congregation. A total of 157 Burghers lost their lives in the Batticaloa tsunami, admittedly not so many in comparison with the roughly 12,000 lives lost elsewhere along the Ampara and Batticaloa coastline. But the impact of the tragedy upon the survivors has been immense: 220 Burgher families lost their homes. All of the former Burgher inhabitants of Dutch Bar who had not secured shelter with relatives or friends were housed in the former Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya near the Petroleum Corporation off Bar Road in Batticaloa Town. Ironically, this educational facility was available as an emergency shelter because earlier LTTE attacks had already caused the entire Sinhala community in Batticaloa to flee in fear. On a brief visit to the school in August 2005 I saw laundry drying on the playground fence, a community television set in one of the classrooms, and a number of Burgher seamstresses with newly donated sewing machines stitching garments together to earn money for their families.

Along with the displaced Burghers of Akkaraipattu, the residents of Dutch Bar have become terrified of the sea and voice no desire to rebuild at their former beachfront homesites. They also pointed out that it would not be practical in any case, because the government's 200 meter post-tsunami exclusionary zone took up 40 percent of the entire isthmus between the seashore and the lagoon. A proposal to resettle the entire Dutch Bar population at a new Burgher colony constructed on the far northeast edge of Batticaloa at Tiraimadu is now being carried out despite sober warnings of seasonal flooding at the site. Everyone agrees it is essential to locate any new Burgher settlement close to Batticaloa town, where their skills as craftsmen and carpenters are in strong market demand. Of the Batticaloa Burgher men who lost their livelihoods in the tsunami, 68 percent were carpenters, 19 percent were metalworkers or mechanics, 11 percent were tailors, and 2 percent were painters and plumbers. A proposal drafted by the Batticaloa Burgher Union for aid from external sources has requested replacement tools and a circulating micro-credit fund to allow the Burghers to get back on their feet economically. With a burgeoning post-tsunami construction boom already underway, the Burgher carpenters seemed poised to do well if tools can be put in their hands.

44 *New York Times*, 6 March 2005, p. A1.

Returning to Colombo in late August 2005 after several weeks in Akkaraipattu and Batticaloa, I stopped by the venerable headquarters of the Dutch Burgher Union in Bambalapitiya to enquire whether the DBU was involved with any Burgher relief work on the east coast. Once again, it was explained to me that, technically, the Batticaloa-side Burghers could not become members of the DBU for reasons having to do with their Portuguese ancestry. And once again, I was assured that DBU legal experts had been struggling for decades to find a solution to this constitutional conundrum. But then, after all this had been explained, I was pleased to learn that the DBU was actively helping to distribute relief funds and new sewing machines donated by several Australian organizations to Portuguese Burgher tsunami victims on the east coast. As the centenary celebration of the DBU approaches in 2008, it appears the tsunami tragedy has finally begun to forge new bonds between all of Sri Lanka's Burgher communities, "Dutch" and "Portuguese" alike.

On the following pages:

Photo 1. The former Portuguese Burgher seashore colony at 40th milepost south of Akkaraipattu, obliterated by the December 26, 2004 tsunami disaster.

Photo 2. A delegation of Burgher women from Valaichchenai visiting their friends and relatives in a tsunami refugee camp for Burghers in Akkaraipattu.

Photo 3. Desmond Barthelot, a leader of the Portuguese Burgher community in Akkaraipattu.





