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Agrarian change in Sri Lanka

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JAMES BROWN
JOE WEERARATNE



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Agrarian Change in Sri Lanka

Edited by

**JAMES BROW
JOE WEERAMUNDA**



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Preface

This volume is a product of the conference on 'Symbolic and Material Dimensions of Agrarian Change in Sri Lanka' that was held in Anuradhapura from 23–27 July 1984. The conference was sponsored by the Joint Committee on South Asia of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, and by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

The transformation of Sri Lanka's agrarian structures in recent times has been both complex and uneven. While the overall direction of change has been towards more capitalist forms of organization, as defined by the expanded use of wage labor and the re-orientation of peasant production from subsistence to the market, the transformation processes themselves have been heterogeneous and contradictory, as well as regionally variable. This volume seeks both to explore the range and to elucidate the complexity of these processes. It does so by bringing together a set of studies, all but one of which are based on intensive ethnographic research, conducted in six of Sri Lanka's nine provinces.

The studies focus on the so-called 'small-holder' sector (i.e., they largely exclude plantation agriculture) and are mainly concerned with the changes that occurred during the forty years prior to the violent escalation of ethnic conflict in the mid-1980s. All of them combine ethnographic with historical analysis, and several of them go back to the colonial period or even earlier. One of the principal aims of this volume is to place the analysis of agrarian change within the local cultural contexts that condition it. Put more dialectically, the objective is to hold the symbolic and material dimensions of agrarian change in simultaneous focus, in order to examine the ways in which culturally constituted patterns of meaning have influenced

material changes in the practice of agriculture at the same time as they have, in turn, been shaped by them. Closely related to this is the attempt to comprehend agrarian change as a dynamic social process, one whose typically complex patterns of conflict and cooperation are marked by continuous struggle over access to resources and the allocation of agricultural products, as well as over the prevailing definition of the social order. At the same time, by stressing both the social process and cultural context, it is also hoped to convey a sense of how the massive changes of recent times have been understood and represented by the villagers who have experienced them most directly.

The authors approach these general issues from different perspectives and with different emphases. Those whose papers have been grouped in Part 2, after the two introductory essays, provide accounts of the overall dynamics of change in local agrarian systems. By contrast, the papers in Part 3 are more concerned with analyzing particular aspects of agrarian change than with describing the transformation of the local system as a whole. Included here are studies that focus on service tenure in a temple village, on the intrusion of party politics into village life, on the struggle to maintain a sense of community within the village, and on the impact of a shift towards the employment of seasonally migrant labor. Finally, the papers in Part 4 share a primary interest in examining how agrarian change has been represented, and how it has been experienced.

Despite these different objectives, and despite the range of historical trajectories that are documented in the case studies, a number of common themes run through almost all the papers. These include the dynamic interplay between local initiatives and state policies, the complex ways in which capitalist relations of production, as they spread through the peasant economy, interact with existing agrarian institutions, and the refashioning of local identities as village life is incorporated into ever wider circuits of economic, political and cultural relations.

The papers in this book are based on field research conducted at various times between 1976 and 1985. All but three of them (Newton Gunasinghe's paper and the introductory essays by Mick Moore and James Brow) were first presented at the Anuradhapura conference. Papers were also delivered at the conference by Ron Herring, Charles Keyes, Joe Weeramunda, and Mark Whitaker, but are not included in the present collection. Others who participated in the conference were David Szanton, Gananath Obeyesekere, Norman Uphoff, Heinz Bechert, Serena Tennekoon, Richard Slater, Akira Adachi, and Charles Kemp.

The conference was held in an atmosphere of concern about the deepening ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka. Insights into some of the underlying sources of the conflict are to be found in this volume, but no attempt is made to take account of the civil war into which the country was about to collapse. Many of the papers have been significantly revised since their original presentation, some of the tables have been brought up to date, and a few recent references have been added, but no major changes have been made since the revised versions of the papers were accepted by the editors in 1985 and 1986. What is presented here, then, is a view of agrarian change in Sri Lanka from the perspective of the mid-1980s.

We are grateful to the Joint Committee on South Asia of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, and to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, for their generous support of the conference. A particular and more personal note of appreciation is due to David Szanton, Staff Associate at the Social Science Research Council, who has been an unfailing source of encouragement, assistance and good advice since the project was first proposed. We also thank the staff of the Centre for Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, especially its former director, Tom Jannuzi, and his assistants, Beth Brown and Louise Flippin, whose efforts greatly facilitated our ability to prepare the manuscript for publication. In addition, we offer our thanks to Nick Siegel, for prolonged and patient assistance in editing and word-processing, to Mike Woost and Jonathan Spencer, for help with the glossary, and to Bina Agarwal and Susan Wadley for their efforts on our behalf. Finally, we want to record our appreciation of Mr. Weerasinghe and his staff at Quickshaw's Nuwarawewa Resthouse in Anuradhapura, who did everything they could to ensure that our stay in the ancient city was comfortable and enjoyable.

We would like to thank the following publishers/journals for permitting us to reprint articles which originally appeared in their publications and are now presented here in a revised form: Cambridge University Press for 'Ideological History of the Sri Lankan Peasantry', by Mick Moore (*Modern Asian Studies*, 23,1, 1989); the Marga Institute for 'The Politicisation of the Power Structure and the Demise of Leadership in a Highland Community', by Tamara Gunasekara (*Marga*, 8,2, 1986); Social Scientists' Association for 'Transformation and Trajectories of Agrarian Systems in Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya Districts', by Newton Gunasinghe; and *Modern Sri Lankan*

Studies for 'Feudalism, Capitalism and the Dynamics of Social Change in a Kandyan Village', by Kalinga Tudor Silva (Modern Sri Lankan Studies, 1,1, 1986).

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A Note on Transliteration and Translation

Sinhala and Tamil words are printed in italic script in the main body of the text, but without diacritics. The latter are added in the glossary at the end of the book.

The distinction between the contrasting Sinhala terms *mada idam* and *goda idam* is, in all cases known to us, a matter of available water supply. *Mada idam* is variously translated in writings on Sri Lanka as wet land, irrigated land, paddy land or mud land. *Goda idam* is translated as high land, dry land or unirrigated land. When the term 'high land,' written as two words, is used in this book, it is always serving as a translation of *goda idam*. High land in this sense is to be found all over Sri Lanka, not only in the central highlands.

The words *asweddumize* and *chena* may be unfamiliar to readers with little previous experience of agrarian life in Sri Lanka, but they have become so common in English-language discussions of Sri Lankan agriculture that they are usually introduced without explanation. *Asweddumize* describes the process whereby *goda idam* is converted into *mada idam*. *Chena* derives from the Sinhala *hen* and refers to the local versions of what is more generally known as swidden, slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation.

Because of climatic and topographical differences, the cultivation seasons vary between different parts of the country. Everywhere, however, it seems that *maha* and *yala* are the two terms most commonly used to designate them. *Maha* refers to the major cultivation season, and *yala* to the minor season.

The initial letters of caste names are capitalized in the text both in Sinhala and English, but those of occupational categories are not.

Thus, to borrow Colin Kirk's example, a Potter is a member of the Potter caste, but not all Potters are potters. Almost all potters, however, are Potters. Some authors translate caste names, others do not. Caste names are not included in the glossary.

A few Sinhala words that are in common use among English speakers (e.g., *mudalali*, *pola*) have been given a plural form as if they were English words (i.e., *mudalalis*, *polas*). Others (e.g., *panguva*, pl. *pangu*) have retained their Sinhala plurals. Where both singular and plural Sinhala forms appear in the text, both also appear in the glossary.

1

Introductory Essays

1

Sri Lanka: A Special Case Of Development?

MICK MOORE

Introduction: Recurring Patterns of Underdevelopment

Anyone ignorant about Sri Lanka but having more than a passing acquaintance with the historical, social, political and economic characteristics of developing countries could make a fair guess at many of the significant features of the Sri Lankan scene.¹ It is a small, relatively densely populated island, with a total population of 16 million. The seven administrative districts that surround the capital, Colombo, cover less than a fifth of the total land area but house 55 per cent of the population. The city of Colombo developed in the late nineteenth century around the export of primary commodities to the colonial power, Britain, and the import of food and other consumer goods (see Table 1.1). Colombo is absolutely

¹ Much of the supporting material for arguments presented here can be found in Moore (1985). Because this paper is an attempt at a synoptic introduction to Sri Lanka, I have not felt it desirable or feasible to provide detailed supporting references.

dominant in the urban hierarchy, having fifteen times the population of the next largest city, Jaffna. It is also the nodal point of a centralized transport network.

Table 1.1
The Changing Composition of External Trade, 1946-88

	1946	1959	1973	1985	1988
Percentage of imports comprising food and drink	56	55	49	11	20
Percentage of export revenues derived from:					
Tea	50	60	48	33	26
Rubber	30	17	23	7	8
Coconut products	6	10	9	7	3
Manufactures	1	1	8	27	48

Source: Snodgrass (1966: Tables A-52 and A-53); and Central Bank of Ceylon (various years).

The climate is tropical and the weather humid throughout the year in all parts of the island, except around the peaks of the central massif. The characteristic rural landscape is one of rice fields fringed with coconut palms. Trudging water buffalo and peasant women transplanting rice are the visual clichés symbolizing rurality.

Located on one of the great historic trade routes between Europe and West Asia on one side and Southeast and East Asia on the other, and itself the source of such tropical exotica as cinnamon, cloves, precious stones, coffee, and tea, Sri Lanka has long experienced inward migrations of diverse peoples who came as traders, adventurers, mercenaries, missionaries, settlers or slaves. In its cultural and linguistic diversity and its maritime and trading orientation, the country has more in common with Southeast Asia than with the Indian cultural area to which it clearly otherwise belongs.

Contemporary economic and social relationships—and the way Sri Lankans perceive these relationships—have been deeply influenced by colonial rule, by integration into the global capitalist economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an exporter of primary commodities (mainly tea and rubber, but also coconut, graphite and spices), and by nationalist reaction against colonial rule and the colonial economy. The relative weight to be

given to the English language and Western culture—as opposed to the Sinhala and Tamil languages and to the putatively ‘traditional’ indigenous culture—in education and public affairs remains a perpetual source of puzzlement and conflict. Through a series of processes in which the causal role of conscious colonial policy remains in dispute, most of the minority communities—Europeans, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Moors, Malays, Malayalis, Sindhis, Borahs, Parsis, Burghers (Anglo-Asians) and Sinhalese Christians (especially the few Protestants among them)—came in the colonial period to occupy social positions and enjoy living conditions which were on average superior to those of the majority and mainly rural Sinhalese Buddhist community. A major theme in the domestic politics of the past half century has been the rectification of this ‘historic injustice’ by the symbolic primacy of Sinhalese Buddhist language, religion, and culture, and to divert material resources to the majority community, frequently in the name of socialism, and always in the name of the people. A systematically distorted Sinhalese nationalist interpretation of the island’s history has been purveyed by many agencies of the state, and ‘traditional’ cultural practices revived in a contemporary form to provide ideological and moral support to the process of Sinhalization. Leading politicians reared in a Westernized culture have ceded to pressures to adopt their ‘native’ language, dress and life style while in the public eye.

Nativism and a rediscovery of tradition have come more recently to the Sri Lanka Tamil community than to the Sinhalese, and

Table 1.2

Sri Lanka's Population, 1946-81

	1946	1981
Total population (thousands)	6,657	14,850
Percentage distribution by ethnic group:		
Low-country Sinhalese	43.6	74.0
Kandyen Sinhalese	25.8	
Sri Lankan Tamils	11.0	12.6
Indian Tamils	11.7	5.6
Sri Lankan Moors	5.6	7.1
Burghers and Eurasians	0.6	0.3
Malays	0.3	0.3
Others	1.2	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Contd.

(Table 1.2 Contd.)

	1946	1981
Percentage distribution by province:		
Western	28.2	26.4
Southern	14.4	12.7
Sabaragamuva	11.2	10.0
Central	17.1	13.5
Uva	5.6	6.2
Northwestern	10.0	11.5
North Central	2.1	5.7
Eastern	4.2	6.6
Northern	7.2	7.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Government of Sri Lanka, *Statistical Abstract of Sri Lanka* (various years).

largely in reaction to Sinhalization. Within each of the numerically significant communities—the Sinhalese Buddhists, Sri Lankan Tamils, (estate-employed) Indian Tamils, and Moors (see Table 1.2)—internal social cleavages have diminished and ambiguities about ethnic identity have been clarified as ethnicity has become of increasing political salience. As in all societies, the emergence of ethnicity as a political force in Sri Lanka has obliged those who lacked a clear ethnic label to choose one or have it chosen for them.

The economy still relies heavily for export earnings on the cash crops developed under British rule, above all on a single commodity, tea (see Table 1.1). Sri Lanka's terms of trade—the volume of

Table 1.3
Sri Lanka's Terms of Trade, 1948–87

Period	Unweighted Annual Average Terms of Trade (1973 = 100)
1948–52	181
1953–57	181
1958–62	181
1963–67	139
1968–72	105
1973–77	78
1978–82	63
1983–87	43

Source: Central Bank of Ceylon (various years).

Note: 'Terms of trade' refers to the quantity of imports which may be purchased from the earnings of a given typical 'basket' of exports.

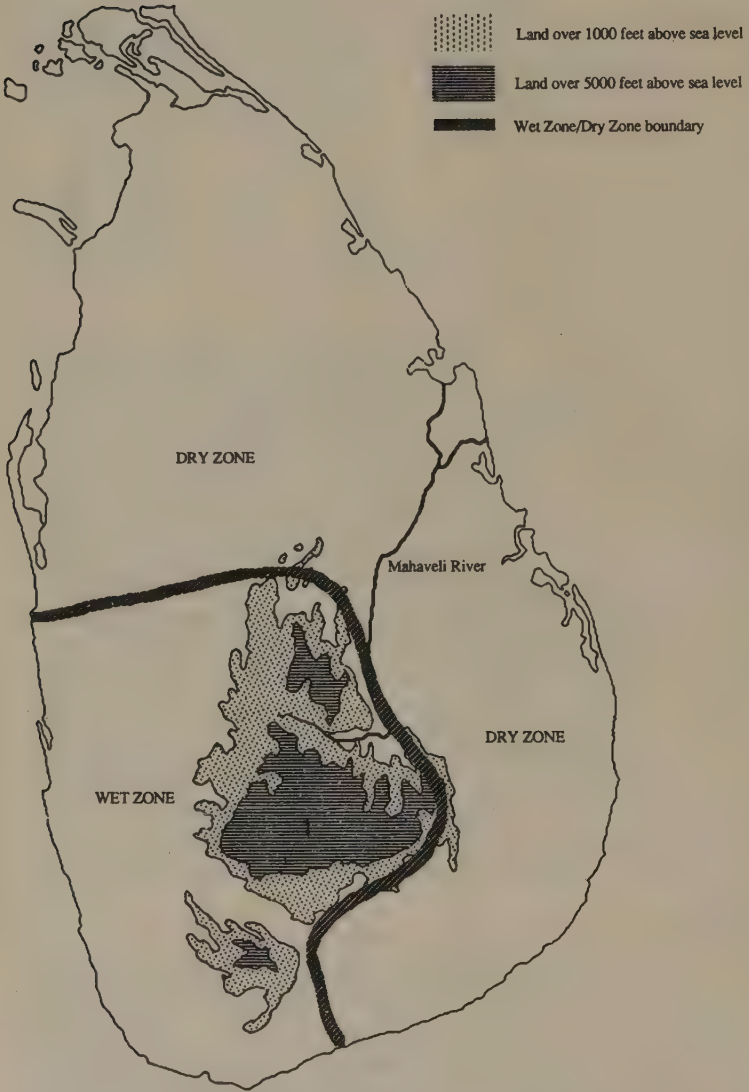
Table 1.4
 The Changing Structure of Agricultural Production, 1962-81
 Index Numbers of Agricultural Production (Volume 1962 = 100)

Year	Tea	Rubber	Coconut	Paddy	High Land Crops	Animal Husbandry	Minor Export Crops	Overall Index
1962	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1967	104	138	83	114	132	126	70	109
1972	101	138	112	131	174	163	127	124
1977	98	141	71	167	245	156	116	126
1981	99	119	88	223	273	181	172	144

Source: Government of Sri Lanka, *Statistical Abstract* (various years).

goods it must export to purchase a characteristic 'basket' of its import requirements—have been in almost perpetual decline since the late 1950s (see table 1.3). The import purchasing power of a representative basket of Sri Lanka's exports was five times as large in 1950 as it was to be in the mid-1980s. Because this decline in the purchasing power of export commodities has been met neither by a rapid growth of productivity in the plantation (or estate) sector nor by an adequate development of alternative sources of foreign exchange (see Tables 1.1 and 1.4), the trade and current payments balances have been in almost perpetual deficit since the end of the 1950s. Controls over foreign trade and payments, introduced to cope with this problem, have been one of the springboards from which, in the 1960s and most of the 1970s, direct government control was extended over much of the national economy. Equally important, a weak balance of payments has made the country increasingly dependent on foreign aid and all the paraphernalia of projects, experts, missions and economic policy conditions which aid entails.

Agriculture remains the major single source of income. It includes plantations producing export cash crops and small holdings producing both these commodities and a wide range of food crops, of which rice and coconut are the most prominent. Agriculture is especially important for the poor, who live mainly in rural areas, and look first to the weather for their prospects of eating well in the months ahead. Social life in the villages exhibits the same Janus-type paradoxes as in peasant communities everywhere.





Fieldwork Sites by Author
and Chapter Number:

- 1 Welivita (Silva, Chapter 3)
- 2 Wewegama (Perera, Chapter 4)
- 3 Pathamany (Gunasinghe, Chapter 5)
- 4 Udawatta (Gunasinghe, Chapter 5)
- 5 Ambalanda (Vitebsky, Chapter 6)
- 6 Dahata (Vitebsky, Chapter 6)
- 7 Mutukandiya (Vitebsky, Chapter 6)
- 8 Kotagepitiya (Kendrick, Chapter 7)
- 9 Rangama (Gunasekera, Chapter 8)
- 10 Devideniya (Gunasekera, Chapter 8)
- 11 Kukulewa (Brow, Chapter 9)
- 12 Nilanne (Hettige, Chapter 10)
- 13 Tenna (Spencer, Chapter 12)
- 14 Ratmale (Kirk, Chapter 13)

Mutual support, intimacy and the occasional expression of local solidarity coexist and interact with tyrannies, whose capacity to destroy human dignity and happiness belies the label 'petty'. Bitter and sometimes violent jealousies and conflicts occur between people who are forced through a simple lack of alternatives to share the same space and compete for the same material resources and positions of power and esteem.

Exit Stereotype

Yet, for all that it has in common with other developing countries, Sri Lanka is not just another hot, sweaty tropical country that might have provided the setting for a Graham Greene novel. It would, of course, be an incompetent country specialist who could not name at least one significant sense in which his country was very special and worthy of the world's attention. It does not, however, require much ingenuity to argue that, from the point of view of those interested in the problems of poverty and development, Sri Lanka is rather special among contemporary developing countries. Remaining trapped in poverty, Sri Lanka has managed to avoid many of the worst pathologies of underdevelopment.

Unlike almost all other developing countries, Sri Lanka has experienced no major flight of people from the rural areas to the cities. The proportion of the population classified as urban remained stationary at 15 per cent between the 1946 and 1953 censuses. This increased to 19 per cent in 1963, 22 per cent in 1971, and remained at the same level in 1981. Colombo's urban slums are small and, by Third World standards, well provided with such amenities as piped drinking water.

A major reason why Sri Lankans have not moved to cities in larger numbers has been the relative excellence—for a country ranking among the poorest 20 per cent in the world—of public provision to most of the population throughout the period since World War II of 'basic needs'—food, shelter, health care and education. The excellence of Sri Lanka's record in meeting basic needs has attracted much comment since the later 1970s, when comparisons revealed that, relative to its low income levels, the country had achieved a uniquely high score on the Physical Quality

of Life Index, a composite index measuring infant mortality rates, life expectancy at birth and literacy rates (see Table 1.5 and Isenman 1980). The literacy rate was 87 per cent in 1981. Almost

Table 1.5
Some Indicators of the Quality of Life in Sri Lanka

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Sri Lanka (1981 Unless Otherwise Stated)</i>	<i>Average for All Low Income Developing Countries (Most Recent Estimate)</i>
Life expectancy		
total (years)	69.4	58.4
female (years)	71.5	59.6
Infant mortality rate		
(per 1000)	44.2	99.2
Total fertility rate	3.5	4.3
Calorie supply per		
capita as percentage		
of requirements	102.0*	97.0
Population per		
physician	7,170*	5,827
Population per		
nursing person	1,340*	3,628
Population per		
hospital bed	340†	1,130
Primary school		
enrollment ratio		
total	103.0	92.4
female	100.0	79.3
Secondary school		
enrollment ratio		
total	51.0	28.0
female	54.0	20.4
Adult literacy		
rate (%)	85.0†	51.0
Radio receivers per		
1,000 population	99	93
Newspaper circulation		
per 1,000 population	49**	16

Source: The World Bank (1983: 83, 148).

Note: * 1980 figures

† 1979 figures

** 1970 figures

all children attend primary school for at least a few years. In 1985, the infant mortality rate was only 24 per thousand. The major blot on the record is the failure to extend this level of welfare to the Indian Tamils, who provide the bulk of plantation labor, especially on the larger tea estates located in the central Kandyan hills.

A number of variables seem to account for this mainly excellent record in meeting basic needs. Background factors include a relatively good rural transport and communications network, which were established in much of the wetter southwestern quadrant of the island—the Wet Zone, where most of the population lives—as a by-product of plantation development in earlier decades. Good transport and communications have both increased the demand for welfare services by increasing the effective political power of rural populations and eased the physical constraints on responding to such demands. It is in the commitment of successive governments to welfare services that one finds the primary explanation for Sri Lanka's basic needs achievements. 'Self-help' has played a very minor role (Moore 1985:228).

In 1931, new constitutional arrangements provided for universal adult suffrage and for the transfer of authority over most internal matters to an elected government. The government elected that year, which comprised almost entirely Sinhalese Sri Lankans, laid the foundations of a welfare state on the British model. In Sri Lanka, as elsewhere, World War II drew government more deeply into economic management and wrought major advances in social legislation. By the end of the war the structure of the welfare system was almost complete, and the government's financial commitment very heavy. By the early 1970s, when welfare provision reached its apogee, the main components were free education from primary to tertiary levels; a widespread network of free basic curative and preventive medical institutions, in which the indigenous homeopathic system (ayurveda) had a recognized place; a subsidized public transport system which extended deep into relatively remote areas; a food ration system which provided substantial quantities of rice and other basic commodities free or at subsidized rates to almost the entire population through a dense network of cooperative retail outlets; and a long established set of legislative enactments and administrative practices through which a large number of poor and landless people were provided with plots of state land, mainly for homesteads but also for cultivation purposes. There was also a range of other minor benefits and a substantial body of

law and administrative regulations designed to advance the interests of employee against employer and of tenant (agricultural and residential) against landlord.

This welfare system explains why income distribution has been so egalitarian in Sri Lanka by world standards. And, to return to the point from which I started, it has considerably mitigated the rate of migration to towns. As will be discussed more fully later (see also Table 1:6), the retention of population in the rural areas is also attributable to the expansion of small-scale family farming since 1930. Thus the rural poor have not been expelled from villages by complete landlessness and destitution at the same rate as elsewhere in Asia. Equally important, it has generally not been necessary for rural Sri Lankans to move into town to hold urban jobs, use public health and education services, or play an active role in politics.

The other side of the coin of rural-urban relations is that Sri Lankan governments have not followed the example set by most Third World states of vigorously exploiting the agricultural and rural economy for the benefit of urban dwellers, the state machinery itself, or projects for rapid, large-scale industrialization. Substantial resources have been extracted from Sri Lankan agriculture, especially through export taxes on tea and rubber, which are grown mainly on plantations. The main losers have been the largely Indian Tamil estate labor force, some wealthy Sri Lankan families, British estate companies until their nationalization in 1975 and, since that time, some agencies of the state itself. This extraction has been largely counter balanced by public spending on the welfare services mentioned above, by the subsidized expansion of small-scale family farming, and by the low incidence of taxation in most other respects (Moore 1985). It is, for example, characteristic of Sri Lanka that the capital costs of a rapidly expanding rural electricity network should be met by the government and foreign aid donors, and the large recurrent losses met by high charges on large-scale and industrial users.

Sri Lankans generally have been little taxed and, since the abolition of the grain tax in 1893, no major political conflict has arisen over taxation issues. One reason for low taxation has been that, until very recently, and once again untypical of the Third World, Sri Lankan governments have been responsible for financing only a rudimentary military and intelligence establishment. Until

Table 1.6
The Distribution of Land in Agricultural Holdings, 1946-83

Size of Operational Holdings (Acres)	Percentage Distribution by Size Classes of Holding: Number of Holdings in the Year				Percentage Distribution by Size Classes of Holding: Area of Land (Hectares) in the Year			
	1946	1962	1973	1982	1946	1962	1973	1982
Less than 1		35.5	45.3	42.2		3.8	4.9	5.9
1-4.99		48.9	42.8			28.0	31.2	
5-9.99	99.4	11.3	9.0	57.6		18.3	18.9	70.1
10-49.99		3.9	2.7		66.0	17.0	15.4	
50 and above	0.6	0.5	0.2	0.2	34.0	33.0	29.6	24.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number (thousand)	855	1,174	1,619	1,817	1,727	1,889	2,036	1,967

Source: Government of Ceylon, Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Agriculture, 1962*; Government of Sri Lanka, Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Agriculture, 1973 and 1982*.

the early 1980s, with the outbreak of widespread armed conflict between separatist Tamil militants and the armed forces, and the subsequent escalation of military posturing between the Sri Lankan and Indian navies across the Palk Straits, resort to firearms for either political or criminal reasons had been rare in Sri Lanka and the threat of external conflict remote. Because the Sri Lankan state was so lightly equipped with armed force and intelligence services, the ill-prepared JVP youth insurgency of April 1971 came very close to immediate military success.

It would seem likely on *a priori* grounds that a state whose activities were so uncharacteristically biased towards the provision of mass welfare would exhibit a pattern of politics different from that normally associated with the third world. This is indeed the case. Sri Lanka has been almost a bastion of pluralist parliamentary democracy. Universal suffrage dates from 1931. The 1947 general elections which preceded independence were, at least in the Sinhalese electorates, mainly contests between an organized conservative bloc and an alliance of Marxist parties. The conservative United National Party (UNP) won these and the subsequent 1952 elections, but in 1956 was swept from power by the recently formed Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. The SLFP was soon to settle into a left-of-center position between the UNP and the Marxist parties with which it has frequently been allied. By Third World standards, the Sri Lankan party system has exhibited a relatively clear left-right coherence, which corresponds to the parties' programs and bases of electoral support.

At each of the five general elections after 1956, the UNP and the SLFP, which gradually absorbed much of the Marxists' electoral support, replaced each other in power. This pattern of mainly free and fair elections and of alternation of power lasted until 1982, when the new 1978 'Gaullist' constitution providing for an Executive President was in force. In October 1982 President Jayawardene, the leader of the UNP, won a further presidential term by popular mandate. He then decided to extend the life of Parliament in order to ensure that his own party retained a sufficient majority to amend the constitution at its convenience. The decision to dispense with general elections by calling a referendum to approve this extension received the approval of the electorate, but only after widespread intimidation of opponents and the massive use of state power for party purposes (Obeyesekere 1984). The fact that the ruling party needed to act in this way to ensure its victory is an

indication of the very high degree of political awareness of the Sri Lankan electorate. Electoral turnout levels are consistently among the highest in the world, and are high in local as well as national elections. Membership rates of political parties and semi-political organizations (like trade unions) are similar to those of Europe. Among the Sinhalese, in particular, politics is seen as one of the major routes to individual success in life. The villager's interest in politics is typically obsessive (Jupp 1978).

On the one hand, the tone and content of Sri Lankan politics are strongly populist and radical. Levels of politicization are high. The various sections of the proletariat have been relatively well organized into politically affiliated trade unions. Marxist parties were a significant force in Parliament between 1947 and 1977. They have strongly influenced the style and programs of the main parties, and still retain more power than electoral arithmetic would imply due to high levels of organization and cadre commitment. Governmental power generally has been used to benefit the mass of the population, especially the rural Sinhalese.

Yet, on the other hand, and almost paradoxically, most major positions of political leadership in all the main parties have been occupied by members of a genuine capitalist bourgeoisie which emerged in the colonial period, largely on the basis of ownership of the means of production in the plantation sector. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the peculiarities of the process by which almost every step towards the radicalization of politics has been initiated by political leaders from a wealthy capitalist elite. The significant point about the distinctive features of Sri Lanka is that it is an exception to the rule that in developing countries 'the domestic bourgeoisie is usually quite weak' (Roxborough 1979: 41). The capitalist class, whose activities extend from plantations, commerce, and property into the professions, politics, and public administration, is a well-developed class, indeed the most developed social class in Sri Lanka in all senses of the term. This is perhaps but one example of a more general point: the level of administration and of social, educational and institutional development in Sri Lanka is so high that it is frequently described as a developed country which happens to be very poor.

Regional Diversity

Unwelcome as the notion is to many Sri Lankans, especially to the

intelligentsia, there seems little doubt that most of the 'development' that conventional observers detect in contemporary Sri Lanka has its roots in colonial rule and the colonial plantation economy. At the same time, it is clear that colonial rule did nothing to bridge those social and ethnic cleavages which have erupted with such tragic consequences in recent years. Most of these cleavages have a major regional dimension.

A separate Tamil Hindu society and culture based in the Jaffna peninsula had existed for hundreds of years before colonialism. Almost cut off from the Sinhalese areas of the southwest by large and nearly empty extents of dry zone jungle, Jaffna maintained close maritime links both with Tamil South India and with the populations of Sri Lanka's east coast seaboard, many of whom were Moors—Muslim in religion if Tamil in language and many aspects of culture. To the Jaffna Tamils, colonialism brought Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic and, more importantly, missionary education which gave them a place in public service and other white collar occupations out of proportion to their relative demographic strength. The colonial plantation economy also brought to Sri Lanka a totally new Tamil-speaking population, albeit one which had nothing in common with the Jaffna Tamils except the label 'Tamils' (= aliens) which the Sinhalese have applied to both groups. These 'Indian Tamils' mainly worked on the tea estates in the central Kandyan hills.

The concentration of the more stereotypical components of the plantation sector—large tea estates owned by Britons and worked by Indian Tamils—in the Kandyan hills contributed to the perpetuation of a cultural and political division among the Sinhalese which had deep roots in history and geography. The Low Country—the southwestern coastal plain—began to fall under European (Portuguese) control in the early sixteenth century. The Portuguese were later replaced by the Dutch and they, in turn, by the British. For generations, however, no European power could overcome the Kandyan kingdom, which was firmly ensconced in the central hills and protected from superior European firepower by difficult terrain.

When Kandy finally came under British control in 1815, the Sinhalese of the Low Country had been under European rule for two centuries and subject to major European influences for three centuries. These contrasting experiences helped to crystallize a

divergence between Kandyan and Low Country Sinhalese, which continues to have considerable political significance. Coastal location, foreign contact, trade and continual immigration from India had probably already engendered in the Low Country a society which was relatively loosely structured, innovative and entrepreneurial, while Kandy remained feudal, hierarchic, conservative and subject to the rule of those who controlled the land. The adaptation of the Low Country Sinhalese to Christianity, commerce, formal education and European culture only exacerbated this difference, which emerged also at the levels of ideology and consciousness. Having resisted Europeans for two centuries and maintained a Buddhist kingdom, Kandyans saw themselves as the repository of pure Sinhalese and Buddhist traditions and culture. The Low Country people, by contrast, saw in the Kandyans backwardness, conservatism, lack of education and commercial naivete. Low Country and Kandyan Sinhalese came to be officially recognized as distinct 'racial' or 'ethnic' groups. They were classified separately in all censuses before 1981, and remain for some purposes subject to different civil laws.

These conflicting perceptions became more pointed after the Kandyan hills were 'opened up' for plantation development, first for coffee production in the 1840s, and then, from the 1870s, for tea. The commercial opportunities which emerged in such spheres as wholesale and retail trade, estate supply, land clearance and development under contract, and transport services were, to a large extent, seized by the Low Country Sinhalese. The Low Country already had a substantial nucleus of mercantile capitalists, especially from the population groups located on the coastal fringe. The general expansion of the plantation economy provided them with many new opportunities.

Kandyans, both villagers and the 'aristocratic' families who defined their social position in relation to a 'traditional' feudal order which the British largely perpetuated, found their world invaded by processes and peoples with which they had little empathy and over which they had little control: the enclosure of large areas of land into estates, the 'invasion' of these estates by Indian Tamils, the emergence of British estate owners and superintendents as rival local chieftains, and the development of a thriving trading system dominated by Low Country Sinhalese, Tamils and various other categories of outsiders.

While the Kandyans did, to some extent, and often by sheer necessity, involve themselves in this new world of commodity exchange, estate production, formal education and, more recently, competitive party politics, they did so more slowly than the Low Country Sinhalese, to whom the Kandyans have sometimes appeared backward. By contrast, the Kandyans have tended to represent themselves as the sole bearers of authentic Sinhalese tradition in the face of a long assault by outside influences of all kinds.

Some Tides of History

Sri Lankan society did not cease to evolve once the plantation system had been established. One of the major significant trends since about 1930, which is dealt with in more detail in my later paper, has been the 'peasantization'—some might say 're-peasantization'—of the agricultural economy, i.e., the expansion of the small-scale family farming sector at the expense of the plantation sector and as a counterweight to the processes through which members of smallholding families would otherwise become landless. The small farm sector has shown considerable vitality. Despite a substantial shift of population out of agriculture, in the period 1946 to 1981–82 the total number of agricultural holdings (+113 per cent) has increased faster than the rural population (+106 per cent) (see also Table 1.6 and Moore in this volume). The main reason is the state's use of a large reservoir of Crown land and of financial surpluses taxed from cash crop exports, both to provide homestead plots for the landless in the more densely populated areas and to develop irrigation colonies peopled by (mainly Sinhalese) small farmers in the less densely populated Dry Zone to the north and east of the Sinhalese heartland in the Wet Zone. The center of gravity of the smallholder economy has shifted substantially to the Dry Zone, and it is here that the population growth has been most rapid (see Table 1.2). Rice surpluses produced in the Dry Zone have, to a large extent, replaced the rice imports formerly used to feed Colombo and the large rural Wet Zone population, which is unable to produce its own food. In response to heavy state support, the smallholder economy, especially rice production, has expanded rapidly while output of the old export staples—tea, rubber, and coconuts—has tended to stagnate (see Tables 1.4 and 1.7).

Table 1.7
Paddy Production and Yields, 1952-84

<i>Annual Average</i>	<i>Net Harvested Area (Thousand Hectares)</i>	<i>Production (Thousand Metric Tons)</i>	<i>Yield (Metric Tons Per Hectare)</i>
1952-54	374	570	1.52
1962-64	522	1,028	1.97
1972-74	575	1,336	2.32
1982-84	683	2,353	3.45
Per cent increase from 1952-54 to 1982-84	+83	+313	+127

Source: Central Bank of Ceylon (various years); for the 1950s and 1960s, data made available by the Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo

The early development of the Dry Zone irrigation colonies was financed entirely by Sri Lankan sources. Only recently, and especially since the change of government and the radical shift to a so-called 'liberal' economic policy in 1977, has foreign financing played a major role. The large Mahaweli irrigation-cum-power program, which was accelerated after 1977, has been financed largely by foreign aid. The government has also tried to attract foreign private capital into agriculture but, perhaps fortunately for the government itself, with little success. Foreign investment in agro-industry, such as Nestle's milk processing plant in Polonnaruwa or the Primo flour mill in Trincomalee, is politically acceptable. On the other hand, attempts to give foreign firms control of land for agricultural production have met the kind of political resistance predictable in a country which is so densely populated and so thoroughly politicized, and where, because of the plantation experience, wresting control of the national soil from foreigners is a prominent theme in nationalist consciousness.

The new 'liberal' economic policy has not reversed the long-term process, pre-dating formal independence in 1948, of re-establishing national control over Sri Lanka's natural resources. This process, which is simultaneously one of Sinhalization and 'peasantization,' has been especially evident in the plantation sector. The proportion

of tea and rubber grown by small (and almost entirely Sinhalese) farmers has increased at the expense of large-scale estates worked mainly by Indian Tamil laborers. A substantial shift in tea production has taken place from the higher elevations of the Kandyan hills dominated by estates to Sinhalese smallholders in the foothills southeast of Colombo. Some estates have been acquired by the government and divided among landless villagers. The number of Indian Tamil laborers, most of whom reside in 'line rooms' on estates, has declined because of repatriation to India (see Table 1.2). Their place has been taken by Sinhalese who remain resident in villages. The nationalization of most of the estate sector in the early 1970s not only accelerated this process but gave local Sinhalese politicians a voice in the appointment of estate staff. 'Estate-village integration,' a slogan of the land-reform period, has indeed been taking place in the political sphere as well as in economics and daily social interaction.

Estate superintendents were reared in an environment in which they enjoyed a very high degree of autonomy and control. Now most have to negotiate their rule with local politicians and with two major estate workers' trade unions, one mainly Indian Tamil and one mainly Sinhalese, whose leaders sit in the Cabinet.

Although never 'total institutions' to the same degree as estates, villages, especially those in the less accessible parts of the Kandyan hills and the Dry Zone, constituted much of their inhabitants' universe of social life in earlier years. To the extent that villagers had less external contact and fewer external sources of livelihood and information than they do today, their degree of commitment to their community was greater than it is now. The rapid spread of public transport, schooling and literacy, and the high levels of extra-village employment and part-time farming imply that there is a core of truth in older villagers' laments about the decline of community. Yet, older Sri Lankan villagers do not voice nostalgia with the same consistency and fervor as the elderly in many other countries. For it is widely recognized that life has improved. The near-eradication of malaria in the late 1940s and 1950s is acknowledged as a blessing, as are lengthened lifespans and the availability of health care and schooling. Members of lower castes in particular have vivid memories of the 'old oppression,' especially the tyrannies exercised over them by village and local headmen who, until the 1950s, were appointed, as in colonial days,

from local families of high caste, status and wealth. Headmen appear to have frequently used their positions to their personal material, psychological and sexual advantage and to have enforced humiliations that perpetuated the inferior status of low caste people. Opposition to the 'headman system' was a potent electoral platform for the Marxists and the SLFP, who abolished it on first coming to power in 1956. At the village level, headmen were replaced by a relatively powerless group of officials called *grama sevakas*.

The contrast frequently drawn between the former authoritarianism of the headmen and the contemporary powerlessness of the *grama sevakas* is an example of themes prominent in several papers in this volume: the disintegration of authority structures at the village level; the fragility and impermanence of local power stemming from electoral success; and the apparent dearth of local organizational capacity to overcome party and factional conflict in the collective interest. While it is difficult to draw confident generalizations about such issues where the information is highly impressionistic, these phenomena do appear to be relatively prominent and problematic in Sri Lanka. A 'traditional' (i.e., colonial) system which guaranteed effective if oppressive authority at the local level has been undermined by electoral competition and the growing capacity of the oppressed to combat their ascribed status. But the older status system has never been clearly defeated or publicly rejected; no social revolution of any kind has occurred. Distrust of the old system and the felt need continually to reassert freedom from the old oppression combine with political factionalism to make many villagers wary of attempts to organize them and reluctant to accept others' attempts to assert leadership.

The Primacy of Politics

The 'headman system' and the broader question of resentment against a hierarchical and exploitative 'traditional' social order was but one of the foci of political conflict which, for several decades, gave Sri Lankan (especially Sinhalese) voters a choice between parties which could be aligned relatively clearly on a left-right spectrum, where 'right' generally indicated conservatism, support

for private enterprise, and an electoral base among the less poor, and 'left' the opposite. A second basis of this pattern of political conflict was the early development of capitalist relations of production in the plantation and transport sectors and the organization of parties around capital (especially the UNP) and labor (especially the Marxists) respectively. Because of the capitalist elite's high degree of Westernization, its early success in attaining local power, and its close relationships with foreign capital in plantation production and foreign trade, the nationalism of the conservative UNP was muted and restricted mainly to the political sphere. Cultural and economic nationalism, and the associated tendency to lean to non-alignment rather than to the West in international relations, have been characteristic of the SLFP and the Marxists. The extent of 'nationalism' has thus correlated crudely with leftism.

The tendency for the poor and lowly to support the SLFP, and the less poor to support the UNP seems to have diminished somewhat over the past decade. One reason is that many of the objectives of lower class and caste groups, organized labor and cultural nationalists have been achieved to a sufficient degree so that the leftist and Sinhalese communalist causes to which they gave rise have lost their urgency. More contingent and personal factors, however, may be of equal importance. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the eventual inheritor of the radical and populist SLFP after the assassination of her husband in 1959, appears to have allowed personal prejudices derived from her Kandyan aristocratic background to undermine the electoral base of her party. To a large degree Mrs Bandaranaike reorganized the SLFP around the leadership of a small group of Kandyan aristocrats (*radala*), many of whom were her relatives. Indeed, the aristocracy's 'feudal' character, and its limited direct involvement in capitalist enterprise, paradoxically made it a relatively credible partner with the Marxists in radical 'anti-capitalist' governments of the early 1960s and 1970-77.

Yet, the effects of Mrs Bandaranaike's poor personal relationships with people from castes other than her own (Goyigama) gradually undermined this radical tradition at the grassroots. Under her husband, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the SLFP had been identified as the party of the 'common man' (for which one would often read 'low caste man'). Mrs Bandaranaike, however, personally offended many non-Goyigama politicians who had been closely associated with her party. When J. R. Jayawardene, a

consummate political organizer, became leader of the UNP in the early 1970s, he saw a chance to act on two related fronts. Purging his own party of its hitherto strong identification with a small group of wealthy Goyigama capitalist families, notably the Senanayakes, he recruited new young cadres from relatively low status (and often low caste) backgrounds. Successfully tarring the SLFP with the brush of elitism and 'family-bandyism,' Jayawardene received extensive support from low caste voters in the 1977 elections. At the time most of the research reported in this volume was conducted, the Marxist parties and the SLFP were in disarray, and the votes of many poorer and low caste groups were more open to the best material offer than previously. At the least, electoral competition between the UNP and the SLFP was being conducted in a more instrumental and less ideological fashion than before.

By one of those twists of fate which appear paradoxical only to those who expect consistency in politics, at the same time that the UNP launched a successful populist appeal for low caste votes it committed itself more firmly than for decades to a classic right-wing economic program of liberalization, privatization, and collaboration with foreign capital. Implementation of this program began when the UNP won the 1977 general elections. The change of direction was, in many respects, so radical that the necessary legislative and administrative reforms are still in train.

It is too early to judge whether the new policies will be successful in macro-economic terms. From a vantage-point in the mid-1980s, they appear to be neither a roaring success nor a clear failure. Economic growth rates above the historic norm and a flowering of new enterprise must be set against major public expenditure and balance of payments deficits, heavy dependence on foreign aid, and a continuing failure to generate substantial new export earnings. While the armed conflict with Tamil separatists makes any short-term prediction about Sri Lankan politics especially hazardous, it does seem clear that at least one set of expectations about the politics of the new economic policy has been frustrated. As is indicated by the establishment of a 'Gaullist' Executive Presidency under the 1978 constitution, President Jayawardene and some close associates hoped to move some way towards the depoliticization of Sri Lankan society: to make Members of Parliament (MPs) more dependent on the President and party leadership; to reduce the power of MPs to intervene in the administration of their electorates; to insulate

economic policy from the vagaries of elections; to undermine the industrial and political power of organized labor; and to deflect energies from politics into private sector economic enterprise. The viability of these hopes is not easy to judge. They were certainly not fulfilled. One of the more evident reasons is that the massive expansion of public investment associated with the new economic program generated public sector contracts of unprecedented size for ministerial distribution, providing opportunities to use political and personal connections for private enrichment that dwarfed those of previous administrations. Another reason was that the President was unable to restrain competition for the succession among his senior subordinates. As old forms of state patronage, like food subsidies, were cut back, new ones, for example Mahapola educational scholarships, and a massive new public housing program masterminded by the Prime Minister, arose to take their place.

For a few years in the late 1970s and early 1980s the growth of private sector employment opportunities, notably in tourism, construction, and semi-skilled and unskilled work in oil-rich West Asia, was so great that for the first time in several decades the ordinary young villager enjoyed an alternative to education, the public sector, and politics as a route for personal advancement. Even agricultural laborers found themselves among the lucky groups whose real incomes were rising as a result of a surge in the demand for labor, while earnings from public sector jobs, hitherto the target of all ambitious village families, were declining. By the mid-1980s, however, the employment booms in tourism, construction and West Asia were over and unlikely to return. By mid-1985, recruitment through political connections into the rapidly expanding armed forces had become the new economic frontier for rural youth. Whatever else happens, politics seems likely to play as big a role in determining villagers' life chances in the next few years as it has done in recent decades. Understanding the political angles will continue to be the key to analysis of most dimensions of economy, society and culture in rural Sri Lanka.

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2

Themes in Agrarian Change

JAMES BROW

Introduction

The long agrarian history of Sri Lanka has been marked by several periods of radical change, during which the prevailing forces and relations of production were fundamentally, and sometimes quite rapidly, transformed. First came the initial introduction of agriculture to the island. Then there was the development, beginning more than two thousand years ago, of the tank-based system of irrigated agriculture in the Dry Zone that sustained the classic kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. When this system fell into decline, from the thirteenth century onwards, the centers of Sinhalese power and population shifted to the Kandyan highlands and the coastal Wet Zone in the southwest, and new agricultural regimes emerged that were increasingly oriented towards mercantile trade overseas. Later still, in the mid-nineteenth century, the direct establishment by the British of export-oriented plantation agriculture in the central highlands wrought yet another set of basic transformations. Finally, or at least most recently, the changes of the last few decades, which are the principal subject of the studies collected in this volume, appear to be attaining a comparable scope.

By emphasizing these decisive, if often extended, moments of radical transformation, I do not mean to suggest that the long stretches of time that separate and connect them were devoid of significant changes in the patterns of agrarian life. It is evident, for example, that changes under British colonial rule, which lasted from the overthrow of the kingdom of Kandy in 1815 until independence in 1948, were not confined to the initial impact of British law and the establishment of plantations. The whole period was one of continuous and pervasive change in peasant agriculture,¹ as a result of legal and administrative innovations that introduced new definitions of property rights and new forms of taxation, commoditization and monetization of the rural economy and the subsequent spread of usury and indebtedness, and land fragmentation in a context of rapid population growth.

The dominant tendency has been to describe these changes in terms of the decay of peasant agriculture and the disintegration of the village community.² Some scholars, however, while acknowledging the deep pauperization of the peasantry that was effected under colonial rule, also point to the substantial conservation and reactivation of Kandyan structures of agrarian relations under British rule (Gunasinghe 1975, 1979; Shanmugaratnam 1980, 1983, 1985). Outside the areas directly taken over by the plantations, transformation of the social relations of production was limited, on the one hand, by the lack of incentives to capitalist investment in paddy cultivation and, on the other, by the absence of attractive employment opportunities outside agriculture. Despite their immiseration, therefore, peasant cultivators were disposed to hang on to their small parcels of land, and to work as sharecropping tenants if they could not sustain themselves as independent

¹ For present purposes, peasants are defined as 'rural producers securing their livelihood through the use of family labour on family land' (Bernstein 1979: 421). In this usage, 'peasant' is a broad descriptive term, not a theoretically informed concept (cf. Bernstein 1979; Friedmann 1980). It identifies the form of social relations within the unit of production ('family labour'), and it indicates that the producers are not totally separated from their means of production ('family land'), but it does not specify either the forms in which surplus is appropriated or the extent to which cultivators are engaged in the production of commodities. Both of these are significantly variable within the category of peasant agriculture.

² The classic accounts are the Report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission (Govt of Ceylon 1951) and Sarkar and Tambiah (1957), both of which focus on developments in the Kandyan highlands. Village agriculture in the Dry Zone was significantly less disrupted (see below).

holders. Thus Shanmugaratnam (1985:1-2) argues that 'the colonial economy had mainly a pauperizing and not a proletarianizing effect on the peasantry.' In other words, the material conditions of peasant life deteriorated, but the social relations of production in village agriculture were, to a remarkable extent, preserved. Most importantly, the class of peasant cultivators was not transformed *en masse* into a new class of landless wage laborers.

Although agrarian change under British colonialism receives detailed attention in several of the following papers, for the most part it serves as a backdrop for analyses that focus on what has happened since independence in 1948. Here, there is broad agreement among the contributors not only that the pace of change has quickened in the last forty years but also that it threatens, if it has not yet everywhere accomplished, basic changes in the modes of production. Ecological and demographic constraints have become increasingly stringent. Agriculture itself has been transformed by technological innovations and has become more diversified. The use of wage labor has expanded, and cash-cropping has replaced much of the subsistence production that formerly prevailed in many parts of the country. Labor has become increasingly mobile, and the agrarian class structure has become more differentiated. These economic changes have conditioned, and been conditioned by, associated changes in the structures of social interaction and the modes of cultural expression. Inherited patterns of hierarchical and reciprocal relations now confront the competitive individualism of the market, and the authoritative propagation of nationalist ideology shapes the reconstruction of local identities that are already challenged by the disruption of the village economy.

The studies in this volume examine various instances and aspects of these changes. With the exception of Mick Moore's account of how a particular understanding of the 'peasantry' has been ideologically constructed within the national elite, all the studies are focused on particular rural sites and are based on extensive ethnographic research. These sites are distributed among six of Sri Lanka's nine provinces, and therefore span a significant range of ecological and historical variation, but no claim is made that they compose a sample that is representative of the island as a whole. More particularly, apart from the village in Jaffna District described by Newton Gunasinghe, all the research sites lie within the boundaries of the former kingdom of Kandy. They include villages

located both in the Dry Zone and in the up-country districts of the Wet Zone, but the Low-Country Wet Zone and other coastal districts, apart from Jaffna, are excluded (see Map 1.2). Moreover, although the impact of the plantations is registered in many of the studies, especially those conducted in the Kandyan highlands, the collection does not include any direct account of the plantation sector. It confines itself to agrarian change in Sri Lanka's villages, or what is commonly—if at times somewhat misleadingly—known as the smallholder sector.

While each of the ethnographic accounts illuminates particular facets of agrarian change, taken together they compose a panoramic view of the kinds of changes that have been taking place in agriculture and their ramifying effects on other aspects of village life. The history of every village is, of course, unique, but certain themes recur in most, if not all, of the studies. In the remainder of this introductory essay, I discuss three of these central and recurrent themes: the interaction between state policies and local initiatives, changes in the social relations of production, and the fate of the village community.³

State Policy and Local Initiatives

The figures assembled by Mick Moore in the previous chapter indicate the extent to which production has been increased in the smallholder sector. Between 1952–54 and 1982–84, the annual production of paddy in Sri Lanka was increased by 313 per cent, the net harvested area was expanded by 83 per cent, and the average yield per unit of land was raised by 127 per cent (see Table 1.7). Moore (1985:87) has also pointed out, however, that between 1970 and 1979 paddy accounted for no more than 29 per cent of the average annual value of smallholder production. Plantation crops (tea, rubber and coconut) accounted for a further 12 per cent, but the largest part of the value of smallholder production (59 per cent)

³ This essay is designed as an introduction to the ethnographic studies rather than as a comprehensive analysis of agrarian change. For recent, theoretically informed studies that focus on the preservation of small peasant production, see Abeysekera (1985). For an analysis of peasant politics and relations between the peasantry and the state, see Moore (1985). For the impact on the peasantry of the 'open economy' policy of the UNP government elected in 1977, see Gunasinghe (1986).

came from the combination of 'minor export crops' (which include cocoa, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and pepper), the production of which increased by 72 per cent between 1962 and 1981, and other high land (unirrigated) crops (including various vegetables, root crops, pulses, chillies, onions, sugar cane, and so on), the production of which increased by 173 per cent during the same period (see Table 1.4). Production of these crops has fluctuated greatly, but the overall trend has clearly combined both expansion and diversification.

Increased production is, at least in part, the result of government policy. Agricultural development has long promised to meet a number of imperative concerns of state, including the relief of landlessness in the context of rapid population growth, reduction of rural unemployment, attainment of national self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs, and the electoral support and political quiescence of the rural population. As the figures indicate, the general goal of raising agricultural production has been sought both by expanding the area under cultivation and by increasing yields per unit of land.

The striking increase in output has involved radical changes both in the material and in the institutional aspects of agriculture that have virtually eliminated whatever vestiges still survived of the village community as a relatively autonomous social entity in which production was primarily oriented to subsistence and simple reproduction. Material changes have included the extensive refurbishment and construction of irrigation systems, improved transport and communications facilities, the introduction of new, high-yielding varieties of seed as well as fertilizers, insecticides and weedicides, and some mechanization of production, all of which have been largely accomplished either directly by agencies of the state or at its instigation and with its support. At the same time, the state has also moved to establish new rural settlements, to reform the terms of tenure, to distribute land in its possession, and to provide various forms of credit, subsidy and insurance. These developments have not only promoted the direct intervention of government officials into village agriculture but have also made cultivators increasingly dependent on both national and international markets and capital.

This overall trend has been sustained regardless of whether it has been the United National Party (UNP) or the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) that was in power. The policies of the two major parties have, of course, differed, and the 'liberalization' of the

economy undertaken by the UNP government after 1977 certainly reduced the role of the state in the supply of agricultural inputs, the purchase of agricultural products, and in rural commerce more generally. On the other hand, state control of the production process has been enhanced by the huge Mahaweli Development Project. At least in the Dry Zone, it is still water that is the scarcest factor of production, and the steady increase in the proportion of irrigation water that is distributed through one or other of the major government schemes indicates a corresponding reduction in the degree of control that the actual producer exercises over his own cultivation practices.

But although the agrarian conditions that have come to prevail have been decisively shaped by actions of the state, they are by no means solely the result of successive government policies. On the contrary, everywhere they bear the stamp of local initiatives, sometimes taken in opposition to the directives of government officials. Thus Tudor Silva describes the beginnings of commercial vegetable production in Welivita, the village he studied in Kandy District, as a 'spontaneous capitalist development produced mainly by market mechanisms' (Silva, this volume) and he argues that

it cannot be directly attributed to any specific production campaign or development program initiated by the government. On the contrary, in the initial stages the government extension staff seems to have discouraged the cultivation of vegetables on paddy land, as it was seen as a practice contrary to the government's drive for self-sufficiency in rice.

Comparable innovations are described in many of the case studies. In contrast to some old stereotypes, there has been no scarcity of villagers willing to take advantage of changes in the structure of market opportunities, both inside and outside agriculture, and even in the face of considerable risk and uncertainty. On the other hand, villagers have been very unequally placed to seize new opportunities, and for many of them changes in their agricultural strategies are more realistically interpreted as defensive responses to impinging ecological constraints and economic threats to their livelihood than as entrepreneurial initiatives.

The agrarian economy of Sri Lanka has long been at least partly monetized, and one overall trend of development through the

colonial period was that of increasing commoditization, marked by the expansion of cash crop production and the development of new markets for land and labor. In many parts of the country, however, such developments were slow to appear, and the most decisive changes did not occur until around the time of independence or even later. Writing about villages in the Kandyan highlands, Tudor Silva, Newton Gunasinghe and Andrew Kendrick all identify the 1940s and 1950s as the period during which a significant shift towards cash crop production took place.⁴ This took two forms: tobacco cultivation on unirrigated land (Gunasinghe, Kendrick), and vegetable production in the village paddy fields during the dry season (Silva, Gunasinghe, Kendrick).

These developments occurred under varied circumstances and had different social consequences. In Welivita (Silva), the shift to cash crop production in the early 1950s was led by a group of low-caste tenants who were already politically mobilized and whose endeavors were subsequently fostered, first by the improved terms of tenure secured by the Paddy Lands Act of 1958, and then by the construction of a road that enhanced their access to the wholesale market in Kandy. In the temple village of Kotagepitiya (Kendrick), by contrast, it was the high-caste Village Official of the temple who initiated and has subsequently continued to dominate the production of both tobacco and vegetables, while in Udawatta (Gunasinghe) it was the intrusion of the Ceylon Tobacco Company in the late 1940s that disrupted the local agrarian structure. This intervention, by which the company sought to control peasant tobacco production, led to the differentiation of a previously homogeneous peasantry into a small class of barn owners on the one hand, and a class of rural workers and small peasants on the other.

Except in Jaffna, where intensive cash crop production has long been established (Gunasinghe), the large-scale re-orientation of village agriculture towards the market seems to have occurred somewhat later in the Dry Zone than in the Kandyan highlands. In most of the Dry Zone, the traditional organization of *chena* (swidden) cultivation remained more or less unaltered until the 1970s, although by that time cultivators were already marketing much of their paddy crop. Under the established *chena* regime, in

⁴ In the village in Nuwara Eliya District studied by Gunasinghe, production of tobacco and vegetables for sale on the market started somewhat earlier.

which millet was usually the principal crop, each household operated independently as the unit of both production and consumption, and exchange was largely confined to the reciprocities expected among kinsmen and neighbors. Only a very small proportion of *chena* produce was sold on the market. The traditional long-fallow system of *chena* cultivation, however, came under increasing stress from the steady growth of population in the Dry Zone that resulted both from natural increase within the region and from migration out of the Wet Zone. Then, from the late 1960s onwards, the demographically based pressure to reduce the fallow period combined with improvements in transportation, increasing demand in urban markets, and at times also the imposition of import controls, to bring about a massive shift towards cash crop production.

The development of commodity production in the Dry Zone has taken various forms. In many cases the scale of operations remains quite modest, as *chena* cultivators have simply given over a portion of their small plots to cash crop production. Throughout the region, however, as is reported here by Jayantha Perera and myself for Anuradhapura district, Siri Hettige for Polonnaruwa district, and Piers Vitebsky for Monaragala district, commercial agricultural enterprises have also emerged on a much larger scale, requiring very considerable investment and well established connections to urban markets.

This diversity of scale is matched by the variety of crops that have been adopted for cash crop production in the Dry Zone. Vitebsky's paper records that limes, manioc and, most recently, sugar have succeeded one another as the principal cash crop in a region of Monaragala district. Jonathan Spencer reports that in Tenna, which lies on the border between the Wet and Dry Zones, beans have become the main cash crop. My own account of a village in Anuradhapura district describes how some cultivators have recently shifted from millet to gram and cowpea, believing that these cash crops will grow well on land that has lain fallow for a shorter period than millet requires. Despite increasingly adverse conditions, others still prefer to avoid the risks of market fluctuations by continuing to grow the traditional subsistence crops. Elsewhere in the Dry Zone, commodity production has favored other crops, such as chillies, tobacco or tomato. Everywhere, however, there is a pronounced tendency, which is most comprehensively analyzed in Vitebsky's paper, to reduce the fallow period, or even to eliminate it.

The Social Relations of Production

Cash crop production has generally been accompanied by greater use of wage labor, and to that extent the direction of agrarian change appears to be not merely towards expanded commodity production but also towards the further establishment of capitalist relations of production.⁵ Commercial vegetable and tobacco cultivation in the highlands (Silva, Gunasinghe, Kendrick) and large-scale cash cropping in the Dry Zone (Perera, Hettige, Brow, Vitebsky) both engage significant amounts of wage labor. On the other hand, although precise information on this issue is to be found only in a few of our studies, there is some evidence that pre-capitalist relations of production, including forms of reciprocal labor exchange (*attam*) and share cropping tenancy (*ande*), as well as dependence on unpaid family labor, are still wide-spread in paddy cultivation. In part, this is due to the generally small size of paddy holdings, which enables their occupants to perform most of the cultivation using only family labor, but doubtless other factors are also involved, including not only the comparatively unattractive returns that can be expected from the investment of capital in paddy cultivation but also the continuing vitality of the constraining cultural norms in which it has long been embedded.

Wage labor, however, is not excluded from paddy cultivation. Indeed, its use is clearly spreading rapidly, especially in the parts of the Dry Zone that now produce the bulk of the country's rice. Many of those who now work as agricultural wage laborers in the Dry Zone are local residents, but in recent years they have been joined by a growing number of seasonal migrants from the Wet Zone, whose conditions of life and terms of employment are the major focus of Siri Hettige's paper. Many of the new capitalist farmers in the Dry Zone prefer to employ these seasonal migrants, not only because they can hire them for lower wages than village residents but also because it is easier to avoid entanglement in

⁵ For present purposes, the defining characteristics of capitalist agriculture are taken to be the realization of surplus in the form of surplus value through employment of wage labor; production for sale on the market, i.e., commodity production; and the reinvestment of profits from agriculture in further agricultural production. The development of capitalism was one of four main trends identified by Morrison *et al.* (1979) in their useful accounts of agrarian change based on studies conducted in the mid-1970s.

enduring relations of personal patronage and dependency with them. The continuing struggle of resident agricultural laborers to forge such personal bonds with their wealthier neighbors reveals their willingness to subordinate themselves for the sake of a more secure livelihood, but it also indicates that the establishment of the impersonal relations of capitalist production is still a matter of contention.

Thus, although capitalist relations of production have spread into paddy as well as unirrigated agriculture, they often remain enmeshed with earlier forms of relationship, even in areas such as the new Dry Zone settlement schemes where entrepreneurial activities are strongly pronounced. This has produced some curious modifications of old relationships. Formerly, for example, share cropping (*ande*) tenancies usually linked landlords who controlled more land than they could cultivate themselves to tenants who lacked enough land. Now, however, as both Perera and Hettige report, small proprietors are leasing their land to wealthy entrepreneurs who cultivate it with the use of wage labor.

These new kinds of leases reflect recent increases in the costs of agricultural production, as a result of which many smallholders can no longer afford to cultivate their own land.⁶ This, in turn, is one aspect of the growing differentiation that, as several authors report, has resulted from the adoption of cash cropping and capitalist relations of production. On one side there is the emergence of a relatively small class of entrepreneurs who control sufficient capital to invest in cash crop production on a large scale. On the other, there is a growing class of cultivators who either do not possess enough land to support themselves or who lack the finances needed to cultivate the land they do possess.

This polarization is far from complete and its progress is highly uneven, as the case studies demonstrate, but it is sufficiently advanced to jeopardize the continued preservation of small peasant production. This, indeed, is the major basis for the claim that, in contrast to the preceding period of colonial rule, the last forty years constitute a time of radical agrarian change. However, the exact extent of structural transformation, that is, the extent to which agriculture in the so-called 'smallholder' sector has come to be organized capitalistically through the employment of wage labor, remains a matter of some uncertainty.

⁶ Hettige and Perera discuss increases in the costs of paddy production. Perera and Gunasinghe discuss increases in the costs of production of other crops.

Mick Moore's analysis of the ideological history of the peasantry shows that it has been the consistent policy of governments since independence, following the lead of their colonial predecessors, to promote the small family farm. Implementation of this policy has been accompanied, and doubtless also shaped, by the propagation of a Sinhalese nationalist ideology that accords a prominent place to the peasant farmer. This policy has achieved substantial success, certainly in retarding the dissolution of peasant agriculture if not in maintaining its structural basis. Moore uses official statistics to show that between 1946 and 1982, the total number of agricultural holdings increased faster than the size of the rural population. Between 1973 and 1983, while the size of the total agricultural workforce grew by only 2 per cent, the number of smallholdings increased by 12 per cent. This was achieved mainly by drawing on the huge reservoir of land that the government inherited from the colonial state to make numerous small grants of land, either in Village Expansion Schemes or in one of the large settlement programs.

Moore also recognizes, however, that an increase in the number of smallholdings does not necessarily entail a corresponding increase in the number of smallholders, if by the latter we mean small-scale cultivators who make their living primarily from working their own lands with family labor. In this connection one must note the tendency in official reports, censuses and survey research, for rural people who occupy a small piece of land to be classified as smallholders, however small the piece of land they possess and however little it contributes to their livelihood. There is a pervasive ideological current here to which members of the elite and the so-called smallholders themselves have both contributed. On the one hand, as both Moore and Hettige point out, officials and politicians, from the left as well as from the right, have been reluctant to acknowledge the existence of a class of agricultural wage laborers, preferring to view them rather as peasants who happen to be without land. It has thus been possible to ignore the specific problems that agricultural laborers confront by subsuming them under the general issue of landlessness. On the other hand, villagers themselves are often disposed to describe themselves as smallholders or as farmers, even when this is not their principal source of livelihood. The evidence from Colin Kirk's study of Ratmale is particularly telling in this regard. In response to his initial survey, more than 50 per cent

of Ratmale householders told Kirk that agriculture was their principal occupation, and a further 30 per cent gave it as their secondary occupation. After thorough study, however, he discovered that almost every household in the village was engaged in the production and sale of pottery, and that 70 per cent of average household income was derived from this form of commodity production.

Under these circumstances, reported increases in the number of smallholdings may serve to mask the expanded use of wage labor in village agriculture. Many of the new smallholdings are very small and do not constitute self-sustaining farms. They provide space for residence and a little cultivation, but only rarely is the latter sufficient to generate the major part of what is needed for subsistence. These 'smallholders' must therefore also seek an income elsewhere, and the evidence suggests that many of them now do so as agricultural wage laborers.

This general picture is supported by—indeed, it is mainly drawn from—the ethnographic case studies in this volume. For the most part the studies do not contain the numerical data necessary to document the trend, but they do clearly show that much of the wage labor in village agriculture is done by people who possess some land, and they further suggest that wage labor has become the principal source of livelihood for many of these holders of small parcels of land. Thus the increasing number of smallholdings is not opposed to the expansion of capitalist agriculture which, on the contrary, it even facilitates by providing a homestead and a supplementary income for those who are employed as wage laborers. At the same time, however, the persistence of these smallholdings also indicates that the process of proletarianization remains an uneven and contradictory one that is still far from fully accomplished.

The Fate of the Village Community

Commodity production, proletarianization and class differentiation have all increased significantly in recent years, but none of them is a new phenomenon, and their impact on village life has long been the subject of intense debate. Much of the discussion, among both scholars and administrators, has dwelt on themes of 'the disintegrating village' and 'the loss of community' which derive from the idea of

'the village community' that was first systematically elaborated by Western scholars in the nineteenth century. Jonathan Spencer's paper, which is theoretically constructed as a critical review of these themes, delineates several of the ways in which the notion of the village community has not only shaped academic research but has also come to occupy a strategic place in the ideology of Sinhalese nationalism.⁷

The idea of the village community has often been employed very loosely and uncritically. At various times it has been defined in terms of economic self-sufficiency, autonomy, equality, cultural homogeneity, social harmony, and even material prosperity, and the implication is not absent that when the village community *really* existed—always at some point in the past although, as Spencer points out, often in the quite recent past—it was characterized by all these features at once. This is a rich concoction that serves powerful ideological interests, but it clearly will not do as an accurate description of any known village in Sri Lanka, either in the present or the past. We cannot, however, simply abandon the idea of the village community because, as an ideal, it is a prominent theme in contemporary ideological discourse and must, therefore, remain within our field of study. We can, however, try to deconstruct it. Moreover, provided we are explicit about the distinction, there may yet be some value in also treating the village community in a second ideal sense that is, in contrast to its ideological usage, not normative, namely as an analytical construct or ideal-type which does not claim to describe any particular empirical reality but with which historically variable real situations can be usefully compared.

As a crude indication of this potential value, it may be asserted that although the ideal-type of the village community, defined in terms of autonomy, self-sufficiency, cultural homogeneity, and the absence of social inequality, does not accurately describe any historical or contemporary reality, during the colonial period it was generally more closely approximated by Dry Zone villages than by those in the Kandyan highlands. At least in the Sinhalese areas, Dry Zone villages were more remote from the centers of power and more isolated from markets, and they were therefore closer to autonomy and self-sufficiency. In addition, the inhabitants of a Dry Zone village were normally all members of the same caste,

⁷ Moore's paper addresses similar themes, but concentrates on the image of 'the peasantry' rather than on 'the village community' as such.

and economic differentiation among them was usually not pronounced, so they were typically also more homogeneous and egalitarian than the multi-caste and economically stratified villages of the highlands.

Along similarly general lines it may also be argued that in both the Dry Zone and the Kandyan highlands, the ideal-type of the village community was more closely approximated in the past than it is in the present. In both regions, incorporation within wider markets has reduced the level of self-sufficiency; penetration of the state has reduced the level of autonomy; migration, differential access to education, and new occupations have made villages more heterogeneous; and economic differentiation has made them less egalitarian. This is admittedly a gross characterization, and there have also been movements in the opposite direction, such as the increased egalitarianism associated with the effective exercise of the franchise and the cultural homogenization that stems from improved communications, the mass media, and the unifying discourse of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism.

Comparative study of this kind could be made much more specific, but it still avoids a direct examination of what is perhaps the most crucial aspect of community, an aspect for which the characteristics discussed so far—self-sufficiency, autonomy, social equality and cultural homogeneity—are often implicitly assumed to serve as indicators. This is the idea of 'community' as a subjective sense of belonging together, or a shared feeling of solidarity (cf. Weber 1964:130). My own paper takes this as the essential feature of community, which is thus defined either as the sense of belonging together itself or as a group of people who share a sense of solidarity. Self-sufficiency, autonomy, social equality and cultural homogeneity are then treated as factors that may, to an extent that must be investigated empirically in each case, promote a sense of solidarity among those who live in the same village.

The degree to which those who inhabit the same village have constituted themselves as a community in this sense has varied from time to time and place to place. While recognizing the difficulty of determining to what extent village solidarity actually prevailed in the past, the evidence would seem to support a claim that the shared sense of belonging together has historically been stronger in the Dry Zone villages than in the highlands, fostered by the absence of either caste or class divisions within the local group.

Even today, the inhabitants of Dry Zone villages typically represent themselves as a single kin group, whose interactions with one another are structured by norms of conduct that differ from those that govern their interactions with outsiders who are not kin. This is not to claim that life in such villages has always been harmonious, because kinship norms are as readily violated as any others, but it does indicate the persistent reproduction of a local culture which stresses that those who live together in the same village possess a distinct identity and should act towards one another with a special sense of mutual responsibility and regard.

Caste and class divisions within the village have inhibited the development of a similar sense of local solidarity in the Kandyan highlands. Nevertheless, the formerly dominant ideology did present the order of castes as a system of mutual interdependencies oriented to the whole, and to the extent that subordinate groups embraced such representations it was possible for fellow villagers of different castes to develop a sense of belonging together within the hierarchical community of village society.

Whatever its former extent, village solidarity has been seriously threatened by the expansion of the market, transformations of the modes of production, and other recent changes in the patterns of rural life. Several of the case studies focus on particular aspects of these processes. My own paper analyzes the disengagement of the social relations of production from the kinship structure in which they were formerly embedded and through which they had helped to sustain the sense of the village as a community of kin. Tamara Gunasekera pays less attention to strictly agrarian issues, but provides a detailed account of the disruptive effect on village life of local competition between the political parties. Political conflict within the villages, which is also discussed in almost all the other papers, has become extremely intense during the last thirty years, as allocation of the varied resources at the disposal of the state has largely passed from the hands of civil servants to those of elected politicians, who distribute them in ways that will enhance their own interests. The particular patterns of conflict vary greatly but, in general, the most prominent local politicians are those who can successfully broker relations between their followers, who seek material benefits in return for their loyalty, and external power-holders, who control the benefits but also need popular support. The role of broker, however, is difficult to sustain, even when the

promise of benefits is mixed with threats of violence, both because the available resources are insufficient to satisfy the demand for them and because a politician's favor can be extremely fickle.

Under these conditions class differences do not appear as the only, or in many cases even as the most decisive, basis of political cleavage. Distinctions between ancestral villagers and recent immigrants, or between different caste groups, both of which typically do, nevertheless, contain a class dimension, are no less evident. Thus, while party political competition has intensified in the villages, its divisions remain no less vertical than horizontal, and increasing class differentiation has not been effectively translated into class-based politics at the local level.

Gunasekera's paper also examines the divisiveness generated by cleavages of caste, noting in this connection a new tendency for local caste groups to segregate themselves from one another. A similar inclination for castes to minimize or even avoid interaction with one another is reported by Tudor Silva and Jonathan Spencer. All three authors emphasize the continued salience of caste identities, even though the linkages that formerly articulated the caste hierarchy with the structure of agrarian relations have largely been dissolved. Andrew Kendrick's study, by contrast, depicts a situation where the continued performance of *rajakariya* (service to a superior) maintains the connections between agriculture and caste, although he also shows that *rajakariya* has itself undergone significant transformations since the time of the Kandyan kings.

Where village solidarity is believed to have declined, that loss is deplored. In some villages, however, the dominant memory of the past is one of poverty, disease, ignorance and oppression (Spencer). Where both kinds of perception co-exist, one may detect a certain ambivalence both about the past and about the present. This is what Colin Kirk found in Ratmale, and he makes it the central focus of his paper. What is at issue here is not only whether village solidarity really was more prevalent in the past, or even the forms in which contemporary villagers remember the past, but also the ways in which they create their present. Changes in agrarian practice, the intrusion of party politics, population growth and migration, reassessments of caste relations, and the propagation of Sinhalese nationalism have all profoundly disrupted social life in the villages. Under these disturbed and disturbing conditions, some villagers struggle to maintain a local sense of identity and solidarity based

on membership in the kin community of the village (Brow). Others reach out to embrace newer identities. Jayantha Perera, for example, reports that since their incorporation into the Mahaweli Development Project, the people of Wewegama have begun to think of themselves as members of a national development program rather than of a village. Jonathan Spencer, noting that some villagers have become very self-conscious about building community, analyzes the practices by which they seek to establish a sense of common identity on new, or at least previously unstressed grounds, such as that of membership in the national community of Sinhalese Buddhism.

In these ways, villagers everywhere are struggling to achieve satisfying explanations of how the social world is ordered, and of how people should behave towards one another within it. They thereby also enable themselves to make some sense of the changes they have experienced. By these intellectual endeavors no less than by their work on the land, they actively participate in the ongoing process of agrarian change.

Conclusion

It is certainly possible to contain the recent agrarian history of Sri Lanka within the broad framework of transition from a tributary, or feudal, to a capitalist mode of production, but if the overall direction of change is to be described in unilinear terms, this can only be done at a very general level that inevitably loses touch with the actual process of transformation and the various trajectories it has assumed. As the case studies show, the agrarian history of Sri Lanka has been extremely diverse, and if one is still to speak of a single transition, one must acknowledge not only that it has been going on for a long time but also that its progress has been heterogeneous, uneven and contradictory. At any given time and place, what one encounters is typically a unique, complex and shifting articulation of capitalist and other modes of production, and it is only by analyzing the dynamics of these local agrarian systems and their relations both with one another and with the outside world that one can hope to comprehend the transition as a whole (cf. Gunasinghe's paper). Nevertheless, there may be some value in

concluding this introduction with one last general observation on the continuing transformation of peasant agriculture, still understanding by the latter a system of 'rural producers securing their livelihood through the use of family labor on family land' (see note 1).

A number of scholars (such as Bettelheim 1972, Meillassoux 1972) have argued that when non-capitalist modes of production are subordinated to capital, they are typically subjected to simultaneous processes of conservation and dissolution. As Meillassoux puts it, 'agrarian communities are being undermined and perpetuated at the same time' (1972:103). Others, however, have challenged this formulation. Alavi, for example, argues that 'in the aftermath of the impact of colonial capital and the transformation that follows, the peasant economies have ceased to be 'pre-capitalist.' While some old *forms* may persist, their underlying structural basis is transformed' (1982:188; emphasis in the original).

Processes of both conservation and dissolution are observable in the colonial history of the Sri Lankan peasantry, but the degree to which the *structures* of peasant agriculture were preserved remains a matter of some contention. Shanmugaratnam's assessment, which I cited earlier, is that 'the colonial economy had mainly a pauperizing and not a proletarianizing effect on the peasantry' (1985:1-2). This is an argument for structural conservation, since 'pauperization is a process of impoverishment...but there is no qualitative change in the structural position of the peasant...[whereas] proletarianization essentially involves a qualitative shift in the structural position of the peasant' (Shanmugaratnam 1985:2). Gunasinghe, by contrast, although emphasizing the perpetuation and reactivation of 'archaic production relations' (1975, 1979) through the colonial period, seems to agree with Alavi when he describes this as no more than a continuity of formal appearances. Gunasinghe (1979:21) identifies the first thirty years of colonial rule as 'a period of rapid structural changes in the Kandyan social formations,' during which the regional dominance of the previous feudal mode of production was replaced by that of a 'peripheral capitalist mode' (1979:21; cf. Alavi 1982). Accordingly, he distinguishes the feudal relations that prevailed in the kingdom of Kandy from the semi-feudal relations into which they were transformed under British rule (see also Tudor Silva's paper). By 'semi-feudal' he refers to 'production relations [that] are feudal in *form* [but] are

located in a general structure which is bourgeois in *content*' (1975:122; emphasis in the original).

Conservation of the forms of pre-capitalist agrarian relations, such as share cropping tenancy and the use of unpaid family labor to cultivate small farms continues to the present. But what distinguishes the most recent period of agrarian history is that even this formal conservation is now being threatened by the expanded use of wage labor. As indicated earlier, the shift to capitalist relations of production was not initiated at the same time everywhere in Sri Lanka, and it is still far from wholly eliminating peasant agriculture, but there are few places where its impact is not being felt.

Under these conditions the massive efforts that are still being made, by the concerted means both of state policy and of ideological propagation, to promote the village community and the self-sustaining family farm may continue to retard the dissolution of peasant agriculture, but their consequences are often anomalous and contradictory. To take just three examples from the case studies, there are now small family farmers who lease out their land to capitalist entrepreneurs rather than cultivate it themselves (Perera, Hettige); there are villagers who describe themselves as farmers but who turn out, on closer inspection, to be petty commodity producers of pottery (Kirk); and there are 'model villages' built by the government that fail to provide their inhabitants with the means of livelihood (Brow). In some respects, then, what is now being conserved is little more than the semblance of a peasant agriculture, the energizing structures of which are already undermined. As the external signs of the family farm and the village community are made to substitute for their dynamic effectivity, it becomes apparent that efforts to preserve peasant agriculture may accomplish not so much its revitalization as its simulation.

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2

**Structural Change of
Agrarian Systems**

Capitalist Development, Rural Politics, and Peasant Agriculture in Highland Sri Lanka: Structural Change in a Low Caste Village

KALINGA TUDOR SILVA

The term feudalism has long been used to describe the pre-colonial social order in the Kandyan highlands.¹ Pieris' (1956) characterization of Kandyan feudalism emphasized the rights and privileges of the king and the aristocracy over the peasantry, as manifested in the system of service tenure. Leach (1959) preferred to use the term 'caste feudalism,' since caste was used as a mechanism for extracting both service and surplus from the peasantry. He also considered the institution of caste to be central to Kandyan feudalism, which therefore differed from European feudalism.² More recently, there have been efforts to analyze Kandyan feudalism using a rigorous Marxian approach (Bandarage 1983; Gunasinghe 1979, 1983).

Despite the increased historical interest in Kandyan feudalism, discussions of contemporary social change in Kandyan society have not rested on a firm understanding of its feudal background. Many early studies of social change, for instance, highlighted the disintegrating and disruptive effects of colonial domination, the

¹ This paper is based on my Ph.D. thesis (Silva 1982). An earlier and substantially different version of this paper was published in *Modern Sri Lankan Studies* 1 (1), 1986, under the title 'Feudalism, Capitalism and the Dynamics of Social Change in a Kandyan Village'. It is reprinted here with permission. The field research was supported by a grant under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Programme of the Australian government. A supplementary grant from the University of Peradeniya enabled some follow-up study in 1983.

² However, he also wrote that '... the actual Sinhalese system was not far removed from European feudalism' (1959:17).

plantation economy, and the population explosion as they affected the Kandyan peasantry, without specifying the exact character of the social system being eroded (Sarkar and Tambiah 1957; Morrison *et al.* 1979). Furthermore, they did not raise with sufficient conceptual clarity the important question of whether the rise of a new social order accompanied decay in the old one.

Similarly, Seneviratne's (1978) extremely interesting account of structural change in Kandy's ritual complex pays insufficient attention to the decline of the feudal power structure that upheld and sustained the traditional complex and its replacement by a state-controlled bureaucracy that has now become the custodian of a mass religio-cultural complex. Finally, recent studies of rural politics in Kandyan society, while describing some important trends such as increased state intervention at the village level (for instance, Robinson 1975; Jiggins 1979), have failed to recognize the increased articulation of anti-feudal social forces through the political process.

This paper examines post-independence change in a Kandyan village against its historical background in colonial and pre-colonial times. In broad terms, the paper is concerned with the development of rural capitalism in a semi-feudal social setting. The village is a predominantly low caste one in which semi-feudal social and economic arrangements remained more or less intact until after independence in 1948.

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

The discussion of modes of production has been revived in recent years, partly as a reaction among classical Marxists against neo-Marxist interpretations of development and underdevelopment within a unified global framework (Laclau 1971; Alavi 1975). A major controversy between classical Marxists and neo-Marxists focuses on the extent to which Asian, African and Latin American societies have maintained structural continuities with their past and a resultant transformative capacity independent of the dynamics of the world capitalist system. Extreme versions of dependency theory suggest that in contemporary underdeveloped societies, there are no historically or culturally specific structural continuities that exist or can transform themselves independently of the world

capitalist system. On the other hand, the conception of the world capitalist system as an all-encompassing system that has absorbed the histories of all societies into a single world history is not acceptable to classical Marxism. As a heuristic device for understanding the historical movement of societies, the notion of modes of production becomes meaningless once such a mid-stream coalescence of varied modes of production is accepted. Hence, classical Marxists have pushed for a return to the concept of modes of production in trying to comprehend ongoing structural change in underdeveloped societies.

The modes of production issue came into sharp focus in the 1970s debate about the social effects produced by the Green Revolution in parts of India. According to analysts such as Rudra (1971) and Chattopadhyay (1972), since the late 1950s the Green Revolution has played a critically important role in the development of capitalism in the Indian countryside, its effect being the dissolution of remaining feudal elements, including share-tenancy and bonded labor, and the corresponding expansion of a capitalist agriculture that has given rise to increased class differentiation, expansion of the agricultural working class and increasing social unrest in the countryside. Others have questioned this interpretation on both theoretical and empirical grounds and have pointed to the persistence of small farmers, the limited and localized nature of observed changes, the lack of domestic industrialization as an impetus for agrarian transformation, and finally the lack of analyses of macro-situations and larger questions of historical process (Patnaik 1971, 1972; Alavi 1975). These critics, however, have not proposed an alternative formula for understanding the very real social changes currently observable in South Asian rural communities.

Even though it has raised some important analytical questions to be answered through empirical research, the Indian debate has failed to generate a general model for understanding processual social change in rural South Asia. In the first place, since the Green Revolution is primarily caused by a technological package introduced from outside, the resulting social changes cannot be seen as autonomous developments arising from social mechanisms within the rural society itself. From this perspective, capitalism comes to be viewed as an exogenous system impinging on essentially passive feudal elements in rural society. Such a conception is alien to classical Marxism which views each society as having an

inherent capacity for change. However encapsulated the rural societies of South Asia are, it is wrong to assume that they are completely devoid of an internal social dynamic. Furthermore, viewed as a passive object, the exact character of feudal survivals in the South Asian countryside remains unelaborated.

Second, the Indian debate has been excessively concerned with narrowly defined economic processes and has not attended sufficiently to the social, political and ideological dimensions of agrarian transformation. The extent to which wage labor is used in agriculture, the extent to which land has come into the market, the extent of capital accumulation and investment in agriculture, and the extent to which households produce for a market have been the major points at issue. Changes in social stratification and value systems, and the manner in which such changes are related to agrarian transformation, have received minimal attention. As Alavi points out (1975), no effort has been made to demonstrate the contradiction between emerging and decaying social forces on the one hand, and between capital and labor on the other, by examining rural politics in relation to agrarian change. On the whole, the question of agrarian transformation has been investigated through macro-studies and survey research, generally neglecting the potential of intensive village studies and ethnographic research.

Finally, the institution of caste, which in many ways is central to South Asian society and culture, received only marginal attention in the whole debate. Although various writers have pointed out the significance of caste in labor organization, land tenure, and forms of surplus appropriation (see, Bailey 1957; Leach 1959, 1961; and Brow 1980), its relevance in agrarian transformation has still not been adequately studied. The exact role of caste in rural South Asian feudal social organization has not been sufficiently clarified either within or outside the Indian debate. Another important but largely neglected question is whether and in what ways caste survives capitalist development in agriculture (cf. Harriss 1982).

This essay addresses some of these questions concerning agrarian transformation within the confines of a village study. We examine social change in Welivita³ during the thirty-one year period from

³ Welivita is a pseudonym. For an earlier interpretation of social change in Welivita, see Silva (1979).

1948 to 1979, focusing on economic and political processes.⁴ The aim is to understand the larger context of agrarian transformation as it affects a predominantly low caste village.

The Village

Welivita is located in what was once the heartland of Kandyan feudalism. It lies at the bottom of a fairly insulated valley situated some ten miles southeast of the historic town of Kandy which, as the capital city of the pre-British Kandyan kingdom, constituted the main hub of feudal relations in the area. Prior to 1815, Welivita and some of its neighboring villages in the valley constituted a royal village (*gabagama*) which produced an agricultural surplus and provided certain services required by the royal family in Kandy under the service tenure system. During the British period (1815–1948), following the abolition of service tenure in 1832, Welivita ceased to be a service village. The changes originating from colonial rule, however, resulted in a reorganization of the village social structure along semi-feudal lines rather than the complete dissolution of the feudal system. As caste provided the key to the social and economic organization of the village until after independence, I begin my account by looking at the caste composition of the village.

The feudal background of Welivita is evident from its caste composition (see Table 3.1). In contrast to the commonly found 'free' villages where the Goyigama (Cultivator) caste is normally a numerical majority, the numerical predominance of one or more low caste groups seems to have been a distinctive structural feature of service villages.⁵ Feudal overlords required the services of

⁴ As the fieldwork reported here was completed in 1979, I have taken that year as the cut-off point.

⁵ Low caste predominance in service villages is revealed in the ethnographic accounts of Leach (1961), Evers (1969), Seneviratne (1978), and myself (1982). Referring to the North Central Province, Leach noted: 'It is a general feature of this part of Ceylon that temple property is extensive but very badly maintained. The temple estates are, for the most part, a residue from the days of the Kandyan kingdom. In earlier times the tenants, who were always members of the inferior castes, cultivated the temple lands as part of their service duties and such service was enforceable. Today such land is still usually cultivated by members of these same inferior castes, but cultivators are sharecropping tenants of the temple priest; and the rights of the priest landlord are unsupported by government sanction' (1961:38).

specific low caste groups in order to maintain their privileged position in society. The existence of customary and legal restrictions applying to the low castes meant that it was easier to subject them to surplus extraction than the free peasants of Goyigama caste. In other words, the caste system was an important element in the 'general ensemble of extra-economic compulsion' prevailing in Kandyan feudal society.⁶

Table 3.1

Caste Composition of Welivita, 1979

Caste Name (Traditional Caste Service)	Traditional Relation to Rice Farming	Number of House- holds	%	Population	%
Patti (Officials)	Landlord/ Owner-farmer	14	7.0	82	6.7
Navandanna/ Galladu (Smiths)	Owner-farmer	3	1.5	22	1.8
Hena (Washermen)	Owner-farmer	18	9.0	94	7.7
Nakati/Berava (Drummers/ Kandyan dancers)	Tenant	161	80.5	1009	82.1
Others	—	4	2.0	21	1.7
Total		200	100.0	1,228	100.0

All four caste groups in Welivita belong to the category of service castes, which implies that they were all at the service of those superior to them in the caste hierarchy. That is not to say, however, that caste distinctions within the village were irrelevant. The Patti (Officials), who are normally reckoned as a relatively low status subcaste of the Goyigama, have held a commanding position *vis-a-vis* the other caste groups in the village. Their own conception of the past, as well as some available evidence, points to the fact that historically the administrative elite in the village

⁶ According to the Marxist view, a distinctive feature of the feudal mode of production is that it involves extraction of surplus from the direct producers by subjecting them to legal, political and customary pressure, in contrast to the capitalist mode of production, where sheer economic necessity compels workers to sell their labor to profit-making capitalists.

came principally from the Patti caste. Its control over the other three caste groups in the village varied according to their place within the caste order. The Navandanna (Smiths) and the Hena (Washermen), accounting for less than 10 per cent of the village population and occupying intermediate positions in the local caste hierarchy, have enjoyed some degree of independence compared to the Nakati (Drummer) caste, whose traditional occupations of drumming and dancing typically involved dependence upon and obeisance to caste superiors.⁷ It appears that as the principal caste servants attached to the royal village, the local Nakati were required to play a dual role as service-givers and surplus-producers. Their physical concentration in this area and their structural position within the caste hierarchy made it easy to mobilize them as duty-bound caste servants.

Its caste composition indicates that Welivita has never been an independent social entity. The presence of a large concentration of Nakati within the village meant that the village held service obligations to an external overlord. The position of the Patti at the top of the village caste hierarchy also implied that the entire village was subordinate to a feudal overlord of higher status. The higher status subcastes of the Goyigama, namely the Goyigama proper, or Rate Atto as they are generally known in this area, and the aristocrats (*radala*) were not present in the royal village, which means that it was directly and completely subjected to surplus appropriation by the royal family. The influence of some Rate Atto families in nearby villages was felt in Welivita only after 1815, following the gradual dissolution of the royal domain.

In order to reconstruct the history of a Kandyan village, one has to depend largely on general historical accounts of Kandyan society. Included in this category are works by Knox (1956), Pieris (1956), Dewaraja (1972), and Bandarage (1983). Regional histories are not available, except for the brief sketches in Lawrie (1896). Oral tradition and ethnographic evidence, including life histories,

⁷ To quote from Seneviratne (1978:151): 'The very act of dancing in front of someone in certain contexts, of which the Perahera is one, places the dancers in a low position and the recipient of the dance in high position. This inequality is enhanced by the dancers worshipping the *radala* authorities every now and then in the moving Perahera ... the dancers also perform the remarkable feat of walking backwards from time to time... another sign of honour accorded to a high status person to whom one does not turn one's back.'

are also useful to a considerable extent. Let us now examine the situation of Welivita in each historical period.

The Kandyan Period (1500–1815)

Feudal overlordship of the king, aristocracy and the Buddhist clergy was a central feature of the Kandyan kingdom. In principle, all land within the kingdom belonged to the king, who distributed it among his officials, clergy and subjects according to their respective positions within the caste hierarchy, which in turn determined their duties to one another and to the king. The king maintained an exclusiveness from the Kandyan caste system by claiming Kshatriya descent from India. The ruling aristocracy as well as leading Buddhist monks generally came from the Radala subcaste of Goyigama, to which most of the population in the kingdom belonged.

The peasantry was broadly divided into two strata. These were the Goyigama, who were free peasants and who comprised the majority of the population, and the service or low castes, whose members in many instances held land subject to caste service and other feudal obligations. Thus, the social order of Kandyan feudalism rested on the caste system. The hierarchy was headed by the aristocracy, which controlled feudal landholdings as well as administrative and religious offices that reinforced its dominant position in society. Lowest in the caste hierarchy, the level with which this study is especially concerned, were the service castes which were placed in serfdom (including restrictions on their movement) and dependence, their lower status and economic subordination within the overall scheme being determined by the interlocking structures of caste, land tenure and civil administration.

In the Kandyan kingdom, rights and obligations in relation to land were largely determined according to the caste system. The king, aristocracy, Buddhist temples and deity shrines each had service villages assigned to them, known respectively as *gabadagam*, *nindagam*, *viharagam*, and *devalagam*. In contrast to the ordinary village in which a majority of the inhabitants normally came from the Goyigama caste and were subject only to generalized taxes and duties imposed by the state, the service villages were largely low

caste and were subordinate to a feudal overlord. The service villages were, therefore, more directly and more systematically subjected to feudal exactions made by the aristocracy. This has received little attention in writings on the Kandyan kingdom.⁸

As a constituent part of a royal village (*gabadagama*), the pre-colonial social order in Welivita was characterized by the land tenure system commonly found in service villages (Pieris 1956). The landholdings in such a village were divided into three distinct domains: lord's domain (*muttettu*), upper caste domain (*pangu*—literally shares), and low caste domain (*nila pangu*—literally, service shares). The inhabitants of a service village were collectively responsible for the cultivation of the lord's domain and the transfer of its product to the lord's mansion. The upper caste inhabitants, whose numbers in a service village were not large and to whom were restricted the positions of authority in the village, held permanent and hereditary (*paraveni*) right to their respective landholdings in the upper caste domain. In contrast, the low caste landholdings, while permanently allocated for the respective caste services, were held by the individuals concerned on a temporary or conditional (*maruvena*) basis subject to caste service. Hence, it was through fulfilling the service obligations expected of them that the low caste inhabitants could retain access to the means of production. The land tenure system in a service village gave weaker rights to service-bound low caste inhabitants and thus placed them in a subordinate, servile position.

The pre-colonial system of land tenure, however, was not without benefits to low caste people. The lowcaste landholdings in a service village, while subject to compulsory service, were permanently assigned to the respective castes. Such land could therefore not be transferred from one low caste to another or, more importantly, from a low caste family to an upper caste family. The low caste people enjoyed an element of protection in their lower social standing in that the services of each low caste group were indispensable to the higher orders in society.⁹ Thus, while the pre-colonial social order was marked by sharp social inequalities, there were customary barriers to the further intensification of such inequalities by the familiar process of 'exploitation of the weak by the stronger'.

⁸ Pieris (1956), for instance, does not elaborate the connection between caste obligations and feudal exactions.

⁹ Leach (1960:1-10).

The British Period (1815–1948)

The effect of colonial rule on Kandyan rural society has yet to be analyzed in a satisfactory manner. The dual economy thesis argues that the development of a plantation economy by foreigners had a minimal impact on the Kandyan villages (Snodgrass 1966). Another view holds that processes emanating from the British occupation of Kandyan areas gradually incorporated the rural population into the world capitalist system (Ponnambalam 1980; Bandarage 1983). Various forms of mutual adaptation and conflict that may have connected the colonial and pre-colonial systems have not been seriously considered in relation to Kandyan society.¹⁰ In any case, the evidence from Welivita indicates that although the rural social structure was substantially altered during the British period, there were also important structural continuities.

One such continuity was that the British administered the Kandyan villages until 1930 or so through a hierarchy of native

Table 3.2

Village Administration in the British Period

Office	Administrative Division
Government Agent (British officer)	<i>palata</i> (province)
↓	
<i>rate mahataya</i>	<i>rata</i>
↓	
<i>korale mahataya</i>	<i>korale</i>
↓	
<i>aracci mahataya</i>	<i>vasama</i>
↓	
Deputy headman (<i>aracci mahataya/ duraya</i>)	↔ Irrigation headman (<i>vel vidane/ vel duraya</i>)
	<i>gama</i> (village)

¹⁰ See, for instance, Laclau (1971), Banaji (1972), and Alavi (1975).

headmen, adapted from the pre-existing feudal administration, who were made responsible to a newly appointed Government Agent, a British civil servant (see Table 3.2). The social background of the native officials as well as their method of administration provided continuity with pre-colonial forms.

The Government Agent for the Central Province was based in Kandy. Under him there were nine *rata* divisions, each under a *rate mahataya*. Welivita came under the *rata* division of Pata Hewaheta, which consisted of three *korale* which, in turn, were subdivided into *vasama*. A Headman (*aracci*) was in charge of a *vasama*, which covered a few villages. Under each *aracci* there were Deputy Headmen and Irrigation Headmen who were village-level officials.

On the whole, the native administrative hierarchy headed by the *rate mahataya* served to reinforce certain structural features stemming from the pre-colonial social order. These administrative offices were largely hereditary, although competition for them may have increased in the latter part of the British period. Neither salary nor bureaucratic procedures were attached to these positions until the early part of the twentieth century. The *ratemahataya*, *korale mahataya* and *aracci mahataya* were usually of Goyigama caste, although there was one instance where a person belonging to the Patti caste rose to the highest position of *rate mahataya* in the Welivita area. Only the lowest rung of the administrative hierarchy was open to low caste leaders. In villages such as Welivita, where low caste people comprised a majority, a Deputy Headman and an Irrigation Headman could be recruited from the local low caste groups, as assistants to higher level officials drawn from the Goyigama caste. However, a petty official of low caste status was known officially by an inferior title. A Deputy Headman of Goyigama caste was called an *aracci*, whereas a low caste Deputy Headman was known as a *duraya*. There was a similar distinction between *vel vidane* and *vel duraya*, Irrigation Headmen representing upper and low castes respectively. Other authors have discussed the manner in which the administration of temples and shrines rested on the caste hierarchy (Evers 1972; Seneviratne 1978). The data from Welivita show that the caste hierarchy was similarly significant in the civil administration during the British period (see also Leach 1961).

The Formation of a Gentry

During the British period, Welivita and surrounding villages in the valley saw the rise of an upper caste gentry which gradually established dominance over the area by gaining control over land ownership and administrative offices. This gentry consisted of some closely-knit kin groups belonging to the Goyigama caste proper (Rate Atto) and the Patti caste, these being the dominant upper caste groups in the area. Members of the gentry emulated the life style of aristocrats and severed kinship ties with ordinary members of their own caste groups. They competed among themselves for land ownership and office, but there was also a considerable cohesiveness among them, especially when their common interests were at stake.

Structural parallels to what I am calling the gentry have been reported by several other writers on rural Sri Lanka. Obeyesekere, for instance, found landowning kinship alliances in southern Sri Lanka that were known locally as *pelantiya*, which he defined as 'status groups formed on the basis of a traditional *feudal* ideology' (Obeyesekere 1967:10; emphasis added). Although characterized as status groups, *pelantiya* also had a substantial economic base supported by administrative influence. In characterizing agrarian stratification in a Kandyan village named Delumgoda, Gunasinghe (1975) similarly identifies a stratum of 'semi-feudal landlords' who control a substantial amount of land in the village. Describing these semi-feudal landlords, Gunasinghe reports:

Some of these families hail from the days of the Kandyan kingdom. Their ancestors were state officials who manned the feudal state bureaucracy. It is true that most of these families will not be able to trace their ancestry to a Kandyan noble and the scene is largely dominated by the 'newcomers' who acquired prominence during the British period. However, the myth of continuity prevails.... (1975:132).

The evidence from Welivita and Delumgoda reveals that the upper caste gentry (which evolved during the British period) not only possessed a feudal ideology, as pointed out by Obeyesekere,

but was also instrumental in continuing semi-feudal relations of production in the Kandyan areas. A detailed analysis of the origin and development of this gentry is beyond the scope of this paper, but the process whereby it became prominent in the Welivita area can be briefly summarized.

First, the native administrative hierarchy described earlier provided an important base for the local gentry. Under British rule, the *rate mahataya*, *korale mahataya*, and *aracci mahataya* were able to increase their power and influence over the local population since they enjoyed great latitude under the foreign administration. In an area where most of the population was low caste and higher level officials came overwhelmingly from the upper caste, the administrative structure essentially reinforced the caste system and its accompanying feudal or semi-feudal social forms.

Second, these officials were the first among the local population to secure substantial landholdings during the British period. Following the removal of the king, the royal domain (*muttettu*) in and around Welivita became the property of the government, which turned it into a marketable commodity. Local officials appear to have gradually expanded their economic base by acquiring feudal linkages with tillers of the soil who, in this area, were predominantly of low caste. With the abolition of service tenure in 1832, low caste landholdings (*nila pangu*) could now be transferred across caste boundaries and, once again, it was dominant local families in the area belonging to the Rate Atto and Patti castes who were best able to benefit from this situation. They were also helped by the grain tax introduced by the British in the 1840s. Local officials, who were empowered to collect the grain tax from the peasants, seem to have turned it to their own advantage, compelling low caste peasants in particular to free themselves from the tax burden by transferring their land to the officials themselves. Obeyesekere (1967) and Roberts (1968) have also found that the Grain Tax Ordinances enabled local officials to strengthen their grip on rural society. Because of the isolated position of the valley, officials in the Welivita area faced virtually no competition from outside land buyers, such as immigrants from the Low Country.¹¹

¹¹ These immigrants were based largely in urban centers in the Kandyan highlands.

Third, evolving production relations in the Welivita area retained a feudal character because landlords used administrative as well as caste privilege to extract a surplus from the local share-tenants, a majority of whom came from the Nakati caste. Both caste privilege and administrative power stood as extra-economic pressures weighing down upon the share-tenants. Service obligations also continued as share-tenants and members of their families were required to provide free domestic labor in the manor houses (*valav*) of the landlords, especially on ritual occasions.¹² The Nakati, the majority caste group in Welivita, remained bonded servants even though they were no longer connected to a feudal structure openly sanctioned by the state.

During the latter part of the British period, there was an important transition in the power base of the local gentry from hereditary office in the home area to bureaucratic posts in urban centers. Beginning in 1920 or so, members of the local gentry began to provide an English education for their children in boarding schools in Kandy. Around the same time, the composition of the gentry gradually began to change as it came to include clerks, teachers, doctors, engineers and civil servants. This transition corresponded to the efforts by the colonial government from the 1930s onwards to gradually bureaucratize the rural administration. With the transition to bureaucracy, a considerable out-migration of local gentry to the cities of Kandy and Colombo occurred. The more successful branches of the landlord families moved to the cities, leaving their ancestral properties in charge of the less successful, who remained in the local area (cf. Obeyesekere 1967). The out-migrants, however, retained control over the means of production as absentee landlords. Thus despite the metamorphosis of the gentry, its dominance in rural society, as well as its ability to extract surplus from the local peasantry continued, although sometimes in new forms. Newly acquired bureaucratic posts provided an important power base and an effective substitute for hereditary office in maintaining domination of the rural society. Even though the gentry became urbanized and linked to the national elite, to the extent that it continued to extract surplus from the local population, using the extra-economic pressure at its

¹² The term *valavva* (pl. *valav*) is normally applied to an aristocratic (*radala*) house. Local landlords also used it, although they were not aristocratic by caste status.

disposal, it remained a semi-feudal force in the countryside.¹³

To summarize the changes that occurred in Welivita during the British period, as the measure of social security inherent in the pre-colonial social order disappeared, there was an intensification of inequalities that were rooted in the caste system. The Nakati caste, the lowest and largest caste group in the village, became economically dependent on a dominant upper caste gentry which utilized caste privileges of pre-colonial origin on the one hand, and the opportunities opened up during the British period on the other, to gain control over the local population. The village was by no means isolated from the larger political economy of British Ceylon. The acquisition of bureaucratic posts by the gentry also led to new linkages with the towns. A gradual increase in the number of peasants turning to wage labor in nearby tea plantations, particularly among the low caste groups, also occurred.¹⁴ The overall pattern of social hierarchy within the village, however, remained caste-linked, and the village economy retained a semi-feudal character.

Post-Independence Changes

Social, economic and political changes in Welivita after national independence (1948) can only be understood against the semi-feudal background described in the previous section. As a predominantly low caste village, Welivita remained the more or less exclusive domain of the local gentry. The organization of production within the village, especially in paddy cultivation, revolved around the caste hierarchy. The presence of the gentry in the bureaucracy meant that it now had a new source of power with which to protect and maintain its hereditary interests in the village.

A substantial break in the old social order first became evident in the political arena. Later, parallel changes in economic

¹³ For instance, in a number of land disputes, landlords used their bureaucratic connections to suppress tenants. For details see Silva (1982).

¹⁴ Originally, the local peasants worked in nearby estates as seasonal or contract laborers to supplement income from rice farming. After 1930, more and more villagers became full-time wage earners in nearby estates. In 1979, about 10 per cent of the village labor force worked in estates on a part-time or full-time basis.

organization took place. Let us examine the political and economic processes in turn.

Political Change

Earlier forms of political conflict within Welivita were related to competition for positions in the administrative hierarchy. Leading Nakati families in the village held office as Deputy Headman, Irrigation Headman, and Chief Drummer in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy,¹⁵ each as deputy or subordinate to, and to a large extent appointees of, higher level officials drawn from upper caste families. In this situation, factional divisions within the Nakati caste were aligned with corresponding divisions within the Goyigama and Patti castes, so that each faction was an intercaste alliance in opposition to other alliances of similar composition. This form of political conflict was not in defiance of the caste order insofar as conflict at each level of the hierarchy involved opponents of identical status who were required to submit themselves to those at higher levels in order to contend for office. With the gentry's transition to the bureaucracy, the importance of competition for office declined, but there was no immediate change in local political organization. On the whole, political conflict in Welivita prior to 1948 upheld the semi-feudal social order with the gentry in a controlling position.

The rise of a low caste leadership independent of, and largely opposed to, the gentry was a turning point in the more recent history of Welivita. A local Nakati leader known as Mambara became a prominent figure in the area after 1948. He entered local politics around 1936 as a member of the Village Council and thus acquired his name.¹⁶ He established links with outside politicians as the primary spokesman for the numerically important Nakati caste in Welivita. He also had the support of certain other low caste groups as well as a few upper caste families in and around Welivita. Realizing the threat posed by Mambara's rising influence,

¹⁵ The post of Chief Drummer was held by some local Nakati families although the village was not formally linked to the Temple of the Tooth. For details regarding this office, see Seneviratne (1978).

¹⁶ Mambara is a corruption of the English word 'member'.

the local gentry made an early but unsuccessful attempt to create a rival faction within the Nakati caste. Mambara was gradually able to mobilize more or less his entire caste group and a considerable number of other social elements in the village in his struggle against the gentry.

The rise of Mambara was not an isolated event. He was initially drawn into the political process through the campaigns of George E. de Silva (1879–1951), a national-level politician of low caste origin, who represented the Kandy electorate in the national legislature from 1927 up to 1948 and was one of the founders of the United National Party (UNP). He was a cabinet member of the first UNP government established in 1948.¹⁷ One of his major achievements was to mobilize a substantial low caste following in localities around the town of Kandy. The rise of a low caste politician in what used to be the seat of power of a feudal kingdom may seem paradoxical, but it reflected the articulation and growing influence of anti-feudal forces throughout the region.

One of the first independent political moves by the Nakati caste leaders in Welivita followed the establishment of a community center in the village in 1948. Sponsored under a nationwide program headed by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the Minister of Local Government in the first UNP government, the community center gradually developed as a center for Kandyan dance training. The dance training was supported by a grant from the local Village Council, as state funds for cultural activities were distributed through local government bodies at that time. Mambara, who was a renowned Kandyan dancer, was the main figure behind the center, which was also used by George E. de Silva in his political campaigns in the area.

One might approach the developments reported so far from the perspective of persisting caste loyalties. In a recent study Jiggins (1979) sees the electoral mobilization of various low caste groups in various parts of Sri Lanka as a manifestation of the vitality of caste, as against class, as a basis for political action. A similar analysis is implicit in Seneviratne's treatment (1978) of anti-establishment tendencies within religious institutions in Kandy. If I was to adopt a similar viewpoint in regard to Welivita, I might claim

¹⁷ See Russell (1981) for a detailed analysis of George E. de Silva's political career.

that Mambara's politics appealed to caste consciousness and manipulated caste symbols. The attempt to promote Kandyan dance, a cultural heritage and a caste profession of the Nakati, may be seen in this light. Such a narrow consideration of caste, however, tends to neglect the historical and structural context of so-called 'low caste politics'. Further analysis of low caste politics in Welivita reveals its anti-feudal and, therefore, progressive character.

Following the change of government in 1956 from the UNP to a coalition led by the newly established Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), important changes took place in Welivita. Mambara and his followers readily turned to the new party, as its reformist policies had a greater appeal to those fighting against feudal social barriers. Support for the SLFP in the Welivita area came from the same social bases that had been mobilized initially by George E. de Silva as a low caste politician within the UNP. The SLFP contributed to a further crystallization of an anti-feudal ideology among the underprivileged caste groups in Kandyan rural society. The tenancy reforms introduced under the Paddy Lands Act of 1958 unleashed a major attack on the remaining semi-feudal arrangements in the countryside. Mambara's leadership was instrumental in the articulation and strengthening of share-tenants' rights in Welivita and was directed towards the goal of liberating his caste fellows, as well as others in similar predicaments, from the remaining clutches of feudal oppression. On the whole, his politics served to undermine the semi-feudal social order at the village level, rather than to preserve it in any form.

The Paddy Lands Act sought to strengthen the share-tenants' position by lowering rents to a fixed level and by providing legal safeguards against eviction. Leach (1961:242[*note 1*]) referred to it as an 'astonishing piece of Marxist legislation'. In Welivita it had a revolutionary effect in dissolving semi-feudal production relations. Passage of the act was followed by a period of turmoil in Welivita. While the low caste share-tenants became increasingly aware of their enhanced rights under the new law, landlords sought to retain the traditional half-share rent, evict the militant share-tenants, and generally evade the law. While their entrenched power within the bureaucracy gave the upper caste landlords an advantage at the higher levels of administration, the low caste share-tenants had the advantage of a favorable political climate, long-term possession and use of the land, the strength of numbers and, above all, a remarkable degree of solidarity in their fight against the gentry.

The effect of tenancy reform varied according to the relative strength of the parties involved. First, a substantial number of share-tenants among the Nakati managed to take advantage of the Paddy Lands Act, and thereby established themselves as protected share-tenants paying a much reduced rent to their landlords. The majority of share-tenants in absentee-owned land were able to benefit in this manner. Some absentee landlords in Kandy and Colombo tried to resist their demands, but physical distance from the village prevented them from withstanding the organized campaign by local share-tenants, while others gradually accepted the regulated rent. No precise data are available regarding land transfers, but it appears that about 25 per cent of the paddy area in Welivita came under increased control and direct management by statutory share-tenants. As the control exercised by absentee landlords declined, an overall weakening of the semi-feudal economic base of the gentry occurred. Liberated cultivators became a new force in the countryside.

Second, many resident landlords responded to tenancy reform by evicting their share-tenants. They were able to do this because of their vigilance and residence in the village, and because they had previously followed a policy of changing share-tenants from time to time as a protective measure. For some years after the evictions, the local Nakati boycotted work for the landlords concerned, compelling them either to work the land themselves or to employ hired workers from outside. In any case, evictions resulted in a separation of the workers from the means of production and thus contributed to a change in production relations. The disruption of tied relations to the land was an important outcome of the tenancy reform.¹⁸

Not all share-tenancy arrangements in Welivita were altered or disrupted in these ways. In 1979 some 8 per cent of the total paddy area in Welivita was still under half-share tenancy arrangements of one sort or another. These tenants had not been able to benefit from the reforms because of their continuing ties with the landlords. The low caste leadership was rather hostile towards these remaining patterns of subordination, which indicated that structural transformation in Welivita was not yet complete.

¹⁸ 'If, for example, the relation of lord and serf in respect of land is no longer binding, and there is no probability of a meaningfully oriented course of action by each party, then the social system which we designate 'feudalism' is at an end' (Pieris 1956:6).

In summary, it can be said that an emerging low caste political leadership played a critical role in the processes leading to the disruption of the semi-feudal social order that had evolved in Welivita during the British period. If we identify the gentry as a conservative force inhibiting rural change, the newly emergent leadership was a dynamic force contributing to tenancy reform and other changes in the countryside. These political processes were, in turn, closely related to certain economic processes that gathered momentum in Welivita during the period after independence.

Economic Change

Welivita is a typical Kandyan village in that high land and paddy land constitute its major economic resource. The village contains about 200 acres of land consisting of 127 acres of high land and 73 acres of paddy. The high land is used for house-sites, home gardens, and small plots of tea, coffee, coconut and pepper. Nearly a third of the high land area is not suitable for cultivation due to steepness, soil erosion and lack of water. Minor export crops, which thrive in certain other Kandyan villages (Morrison 1979), cannot be grown successfully in Welivita due to climatic and soil conditions. On the whole, high land provides little scope for the capitalization of agriculture.

Paddy cultivation, which depends on seasonal rain and water from the village stream, traditionally suffered from a number of limitations. During the dry season, from May to August, a substantial area of paddy situated at higher elevations was not cultivated due to the scarcity of water. Paddy yields were quite low, partly because the rigidity of caste-based relations of production prevented dynamic change in the rural economy. As tenants paid one-half of the produce to their landlords, many of whom were absentee owners with no direct involvement in the production process, the prevailing tenancy arrangements were grossly counter-productive. Because of the half-share rent the tenant, the direct producer, had neither the ability nor the incentive to adopt improved practices or make any long-term investment in the land. As an overall outcome of ecological and institutional factors, the village economy remained stagnant and underdeveloped. Only marginal improvements in paddy production techniques took place in

Welivita before 1958. Adoption of improved seed varieties, transplanting, and the application of chemical fertilizer were started by a few successful tenant farmers, but the prevailing tenurial arrangements inhibited widespread utilization of these new practices.

In the early 1950s, a far more important change in agricultural production was initiated. This was the utilization of certain paddy fields for the cultivation of vegetable crops during the dry season. This innovation was introduced into Welivita by an uxorilocal (*binna*) husband who originally came from Marassana, where paddy land had long been used for seasonal vegetable cultivation. Welivita villages discovered that the paddy land they did not cultivate in the dry season because of water scarcity could be utilized for vegetable cultivation, which needs less water than does paddy. In effect, a crop rotation between paddy and vegetables evolved, with the latter as a dry-season crop grown primarily for the wholesale vegetable market in Kandy. Initially, the main advantage of crop rotation was to end the annual fallow season, thereby resulting in an intensification of land use. Gradually, it was discovered that crop rotation also substantially improved the paddy harvest in the wet season. It also became clear that because of the high price that vegetables fetched in the Kandy market, growing them in the dry season (even on land where paddy was traditionally grown in both seasons) was far more profitable. Thus the rationality and profitability of crop rotation became increasingly evident. In Welivita, however, crop rotation became firmly established only after 1958, in connection, as will be shown later, with tenancy reform.

The evolution of a successful crop rotation between paddy and vegetables appears to have been a widespread development in villages in the southeastern part of the hill country.¹⁹ Yalman noted its presence in Terutenne in 1955:

In the dry season when the fields were not under rice, some vegetables could be substituted, but the total was strictly limited by the lack of water. In areas nearer the town centres such as Nuwara Eliya, rice lands had been converted into vegetable gardens; it seemed clear that with a steady demand from organized markets and improved transport facilities there would be no

¹⁹ For references to crop rotation, see the Report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission (Govt of Ceylon 1951); Yalman (1967); Abeysekere and Senanayake (1974); and Gunawardena and Chandrasiri (1980).

insurmountable traditional hindrances to the cultivation of cash crops (1967:48).

As is evident from Welivita, organized markets have indeed emerged, and vegetables have become one of the principal cash crops in the villages of this region.

The recent expansion of vegetable cash-cropping in several parts of the hill country is linked to the development of a countrywide network of vegetable marketing. The wholesale markets in Colombo and Kandy, which supply vegetables to smaller markets and retail traders throughout the country, serve as the principal outlets for vegetables produced in the hill country villages (Abeysekere and Senanayake 1974; Gunawardena and Chandrasiri 1980). The development of a countrywide network of periodic markets (*pola*), as reported by Deborah Winslow (1977) and Piyadasa Senanayake (1980), may also be related to the expansion of vegetable cultivation. Expansion seems to have mainly affected the cultivation of what are known as exotic or up-country varieties of vegetables, which are distinct from indigenous species grown mostly by *chena* farmers using primitive techniques.²⁰

Seasonal vegetable cultivation in Welivita developed in direct response to the demand from the Kandy wholesale market. Vegetable wholesalers in Kandy, most of whom are immigrant businessmen of Low Country origin, provide credit to many of the local vegetable farmers whose produce they purchase directly. Four or five wholesalers in Kandy purchase almost the entire vegetable crop in Welivita by advancing credit to the local producers.²¹ Trucks owned or hired by the wholesalers are used to transport vegetables to Kandy. As members of an urban capitalist class, the wholesalers have come to acquire a surplus from Welivita through the medium of merchant capital, and this has contributed to important structural changes in the rural economy.

Table 3.3 describes the vegetable farmers in Welivita during the 1979 dry season. Only the first two categories of vegetable growers supplied their produce to the Kandy market. Those in the third

²⁰ Examples of the exotic varieties are beans, tomatoes, cabbage and carrots. The indigenous varieties include okra, eggplants, gourds and pumpkins. For details on this situation see Winslow (1977).

²¹ The sociological aspects of the wholesale vegetable market in Kandy are described in Silva (1982).

category produced vegetables mainly for household consumption. If they obtained any surplus, it was sold to local shops or to itinerant traders. Often, they cultivated only a small portion of their rice fields with vegetables, using the remaining area for paddy cultivation. The medium-scale cash-croppers had at least one rice field fully cultivated with vegetables, but their farm size was not more than one acre. The large-scale operators, whose farm size was larger than one acre, usually had two or more fields under vegetables. A characteristic feature of the large-scale operators was that in addition to their own land, including the land they controlled as statutory tenants, they leased land from others for vegetable cultivation under a short-term lease. The leaseholders paid a cash rent of Rs 400 per crop season for a plot of one-half acre.

Table 3.3
*The Distribution of Vegetable Farming Households
in Welivita by Caste and Scale of Operation*

Scale of Operation	Caste					
	Nakati	%	Others	%	Total	%
1. Large-scale	9	5.5	0	0	9	4.5
2. Medium-scale	14	8.6	3	7.9	17	8.5
3. Vegetables as a subsidiary crop	42	25.9	3	7.9	45	22.5
4. Total number of households engaged in vegetable farming	65	40.0	6	15.8	71	35.5
5. Number not involved in vegetable farming	97	60.0	32	84.2	129	64.5
Total (4 + 5)	162	100.0	38	100.0	200	100.0

A stratum of relatively successful commercial farmers has emerged in Welivita as a result of the market gardening of vegetables. During the 1979 dry season, when about two-thirds of the

total paddy area in Welivita was under vegetable crops, nine households (4.5 per cent of all households) had a total of 23 acres (33 per cent of all farmland) under vegetables, with an average of 2.5 acres per household. All the leading cash-croppers in Welivita belong to the Nakati caste, indicating that vegetable cultivation has enabled certain families belonging to the lowest layer of the caste hierarchy to move up in society. Through their cash income from vegetables, they have purchased land on a moderate scale, educated their children, and attained a relatively high standard of living. They have become clearly differentiated from the vast majority of impoverished low caste households.

As an emerging low caste leader, Mambara represents the upwardly mobile social stratum in Welivita. His growing influence shows that this stratum has gradually surpassed the gentry as the dominant force in the countryside. Mambara himself is a medium-scale cash-cropper and his political rise was in many ways linked with the development of cash-cropping and related changes in the rural class structure. He led the local campaign for tenancy reform and successfully campaigned for certain infrastructural developments which directly contributed to the development of cash-cropping in the area.²² One such project was the use of concrete in reconstructing the canals that distribute water from the local stream, which substantially improved the local irrigation system. Even more important was his role in road building in the area. Until 1965 there was no direct motorable access to Welivita because of its location at the bottom of a steep valley. In those days, farm produce was carried on the head for a mile or so over the rugged mountain to a point that trucks could reach. A tarred road was extended to Welivita in 1965, largely due to Mambara's lobbying of the local Member of Parliament. Now trucks from Kandy can come to Welivita in 30 minutes, and improved transport facilities have been a major factor in the recent expansion of vegetable cultivation.

The expansion of vegetable cultivation in Welivita proceeded hand-in-hand with the tenurial changes instituted by the Paddy Lands Act of 1958. Weakening of the semi-feudal control exercised by the gentry, and acquisition of greater control over the means of production by some of the local Nakati who were directly involved

²² In 1975 he became the chairman of the Agricultural Productivity Committee for the area. This post helped him greatly in securing institutional support for infrastructural improvements in the village.

in cultivation, seem to have been structural prerequisites for the development of cash-cropping in Welivita. Following tenancy reform it became possible for the statutory share-tenants to cash-crop the land themselves, or to sublease it to others for cash-cropping, provided that the statutory paddy rent or its money value was paid to the absentee owners. Resident landlords, on the other hand, found it advantageous to obtain a high cash rent by leasing out their land to cash-croppers under a short-term contract valid for only one crop season. That these landlords are not directly involved in vegetable cultivation reveals their increasing marginality, lack of enterprise and caste background as non-cultivating owners. The development of cash-cropping was related to several outcomes of the tenancy reform: the strengthening of the rights of some cultivators, rent regulation and the change from a produce rent to a money rent, the disruption of intercaste dependency relations and the consequent liberation of the low caste population, the switch from long-term tenancy to short-term lease, and land sales from absentee owners to local cash-croppers. Thus the demise of semi-feudal economic forms through tenancy reforms was structurally linked to the advance of the capitalist mode of production.

The evolution of crop rotation in Kandyan villages must be seen as a spontaneous capitalist development produced mainly by market mechanisms. It cannot be directly attributed to any specific production campaign or development program initiated by the government. On the contrary, in the initial stages the government extension staff seems to have discouraged the cultivation of vegetables on paddy land, as it was seen as a practice contrary to the government's drive for self-sufficiency in rice. It has been suggested that the imposition of an import ban on certain commodities in recent times had a positive effect on local vegetable cultivation.²³ The import restrictions, however, applied to dry, storable vegetables like potatoes, onions and chillies, which are not part of the crop rotation in the Welivita area. Although a government department is responsible for marketing vegetables, its contribution to the expansion of vegetable cultivation seems to have been quite restricted.²⁴ On the whole it was because of the economic advantage it brought to private traders and cash-cropping farmers rather than any direct

²³ Morrison *et al.* (1979); see also Gunasinghe in this volume.

²⁴ Abeysekere and Senanayake (1974); Gunawardena and Chandrasiri (1980).

support from the government that crop rotation developed in the Kandyan villages.

In an agro-ecological sense, crop rotation is an improvement over simple year-round cultivation of paddy. Each crop has a definite advantage in the particular season in which it is grown. Crop rotation adds to the fertility of the soil and constitutes an efficient and profitable use of land and water resources. Because of crop rotation, the entire paddy area in Welivita is now intensively used in both crop seasons. As a result of the changed cropping pattern, the actual and potential productivity of land has rapidly increased to yield a marketable surplus. Land values increased from about Rs 4,000 an acre in the 1950s to over Rs 20,000 in 1979. The rationalization of rural production processes has recently been reported for various parts of Sri Lanka,²⁵ but its specific nature in hill country villages can be understood only with reference to the non-availability of large tracts of irrigated farm land, and the presence of other constraints imposed by hilly terrain and a feudal background. In the context of rapid population increase, crop rotation has made it possible to use the available land and water resources more efficiently and more productively than in the past. We know from Geertz (1963) that similar processes can lead to an involutive tendency whereby pre-existing social patterns, instead of weakening, achieve a greater elaboration. Our findings on crop rotation, however, point in the opposite direction.

The cropping pattern change in Welivita has been accompanied by an overall reorganization of the rural economy. A heavy capital outlay is now needed in both paddy and vegetable cultivation, but more decisively in the latter. The owners of capital, namely outside traders and local cash-croppers, have therefore been the main beneficiaries of recent increases in the productivity of land. Wage labor has gradually replaced family and cooperative labor (*attam*) as the dominant mode of labor utilization in local agriculture. Family and cooperative labor still has a place in paddy cultivation, but even here the disintegrative processes noted by Gunasinghe (1976) are at work. Recent changes within the rural economy have been accompanied by a rapid increase in the numbers engaged in wage labor both within and outside the village. The number of local people working in nearby tea

²⁵ See Brow (1978); Hettige (1984); and Alexander (1982).

plantations has substantially increased in recent years (Silva 1980). Seasonal migration to the Dry Zone in search of farm work is also widespread, especially among younger men and women from landless families.²⁶

These economic processes indicate increasing capitalist penetration into the countryside, especially after 1958. The changes in the cropping pattern represent a particularly significant advance of the capitalist mode of production and a corresponding weakening of remaining feudal elements.

Conclusion

Both economic and political processes in Kandyan rural society since 1948 must be understood in the larger historical context of a transition from feudalism to capitalism. Local level politics after 1948 reveal a contradiction between emerging capitalist forces and decaying feudal elements in Kandyan rural society. In a major contribution to the Indian debate on modes of production, Alavi (1975: 172) noted the importance of the political dimension of agrarian change and pointed out that 'None of the participants in the debate have demonstrated that there is any conflict between the new "rural capitalist" class and the "feudal" landlords, if they can be structurally distinguished at all!'

In the case of Welivita, I have demonstrated that feudal and anti-feudal elements were sharply distinguished and that the contradiction between them was clearly expressed in the political process. Dualistic notions of co-existence or unity between capitalist and pre-capitalist forms, commonly attributed to colonial and neo-colonial situations, are not supported by my data on the period since independence.

Many of the changes observed in Welivita from 1948 onwards were irreversible and structurally discontinuous. While changes in Kandyan rural society during the colonial period maintained considerable structural continuity with the pre-colonial social order, and therefore produced semi-feudal arrangements in the countryside, post-independence changes resulted in a far more radical rupture

²⁶ For more details see Silva (1982) and Hettige (1984 and this volume).

with the pre-existing social situation. Mobilization of anti-feudal social forces, tenancy reforms, the expansion of commercial farming, the formation of an upwardly mobile social stratum and the proliferation of wage earners were interrelated processes that all moved in the same direction. Hence it is appropriate to refer to an overall structural reorganization of the rural economy and society.

However, we cannot disregard important structural continuities that persisted in Welivita even as late as 1979. Even though commercial farming has rapidly expanded, agriculture continues to be dominated by smallholders who rely heavily on family labor. Hence the workers are not fully separated from the means of production, indicating that the transition to capitalist agriculture has yet to be completed. Unlike highly commercialized vegetable cultivation, rice farming continues to be oriented largely towards household subsistence. Agricultural practices and forms of labor utilization, such as cooperative labor (*attam*), within rice cultivation, although modified in many ways, maintain a good deal of structural continuity. Despite the alternating use of the same farm land for rice and vegetable cultivation, a considerable difference persists between the forms of production relations employed in the two activities.

Finally, the institution of caste continues to be important in the social and political organization of the village, even though its present functions are radically different from what they were earlier. The caste system has lost much of its rigid and obligatory character. It is no longer important as a mechanism for extracting surplus and services from duty-bound low caste groups. Low caste groups have successfully relinquished compulsory caste services, which they now describe as demeaning work (*baldu vada*). They have also given up the use of derogatory caste and individual names (Silva 1986a). On the whole, the rural social order has been infused with an egalitarian ethos that resists hierarchical arrangements (cf. Seneviratne 1978; Brow 1980). Caste is increasingly seen as a matter of cultural heritage and personal identity rather than a mark of superiority or inferiority.

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4

Trends in Agrarian Change: Past and Present in Wewegama, A Village in the Mahaweli Development Project Area, Anuradhapura District

JAYANTHA PERERA

Introduction

One important characteristic of social change in rural Sri Lanka has been its accelerating pace.¹ This has been the result mainly of increased state intervention in the rural areas that began at the turn of this century, coupled more recently with a process whereby village affairs and rural development efforts have become increasingly politicized.

In this study, social change has been classified into three phases.

¹ Wewegama is a pseudonym. Until the 1970s it was the largest traditional (*purana*) village in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. It is located 15 miles from Anuradhapura along the Anuradhapura-Kurunegala road. It now belongs to the H4 area of the Mahaweli Development Project. For useful comments on earlier drafts and editorial assistance, I am grateful to Shyamala Abeyratne, James Brow and Norman Uphoff.

My argument is that prior to the 1930s—the first phase—changes were gradual and cumulative. The principal factors of change in this phase were economic ones, such as markets for agricultural produce and land, the effect of which was to bring villages into greater contact with the national economic system. In the second phase—1930s to 1970s—a new impetus to welfare and development activities was given by the proliferation of government agencies designed to service the village level. But although the process of social change gathered momentum during this period, it did not depart significantly from the earlier period and remained cumulative in nature. In the 1970s, however, the pace of change quickened further, as new development ideologies and strategies were introduced and the state embarked on several ambitious capital-intensive development programs that transcended village boundaries and assumed a regional scope. In the Dry Zone, this meant that traditional small villages became absorbed into large irrigated settlement schemes that were bureaucratically managed. The recent history of Wewegama, the village that is the subject of this chapter, exemplifies this third phase of change. Wewegama became incorporated into the Mahaweli Project and its inhabitants were compelled to take on new identities and values in the face of new patterns of social and economic organization.

In this chapter, I will argue that the core ideas of social organization in Wewegama, and in the wider area of Anuradhapura District, including such basic concepts as that of the 'traditional village' (*purana gama*) as well as claims over land and water that were considered to be the villagers' exclusive property, persisted more or less unchanged until the 1970s. Change was cumulative, and overall it did not radically upset the simple and steady compatibility that existed between the material and cultural dimensions of the village community. In the 1970s, however, cataclysmic changes took place in Anuradhapura District as the state intervened with greater force to turn village society and economy upside down. Between 1978 and 1985 change was so sudden and radical that it has now become difficult to use analytical concepts such as 'cultivator,' 'tenant,' 'laborer,' and 'village community' to convey the same meaning that they had before 1978. They have taken, or been given, different meanings and different importance. In this chapter, I will describe and analyze the main features of Wewegama's economy and society during the last

eight decades, focusing on the combination of change and continuity in the period up until 1978, and on the way in which change has become discontinuous since then.

Landholding and Cultivation

British administration in rural Sri Lanka, at least until the 1930s, was a system of indirect rule. Effective authority in the rural areas was in the hands of 'native' officials, appointed by the state from among individuals who had property qualifications and social standing in their respective communities (Collins 1951; Wiswarnapala 1974). These officials scarcely differed from the feudal overlords of the former Kandyan kingdom. In 1871, the British enacted the Village Communities Ordinance in an attempt to restore village communal self-government, which was believed to have existed in the past. British policy also reflected the belief that the security of private property was essential to establish a suitable foundation for agricultural development. Ordinances such as the Waste Lands Ordinance of 1840 and its amendment in 1896 required surveys of all lands in the island to distinguish Crown lands from private land. With a view to increasing agricultural production in rural communities in the Dry Zone, the government also began to refurbish small community reservoirs generally known as 'village tanks'.

As a traditional (*purana*) village, Wewegama in the early twentieth century had certain characteristics in common with most other villages in the district.² It had its own reservoir (*vava*), below which lay the irrigated paddy fields. The villagers cultivated their rainfed *chenas* in the nearby jungles. The villagers were all Sinhala Buddhists who belonged to a single subcaste (*variga*) of the Goyigama (Cultivator) caste. A Government Agent of the North Central Province wrote at the turn of the century that the

province is inhabited by an agricultural population collected together in small communities, called *purana* 'villages' each under its own tank, and each separated from the other by a

² For a more comprehensive account of social change in Wewegama, see Perera (1985).

more or less extensive tract of forest and jungle. The communities are at once primitive and exclusive, the customs and ideas of a hundred years ago still prevail, the 'village' is the villagers' world, and all intrusions from outside are regarded with utmost jealousy (Booth, 1904:109).

The village tank (*vava*) played an important role in the village economy. The extent of paddy land villagers could cultivate depended on the amount of water the tank held in a particular season. The *purana* villagers cultivated paddy under the tank in their private holdings.

The first cadastral survey in Wewegama was made in 1905, and in 1907 the village tank was refurbished by the state. Both irrigated paddy land and unirrigated high land (which were under cultivation at the time of the survey) were recognized by the state as ancestral shares (*paraveni pangu*) property, while all the rest, including the tank, was claimed as Crown land. The refurbishment of the tank permitted cultivation of a few more acres of paddy land below what was known as the Old Field (Table 4.1). On several subsequent occasions, the Anuradhapura Kachcheri (Government Agent's office), on the recommendation of the Village Irrigation Headman (*vel vidane*), sold Crown land lying below the Old Field. The new paddy lands became known as Acre Field (*akkara vela*) and were mostly sold in four-acre blocks. The government encouraged both villagers and outsiders to buy these lands and bring them into production.

Table 4.1
Registered Paddy Land Holdings Owned by Wewegama Villagers
Between 1905 and 1978

Location of Holdings	Extent of Holdings (Acres)			
	1905	1925	1951	1978
'Old Field'	9.5	14.8	19.0	20.3
'Acre Field'	0.0	14.7	15.6	17.5
Outside the Village	0.5	0.8	14.8	44.3

Source: Land Records of Wewegama, Land Registry, Anuradhapura.

The Old Field had reached its limits of cultivation by 1900. The apparent expansion of its area over the next seventy years is

deceptive, since it is attributable simply to the registration of their paddy holdings by the villagers. Two factors seem to have hastened that process. After 1900, paddy land entered the market as a commodity, and sellers of land had to have legal deeds to attract buyers. Furthermore, the sale of Crown land in the vicinity of Wewegama made villagers fear that the government would take over all unregistered land in the village in order to sell it as Crown property.

The majority of landowners owned less than half an acre of paddy each: 71 per cent in 1905, 61 per cent in 1925, and 63 per cent in 1951 (Table 4.2). As the village population rose and as the land available for paddy cultivation was occupied, a larger increase in the percentage of villagers holding less than half an acre might have been expected. It seems, however, that many owners of tiny plots did not register their holdings, since they mainly depended upon *chena* cultivation for their livelihood. On the other hand, the number of large paddy landowners, i.e., those with holdings of four acres or more, increased from two (4 per cent) to fourteen (38 per cent) between 1951 and 1978. This increase was achieved mainly by the acquisition of paddy land outside the village (Table 4.1).

High land, i.e., unirrigated land, in Wewegama was of four tenurial categories: ancestral (*paraveni*), freehold (*sinnakkara*), leasehold (*badu*) and encroached (*anavasara*). In 1978, ancestral high land holdings, where most of the village houses stood, covered about 110 acres and were known as home gardens (*ge watu*).

Soon after the cadastral survey of 1905, the state began to sell high land in the vicinity of Wewegama. Government officials expected that large numbers of outsiders would come to the Dry Zone to open new estates, as some entrepreneurs had in the Wet Zone. Their optimistic expectations were reflected in their reports. For example, in 1904 the Government Agent of the North Central Province reported that

low country Sinhalese and Tamils from the congested areas as well as capitalists must look in the main for the opening up of the country [Anuradhapura District] with rich soil and so many fields of enterprise to be carried out. There is every ground for hope that men of the right stamp will begin to be attracted as soon as the railway has made the country accessible and the restoration of the tanks for irrigation completed ... Numerous enquiries regarding lands available for sale or lease received from outside (Booth 1904:110).

Table 4.2
Distribution of Owners of Registered Paddy Lands According to the Size
of Holdings Between 1905 and 1978

Size of Holdings (in acres)	Owners of Registered Paddy Lands											
	1905		1925		1951		1978					
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Less than 0.25	5	30	7	21	7	13	2	13	2	5	5	5
0.25 - 0.49	7	41	13	40	28	50	0	50	0	0	0	0
0.50 - 0.99	4	23	6	18	13	23	11	23	11	30	30	30
1.00 - 1.99	0	0	5	15	5	10	10	10	10	27	27	27
2.00 - 4.99	1	6	2	6	1	2	8	2	8	22	22	22
5.00 and more	0	0	0	0	1	2	6	2	6	16	16	16
Total	17	100	33	100	55	100	37	100	37	100	100	100

Source:

Entrepreneurs from outside, however, did not invest in land on a large scale for two main reasons. First, the Dry Zone remained an unattractive area until malaria was finally brought under control in the 1940s. Second, the restoration of reservoirs in the Dry Zone failed to provide adequate water for large-scale cultivation. As a result, the state managed to sell only 160 acres of freehold high land in Wewegama by 1930.

Under the system of Crown leases (*badu*), which was introduced by the Land Development Ordinance of 1935 to resettle landless villagers on Crown lands, each family received two acres of unirrigated land on leasehold. Most of the land distributions under these Village Expansion Schemes occurred only after World War II. Between 1951 and 1978, four schemes were started in Wewegama to resettle landless villagers on what came to be known as 'village expansion land' (*vyapara idam*). By 1978, 28 per cent of the village population was settled on these schemes.

Each *purana* village was surrounded by scrub jungle, which was accessible to all villagers for the cultivation of various crops under rain-fed conditions. The government branded this *chena* cultivation as encroachment and opposed it on several grounds. Rhys-Davids (1871:93) summarized all the purported disadvantages of *chena* cultivation as follows:

Chena cultivation prevents civilised habits and enterprise; it is unwholesome and unhealthy; it is incompatible with paddy or other more remunerative cultivation because the working times clash; it destroys forest resources; and the rotation of the soil prevents any permanent improvement of the land.

Thus British policy discouraged *chena* cultivation in favor of the more intensive cultivation of paddy. Nevertheless, the colonial government admitted that paddy crops were often destroyed by drought in the Dry Zone and that a minority of villagers in each village suffered badly in such seasons. For these few, special concessions were given in the 1870s to cultivate *chenas* in Crown jungles. The government looked upon limited *chena* cultivation as a method of raising additional foodstuff in an emergency. But villagers saw it primarily as a regular means of growing subsistence crops as well as a surplus for sale. Thus, as Leach (1961:289) observed, 'shifting cultivation (*hena*, or *chena*) is a matter on

which villagers and the administration hold diametrically contrasted points of view.'

Nearly every villager encroached on state land to cultivate a *chena* from which a substantial portion of income was obtained. *Chena* cultivation was a system of obtaining a measure of distributional justice for all villagers. Since (a) paddy lands in the village did not expand at the same rate as the population; (b) there was very little diversification of employment opportunities until the 1960s; and (c) the sale of state land and the distribution of state leaseholdings did not help the villagers much in their quest for more land to cultivate, the only avenue available for many villagers was to cultivate a plot of *chena* in the jungle around the village, which they considered to be a part of their village. Furthermore, *chena* cultivation required minimal capital: a few tools and labor. Villagers who worked hard cultivated their *chenas* by themselves and the practice of collective *chena* cultivation, in which friends, neighbors and kinsmen cooperated, often allowed even a widow in the village to cultivate a piece of *chena*. In 1978, Wewegama villagers cultivated 299 acres of high land. Of this, 122 acres (40 per cent) were registered as individual holdings owned by villagers and the rest were encroachments. Villagers who cultivated encroached lands now treated their holdings as freehold and cultivated them in consecutive years, abandoning the practice of changing plots every three years as their predecessors had done.

The Cultivation Officer of Wewegama said in 1978 that 'high land [*chena*] cultivation keeps many villagers in good financial position; cash crops such as chillies, cowpea, green gram and aubergines bring them substantial income.' One of the biggest landowners, who owned five acres of paddy, said:

Even if a villager owns five acres of paddy, he has no assured income throughout the year unless he cultivates a high land plot. This is because paddy cultivation often fails, sometimes for several seasons. In such circumstances, villagers have to depend solely on high land cultivation for their survival.

Until the 1950s, village boundaries were clear and the size of the village population was small, so there was no great problem in cultivating *chena* in the vicinity of the village. But with the abolition of the positions of Irrigation Headman and Village Headman in 1958

and 1963 respectively, many outsiders encroached on the lands where previously only the *purana* villagers had cultivated *chena* crops. As several villagers pointed out, there were several large *chenas* in the vicinity, each of which was 10-15 acres in size, but they belonged to outsiders. In 1978, 20 per cent of Wewegama villagers were not able to cultivate *chenas* for want of land.

With the opening of large-scale *chenas*, new job opportunities became available to the poor, especially poor women, during slack periods in paddy cultivation. These large *chenas* were not cultivated for subsistence but to make profits on the market. In the early 1960s, the import of several commodities (such as chillies, cowpea and other pulses) was stopped by the government because of the worsening foreign exchange situation in Sri Lanka. The government introduced increased agricultural subsidies, guaranteed prices and opened branches of the Marketing Department in rural areas to buy the villagers' produce, with the result that *chena* cultivation increasingly became a commercial enterprise, especially for large-scale cultivators.

Peasant Classes and their Interactions in Wewegama

In 1978 agriculture, including both paddy and *chena* cultivation, continued to be the main source of livelihood for the majority of Wewegama villagers. Village economic organization was therefore still mainly based upon relationships between different agricultural groups according to their ownership or non-ownership of land. Non-agricultural occupations had also emerged as a result of increasing links between the village and those outside the village and increasing state activities in the rural areas.

Those who engaged in agriculture may be divided into three main classes: owner-cultivators, sharecropping (*ande*) tenants and laborers. An owner-cultivator is someone who owns a paddy holding that is cultivated mainly by himself. In Wewegama, where rainfall is not reliable, a household needs at least an acre of paddy to meet its annual food requirements when a *chena* is not cultivated; 94 per cent of households in 1905, 79 per cent in 1925, 86 per cent in 1951 and 35 per cent in 1978 did not own a sufficient amount of

paddy land to meet their own food requirements. They typically supplemented income from their paddy holdings with *chena* cultivation and/or sharecropping tenancies. For example, in 1978, 90 per cent of owner-cultivators cultivated high land in addition to paddy and most of their high land holdings were larger than an acre. Six out of thirteen (40 per cent) owner-cultivators with less than one acre of paddy cultivated additional paddy land on sharecropping tenancy. On the other hand, every owner-cultivator who owned more than 1.5 acres of paddy land rented out a portion of it on sharecropping tenancy.

A sharecropping tenant is someone who cultivates another's paddy land under contract for at least one cultivation season. Many tenants are landless, and they often also hire out their labor for wages. In 1978, 58 per cent of tenants did not own any paddy land. The largest paddy holding owned by a tenant was 0.5 acre. Every tenant who cultivated less than 0.5 acre as a sharecropper also hired himself out as a wage laborer in both agricultural and non-agricultural work. There were 18 tenants under owner-cultivators in 1978. All except three tenants also cultivated their own high landholdings to supplement their incomes.

A laborer is someone who works for wages on tasks that require physical strength or patience rather than managerial skill or training. All the laborers in Wewegama in 1978 were landless, and they tried without success to find some paddy land to cultivate on sharecropping tenancy. To become a full-time laborer was the last thing a villager wanted, as it put him lowest on both the occupational and the status scale. As early as 1910, there were six households in Wewegama that depended mainly on hiring out their labor for a payment in kind in order to earn a living. They engaged in their own *chena* cultivation during slack periods in paddy cultivation. Laborers found work in paddy cultivation only at peak periods, such as land preparation and harvesting. At the harvest, both husband and wife in a laborer household could usually find work in the paddy fields.

In the *yala* season, when paddy cultivation was limited by the shortage of water, the number of days a laborer could find work was much less. Each laborer, however, cultivated a small high land holding. Many laborers also found work outside the village to supplement their income. In 1978, 40 men from Wewegama worked for more than 20 days a month for over ten months on construction sites of the Mahaweli Development Project.

Those who were engaged in non-agricultural occupations may be divided into two categories: the self-employed and the salaried. In Wewegama, in 1978, the class of self-employed consisted of two small shopkeepers and three wholesale vegetable merchants. The shopkeepers were outsiders who had come to the village in the 1930s. One shopkeeper owned the only car in the village. He also owned three acres of paddy in the village and another three acres outside. He cultivated his paddy holdings in the village with the help of laborers while the rest was rented out to three tenants. The other trader began his life in Wewegama as a carpenter, but gave up carpentry in 1970 to become a shopkeeper. He owned no paddy land but cultivated two acres of *chena*. Two of his sons were government employees.

The wholesale vegetable businessmen were *purana* villagers. One of them had been a labor contractor to the government construction project in the vicinity of the village that was established in the 1950s. These businessmen were middlemen in vegetables and paddy. Each of the three owned more than two acres of paddy land. They also cultivated *chenas* with the help of hired laborers.

There were seven salaried employees in Wewegama in 1978. All of them were government employees of lower grades. Specifically, their jobs were those of bus conductor, police constable, teacher, clerk, survey assistant, cultivation officer and cooperative manager. Four of them owned small plots of paddy that were cultivated by family members, in some cases with the help of hired laborers.

In many ways, the owner-cultivator group had a more homogeneous and sharply defined character than it displayed in the 1970s. Until the 1940s, only *purana* villagers owned paddy land in the village. But by 1978, 30 per cent of the village paddy lands were owned by outsiders in the Village Expansion Schemes. Twenty-five per cent of the paddy land was worked by means of sharecropping tenancy, but this was not the result of large paddy holdings leased out to tenants. Not a single household in the village owned more than six acres of paddy. Over 60 per cent of paddy holdings in Wewegama were less than two acres in size. Landowners let their land on sharecropping tenancy for a number of reasons. First, many landowners felt (and were often reminded by their landless relatives and friends) that they had an obligation to let some of their paddy lands to their kinsmen and friends. Second, renting

out land was a sure way of recruiting dependents in the villages. Third, some of the landowners, especially the educated ones and those employed outside the village, rented out their land either because they had left the village or because they were engaged in more lucrative occupations than agriculture. In Wewegama, the biggest landlords were the salaried and some of the self-employed. Fourth, widows, and old and sick landowners, rented out most, if not all, of their land. Fifth, whenever a villager mortgaged his paddy holding in order to obtain the substantial amount of ready cash needed to meet a family crisis, the norm was to allow the mortgagor to continue to cultivate the land as a sharecropping tenant if he so desired. Finally, there were several cases in Wewegama of tenancy arrangements linked to inheritance. When a son married and established his separate household, he sometimes became a tenant of his parents. Although he was the heir, or one of the heirs, to his parents' property, if it was not formally divided among the children, he did not have absolute rights over his share. If the parents wished, they allowed their son to cultivate his share, or more, and took a share of his harvest as rent. Leach (1961) and Brow (1980) mention the same type of sharecropping tenancies in other villages in the same district as Wewegama.

The rent the landlord received varied according to the productivity of the land, the amount of labor and other inputs provided by the landlord and, above all, the personal relationship between the landlord and the tenant. For the last hundred years or so, the following type of tenancies have been practised in Wewegama.

Village tenancy (gam ande): Under this arrangement, the landlord provided his tenants with land, seed paddy and buffaloes for land preparation. The tenant did all the work in the field. The harvest was shared equally between landlord and tenant.

Combined tenancy (kattu ande): Under this arrangement, the landlord worked alongside his tenant and managed all cultivation operations. He provided all necessary inputs. He took half of the gross harvest as his rent and expenses, and the other half was equally shared with his tenant. Thus, the landlord received 75 per cent of the total harvest.

Mortgage tenancy (ukas ande): In a subsistence economy such as Wewegama, a villager rarely had enough savings for a family

emergency. Therefore, when a large sum of money was suddenly required, the usual practice was to mortgage paddy holdings against a cash loan from a wealthy villager. The custom was that the mortgagee should employ the mortgagor as his tenant on that particular tract and take a share of the crop as interest for the money loaned. In such instances, the mortgagee did not provide any inputs and simply collected one-fourth of the harvest. If the mortgagor could not pay back the loan within a few years, he usually sold absolute ownership rights over the holding to the mortgagee for an additional sum of money, but he could remain as the tenant of the holding if the new owner so desired.

Despite all the interest shown by successive governments since 1931 in the promotion of paddy cultivation, very little was done to improve tenancy conditions until 1958. The report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission (Govt. of Ceylon 1951) highlighted how up-country villagers had been impoverished and often displaced from their homes by the spread of the plantation economy. An economic survey of rural Sri Lanka carried out in 1950-51 showed that 26 per cent of all agricultural households owned no land and another 16 per cent owned less than half acre each (Govt of Ceylon 1954). Then came the Paddy Lands Act of 1958, which was ambitious in its scope and favorable to tenants. Its most important objective was to control the power that landlords wielded and to give tenants security of tenure. This act introduced a new form of sharecropping tenancy to Wewegama: one-fourth tenancy (*hataren ande*) which is also known as legal tenancy (*niti ande*).

Under legal tenancy, a landlord does not provide any inputs or draft power but simply rents out his land. Such arrangements are often long-term tenancies, and the tenant must pay his landlord a quarter of his harvest each season. Registered tenancies under the Paddy Lands Act are mostly of this kind.

The Paddy Lands Act and subsequent tenancy laws, such as the Agricultural Lands Law of 1973 and the Agrarian Services Act of 1979, aimed at giving a tenant the status of a renter who is required to pay the landlord only a quarter of the harvest. These laws further guaranteed that the tenant could neither be evicted nor asked by the landlord to perform certain traditional or feudal duties, such as housework, as part of the tenancy arrangement.

Favorable though they were to the tenants, these measures were not

able to guarantee security of tenure or a limit to rents. Economic forces of supply and demand, reinforced by the pressure of the status system, were too strong in the villages. For a number of reasons many tenants continued to pay share-rentals at the customary levels above the new legal specification of 25 per cent. Chief among these reasons was the fear of eviction. When jobs were lacking and few had savings, it was too risky to rely on the security offered by the law. Besides, court proceedings could take several years before a claim was resolved. Second, many tenants depended on their landlords to provide draft animals, seed paddy and sometimes subsistence during the period between sowing and harvesting. Only 3 per cent of the tenants in Wewegama obtained credit and inputs from the village cooperative store in 1970, while 65 per cent of the owner-cultivators availed themselves of institutional credit and subsidies. Third, social and customary restraints also played a role. A tenant who had cultivated a holding for many years felt that to insist on paying only a quarter of the harvest as rent would be ungrateful to a landlord who had for many years provided him with a means of livelihood.

The relationship between landlord and tenant was a comfortable one when the landlord did not live in the village, as an absentee landlord could not easily obtain extra-tenurial services from his tenant. In general, what the landlord could command was less than it had been in the 1930s. Frequent changes of tenants by landlords was a simple way of evading tenancy laws, which provide tenure security for a tenant who cultivates the same plot for two consecutive years. But it could be difficult and embarrassing for a landlord to get his land back soon after harvest from a tenant who was often a relative or a friend of the family. This difficulty was overcome in two ways. The first was for the landlord to take the holding back to cultivate by himself, with the help of laborers, for one season. This form of alternating cultivation, one season with tenants and the next with hired laborers, also eased the risks of cultivating in the Dry Zone, where irrigation water is frequently insufficient. A landlord cultivating his own holding with the help of laborers bore all the risks, but if a tenant was associated the risk was shared. The second way of getting land back was to instigate a dispute with the tenant, making it impossible for him to ask for tenancy the following season.

Laborers differed from tenants in several ways, the most important of which was their insecurity of employment. Once they

had acquired a sharecropping tenancy, tenants were assured of employment for at least one cultivation season. But wage laborers had neither responsibilities over operations nor did they bear the risks, except for physical injury from chemical spraying. Laborers provided only their labor for wages.

Laborers were generally recruited by land operators *ad hoc*. The demand for labourers in paddy cultivation stemmed from the inadequacy of family labor at peak periods and for time-bound operations such as land preparation. In recent times, the demand for laborers has been generated by landlords who have chosen to cultivate their own land with the help of laborers in order to avoid the tenancy laws, or who have wanted to raise themselves from the owner-cultivator category into the elite class of landlords.

In some cases, however, laborers established a more enduring relationship with their employers. Some landlords preferred to work their paddy fields with laborers who had proved themselves to be good workers in previous seasons. Businessmen who cultivated large extents of *chena* also usually hired the same groups of laborers to cultivate their *chena* every season. An important aspect of such continuing relationships between employer and laborers was that the latter tended to look to their employers for assistance in various ways, such as loans for family events, or money to buy food on days they could not find work.

In addition to wages, it was customary to provide drinks, *bidis* (local cigarettes), and sometimes also liquor for agricultural laborers. Since the cancellation of the Free Rice Ration Scheme in

Table 4.3

**Average Daily Wages in Rs Paid in Wewegama to Laborers
in Paddy Cultivation, 1978-79
(Excluding Meals and Tea)**

Type of Work	Payment to Men	Payment to Women
Land preparation	10.00	—
Transplanting	—	—
Application of fertilizer	10.00	—
Weeding	10.00	—
Harvesting	10.00	7.00
Stacking	9.00	—
Threshing	15.00	—
Winnowing	12.00	8.00

1979 and the increase in the price of rice, some laborers preferred to postpone receiving their wages until the end of the cultivation season and then to be paid in paddy. This practice normally applied only to harvest-related work. Operators also preferred this arrangement as it freed them from having to raise money every day during peak times in agriculture in order to be able to pay their laborers. This method of wage payment made laborers even more dependent on employers. Wages in paddy cultivation varied according to the type of work and the sex of the laborers (Table 4.3).

In *chena* cultivation, wages were generally paid either weekly or daily. A man received Rs 12 to 14, while a woman received Rs 8 to 10 a day in 1978. Several Wewegama villagers also worked as casual hands in construction sites of the Mahaweli Development Project. They were paid between Rs 20 and Rs 30 a day in 1978, which was quite a high rate for the area. Poor villagers had to depend on political leaders to obtain jobs in the project, as recruitment to such jobs was highly politicized. Just as landlords could favor some villagers by giving paddy land on sharecropping tenancy or by employing them as laborers, so politically powerful patrons could provide jobs in the Mahaweli Development Project. This was a new form of patronage that emerged in the area in the 1970s.

Many of the changes just described were consequences of the gradual penetration of state activities into the village. Examples of this were state regulation of land tenures, and attempts by the state to settle disputes over land in the villages, to promote the growth of agriculture, and to reduce poverty. Another important phenomenon was the rapid growth of population in the rural areas that resulted from the eradication of malaria in the Dry Zone and the general improvement of medical facilities. The state's claim over land to which cultivators had no proof of ownership, and the subsequent sale of such land to the rich and influential of the area, arrested the expansion of village boundaries while the population was increasing. To a certain extent, this increased pressure on land defeated the state's objective of promoting agriculture in the paddy sector.

Population growth and state regulation of land, however, did not affect Wewegama as adversely as they did the Kandyan areas that were dominated by capitalist plantations. In Wewegama, although the state prohibited *chena* cultivation on Crown lands

villagers did not abandon their *chenas*, since those lands were not sold on a large scale to capitalist farmers. Furthermore, state leaseholds in Wewegama allowed expansion of village boundaries as the population grew. Economic growth could be observed in the village from the 1950s onwards. The expansion of cash-cropping after the ban on importing certain commodities, and the establishment of good roads and rural market networks that connected remote villages with bazaars and towns, brought the village into more frequent contact with the outside world. Many non-agricultural occupations emerged as a result.

Most salaried employees and businessmen in Wewegama owned paddy lands but did not cultivate them themselves. The concentration of a significant amount of land in their hands placed them well above the agriculturalist groups in both income and status. Salaried employees and businessmen not only provided employment to the agriculturalists but also acted as agents between the village and the outside world, thereby deepening the villagers' dependency on them. It is possible to identify several types of dependency in terms of the different kinds of resources they involved. Land was still the most important of all resources in the village. Landlords retained a number of their dependents by renting out their land on sharecropping tenancies and by recruiting laborers. Access to markets and ownership of capital allowed traders and businessmen to retain dependents by giving them loans, offering cash advances for crops, and providing access to outside markets. Traders, schoolteachers and government employees helped their fellow villagers to meet their increased need for contacts with government officers and politicians in towns and cities.

The Social System in the Process of Change

Until 1900, every *purana* village in the North Central Province was a single-caste village. The members of a village considered one another to be kinsmen, and thus each village constituted a kin group called a *variga*. The *variga* was, in principle, an endogamous group 'whose members refrained from associating with people of alien *varigas* (*pita variga*), particularly in marriage (*magul*) and

funeral (*ilav*) ceremonies' (Pieris 1956:252). As a kin group the *variga* was territorially based and took the name of the village. Thus, Wewegama *variga* meant two things for its members: a kin group, or kindred, and the land owned and controlled by the kindred. The tradition was that only *variga* members could own land in the village and use the village tank for agricultural and domestic purposes. The principle of endogamy ensured that outsiders did not come in and occupy village lands. The *variga* thus resembled Sir Henry Maine's concept of the Indian village community in that, like the village community, it was both a kin group and an assemblage of co-proprietors. But it also differed from Maine's 'village community' in that land was not owned by the village collectively, but separately by individuals. The *variga* maintained its authority by means of various sanctions such as fines and public criticism, and even by depriving a wrongdoer of *variga* membership, which practically meant expulsion from the village (Leach 1961:95; Brow 1978:65; Perera 1979: 6). Each *variga* had its representative leaders, i.e., village leaders who formed a *variga* court to decide disputes pertaining to kinship and property.

Although *purana* villagers considered themselves to be a single group *vis-a-vis* outsiders, in day-to-day matters they grouped themselves into three clusters based on residential criteria and, to some extent, economic and political differences. *Purana* villagers lived in three physically distinct settlements called Galawa, Kalundawa and Ranorawa. In the 1950s, another small residential group called Kurunduwatta emerged within Ranorawa.

Galawa members considered themselves to be descendants of the original inhabitants of the *purana* village, a claim accepted by all other *purana* villagers. Galawa members were the richest in the village and occupied the most valuable home gardens near the tank and paddy fields. The second group, Kalundawa, closely identified itself with Galawa. Its members claimed that their ancestors arrived in Wewegama more or less at the same time as the ancestors of Galawa. Economically, however, they were poor. Each group considered the other to be composed of genuine members of the Wewegama village *variga*. The third group was Ranorawa; its members were mainly youths who moved away from the first two groups as the village population grew. They were socially mobile and politically active and maintained good

relations both with outsiders in the Village Expansion Schemes and with other households in the village. A few were engaged in trade and business. In 1978, the chief organizer in the village of the ruling United National Party (UNP) was a Ranorawa member. The fourth group was Kurunduwatta, which comprised 12 households. They were the poorest members of the village. They owned no paddy land and most worked as wage laborers in other people's *chenas* and paddy fields. Many were notorious, as early as the 1950s, for doing jobs that other *purana* villagers were loathe to do. They caught fish in the tank to sell to outsiders, with whom they had close relations. The Galawa and Kalundawa people branded their residential area as Theppeliwatta (fish-smelling area) and treated them as a separate, inferior sub-group within Ranorawa. In the 1956 general elections, the Theppeliwatta people publicly supported the UNP while others supported the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which was an ironic way to differentiate themselves, given the UNP's reputation of being the party of the rich. SLFP supporters sarcastically changed the name of Theppeliwatta to Kurunduwatta, after Colombo's most exclusive residential area, where the rich and Westernized elite live.

Improvements in communications and the emergence of land as a marketable commodity disturbed the traditional village social structure and value system. Wewegama experienced an influx of 'outsiders' into the area in the early twentieth century. Between 1910 and 1935, nearly 20 households arrived in Wewegama for various purposes. The majority came as agricultural helpers and settled on the village's boundary lands. They were of different castes, including Karava (Fishermen), Salagama (Cinnamon Peelers), Badahala (Potters) and Vahumpura (Jaggery Makers). By 1940, a clear distinction was apparent between the *variga* members (*variga atto*) and non-members *varigen pita minissu*. The influx of outsiders into Dry Zone villages (such as Wewegama) was presumably a consequence of population growth in their native villages resulting from better health services. Their mobility was facilitated by the improvement of transport facilities.

'Outsiders' were commonly referred to by the *purana* villagers as *vyapara udaviya* (members of the Village Expansion Scheme), since most of the outsiders lived in one or other of the four schemes. Outsiders felt and expressed their group identity as a whole perhaps only when they distinguished themselves from

purana villagers or when the latter discriminated against them as outsiders. Most came from the south, especially from Galle and Matara districts, and most were Buddhists. They brought their own beliefs in gods and other spirits to the area and often ridiculed *purana* villagers' parochial gods and spirits. They had a strong belief in national gods such as Kataragama and Pattini rather than in local gods. In 1977, they built a Buddhist temple in one scheme and installed as its chief incumbent a priest of the Amarapura sect, which draws its members exclusively from outside the Goyigama caste.

The arrival of outsiders in Wewegama led people to identify themselves either as original inhabitants of the village (*purana gamkarayo*) or as members of the Village Expansion Scheme (*vyapara udaviya*). *Purana* villagers claimed a village history of at least 300 years and considered themselves members of a single *variga* of the Goyigama caste. They called themselves 'our people' (*ape aya*) or 'original group' (*purana udaviya*) and considered themselves to be the genuine owners of the village paddy fields, the water in the tank, and to have use rights in the surrounding jungle. All others in the village were 'outsiders' (*pita minissu*).

The members of the Village Expansion Schemes (hereafter, outsiders) in Wewegama did not belong to the village in a social sense. They belonged to different castes, as mentioned earlier. Most of them were from the Southern Province and bore names such as Perera, Silva and Fernando. The attitudes of *purana* villagers towards them were rather ambivalent. According to one informant from the Galawa group:

Outsiders are low caste people and do not have proper Sinhalese names, but carry foreign names, such as Silva and Albert. They therefore do not have proper roots. They are beef-eaters and therefore they are untouchables (*candala*). They engage in gambling, brewing liquor, stealing others' cattle and whoring in the village. They are evil people. They practise such vices and entice the youths of the *purana* settlements into such vices. Now it is dangerous to send a grown-up girl alone to a shop even in the day-time; those nasty youths of the 'schemes' might molest her The police station is on the boundary of the village and its presence does not stop such vices and crimes. It seems those officials also patronize brothels and liquor shops in the 'schemes' and provide necessary protection for such trades.

The *purana* villagers thought of themselves as backward (*gode*) and shy people in comparison with the outsiders. They felt that they were becoming subordinates of the outsiders, not because the latter had control over village lands or good jobs in the towns, but mainly because of their cultural superiority in the wider social system of which the village had progressively become a part. The manner of speech, the names and, to a certain extent, the dress of the outsiders in the village were those of town dwellers. These qualities allowed them to mix with town people and to obtain more easily any aid coming to the village from the outside. According to the *purana* villagers, officials who came to the village first met the outsiders, who lived by the roads. Often they did not even come into the *purana* village to meet the villagers. Most politicians also depended on outsiders and their leaders to obtain information about the village and to carry out various projects in the village. Thus, the outsiders became influential not only in the village but also in a wider area.

According to the outsiders in Wewegama, the *purana* villagers were primitive and illiterate. They were said to be shy and scared of officials and therefore dependent on the outsiders for assistance in contacting officials and politicians. One outsider, a spokesman for one of the schemes, said:

During the rainy season, *purana* settlements become muddy and no one can visit them. Then those areas become like hell (*narakadiya*). The *purana* villagers do not use lavatories, but use the tank bed as a lavatory during the day and their own compounds at night. Their marriages are promiscuous and many of them practise polyandry They do not have any social manners; they did not know how to laugh until very recently. They were aborigines (*vaddo*).

Purana villagers and outsiders both still wanted to keep their distance from each other. This dissension was especially marked in marriages. The outsiders preferred to bring marriage partners from their ancestral villages in the south. One shopkeeper, an outsider, asked me, 'How can we, the southerners, marry our children to those illiterate and primitive people?'

The two groups had different views of the recent changes in the area. *Purana* villagers considered the opening of the village to the

outside and the influx of outsiders to be a sign of social, economic and religious decay. They disliked the outsiders mainly because the latter had encroached on their *chena* lands, thereby limiting their opportunities for subsistence. Moreover, the arrival of the outsiders left no room for the village to expand, and *purana* villagers had no desire to move to a 'scheme'. Furthermore, the jobs as casual laborers and supervisors in the new government-sponsored development projects were taken by the outsiders because of their links with officials and outside politicians.

From the outsiders' viewpoint, it was they who had succeeded in linking the 'isolated,' 'uncivilized,' 'primitive' *purana* villages with the larger world. One outsider said:

The *purana* villagers are like frogs in a well. They still want to stick together in their settlements away from civilization. Now the *purana* settlements are linked, to some extent, with the outside world and they are becoming used to strangers.

In the eyes of *purana* villagers, the real decay of the village could be seen in the realm of religion and belief. The belief system of the area had been a replica of the regional administrative system. The god in charge of the area was Aiyamayaka. He was an agent of Lord Buddha, who stood at the apex of the hierarchy. God Aiyamayaka's area of authority was called the Kingdom of Reservoirs (*vava bandi rajaya*), and he ruled it with the help of five assistant gods, Ratna Kambili, Ratna Kadawara, Kalu Devatha, Illandari Devatha and Guruma, each of whom was entrusted with a specialized task to fulfil. Next in line were the area gods: Akasa (sky), Bhumatu (earth), Muhudu (sea), Ganga (river) and Thotupala (ferry). In addition, each village had its own god called the Gambara Deiya. This pantheon of gods was benevolent and harmless, as all of them obtained their powers (*varam*) from God Aiyamayaka. But below them were the harmful and malevolent demons and ghosts. Because of their fate (*karuma*), demons and ghosts could not become benevolent gods by their own endeavors, so it was thought to be the duty of human beings to accrue merit on their behalf in order to help promote them into the category of benevolent gods.

Purana villagers came to change their view of this pantheon. According to them, there were now more malevolent and harmful spirits than benevolent gods in the area, because of the arrival of

outsiders with their gods. One *purana* villager said that, in a way, those gods were evil spirits. He claimed that God Aiyanayaka became frustrated by the new evil spirits and decided to renounce this world in order to attain ultimate bliss (*nirvana*). So the god became a pious Buddhist layman (*upasaka*) at the Nallachchiya Buddhist temple. In the good old days, God Aiyanayaka had been powerful and everyone had feared him. He had never allowed anybody to harm an innocent person. But now everybody knew that God Aiyanayaka was an *upasaka* and did not punish anybody. People had misused this opportunity and begun to engage in all sorts of vices.

There was another view of God Aiyanayaka's resignation from the powerful post of regional god. One *purana* villager told me that outsiders who moved into the area from the 1960s onwards had gradually discredited the god in order to be able to practise their vices. When people believed in a powerful god they were afraid to indulge in any vice, but when rumor said that the god had resigned from his position and was no longer powerful, people could get up to all kinds of wrongdoing. It was similar, he said, to the police withdrawing from an area notorious for crime.

The outsiders had their own interpretation of the changes. They believed that they had brought a new, national-level belief system and worldview into the area. They often ridiculed the *purana* villagers' gods and spirits, and displayed a strong belief in national gods such as Kataragama and Pattini. They wanted to show the *purana* villagers that a regional god like Aiyanayaka was no longer able to cater to the demands of the area, and had therefore voluntarily retired from his job.

With the improvement of transport facilities, many villagers began to make pilgrimages to places where national gods were believed to reside. For example, many villagers went annually to worship the Buddha's footprint on the summit of the Sri Pada mountain (Adam's Peak). This shrine was supervised, according to the villagers, by a god called Saman who had authority over all of Sri Lanka, along with other gods who received power (*varam*) from the Lord Buddha. In 1978, several villagers went on pilgrimage to visit sixteen important shrines located throughout Sri Lanka, including that of the most powerful God Kataragama in the southeast of the island. They made vows to such gods to pay a visit or to make an offering of money or gold jewelry in return for a favor,

such as success in litigation or examinations. These changes symbolically demonstrate the emergence of outsiders' influence over the area during the last few decades and the village's gradual incorporation into national social and cultural systems.

Many Wewegama villagers believed that significant agricultural and rural development took place in the village during the twenty years prior to 1978. A sample of 38 Wewegama households was asked in 1978 to express opinions on the extent of change in the following areas of social life: agriculture, crop diversification, non-agricultural employment, water supply for cultivation, the use of agrochemicals, and cooperative work and discipline (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Villagers' Opinions on Development in Wewegama, 1978

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Opinion</i>			
	<i>Increased</i>	<i>Decreased</i>	<i>No Change</i>	<i>Cannot Say</i>
Crop Yield per acre	30	35	32	3
Crop diversification	46	8	38	8
Use of fertilizer, etc.	72	20	—	8
Water supply for cultivation	6	16	78	—
Employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sector	72	16	6	6
Cooperative activities	24	44	32	—
Crimes—thefts, fights, etc.	44	30	16	10

Note: Figures are percentages.

The most prominent changes that villagers recognized occurred in the areas of (a) the use of fertilizer, agrochemicals, and extension services, (b) crop diversification, and (c) non-agricultural employment,

all of which they saw as having increased, while (d) levels of co-operation and (e) social discipline were perceived to have declined. Villagers felt that the use of fertilizer, chemicals and agricultural services increased because of new diseases (35 per cent), a general improvement in education (16 per cent), and the requirements of new paddy varieties (21 per cent). Diversification was due to the high prices that prevailed for crops such as chillies, gingelly, maize and cowpea. The increase in non-agricultural employment was due mainly to the Mahaweli Development Project and other government-sponsored projects in the area. Cooperative activities were thought to have declined because the influx of outsiders broke down village cohesiveness and also because of political rifts. Discipline deteriorated because of illiteracy, poverty and liquor. During this period, general amenities for villagers improved dramatically. The majority of respondents acknowledged that library facilities (75 per cent), dispensary facilities (89 per cent), schools (86 per cent), and roads (100 per cent) had improved. However, everyone maintained that no development had taken place in recreational facilities, health care, electricity, and domestic water supplies.

In summary, it may be worth asking whether Wewegama ever did fit the classical model of the 'traditional village community' described by writers such as Henry Maine and, if it once did so, to what extent this ceased to be the case in the years before 1978. Until the 1950s, many aspects of village life took place primarily within the sociogeographic context of the 'natural' village. The village was in a sense a 'community of fate,' which allowed its members little mobility or choice. Cultural and ethical aspects of community life were congruent with economic and social aspects. In Wewegama, there was also a general correspondence between the status rankings associated with the different sets of village activities. Within the village, a person normally occupied positions of more or less similar rank in different structures. Most tenants and laborers were economically subject to the domination of a small group of more well-to-do neighbors. This domination was not confined to economic activities but was reinforced by interlocking social and political domination as well.

From the 1950s onwards, the rate of change in the village's socioeconomic and belief systems began to accelerate. Wewegama villagers gradually absorbed the changes, however, and became

accustomed to new development trends, as indicated by their adoption of government-introduced agricultural innovations. And although the *purana* villagers resisted change, by the 1970s they had accepted the presence of outsiders and were sharing both local and external resources with them. New value orientations and behavior patterns became established and a new accommodation was achieved between the material and symbolic spheres of village life.

Another change that began to have a strong impact on Wewegama was politicization. State intervention to improve the lot of agricultural groups, especially tenants and wage laborers, brought only limited benefits, but organizations established at the village and divisional levels to carry out these reforms and to distribute government aid among cultivators, such as the Cultivation Committee and the Agricultural Production Committee, gave rise to a new source of power and authority based on control of those organizations. Rural organizations were rapidly politicized, and some non-agricultural groups, especially outsiders in the village expansion schemes and the landless in Ranorawa, were allowed to participate in decision-making concerning agricultural development in the village. In this way, by the 1960s a new source of power had emerged that was held not by landlords but by members of mixed occupational groups who came from both *purana* settlements and the schemes.

Nevertheless, well into the 1970s there was also considerable continuity in some of the most salient characteristics of traditional society. The main components of a *purana* village, namely the tank, the paddy fields, the cluster of houses and the jungle surrounding the village, remained more or less unchanged. Land ownership continued to be the main criterion of socioeconomic stratification although some non-agricultural forms of employment had begun to emerge.

Acceleration of Change and the Emergence of a New Society

In the late 1970s, the government of Sri Lanka adopted the Mahaweli Development Project as one of its main development programs,

and undertook to complete the project in five years at a total cost of Rs 73 billion (figured at 1983 prices). Acceleration of the project was justified on the grounds that it was necessary to solve balance of payment problems, unemployment and the slow growth rate in agriculture and industry. The Accelerated Mahaweli Program (AMP) is a river basin development project involving both power and irrigation. Wewegama has been incorporated into a sub-system of the AMP commonly known as 'System H'. Within the boundaries of Wewegama, a new complex of buildings was constructed in 1980-81 as a township that would serve as the center for a section of 'System H'—the H4 area. The major emphasis of the project has been construction, development of infrastructure and settlement of a new population. Authorities have paid little attention to the fate of the previous inhabitants (both *purana* villagers and outsiders who have been in the village since the 1950s). Authorities have attempted to erase economic class differences in the existing settlements by replacing the hierarchical stratification of landowners, owner-cultivators, tenants and laborers with a more egalitarian pattern of land proprietorship. Each village household became the owner of three acres of land, made up of two and a half acres of irrigated land and half an acre of home garden. They were, however, compelled to abandon traditional high land (*chena*) cultivation in favor of intensive paddy cultivation. The transitional period of social adaptation was expected to be short, since the villagers remained in their known environment. But although the *purana* villagers did not have to move from their ancestral homesteads, they did have to adapt to new forms of social and economic organization. Wewegama villagers received land both in the 'traditional' paddy fields and in fields away from the village, so many villagers now have new settlers as their neighbors in these fields. Several aspects of the new arrangement favored the new settlers in the area:

1. The new settlers who arrived in the area, such as the evacuees from Kothmale, were known to be efficient farmers, having previously practised intensive agriculture in their ancestral lands. Furthermore, they traditionally transplanted paddy, a practice that was little known in Wewegama.
2. Kothmale settlers in the Mahaweli 'System H,' where Wewegama is located, were already well endowed with compensation received for their former lands, which had been inundated.

In 1982 some evacuees who received land in 'System H' received as much as Rs 1,00,000 in compensation. This allowed them either to invest in capital items such as tractors or in business ventures.

3. New settlers started in the Mahaweli 'System H' with more favorable facilities than others in the project, since they were resettled under the Hunting Trials Unit and treated with special attention.³ Settlers there had access to irrigation water as early as the first *maha* season in 1979-80, although they had been there only two months. *Purana* villagers who received land in the new settlement scheme did not have any of these advantages and consequently revived traditional grudges against the new outsiders who threatened to outstrip them socially, economically and politically.

Although new laws were enacted to ensure equal distribution of irrigable land in the Mahaweli Development Project area, differentiation in the ownership of holdings is already visible in Wewegama, as it is in other settled areas. Under the Land Development Ordinance of 1935, as amended by the Land Grants (Special Provisions) Act of 1979 and the Land Development (Amendment) Act of 1981, the disposition of land is restricted. One land settlement expert has argued that the protection provided by the Land Development Ordinance (LDO) is 'one of the best-conceived charters for family farm settlement policy' (Schickele 1968: 5). This law and others prohibit the sale, mortgage, lease or subdivision of granted land. But despite these laws and the equal distribution of recent allotments among villagers, Wewegama has already witnessed a wide range of land transactions that disturbs the equal distribution of land. The average operational holding size in Wewegama in *maha* 1981-82 was 3.1 acres, which is more than a half acre increase in the alienated holding size from three years earlier.

³ The Hunting Trials Unit was the 'model block' in the Mahaweli 'H' system which received special attention from the start from the project officials. The settlers of this unit, for example, had access to the irrigation water supply as early as the first *maha* season in 1979-80. As a result, these settlers managed to cultivate their irrigated land within two months after their arrival from Kothmale while other settlers had to wait, on average, at least 12 months to cultivate their paddy holdings (Krimmel 1982:120).

By 1981-82, about 35 per cent of households in the village owned less than they had received, which was 2.5 acres each (Table 4.5). They constitute the first cluster in the distribution according to the different size classes. A second cluster is around or somewhat below 2.5 acres, which includes 45 per cent of the households. The grouping with more than 2.5 acres comprises 20 per cent. In this connection, one may assume that villagers have underreported illegal leases, since under the LDO they run the risk of losing their land. Thus, the actual extent of illegal leases in the area is difficult to assess.

Table 4.5
Distribution of Holding Size in Wewegama
in the maha Season, 1981-82

Size of Holding (Acres)	Number of Farms	Percent
Less than 1.00	2	5
1.00 to 1.99	12	30
2.00 to 2.49	18	45
2.50 to 3.99	5	12
4.00 or more	3	8
Total	40	100

Source: Figures are based on a sample survey carried out by the author.

The rapid changes noticeable in the distribution frequencies indicate the polarization of villagers into distinct socioeconomic classes. Another recently studied *purana* village also demonstrates that economic differentiation is increasing rapidly in the area (Table 4.6). In 1982 there were roughly 16 share-cropping tenancies in the village. Again, this is undoubtedly an underestimate, as tenants were afraid to say what had happened to their original allotments. Six of the tenants were from outside the village. Two types of tenancies now prevail in the area. In one, the tenant bears a portion of production costs and deducts them from the harvest before it is divided equally between him and the landlord. In the other, the landlord provides all inputs and the tenant supplies labor; the tenant receives one-quarter to one-third of the total harvest as his share. The second type is more prevalent.

Sharecropping tenancies have acquired several new characteristics. First, several politically powerful persons have obtained irrigable plots in the Mahaweli Project area. They do not live in the area

Table 4.6
Distribution of Operational Holding Sizes
in Midellewa, 1978-79

Size of Holding (Acres)	Number of Farmers	Percentage
Less than 1.00	2	5
1.00 to 1.99	19	45
2.00 to 2.49	13	31
2.50 to 2.99	5	12
3.00 to 3.99	3	7
4.00 to 4.99	—	—
5 or more	—	—
Total	42	100

Source: Siriwardane (1981).

and have rented out their lands. The rent they collect is a source of income for which no capital has been invested. Second, tenants are now mainly rich entrepreneurs who obtain land on sharecropping tenancy in order to cultivate it for a profit. They cultivate several plots of land on sharecropping tenancy, sometimes with the use of wage laborers. In the past, tenants came mostly from landless or small landholding families who looked for tenancies as their major source of income. Leasing (*badu*) arrangements, which can also be considered a form of tenancy, are becoming the most frequent kind of tenancy in the area. An average leaseholding is about 4 acres in size. Leaseholding is principally a commercial transaction. No payment in kind is involved, and leases are of long duration.

Since all farmers must complete the same operations at the same time, it has become impossible to undertake cultivation operations jointly or using only family labor. Krimmel (1982) reports that in a nearby village, in the *maha* season of 1981-82, the average requirement of hired labor per 2.5 acres of land was 86.2 days. Most of this labor is obtained from the Wet Zone where the ancestral villages of the new settlers are located. Furthermore, many women among the new settlers are now organized into labor gangs and offer their services as wage laborers. A male laborer receives on average about Rs 40 a day while a female laborer earns Rs 30. Seasonally migrant laborers are paid more and are provided with meals and lodging by their employers.

The major recent change that Wewegama villagers have noticed is that paddy cultivation has become a highly commercialized enterprise. Access to capital has become a precondition for the profitable cultivation of paddy. Wewegama villagers have already begun to borrow money from local traders to cultivate their lands. It is not uncommon now for cultivators to sell their harvest in advance to big moneylenders and traders who often buy the whole crop very cheaply, sometimes paying only Rs 40 for a bushel when the normal market price is Rs 65.

In the past, trade and moneylending were coterminous, and they are still very closely connected. Long before the actual implementation of the Mahaweli Development Project, a large number of outsiders, among whom were speculators, settled in the area. One trader, for example, together with 16 laborers, came to the village in the 1970s from Kurunegala district. With the implementation of the Mahaweli Development Project, each of the 16 received an allotment of 2.5 acres. The trader now cultivates the entire amount, using the wage labor of the 16 allottees who came with him to the village.

Dependence on timely use of water issues to cultivate paddy fields necessitates the possession of capital at the beginning of the cultivation season. Those who lack finance start cultivation late and face much higher risks than those who begin on time. The major expenses in paddy cultivation are for hired labor, fertilizer, agrochemicals and draft power.

As in the past, local and outside private traders still market the crops. They arrive in trucks to buy paddy as soon as the harvest is reaped. Cultivators prefer this arrangement, although it gives them low prices, because they save transportation costs and obtain ready cash for their produce.

The ambivalent attitudes of villagers in Wewegama towards the Mahaweli Development Project reveal several interesting facets of the relationship between the material and symbolic aspects of village life. From the time the project was planned, there was a lack of adequate communication between project administrators and project beneficiaries—in this instance *purana* villagers—and the latter had reservations about the project's impact. The villagers' main channels of information were fellow villagers and field officers, although the information gathered from these sources was incomplete and often misleading. Villagers also suspected outsiders, especially

contractors, of fraudulent activities. They believed that contractors often obtained payments from the government through nefarious means. A typical example is the belief that contractors obtained payments for cleaning and levelling *chena* lands that had already been developed by the villagers themselves.

Villagers had mixed reactions towards the new settlement scheme. The landless were willing to move out of the village in order to obtain cultivable land elsewhere. On the other hand, landholders who owned more than two acres wanted to retain their property if they possibly could. They felt that the government's best course of action would be to refurbish the village tank, allow the landowners to remain where they were, and transfer the landless to areas where new lands were being opened for cultivation.

Some *purana* villagers had strong misgivings about their future in the new settlements. These included their perceived inability to continue living in a community of kin as they had for generations. Many were diffident about living with strangers, who were sometimes of different caste and religion. Another factor that caused considerable concern was the construction of new houses in the settlements. Apart from the inadequacy of the cash grant given for construction of new houses, people felt that they were incapable of building new houses that could accommodate the belongings they had accumulated over several generations. The future of the disabled and old was another issue that they raised.

Nevertheless, Wewegama survived as a settlement, and those who wanted to stay in the village were allowed to do so by the Mahaweli Development authorities. This relieved many villagers of their fears. However, the structural changes that have been introduced have brought about changes in the villagers' perceptions of their property rights. The equation, 'village = property of the *purana* villagers,' lost its validity when the Project authorities allocated individual holdings to some villagers outside the *purana* village. Traditional concepts such as 'Old Field,' 'New Field,' exclusive rights to the tank, and so on, have become obsolete.

Property has been given a new definition by the government. All lands belong to the state and land grants cannot be transferred, sold or mortgaged. Several villagers challenged this new concept of property and the imposed ceiling on a family's holding of 2.5 acres. They argued that since the country's law allowed any citizen to own 50 acres of high land and 25 acres of paddy land, it

was unfair to impose a different law on them. Several of them staged a campaign of fasting (*upavasa*) to demonstrate their grievances.

Although the *purana* villagers of Wewegama have distrusted and hated the outsiders for several decades, they welcomed the arrival of the Kothmale evacuees into the new settlement. Some villagers have already traced *variga* links with the new settlers, as Wewegama *variga* networks reach as far as the Kandyan Highlands. The fact that most of the Kothmale evacuees are Kandyan Sinhalese of Goyigama caste is another feature of the project that they welcome. *Purana* villagers do not feel badly about being employed as the casual laborers or tenants of these new settlers.

In 1984, the political authorities of the electorate, in consultation with the Mahaweli Development Ministry, constructed 101 houses on land where until the 1970s *purana* villagers had cultivated *chenas*. Many youths who did not have homesites within the *purana* high lands moved into these new settlements. Each settler was provided with basic housing materials, such as bricks, cement and roof tiles, by the Mahaweli Ministry. About 60 per cent of these settlers are *purana* villagers. The new settlement is known as Aluthwatta (New Garden) and does not carry any stigma as a village expansion scheme. The distinction between the *purana* village and the schemes has been reduced as Aluthwatta has incorporated all four schemes within its boundaries. Wewegama villagers now think of themselves as members of a national development program, and this identity rises above their village identity. Political party connections and membership in various rural organizations have also played a vital role in this regard. Village leaders are now political leaders whose areas of operation and authority often transcend traditional village boundaries. Wewegama villagers are well aware of these changes and do not try to challenge them. They have learned that they live in a socioeconomic and political milieu which is different from their former environment.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the process of change that has taken place in the village of Wewegama since the beginning of the present century. It is evident that Wewegama has undergone at least three

distinctive phases of change. As long as the changes remained cumulative and gradual, they did not upset the balance between the material and cultural dimensions of the community. Although a money economy and attendant values gradually penetrated and replaced a predominantly subsistence economy, the 'traditional' characteristics of village community still played an important role in the day-to-day life of the villagers. In the political realm, which underwent rapid changes after the 1950s, non-political relationships (such as primordial group membership and economic dependencies) were still being used in vote-soliciting activities. Such instances indicate the persistence of the village identity as a moral community which imposed new bonds on its members or, at least, renewed old bonds that limited their opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status in the village. But, after 1978, the pace and intensity of state intervention took on a new form that struck at the very basis of the community as it existed. In this sense, recent social and cultural changes in Wewegama have been discontinuous. Wewegama has now become a small unit in a large state-sponsored development scheme, and the villagers have had to discard their traditional identities and values to take on new ones within a regional context. In the process of re-formulating the principles of social and economic organization, the Wewegama villagers were not able to rely on their past experiences, identities and bonds, but instead have had to re-define their social relationships and their value systems.

It is evident that the mechanisms of change, although consistently originating from the outside, principally in the form of state intervention, have at different times produced different types of change. These differences reflect the different degrees and strategies of state intervention. From the 1930s on, as political control of government activities relating to welfare and rural development increased, political mechanisms of social change took on greater prominence. But state intervention remained largely indirect and *ad hoc* until the late 1970s. As a result, however, of the recent convergence of increased state intervention and extreme politicization, the period since 1978 has been characterized by more rapid and discontinuous social change. What finally emerges from this account is a sense of a complex social process in which the material and cultural dimensions of village life have at times come into conflict with one another, but almost simultaneously have

been allowed to combine again with one another, albeit on altered premises.

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5

Transformation and Trajectories of Agrarian Systems in Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya Districts

NEWTON GUNASINGHE

... the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is the only way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind (Marx 1973:101).

The method of ascent from the abstract to the concrete is first of all a method of analysis of real empirical facts. As such, it organically comprises in itself the reverse motion as its internally necessary opposite: each step on this path is exactly an act of ascent from the sensually given concreteness to its abstract theoretical expression. That is why the ascent from the abstract to the concrete in thought is at the same time continually renewed movement from the concrete in contemplation and notion to the concrete in the concept (Ilyenkov 1982:165).

Although peasant agriculture in Sri Lanka shares some basic elements, it also displays great structural diversity.¹ It varies from

¹ This paper is an abbreviated version of Gunasinghe (1985). It is reprinted here with permission. Preparation of the paper in its present form was completed by

primarily subsistence-oriented cultivation in the jungle villages of the North Central Province to highly market-oriented agriculture in the Jaffna peninsula; from the realization of ground rent from certain tree crops in some Kandyan villages to intensive labor processes in paddy agriculture in the southern Dry Zone; from the bureaucratically managed, large-scale resettlement schemes in the river valleys to the peasant production of agricultural raw materials for the factories of multi-national enterprises. Given this structural diversity it is not possible to conceptualize agrarian structure and changes in terms of a uniform concept of 'peasant society' or 'peasant economy'.

An attempt to construct such a uniform theory of peasant economy as a distinct system of production was made by the Soviet economist A.V. Chayanov in the early 1920s. Chayanov probably obtained the elements of his theory of the peasant economy from Marx's observations on the French peasantry in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. Marx emphasized that French peasants in the mid-nineteenth century lived in isolation from one another, each peasant household cultivating its plot of land with family labor in order to satisfy consumption needs. 'Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society' (Marx 1976, I:478).

Chayanov assumed that small holdings, exclusive reliance on family labor, and subsistence orientation, were the *universal* constituent elements of peasant economy and argued that the attempt to reach an equilibrium between subsistence needs and the drudgery of labor constituted the basic internal dynamic of the peasant economy (Chayanov 1966). Chayanov's theorization of peasant economy in a modified version forms the conceptual base of a series of more contemporary works, such as those of Wolf (1969), Migdal (1974), and Scott (1976). These authors, who have been dubbed 'moral economists' by Popkin (1979), while taking note of commercialization, market integration, and class differentiation within the peasantry, still seem to work essentially within a Chayanovian conceptual framework insofar as the category of

James Brow, following the author's untimely death in 1988. E. D. S. Wickremasinghe, T. Maheswararajah, P. Wijesinghe and M. B. Herat assisted in field investigations.

peasant 'subsistence minimum' forms the key analytical concept in their interpretations of peasant political mobilization.

In the agrarian systems of Sri Lanka, however, one not infrequently comes across situations in which the crop grown by the peasant is primarily used as an exchange value and hardly at all as a use value, as is the case with tobacco, cloves, and chillies. In other words, the peasant in these systems does not grow his 'subsistence minimum,' but obtains it from the market in exchange for the specialized commercial crops that he grows. On the other hand, there are also systems in which smallholding, family labor, and subsistence orientation predominate. Our contention is that it is theoretically impossible to conceptualize this structural diversity within the context of a uniform theory of peasant economy. In other words, there is no single peasant agrarian system. On the contrary, there are peasant agrarian systems.

The concept of agrarian system is advanced here as one that is capable of grasping the structural specificities and transformatory tendencies of diverse agrarian structures. An agrarian system is not a closed entity, but a specific condensation of forces and relations located in a particular social field. Conceptualized at an abstract level, an agrarian system is the product of a structured articulation of its constituent elements (i.e., forces and relations). Some of these elements are common to all possible agrarian systems and are termed invariant; other elements are present in certain systems but not in others and are termed variant.² It is the differential and proportional combination of these invariant and variant elements that makes one specific agrarian system structurally distinct from another.

Land, water, crops, and the presence of direct producers who expend their labor power in the form of a labor process can be taken as *invariant forces* common to all possible agrarian systems.³ The social nature of production, production of surplus and its

² Agrarian systems may vary from highly advanced, capital-intensive agribusiness in the US Midwest to primitive slash-and-burn cultivation in the highlands of New Guinea. But such elements as direct producer, labor and land are common to all agrarian systems. Elements such as production relations and levels of technology vary a great deal from one system to another. The distinction between invariant and variant elements is made on this basis. For a theoretical discussion of invariant and variant elements in a structure see Althusser and Balibar (1979: 225-53).

³ 'Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power' (Marx 1976, III: 13).

appropriation, and the mechanisms of reproduction of the agrarian system can be taken as *invariant relations* common to all possible agrarian systems. The size, location, and fertility of the operational holding, the level of development of agricultural technology, and the production process may vary from one agrarian system to another and hence can be termed *variant forces*. Production relations, exchange relations, and the methods of surplus extraction and patterns of surplus appropriation also vary greatly from one system to another and can be considered *variant relations*. The invariant and variant forces and relations are articulated with one another within the context of an agrarian system (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

*Invariant and Variant Forces and Relations
within an Agrarian System*

	<i>Variant</i>	<i>Invariant</i>
Forces	Operational holding	Direct producers
	Level of technology	Labor processes
	Production processes	Land, water, crops
Relations	Production relations	Social production
	Exchange relations	Surplus production and appropriation
	Methods of surplus extraction and appropriation	Reproduction process

As a structured articulation of forces and relations an agrarian system contains a number of contradictions that are internal to the system. First, there is the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, which expresses itself in the growth of productive forces that come into conflict with the backward relations of production. Second, this contradiction leads to a process of class differentiation within the peasantry, bringing about class contradictions. Third; as agrarian systems are necessarily located in a particular social field, the available agrarian resources are by definition relatively limited. Rapid population growth within this framework can generate a contradiction between the growing population and a relatively limited resource base. Fourth, changing agrarian practices may disrupt the ecological equilibrium, leading to a contradiction between people and their environment at a given level of development. Any one of these contradictions, or a

combination of them subjected to external determinations, is capable of bringing about systemic and structural changes in an agrarian system.

An agrarian system does not exist in a vacuum. Located as a condensation in a social field, it interacts with other agrarian systems located in other social fields. These inter-systemic interactions are central to an understanding of the articulation of an agrarian system as well as its transformatory tendencies. First, at the level of production relations, these interactions exist as flows of capital and as flows of migrant laborers and settlers from one system to another. Second, at the level of exchange relations, the products of one agrarian system may reach another either in the form of commodities or as exchange items. Third, at the level of resource allocation, systemic interactions may occur when the resources of one system, mainly labor, land, and water, are appropriated by another system.

All agrarian systems are located in a macro-system, which itself consists of two tiers or levels, the level of the nation-state and the level of the world system. At the level of the nation-state, agrarian systems are overdetermined by other sectors of the economy, such as the industrial sector, the financial sector, and so on. Most of all, they are subjected to direct state intervention that takes the form of an overdetermination.⁴ At the level of the world system, they are overdetermined by multi-national capital (as is the case with capital-intensive peasant resettlement schemes), conditions of the world market, and tendencies towards recession and boom generated by the world system as a whole. As far as agrarian systems are concerned, the most important of these interventionary overdeterminations are as follows: (a) the flow of multi-national and national capital into agrarian systems; (b) the flow of labor from agrarian systems to other areas of economic activity; (c) the flow of agricultural commodities produced by peasants into the world market and peasant purchases of industrial products, which introduce the relation of 'terms of trade' between industry and agriculture both at the national and international levels; (d) interventions by the nation-state to remold agrarian systems in specific directions.

⁴ Althusser uses the concept of overdetermination to emphasize the *effectivity* of external interventions in determining the contradictions of a structure. It is a structure of dominance over the contradictions of a particular formation (Althusser 1969: 89-116).

In order to obtain a correct understanding of the articulation and transformatory tendencies of agrarian systems, it is essential to grasp the contradictions internal to the systems, the interactions between various agrarian systems and, most of all, the interventionary overdeterminations from the macro-system. Whether the contradictions internal to the system encounter a 'historical inhibition' in their structural transformations, or are able to develop in the direction of a 'revolutionary rupture,' depends primarily on these interventionary overdeterminations.⁵

In accordance with what has been outlined above, I will now proceed to examine in detail two distinct peasant agrarian systems in Sri Lanka and the different trajectories and transformations that they display.

An Agrarian System with a Strong Potential for Growth

Market-oriented, cash crop cultivation in the Jaffna peninsula has long been known for its levels of efficiency and productivity, and for its innovative tendencies. Even in the late nineteenth century, chewing tobacco was widely cultivated in the Jaffna peninsula and was marketed not only inside Sri Lanka but also in South India. The historical pattern of land tenure in Jaffna was not one in which land was heavily concentrated in a few families, but was characterized by smallholder ownership concentrated in the agricultural caste of the Vellala. This smallholder land tenure provided the basis on which subsequent developments of the agrarian system took place. In more recent times, the cultivation of specific commercial crops for an island-wide market was started by Jaffna cultivators. Vegetables, chillies, onions, and, more recently, potatoes and grapes form the most important commercial crops cultivated in the peninsula.

When conceptualized at an abstract level, the agrarian system

⁵ Althusser, who conceptualizes World War I as the overdetermination that enabled the contradictions of the Russian social formation to break out in a revolutionary rupture, contrasts the conditions in Wilhelmine Germany, where the overdetermination acted as a 'block' for the contradiction and moved it in the direction of a historical inhibition (Althusser 1969: 106).

found in the Jaffna peninsula basically consists of the following constituent elements: (a) ecological conditions characterized by a dry climate and reserves of underground water, which compel the cultivator to resort to a specific type of irrigation; (b) prevalence of smallholder cultivation, monetary rent, and the total absence of archaic agrarian relations, such as sharecropping and labor rent; (c) dependence of the production process on the use of the smallholder's family labor and wage labor; (d) capital-intensive agricultural practices which make use of agricultural machinery and chemical inputs at each step of the production process; (e) in the sphere of commodity circulation, a relative absence of a hierarchy of merchants, and direct relations between the cultivators and commission agents in Colombo; (f) a strongly hierarchical caste system which still impinges on the division of labor and landholding patterns; (g) the presence of internal dynamics of change within the system with the potential to reach a qualitatively higher level.

The village of Pathamany, near the township of Atchuvely, approximates the abstract system outlined above. Pathamany village, which lies 12 miles northwest of Jaffna town, is located in the Kopay electorate and comes within the Valikuman revenue division. Pathamany is one of a number of villages located in the *grama sevaka* division that bears the name of Pathamany. Population density is rather high in this area, and at the time of the study in 1981 the village had a population of 2,647 (see Table 5.2). Two main motor roads cut across the village, and the area in general bears the semi-urban character typical of the Jaffna peninsula.

Table 5.2

Population Growth in Pathamany

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>
1921	1,314
1931	1,258
1953	1,935
1963	2,457
1971	2,558
1981	2,647

Source: Government of Sri Lanka, Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Population* (various years).

The topography of the area, as in other parts of the peninsula, is low and flat. Natural surface drainage is relatively undeveloped, but

abundant underground water reserves are available. Geographically, the area is characterized by the Jaffna limestone formation of the early Miocene Age. A stratum of soil with red loam tops the limestone formation, which has a depth of two to seven feet. The temperature of the region is uniformly high. The average annual temperature exceeds 82° F. and the annual rainfall is between 50 and 75 inches. Due to a high incidence of sunshine and long periods of dry weather, the loss of moisture from evaporation is high.

Smallholder ownership of land prevails for the most part (Table 5.3). Most households cultivate areas varying between three and eight *lachams* of land.⁶ The minuteness of land parcels has not acted as an impediment to productive efficiency, as highly labor-intensive methods of cultivation are employed. Ecological conditions in Jaffna peninsula, with its large reserves of underground water, determine the methods of irrigation. The peninsula is basically a large mass of limestone covered by a fertile layer of red soil, which is itself covered by a shallow rock formation that has to be removed in order to make the land cultivable. For a number of decades residential land in the peninsula has been expanding, converting previously cultivated land into residential compounds. But this process has not led to a contraction of the total cultivated area in the peninsula, because cultivation has been expanding into areas where the surface consists of the outer rock formation. This, of course, is not a process that can continue indefinitely.

Table 5.3

Distribution of Cultivated Land among Castes in Pathamany

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Total Land in Lachams*</i>	<i>Families holding Land</i>	<i>Total Number of Families</i>
Vellala	850	85	160
Nalavar	147	39	172
Madaththavar	260	35	48
Kariar	171	25	42
Thanathar	111	17	24
Carpenters	3	1	19
Others	27	3	13
Total	1,569	205	478

Note: *One *lacham* is approximately equal to one-tenth of an acre.

⁶ The *lacham* (one-tenth of an acre), the popular measure of land in Jaffna, itself indicates the minuteness of the holdings.

Cultivation in Pathamany, and in other villages like it, depends on the use of underground water, which is reached by means of wells. Recent estimates suggest that almost every household has a well. This is a serious constraint on the system, of which the full ecological effects are yet to be felt. The limestone formation underneath acts as a sponge that retains freshwater within itself. Excessive drawing of water from this sponge may lead to the absorption of seawater by the limestone formation as time goes on. This limitation cannot be overcome by exclusive reliance on resources available within the peninsula itself. However, it should be pointed out that this problem has not yet reached serious proportions.

The means of drawing water have undergone significant changes and have become more efficient and capital-intensive. The recent history of drawing water from the wells in Jaffna peninsula can be divided into three phases. At first there was the old well sweep, whose distinctive feature was a long pole that rested on a construction on top of the well. A bucket was attached to the pole with a rope. A man had to stand on this pole and walk to and fro, thus forcing the pole either to move down or up. When the pole moved down, the bucket attached also went down and in the reverse movement a bucket full of water was lifted up. Another man standing near the well emptied the bucket into the nearby irrigation channels, which then watered the plant beds. This was a highly labor-intensive form of obtaining water, which in many deep wells required the services of more than two persons. In such wells, two or three persons walked to and fro on the well sweep. Within the ranks of the middle peasants and poor peasants, this gave rise to exchange labor arrangements.

With the gradual commercialization of agriculture and the accumulation of capital in the hands of affluent cultivators, a new device called the *soothiram* was introduced. A series of buckets is attached to a chain, which revolves around a system of wheels in much the same way as an industrial belt. This mechanism is in turn attached to a device on the top of the well that can be turned around, making the chain with the buckets move. Human labor can be used to turn the wheels, but more often than not buffaloes or cattle are used. This system is more efficient than the old well sweep because there is a bucket attached almost every 12 inches along the chain. As the chain revolves around the wheels, an

almost uninterrupted flow of water is poured into the irrigation channels. In addition, this device makes it possible to replace manpower with animal power. Around 1967, the cost of installing a *soothiram* was Rs 2,000; by 1980 it had risen to about Rs 10,000. Although it is logically possible to use a system of exchange labor with a *soothiram*, in fact exchange labor networks have tended to disintegrate because animal power is most often used, with the cultivator himself driving the animals.

The third stage began in the late 1960s, as mechanical water pumps became widespread. The introduction of mechanical pumps made the process of drawing water even more efficient and the levels of supply could be raised by the introduction of bigger pumps. In 1980, the price of different types of pumps used in Pathamany varied between Rs 3,500 and Rs 7,500. In a sample of 32 onion cultivators, 30 cultivators were using mechanical pumps, whereas only two cultivators were using the *soothiram*.

These changing irrigation practices indicate that the forces of production in this system possess a tendency towards growth. This development is simultaneously a movement away from locally available resources towards inputs arriving from the macro-system. The old well sweep relied almost totally on locally available resources. Labor-intensive methods were used in digging the well. Local timber was used in constructing the sweep. The rope was made from locally available material, probably by local artisans. Even the bucket could have been made by a local blacksmith. Movement away from the well sweep increased dependence on elements coming from the macro-system. Operation of the *soothiram* employed locally available animal power, and it was assembled in a local workshop, but some of its components, such as its wheels, came from the macro-system. The introduction of water pumps, which were mostly manufactured by industrial companies in foreign countries, introduced a totally new dimension. The initial capital investment needed for a water pump was not exceptionally high, but the pump required continuous inputs of fuel, either kerosene or gasoline, as well as periodic replacement of parts.

The structural changes that occurred in the sphere of irrigation open up an interesting line of investigation pertaining to the terms of trade between agriculture and industry, town and countryside, as well as in the international balance of trade itself. The cultivator in this system produces primarily for the market, and it is the price

levels in the market that determine his income and thus the amount that he can invest in agricultural production.

Onion cultivation may be used to demonstrate the various aspects of the production process of commercial cultivation in Pathamany. Onions have been cultivated in the village for a fairly long time, but it was only in the early 1960s that the crop started reaching an island-wide market. Prior to this, the crop was normally sold in the local market. Before the early 1970s onions were cultivated in Pathamany twice a year, once during the dry season and again during the rainy season. When market prices shot up in the mid-1970s, cultivators started growing three crops of onions a year. Though onions are currently cultivated throughout the year, three broadly distinct seasons can be identified in Pathamany. These are the October/December, January/March, and June/August seasons. Onions require approximately 70 to 80 days from planting to harvesting. Being a tender plant, they are highly susceptible to inclement weather conditions, especially mist and heavy rain. Two varieties of onions are cultivated in Pathamany, a large variety known as *vallarai* and a small variety known as *bellarai*.

The cultivation process can be summarily described as follows. First, the soil is turned over with the use of a mammoty. After a couple of days the plot is plowed either with a two-wheel tractor or a wooden plow. Use of the two-wheel tractor has become ubiquitous in recent years. After plowing, the beds are prepared once again with the help of a mammoty, during the course of which cowdung is applied as manure. Some cultivators plow and prepare the land more than once. The land is then flattened with a mammoty and the beds are prepared. At this point, the seed onions are planted and the plot is watered every four days. In the course of watering, fertilizer and insecticides are frequently applied. In the sample of 32 cultivators investigated, 17 cultivated less than 1,000 to 1,500 plants, and 11 cultivated between 1,500 and 3,000 plants. Fifteen out of the sample of 32 cultivators owned their own plots; the rest rented land for a monetary rent. Two methods of labor mobilization for onion cultivation were employed: the use of the cultivator's family labor, and wage labor of two types—daily rate and piece rate, the latter of which is also known as contract labor. There is a strict sexual division of labor in onion cultivation, especially when wage labor is employed. Mammotying, plowing, flattening the beds, watering, carrying cowdung, and spraying insecticide and

fertilizer are done by male labor, while planting, manual weeding, clearing flowers, and harvesting are exclusively done by female labor. When family labor is involved, however, this strict line of demarcation becomes somewhat blurred. Removing flowers from the onion plant is a rather labor-intensive operation which is done by female labor. Onion flowers can also be sold in the market. In the mid-1970s, there was a ready market in Colombo for onion flowers and price levels were comparatively good, but in 1980 a pound of onion flowers was being sold locally for only five cents. Harvesting onions is also a labor-intensive operation which requires heavy inputs of wage labor. The average price of red onions on the local market is given in Table 5.4. Consumer prices in Colombo generally tend to be higher.

Table 5.4
Price per Pound of Red Onions in the Jaffna Market

<i>Year</i>	<i>Rs/Cents</i>
1968	0.42
1970	0.43
1971	0.81
1972	1.14
1973	1.47
1974	1.31
1975	1.70
1976	2.35
1977	3.24
1978	2.46
1979	2.77
1980	2.19

Source:

Price movements of onions on the open market are heavily influenced by the export/import policies of the government. From the mid-1960s onwards, Jaffna onions were reaching an island-wide market but were still competing with products imported from abroad. With the balance of payments crisis, which reached serious proportions in the early 1970s, the government was compelled to prohibit many imports, among them chillies and onions, as a result of which no dried chillies were imported in 1974, 1975, and 1976. Because the domestic supply was limited, the price of these items shot up in the domestic market, as can be seen from Table 5.4.

Although onions were also grown in other parts of the island, those produced in the Jaffna peninsula acquired an important place in the domestic market. In the course of the six years from 1971 to 1977, the price of onions in the consumer market rose from 81 cents to Rs 3.24, a nearly fourfold increase during a period in which the rate of inflation was quite low. The situation with regard to chillies was similar. The price offered to chilli producers in the local cooperative shops increased from Rs 1.60 in 1971 to Rs 14.11 in 1976. This significant increase clearly meant that during this short period the terms of trade were moving in favor of agriculture, at least in some commodities. The accumulation of surplus within a stratum of cultivators was clearly determined by the prices offered for these products.

With the introduction of liberal economic policies from 1977 onwards, the protected domestic market vanished, and commercial crop growers in Jaffna were compelled to compete with products arriving from abroad.⁷ As a result of this, competition prices for commercial crops declined rapidly, thus seriously eroding producer margins. But while prices for commercial crops declined, the prices of the factors necessary for production simultaneously recorded a rapid increase. On the one hand, land rents increased two to three times from the mid-1970s to 1980. On the other hand, a new system of rent came into operation, which in actual fact increased the ground rent still further. The new system, known as *otti*, required the renter to deposit a substantial amount of money with the landowner. The interest emanating from this amount constituted the ground rent. When the contract came to an end, the landowner was obliged to return the original amount to the renter. In 1980, for a plot of land covered by 3,000 plants, Rs 12,000 had to be paid as *otti*. As the finance companies at the time were paying around 25 per cent per annum for deposits, the sum of Rs 12,000 could yield an interest of approximately Rs 3,000 a year. This new system of renting drives cultivators with no savings out of the cultivation process. The degree to which the new system can expand will ultimately depend on the levels of savings attained by the cultivators as a whole. In the meantime, however, there is no doubt that rent has increased substantially.

⁷ In 1973, 6,900 metric tons of dried chillies, worth Rs 91 million, were imported by the Ceylon Wholesale Establishment. In 1979, the amount was 8,177 metric tons worth Rs 98 million, and in 1980 12,921 metric tons worth Rs 163 million.

Another item essential to the production process in Pathamany is wage labor. Wages that used to be around Rs 10 in the mid-1970s increased to about Rs 30 by 1980. In addition, agrarian workers were pressing their employers to reduce the length of the working day. Although the importation of plantation workers from the hill country has tended to deflate a possible acceleration of wage rates, it is mainly local labor that is used in commercial crop cultivation, since plantation workers are not regarded as sufficiently skilled to do this type of work.

Prices for fertilizer, insecticides and weedicides also increased in the period under consideration. As products based on petroleum derivatives, the prices of these items generally rose along with oil prices. The price of kerosene and gasoline, which had become important production factors due to the use of water pumps, also increased sharply in the period between 1975 and 1981. Hence, the picture that emerges is one of a very sharp decline in the prices of commercial crops accompanied by a very sharp increase in the cost of the factors of production. This process has created a crisis in commercial crop cultivation, which may be called a capitalist 'scissors crisis.'

Even in the early 1960s, the social structure of Pathamany was clearly differentiated into social classes. To a certain extent, class differentiation runs parallel to the old caste distinctions, but it is not entirely devoid of discordant themes. At the bottom of the agrarian pyramid there are rural workers who do not own or possess any productive land, and are therefore compelled to rely exclusively on the wages they earn to sustain themselves and their families. This layer in Pathamany consists almost entirely of non-Vellala people, especially those of the Nalavar caste. Then there is the social class of poor peasants, who either own or possess a small plot of land, the yield of which is insufficient to sustain them. In addition to cultivating their own plots of land, these poor peasants are compelled to work as rural wage laborers. In Pathamany, this layer is also primarily of non-Vellala people. Then come the middle peasants, who own or possess sufficient land from which to derive an adequate income and who are therefore not compelled to work as wage laborers. The middle peasants in Pathamany are mainly of Vellala caste. There is also a thin layer of rich peasants in the village, who also belong to the Vellala caste. These can be defined as a stratum of affluent cultivators who use both capital-intensive and labor-intensive methods

of cultivation and who produce entirely for the market, with profits and capital accumulation as their goal. Rich peasants generally have permanent agrarian laborers attached to their households.

It is interesting to consider how these different peasant classes are responding to the scissors crisis referred to above. Wage laborers have been pressing their employers for wage increases, and in this they have been relatively successful. As agricultural laborers are not petty commodity producers, they do not relate to the market as sellers of a crop. On the contrary, they are buyers of agricultural commodities in the market. Agricultural wage laborers are affected by the scissors crisis to the extent that agricultural operations become contracted and their work opportunities dry up. Poor peasants display a double character, as petty commodity producers and as wage laborers. This class has been seriously hit in its petty commodity production and is displaying a tendency to sever its links with the market. This has taken the form of a pronounced move away from commercial crop cultivation and a reversion to subsistence crop cultivation. Poor peasants have started cultivating plots of manioc, millet, and varieties of yam that are primarily intended for home consumption. Certain lower layers of the middle peasantry are also showing a tendency to distance themselves from the market. But rich peasants and the upper layer of the middle peasants display an entirely opposite tendency. Their response to the scissors crisis has been to involve themselves closely with the market by taking up potato and grape cultivation. Both these crops currently command good prices in the domestic market, but since they both also require heavy capital investment, it is not surprising that only the affluent peasants have been able to make this shift.

Thus the scissors crisis has not elicited a uniform response from all classes of cultivators. In this connection, along with the tendency of different classes to either reduce or intensify their links with the market, it is interesting to note some related changes in labor relations. In the recent context of rising wage rates, poor and middle peasants are tending to reactivate networks of labor exchange.

In general, the agrarian system of Pathamany clearly has the potential to break through to a qualitatively higher stage. The internal contradictions between the forces and relations of

production have developed significantly during the last few decades. This is clearly demonstrated in the changing system of irrigation, which during the last few decades has changed from the well sweep to the *soothiram*, and from the *soothiram* to the mechanical pump. In addition, the intensive cultivation of commercial crops has also introduced a wider application of agricultural machinery in the form of tractors and pumps. The social structure of the system has been responding to the growth of the productive forces, principally with a complex class differentiation which, however, has still retained some facets of the caste system. The agrarian system is also subject to important ecological constraints, such as the limited underground water reserves, which will make themselves felt as time goes on, but which have yet to reach serious proportions.

Within this context, what are the factors that inhibit the system from realizing its full potential? The main factor that brought the process of accumulation to a halt was the scissors crisis that resulted partly from the liberal import policy and partly from the inflation of the cost of inputs. It must be emphasized that as long as the terms of trade are unfavorable to agriculture, petty commodity producers are not in a position to accumulate sufficient capital to break out to the level of capitalist farmers. The process of accumulation that went on in the mid-1970s served to increase the area of cultivated land, to promote the mechanization of agriculture, and to improve irrigation facilities. If this process of accumulation had not been brought to a halt by the worsening terms of trade, one might assume that the level of accumulation would have extended further and that by such means the system would have been able to attain a higher level through a qualitative rupture. The scissors crisis was not wholly generated within the national economic structure. Commercial crop cultivation in the Jaffna peninsula today depends heavily on industrial products imported from abroad, including water pumps, tractors, gasoline, insecticides, fertilizer, and weedicides, all of which are essential to the production process. It is the articulation of the macro-system on a worldwide scale that determines the price of these items. Hence the mechanisms that inhibit developments in Pathamany are not located within the agrarian system itself, but are the result of overdeterminations from the macro-system.

An Agrarian System Transformed and Frozen

The last three decades have been characterized by increasing intervention on the part of trans-national corporations into peasant production, not only in the supply of inputs and machinery but also in the organization and regulation of peasant production. But unlike the United Fruit Company in Central America, which grows the major part of its crops in large plantations, other trans-national corporations have been encouraging the peasantry to continue to grow their subsistence crops at the same time as they expand into commercial production. This form of organizing peasant agriculture in order to produce surplus for trans-national corporations is expanding in underdeveloped regions, and in the case of Sri Lanka is reaching into new areas of control and regulation. It can be seen, for instance, in the newly resettled Mahaweli region, where the Ceylon Tobacco Company controls 5,600 acres of peasant production. Trans-national intervention, designed to control and regulate peasant production while simultaneously preserving and reactivating archaic relations, is increasingly evolving into an identifiable agrarian system that can be clearly distinguished from other agrarian systems. The Ceylon Tobacco Company's entry into the Mahaweli region in order to control peasant production is rather recent, but for at least three decades the company has been relying for the supply of its primary raw material on peasant cultivators concentrated in the Kandyan countryside.

When conceptualized in abstract terms, this agrarian system, which is essentially a product of the articulation of the apparatuses of the company and peasant petty commodity production, is composed of the following basic elements: (a) concentration of medium-sized land plots in a stratum of entrepreneurs and the uneven distribution of fragmented small plots among the peasantry; (b) trans-national corporations which act in a double capacity—as the monopolistic buyers who enjoy absolute control over the marketing of the crop, and as 'super patrons' who guarantee credit and supplies such as seed, plants, fertilizer and insecticides; (c) a social stratum of entrepreneurs through which control and regulation of peasant production is actually implemented; (d) the commercial crop, which is often an industrial raw material that has to be

processed by the factories of a trans-national corporation before it reaches the consumer; (e) a subsistence crop sector which contributes to the reproduction of the labor power of small cultivators and laborers; and (f) the tendency of the corporation to transfer all the risks of cultivation, including the production of the finished raw material, to the peasantry and the intermediate social stratum.

The Ceylon Tobacco Company started experimental cultivation of tobacco in the area of Hanguranketa in the late 1940s. Udawatta village, which is located four miles from Hanguranketa township, has been engaged in tobacco cultivation since the late 1940s, and the transactions between the company and the peasantry can therefore be studied with a historical depth of more than three decades.

Udawatta village is located in the Ganga Palata Revenue Division of Nuwara Eliya District. The terrain is hilly and the village is surrounded by extensive tea plantations. Udawatta is located on the slope of a mountain, the residential compounds of the villagers extending from the top of the mountain, where a motorable road cuts through, along the slope downwards to the valley where the village's paddy fields lie. Given the terrain and the comparatively high rate of population growth, peasant holdings are minutely divided into small plots, both within the paddy fields in the valley and in the unirrigated high land. Besides tobacco, the cultivating peasants of Udawatta are also engaged in the production of paddy and vegetables. Since paddy holdings are minute, no marketable excess is normally produced and the paddy grown within the village is mostly consumed within the producing households. Unlike paddy, vegetables are grown primarily for the market. Vegetables are cultivated in the paddy fields during the *yala* season when water is scarce. The seasonal cycle of a typical paddy plot is as follows: in January, at the end of the *maha* season, vegetables are cultivated, followed by another variety of vegetables in April; during October and November paddy is planted for the *maha* season and the harvest is usually gathered in late January or mid-February.

The cultivation and sale of vegetables in Udawatta is subject to all the uncertainty and mercantile exploitation found in other regions of Sri Lanka. A hierarchy of small and big merchants intervenes in the marketing of vegetables, with each merchant carving out for himself a part of the surplus and thus often leaving

the cultivator a price that is insufficient to cover his costs of production.

As vegetable crops tend to be seasonal, many varieties flood the market simultaneously and create a glut, which then lowers the prices accruing to the cultivator. Interestingly enough, however, this fluctuation is not necessarily reflected in what consumers have to pay in the urban markets. Between 15 December 1980, and 4 January 1981, for instance, the buying price of radishes in Udawatta varied from 33 to 60 cents, whereas the price in the Pettah wholesale market for the same vegetable ranged between Rs 1 and Rs 2. Yet the consumer in the Bambalapitiya retail market in Colombo had to pay between Rs 2 and Rs 3 per pound regardless of the wide price fluctuations at the other two levels (Table 5.5). Thus, cash crop production of vegetables in Udawatta presents high risks and is subject to rapid price fluctuations. In the case of tobacco, however, such wide variations are unknown and the prices have been generally stable. This may be one reason why tobacco cultivation has become established as a permanent feature of the agrarian regime in Udawatta and has even expanded into plots of land where vegetables had been formerly cultivated.

Table 5.5
Price of Radishes

<i>Date</i>	<i>Udawatta Price</i>	<i>Colombo Price (Bambalapitiya)</i>
15 December 1980	0.33	3.00
17 December 1980	0.33	3.00
19 December 1980	0.33	2.50
21 December 1980	0.33	2.50
23 December 1980	0.44	2.00
28 December 1980	0.40	2.00
4 January 1981	0.60	2.00

Source: Author's field research.

Even before the intervention of the Ceylon Tobacco Company in tobacco cultivation in the late 1940s, peasants of Udawatta were already cultivating both chewing tobacco and cigar tobacco, as well as vegetables, for sale on the market. The cigar tobacco they grew was purchased by itinerant Muslim pedlars. Thus, the intrusion

of the Ceylon Tobacco Company did not entail a total re-alignment of their production activities.

At the level of the production process, the following elements are involved in the production and marketing of tobacco in Udawatta: The Ceylon Tobacco Company; The People's Bank; the barn owner; the small cultivator; and the wage laborer. Of these elements the barn owner plays a crucial role by growing a part of the tobacco himself, obtaining tobacco from small peasants, and flue-curing the green leaf. The company does not maintain direct relations with the small peasants who grow tobacco. Instead, each barn owner is surrounded by a group of small peasants who cultivate a plot varying from one-fourth of an acre to one acre. The barn owner purchases fresh tobacco leaf from the small peasants, turns out a semi-finished product, and sells it to the company. The small peasants are indebted to the barn owner, who supplies them with credit for production as well as consumption needs. When the company entered Udawatta in order to regulate and control peasant production, the peasants of Udawatta were already integrated into the market, as indicated by the fact that they were growing tobacco and vegetables as cash crops. But the entry of the company drastically reorganized this agrarian structure. A number of affluent peasants were able to pull themselves up to the level of barn owners, with the help of credit facilities extended to them by the company, thereby significantly altering both the production process and class relations. With respect to the medium-sized plots of eight to ten acres held by the barn owners themselves, this change also involved a significant growth of the productive forces. The introduction of tobacco cultivation simultaneously made wage labor more prevalent than it had been in the peasant production process. The expansion of wage labor can be seen at two levels. First, in the cultivation process, labor mobilization in the medium-sized plots cultivated by the barn owners occurs exclusively on the basis of wage labor, whereas the small cultivators, who depend primarily on family labor, use wage labor only as a supplement during the peak periods. Second, in the production process, wage labor is intensively used in flue-curing, preparation of leaves, firing of the barn, carrying, and so on.

It would therefore be incorrect to stress the similarities between the agrarian structure that existed before the entry of the company and the agrarian system today. Prior to the entry of the company,

although unequal distribution of land prevailed, Udawatta was basically a community of smallholding cultivators largely undifferentiated into classes. Since the entry of the company, a thin layer of affluent peasants has emerged as a stratum of barn owners. In other words, the cultivation of medium-sized plots combined with an element of entrepreneurship has appeared. As far as the tobacco industry is concerned, the entrepreneurial activities of the barn owners are constrained by the severe restrictions laid down by the company, which sets definite limits to their freedom in entrepreneurial decision-making. Hence, it is no wonder that the interests of the barn owners come into conflict with the interests of the company. This is clearly manifested in the bargaining that takes place over the price of cured tobacco. Barn owners are always complaining that their producer margins are being progressively eroded. There are also some contradictions between barn owners and the small peasants, but whenever the small peasants complain about the low prices that they receive from the barn owners, the latter point an accusing finger at the company.

It is possible to argue that the margins going to the barn owners, as well as the margins going to the small peasants, have declined during the last ten years or so. As is the case with many other agrarian products, the costs of production have risen but the price offered by the company for cured tobacco has not increased proportionately. Although barn owners have attained certain levels of accumulation, some obstacles still block expanded reproduction and prevent the development of real capitalist entrepreneurship. These obstacles are located in the current agrarian system itself.

Conceptualized in this way, the agrarian system is subject to interventionary overdetermination by the macro-system in the form of a trans-national corporation. Certain schools of thought tend to assume that when capital, especially multi-national capital, comes into contact with peasant production, it necessarily dissolves all archaic relations and introduces the capital-wage nexus on an ever-expanding basis while developing the forces of production to the utmost. The relations between the Ceylon Tobacco Company and the peasantry in Udawatta are interesting to examine in this context. It is true that a certain expansion of wage labor has occurred. It is also true that a degree of capital accumulation has occurred within the ranks of the barn owners and, to this degree,

the traditional agrarian system has been transformed, but this transformation has by no means eliminated peasant production. On the contrary, more tobacco is grown in Udawatta by small peasants than by barn owners. In fact, the whole system of tobacco production and curing by the barn owners logically assumes the presence of a plethora of small peasants who continue producing tobacco for the barns and, through the barns, for the company.

The contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production thus takes a specific form in this agrarian system. A certain degree of development of the production process has taken place and, in line with this development, the local society has become differentiated into classes: a class of barn owners on the one hand, and the classes of rural workers and small peasants on the other. But this contradiction necessarily works itself out within the constraints introduced by the company. In fact, the contradiction between the company and rural society as a whole appears to the villagers as more important than that between the barn owners and the small peasants. The contradiction between changing agrarian practices and the ecological equilibrium is also acquiring importance. As tobacco is cultivated on the slopes of hills, it necessitates clearing the bush that once covered the slopes, so that the top-soil has now become exposed and is eroding. The Department of Agriculture is concerned about this growing ecological disequilibrium, and the company is being compelled to expand into the Dry Zone.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the structural transformation of two distinct systems of peasant agriculture, laying emphasis both on their internal contradictions and on the interventionary over-determinations that work on them from the level of the macro-system. The Udawatta system is subject to over-determinations in the form of a transnational corporation operating directly at the level of peasant production. This intervention has been going on for some three decades and has produced significant changes in the traditional smallholding agrarian system, but structural transformation seems to have been frozen at a particular level. Interventionary

over-determination on the part of the trans-national corporation now operates as a major obstruction to any further growth of productive forces in the system.

Pathamany, where the scissors crisis is being felt most acutely, is also subject to interventionary over-determination from the macro-system in which trans-nationals again constitute an important element. The agrarian machinery and the chemical inputs so liberally used by the cultivators of Pathamany come from trans-national corporations, and their rising price levels, combined with the deflation of prices in the national market for the particular commodities produced by Pathamany cultivators, constitute the central element of the scissors crisis as it is experienced here. Although the trans-national presence does not take the form of direct intervention or control of peasant production, it is manifest in the inputs required for cultivation. It can be seen, therefore, that both systems analyzed here are subject to intervention by the macro-system and the trans-national corporations, but to varying degrees and in different ways.

It must be emphasized that it has been possible in the course of this investigation to give appropriate weight to different elements only because the discussion was presented within the conceptual framework of agrarian systems. If, by contrast, we had taken a uniform concept of peasant economy as a point of departure, it would not have been possible to lay stress on differential aspects and the different trajectories along which these systems are compelled to travel, as a result both of their internal dynamics and of interventions from the macro-system. Similarly, the concept of mode of production can be stated only at a highly abstract level, and had an attempt been made to discuss the two agrarian systems in terms of a concept of the mode of production, it would not have been possible to lay proper emphasis on the structural differences between them. We would also have been compelled to locate these different systems at varying points along a unilineal path of transition, from pre-capitalism to capitalism. But within a social formation dominated by the capitalist mode of production, a number of structurally distinct agrarian systems can be identified which tend to move on multiple trajectories. The concept of the agrarian system enables us to identify these differential and uneven movements. However, the theoretical linking of the concept of the agrarian system with the concepts of the mode of production and

social formation has yet to be accomplished. Our ongoing research will take us in this direction.

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6

Shifting Cultivation Comes to Rest: Changing Values of Land and the Person in an Area of Monaragala District

PIERS VITEBSKY

Introduction

Shifting cultivation¹ is an important means of livelihood throughout the tropics and is practised by an estimated 12 million households in South and Southeast Asia alone (Spencer 1966: Appendix A).² The term, along with near-synonyms like 'bush fallow,' 'slash-and-burn,' or 'swidden,' is used to refer to a wide range of practices that involve cutting down forest and burning it before sowing or planting crops on the site. For reasons of soil structure and chemistry, the

¹ Research was funded by the Overseas Development Administration of the United Kingdom. Thanks are also due to the Agrarian Research and Training Institute, Colombo, and to the villagers of southeastern Sri Lanka.

² Spencer gives figures of 3.1 million households and 55 million acres for India, but makes no estimate for Sri Lanka. For Africa see, e.g., de Schlippe (1956); Richards (1961); for South America, Steward (1946-50); Wilbert (1961).

yield is high in the first season and then begins to drop drastically, so that the site should ideally be abandoned for ten years or more in order to recover fertility before being re-used (Ruthenberg 1976: 28–66). Thus, at any one time there may be about ten times as much fallow land as land under cultivation. Shifting cultivation, therefore, can function without damage to the soil only at low population densities (Geertz 1963) which have in many places been exceeded, so that it is now held responsible for widespread deforestation and erosion, and there are strong pressures for its suppression.

Shifting cultivation, known as *chena*, has been a major form of agriculture in Sri Lanka for centuries. In Sri Lanka, however, the term *chena* is also used to cover other forms of unirrigated cultivation in which one plot is cultivated continuously for a longer period of time or, sometimes, indefinitely. Empirical investigation confirms that, as the range of the native term suggests, these various forms of unirrigated agriculture must be considered as aspects of the same phenomenon.

Several substantial social anthropological studies have been conducted in areas of Sri Lanka where *chena* was prominent and central (e.g., Leach 1961; Brow 1978; Yalman 1967), but because of a general preoccupation with land tenure (i.e., with tenure of permanently cultivated land), they have largely ignored *chena* in favor of paddy, as did Farmer's Green Revolution Project (Farmer 1977).

The aim of this paper is to begin to redress this balance by reporting on research that made *chena* its central topic. When I began research, I was sometimes asked whether there was anything left to investigate, since shifting cultivation was supposed to be dying out. My answer now is that something called *chena* is alive and well and on the increase, and that the responsibility for its often disastrous ecological effects must be laid not, as is conventionally done, on the supposedly primitive, jungle-dwelling subsistence farmer but on a modern, sophisticated, nationwide marketing system and on regional population policies.³

³ A further discussion of many points raised in this paper will be found in Vitebsky (1984). In this context, I am concerned not with policy but with interpreting spontaneous human actions.

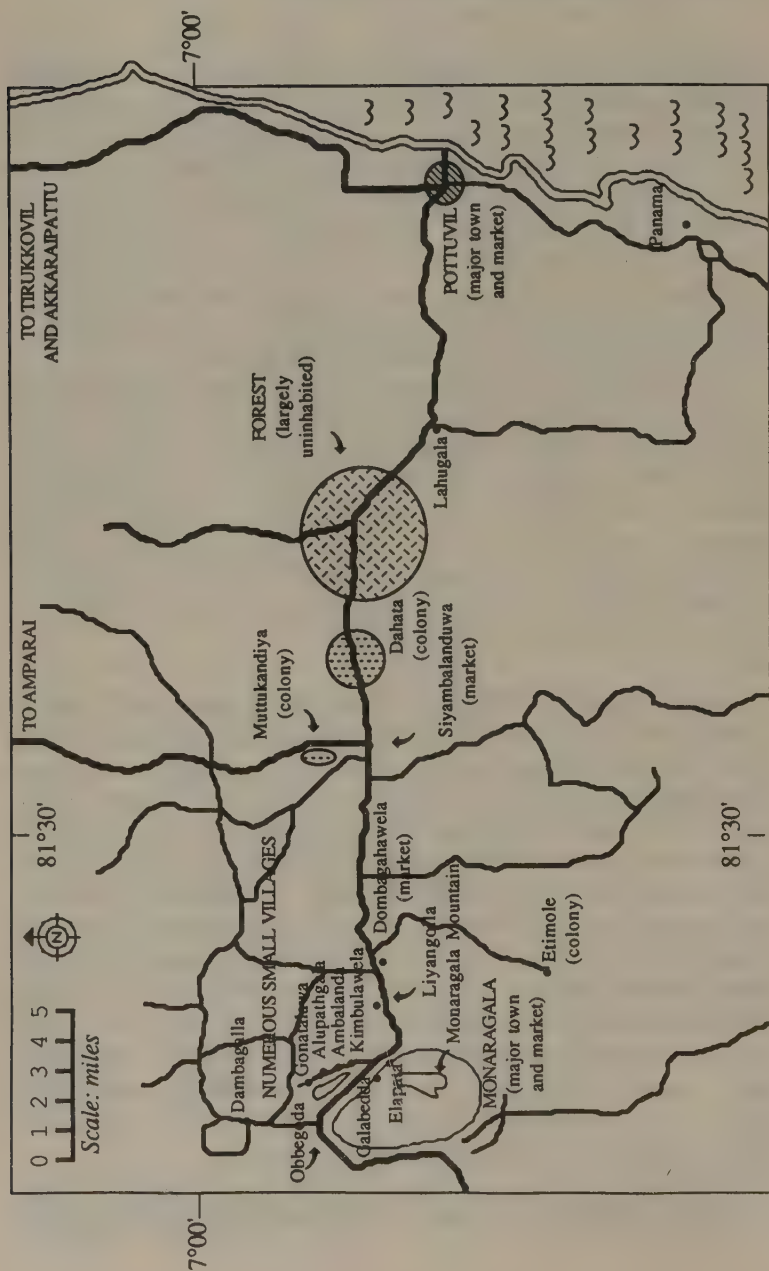
Types of Villages and Land Use

Monaragala district is inhabited almost entirely by Sinhalese Buddhists, some of whom show traces of an earlier Vedda ethnic origin. Monaragala forms part of a wider region known historically as Lower Uva, which includes both the eastern scarps of the Central Highlands and the extensive, relatively flat country stretching almost to the coast, where the population is mainly Tamil and Muslim. For a long time the area has been marginal and underdeveloped, and remains so today. This is related to the fact that large areas, particularly in Monaragala district, have little or no paddy land and must therefore survive on *chena* alone.

The area studied runs eastward from the Intermediate Zone to the extreme Dry Zone (Map 6:1). The Sinhalese Buddhist settlements in the western part are separated from the Muslim and Tamil Hindu settlements on the east coast by the uninhabited reserve forest of Lahugala. Settlements fall into three broad types, although members of all three types of villages are often closely related and a single individual may move during the course of his lifetime from one to another. The implications of this will be discussed in the last part of the paper.

Purana ('ancient') Villages: These are located both on the roadside and in the interior, with more or less easy access to the road. These villages are mostly inhabited by people of Goyigama (Cultivator) caste and are closely intermarried, forming an endless network of kinship from one village to the next. The villages are concentrated in the western half of the study area, which is dotted with them. They may number between 100 and 500 inhabitants and may be either up to a mile apart or, especially near main roads, run into each other by ribbon development linking the nuclei of old villages. The term *purana* appears to be relative. People generally claim to have come from Upper Uva or the Kandyan area during the nineteenth century, but since then have been constantly shifting, generally eastwards. Several *purana* villages were studied, but our main example is Ambalanda, on the edge of the cluster of villages around Galabedda.

Modern Spontaneous Colonies: These settlements are distinguished



both analytically and in the minds of local people from the former type mainly by their modernity and larger size. The largest such site in the area is Dahata (marked on official maps as Mahakalugolla), which lies to the east of most *purana* villages. Dahata was founded in 1956 by a small group of enterprising families from Galabedda, 20 miles to the west, which was already suffering more than most *purana* villages from an acute shortage of *chena* land. Dahata has grown rapidly. Its population according to the 1981 census was 1,246 and it has continued to expand since then.

Official Colonization Schemes: The earlier Colony at Etimole has been joined by one being completed with Australian aid at Mutukandiya, using a renovated irrigation tank. Here there are a number of two-acre plots of irrigated land, combined with three-quarters of an acre of unirrigated garden (*vatta*), as well as allotments of six acres each of purely unirrigated land intended for 'stabilized *chena*'. Plots are allocated to a heterogeneous mixture of *purana* villagers from nearby, distant migrants, second generation Etimole Colonists, and others.⁴

In the *purana* villages title deeds are held only for a few of the older plots in the village centers. The remainder of the land is held 'without permit' (*anavasara*, i.e., encroached). In Dahata, only a thin ribbon of the earliest encroached settlement along the road has been 'regularized'. Thus outside Mutukandiya, where a distinctive Colony regime prevails, land in the area for the most part falls into one of two categories: land legally held by a few households, but probably always inadequate for their needs, and land illegally encroached but essential to the needs of all households. Official response to this takes two simultaneous and contradictory forms. On the one hand, strictly speaking, such people can legally be evicted in the interests of forestry, soil conservation, and the rule of law. On the other hand, this rarely happens and there are strong humanitarian, political, and populist pressures which allow and even encourage such encroachment. Thus one active component of policy under both the present and the previous government has been to 'regularize' such encroachments retrospectively.

⁴ Such Colonies will henceforth be spelled with a capital 'C'.

Discussions of smallholder land use in Sri Lanka generally, and in the Dry Zone in particular, have traditionally distinguished three kinds of cultivated land, as follows:

Irrigated Paddy Fields (kumburu): In the area under discussion these are small, stream-fed, terraced plots, and are of relatively little importance since they are few and their yields are low. In economic importance they are totally overshadowed by sugar cane, although their status value is high.⁵

Home Gardens (vatta; pl. vatu): These are areas, usually of one to two acres, immediately surrounding the house and under permanent cultivation. A garden around the house is considered a basic prerequisite for satisfactory human habitation. It can usually be dated by the age of its jak and coconut trees, which eventually reach a great height, since the planting of these trees is one of a settler's first actions, even in the drier regions around Dahata. Especially in the more western and thus wetter areas, where most of the *purana* villages lie, the gardens also contain some equally large tamarind and mango trees, as well as arecanut palms and palmyrah palms. Beneath this level are a number of smaller trees and shrubs—bananas, citrus (especially lime), coffee, papaya, castor oil, and, in the wetter parts, black pepper vines. In the less densely shaded parts, tomatoes, chillies, brinjal (eggplants), manioc, and other annuals are grown, as well as some herbs, flowers, and medicinal plants.

Chena, or Shifting Cultivation Plots (hen): These are unirrigated, temporary plots, often far from the house, so some or all of the cultivating family may sleep in a temporary hut in the *chena* during certain seasons, in order to guard the crops against wild animals. Until recently, they were cultivated almost entirely with annual crops, mainly maize and millets as well as various vegetables. Now they are increasingly being used to grow crops with a longer lifespan, such as sugar cane (seven years) and lime (20 years and more). The implications of this change will be discussed later.

⁵ In Mutukandiya Colony, of course, paddy fields play a different role.

The Commoditization of Domestic Resources

The most common form of household in the area is the nuclear family, in which a married couple rears its own children in a separate house. The core symbol of the living household, and especially of its self-sufficiency, is the *atuva* (granary, grainbin) which is placed inside the house, above or beside the hearth. This position, close to the heat, is said to be necessary for protection against insect pests. The *atuva* is used for the basic *chena* grains, namely maize, *kurakkan* and other millets, and also pulses. It is not, however, used for rice which, when it is grown, is stored in sacks elsewhere. The *atuva* contains grain both for eating and for sowing. Most of the *atuva* is occupied by maize and *kurakkan* millet, which are stored off the stem. Grain is taken from the top of the *atuva* and fed in at the bottom in a never-ending cycle. In order to insert a new season's grain, the old grain is first shovelled out and then replaced on top of the new grain.

A man's growing independence and maturity are strongly reflected in the development of his *chena* activities. Small boys make their own *chena* close to their parents' house, while teenage boys make proper *chenas* further afield, likewise in their own names but usually alongside that of their father. In both cases, the harvest goes into the parental *atuva*. In order to marry, a young man should first make a new *chena*, then put the yield into a new *atuva* which will be at the core of his new home. Even if, in the early years of a marriage, the young couple live in the house of the parents, their *atuva* and their cooking will still be separate.

Even from this brief description, certain features of the *atuva* stand out that underline the essentially non-monetized nature of the economic system with which it is associated. First, its frame of reference is clearly domestic and intimate, and indicates that food is grown rather than bought. In principle, one year's grain should not be eaten until the next year's harvest is in. Even in a bad year, it must never be allowed to become empty, as this would be a source of intense shame (*lajja*). This notion applies particularly to *kurakkan*.

Moreover, the *atuva* is linked as a symbol of continuity and regeneration to the relics of the Buddha. The word for 'relic' is *dhatu*, which is also said to mean 'semen' and 'lifeforce'

(cf. Yalman 1967:137). The *atuva* is said, like the Buddha's relics, to enshrine people's security, and grain is put in and taken out at auspicious times according to certain ritual procedures. Thus, the *atuva* is used both economically, as a buffer stock, and symbolically, as an indicator of a household's social and material viability.

Second, the *atuva* presupposes that every household operates at a similarly low level of production by using a combination of internal labor and exchange labor (*attam*). Under this system, each day's work that is given must be returned at another time. Exchange labor is the primary means of carrying out jobs which require more labor at a time than the members of the household alone can provide. It broadens the group based only on household members by including brothers and sisters of the householders as well as nephews, nieces and cousins. In fact, the boundaries between household labor and exchange labor are not always clear-cut and villagers recognize many degrees of the latter, with a corresponding degree of obligation to reciprocate on a one-for-one basis.

On purely technical grounds, hired (*kuli*) labor can be employed on any agricultural task to which exchange labor would normally or traditionally be applicable. Ideologically, however, exchange labor and hired labor are sharply distinguished; the former is an expression of an abiding relation of kinship, whereas the latter is a commercial relationship which may last only for one season or one job. Thus hired labor can be employed for growing grain, and is so used by traders, clerks, or schoolteachers who have no time to take part in exchange labor, but exchange labor can generally not be used in sugar cultivation, since this is a purely commercial crop and its use would be considered unethical or inappropriate.

Third, the *atuva* is part of an elaborate, subsistence oriented food system which is highly sensitive to the ebb and flow of the seasons. In this region, the season of abundance in staple foods begins in late December, while the season of hardship and scarcity intensifies in the months immediately prior to this time. During the latter period, the *atuva* in many households is likely to be empty. This tendency is enhanced by the large amounts of food that are required to feed exchange labor parties (or their hired equivalents) during the heaviest work season from May to September; and again in January.

This accounts for the prominence of starchy fruits and tubers, which in the lean season make up a large proportion of the diet

and its nutritional value. Being high in starch, they embody much of the flexibility of the food system and its capacity to respond to any crisis in the supply of staple grains. It is for this reason that the dry grain consumption of all households, and especially of the poorer ones, dips noticeably at certain periods when alternatives are available. The main advantage of this is the provision of starch over and above one's grain resources without any financial expenditure. Although almost every household does this at the appropriate season, for the poorer households it is extremely important for survival.

All of these points indicate that although other parts of Sri Lanka may have been highly monetized for a long time, in this area the use of money must until recently have been very limited indeed. Lately, however, this model of the *atuva* has been substantially undermined in a way which seems directly related to the growth of marketing facilities. In order to show the intertwining of the material and symbolic aspects of the *atuva*, as well as the link between its position at the heart of the household and that household's involvement with the national and even international scene, I shall approach the topic of markets through a discussion of currently unfolding change in dietary habits.

Although the traditional staple diet of the area has always been *kurakkan* millet, many households now eat rice as their staple while even in the others the women often cook two separate meals, one of millet and one of rice, for different members of the household. This shift has extremely important implications for the economy of an area which produces very little rice, and it stands out sharply on the weekly shopping bills of all households at all seasons. In general, we can say that the area produces one kind of grain (millet) and consumes another (rice). It is true that most houses in most years plant some dry rice in their *chena*, while a few have some terraced but unirrigated paddy fields which sometimes give a harvest, although this is always low. But it is clear that rice yields always fall very far short of consumption needs. Conversely, although a declared weekly shopping bill rarely if ever includes millet, there is in fact a great deal of private buying, selling, and lending between households, which is admitted only in private conversations (and with extremely unreliable quantification). Some millet grown in the area is even sold at the weekly markets to merchants (*mudalalis*) who quote prices for this as for any other

crop and sell it back to consumers within the same area. The reasons for this reticence in revealing the purchase of millet run very deep and are related to the shame associated with an inadequate stock in the *atwva*.

One reason for the shift towards rice consumption is that millet is becoming more difficult to grow. Because of the fundamental constraint of soil exhaustion under a *chena* regime, the soil will yield well only in the first and perhaps second years of a rotational cycle. For maximum fertility this should be land cleared from trees rather than from *illuk* grass, which gives a poor ash yield when burned. One response to this is that more and more millet is now raised in gardens in which the top few inches of soil are already exhausted by previous annual cropping. Moreover, the shade of the trees is said to inhibit the millet crop. This complaint is common, and yields are said to have dropped to as little as 17 per cent of what was taken 30 years ago.

The causes of the shift towards rice consumption, however, are not exclusively economic. There is also a long standing tendency in Sinhalese culture towards an ideology of rice. This is echoed and taken up by the rhetoric with which the Mahaweli Development Project is said to be bringing back the Golden Age of the medieval King Parakrama Bahu. This rhetoric is highly Sinhala nationalist in tone and is widely disseminated from the capital in the press, on the radio, and in ministerial handouts. A related movement can be discerned in the subtle and complex process whereby the ambiguously placed villagers on the southern edge of the old Wedi Rata ('Vedda country') are coming to repudiate the Vedda strands in their ethnic identity in favor of defining themselves as Sinhalese of Goyigama caste from the Kandyan highlands. Thus the people of Wedikumbura ('Vedda paddy field'), a village just south of Monaragala town, recently started a campaign to change their village's name. The menu of millet and wild meat is a classic symbol of supposed Vedda identity and thereby, on the national scale of values, a lack of civilization.

In this context, a generation gap has suddenly emerged between older folk, who prefer millet and extol its strength-giving properties, and younger people who insist on the superior taste of rice. The latter do, however, acknowledge that millet is perhaps acceptable if served with meat. So although meat is usually not available now, care is taken to serve millet with a curry of pulses or young jakfruit,

as these are felt to be the most 'meaty' vegetables; a curry of leaf vegetables or gourds, generally eaten with rice, is considered unacceptable with millet.

One consequence of the shift to rice consumption is that it raises the price of basic foodgrains by at least 100 per cent since, as noted above, most rice must be bought. The purchase price of millet varied from Rs. 2 (in April 1982, April 1983) to Rs. 3 (in October-December 1982), while that of rice was approximately double. In addition, a larger raw weight of rice must be cooked. Millet is thus sold by those households that feel they have a secure enough cash crop income to pay for their rice purchases. Conversely, to buy millet is seen as a sign of desperation, in terms both of grain stocks and of cash. But whether they grow it or buy it, and regardless of age group preference, poorer households are in fact constrained to eat more of a high-millet, low-rice diet, although they almost always would prefer to do the reverse.

A second consequence of the shift in dietary preferences, then, is that the *atuva* is likely to retain its importance in the poorer households while losing it in the wealthier ones. Symbolically as well as economically, rice is separated from the other grains, of which millet is always quoted as the paradigm. Rice is stored in sacks, the others in the *atuva*. Among villagers loans made in rice are subject to various rates of interest, while those made in millet are not. In general, we can say that rice is commoditized, while millet retains an intimate or domestic frame of reference. Thus the proportion of rice in a household's diet serves as an index of its involvement with the outside world through the medium of cash and of its success in handling that relationship.

The Growth of Markets

The markets directly relevant to our study are strung out along the road from Monaragala to Pottuvil. The development of the marketing system in this area is thus directly related to that of road construction and the transport industry.

According to informants, before World War II there were two weekly bus services westwards from Monaragala to Matara and Badulla. A further service running eastwards to the Tamil town of

Tirukkivil (via Siyambalanduwa and Pottuvil) was added soon after the war. This was the first bus service to run through the study area, and it led directly to the founding of the spontaneous colony at Dahata in 1956 by a Galabedda man who—unusually—married a Tamil woman from Tirukkivil. Thus, although the earlier Matara bus was used by a few *mudalalis* (merchants, traders) from Matara to buy produce in Monaragala, it appears that little if any of this produce came from as far east as Galabedda. There was an active internal market in the villages in millet and other subsistence crops, but its dynamics cannot easily be reconstructed. The economy at that time can be characterized by its low degree of monetization, which provided little incentive for the production of non-subsistence crops and gave little opportunity or need for investment.

Immediately after the war, it seems that large numbers of military vehicles were salvaged and auctioned to Matara *mudalalis*, who were then able to operate the first trucks eastwards out of Monaragala. They made contact with enterprising men in each village who would buy produce from fellow villagers and resell to the itinerant *mudalali*. These village *mudalalis*, who also contrive to cultivate, buy produce from their fellow villagers and sell it to the bigger *mudalalis*. This is a role into and out of which people move fairly freely, but it can entail some embarrassment in a village still based largely, if unrealistically, on egalitarian values, since village *mudalalis* are able to participate in few or no labor exchanges. They cultivate like anybody else, but do so almost exclusively with hired labor, because all their time is taken up with the procurement of produce and trading in the market place.

It appears that village *mudalalis* flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, but they are now in obvious decline. For example, a village which at one point had 12 such people now has two, only one of whom appears to be successful. The other is the butt of rude songs about his inability to compete in the market. It is always said that villagers at that time had no access to information about prices in Colombo or Monaragala since they had no radios, could not read newspapers, and did not travel very often. The decline of village *mudalalis* is always linked, no doubt correctly, to the very obvious reversal of each of these conditions today. An additional factor, and perhaps a very important one, is that village *mudalalis* operate with little or no capital, and pay cultivators only after they have

resold the produce and received payment for it. This delay is unnecessary when selling to a town *mudalali*, and is now considered unacceptable by the cultivator.

The town *mudalalis*, who operate on a larger scale, are almost exclusively Sinhalese from Matara. They buy both from village *mudalalis* and directly from the villagers, either at the markets or when traveling in the village. They do not generally re-sell within the area but send their goods to various destinations in the west of the island, particularly Colombo but also commonly to Negombo, Hakmana, Matara and Galle.⁶ *Mudalalis* in Monaragala maintain close connections with traders in Colombo's Pettah market, who instruct them in detail about purchasing requirements and prices.

Thus village *mudalalis* played a crucial role in the initial commoditization of village economic life. Where they continue to operate, their scale remains as petty as before, but the external market is now mushrooming and profitability depends on a large scale of operations and the capital to make cash advances. In order to prosper today, village *mudalalis* would need to retain a monopoly on contacts between villagers and the town *mudalalis* with connections in Colombo and Matara. But not only do the town *mudalalis* continue as before to tour widely in the villages, but most villagers also travel to town by bus at least once a week. The role of the village *mudalalis* has thus been cut out.

For someone seeking profits from a village base, the village *mudalali's* type of operation has been replaced by the cultivation and processing of sugar. This is the latest and largest of the commercial crops to flourish in the area, as the combined result of rises in the world price and import restrictions imposed by the government during the past twenty years. Virtually every household now grows sugar, with the average around 2 acres each, although very poor houses have less or even none, and richer ones, especially at Dahata, have 10 to 15 acres.

Sugar obtains substantially higher returns than any other crop. While a household's total annual income from other crops may amount to no more than Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000, with sugar a household may sell several acres of crop a year at up to Rs 3,000 per acre. At the same time, in comparison with *chena* crops, sugar cultivation requires a much greater capital investment, for example

⁶ Muslim traders based on the east coast also buy in Monaragala and transport manioc to Kalmunai and Batticaloa.

in purchasing the young plants, transporting them in bulk, clearing the land, which must be rather more thorough than for millet, and hiring labor which, both because of the scale of operations and because of ethical considerations, cannot be done by means of exchange labor. Furthermore, the first returns take one year, as opposed to three to four months for subsistence crops. Sugar production also requires an extensive transportation network. It is a bulky crop and the spread of its cultivation has gone hand in hand, not only with the expanded number of long distance trucks to carry the syrup, but also with the appearance of local small-scale crushing mills or factories. These mills are now dotted every few miles along the roadside. They cost Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 50,000 to set up, and are run either by enterprising outsiders or by a very small number of locals whose successful sugar cultivation has transcended the highest level of profit satisfaction that cultivation alone can offer, the role of the village *mudalali* having long been left behind.

Sugar's huge requirement for labor has created a catchment area that goes far beyond the local village. It includes Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, who come from Monaragala, Pottuvil, Panama, Akkaraipattu, Badulla, and elsewhere. Some of these laborers become settlers in the area.

In general it can be said that, with the exception of *ganja*, the history of which cannot be reliably reconstructed, each successive boom crop, namely lime, manioc and sugar, has followed the opening up of a new opportunity that hinged directly on a qualitative change in access to the outside world. Each of these crops has progressively escalated potential profit margins, a development which always has repercussions for social life through changes in labor patterns, consumer needs, buffers and surplus, and so on. Finally, each of these crops has made the local economy more vulnerable than before to shifts in the wider market and to political developments and decisions, the main purposes of which have not necessarily been the regulation of the local economy itself.

Such a situation transforms the values of labor and capital, to say nothing of land. It is the very possibility of using hired labor at all that has greatly increased the scale on which cultivation can be carried out. Exchange labor can function on a wide scale only if all parties hold similar amounts of land, or at least if their holdings are in proportion to their household strength. It is widely recognized that all over the world, shifting cultivation plots based on household

or exchange labor average very consistently around 2 acres. Thus, if for some reason significant differences appear in the size of the landholdings of various households, the scope for exchange labor will be correspondingly reduced, at the same time as the need for labor from outside the household remains or even increases. This is precisely what the increasing scale of cash cropping entails. In the case of sugar, we can also point out that, apart from the ethical considerations described previously, the use of exchange labor here would require that a large number of households cultivate a similar acreage. Figures collected for sample households show a much wider discrepancy between sugar acreages (between around 0.5 acre and 20 acres) than for any other crop, on a scale which confirms that exchange labor would indeed be impractical here. By contrast, even where manioc and other crops are widely sold, the extent grown rarely exceeds around 2 acres per household.

A continuing replacement of exchange labor by hired labor and an increasing differential in the size of landholdings (especially for sugar) are likely to reinforce each other, and under present conditions to increase further. The reason is that monetized labor is an expandable rather than a finite resource. Thus, so long as land remains to be cleared or fallow to be shortened, it is the supply of this kind of labor that chiefly determines how quickly this will be done. Labor becomes a vehicle for investment by which money can yield profit. The option of hired labor, particularly when it is applied to sugar, thus allows the indefinite expansion of cultivation and increases wealth differentials between cultivators.

Political Developments

Land, labor and capital thus become precious resources to be fought for. Although one may have to migrate to find land, it is still available for the taking, provided one has the labor with which to cultivate it. Labor in turn can be bought, provided one has capital. Access to all three factors is becoming ever more closely related to the cultivation of political connections. In this process, I shall argue that just as the focus of the diet is moving from the *atava* to the national market, so the focus of social and political life

is moving out of the village to the national parties and international 'Aid' budgets.

Because of the still rudimentary or transitional stage of the region's overall marketing pattern, there is a severe shortage of capital in private hands (for instance, the *mudalalis*), with the result that the few state-sponsored development initiatives which reach the area have a very high opportunity value indeed. The funding and credit available to villagers pass through various institutions or positions, including the following: Rural Development Societies, Village Awakening Councils, Village Funeral Societies, Village Youth Societies and the Youth Council, Village UNP Society (United National Party, the ruling party), the local MP (Member of Parliament), and so on.

The effects of these organizations on the social lives and agricultural practices of the villagers call for some comment. For example, one Rural Development Society has not met for two years, because the first item on the agenda would have to be its bank balance, which is said to have mysteriously disappeared. In another village, the society is flourishing under the leadership of someone who describes himself as a volunteer social worker and who claims to have secured for the village grants of around Rs 2,00,000 from abroad to subsidize sugar cultivation! This man claims both that everyone in his village is a member of the society, and that all members of that society are also members of the village UNP Society, although he denies that the latter is an obligatory requirement for the former.⁷ The amount of such constant 'Society' activity in a village of, say, 50-200 households is striking. Each of these societies is in frequent touch with government officials, and holding office in them, or close public association with those who hold it, is explicitly seen as a direct line of access to the electorate's MP, and therefore as a necessary prerequisite for a government job, an allocation of land in a Colony or any one of numerous subsidies and handouts. Above all, perhaps, these societies make substantial loans to their leading members, especially towards the planting of sugar cane.

The intense party politicization of social activity today can be vividly illustrated by examining what one would expect to be intimate and, in the bureaucratic sense, informal areas of village life.

⁷ I have not heard of a currently active village SLFP Society (Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the largest opposition party).

These include certain kinds of traditional, life crisis occasions which the entire village attends, such as weddings, exorcisms and funerals.⁸ The format of a funeral ceremony requires that everyone should gather at the house and that speeches should be made praising the deceased. But during the 1960s, it was apparently felt that the cost of a coffin for the deceased and light refreshments for the living was too high a burden for bereaved households, and Funeral Societies were formed in many villages. Every household in the village pays a regular subscription, and when someone dies the society pays the expenses (around Rs 1,000). By the 1980s the speeches, formerly made by close friends, were being made by the Secretary, President and Treasurer of the Funeral Society. Moreover, in one village the society, which was run entirely by members of the younger generation, was seeking official registration avowedly in order to be able to write recommendations for its members to get scarce government jobs and six-acre allocations, with numerous subsidies, on a nearby Colony scheme. The previous Treasurer of the society was the only person in the village who had already received such an allocation, while the present Treasurer was also the Treasurer of the village branch of the UNP.

Even relatively informal village-level gatherings thus atrophy or are being bypassed in favor of 'distant'-headed ones. This is taking place not only through processes familiar from conventional theories of modernization (i.e., infiltration by the market economy and its values) but most particularly through the bureaucratization of social life in a dominantly party-political idiom. Today, especially for the younger generation, acquisition of material wealth and power necessarily depends on the ability to muscle in on government subsidies, development grants, and access to the local MP. The only path to these is through active work for the heavily politicized village societies.⁹

⁸ A wedding may, of course, involve outsiders if the marriage is with someone from another village, but for our purposes the format is the same.

⁹ In fairness to the UNP government elected in 1977, it should be said that the previous government likewise encouraged such political patronage and opportunism and that it is now generally accepted as the way life is. The probably greater impact of this today can be attributed to two factors: (a) the great opening of the villages to the world brought about by the UNP government's pro-Western 'open economy'; and (b) between independence and 1977, the change of government at elections was regular and allowed the beneficiaries of the rival systems of patronage to flourish in turn. Constitutional changes from 1982 onwards have made such a

This political situation is reflected in the social composition and economic fortunes of the three types of village studied, which may be briefly characterized as follows:

The Purana (Ancient) Villages: Kinship networks still provide a high level of support in these villages. Exchange labor is widespread, although it is being replaced to some extent by hired labor. There is, however, a severe loss of leadership, as the old Village Headman has been replaced by a more complex web of political opportunism. Until late 1982, the *purana* villages in this area were mostly supporters of the SLFP. Now, at least overtly, they are almost entirely UNP.

The Spontaneous Colony: The majority of settlers in Dahata are still from the same *purana* village and retain the old social forms. To some extent, this is also now expanding to include a minority of later settlers from elsewhere. But the shift from exchange labor to hired labor is more advanced here. Many residents maintain land interests both in Dahata and in their *purana* village. Because of its vigorous pioneering spirit, this is the kind of settlement in which political patronage is least essential for survival. There are thus many renegades and left-wing supporters, to the extent that in relation to the lack of development projects, many settlers feel that they are victims of political discrimination.

The Official Colony (Mutukandiya): Land in the colony is held and operated under a specific administrative regime. The selection of colonists is a complex process, formally under the control of the Government Agent, who is a civil servant, but strongly influenced in practice by the local MP. The result seems to be a peculiar mixture of genuinely deserving cases and grace-and-favor political rewardees. Owing to certain planning problems, but particularly to a shortage of working capital, the former are often unable, even with apparently generous subsidies, to utilize their allotment fully and often lapse into practising illegal *chena* outside the boundary of the colony. The latter, however, are able both to cultivate their allotments here and to maintain lucrative interests in plots already held elsewhere. Although this is against the rules of the scheme,

change unlikely in the foreseeable future. This appears to have affected considerably the sense of political give-and-take in the countryside.

which is intended only for the landless, it is common, as is the ploy of selling one's previous land for a substantial cash sum in order to make one's status as 'landless' unimpeachable. This appears to be especially common among those who are already members of other, earlier colonization schemes, where under present regulations their land can now be bought and sold as freehold. It illustrates vividly how advantage breeds advantage, and how those who were originally truly landless are the ones most likely to be extruded again from the colony.

The following example is typical of many. In one local *grama sevaka's* division, a very large number of people applied for places at Mutukandiya, which remains the only recent colony development in the area. Only five of them were successful. All five had obvious connections with the local MP, who is of the ruling UNP. One of them is the former secretary of his village's UNP Society. He has been a member of the UNP since 1977, when these villages were almost entirely supporters of the socialist SLFP party. His credentials are thus particularly strong. At his interview, he says, he was questioned specifically on his 'social activities,' namely his participation in *sramadana* (voluntary collective labor) activities, in the village Funeral Society, and in the village UNP society. The main desideratum, he says, is to be 'friendly' with the MP. His support for the UNP is based not so much on the party's policies as on the MP's 'accessibility'. This man predicted with confidence those who would be allotted places next. In each case, his reason for claiming to know was based on the person's current performance in a key post, such as in a village UNP Society. Of another man who has exchanged his hereditary calling as an exorcist for that of diligent Funeral Society Secretary, he expressed the opinion that, as he had switched his allegiance to the UNP only in 1983, he would have to give many tokens of loyalty yet before he would be rewarded.

This man has extensive gardens in his own village, which he has no intention of giving up. However, he was able to qualify as 'landless' for the simple reason that, like most land, his is encroached (*anavasara*). The income from the land in his original ancient village is greater than that from his irrigated paddy land in Mutukandiya. But the latter is required both as insurance against any adverse turn in policy towards users of untitled land, and for

his children, to whom he has the right to pass on his allotment. He himself prefers the social life in his old village and plans to return there as soon as he can leave someone on the site to manage his new land.

A Region in Flux

In the remainder of the paper I shall try to draw together the strands laid out above, and in particular to show the impact of the commoditization of domestic life on the overall pattern of labor and land use across the region. This perspective necessarily overrides the village study approach because the nucleated village is ceasing to be viable.

The model of the nucleated village depends on a clearcut distinction between perennial crops (grown in the garden) and annuals (grown largely in the *chena*). In its place I shall try to give a regionwide picture of more disnucleated settlements (ribbon development), based not on village stability but on migration. The key to this development lies both in the commercialization of cropping and in the fact that the most important commercial crops are neither annuals nor long-lived trees, but medium-life-span plants living for several years.

Let us return to the dichotomy between the garden (*vatta*; pl. *vatu*) and the *chena*. A *vatta* basically consists of sizeable trees and bushes living upwards of seven years (e.g., coconut, jak, mango, coffee and lime), and annuals living one year or less, mostly in the less shaded areas (i.e., grains, tubers, and especially vegetables). A *chena*, on the other hand, traditionally consists of the short annual crops, living in full sunshine for a period from a few months to a maximum of one year (e.g., manioc). There is no absolute dividing line between those annuals grown in the *vatta* and those grown in the *chena* (except for cannabis, which must be grown secretly). However, there is a strong tendency to separate them in accordance with the quantity required by the household. Thus in this area tomatoes, eggplants, and chillies in particular are grown in *vatu*, because, unlike some other *chena* regions, they are not grown for sale. By contrast, both

here and probably in every *chena* region, all grains, and particularly millet, the traditional staple, tend to be grown exclusively on the *chena*. This is both because of the quantities required and because grains are known to demand much sunlight and to yield poorly if grown in the shade, as they would be in a *vatta*.

In a traditional *vatta*, the more medium-lifespan crops such as manioc (12 months), lime (20 years), and sugar cane (seven years) were grown as part of a mixed underplanting in very small quantities for domestic use, along with coffee and other useful domestic crops. With their monetization and entry into the market, however, these same crops are now grown on an extensive scale and must *always* be marketed since, unlike annual crops, they cannot be utilized, on the scale on which they are grown, within the domestic food system.

This increase in scale is seen very clearly as one reconstructs the emergence of any one of these crops, previously not required in any great quantity, as a significant market crop. For example, villagers remember the growth of the manioc market and the correspondingly larger stands of it grown further out into the *chena*. Even among annuals, while groundnuts are a small-scale *vatta* crop in some villages, they have become a large-scale field crop in others.

Likewise, large fields of pumpkins are grown around Dahata because they ripen there just ahead of the main crops from further west and thus fetch Rs 10 each instead of 50 cents, and so on.

Thus a crop which is extensively cultivated in *chena* may be either a staple subsistence crop, such as millet, or a cash crop. Since World War II, as the region has come to depend economically on the specialized large-scale production of manioc, lime and sugar cane, each of these has moved from being a small-scale *vatta* plant to an extensive field crop. The implications of these large stands, however, are not the same as in the case of grains, because as long as only annuals are grown in a *chena* there is a rapid crop rotation scheme which leads very soon to a fallow. By contrast, wherever medium-lifespan crops intervene in this system, the fallow is effectively eliminated.

During the first year of a plot's use, millet is a main crop, though often mixed with a variety of others, especially maize or lima beans, with dry rice in pure stands in low-lying areas. Just as there is no fixed crop mixture for the first year, so succeeding crops in the

second year are equally varied. A common choice, after the best of the nutrients in the shallow ash have been used by the first year's grain, is manioc, which gives a very high yield in weight and is understood to exhaust the soil to a greater depth.

For the third year, cultivators agree with agricultural scientists (Ruthenberg 1976; Young and Wright 1979) that the plot should be abandoned to recuperate under fallow for a period up to about 20 years. In practice, however, there are two interrelated tendencies both of which are substantially at variance with this principle. Whichever of these courses is followed, the consequences are radically different from that of a 'long fallow' system (Ruthenberg 1976). On the one hand, although the use of fallow is still widespread, its length is now always seriously reduced, often to as little as three to five years (cf. ICRA 1983:25). Where fallow is greatly shortened, frequent burning destroys the stumps of the larger forest trees. The regenerating plot has time to produce nothing more woody than some very slender shrub species or, in the absence of shady trees, it may deteriorate into *illuk* or *mana* grassland. It is estimated that such grassland already occupies 40 per cent of the area of Monaragala district. Under present input conditions, it is virtually impossible to return this to forest, while if it is used for cultivation it requires far more labor to clear than forest, and with its poorer ash is much less fertile. On the other hand, on many plots the practice of fallow itself disappears altogether. It is replaced, after the usual two annual croppings, with a field of sugar cane or lime, that is of medium-lifespan crops, with bananas often added as well. The young plants of the medium-lifespan crops may also be mixed with the second crop of annuals in order to gain a year. The effect of this is to make the conventional clear-cut distinction between *vatta* and *chena* ever less applicable to the situation on the ground, as many *chenas* turn progressively into lime orchards or dense sugar plantations. Under these conditions, the amount of land under cultivation at any one time increases rapidly. This must be so, not simply in order to accommodate an increasing population but also because the emerging farming system, based on medium-lifespan crops grown largely for the market, has a higher basic requirement per household for land under cultivation than does the earlier system based on annual, largely subsistence crops. At the same time, by monetizing the fundamentally domestic system of labor, this market orientation allows for and encourages a

potentially infinite expansion of cultivation. Thus, whereas traditionally the shifting *chena* plots of a household, with their annual crops, amounted to about 1 or 2 acres under cultivation at any given time, supported by a *vatta* of similar size, under present-day conditions many households in the purana villages have 5 acres and many in Dahata have 10 to 20 acres, in both cases composed almost entirely of cash crops.

We can therefore point to a difference both of region and of period between the situation discussed here and the classic picture of the Dry Zone village given for Anuradhapura District by Leach (1961: 44). In that kind of tank- or reservoir-based village, the old *vatta* area lies under the tank and the tree roots benefit from its water table, while the *chenas* lie further away and are generally higher. In Monaragala, by contrast, where tanks are all but non-existent, this distinction is less clear cut. Even where paddy fields exist, they are mostly rain-fed and have low yields (even if high prestige) and, moreover, *vatu* have no privileged source of groundwater. There is thus an unbroken continuum—both theoretically and empirically—between *vatu* and *chena*.

Another aspect of the distinction between *chena* and *vatu* should also be mentioned. The widespread official inclination to regularize illegal encroachments (*anavasara*), however belatedly, has been marked by a tendency for permits to be given only for plots recognized as *vatu*. Sites which resemble *chenas* are excluded and remain illegal encroachments under the still operative Crown Lands Ordinance of 1840, whereby all such land was vested in the state. This further encourages the planting of medium-lifespan crops and informs the important strategy whereby people secure land for later conversion to a *vatta* on behalf of their children, as medium-lifespan crops can subsequently be filled in with long-lifespan trees and houses built on the site.

The continuity in space from generation to generation in each of these patterns is represented in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. Table 6.1 presents a model in which only annual crops are grown, usually in succession for two years. Plots are re-opened after a period of five to twenty years. The diagram shows an ideal period of ten-year succession. Blank squares represent the building up of fallow vegetation. Table 6.2 represents a model in which land cleared for two years of annual cropping is, in the third year, planted with perennial crops instead of being left fallow. Since new land is

Table 6.1
The Traditional Succession of Chena Land

Year	Plot Number								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	A1								
2	A2	A1							
3		A2	A1						
4			A2	A1					
5				A2	A1				
6					A2	A1			
7						A2	A1		
8							A2	A1	
9								A2	A1
10	A1								A2
11	A2	A1							

Note: A1 = annual crops, first year; A2 = annual crops, second year.

Table 6.2
The Modern Permanency of Garden Land

Year	Plot Number								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	A1								
2	A2	A1							
3	P1	A2	A1						
4	P2	P1	A2	A1					
5	P3	P2	P1	A2	A1				
6	P4	P3	P2	P1	A2	A1			
7	P5	P4	P3	P2	P1	A2	A1		
8	P6	P5	P4	P3	P2	P1	A2	A1	
9	P7	P6	P5	P4	P3	P2	P1	A2	A1
10	P8	P7	P6	P5	P4	P3	P2	P1	A2
11	P9	P8	P7	P6	P5	P4	P3	P2	P1

Note: A1 = annual crops, first year; A2 = annual crops, second year;
P1 = perennial crops, first year; P2 = perennial crops, second year; and so on.

cultivated each year while no land goes out of cultivation, the amount of land in active use increases progressively and in theory indefinitely.

Population increase and the change to permanent crops have combined to make most, if not all, *purana* villages what may be

called completely 'landlocked'. Such a village, taken for the moment as an isolate, may be called a *bounded system*, in that its boundary is sharply restricted, either by the boundaries of other villages or by strictly protected reserved forest, mountains, and so on.

By contrast, Dahata still has no such boundaries and may be described as an *unbounded system*. The implication of this is that, while the first type of village must eventually extrude surplus population or those in quest of better opportunities, the second type can accommodate them—subject to non-demographic criteria of social acceptability and political considerations. Detailed kinship analysis reveals that the unbounded system not only accommodates male offspring and outside settlers, but can also accommodate daughters' in-marrying husbands. Correspondingly, since the bounded system cannot always satisfy its own sons, it also cannot welcome its daughters' husbands.

Thus, for many people in the region, there is a driving necessity not only to increase the amount of land they control, but also to shift their homes to another location (almost always eastwards). Though the sites and identities of *purana* villages remain, population is increasingly moving up to their boundaries or moving outside the village altogether, either to some roadside ribbon development or to a new site elsewhere. The characteristics of the village are changing, in that close relatives who formerly would have lived next door to each other may now live far apart, while many individuals have interests and part-time residential loyalties which straddle more than one settlement. There is thus an important sense in which our understanding of the village as a 'system' must be qualified in favor of a broader regional view in which they are seen as subsystems with fluid or permeable boundaries.

From these models of bounded and unbounded village systems, we can derive three kinds of possible responses to the perceived insufficiency of land. These can be briefly summarized as follows: (a) *intensification*: this involves making permanent the land on which one lives; (b) *expansion*: i.e., cultivating land in addition to that on which one lives; and (c) *migration*: i.e., going to live and cultivate in another settlement somewhere else.

These three kinds of action are stages in both spatial and temporal processes. In terms of space, they constitute a continuum which

runs, as it were, from the core to the frontier of settlement, whether in a particular village or in the region as a whole. In terms of time, there is a close connection between these three choices and the developmental cycle of the household. In addition, one household may be involved in more than one of these states at a time.

In a clear break from earlier 'traditional' *chena* practices, intensification may be regarded as being today the basic technique of the region and the culmination of a teleological process in which expansion and migration are merely prior stages always likely to lead to it. This may be taken as a sure sign that all agriculture is becoming permanent, above all in intention. In their initial activities, contemporary expansion and migration are of course agronomically, if not in any social or political sense, identical with traditional shifting *chena*. As we have seen, it is in the second step, over the question of fallow, that this resemblance ceases.

The three stages of response outlined in the foregoing (*intensification, expansion, and migration*) will be discussed in turn.

Intensification of Existing Land Holdings: This is somewhat analogous to an unirrigated, and therefore less intense, form, of the agricultural involution described by Geertz (1963). People who intensify their cultivation are those established in their 'permanent' (*isthira*) houses on their 'own' land, whether with or without title, and having the resources to develop it. Most, if not all, *purana* villagers in bounded systems (e.g., Galabedda, Ambalanda) are in this stage, but it also includes those who are more established and/or live near the center of a spontaneous colony such as Dahata. The main crops are sugar and other medium-lifespan marketables, of which each household has 2 to 5 acres under cultivation at any one time. The forms of labor are mixed, with much exchange labor still used, except in sugar production. Capital investment may be slight, but is enough to hire labor to supplement or supplant exchange labor. The heavy work of clearing the land, however, has already been done in earlier years. In the absence of fertilizer, the problem of soil exhaustion is presumably postponed because roots of the larger plants dig deeper. The legal position of those with title is secure. Even if villagers lack title they still do not expect to be evicted, owing to the policy of 'regularization'. Lack of title

thus does not appear to be a deterrent to planting longer-lifespan crops.

Expansion to Nearby Land: People who do this clear a new area beyond that which is currently inhabited. This may or may not be followed by the establishment of a permanent house. This now takes place at the limits of bounded systems and more widely in unbounded systems, such as in Dahata. This is also found around the edges of artificially bounded systems such as Mutukandiya Colony (see also under 'migration' below), and elsewhere in interstices. It is very closely linked to the provision of land for one's children and the building of further houses. There are varying degrees of absentee-landlordism. For example, a household may find additional plots in the vicinity of its house and its previous plots, or its members may live in a *purana* village and maintain plots some twenty miles away at Dahata; a couple may even separate for much of the year in order to live on two widely separated plots; or a sugar factory owner may grow some sugar of his own to occupy himself during the slack crushing season; or a merchant (and others such as retired schoolteachers) who lives outside the area may clear a commercial plot and instal a manager, growing as his first crop saleable annual vegetables rather than subsistence oriented grains. The main crops are annuals, followed by medium-lifespan crops. The extent of cultivated acreage is from 2 to 5 acres for domestic purposes and 10 to 20 acres for commercial production. The forms of labor are mixed, extending strongly to hired labor with increasing acreage and commercial intention. There is little exchange labor and most cultivators must therefore be able to hire labor. Capital is obviously crucial. The soil exhaustion problem is again postponed, this time because new ground is still being cleared, so that yields of even shallow rooted annuals are high, at least for the time being. The legal and political situation is more difficult than for intensification, owing to the need to burn trees, which is illegal. Those clearing land for commercial production, however, are usually well protected by their political connections.

Migration to New Territory: Migrants leave their former residence and go to reside in, and clear, a new place. There may be varying degrees of continuing attachment to their old site, making 'migration' more or less continuous with 'expansion' above. Examples of

migration include *purana* villagers who have labor or capital but no land on which to apply them. They may also migrate because of personal embarrassment, as in the case of elopement or after a witchcraft attack by neighbors, political harassment, a series of bad harvests, the lure of higher profits or a frontier life, and so on. Their destination may be either a spontaneous colony (Dahata) or an official colony (Mutukandiya). This difference is politically significant. Dahata is open to all, and many who go there are in some sense freelancers or renegades. For example, there are many sympathizers of the leftist JVP Party at Dahata. As for Mutukandiya, ancient villagers who have served faithfully on the committees of village societies or who have otherwise cultivated the favor of the MP may have their paths opened to a subsidized allotment there. Some Dahatans also graduate to Mutukandiya, but a measure of the difference which is sensed to exist in official eyes between the two locations is the strong resentment among many Dahatans that the irrigation channels of Mutukandiya have not been continued a further two to three miles into their territory. I cannot say whether this would be technically or financially feasible, but it is widely felt to be a political punishment for not being fully supportive of the ruling party. The cropping patterns, forms of labor, capital requirements, ecological constraints and legal circumstances to be found among those who migrate to new territory are so numerous and diverse that they cannot be itemized here.

Conclusion: Changing Values of Land and the Person

The 'traditional past' is no doubt a somewhat hypothetical, ideal concept (cf. Hill 1982: Ch. 15). But despite the politics surrounding the old Village Headman system, and other complexities which were probably always present, the range of economic and political opportunities available under the system of shifting *chena*, as expressed by the symbolism of the *atuva*, must on the whole have been simple and limited. One's livelihood depended on land cleared by exchange labor. The scale of one's cultivation was linked to the number of mouths one had to feed. Thus it could be said in principle that, with the exception of *corvee* labor demanded by the Village

Headman, the amount of land and harvest that a man controlled was closely proportional to his needs, interpreted in a subsistence oriented sense. The balance between harvest and need was held steady by the arithmetical equivalence of both of these to labor, which was itself at the same time both the means of production of that harvest and its consumer. Indeed, this kind of situation could be taken as one definition of a subsistence oriented economy.

The recent changes in diet and the role of *chena* in a person's life are reducing the significance of the *atuva*, and a few households now do without it altogether. With the separation of the ideas of provisioning and of cultivation, some people also no longer consider it shameful, as they once did, to buy millet, let alone rice. For these people, and to an increasing extent for everyone, the effective 'grainbin' is itself several miles away, in a public place, i.e., the market. This is controlled by outsiders and shared by all. Access to this market is by cash, and success when operating within it calls for negotiating skills rather than the power of manual labor or that derived from a position in a network of mutually dependent, equivalent households. Every household budget shows a year-round bill for 10, 20, or 30 kilos of rice *per week*, just as—ironically—while selling sugar cane, they buy several kilos of sugar per week. Survival in food depends more than ever not just on how people grow it but also on how they sell and buy.

In the present situation, then, the 'subsistence' model has been upset at several points: (a) mouths to feed are now far from being the measure of a household's needs; (b) even where we do measure food requirements alone, they must pass through the filter of several stages of marketing procedure; (c) command of labor has become detached from the scale of domestic manpower, and with the aid of capital can be increased indefinitely; (d) the quantity, quality, and even species of the harvest depend on capitalized inputs; and (e) the size of landholdings is increasing and could in theory increase indefinitely at the expense of forest or of other landholders. All this is happening at the very time when in the predominantly bounded villages of the area land itself is becoming ever scarcer. To have and use land is now clearly to occupy a position in a far flung, even nationwide, network of political advantage. One's position may be stronger or weaker: it is only for the very poor that it amounts to no more than a reliance on kinship and exchange labor, often combined with the performance of hired labor for others.

Thus, as one moves nearer the frontier, from *intensification* through *expansion* to *migration*, the diversity and complexity of the examples given above increase. The secure but narrow homestead base of *intensified* and *expanded* chena is largely the prerogative of the *purana* villager, and often only of the well placed one at that. As pointed out above, there is a developmental sequence between these three options, whereby all agricultural activity tends eventually towards intensification. We can say that in this race well established *purana* villagers start relatively near the finishing post, while similarly those who migrate within the region often retain the advantage of a continuing interest in land in their home village.

However, there is a large and probably growing number of regional in-migrants. The population of Monaragala District has increased greatly and much of this is the result of immigration from other parts of the country (Kearney and Miller 1983). Recurrent features that emerge in talking to such people are that they bring little with them by way of capital; that they lack a local network of support such as is provided by political patronage or kinship in a *purana* village; that they are often of diverse, lower castes entering a largely Goyigama caste area; and that they are caught up in a huge drift eastwards whereby people enter the area sometimes directly, and sometimes in stages over one or two generations, from the more crowded and exhausted soils of Uda Walawe, Balangoda, Badulla and beyond. Lacking either capital or exchange labor relationships, these people rely initially on the weakest of economic bases—homemade *chena* combined with working as hired laborers for established *purana* villagers. Unlike the majority of the Tamil migrant laborers, these Sinhalese will not return with a change of season to a fixed base elsewhere. Indeed, they are not unlike refugees and their life can be very rough. For example, in contrast to the road from Monaragala to Pottuvil, which has been the focus of my study, and along which one encounters, dotted among the mud houses, a number of pastel-colored, suburban-style houses, the jungle track from Buttala to Kataragama, still unsurfaced, harbors a pattern of more amorphous and anarchic settlement, mostly in tatty mud and grass huts. On investigation there, I found gem prospectors, criminals on the run from the west coast, and others with shady pasts (and perhaps presents). There had been several very recent murders, rapes and violent robberies, and people appeared genuinely to know, or want

to know, very little about the background of their near neighbors. It was also obvious that the people were on the whole much more poverty-stricken than on the other road.

The replacement of annual cereals with medium-lifespan plants and trees has significant implications for the value of land, not merely in a purely economic sense, but also taken, so to speak, as an aspect of human consciousness. It is interesting to compare the overall picture of this area with Leach's (1961) account of a Dry Zone village society in Anuradhapura district. In that area, irrigated paddy is prominent and *chena* secondary or at best equal (but cf. Brow 1978). Leach maintains that in Pul Eliya, an irrigated tank village, kin groups 'endure because the estates endure, but the groups have no corporate existence, which could survive a dispersal of their landed property' (1961:129). Leach's account portrays a very stable village system which differs greatly from what has been outlined here. Clearly, Leach's model was not designed to accommodate a mass of people who are constantly on the move and seek survival by changing and multiplying their house sites and fields. A central feature of Leach's account is the use and control of irrigation water. Houses are fixed in a nucleated cluster away from the fields, while in those fields 'land' is made permanent, and thereby in an important sense real, by the fact that—and even explicitly to the extent that—water runs over it. In our area, by contrast, it is precisely because there is virtually no water that land can become permanent and in this sense 'real' (i.e., claimed) only when one actually places a house on it. It is for this reason that the pattern of settlement in this area is becoming ever more disnucleated.

I suspect it is for these reasons also that, where the term *atuva* is reported from areas where irrigated rice predominates (e.g., Pieris 1956:65, 84, 236; Farmer 1957: Plate 6), it denotes a granary for this rice which stands on stilts outside the house, and I have discovered no mention of the kind of symbolism outlined above. If this is so, then I would suggest that in Monaragala district the 'traditional' sense of the relation of humans to land was not mapped in this way primarily on to the land itself. Under this *chena* system, land as such was both ephemeral in its main human relevance and spatially separated from the house, and was therefore not suitable to bear the greater share of symbolic weight within this twofold partnership, i.e., with people. It was for this reason, I think, that its produce had to be brought inside the house in order to function

as a symbol there within the *atuva*. What it symbolized was the fruit, not so much of private *land* as of labor given reciprocally among *people*. The link between humans and land was expressed through the analogy between human seed (*dhatu*) and that of the millet in the *atuva*. So it is only now, through the gradual shift from exchange to hired labor, from annual to perennial crops, and from subsistence to market economy that the permanence of Leach's irrigated land is coming to find its unirrigated analogue.

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3

**Aspects and
Implications of
Agrarian Change**

7

Landholding and Service in a Temple Village in the Kandyan Highlands

ANDREW J. KENDRICK

Introduction

In the Kandyan highlands, where the temples (*vihara* and *devala*) are major landowners, there still operate forms of service tenure which have their origins in the agrarian system of the pre-colonial Sinhalese kingdoms. This system has not, however, remained unchanged since the fall of the Kandyan kingdom in 1815. This paper discusses the changes in tenure and service that have taken place in Kotagepitiya, a temple village (*devalagama*) belonging to the temple (*devale*) of the goddess Pattini in Hanguranketa.¹

The bulk of the land belonging to the Pattini temple consists of hereditary shares (*paraveni pangu*) which are held in perpetuity, subject to the performance of personal service (*rajakariya*) to the temple. Certain of the hereditary shares have duties linked to them

¹ Fieldwork was carried out between June 1979 and May 1981, and was supported by a grant from the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain towards a Ph.D. program at the London School of Economics. I have not given the village under study a pseudonym since its particular features make it readily identifiable. However, personal names have been changed.

that are caste specific. For example, the tenants of the potter share must provide the temple with pots, and this is the preserve of the Potter (Badahala) caste.

The duties for each hereditary share were clearly demarcated by British legislation in 1872. Although the objective of this legislation was to enable temple tenants to commute their *rajakariya* service for a cash payment, it had only a limited effect in this regard. What it did succeed in doing was to formalize the service tenure system to a degree that was previously unknown. At present certain *rajakariya* services are commuted for a cash payment, but these tend to be general duties such as the provision of vegetables and oil. The personal service that is still performed for the temple has become increasingly associated with the caste specific, low caste hereditary shares, and this has reinforced the connection between caste and *rajakariya*.

Changes have also occurred in the organization of the temple *bandara* lands—lands which, as distinct from the hereditary shares, are the absolute property of the temple. Certain fields, known as *muttettu*, were once cultivated by holders of the hereditary shares, with the total crop going to the temple. This no longer happens and the *muttettu* fields, along with other *bandara* lands, are either leased out or given on sharecropping tenancy. Moreover, the introduction of cash crops (such as tobacco and vegetables) on the temple *bandara* lands has created an economic incentive for the performance of *rajakariya*, since the tenants of the hereditary shares have become increasingly dependent on the additional income which the *bandara* lands provide, either through direct tenancy or through wage labor associated with the cultivation of cash crops.

The link between caste and *rajakariya* forms the central motif of caste ideology in Kotagepitiya. The king is said to have commanded certain people to perform specific duties for him, and the various castes are descended from these people. The traditional caste occupations have been handed down from generation to generation. The low castes are conceptualized as servants (*vada karayo*) by the higher ranking Goyigama (Cultivator) caste. The *raison d'être* for caste is thus placed in the past, in the time of the Sinhalese kings, but the relationship between caste and *rajakariya* is reproduced and re-enacted in the performance of temple ritual.

The significance of these rituals, however, has itself changed. In

recent years one festival, the *Asala Perahara*, has become increasingly important, with a corresponding decline in the importance of other festivals. *Rajakariya* is now almost totally concerned with the performance of this particular festival. This change is related to the role of politicians as temple officials. Because of the relationship between Sinhalese nationalism and Sinhalese Buddhism, politicians have sought positions of traditional authority in temples, and religious processions present an opportunity for them to legitimize their political status by their public support of the Buddhist religion.

Over the past 170 years, then, there have been important changes in the temple estates. Although *rajakariya* is represented as a survival from, and a link back to, the time of the Sinhalese kings, it has in fact undergone significant transformation, yet it continues to articulate the ideology of caste in the temple village.

The Temple and the Village in Historical Context

An elaborate system of service tenure operated in the Kandyan kingdom. As lord of the soil (*bhupati*), the king had, in principle, authority over the land in his domain and, through this control of land, control over the people on the land.² Land was given out subject to the performance of service to the king (*rajakariya*). This generally took the form of personal labor service which, to a large extent, was organized along the lines of caste (cf. Gunasinghe 1979).

The system, however, was not simply a two-level structure of king and tenant, because the king also distributed land to members of the aristocracy, state officials and religious institutions. Along with such land went the rights to the services attached to the land. If land was given to a temple, for example, the tenants of that land, who had previously provided personal service to the king, would now have to provide that service to the temple. The prevailing order, then, was a hierarchical system of rights in land and rights to the services attached to them.

Only the estates of religious institutions, whether held by

² Habib (1963) and Neale (1969) have stressed the importance of this control over people, mediated through the land tenure system, in the kingdoms of medieval India.

Buddhist temples (*viharagam*) or by temples of the gods (*devalagam*) could not be reclaimed by the king, as they had passed into the jurisdiction of a higher authority than the king (Evers 1972:14). Even temple tenants, however, were obliged to perform service to the king for public works and in case of national emergency.

The term *rajakariya* was applied not merely to service to the king, but to service throughout the politicoeconomic structure (Gunasekera 1978:127). Thus regardless of whether the recipient of the service was an aristocrat or a temple, it was still *rajakariya*. The king's ultimate control of land and people was therefore expressed throughout the redistributational network.

When the British deposed the King of Kandy in 1815, they stated in the Kandyan Convention that there would be no attack on the Buddhist religion. But the position of a Christian government could not replicate the essential role of the divine Buddhist king in the religious structure of the Kandyan provinces. When rebellion broke out in 1817, it was supported by many Buddhist monks. After the rebellion had been quelled, however, the British government continued its policy of support for the Buddhist religion. It appreciated too well the importance and influence of the Buddhist order of monks to attack directly the economic basis of religious institutions. By the Proclamation of 21 November 1818, temple estates were exempted from all taxation, although the obligation of the inhabitants of temple villages 'to perform fixed gratuitous services ... to the Crown' was reaffirmed. These 'gratuitous' services were the traditional *rajakariya* services for public works.

Compulsory services for the British meant, almost exclusively, work on roads and bridges, which were constructed on an unprecedented scale after the rebellion of 1817-18. For example, in the decade 1820-30, 400 laborers a day were compelled to work on the Kandy-Colombo road and in the period 1831-33 as many as 800 laborers were called upon (de Silva 1953: 401).

Towards the end of the 1820s, however, the British government began to acknowledge the iniquities of the compulsory labor system. Colebrooke's 'Report on Compulsory Labour,' presented in 1832, thoroughly condemned the system and proposed that hired labor should be used to construct public works.³ In the same year all proclamations, regulations and laws relating to compulsory service

³ It should be pointed out that by this time the bulk of the road building program undertaken by the British had been completed.

were repealed. But although compulsory labor service was abolished, service tenure in royal villages (*gabadagam*), villages granted to an individual (*nindagam*), and temple villages (*viharagam*, *devalagam*) was not affected by the new legislation.

The effect of this period of British administration on the performance of *rajakariya* at the Pattini temple in Hanguranketa is highlighted by the evidence given by the temple priest (*kapurala*) to the Temple Lands Commission set up in 1856:

Attenaikemudianselagey Punchierale Capurale, affirmed, states—The Nillecareas used to cultivate the Muttettu fields; that was their principal service. They have not done so for about fifteen years The Nillecareas scarcely perform any service now, except repairing the Dewale, and attending the festivals. Some of them do not even come to the festivals. Some of them do not do a day's work in each year The Dewale is falling. The Nillecareas are not made to perform services, and the Muttettu fields are let on rent to strangers, who pay the rent to the Basnaikenilleme, and he never disburses a pice to the upkeep of the temple I know that, from as long as I recollect up to seventeen years ago, the Nillecareas performed services and cultivated the Muttettu fields (Govt. of Ceylon, 1857–58).

This must be viewed as a major restructuring of *rajakariya*, since it involved a total break of the traditional connection between hereditary service shares and the *muttettu* fields and an abandonment of the principal form of surplus extraction that prevailed in the pre-colonial service tenure system. After this, *rajakariya* came to be more closely focused on the performance of temple ritual.

However, the temple, or the lay official of the temple, did not necessarily lose from the change. The income that accrued to the temple from *muttettu* fields given out on rent or on sharecropping tenancy would probably have been greater than when they were cultivated reluctantly by tenants of the hereditary shares who gained nothing from any increase in the yield (cf. Evers 1972:79). Thus, there would have been little pressure to force temple tenants to continue cultivating the *muttettu* fields. When it came to registering the services for the hereditary shares in 1872, the cultivation of these fields was not included in the duties to be performed.

Soon after the proclamation of 1818, which exempted temple estates from all taxation, the British discovered that paddy land was being falsely declared as belonging to temples. In order to prevent this evasion of tax, they decided to register the temple estates. Several efforts in this direction were made during the next two decades but, as Roberts (1973:131) reports,

In the absence of adequate personnel and machinery these attempts had very partial success; and merely contributed to official fears that relatives of the trustees of temple lands were able to avoid the paddy tax by listing their *mada idam* (paddy land) as temple property.

In 1856 the topic was taken up again, with the establishment of the Temple Lands Commission, which functioned for the next twelve years. Despite their inadequacies, the Commission took the two previous registers, and the register of plowed land of the Kandyan kingdom, as their basic guides. For the most part, adjudication in the registration of temple lands appears to have been fair, and there is little evidence that it was subverted by the strong demands for appropriation of temple property that had followed the successful establishment of coffee plantations in the Central Highlands. Nevertheless, a great deal of land that was claimed to be temple property was not recognized as such by the Commissioners. Figures from the Temple Lands Commission Reports between 1857 and 1864 suggest that over half the land claimed by the temples was rejected. Against this loss of land, however, the religious institutions secured clear title to their property by the registration of their holdings and 'the system for the first time was systematically formalized and put down in writing ...' (Evers 1972:17).

At the end of the 1860s the subject of service tenure in the temple villages came under discussion once again. The general feeling among the British was now that these tenures should be abolished. As the Queen's Advocate wrote in a memorandum to the Governor dated June 1868:

This system is degrading to humanity, it discourages agricultural industry, bars improvement, and, as respects temple lands, interferes with the right of conscience and forms a powerful impediment to the spread of Christianity (Govt. of Ceylon, Sessional Paper 26 of 1869).

The result of this pressure was the Service Tenures Ordinance of 1870, which reviewed the position stated in the legislation of 1832 and concluded:

The enforcement of services for lands in the Royal Villages has been long since abandoned by the Government, and there is much in the nature of the services which are still retained, which is repugnant to the constitution of the Colony, and which tends to check its advancement and improvement, and it is desirable to take steps to encourage their commutation (Govt. of Ceylon, Service Tenures Ordinance of 1870).

The Ordinance called for the establishment of a commission which was to register (a) the kind of tenure associated with each share—whether it was held in perpetuity or was temporary, (b) the name of the tenant, and (c) the nature and extent of the services due. The Commission was also authorized to set the amount of money for which services could be commuted.

It will be noted that this legislation fell far short of the calls for the compulsory abolition of *rajakariya*. Although the ordinance of 1870 made provision for the commutation of service, it was left to the individual tenant to apply in writing for commutation to the Service Tenures Commission. More than twenty years later, Le Mesurier reported that commutation was 'rarely resorted to' (Le Mesurier 1893:113). What the legislation did accomplish was to provide temples with the legal backing either to enforce the performance of service or to obtain a substitute payment. Although the tenant could not be evicted for failing to perform *rajakariya*, action through the courts could result in the value of the service being recovered by sale of the crop from his share or by seizure of his personal property. Thus the system of service tenure on temple estates was given full support by the colonial legal system.

After the survey and registration of temple lands were completed, the Pattini temple had hereditary shares in seven villages situated within a five mile radius of the temple. According to Lawrie (1898:321), these shares added up to approximately 55½ *amunu* of paddy land, 16 *amunu* of garden and 18 *amunu* of high land, of which roughly one-third of the paddy and garden land, and two-thirds of the high land, were located in Kotagepitiya.⁴

⁴ An *amuna* (pl. *amunu*) is a measure of grain that is also used as a measure of land. Traditionally, land was measured in terms of the amount of grain required to

Caste and Landholding in Kotagepitiya

Kotagepitiya is situated in the Pata Hewaheta division of Kandy district. It lies on the floor of the steep-sided valley of the Maha Oya, which runs northeast and north until it flows into the Mahaweli river. The flat valley floor is covered with paddy fields which are watered by small irrigation canals fed by the river, and by streams which run down the hillside. Further up the hillside steeply terraced paddy fields have been made possible by the building of the Mirapola canal.⁵ The houses of the village are scattered along the hillside in pockets of garden and waste ground between the paddy fields.

The village's population of 447 is divided into 84 separate households.⁶ Forty-nine households belong to the Goyigama (Cultivator) caste, 4 are of Kammalkaraya (Blacksmith) caste, 18 are of Henaya (Washerman) caste, 2 are of Badahala (Potter) caste, and 11 are of Gammahela caste.

The Blacksmith, Washerman and Potter castes all have connections with the hereditary service shares of the Pattini temple. The Gammahela caste, however, has no traditional occupation associated with it and is in a somewhat anomalous position. The Gammahela describe themselves as Goyigama. This claim is supported by Gunasinghe's finding that, in the village of Delumgoda, the Gammahe are a low subcaste of the Goyigama caste. They refer to themselves as Goyigama and are recognized as such, albeit of inferior status, by other members of the Goyigama caste (Gunasinghe 1980:164-65). Against this is the fact that in the Service Tenure Register of 1872, the name of a member of this caste was given as Gammahelagedara Tambiyahenaya. The suffix of the personal name suggests membership in the Washerman

sow a particular area. Moreover, different categories of land were often measured using the sowing extents of different types of grain. Thus, whereas paddy land was measured in quantities of rice, high land was often measured in quantities of millet. In Kotagepitiya today, one *amuna* is reckoned to be equal to 2 acres of paddy land.

⁵ The Mirapola Ela scheme was begun just after World War II and was completed in 1949. The canal is almost 10 miles in length, has a discharge of 33 cubic feet per second, and irrigates an area of 2,000 acres.

⁶ Use of the ethnographic present tense refers to 1979-81, the period of field research.

(Henaya) caste.⁷ In contrast to the situation in Delumgoda, the Goyigama in Kotagepitiya vehemently deny that the Gammahela are Goyigama. The other castes in the village also do not consider the Gammahela to be Goyigama, and they are often stated to be the lowest caste in Kotagepitiya.

I will now examine the relationship between caste and the distribution of rights in paddy land among village households.⁸ At the outset, two factors should be mentioned that militate against a perfectly accurate account. First, there are the problems attendant upon the traditional, and still persistent, practice of measuring land in terms of the amount of grain required to sow it. Second, as a result of the fact that the inheritance of land takes place over a period of time, certain individuals who at the moment of analysis appear as landless may already enjoy rights of cultivation in the land to which they are the heirs (cf. Leach 1958). In the discussion that follows the household, which is the basic unit both of production and consumption, is also taken as the unit of analysis, and the landholdings of different members of the same household are not distinguished. All paddy land held by members of Kotagepitiya households is considered, whether it is located in Kotagepitiya itself or in other villages.

Beginning with privately owned paddy land, as distinct both from hereditary shares in the Pattini temple's land and from the temple's own *bandara* land, there are 25.46 acres of such paddy land in the village. Residents of Kotagepitiya, however, own only 12.75 acres (50.1 per cent) of this land. On the other hand, they own 34.4 acres of private land in other villages. Table 7.1 shows that 27 (55.1 per cent) of Goyigama households own private paddy land, whereas only 14 (40 per cent) of the low caste households do so. These landholding Goyigama households also own a disproportionate amount of this land. The 14 low caste households (34.1 per cent of all landowning households) own only 8.75 acres (18.6 per cent of land owned).⁹

⁷ Many of the Washerman caste in the village have personal names ending in the suffix *henaya*.

⁸ The following discussion is restricted to rights in paddy land. It may be noted, then, that most households had small amounts of garden land (*vatta*) or high land (*hena*) situated in the village, on which they grew a variety of tree crops. Moreover, three of the wealthier households in the village also held substantial amounts of high land outside the village on which they grew tea.

⁹ The link between caste and land ownership has also been shown in other studies of multi-caste villages in the central highlands. See Yalman (1967) and Silva (1979).

Table 7.1
Ownership of Private Paddy Land by Household

Size of Holding (Acres)	Caste of Household					Total	per cent
	Go	W	G	B	P		
No holding	22	11	8	1	1	43	51.2
0.1 - 0.5	14	4	3	2	-	23	27.4
0.6 - 1.0	6	2	-	1	1	10	11.9
1.1 - 1.5	4	-	-	-	-	4	4.7
1.6 - 2.0	2	1	-	-	-	3	3.6
2.1 - 4.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
More than 4.0	1	-	-	-	-	1	1.2
Total	49	18	11	4	2	84	100.0

Note: Go = Goyigama; W = Washerman; G = Gammahela; B = Blacksmith; P = Potter.

The low caste households in Kotagepitiya, however, have access to the Pattini temple's hereditary shares (*paraveni pangu*) and this tends to equalize the pattern of access to land. There are 58.87 acres of the hereditary shares at present under rice cultivation, of which 28.04 acres (48.5 per cent) are tenanted by village residents. The significant fact about these hereditary shares is that, subject to the performance of *rajakariya*, title to the land is in perpetuity. The temple shares can be sold, gifted or passed on by inheritance. The tenant also has the right to the entire crop. 22 low caste households (62.9 per cent) have holdings in the temple's hereditary shares, whereas only 16 Goyigama households (32.7 per cent) have

Table 7.2
Holding in Temple Hereditary Shares by Household

Size of Holding (Acres)	Caste of Household					Total
	Go	W	G	B	P	
No holding	33	6	3	3	1	46
0.1 - 0.5	8	7	6	1	1	23
0.6 - 1.0	5	1	1	-	-	7
1.1 - 1.5	1	3	1	-	-	5
1.6 - 2.0	1	1	-	-	-	2
2.1 - 4.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
More than 4.0	1	-	-	-	-	1
Total	49	18	11	4	2	84

Note: Go = Goyigama; W = Washerman; G = Gammahela; B = Blacksmith; P = Potter.

such holdings (Table 7.2). Goyigama households, however, again hold a disproportionate amount of the land, although to a lesser degree than in the case of land ownership. The 22 low caste households (57.9 per cent of all households holding temple land) have title to 12.96 acres of temple land, or 46.2 per cent of the land held as hereditary shares by Kotagepitiya residents.

If we combine these two sets of figures, we are able to see the overall pattern of landholding in Kotagepitiya (Table 7.3). These figures show that the distribution of landholding is roughly similar among the different castes. The point is made even more clearly if the low castes are grouped together (Table 7.4). In fact the

Table 7.3
Combined Holdings in Private Paddy Land and Temple
Hereditary Shares by Household

Size of Holding (Acres)	Caste of Household					Total
	Go	W	G	B	P	
No holding	14	2	1	1	1	19
0.1 - 0.5	16	9	8	1	-	34
0.6 - 1.0	8	2	1	2	-	13
1.1 - 1.5	7	2	1	-	1	11
1.6 - 2.0	1	2	-	-	-	3
2.1 - 4.0	2	1	-	-	-	3
More than 4.0	1	-	-	-	-	1
Total	49	18	11	4	2	84

Note: Go = Goyigama; W = Washerman; G = Gammahela;
B = Blacksmith; P = Potter.

Table 7.4
Combined Paddy Land Holdings of Goyigama Households
Compared to Low Caste Households

Size of Holding (Acres)	Goyigama Households		Low Caste Households	
	No.	per cent	No.	per cent
No holding	14	28.6	5	14.3
0.1 - 0.5	16	32.7	18	51.4
0.6 - 1.0	8	16.3	5	14.3
1.1 - 1.5	7	14.3	4	11.4
1.6 - 2.0	1	2.0	2	5.7
2.1 - 4.0	2	4.1	1	2.9
More than 4.0	1	2.0	-	-
Total	49	100.0	35	100.0

Goyigama have a higher percentage classified as landless, but if we take the first two categories together (the landless and those holding half an acre or less) the figures are quite similar: 61.3 per cent of the Goyigama households and 65.7 per cent of the low caste households fall into these two categories. Throughout the categories, the figures for the Goyigama and the low castes are roughly the same. In terms of the extent of landholdings, however, although low caste households with title to land constitute 46.2 per cent of landholding households, they hold only 28.9 per cent of land held by residents.

The major factor accounting for the disproportionate amount of land held by the Goyigama households is the one household that has holdings of more than 4 acres. The head of this household is the *vidane mahataya* (Village Official) of the Pattini temple. This household owns 18 acres of paddy land in villages other than Kotagepitiya and holds 4.5 acres of hereditary shares in Kotagepitiya itself. This adds up to 29.9 per cent of the total landholdings of the village households.

Thus paddy landholding in Kotagepitiya is unequal, with the majority of households in the village (63.1 per cent) either having title to no more than half an acre or holding no paddy land at all. Four households (4.8 per cent) hold 43.1 per cent of the paddy land held by residents of Kotagepitiya. If we set aside the large landholdings of the *vidane mahataya*'s household, however, caste is not a major factor in the overall distribution of landholding, due to the fact that the low caste households tend to have holdings in the temple's hereditary shares while the Goyigama households tend to own private land.

The prominence of the *vidane mahataya* is not limited to his own holdings in land. He also rents large sections of the temple *bandara* land in Kotagepitiya and sublets them on sharecropping tenancy (*ande*). Fifty-four households (64.3 per cent) take land on sharecropping tenancy, and in order to show the effect of this on the distribution of cultivation rights in the village I make use of the concept of 'effective operational holding' (Silva 1979). This is calculated by multiplying the amount of land cultivated by the proportion of the harvest accruing to the operator. Thus 1 acre of land cultivated on sharecropping tenancy has an operational value of half an acre both to the landlord and to the tenant.¹⁰ Table 7.5 compares the

¹⁰ This is only an approximation. In many cases, the tenant's share will be less than half due to the practice of the landlord supplying seed and fertilizer and the cost of these, plus interest, being deducted from the crop before it is split. In cases of sharecropping tenancy between kin the division of the crop is flexible, depending upon the relationship between landlord and tenant and their economic circumstances.

figures for landholding with those for effective operational holdings. It can be seen that, at the lower levels of landholding, sharecropping tenancy has important effects. Only four households cultivate no land at all and the number of households that effectively operate between 0.6 and 1.0 acre is almost double the number that have title to that much land.

Table 7.5
Comparison of Paddy Landholding to Effectively Operated Paddy Land

Size of Holding (Acres)	Landholding Households		Effectively Operated Land Households	
	No.	per cent	No.	per cent
No holding	19	22.6	4	4.8
0.1-0.5	34	40.4	33	39.3
0.6-1.0	13	15.5	25	29.7
1.1-1.5	11	13.1	11	13.1
1.6-2.0	3	3.6	6	7.1
2.1-4.0	3	3.6	4	4.8
More than 4.0	1	1.2	1	1.2
Total	84	100.0	84	100.0

I will now look in greater detail at the nature of sharecropping tenancy. In Table 7.6, I have distinguished three sub-categories, based on the relationship of landlord to tenant.¹¹ Of the 33 cases

Table 7.6
Sharecropping Tenancy in Kotagepitiya

Relationship between Landlord and Tenant	Land Worked on Sharecropping Tenancy	
	Acreage	Number of Tenants
Kin relationship	11.38	33
Non-kin	10.87	17
Temple <i>bandara</i> land	15.75	27
Total	38.00	77

¹¹ Some of the temple *bandara* lands that are sublet on sharecropping tenancy by the Village Official are worked by tenants who are his kinsmen. In Table 7.6, however, these cases are grouped under 'temple *bandara* land' rather than under 'kin relationship'.

of sharecropping tenancy between kin, 12 involved land being worked by a son while the parent who held title to the land was still alive. In ten of these cases, the son's household was classified as landless and thus, over half of those classified as landless were potential heirs to their parents' estate.¹² Seven men were cultivating the land of brothers who had left the village to find work or who had obtained land in colonization schemes. In six cases, men were cultivating the land of sisters who had left the village at marriage.¹³ The remaining cases of sharecropping tenancy between kin involved residents of the village, one of whom had land surplus to his capacity to work.

Cultivation of a non-relative's land on sharecropping tenancy most often involved absentee landlords. Some land in Kotagepitiya had been bought by Muslim traders from a nearby town and this was all worked on sharecropping tenancy. Similarly, owners of land in Kotagepitiya who lived in neighboring villages often found it easier to give land on sharecropping tenancy rather than to cultivate it themselves. This was especially the case if the absentee landlord was not himself a farmer.

The largest category of land which was given out on sharecropping tenancy, however, consisted of sections of the temple's *bandara* land situated in Kotagepitiya. The *bandara* lands of the Pattini temple, which are the absolute property of the temple, comprise the temple site itself, the *muttettu* fields, lands which were traditionally given out on tenure-at-will (*maruvena*), and certain other lands that were previously jungle or waste land. The temple owns 18 acres of *muttettu* fields, half of which are in Kotagepitiya and half in Mapanawatura. It also owns nine acres of *maruvena* land in the villages of Aluwatagama and Damunumeya. With one exception, the latter fields are all given

¹² Gunasinghe has argued that the sharecropping relationship between parents and sons 'where the portion going to the landlord was assiduously observed' (Gunasinghe 1979:35) indicates the fragmentation of extended kin relationships and the isolation of the nuclear family. I believe, on the contrary, that it is an expression of the practice of 'assistance' (*upasthanaya*) in the context of the long term process of inheritance. Even after land has been inherited by children, they are expected to make a contribution to their parents' maintenance.

¹³ This dispersal of land rights in the village has important implications for the organization of temple villages and temple service. The latter cannot be viewed as closed systems in which the residents of temple villages perform services that can only be seen by outsiders in the performance of major religious festivals. The network of religious institutions is spread in an ever-finer mesh as the rights and duties in temple lands are carried beyond the temple villages through the medium of marriage and 'dowry' (*davadda*).

out on sharecropping tenancy. The exception involves a field which is given to the Drummer who performs twice a week at the rituals at the temple. The last category of *bandara* land is situated in Kotagepitiya. This land, 72 acres in extent, was previously jungle and little income from it used to accrue to the temple.

In 1920, this jungle land was rented to the English supervisor of a nearby tea estate. He developed the land for the cultivation of rubber trees; hence the land's present name, the Rubber Vatta. The supervisor also bought approximately 25 acres adjacent to this land, half of which belonged to the high land (*hena*) sections of the temple's hereditary service shares. In 1937, the lease to this land was revoked and the temple also bought the other sections of high land. The land was leased out again but, according to villagers, it was not properly cultivated and much of it reverted to jungle. The unexpired lease was surrendered in 1951.

In the late 1940s construction of the Mirapola canal, which passed through the Rubber Vatta, had a significant effect on the economy of the village and on the value of the temple's *bandara* land. It now became possible to cultivate rice on the high land sections of the temple's hereditary shares and on parts of the Rubber Vatta. In 1955, the Rubber Vatta was leased to the *vidane mahataya* at a greatly increased rent. At around the same time, the temple initiated a number of court cases contesting the boundaries of the high land sections of the hereditary service shares. Approximately 7 acres of the hereditary shares were deemed to be *bandara* land and were subsequently leased out.

At the present time, the 9 acres of *muttettu* fields in Kotagepitiya are worked by 10 tenants on sharecropping tenancy. Approximately 20 acres of the Rubber Vatta are also given out on sharecropping tenancy. In 1981, this was divided into 36 separate plots, ranging in size from one-quarter acre to one acre. Sixteen of these plots were worked by tenants who lived in villages neighboring Kotagepitiya and 20 were worked by residents of Kotagepitiya.

Even with the increased acreage under rice cultivation due to the asweddumization of sections of the Rubber Vatta and the high land portions of the hereditary service shares, the majority of households (73.8 per cent) have effective operating rights in no more than 1 acre of land. The small size of average landholdings means that most households cannot subsist on the income from these lands alone. I have estimated that 44 households (52.4 per cent) operate less than enough land to provide themselves with the basic requirements

of rice.¹⁴ The most common means of obtaining extra income is from agricultural wage labor, the main source of which is in the production of vegetables and tobacco. The temple *bandara* lands and the *vidane mahataya* are of crucial importance in these areas of agricultural production.

Only in the last twenty-five to thirty years has the cash-cropping of vegetables been undertaken on a large scale. The principal growing season is between May and August (*yala*), when vegetables are planted, for the most part, in those fields where a sufficient supply of water cannot be guaranteed for the cultivation of rice. These tend to be the fields that have been converted from high land and are irrigated by the Mirapola canal. The fields of the Rubber Vatta are also included in this category. Because of the higher capital risks involved in vegetable cultivation, several farmers who take land on sharecropping tenancy for the cultivation of rice in the *maha* season (November–February), give the land up in May–August. These fields are then cultivated by the *vidane mahataya* using wage labor.

There are two tobacco barns in Kotagepitiya, the larger of which is owned by the *vidane mahataya*, who grows tobacco on the unirrigated section of the Rubber Vatta. Besides growing tobacco himself, the *vidane mahataya* also sublets land to petty farmers. He supplies the seed and fertilizer, the cost of which is deducted when he buys back the green leaf for processing in the barn. In the 1980–81 growing season, he rented out a total of 10 acres to 14 petty farmers.

Tobacco cultivation was also an important source of wage labor. Tying the tobacco leaves on to rods for drying and grading the tobacco leaves were mostly done by women and children. Picking and transportation of leaves were done by men. At the height of the season more than 50 people a day were employed at a single tobacco barn.

With the increasing pressure on land due to the rising population and the subsequent fragmentation of landholdings, households have become more and more dependent on the opportunities for additional income presented by temple *bandara* lands. Of the 38 households that have title to the temple's hereditary service shares, 14 take land

¹⁴ This estimate was made by calculating the annual rice crop of each household, using the figure for effectively operated land and the average yield of 77 bushels of rice per acre per year. This amount was then divided by the number of people in the household. The baseline for requirements was the national average intake of 300 pounds of rice and flour per person per year (Richards and Stoutjesdijk 1976: Table 18).

in the Rubber Vatta and *muttettu* fields on sharecropping tenancy or grow tobacco for the *vidane mahataya*'s barn. Four other households which have prospective inheritance rights in the temple's hereditary shares do likewise. Several more households with title to temple's hereditary shares are dependent on wage labor in the *vidane mahataya*'s tobacco and vegetable operations. This means that the temple administration, through the *vidane mahataya* who is its local official, has an immediate economic lever with which to ensure the performance of *rajakariya*. The threat of eviction from the *bandara* land or withdrawal of labor opportunities provides a powerful hold over temple tenants.

Temple Service and Caste

Rajakariya duties for the 24 hereditary service shares of the Pattini temple situated in Kotagepitiya are set out in the Service Tenure Register of 1872, and this register is the basis for the present performance of service.¹⁵ The *vidane mahataya* insisted to me that *rajakariya* is carried out exactly as set down in the register, but this is not in fact the case.

Rajakariya duties for four types of hereditary service shares—guard shares, vegetable provision shares, rice pounding shares and oil provision shares—have generally been commuted for cash. Only a few tenants of the vegetable provision shares still supply vegetables, and even this is done only during the Asala festival and not throughout the year. On the other hand, with certain minor exceptions, the *rajakariya* duties attached to the cooked provision shares and the duty shares are still performed according to the register. The tenants of the washer shares likewise still carry out all but two of their *rajakariya* duties as laid down in 1872, but the tenants of the potter share, who no longer work at their traditional caste occupation, now purchase the pots which they are obliged to supply to the temple.

There are three main reasons why temple service is not performed as set down in the Service Tenure Register of 1872. First, certain

¹⁵ The Service Tenure Register of 1872 for Kotagepitiya is held in the Kandy Kachcheri. It is reproduced in Kendrick (1984:85-88).

of the services are now obsolete. Modern transport, for example, makes the special arrangements to provide an entourage for the *basnayaka nilame* (chief lay official) on his journey from Kandy to Hanguranketa no longer necessary. Second, the possibility of commuting *rajakariya* for a cash payment has almost completely eliminated the performance of certain services. This has occurred mainly with those hereditary service shares associated with the supply of provisions such as vegetables and oil, which in a market economy the temple finds it more convenient to buy with money paid by tenants. The third reason is linked to the lessening importance of three of the annual festivals relative to that of the Asala festival. The *rajakariya* services connected with these three festivals are often not performed as fully as they used to be. For example, in the new rice festival (*alut sabhal mangalaya*) the tenants of the duty shares used to bring the new rice from the store of the Temple of the Tooth at Gurudeniya to the Pattini temple in a small procession (*perahara*). In 1981, the rice was received by a representative of the Pattini temple in Kandy and sent to Hanguranketa by bus. This decline is also reflected in a lack of public participation at these festivals. The result of these changes has been to associate *rajakariya* more and more exclusively with the performance of the Asala festival, and today it is the services performed for this ritual that adhere most closely to the register of 1872.

In the pre-colonial Sinhalese kingdoms, as we have seen, the system of service tenure had at its apex a divine king. Symbols of royal authority, which were also symbols of divine authority, were reproduced at lower levels of the redistributive structure. The hierarchy of the politico-economic structure was represented in the idiom of religious ideology and is still today expressed both in *rajakariya* and in sharecropping tenancy.

In the Service Tenure Register of 1872, the *rajakariya* service of tenants of the duty shares includes the presentation of a sheaf of betel leaves (*bulat hurulla*) to the *basnayaka nilame* of the temple at Sinhalese New Year and at the Asala festival. When presenting the sheaf of betel, the tenants worship (*vandinava*) the official. This is also the common way to approach the gods. Similarly, a person seeking a sharecropping tenancy from a wealthy landowner also approaches him with a sheaf of betel and worships him. This is repeated when the tenant tells the landlord that the crop is ready to be harvested or when the landlord is present at the division of the crop.

Goyigama tenant: 'When I go to tell the owner that I am going to harvest the field, I take betel and worship him. Previously, you had to take a basket of cakes to offer to the owner. He is like a god. There are owners who still ask for the cakes or they will not give the field out again.'

In a situation where land is in short supply, this ideology legitimates the traditional rate of surplus appropriated by the landlord.

Goyigama tenant: 'According to the law I am only supposed to give a quarter of the crop, but I give half. It is only because of the owner of the field that I am able to live.'

Property is bestowed by the life-giving landlord in a manner analogous to the bestowal of good health and protection on supplicants of the gods.

Yalman (1967) and Evers (1972) present two diametrically opposed views about the attitude of temple tenants to the performance of *rajakariya*. Yalman states that 'All the castes I came across in the villages of the Kandyan highlands willingly performed their traditional duties at temples and other annual rituals' (Yalman 1967:59). On the other hand, Evers, describing the temple tenants of the Lankatilaka temple complex, says that 'Most peasants objected to performance of *rajakariya*, but stated that they had to obey for fear of eviction from their land or other economic deprivations' (Evers 1972:94).

The situation in Kotagepitiya is more complex and must be discussed in terms of the changes that have occurred both in the nature of *rajakariya* and in the wider political and economic context.

From the perspective of the tenants of the temple's hereditary service shares the owner of the land is the goddess Pattini. In this context, *rajakariya* is discussed in the idiom of religious devotion.

Goyigama tenant: 'In a previous time a vow was made to make the procession (*perahara*). When they made the fields the people made a vow to perform *rajakariya*.'

Drummer tenant: '*Rajakariya* is an offering to the god. It must be done properly. It would not honor the god if you stayed at home and hired someone else to do the *rajakariya* for you.'

Blacksmith tenant: 'It is good to do *rajakariya*. You must do it

well. The gods gain merit and the people who do *rajakariya* gain merit. If you have temple land on sharecropping tenancy you do not gain merit. Those people who are paid to go in the procession do not gain merit.'

Previous descriptions of *rajakariya* have stated that it is not considered to be a meritorious act (Evers 1972; Seneviratne 1978), and this assessment was also expressed in Kotagepitiya.

Goyigama tenant: '*Rajakariya* is not for merit. It is work.'

However, I would suggest that it is the fact that service tenure now operates only on temple estates that has made possible this stress on the religious aspect of *rajakariya*. In a sense there is a denial of the subordination of the tenant to a lay authority. *Rajakariya* has become associated with the broader practices of the worship of the gods rather than with the conditions of tenancy under threat of legal sanction.

On the other hand, the spread of egalitarian ideas since independence and the very recognition of the subordination implicit in the performance of service have led to outspoken opposition to *rajakariya*.

Washerman tenant: 'The king started the procession for his own amusement. It would be a good thing to abolish *rajakariya*. As soon as they abolish *rajakariya*, caste will disappear and hundreds of thousands of people will be happy.'

Potter tenant: 'The rice that goes to feed Pattini in fact goes to feed the priest. The people who do *rajakariya* are the slaves of the priest.'

Washerman tenant: '*Rajakariya* is to commemorate the king and to kill us.'

Goyigama tenant: 'In those days, the kings gave land to the temples. The land was split up between the people, and because of this they have to do *rajakariya*. The priest talks harshly to the people who do *rajakariya* and tries to put them down. *Rajakariya* is like slave work.'

In some cases, these reflections on the degrading nature of *rajakariya* were backed up by the refusal to perform service. As part of his *rajakariya*, the Washerman quoted above was supposed

to present the *basnayaka nilame* with a hat, but he did not do so. This provoked a verbal reprimand from the *vidane mahataya*. It is significant that this Washerman had other lands besides his smallholding in the temple's hereditary share. He was not totally dependent on the temple land and did not need to take land in the temple *bandara* lands or work for the *vidane mahataya*. He was thus in a position to challenge the system.

Other assessments of *rajakariya* concerned the material aspects of tenancy of the hereditary service shares, which can be viewed as falling somewhere between ownership of private land and taking land on sharecropping tenancy:

Blacksmith tenant: 'Private land is better than sharecropping. But *rajakariya* is also better than sharecropping because there is no splitting of the crop.'

Goyigama tenant: '*Rajakariya* land has less value than private land because you are not the owner. But *rajakariya* is good because you have the title deed even though you are put down by the priest. If someone has land on sharecropping tenancy and the yields are low, the owner will not let them carry on working it.'

Thus, the temple's hereditary service shares were preferred to sharecropping tenancy because the tenant received the full crop yield of the field and also held a title deed. As already pointed out, the main form of surplus extraction associated with service tenure in the pre-colonial system—the cultivation of the *muttettu* fields—is no longer linked to the hereditary service shares. In terms of the actual work involved, *rajakariya* duties were considered relatively light.

Washerman tenant: 'I have to carry the flag in the *perahara*. I can leave the village at about 4 o'clock and come back the same night. It does not affect my other work. I prefer to do this rather than hand over half the crop.'

Similarly, the commutation fees paid in lieu of *rajakariya* duties are a fraction of what would be paid to rent land.

It must be stressed that these themes in the discussion of *rajakariya* were, to a certain extent, contextual. Evaluation of the material

aspects of service tenure could be linked to its religious aspects or to statements concerning political subordination, as can be seen above. Further, the economic and caste position of tenants, and their degree of dependence on temple land, affected the evaluation of *rajakariya*.

No less important than these statements was the unspoken acceptance of *rajakariya* by many temple tenants. *Rajakariya* was a matter of custom (*sirita*) and was not always questioned. Representations of *rajakariya* in Kotagepitiya did not form a coherent discourse, but were full of contradictions that reflected more general changes. A crucial factor in this regard was the link between *rajakariya* and caste.

The central theme of the exegesis of caste origins in Kotagepitiya was service to the king (*rajakariya*). Each caste had its own specific service to perform for the king.

Washerman: 'During the time of the king Mahasammata, there were only two sets of people: males and females. The king made the castes for the work they did.'

Goyigama: 'There was a family who lived in the high land (*hena*) and it was their work to wash the clothes of the king. The Washermen people (Hena) are descended from this family. The other castes did different things for the king.'

Washerman: 'The king told different men to go and do different work for him. For this he gave them land. This is why there are different castes.'

Blacksmith: 'Only Blacksmiths can do smithing. This is because it has been handed down from generation to generation and they are accustomed to the work. The castes are different because they do different work.'

This explicit relationship between caste and occupation was reinforced in various ways, ranging from the former practice of branding cattle with caste-specific marks, that signified a particular occupation, to the adoption of caste names, that similarly indicated a characteristic profession.

As is generally the case in the Kandyan region, in Kotagepitiya there is a two-fold division of the five castes in the village, with the Goyigama at the top of the hierarchy and the low, or artisan, castes

below them. This division is expressed in the non-acceptance of food and drink by the Goyigama caste.¹⁶

Goyigama: 'We do not eat and drink with those people. We do not drink tea, we do not eat rice.'

Goyigama: 'If we accepted food from the low castes it would make us one. We would have to give them women.'

Blacksmith: 'The Goyigama will not eat with us. They will accept betel but they will not accept food or tea.'

This non-acceptance of food and drink was never spoken of in terms of concepts of purity or pollution. It was, however, referred to in terms of service.

Goyigama: 'The king split up the people. They do not eat and drink together because it is a custom passed down from the king. If you know that a person is low caste, you will not eat with them. You can give food to a low caste person, but you cannot accept it from them. This is because they are servants.'

Discussing the alternative codes of hierarchy in South Asia, McGilvray has argued that the

downward distribution of food and refusal to accept food upwards makes sense as a tactic to protect and enhance bodily purity, but it can also be seen as a gesture of *noblesse oblige* and a statement of position as patron and protector (McGilvray 1982: 5).

The second of these propositions seems to me to be the more useful in understanding the ideology of caste in Kotagepitiya, and in this I return to Hocart's study of caste which stresses the relationship of service and the role of the king: 'What is uppermost in the minds of all our witnesses is the idea of service' (Hocart 1968: 8).¹⁷

¹⁶ In certain specific contexts, the Goyigama will accept food cooked by the Vahumpura (Jaggery Maker) caste but, significantly, this acceptance of food is an affirmation of the traditional caste service of the low caste (cf. Yalman 1967:93).

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of caste, including a critique of Yalman's work (1960, 1963, 1967), which emphasizes the relationship between the caste system and concepts of purity and pollution, see Kendrick (1984).

It is important to stress that the ideology of caste and *rajakariya* masks class divisions. This was the case in pre-colonial Sinhalese kingdoms, and it remains so today. But Tudor Silva (this volume) oversimplifies the relationship between caste and class in the Kandyan kingdom in at least two respects when he argues that, broadly speaking, the peasantry was divided between the Goyigama caste who were 'free peasants' and the low castes who were 'subject to caste service and other feudal obligations'. First, the existence of a free peasantry that was not subject to caste service is open to debate (Bandarage 1983:36). Second, it is apparent from the evidence that a large number of the Goyigama caste were service tenants (Service Tenures Commission Report [1870], cited in Pieris 1956:64).

The Goyigama caste, then, was internally differentiated in terms of property relationships. At the top of its hierarchy was the aristocracy (*radala*), and at the bottom were those Goyigama tenants who held land on the same basis as the service castes (cf. Obeyesekere 1967: 15–16). The various status ranks, or subcastes, however, shared a common identity as Goyigama (see, for example, Pieris 1956: 67–68). The lower subcastes of the Goyigama were, then, differentiated from the service castes not by their hierarchical rights in land but by the nature of the non-agricultural services which they owed to their lord (Gunasinghe 1979:10; Bandarage 1983: 39).

At the present time in Kotagepitiya, the identity of the Goyigama caste as a group of kin affects the way the relationship between landlord and sharecropping tenant is expressed. Brow (1981:708) has pointed out that evaluations of sharecropping tenancy are dependent on the relative caste status of landlord and tenant. An instance from Kotagepitiya illustrates this point. Two adjoining fields in the *muttettu* land of the temple were worked by two different tenants, a Washerman and a Goyigama. The two men shared a threshing floor near the boundary of the two fields. When the son of the *vidane mahataya* came to oversee the division of the crop, he was presented with a sheaf of betel by the Washerman but not by the Goyigama, who was his classificatory father's brother (*bappa*). So although the two men worked closely together in cultivation, their different caste status was marked by the ritual expression of the lower caste man's subordination.

Divisions in the class structure are blurred by representations of caste identity. We have seen that, in recent years, the trend has

been towards the commutation of caste services by the Goyigama while low caste service continues to be performed in a relatively unchanged manner. Moreover, since the traditional occupation of the Goyigama caste is farming, which all castes in fact undertake, the ideological stress associates *rajakariya* with the low castes. Thus the transformation of *rajakariya* on the temple estates has reinforced both its caste nature and the consequent ideological subordination of the low castes *vis-a-vis* Goyigama tenants.

There is now a general acknowledgement in Kotagepitiya that the caste system is undergoing change. Evaluations of this change are, of course, very much influenced by the caste of the informant. For the Goyigama, the breakdown of the caste system is linked to the general lack of respect for authority which they feel has become prevalent in recent times.

Goyigama: 'People of the lower castes who hold high positions, such as school teachers, call me by my name and I do not like that. If a low caste person had done that during my grandfather's time, he would have slapped the person.'

Goyigama: 'Everything is changing. The people who are now wearing trousers feel ashamed to visit their elder brother who is a farmer and wears a sarong. After independence and up to 1956, most of the top posts were given to aristocrats (*radala*), and it was always Goyigama who were Village Headmen. Bandaranaike did away with the Village Headmen and brought in the *grama sevakas*. Now anyone can have the post. The Potters do not make pots now because their status would be less. If their children are government servants, they do not want their parents making pots. When I went to school, I was called by my name by everyone. But outside school I was called *ralahami* or *nilame*. In school everyone was the same level. When high caste people were in positions of authority, the low caste people respected them. Now people will argue with a police sergeant.'

I mentioned earlier that there used to be a close link between caste and names. Changing names is viewed as one means by which caste is becoming confused.

Goyigama: 'Now the castes are mixing. All the titles are changing. In the old days you would use a harsh name to a Drummer. Now

they give him a title like *gurunanse* (teacher) Caste goes down on the male side. It follows the *vasagama* name. Now they change their names. Before they could not do that. From 1956 Mr Bandaranaike changed it all. Now anyone can learn and get on. The Prime Minister, R. Premadasa, is a low caste man.'

Goyigama: 'That man came from the village. He is a low caste man. He became a school teacher in another village. He changed his name to go with his high position.'

The new avenues of advancement, although only rarely available to a low caste resident in Kotagepitiya, have meant that the importance of the caste system can be denied.

Washerman: 'Caste started in the very beginning in the time of the kings. Now there is no difference. Everyone is the same. If you have food, you can eat. Now there is no problem about getting married to someone of a different caste. It is not caste that matters, it is money.'

Blacksmith: 'The caste system is breaking down. A Goyigama man from this village married one of our relations. They now live in Matale.'

Washerman: 'There is no difference whatsoever between the castes. In ten years there will not be any caste. As long as a person is well-educated and good in himself, there is no caste.'

In spite of this general appreciation that the caste system is changing, the Goyigama caste in Kotagepitiya continues to possess what Srinivas terms 'decisive dominance' (Srinivas 1959).¹⁸ We have seen that the most economically powerful man in the village is the *vidane mahataya*. This traditional position of authority was previously held by his sister's husband, and before that by the latter's father who was also the present *vidane mahataya*'s mother's brother. The *vidane mahataya*'s mother's brother was also the Village Headman (*aracci mahataya*) before that position was abolished. Lesser positions of authority have also been monopolized by the Goyigama caste. When a road was being constructed through the village, all the overseers who were hired were Goyigama, and the two chief overseers were the *vidane mahataya*'s son and his

¹⁸ The criteria for decisive dominance are numerical superiority, economic power through landholding and high position in the local hierarchy (Srinivas 1959).

bana (sister's husband's brother's son). Four people in the village had highly prestigious posts as school teachers or government servants, and all four were Goyigama.

For most of the time that I was in the village, expressions of tension between low castes and Goyigama were limited to the kinds of statements recorded in the foregoing. The low castes and Goyigama worked together in exchange labor (*attam*) and, as one Goyigama man put it: 'We do not eat and drink with the low castes, but we do help them in the fields.' Just before I was due to leave the village, however, tensions became more violent. Three young Washerman boys were suspected of damaging a bridge in the village. They were brought before the local administrator (*grama sevaka*). The father of one of the boys heard about this and came to take his son away. The *grama sevaka* attempted to stop him and a fight broke out. Several Washerman youths who had gathered were chased off by a larger group of Goyigama youths as the older Goyigama stood by and encouraged them.

Goyigama: 'The Washermen are united. Now is the time to show them who is the strongest.'

Washerman: 'When the row started at the *grama sevaka*'s, even Punchibanda hooted at our people running away. This will go further. Just because people wear trousers, they think they are great.'

Washerman: 'The Goyigama want to put us down.'

The Asala Festival and the Legitimation of Authority

The Pattini temple is one element in a religious complex which also includes temples of the gods Vishnu and Alutnuwara and the Buddhist temple (*vihara*) that is known as the *Potgul Maligava*.¹⁹ These temples participate together in the performance of the Asala festival which has become a major spectacle, drawing crowds of up to fifty thousand people. The relationship between the temples is

¹⁹ This translates as 'Library Palace'. The temple has a fine collection of palm-leaf books.

similar to the larger religious complex in the city of Kandy (Evers 1972; Seneviratne 1978). The Pattini temple in Hanguranketa is closely linked to the larger and more important Pattini temple in Kandy. Both are administered by the same *basnayaka nilame*, and the priests of the two temples are related.²⁰

This festival was the most important state ritual during the time of the Kandyan kingdom. Seneviratne describes it as a 'microcosmic representation of all the salient features of Kandyan society' (Seneviratne 1978:108). The king and the state played important roles in the *perahara* (procession). At the head of the procession, a government official carried the register of all the lands in the kingdom. This symbol of the king's power and authority over land and of his rights to the services of the people was followed by military representatives of the government. Behind them came representatives of the 12 provinces of the kingdom. The next section of the procession represented the religious system, and consisted of the officials of the Buddhist temple followed by those of the temples of the gods. Finally, the rear of the procession was brought up by further representations of the central government.

The Asala *perahara* must have looked like an impressive military march-past, with sections of central and provincial government encapsulating those of the religious institutions. Seneviratne argues that

By circumambulating the city, the king (who sometimes rode in the Perahara) directly, or through his officials who represented him in the Perahara, was gaining symbolic control over the city, representing the larger kingdom. In conducting the Sacred Tooth Relic and the insignia of the gods in the Perahara, the king was summoning the aid of these sacred objects in his attempt at gaining symbolic control. He was in a sense 'capturing' the city, with the weapons of the gods assisting him (Seneviratne 1978:85).

The Asala *perahara* was thus an important legitimization of the king's authority. In the first place, the performance of *rajakariya* dramatically expressed the hierarchical principles of the social order.

All participants, from ministers at the top to the low castes who performed menial functions were represented, so to say, in their

²⁰ The priest of the temple in Kandy was the Hanguranketa priest's brother's son.

true form, that is, carrying the signs—dress, symbol or other markers—of their status, while also taking positions in the respective sections of the spectacle according to status (Seneviratne 1978:112).

Second, the Asala *perahara* demonstrated that the king possessed the sacred relic (*dhātu*) of the Buddha which was the paladium of the Sinhalese. It is through his relics that the Buddha re-enters the world and can provide legitimation for the king. The Buddha is no longer of this world, but his presence lingers in his bodily remains (Obeyesekere 1963, 1966). As protector and supporter of the order of Buddhist monks, the king gains legitimacy through his association with the Buddha's corporeal relics.

Today there is no longer a king, but I will argue that, to a certain extent, the role of the king has been taken over by modern politicians. The religious procession of the Asala *perahara* is used by politicians to place themselves in positions of traditional authority and to legitimate their political status through their public support of the Buddhist religion.

Kearney (1979) uses the concept of 'cultural nationalism' to describe the platform of those such as the Anagarika Dharmapala who called for 'the regeneration of the (Sinhalese) nation through the exaltation of the religion, language, customs, and history of the (Sinhalese) people' (Kearney 1979:449). One result of the growth of Sinhalese cultural nationalism was the election, in 1956, of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the newly formed Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which gained popular support by appealing to religious and linguistic grievances. At the time, English was the official language and the SLFP played on the discontent felt by the majority of Sinhala speakers towards the English educated elite. When the Sinhalese Buddhists achieved political power in 1956, 'it became possible for them to claim for Sri Lanka the status of Sinhala Buddhist (not simply Sinhalese) nation' (Obeyesekere 1979:310).²¹

Reaffirmation of the continuity of the Sinhala Buddhist nation with the glories of historical tradition has continued to the present day. One aspect of this is the manner in which the President of

²¹ The ideological construction of a Sinhala Buddhist nation must be viewed as a significant factor in the horrific explosion of racial hatred, which led to the death of unknown numbers of the Tamil minority in July 1983, and the continuing inability to solve the violence and tensions between the two peoples.

Sri Lanka has taken on the attributes of a traditional king. When the UNP was returned to power in 1977, the traditional first-ploughing festival (*vap magula*) was re-inaugurated. Associated with the prosperity and fertility of the nation, this festival used to be performed by the king. The 1979 festival was described in the press as follows:

Following in the footsteps of ancient kings of Sri Lanka's glorious past, President J. R. Jayawardene with Prime Minister R. Premadasa, other ministers, MPs and District Ministers inaugurated the third Vap Magul ceremony—one of the most important annual events in the traditional agricultural societies in India and Sri Lanka—at the historic Tissa paddy fields on Saturday.

The ceremony which had been given Royal patronage even by King Suddhodhana, father of Prince Siddhartha, was held at Tissamaharama, to mark the beginning of a prosperous era again, for Ruhuna *rata*, the historically famous granary of the south.

Clad in a green sarong dotted with a black and white motif and a scarf tied around his head to keep away the heat of the blazing mid-morning sun, a smiling and enthusiastic President balancing himself knee-deep in mud steadied the plough, drawn by two bulls, and goaded them into action while the slushy mud splashed all over his face and body (*Ceylon Daily News*, 29 October 1979).

So, although the Kandyan kingdom fell in 1815, the concept of the Buddhist king and the traditions of the Sinhalese kingdoms continue to have deep significance in today's Sri Lanka. The increasing importance of the Asala *perahara* must be viewed in this context.

This *perahara* also provides an opportunity for the *basnayaka nilamavaru* (chief lay officials) to present themselves before the onlooking populace bedecked in the traditional trappings of authority. Seneviratne writes of the Kandy Asala *perahara*:

The viability of the Perahara is also greatly contributed to by the room it provides for self-glorification and identification with the popular ideology of cultural revivalism for *radala* aspirants to power in modern politics (Seneviratne 1978:137).

In the case of the Hanguranketa *perahara*, the *basnayaka nilamavaru* of the Pattini and Vishnu temples were political rivals at the time of the study, and their rivalry led to an increasing elaboration of the procession as each tried to put on a more impressive spectacle than the other. In the 1980 procession, the *basnayaka nilame* of the Pattini temple was particularly proud of a set of revolving lights that were fixed to the forehead of the elephant carrying the insignia of the goddess. He claimed that it was due entirely to his efforts that the Hanguranketa Asala *perahara* had become a spectacle worthy of the occasion. Prior to his election to office, the Pattini section of the procession had included only one or two elephants. He also argued that it was only because the Pattini section had increased in size that the Vishnu temple followed suit.

A further point concerns the internal structure of the procession. The degree of elaboration of the subsections of the sacred insignia and the lay authorities indicates the amount of honor being bestowed. In ideal terms, the subsection of the sacred insignia would be expected to be the most elaborate, with the largest number of dancers and drummers. In practice, however, we find that the subsections of the lay authorities are just as large as those of the sacred insignia. It thus appears that it is the lay authorities as much as the gods who are being honored in the procession.

The relationship between Sinhalese nationalism and Buddhism underlies the continuing involvement of politics in the performance of this ritual. The active participation of politicians explains the increasing elaboration of the Asala festival in recent years, as other rituals fall into varying degrees of decay with little popular participation. The politicians affirm their support of Buddhism as they rival each other in the splendor of their sections of the procession. Bedecked in the splendid costumes of the traditional Kandyan aristocracy, they legitimate their status in the eyes of the electorate, reaffirming their links with the glorious past of the Sinhalese Buddhist nation.

Conclusion

Two significant periods of change must be recognized in the agrarian history of Kotagepitiya. The first was initiated by the

colonial conquest of the Kandyan kingdom in 1815. The second occurred with the rapid expansion of capitalist relations of production in the village after 1950. Change also occurred both in pre-colonial times and in the period from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, but it was during the two briefer periods that I have identified that the pace of change quickened and important structural changes occurred.

Initial changes in the land tenure system in the Kandyan highlands were the result of direct intervention by the colonial state. Reforms were instigated in reaction to the rebellion of 1817–18 in order to curb the power of the Kandyan aristocracy. However, British recognition of the influence of religious institutions led to service tenure on temple estates being exempted from major acts of legislative reform. Despite this, the interlocking mesh of rights in land meant that temple estates could not be isolated from the changes that were occurring in surrounding estates and villages. The increased burden of 'public service' (*rajakariya*), initially in the construction of roads, and then the breakdown of the service tenure system in other kinds of villages (*gabadagam* and *nindagam*), caused tenants to balk at the performance of service to temples. This affected most seriously the *rajakariya* duties connected with the cultivation of the *muttettu* fields. But although the British intervened to ensure that *rajakariya* was performed, the duties associated with the *muttettu* fields ceased to be enforced. This must be linked to the advantages that accrued to lay authorities of temples, in the context of an expanding market economy, from distributing *muttettu* fields on sharecropping tenancy or rent. When calls came for the abolition of service tenure, the colonial state again vacillated because of concerns about the effects that abolition would have on the emergent 'aristocracy' which formed the local level administration and controlled temple lands either as lay trustees or as chief monks (cf. Gunasinghe 1979). Thus instead of abolishing service tenure, an opportunity was provided for the voluntary commutation of caste service.

At this point, I must take issue with Gunasinghe's analysis of the 'reactivation' of 'archaic production relations'. In general terms he argues that

capital by no means tears away all production relations in a pre-capitalist formation. It selectively absorbs and selectively eliminates.

It tears away only those production relations that could be turned into profit making relations (Gunasinghe 1979:16).

If we look at the reproduction of service tenure, however, we find that this is not the case. Although surplus from the *muttettu* fields may have increased with the introduction of sharecropping and renting, the labor rent on the hereditary service shares usually involved only minimal *ritual* duties. During this period, the reproduction of service tenure by the intervention of the colonial state was overdetermined by political and ideological factors, in particular by the necessity to support the authority of temple overlords and Buddhist religious practices (Bandarage 1983:157).

The possibility of commuting *rajakariya* did not bring about any immediate change in the performance of service. At first, few tenants took the step of having their service commuted. Over time, however, a significant change did take place as more influential Goyigama tenants took advantage of the legislation, and *rajakariya* became increasingly linked with the low caste hereditary service shares. Thus, the Service Tenures Ordinance of 1870 reinforced in practice the ideology of the caste-linked nature of *rajakariya*.

The second period of change occurred with the introduction of cash crops into the village in the 1950s and the use of the temple *bandara* lands to cultivate them. The extension of capitalist relations of production in the village reinforced the system of service tenure in two ways. First, the temple received much larger revenues from its *bandara* lands than had ever been obtained before. This, in effect, cushioned the hereditary service shares. Moreover, the appropriation of surplus from *bandara* lands subsidized the performance of rituals that depended on the service tenure relationship. This increased revenue underwrote the massive expansion of the Asala festival, paying for the large number of drummers, dancers, torchbearers and elephants which now take part in the procession.

Second, with the increase in population and the fragmentation of landholdings in the village, temple tenants were forced to depend on the opportunities for labor provided by the cultivation of cash crops on the temple *bandara* lands. This dependence gave temple authorities a powerful economic lever over temple tenants to ensure that *rajakariya* was performed.

The changes that occurred in the two periods outlined above have reinforced the association between *rajakariya* and caste.

Most tenants of the hereditary service shares are low caste and the performance of *rajakariya* is ideologically linked with low caste shares. The ideology of caste blurs class divisions and places low caste tenants in a subordinate position to Goyigama tenants, whose relationship to the temple is affected by their common caste identity and their kinship links with temple officials.

The expansion of educational opportunities and the opening up of positions of prestige and authority to low caste people have clashed with the traditional structure of authority dominated by the Goyigama caste. Even though these opportunities are rarely available to low caste residents of Kotagepitiya, the knowledge of their existence, and well known examples of prominent low caste men, fuel their opposition to the dominant Goyigama caste. This has led to increasing tension between the castes in the village.

In the last section of this paper, I have argued that the relationship between Sinhalese nationalism and Buddhism has entailed the continuing involvement of politics in the performance of religious ritual. Lay administrators of major temples are normally high ranking politicians and they take an active part in the Asala festival, walking behind the insignia of the god (or the Buddha) of their respective temples. As other rituals fall into varying states of neglect, the Asala festival has become a majestic spectacle and continues to express publicly the hierarchy of caste through the performance of *rajakariya* service.

Rajakariya is typically represented as a custom passed down unaltered from the time of the Sinhalese kings. This paper, however, has demonstrated that its significance has in fact changed since the fall of the Kandyan kingdom. In pre-colonial times, *raja-kariya* denoted all forms of service to the king (and by devolution, to the temples, nobles, and officials of the state), structured in terms of caste but encompassing also the principal means of surplus appropriation. Over time, this has been narrowed down to little more than the service performed for one particular religious festival, but in the course of this change the link between *rajakariya* and caste has become more pronounced.

My argument is that, in Kotagepitiya, *rajakariya* articulates the ideology of caste. To assess the extent to which this is typical of the Kandyan highlands, I will briefly refer to two other recent studies that analyze caste relations.

Silva's study of a village that was once a royal village (*gabadagama*)

but where service tenure ceased to operate after the legislation of 1832 concludes that

The institution of caste continues to be important in the social and political organization of the village, even though the present functions are radically different from its earlier functions (Silva, this volume).

Silva shows that although the caste system is weakening and the hierarchical nature of caste is breaking down, caste itself persists. Gunasinghe (1979, 1980) arrives at similar conclusions: 'on the one hand the economic base of the caste system has undergone erosion, on the other hand caste-consciousness and caste endogamy still prevail' (Gunasinghe 1979:37).

Both authors agree that the hierarchical relationships of subordination based on service tenure are disappearing due to changes in the agrarian system, but that the identity of caste communities continues.²²

The comment of a low caste woman who had married into Kotagepitiya is particularly noteworthy in this connection. As I was chatting with her husband, she shouted through from the kitchen, 'They only bother about caste in this village. Where I come from it is not important.' Thus, in whatever ways the caste system may have been transformed in other parts of Sri Lanka, villagers themselves recognize its continued salience in Kotagepitiya. This is attributable to the persistence of *rajakariya*, which has itself been modified but which in this and other temple villages still remains enmeshed both with the hierarchical principle of caste and with the organization of agriculture.

The role of Buddhism in the legitimation of political authority has helped to maintain service tenure in religious institutions. Neither the Paddy Lands Act of 1958 nor the subsequent Agricultural Lands Law of 1973 exempted temple estates from their provisions, and there has been a great deal of opposition to both these pieces of legislation from temple administrators and the feudal aristocracy (*radala*), who have argued that they seriously jeopardize the maintenance of traditional rituals. Their opposition

²² Several other papers in this volume also address this issue, both in the Kandyan highlands and elsewhere in the country. See, in particular, the papers by Perera, Spencer, Brow and Gunasekera.

appears to have had some effect, for 25 years after the first legislation was enacted, it has still not been applied to the temple estates.

On the other hand, various commissions in recent years have stressed the degrading nature of caste service in the religious festivals and have argued that service tenure should be abolished. In the case of the Kandy Asala festival, the government has intervened and now subsidizes the temples that take part in the festival. Ostensibly, this is to enable the festival to be performed with less reliance on *rajakariya*. The great increase in the size of the festival, however, has already taken it beyond the scale that *rajakariya* by itself could sustain, and the temple authorities will undoubtedly continue to draw on the service of temple tenants. And while the cultural values and 'traditions' of the Sinhalese nation continue to be embodied in the religious rituals of Sinhalese Buddhism, caste identities and representations, although transformed by changes in the agrarian economy, will persist in the lives and minds of the Sinhalese.

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8

Democracy, Party Competition and Leadership: the Changing Power Structure in a Sinhalese Community

TAMARA GUNASEKERA

Introduction

Knowledge of the local power hierarchy is one of the most crucial aspects of the study of agrarian change and rural development, because it is here that the aims of central policy interact with the grassroots reality of village life. This paper, which is based on aspects of my doctoral research (Gunasekera 1984),¹ examines changes in the power hierarchy of a highland community since independence. I concentrate on the dimension of power not only because it has undergone more fundamental changes than have those of class and caste, but also because these changes have significant implications for the planning and implementation of rural development projects.

¹ Field research was carried out between February 1979 and June 1980 under a grant from the Social Science Research Council. My use of the ethnographic present tense in this paper refers to that period. An earlier version of this paper was published in *Marga* 8 (2):1-32, 1986 under the title 'The Politicisation of the Power Structure and the Demise of Leadership in a Highland Community'. It is reprinted here with permission.

In the first section of the paper I examine social stratification in a community in Sabaragamuva province. I identify the changing composition of its power elite and show how, largely due to the dynamics of party competition, the independent bases of village leadership have gradually been eroded. I then discuss the extent to which divisiveness has come to permeate group relationships in the community. Despite, or even because of, redistributive policies and the emphasis on egalitarianism, the disunity and antagonism created by caste, class and party cleavages frustrate attempts to promote collective action at the local level. Yet the leadership roles which might earlier have overcome, or at least mitigated, the effects of factionalism no longer exist. In the final part of the paper, through analysis of the cultural dimension of stratification, I argue that a resurgence of leadership in this community is unlikely because the development of democracy in Sri Lanka has fostered egalitarian ideologies that have made people increasingly unwilling to act out the role of follower.

The dominant practice in ethnographic inquiry has been to focus analysis on a single community. But insofar as the impact of national party competition and political patronage, as well as the cleavages of caste and class, are widespread in many rural areas, it is unlikely that the kind of changes depicted in this paper are confined to the community in which I conducted research. If so, the implications for a strategy of rural development based on the notion of popular participation are rather gloomy. But if induced change of any sort is to be successful, it is important to take these realities as our starting point.

In order to comprehend the complex phenomenon of stratification, this paper employs a theoretical framework which makes analytical distinctions between various aspects of social reality. In the first place, this framework avoids the tendency to accord causal priority either to behavior or to ideas. Both the cultural realm and the social realm are treated as equally fundamental parts of social reality. Second, within each of these realms, analytical distinctions are made between the hierarchies of class, status and power. This three-dimensional model of stratification, which borrows from Weber's work (1970), especially as developed by Runciman (1970), regards as unwarranted the *a priori* assignment of primacy to any one dimension of stratification. Accordingly, inequalities of class, status, and power must be separated for purposes of analysis.

Separate analysis of social structure and culture on the one hand, and the three dimensions of stratification on the other, does not imply rejection of the possibility of interplay between these aspects of social reality. On the contrary, this framework is based upon the premise that relations between conceptually distinct aspects of social reality can be properly understood only if such analytical separations are made. The framework ensures that the nature of such relationships is empirically verified rather than theoretically assumed.

The community I studied was composed of two adjacent villages in the Naranhena² electorate. Because of their close geographical, historical and interactional links, it is appropriate to include both villages within the boundaries of the subject 'community'. Rangama, the larger village, is multi-caste, while Devideniya, which lies due west of it, is a predominantly Batgam village.

There are 236 households in the Rangama/Devideniya community, and its caste composition reflects the caste distribution in Sabaragamuva province as a whole. The three largest castes are the Batgam, Goyigama and Vahumpura. In addition, there are several households belonging to the Patti, Gallat, Henaya and Vahal castes, and a single Muslim family. The high caste Goyigama constitute 28.4 per cent of the population of the community. The Batgam who, other than the Vahal, occupy the lowest rank in the caste hierarchy, are not only numerically preponderant (46.6 per cent), but have also increased their landholdings during this century and become the wealthiest caste in the community. Today the Batgam control a disproportionate extent of agricultural land (Table 8.1).

The rise to prosperity of certain Batgam families over the past seventy years was principally due to their willingness and ability to take advantage of employment opportunities afforded by two British plantations, Beligoda and Saman Kande, located in the hills above Devideniya. A few Batgam men already worked as laborers on the plantation before 1910, but in the following years, as rubber replaced tea as the principal crop and production was intensified, several Batgam men also obtained jobs as overseers

² I have employed pseudonyms for most of the place names referred to in this paper, as well as for the names of certain people, in order to respect the privacy of various individuals, and in deference to the sensitive nature of certain points of information.

Table 8.1
Caste Distribution of Paddy Land and High Land in Rangam/Devideniya Controlled by Residents, 1979-80

Caste	Households		Paddy Land			High Land			Percentage
	Number	Percentage	A	R	P	A	R	P	
Batgam	110	46.6	60	0	19	196	2	25	62.8
Goyigama	67	28.4	23	1	30	70	2	10	22.5
Vahumpura	31	13.1	6	2	25	28	2	30	9.2
Patti	10	4.2	3	1	11	4	1	20	1.4
Henaya	7	3.0	0	3	15	3	0	0	1.0
Gallat	6	2.5	0	1	10	2	3	0	0.9
Vahal	4	1.7	1	0	35	3	2	0	1.1
Muslim	1	0.4	0	2	18	3	2	0	1.1
Total	236	99.9	96	2	3	313	0	5	100.0

Note: A = acres (1 acre = 0.4 hectares); R = roods (4 roods = 1 acre); P = perches (40 perches = 1 rood).

and watchers. The contacts they made and the salaries they received in these positions enabled them subsequently to take on other work as contractors. From the profits they made by contracting to perform such tasks as clearing the jungle, fencing, planting rubber trees, constructing storerooms, and so on, they accumulated the capital that enabled them to purchase land in Rangama and Devideniya when it came on the market.

As a result of such enterprise, a number of Batgam families have emerged as prominent members of the wealthiest stratum. Thus, the hierarchies of class and caste in Rangama/Devideniya are dispersed rather than cumulative (Beteille 1974) and many individuals occupy discrepant positions on these two scales of inequality.

The economy of the community is predominantly agricultural. Although approximately 12 per cent of the inhabitants engage in various non-agricultural occupations,³ agriculture constitutes the major source of income of the vast majority of household heads.

As in many parts of Sri Lanka, agricultural land in Rangama/Devideniya is divided into two basic categories—paddy land and high land. Paddy fields are not only rainfed but also receive water from minor irrigation works. Paddy land is relatively scarce and 106 households have no access to it. The holdings of those that do have access to paddy land vary in size from $1/16$ of an acre to seven acres.

Food crops such as coconut, jak, breadfruit, bananas and other fruits are grown, principally for domestic consumption, in home gardens. Traditional *chena* cultivation is no longer practised on high land. Most households grow high land cash crops instead. Rubber is cultivated by 59 households, and in recent years a variety of non-traditional cash crops, such as pepper, coffee, cloves and cocoa, has become increasingly important in the local economy. The sharp increase in the price of cloves made it the most profitable cash crop in 1979–80.

The Decline of the Traditional Power Elite

In the 1940s and 1950s, the power elite in the community consisted of five people—the Village Headmen of Rangama and Devideniya,

³ For example, government officials, teachers, traders, carpenters, masons, and so on.

the Irrigation Headman, the local school teacher, and Nuwarapakse Mudalali, the largest landowner. One defining characteristic of their power was their role as brokers controlling the channels of communication between the community and the wider society. The important outsiders with whom they maintained contact included doctors, police officers, regional administrators and politicians.

A second defining characteristic of this power elite was that all of them were leaders. Although there is a close relationship between power and leadership, the two concepts are not synonymous, and it is important to distinguish between them if one is to understand some of the most significant changes that have occurred in the local power structure. Power may be defined as the ability to influence the actions of others and/or the ability to bring about an intended state of affairs with or without the use of coercion. A leader, on the other hand, is a member of the local power elite who is able to command a following and direct collective activity because s/he is respected and admired and because his/her power is deemed to be relatively permanent. Although leadership at the local level implies membership in the power elite, those who exercise power need not always be leaders. This distinction between power and leadership is akin to Weber's distinction between power and authority, insofar as both leadership and authority imply a notion of legitimacy.

Two members of the old power elite still lived in Rangama/Devideniya at the time of my fieldwork. One, H. R. Timiri Banda, the former Irrigation Headman who was now 80 years old, claimed that in the 33 years he had held office he was able to mediate settlement of all but five paddy land disputes. The other, Nuwarapakse Mudalali, is a Batgam. His ability to exercise leadership in Rangama was limited by his low caste status, but his leadership in Devideniya was undisputed. In his heyday, he was instrumental in mobilizing fellow villagers to build the Buddhist temple (*vihara*) and the school in Devideniya. Like the village bureaucrats and the school teacher, he seems to have been widely regarded as a father figure to whom people naturally turned as an arbiter in times of conflict. As a symbol of their position as leaders, both these men were honored with a tribute of betel leaves by their fellow villagers at Sinhalese New Year.

The power of these individuals has declined during the last 25 years. At a general level this can be traced to the effects of electoral

competition and the drive to secure greater benefits for rural constituents. Post-independence legislation introduced into the village a number of institutions that obviated the need for the kind of mediation the brokers had formerly provided. Contemporary Rangama/Devideniya has three schools that employ more than 15 teachers, a resident midwife, a dispensary with a resident apothecary, two cooperative stores and a sub-post office. Bureaucrats from the Divisional headquarters and Agrarian Services Center in Doragala frequently visit the community. The presence of specialist government officials in or near the community has meant that contact with these officials is not difficult for the average villager.

National legislation has also served to distribute more widely the kinds of resources that former powerholders had used to achieve prominence in the community. With the rapid spread of educational facilities, the school teacher lost his monopoly over superior education. Similarly, welfare and redistributive measures dramatically reduced the economic dependence of many poor people on Nuwarapakse Mudalali. The case of the officials requires more detailed consideration, because bureaucratic office as a basis of power has been undermined by two sharply contrasting processes; on the one hand, the regularization of government officeholding on the basis of educational qualifications, and on the other the attempt to subvert the independence of the bureaucracy through political control.

The old posts of Irrigation Headman (*vel vidane*) and village headman (*aracci*) no longer exist, but interestingly enough, despite a series of legislative changes affecting the administration of rural areas, the two principal bureaucratic posts at the village level today are in many ways the counterparts of the administrative posts that existed under colonial rule. These are the Cultivation Officer and the *grama sevaka* (local government administrator) of the administrative division to which both Rangama and Devideniya belong. This does not mean, however, that the relationship between bureaucrats and villagers has remained unchanged. Bureaucratic office is no longer a sufficient condition for entrance into the ranks of the power elite, and neither of these two bureaucrats has taken over the mantle of leadership borne by the former Irrigation Headman and Village Headman.

Although the general functions of the old post of Irrigation Headman were the same as those of the contemporary Cultivation

Officer—the supervision and improvement of agriculture—the Rangama Cultivation Officer is neither a powerholder nor a leader. The Irrigation Headman was invariably an experienced farmer and was in charge of mediating paddy land disputes. The Rangama Cultivation Officer is a political appointee and has little knowledge of the land under his authority. Land disputes today are mediated by the Divisional Officer of the Agrarian Services Center, and although the Cultivation Officer is present he plays little part in the settlement.

The Rangama Cultivation Officer's lack of leadership qualities is clearly shown by his failure to organize any type of cooperative agricultural activity. Most farmers in Rangama and Devideniya do not even know the names of the officeholders in the Farmers' Society and the Young Farmers' Society, which the Cultivation Officer has dutifully founded. During my stay in the community, his most important activity appeared to be that of compiling land registers, but even those were inaccurate. The Rangama Cultivation Officer is an insignificant figure in the community and, were his function to disappear, few farmers would be either aware of it or concerned about it.

The role of the *grama sevaka* in the Rangama/Devideniya community is more complex. Unlike the Cultivation Officer, he is not without power. In dealings with the outside, a villager is often required to produce a letter from his *grama sevaka* which serves both as identification and recommendation. The *grama sevaka's* stamp of authority is also required for numerous other activities, ranging from transporting timber across district boundaries, or felling jak or breadfruit trees, to requesting a change of collection point for food stamps. The receipt of welfare provisions is also, up to a point, at the discretion of the *grama sevaka*, since it is he who fills out, checks and examines eligibility claims.

The *grama sevaka's* official role in the community thus allows him to exert considerable influence over the inhabitants of his administrative division. It also affords ample scope for self-enrichment. In 1979, when *grama sevakas* were responsible for compiling lists of those eligible for food stamps, it was widely believed that the Rangama *grama sevaka* had been bribed to include some individuals whose personal income would otherwise have warranted exclusion. Even without resorting to illegal means, the *grama sevaka* wields sufficient power to gain considerable extra emoluments.

The Rangama *grama sevaka* frequently asks people for loans, timber, fruit, and so on, which they find difficult to refuse.

Since it is judicious to keep in the *grama sevaka*'s good books, even the most snobbish Goyigama, whatever their private reservations about his Batgam caste status, are circumspect in their personal interactions with him. Like others in the community, for example, they do not address him by his title. Instead, they use the more respectful term *aracci mahatmaya*, which harks back to the provincial bureaucracy of the Kandyan kingdom and the 'native headmen' system under British colonial rule, when 'aracci' referred exclusively to a high caste Headman. But although the villagers are dependent upon his cooperation, the *grama sevaka* is unable to act as a leader in the community. He is given official recognition in Devideniya village affairs, but even among the Batgam he is not a figure of respect or admiration. And the Rangama Goyigama, though individually careful not to antagonize him, will nevertheless pointedly ignore him whenever collective responsibility for such behavior (for instance, at Rangama temple festivals) may be assumed.

In part, it is precisely because of the formalization of his bureaucratic status that the *grama sevaka* is unable to act as a leader. In the first place, unlike former Village Headmen, contemporary *grama sevakas* are selected on the basis of formal qualifications and are often 'outsiders' in the administrative divisions to which they are posted. Moreover, because of frequent transfers, they reside in the area of their jurisdiction only for a short time. The fact that they are outsiders, and transient as well, makes villagers less inclined to look upon them as figures worthy of respect and admiration. In the case of the Rangama *grama sevaka* these factors were exacerbated, especially for high caste people, by his low caste status.

The power of the present *grama sevaka* thus bears no comparison with that enjoyed by the former Rangama Village Headman. Not only has there been a considerable attenuation of his official duties but he also has less discretion in how he performs them. It is clear to everyone that the *grama sevaka* is accountable to his superior, the Assistant Government Agent, and increasingly to the Member of Parliament (MP) of the Naranhena electorate as well. For instance, at the time I left the community, the Assistant Government Agent had received a large number of petitions from villagers

complaining about irregularities in the way the Rangama *grama sevaka* was carrying out his duties. As a result, the *grama sevaka* was suspended from work pending an inquiry.

More significant still, perhaps, in accounting for the decline of bureaucratic power has been the rapid increase in party political control of the administration, not only at the local level but at divisional and district levels as well. Since the late 1960s, the power of MPs in their electorates has expanded to such an extent that today bureaucrats' careers (appointment, promotion, transfer, and so on) are largely determined by elected political representatives.

This political control of the bureaucracy must be seen in the context of party competition and the growth of patronage politics. Prior to 1956, party competition was marginal to electoral politics in Sri Lanka. The marginal role of parties in the first two decades of universal franchise may be gauged by the number of independent candidates who stood for and were elected to parliament. In 1947, half of the candidates who contested the election ran as independents. As Calvin Woodward (1974-75) has shown, the notables who dominated the political parties in those years did not have to rely on party backing to win elections. By and large, their success hinged on their regional prominence.

The 1956 election was a watershed in Sri Lanka's electoral politics. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), with the help of a few smaller parties, swept the polls. The significance of this victory lay in the fact that it established the presence of a democratic alternative to the United National Party (UNP), and thus the importance of party competition. Since Bandaranaike's victory in 1956, there has been an effective two-party system in Sinhalese areas, and independent candidates have almost completely disappeared from the political scene.

With the emergence of party competition, political parties began increasingly to use state benefits as levers of political patronage, with the MP as the principal distributor. As state activity in rural areas expanded into the supply of agricultural inputs, marketing of crops, land distribution, provision of educational and health services, and so on, so too did the range of resources over which the MP had control.

Extension of the scope and intensity of political patronage has been possible because electoral politics in Sri Lanka operates in

the absence of autonomous provincial institutions that are capable of challenging the dominance of the elected representative. Today, this is most clearly evident in the functioning of local government. Village Councils have very modest powers and are not autonomous representative bodies.⁴ The central government has a high degree of control over their activities and retains the residual right to dissolve them. In recent years, 'the punitive dissolution of Village Councils has become increasingly common and the grounds for dissolution increasingly diffuse' (Blackton 1974: 38).⁵ Far from the Village Council acting as a check on the MP's activities, the MP has the power to dissolve an 'uncooperative' Village Council.

Although the SLFP has been primarily responsible for most of the radical changes in rural society, nothing the present UNP government has done since its election in 1977 suggests that it is in any hurry to dismantle the structure of patronage that has been created in recent decades. The willingness of both parties to underwrite the MP's power over his/her electorate means that today, at the constituency level, the MP is unequivocally the most important powerholder.

The concentration of power in the hands of the MP is often remarked upon, but it is worth specifying the nature and extent of that power. During my period of fieldwork, the UNP MP for Naranhena acted as the 'commandant' of all bureaucrats in his electorate. He arranged the transfer of many *grama sevakas* suspected of being sympathetic to the SLFP, and he refers patronizingly to the Assistant Government Agent, the chief bureaucrat of the area, as 'my AGA'. His influence also extends to bureaucrats from outside his electorate who are involved in projects located in Naranhena. For instance, a senior official of the National Agricultural Diversification and Settlement Authority, operating from headquarters in Kandy, felt it judicious to consult the MP and to accept the latter's decisions on all matters pertaining to his organization's project in Naranhena, even though in many cases this clearly hampered the project's efficiency. Not even the forces of law and order are above the influence of the MP. The principal

⁴ Since the time this research was conducted, the Village Council has been replaced by the Village Awakening Council (*gramodaya mandalaya*).

⁵ Blackton cites a case where a Village Council was dissolved after a protracted confrontation between the Village Council chairman and the MP over the latter's alleged failure to pay his electricity bill to the Village Council authority.

police station in the electorate is situated in Doragala and is in charge of an Inspector of Police. The Inspector's relationship with the MP is not dissimilar to that of bureaucrats. It is widely held in Rangama/Devideniya that the Inspector of Police receives and accedes to requests from the MP to drop charges against favored caste fellows or political supporters.

Control over employment opportunities constitutes perhaps the best evidence of the MP's pre-eminent position in his electorate. Virtually all state employment in Naranhena is distributed through the MP's office. It is well known in Rangama/Devideniya that, in order to get a job as a laborer in a government department or estate, an applicant needs to carry a letter from his/her local UNP organization, and must usually also obtain clearance from the MP's office. The application is then submitted to the relevant bureaucracy which, having drawn up a list of 'suitable' employees, sends this to the MP's office for final approval. At this stage the MP adds or deletes names as he sees fit and sends the list back.

The procedure for the distribution of white collar jobs, such as the very popular posts of teacher or bank clerk, is somewhat different, but the MP's discretion in the final selection remains crucial. Applications for vacancies in teaching posts, for example, are sent to the Education Ministry, but it is common knowledge that prior to appointing anyone the Ministry draws up a list of candidates with the appropriate educational qualifications and forwards it to the MP's office for approval. A well placed source within the government told me that there is tacit acceptance in the Ministry that MPs may (and often do) insert the names of other persons on to the list, some of whom lack the necessary qualifications for the job.

The Naranhena MP's control over state employment in his electorate has led to a situation where most SLFP sympathizers have resigned themselves to the futility of applying for government jobs. They are biding their time until the next general election, when they hope the SLFP will return to power and it will be their turn to obtain employment.

The New Power Elite in Rangama/Devideniya

The MP's extensive power in the electorate and the degree to which

s/he can directly or indirectly influence the lives of those within it has made the constituency power structure an increasingly important determinant of the local level power structure. The patronage that MPs distribute today is highly individualized. It is not restricted to the provision of collective goods (like wells, roads and electricity, but extends to individual benefits such as who gets a one acre government allotment and who gets a job as teacher or as laborer on a state plantation). The high degree to which virtually every aspect of rural life has become politicized in this sense means that those individuals who are able, through the MP's support, to manipulate the distribution of specific resources have risen to prominence as the power elite of local communities. Of the people with access to the MP, those who have the greatest degree of backing may be termed 'henchmen'.⁶

Henchmen may or may not be relatives or friends of the MP or officials of the local party organizations. In the Rangama/Devideniya community, the MP's henchmen do not belong to any of these categories. The individual with the closest personal contact with the Naranhena MP is B. Jayasena, a close relative and a prominent SLFP supporter. Despite opposing political allegiances, their relationship has been characterized by goodwill. After the 1977 election, B. Jayasena escaped political victimization. Unlike many others, he retained the job on a government plantation to which he had been appointed by the previous SLFP government. But although his relationship to the MP has enabled him to obtain occasional favors for himself and for others, he cannot be described as a henchman of the MP.

Nor can the officials of the Rangama and Devideniya UNP party organizations be so described. Their post-election relationships with the MP are bitter and strained. As in many rural areas, the most dedicated workers for both the SLFP and the UNP are educated youths who hope to obtain prestigious white collar jobs, for example as teachers or bank clerks, in return for their campaign work. But there is no binding obligation on the part of the MP to reward local party officials, especially since the balance of reciprocity shifts in his favor after the election. The Naranhena MP ignored the claims to white collar jobs of many party officials, preferring to distribute these scarce jobs according to a criterion that was

⁶ The masculine form is used throughout for convenience. It does not mean that women are excluded from this role.

materially advantageous to himself. All four local UNP officials in the community received jobs, but not of the kind they wanted. They feel they have been inadequately rewarded and have lost interest in the party organization. At the time of my fieldwork the UNP organizations in the two villages were just as inactive as the local organizations of the defeated SLFP party. Indeed Jayaratne and Piyaratne, both UNP officials in Devideniya, have left the village in order to avoid the scorn levelled at them by their fellow villagers for having failed to receive the prestigious white collar jobs they expected. Jayaratne's departure was also motivated by the fact that his attempts to obtain jobs for some of his relatives as manual laborers were successfully frustrated by a henchman of the MP in the community.

This individual was N. Siyathu, a small farmer who also held a job as an overseer (*kankanama*) for the National Agricultural Diversification and Settlement Authority's project on the nearby Saman Kande estate. Together with the monk of the Rangama temple, Siyathu may be said to constitute the present power elite in the community. The two men are, however, dissimilar in many respects. The Rangama monk is a Goyigama from an old, established kin group. Siyathu is a Batgam. Siyathu is a diehard UNP supporter, whereas the monk's political sympathies have been ambiguous and fluctuating. What they have in common is the backing and support of the Naranhena MP, and this enables them to wield power by manipulating the distribution of resources of high value to people in the community.

In theory, every person in the electorate has access to the MP. Yet, most people realize that making a personal request to the MP is one thing and having it fulfilled another. The advantages of working through a person known to be favored by the MP is therefore readily understood by people in the Naranhena electorate. Acting as intermediaries, the monk and Siyathu have secured a variety of favors for people in the community. On one occasion, Siyathu obtained a conductor's job on the Saman Kande estate for N. Dayananda, a political activist who until just before the 1977 election had been a staunch SLFP supporter. It is likely that the MP and Siyathu thought it advisable to give Dayananda this post, over the claims of more educated persons who had enjoyed a long-standing association with the UNP, in order to cement Dayananda's new allegiance to the party.

The henchman's role may also be used in a negative way. Henchmen can remove people's names from employment lists that are routinely sent to the MP's office for approval. Siyathu frequently does this, because his loyalty to the UNP is so obsessive that he cannot countenance anyone with SLFP sympathies getting a job under a UNP government.

The power that the Rangama monk and Siyathu wield in the community is not limited to the supply or withholding of individual benefits from the state. They also exert wide-ranging and often negative influence over community affairs, in large part because villagers know that henchmen operate under the aegis of the MP. Villagers are aware that the actions and decisions of henchmen will be sanctioned and upheld by the MP. In this context, opposition to their wishes is largely futile. For example, because he was not elected president of the Devideniya Rural Development Society, Siyathu successfully petitioned the MP to refuse to register the society on the grounds that there was an SLFP conspiracy to dominate it. The Rural Development Officer, who is responsible for the promotion of such societies, tried on two further occasions to establish a Rural Development Society in Devideniya, but finally abandoned the attempt in the face of Siyathu's intransigence. In this case, however, Siyathu's victory was not complete, since his desire to become president of the society was never realized. But in the case of the Saman Kande Workers' Welfare Society, he was able to put his aggressive UNP stand to good use. He managed to undermine his main rival for the presidency, an SLFP supporter, by stressing that the society would be impotent if it had a known SLFP sympathizer as president. As a result of this pressure, Siyathu was duly elected president.

Of the two members of the power elite in this community, the monk of the Rangama temple is in greater favor with the MP. This is reflected in the greater influence he has over local affairs. His actions do not run into the measure of opposition that Siyathu occasionally encounters. For instance, when a Rural Development Society was to be set up in Rangama, the monk did not have to manoeuvre for support, but decided in advance who the office bearers would be, and assigned various people to propose and second his nominees. When the Rural Development Officer arrived for the meeting, these nominees—M. Alwis (a Batgam) and the monk himself—were elected president and secretary without opposition.

An interesting example of the unbridled nature of the monk's power and influence in local affairs, which he is able to exercise under the protective aegis of the MP's favor, is the way in which he secured domination over the local Sarvodaya movement. This 'self-help' movement is one cherished by planners and urban intellectuals for its potential to stimulate community-based rural development, but the 'power plays' engineered by the monk to wrest control of the local organization from a lesser powerholder in the community suggest that its success may be contingent on factors rather different from the spirit of 'community' on which its more optimistic supporters suppose it to rely.

The first Sarvodaya organization in the Naranhena area was started by the Rangama *grama sevaka*. As with most activities he initiated, the *grama sevaka* embarked on this project with his caste fellows from Devideniya, and the first meeting was held at the Devideniya school in February 1979. Although this particular branch was set up to serve five villages, including Rangama, the meeting was dominated by the *grama sevaka* and the people from Devideniya. Dayananda from Devideniya was elected president of the local organization's 'youth circle.' The Rangama monk was not invited to attend either this meeting or the second meeting held in March, but was belatedly invited to the third meeting by the Sarvodaya 'youth circle' secretary, a young man from a neighboring village. At this meeting the monk spoke enthusiastically about the aims of Sarvodaya, but was privately cynical about the whole endeavor. He told me that despite Sarvodaya's grandiose ideals, the local organization had been set up by the *grama sevaka* and certain Devideniya people for their own benefit.

Although it proposed innumerable rural development schemes, Sarvodaya achieved nothing concrete in the Naranhena area in its first five months. It was agreed that the initial project would be a pre-school for children under five, and the *grama sevaka's* mistress was chosen to be the teacher. But no one was prepared to donate a plot of land or a building to house the pre-school, and neither the higher Sarvodaya officials in the region nor the local officeholders appeared to know how to proceed with the project. Attendance at Sarvodaya meetings in the Devideniya school dwindled and the organization gradually ground to a halt.

Meanwhile, the monk contacted Sarvodaya officials at the regional level through the secretary of the local 'youth circle'. From

subsequent events, the following bargain appears to have been struck. The monk would donate a plot of temple land for the pre-school and would make available the preaching hall until the building was constructed. In exchange, Rangama village would be made the central point of Sarvodaya activity in the area.

In August 1979, a well attended meeting of Sarvodaya took place in the Rangama temple. Although Dayananda and the *grama sevaka* were present, the monk had now become the central figure. He organized a 'mothers' circle,' which soon became a puppet group through which he could run Sarvodaya in the way he wanted. A pre-school was established in the preaching hall, but the *grama sevaka's* mistress was no longer the teacher. Claiming that an 'outsider' (from Devideniya) was not suitable to teach in a Rangama pre-school, the monk selected Malini, a Rangama girl, instead. Since their role in Sarvodaya had been usurped by the monk, Dayananda and the *grama sevaka* stopped attending Sarvodaya meetings. By the time I left the community, the local Sarvodaya organization, ranging from the selection of office-holders to the distribution of benefits, was completely under the monk's control. His decisions were never opposed and he ran Sarvodaya as if it were his private company. The result was widespread disillusion with Sarvodaya activities. Many villagers, including parents of children attending the pre-school, felt that corruption was rife at all levels, and that those involved in Sarvodaya were motivated not by enthusiasm to develop the rural areas but by the hope of material gain. They alleged that Sarvodaya funds and materials intended for the pre-school were being misused. Malini herself was dissatisfied with the whole enterprise and told me that she and her assistant were waiting for an opportunity to resign from their posts.

Even more striking than the monk's dominance over Sarvodaya was the way he manipulated and controlled the principal benefit from the only development project that the community has received in many years—the supply of electricity. Under the village electrification scheme funded by the Asian Development Bank, 15 villages in the Naranhena area, including Rangama, were to receive electricity. Long before work started on the project, the inhabitants of the community knew that the monk was actively involved in it. He had visited all the houses situated along or near the Rangama road, and made a list of those who wished to have electricity. For this reason and also because the dispensary, a cooperative store,

and the largest school in the community were situated towards the end of the main Rangama road, most people reasonably assumed that the line would continue along the road for approximately one mile past the turn-off to the Rangama temple.

As the months passed no definite information about the project reached the community and many people became anxious about the precise path the line was going to take. When construction crews arrived, several individuals (my landlady among them) asked the monk whether the electricity line was going to be constructed along the Rangama road as expected. The monk told them they had no cause for concern and that the project was proceeding smoothly.

One month later, word leaked out from the construction crew that the line was only to be taken as far as the Rangama temple on the road newly made motorable and named after the MP, which branched off the main road. While people with houses on the main Rangama road past the temple turn-off were annoyed and upset, the monk was pleased to inform me that he was getting electricity to his doorstep at government expense. The disappointed people began to besiege the resident linesman from the Ceylon Electricity Board, demanding an explanation and requesting an extension of the line. The linesman advised them to petition the appropriate authorities.

The linesman could do little else. From all accounts, he and all other employees of the Ceylon Electricity Board working in the area were under instructions from the MP to complete the project in a way that would please the monk. Soon everyone understood that no step could be taken without the monk's approval. The linesman confided in me that the monk determined the exact positioning of the connections, and thus which particular houses received electricity and which did not. The best indication of the monk's control was the fact that each time the Superintendent Engineer from Kandy visited the area, he proceeded directly to the Rangama temple to discuss the project's progress. The monk had effectively become the local director of the Rangama electricity project.

The nature of the power exercised by the monk and Siyathu is quite different from that of their predecessors. They depend upon the protective aegis of the MP and upon his largesse and interest in allowing them to control the distribution of state patronage. But because they lack any independent resources of their own, they

cannot be considered 'brokers' in the conventional sense.⁷ They cannot, for instance, be considered managers of 'vote banks,' who can trade their ability to deliver votes for favors from the MP. Siyathu and the monk are better considered as sources of information who provide the MP with inside knowledge about the electorate, which he needs in order to further his own and his party's interests by maximizing returns from the power and patronage at his disposal.

This lends an element of reciprocity to the relationship between the MP and henchmen, but because information cannot be monopolized the balance of reciprocity is always, unambiguously, in the MP's favor. Because of the considerable advantages attached to being a henchman, there is no dearth of candidates for the position. The MP is therefore always at liberty to choose his henchmen, not vice versa. In doing so, the attributes he looks for are not control over a particular resource, possession of a particular skill, or evidence of long-standing and devoted party allegiance, but evidence of trust and personal loyalty to the MP himself. This means that officials of local party organizations are by no means automatic candidates for henchmanship.

In the Rangama/Devideniya community, the henchman most favored by the MP is not Siyathu, the diehard UNP supporter, but the far less 'committed' monk, who was until recently an SLFP supporter. During the 1977 election campaign, the monk had initially supported the SLFP candidate, and had even allowed him to use the Rangama temple for a campaign meeting. The SLFP candidate's reluctance to promise certain improvements to the Rangama temple alienated the monk, who thereafter supported the UNP candidate. Ironically, in a system of power that has evolved through competitive party politics, the intensity of party support is not of crucial importance either in the MP's choice of henchman or in the degree of support and backing that he gives them.

This emphasis on personal trust and loyalty means that the henchman's power is essentially unstable and impermanent. If the relationship between the MP and a particular henchman breaks down, the latter ceases to have power and the MP simply selects another henchman. Moreover, as is clearly revealed in the history of electoral politics since independence, with few exceptions a

⁷ A broker is 'an individual who classically plays the role of intermediary through utilising his controls at each level to the advantage of the other' (Adams 1970:320).

'safe' seat does not exist in Sri Lanka. So the temporary nature of the henchman's tenure is effectively institutionalized. Between 1970 and 1977, for instance, neither the monk nor Siyathu was a powerholder or a member of the power elite. During that time B. Jayasena, a henchman of the previous SLFP MP, was the principal powerholder in the community. The monk and Siyathu became powerholders only in 1977, and their power will last no longer than the UNP and present MP for Naranhena remain in office.

The impermanent and dependent character of the henchmen's power makes it almost impossible for them to assume the role of leaders. So, too, does the way they are obliged to wield that power. The distribution of scarce state patronage inevitably entails discrimination on political and even personal grounds. Since both the monk and Siyathu operate in an atmosphere of secrecy and favoritism, neither can call upon the respect and admiration of his fellow villagers. Neither has followers or supporters.

Although people may praise Siyathu to his face, and although they continue to give the monk the respect accorded to the Buddhist monkhood, in private they frequently express resentment at the activities of both men. Acts of overt opposition are rare, but as long as anonymity can be preserved, many people in Rangama/Devideniya are quick to express covert antagonism. Numerous petitions have been sent to the MP and the National Agricultural Diversification and Settlement Authority to have Siyathu dismissed from his post as overseer on the Saman Kande estate. Other forms of covert protest have been employed against the monk. The Rangama temple police book, signed by the police every night, has twice been stolen, and in January 1980 two of the monk's dogs were poisoned. I also learnt from a reliable source that the monk is so suspicious of the intentions of certain families that, when it is their turn to provide the daily meals for the temple, he accepts the food but does not eat it for fear of being poisoned. Perhaps the most pointed act of symbolic opposition to the monk's power and his connection to the MP was the theft of the signboard marking the road—named after the MP—to the Rangama temple.

The Nature of Disunity in the Rangama/Devideniya Community

The demise of leadership does not necessarily erase the possibility

of effective collective action at the local level. It could be argued, for example, that the diminished salience of local inequalities in the post-independence era has created an environment more conducive to collective action, and has thus obviated the need for well defined leader-follower relationships. But, although the structure of inequality has indeed undergone significant changes in Rangama/Devideniya, particularly with regard to patterns of economic dependency and caste etiquette, the effect has been to sharpen, not reduce, divisiveness within the community, thus rendering ineffective rural development projects based on the ideal of popular participation.

Let us look at the class hierarchy in this connection. In Rangama/Devideniya, it is differences in the amount of land controlled that create cleavages of wealth and material well-being. The term 'control' as used here is not synonymous with ownership. Rather, control over land is understood to mean control over the product or income-yielding potential of the land. Such control is gained when there is secure expectation of a regular stream of income from a given parcel of land, for example through ownership, secure tenancy,⁸ or certain types of mortgage and lease. On the basis of their control over income-yielding land gained through one or more of the above means, the inhabitants of Rangama/Devideniya may be divided into four classes. As Table 8.2 illustrates, sharp disparities exist in the degree of wealth and material well-being that villagers enjoy. Seventy-five per cent of the households in the community control 2 acres or less of income-yielding land, and of this number more than half have less than 1/2 acre. Many of the poor, especially those at the lower end of the scale, are just able to eke out a bare subsistence with the help of government welfare

⁸ In contemporary Rangama/Devideniya, tenants protected by the Paddy Lands Act have a permanent, virtually inalienable, right to a proportion of the product of the land they cultivate. Although the crop is shared, in net terms the proportion of the product tenants receive is less than half because tenants bear 80 per cent of the costs of cultivation. The relationship between gross income and the cost of paddy cultivation in this region is such that when tenants' cultivation costs are taken into account, their share of the total net income is one-third. (A detailed analysis of cost and income sharing between landlord and tenant may be found in Gunasekera-O'Grady 1984:377.) Contemporary landlords in the community, therefore, have effectively lost permanent control of one-third of the income-yielding potential of lands cultivated by their tenants. Since tenants are secure in the expectation of one-third of the net product of the land they cultivate, control over tenanted land may be considered as being divided between landlord and tenant, the tenant having control of one-third and the landlord of two-thirds of such land.

Table 8.2
Class Categories in Rangama/Devideniya

Class	Income Yielding Land per Household (Acres)*	Number of Households	Percentage of Households	Total Income Yielding Land Controlled			Percentage of Income Yielding Land
				A	R	P	
Rich	4.00 and more	18	8.5	216	0	1	52.9
Middle	2.00 - 3.99	32	16.5	91	1	9	22.4
Poor	0.50 - 1.99	78	33.1	78	3	25	19.3
Very poor	Less than 0.50	108	41.9	22	0	1	5.4
Total		236	100.0	408	0	36	100.0

Note: *Refers to land controlled, not owned.

A = acres (1 acre = 0.4 hectare); R = roods (4 roods = 1 acre); P = perches (40 perches = 1 rood).

provisions. In contrast, 18 households in the community (8.5 per cent) control over 50 per cent of all land controlled by residents.

Despite persistent inequalities in the control of land, class relations in the community have undergone significant change. In recent decades, the control of the richest class over material resources and the concomitant economic dependence of the indigent upon them have been undermined by welfare legislation and the redistributive policies of national governments. For instance, the Paddy Lands Act and the four Village Expansion Schemes in the vicinity of the community have enabled 47 households to gain control of sufficient land to remove them from direct dependence upon the upper stratum. The 1972 land reforms have also had a significant impact on economic relations within the community. This was not due to any direct redistribution within Rangama/Devideniya—none of the rich households lost any of their land—but was a consequence of vesting control of estate land in the Land Reform Commission. In the first place, 54 acres of the nearby Beligoda estate were divided into one acre blocks and distributed to land-poor or landless families. Second, the presence of a timber forest on the Saman Kande estate, which the former owner had planted for his matchbox factory, led to the construction of a pencil factory in the Naranhena electorate in which some members of the community obtained employment. Third, the transport of timber from Saman Kande to the factory required the construction of a motorable road through Devideniya, and this too provided employment for many villagers. Most importantly, perhaps, large sections of both estates, which had been run as collective farms under the SLFP government, were handed over to the National Agricultural Diversification and Settlement Authority (NADSA) in 1978. NADSA is a pioneer statutory organization whose function is the cultivation of non-traditional cash crops with hired labor and the distribution of the land to these laborers once it begins to yield an income. All these laborers received 1½ acres of garden land in 1983 when the NADSA land was distributed.

The provision of alternative sources of income and employment has led to a new assertiveness on the part of the lower classes in the community. They do not readily comply with the wishes of the rich, and indeed often actively oppose them. Many, for instance, petitioned the Assistant Government Agent and the Electricity Board to protest the fact that the linesman had been bribed by certain rich people to divert the electricity line past the wealthy people's houses.

This new assertiveness of erstwhile dependents has in turn effectively alienated the wealthy from participation in local affairs. They are tight-fisted when contributing to local projects, such as drama groups and temple festivals, and even when externally sponsored schemes are introduced, they show little desire to bring about improvements that might benefit the community as a whole. Indicative of this attitude is the way the three car owners never give lifts to neighbors whom they see walking home from the bazaar.

Relationships between the poor and rich strata are thus distant and uneasy. The indigent resent the arrogance and exclusiveness of the rich and the latter's disinclination to contribute to the welfare of the poor. Older villagers contrast the behavior of the contemporary rich with that of their predecessors who, they claim, frequently gave rice and coconuts to poor people, and on occasion even small plots of land. *Noblesse oblige* no longer prevails in the community because the wealthy do not receive the subservience of the poor in return for their largesse. Latent class antagonism is pervasive. As one rich man put it, 'Poor peoples' arrogance prevents them from working for us or asking us for anything. They'd rather do without than ask for help.'

In caste relations, as in class relations there has been a significant attenuation of conventional patterns of subservience. Inequalities in dress, forms of address, and exchange of caste services are no more than a shadow of what they once were. In the administrative sphere, the appointment of salaried officials to local administrative positions has, to an unprecedented degree, brought low caste persons into positions of authority.

These changes have not, however, led to a decline of caste divisiveness in Rangama/Devideniya. As with changes in the distribution of wealth, they appear on the contrary to have exacerbated group tensions. The presence of a Batgam *grama sevaka*, for example, has led non-Batgam castes to close ranks against him. They allege, correctly, that he spends a disproportionate amount of time with his caste fellows. But that he chooses to do so is hardly surprising. The Batgam inhabitants of Devideniya cooperate with the *grama sevaka* and welcome his presence. In contrast, the Rangama Goyigama often fail to invite him for village functions and even when he turns up uninvited, as he frequently does, they do not accord him a position of prominence. In other words, the Batgam *grama sevaka* is simply not allowed to assume a position of importance in Rangama affairs because the Goyigama resent his appointment.

Caste divisiveness often finds expression in violence, particularly where inter-caste liaisons or marriages are at issue, but this is not in itself a distinctly modern phenomenon. What does seem to be a new and unsettling feature of caste relations is the tendency towards caste segregation. This appears to be a direct result of the liberalization of caste etiquette, for the attenuation of social privileges and obligations based on caste status does not foster unity. Those groups that stand to lose their privileges resent the assumption of liberties entailed by other groups' denial of their privileges. The Goyigama in Rangama/Devideniya, for instance, feel that the liberties presumed by the low castes in dress, forms of address, and so on, are highly improper, and deplore the fact that 'people who deserve respect don't receive it anymore.' Moreover, while some castes (such as the Gallat and Vahumpura) resent acts of discrimination perpetrated by the Goyigama, they are in no hurry to treat, or be treated, as equals by the Batgam. Interaction between castes thus places individuals of all castes at risk of being insulted—the higher by the lower flouting caste etiquette, the lower by the higher maintaining it. Caste segregation offers protection against such risks. Segregation is, therefore, not a simple manifestation of high caste exclusiveness, but characterizes relations among all castes. A Vahumpura, for example, is eager to avoid contact not only with the Batgam, but also with the Goyigama.

Segregation is present in both social and economic activities. Social visiting is hardly practised across caste lines, and most school children have never been inside the houses of classmates of different castes. In the economic sphere, certain types of inter-caste contact are unavoidable, as when the landlord and tenant or landowner and laborer belong to different castes. Nevertheless, every effort is made to keep inessential contact to a minimum in agricultural activities. The mixed-caste cooperative labor teams that together engaged in paddy cultivation in the past are a rarity today. Even in transplanting, which is often carried out by school-girls, there is a marked preference for cooperative labor teams to be caste exclusive.

Caste segregation also extends into the religious sphere. Until recently all castes in the community worshipped at the Rangama *raja maha viharaya* (Buddhist temple), which belongs to the Siamese sect. In the 1940s, however, rich Batgam and Vahumpura individuals sponsored the construction of two new temples. This has enabled

the majority of Batgam and Vahumpura people to maintain a high degree of caste exclusiveness in religious affairs.

Religious exclusiveness is not confined to Buddhist temple activities. It also characterizes the performance of domestic religious rituals. In contrast to the situation a few decades ago, when Buddhist merit-making rituals (*pinkam*) brought together members of different castes in a spirit of cooperation, merit-making in Goyigama, Vahumpura and Batgam houses is now caste exclusive. Only caste fellows are asked to help in providing the breakfast and luncheon feasts for the monks. Likewise only caste fellows attend the all-night chant of sacred texts (*pirit*).

While caste exclusiveness denies members of other castes the privilege of participating directly in the ritual, the fiction that all are welcome to gain merit is nevertheless maintained through the ingenious institution of a voluntary public appeal. In order to allow non-caste fellows to contribute towards the ritual, a tray of betel leaves and a book are left in a village shop prior to the ritual. In this way, any criticism that caste segregation is being applied to religious affairs is forestalled. All who wish to gain merit from the ritual are enabled to do so by placing a donation on the tray and recording the amount given in the book. Thus, merit can be gained by all without compromising the caste exclusiveness of the ritual performance itself.

Social divisiveness in the community has been enormously increased by the politicization of village life. Its extent may be gauged by the fact that in Rangama/Devideniya, it is considered almost unnatural to be neutral as far as party loyalty is concerned, and those who claim to be so are simply not believed. Deep-rooted party antagonisms reach their peak of intensity in election years. After the UNP victory in 1977, supporters of rival parties refused to work together on cooperative labor (*attam*) teams, and their children shunned each other in school. SLFP supporters were publicly insulted. As they collected their rice rations, UNP supporters would jeer 'You voted for the SLFP but now you are eating from our government.' Jubilant UNP members went to SLFP houses and forced the residents to worship pictures of President Jayawardene and the new MP for Naranhena. A few SLFP houses were stoned and burned. Fearing harassment and physical injury, the president of the Rangama SLFP organization left the village, and SLFP-appointed laborers on the Saman Kande

cooperative, who had received their jobs under SLFP patronage, fled from their workplaces.

Although the intensity of political party antagonism diminishes after each election, rivalry between the UNP and the SLFP is a constant feature of life in Rangama/Devideniya. The Devideniya monk, in contrast to his Rangama counterpart, is an SLFP member. He has ensured that the lay organization of temple activities is dominated by SLFP supporters, and he allows temple festivals to be used as an arena for demonstrating loyalty to the SLFP, for example by using blue decorations (the color of the SLFP), thanking the former SLFP government for improving the village, and so on. UNP members are, therefore, reluctant to involve themselves in temple activities beyond performing the duty of providing meals for the monk. Party rivalry in the community has the potential to erupt into violence over even minor provocations. In March 1980, almost three years after the general election, the government's announcement of an increase in the price of bread led to a violent confrontation between rival party supporters. When an SLFP supporter had the temerity to remark in a Rangama shop that even if the government raised the price of a pound of bread to Rs. 10, he would still be able to afford it, a UNP sympathizer who heard his remark correctly read in it an insult to the UNP and a hint that the party was failing to help the people. The ensuing brawl was so serious that people were hospitalized and a court case was initiated.

The demise of leadership on the one hand, and the intense divisiveness of social relations on the other, have effectively undermined any initiatives towards local participation in community development. This is clearly evident in the dismal performance of local institutions and organizations, for despite the efforts of government and administrators, experiments in local participation have failed. While a number of rural people hold elective or appointed office, this is a result of the multiplicity of local level institutions and indicates nothing about the actual level of participation in, or effectiveness of, these institutions. In Rangama/Devideniya, it is usual that after an initial meeting in which office holders are elected, the organization continues to exist in name only. The Rangama Rural Development Society is a case in point. After the 1977 elections, the UNP government decreed that all Rural Development Societies were to be reconstituted. The newly 'elected' president of the Rangama society belonged to the Batgam

caste. The Goyigama of Rangama, who constitute over 40 percent of the village population, were bitterly opposed to a low caste person holding office and refused to become involved with the organization. The Batgam president told me that a large part of the problem centered around their opposition to his occupying a superior seat on the dais at meetings. A few meetings were held, after which the Rangama Rural Development Society ceased to function.

Collective participation in agricultural activities is just as unsuccessful. Only a handful of farmers bother to attend meetings of the Farmers' Society. And the difficulty of getting farmers to engage in voluntary collective labor (*sramadana*) is so acute that the Divisional Officer has even suggested that they be inveigled to attend on the promise of free refreshments provided by the Agrarian Services Center. In a community divided by caste, class and party allegiance, the inability to foster collective action is in large part a consequence of the absence of leaders. Contemporary Rangama/Devideniya does not have men or women who inspire sufficient confidence to enable their fellow villagers to overcome their disunity and engage in communal effort.

The Impact of Egalitarian Ideologies

A resurgence of leadership in the future seems unlikely. In recent decades, the cultural conceptions of the Rangama/Devideniya people, influenced by external factors, have inhibited the appearance of followers, and a leader who has no followers is no leader at all. Principal among these external influences has been the democratic ideology espoused by national governments since independence. Parliamentary government and the imperatives of party competition have meant that ideology at the national level has carried with it the espousal of democratic and socialist ideals. Local receptivity to this national ideology has been facilitated by the wide extension of education, which has not only made it easier for villagers to understand national issues, but is also in itself a practical illustration of the ideal of equality of opportunity. Exposure to democratic and socialist ideologies at the national level has not, however, changed the Rangama/Devideniya people's evaluation of caste, class and

power uniformly. Egalitarian ideologies have had a far greater impact upon the practice of power than on caste and class practices.

In order to understand ideological diversity in the Rangama/Devideniya community, it is necessary to distinguish between two components in the evaluation of inequality: evaluation of the stratification system as such, on the one hand, and evaluation of the way the system operates, on the other. The former refers to the evaluation of the very existence of ranked strata in relation to a particular aspect of inequality, whereas the latter evaluates the empirical patterns of interaction between strata, the way in which different groups within the stratification system actually behave toward each other. In the case of wealth and caste, egalitarian ideologies have affected people's evaluation of the way these systems actually 'operate' in their society, but the majority still accept the principle of stratification. In contrast, there has been a comprehensive rejection of stratification in the dimension of power.

With regard to caste ideology, low castes today denounce the way the caste system actually operates and generally repudiate inherited forms of caste etiquette. But there is not necessarily widespread rejection of the principle of hierarchical differentiation based on birth status. A negative evaluation of the caste system itself is prominent only among some middle-aged and young Batgam. Older Batgam appear to accept as legitimate the presence of a caste hierarchy in their society. At the risk of annoying their educated offspring, they continue to abide by the rules of caste etiquette. They would not, for example, want Goyigama to accept food from them, since they feel 'it is not right to pollute good people' (*honda minissu indul karana eka hari na*). Some low caste persons in the community conform to caste etiquette even in their interactions with economic dependents. My landlady, a middle-aged Vahumpura woman from one of the richest households in the community, addressed a tenant of aristocratic origin by the honorific '*bandara mahatmaya*' and her Goyigama laborers by the honorific '*ralahami*.'

The general attitude towards caste of most low caste persons is marked not by approval or disapproval but rather by a sense of inevitability and acceptance. The Gallat and Vahumpura, for example, are placed well enough in the hierarchy to contemplate its existence with equanimity. Thus, many low caste people in Rangama/Devideniya do not deny the superior birth status of the

high castes. What they take issue with is the translation of that superiority into patterns of behavior that entail privilege and discrimination.

As with caste, it is among the lower economic strata that the most striking changes in perceptions of material inequality have taken place. Even a short visit to the Rangama/Devideniya community will confirm the widespread antagonism harbored by the poorer strata against the rich. This antagonism derives particularly from dissatisfaction with the way in which rich people behave. It has little to do with a negative evaluation of material inequality itself. On the contrary, the system of stratification in which certain groups are economically better off than others is considered legitimate by the vast majority of people in Rangama/Devideniya.

Villagers do not expect everyone to be equally well off and do not look forward to a classless society in which land is distributed equally among all the inhabitants. The 'non-rich' may be envious of the 'rich,' but they do not question the legitimacy of rich people possessing more than they do. Land is highly valued by all, and the inalienability of private property is a notion strongly held by rich and poor alike. For example, except for the significant number of tenants who gained security of tenure under it, the Paddy Lands Act is looked upon with disfavor, primarily because it contradicts the proprietary view that the owner of a plot of land should have control over it. Proprietors refer to the process of the act taking effect as 'fields being captured' (*kumburu ahuvuna*). Most tenants feel that the landlord's right to half the crop is fair as long as he does not try to evict them. For instance, M. R. Podiappuhami, who belongs to the poor stratum, took his legal share of three-quarters for a few years after his landlord tried unsuccessfully to evict him, but once he was confident that the landlord would not attempt to evict him again, he reverted to the traditional half share. In other words, as in the case of caste, egalitarian ideologies have led to a negative evaluation of the way economic differences operate in society, but not of economic stratification itself.

In Rangama/Devideniya, widespread rejection of stratification does occur, but not in connection with material inequality or birth status. It is in the dimension of power that there has been a comprehensive rejection of stratification. With the exception of the rich who regret their declining ability to dictate to the poor and

impose their will upon them, there is universal disapprobation of a stratification system in which some people are subservient (*yatatbhave*) to others. People of all strata in Rangama/Devideniya are adamant that relationships of dominance and subordination have declined markedly in recent decades. In this regard contemporary society, according to them, is greatly to be preferred to the society of their forebears because no individual has to bow and scrape before others. Their own explanations of this phenomenon invariably makes reference to the fact that wealth no longer entails the ability to influence others:

People are developed (*diyunu vela*) enough these days not to accept being dominated by a wealthy man.

Today, people are not frightened of another's wealth—a rich man cannot order around even the poorest man today.

Today, the country has improved. Even the poor have money. If you have enough to eat and drink you need not be subservient to anyone else, however much he has.

Such statements are not simply rhetorical. Not only the high caste and the rich, but also the low caste and the poor, display a remarkably independent attitude of mind. This new assertiveness is perhaps best epitomized in the relationship between villagers and officials which previously, by all accounts, was characterized by a high degree of respectfulness on the part of the former. Today, when farmers in the community bother to attend seasonal cultivation meetings, they are not afraid to express their opinions, or to contradict and occasionally ridicule official advice, even in the middle of an official's speech.

The corollary of this confidence and self-respect is to regard as demeaning any action that might hint at subordination to another. In Rangama/Devideniya, people try as far as possible to avoid certain actions that have become potent symbols of subservience, such as climbing trees to harvest fruit. Until recently, poorer people were quite ready to perform this type of work for payment in kind (for instance, one coconut for every tree climbed). Today such work is considered degrading and the wealthy in Rangama/Devideniya find it increasingly difficult to find anyone willing to harvest their fruit trees. Most poor people would feel insulted if asked to do so.

The development of democracy in Sri Lanka has thus not only disqualified the old rural power elite from assuming the role of leadership, but has also created an ideological environment inhospitable to the emergence of followers. It may be noted in conclusion that this phenomenon is not restricted to one small quarter of South Asia. Writing of Arunpur in North India, Sharma records the villagers' claim that 'today no one obeys anyone; all think themselves big' (Sharma 1977:143). Here too, the widespread negative evaluation of subservience has made the role of follower one which is looked upon with disdain. Thus, the indications are that the demise of leadership is neither a limited nor a temporary phenomenon.

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9

Agrarian Change and the Struggle for Community in Kukulewa, Anuradhapura District

JAMES BROW

Introduction

The agrarian economy of Kukulewa, a village in Anuradhapura district, underwent massive changes in the thirty years from 1953 to 1983.¹ Increased production for the market and the rapid spread of wage labor, which were the most profound of the changes, seriously threatened a form of social order the fundamental features of which appear to have been continuously reproduced, with only minor modification, through many previous generations.²

This paper examines the agrarian changes of the last thirty years

¹ Field research was conducted from 1968 to 1970, under a grant from the Smithsonian Institution, and in 1983, under grants from the Joint Committee on South Asia of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the University of Texas at Austin. P. G. Somaratne made an invaluable contribution in 1983, both in collecting the data and in helping me to understand their significance.

² The reader is asked to take seriously the qualifications attached to the latter part of this assertion. I do not mean to claim, for example, that social life in Kukulewa was entirely unaffected by British colonial rule. But such interventions as the establishment of individual property rights in land and the demand for tax,

as they affected, and were affected by, struggles to sustain the village community.³ Two aspects of this complex process are emphasized. One is the village's incorporation into larger economic and political systems, which considerably reduced the level of economic independence that had formerly been an important basis of the local community. The other is the changing normative assessment of the social relations of production and, in particular, of wage labor, which as late as the 1950s was still considered fundamentally antithetical to the traditional values of community.

Given the diverse connotations of the two terms, to describe Kukulewa in 1953 as a 'traditional community' may be seriously misleading, especially since my account will necessarily be brief, so I will try to make myself as clear as possible. By 'traditional' I refer to a situation where social action in general, and the exercise of authority in particular, are principally legitimated by appeal to immemorial custom. In no way does this imply the absence either of conflict or of change, although I do want to suggest that prior to the 1950s the pace of social change in Kukulewa was slower than it later became, and that it was mainly quantitative and incremental rather than qualitative and structural. Thus the first half of the twentieth century saw a steady increase both in Kukulewa's population and in the extent of its irrigated land, but there was no decisive change in the social relations of production comparable to the shift from sharecropping tenancy (*ande*) to wage labor that took place after 1953.

'Community' refers here simply to the sense of belonging together, with the notion of a '*sense* of belonging together' being intended to capture both an idea and an experience. Where that sense receives institutional support from codes of conduct that prescribe distinct forms of behavior appropriate to people who are supposed to belong together, I describe those codes as communal norms. I also observe the convention and convenience of using

however radical their long-term implications may have been, did not fundamentally transform the social relations of production during the colonial period. At the same time, I am mindful of Jonathan Spencer's point (this volume) that outside observers have almost always been persuaded that 'rural decline' set in about thirty years before they wrote, whenever that was.

³ For accounts of recent social change in Kukulewa that focus on aspects other than those emphasized here, see Brow (1988, 1990a, 1990b).

'community' to describe a place where the sense of belonging together exists, either as an idea or as an experience (as in 'the village community'), as well as the people who share that sense ('the village community' again), but there is no assumption of either egalitarianism, autonomy or self-sufficiency. I shall suggest that all these characteristics were present in Kukulewa in some significant measure, and that they helped sustain the sense of community, but they do not define it. Nor do I mean to imply, by describing Kukulewa as a community, either that social life in the village was ever perfectly harmonious or that the villagers always subordinated pursuit of their individual interests to the discipline of communal norms.

The next two sections of the paper summarily examine, first, the village as it was in the early 1950s and, then, the major changes that have occurred subsequently. This is followed by an analysis of household strategies in 1983 that reveals both how villagers tried to deal with the altered conditions of agriculture and how their agrarian practice was informed by, as it informed, communal norms. The relationship between symbolic and material dimensions of agrarian change is examined again from a slightly different perspective in the following section, where the focus is on the material means and moral basis of influence within the village.

Sketch of the Traditional Community

The traditional social organization of community in Kukulewa was both segmentary and hierarchical, and was predominantly structured in the idioms of kinship and caste. Those who belonged together in the same family (*pavula*) were, for the most part, also members of the same village (*gama*), which in turn formed part of the larger community of the caste (*variga*). Which of these segmentary divisions was the most salient varied with the particular context of social action, but all rested on the same principles. Apart from the internal hierarchies of age and gender, each defined an egalitarian community of kinsmen and caste fellows. At the same time the Vedda *variga*, to which the people of Kukulewa belonged, was only one caste in a system of castes that also constituted a community, although in this case the structure of community was hierarchical.

Distinctions of caste and the commonality of kinship served to promote a collective identity that was focused most sharply on the village itself. Other villages of the Vedda *variga* were some distance away, while the neighboring villages with which the people of Kukulewa had regular dealings were all communities of different *variga*. In most practical situations, the expressions 'village people' (*game minissu*), 'our kinsmen' (*ape nayo*) and 'our people' (*ape minissu*) were used more or less interchangeably, as well as frequently, to invoke a collective identity that distinguished the people of Kukulewa from their neighbors. Yet, those neighbors did also participate in the traditional caste system and were themselves distinguished from more complete outsiders, such as Tamils and Low Country Sinhalese, who had no place in the traditional hierarchy of the region, although some Low Country Sinhalese could be included in the even more extensive, if still more diffuse, community of Sinhalese Buddhism.

The boundaries of the village community and the distinctive identity of those it contained were continuously reproduced by a vast array of conventional practices, both ceremonial and mundane, that virtually encompassed the whole of ordinary life. These practices ranged from occasional offerings to the village's protective deities and the recital of myths that celebrated the unique qualities of the Vedda *variga* to the habitual use of kinship terms in mutual address and residence in a village inhabited solely by members of a single *variga*. In between were all kinds of customary codes of conduct, such as commensalism and endogamy, that differentiated the way villagers behaved among themselves from the way they behaved towards others. Included among these codes were the norms that governed agrarian practice.

The traditional organization of agriculture in Kukulewa has been analyzed in detail elsewhere (Brow 1976, 1978a, 1978b) and will only be summarized here. Agricultural ecology itself provided a material basis for the sense of village community. Like most other villages in the district, Kukulewa possessed its own independent tank (*vava*), from which its paddy fields were irrigated. The village houses were clustered close to the tank bund and were surrounded on all other sides by jungle that was used for *chena* (shifting) cultivation and the collection of undomesticated foodstuffs.

The social relations of production in the two forms of agriculture were very differently organized. *Chena* was cultivated in the jungle

surrounding the village, on land to which all members of the community enjoyed the right of access. The technology was simple, and each household normally cultivated its own plots independently, using its own labor power. Millet (*kurakkan*) was the staple, accompanied by a variety of subsidiary crops. The product was destined for domestic consumption. Paddy land, by contrast, was individually held, but its cultivation demanded close coordination among the various households since everyone depended on irrigation from the same village tank. It also rested on a more complex technology that included the use of draft animals as well as human energy, and it typically required at times the application of more labor than could be mobilized within the proprietor's own household. Thus, *chena* and paddy cultivation manifested different combinations of individual and collective features. Households cultivated their *chenas* independently, but the land itself was held to be communal property, while paddy cultivators enjoyed private ownership but were obliged to cooperate in production.

Kinship structured both forms of production. Possession of paddy land was properly transferred only by inheritance, although sale and mortgage (*ukas*) were not uncommon. Kinship also gave the right of access to jungle land for *chena* cultivation. Most agricultural labor was done by household members who were close kinsmen of one another. When labor was provided by members of other households, it was governed by norms of reciprocity and mutual aid appropriate to relations among kin. *Ande* (sharecropping) was common within the village, but just as Leach discovered in Pul Eliya, the 'people themselves seemed to think of the *ande* relationship as one of mutual service rather than tenancy' (1961:251). Wage labor was strictly excluded from the village economy. Here, again, economic propriety seems to have been exactly what it was in Pul Eliya, where Leach (1961:251) found that 'in 1954 there was still an emphatic feeling that the payment of cash wages is not compatible with a transaction between friends or kinsmen.'

Although *chena* cultivation and wet-rice agriculture in their own fields provided the people of Kukulewa with a substantial measure of self-sufficiency, the village economy was neither fully autonomous nor self-contained. Local autonomy was compromised by demands for tax, which remained low, by involvement in external markets, which also remained at a low level, and by the mortgage of paddy lands to outsiders, which was common. When land was mortgaged,

the original holder usually continued to cultivate it if he wanted to, but now he did so as the *ande* tenant of the mortgagee. The people of Kukulewa also went outside the village to work land on *ande* in more prosperous villages, usually of Goyigama (Cultivator) caste. The material terms of *ande* were the same in such cases as they were when landlord and tenant were fellow villagers, but they were evaluated very differently, especially by the landlords (Brow 1980). The Goyigama people looked on their Vedda tenants as hereditary status subordinates who were performing their traditional labor service by cultivating Goyigama fields on *ande* (cf. Leach 1961:251–52). For their part, however, the Kukulewa people were unwilling to acknowledge their inferiority, and were more inclined to extend the intra-village understanding of share tenancy as a relationship of mutual aid among status equals to include their relationships with their Goyigama landlords. But despite these conflicting interpretations, Veddas and Goyigama were agreed that they both belonged within the same traditional hierarchical community and that, consequently, the provision of services between them should be compensated in kind and not cash.

Thus, the particularistic norms attached to agrarian relations constrained economic action by inhibiting the free development of a market in land and labor at the same time as they gave ethical force to the distinction between the people of Kukulewa and their neighbors. Likewise agrarian practices not only sustained the village materially but also, by providing recurrent occasions for action that expressed communal norms, continuously recreated the very idea and experience of community. The recognition that certain agrarian relations that were appropriate between kinsmen were inappropriate between members of different villages, and *vice versa*, and the more intricate interpretation of identical material relations as being, in the case of *ande*, an expression of communal solidarity and mutual aid when the parties were members of the same village, but an expression of hierarchical domination and subordination when they belonged to different *varigas*, served to reinforce a sense of communal identity that was fundamentally grounded in the local ecology.

Agrarian and Political Change, 1953–83

The simple reproduction of the village community was severely

threatened by agrarian and other changes, all mostly exogenous, that swept through Anuradhapura District after the mid-1950s. The most general effect of these changes was to reduce the control that villagers exercised over their means of livelihood and to increase their dependence on economic and political processes external to the village.

One of the most fundamental developments was the accelerated rate of population growth. Starting at a little over 100 in 1900, the population of Kukulewa doubled during the next forty years and then, from the 1940s onwards, began to grow more rapidly. By 1970 it had reached 552, and in the next thirteen years it increased a further 67 per cent, from 552 to 910. Almost all this growth was natural increase, since in-migration and out-migration, which were largely confined to marriage, more or less balanced one another. Until about 1970 population growth was matched by the expansion of irrigation facilities, and the mean per capita holding of paddy land in 1970 was 0.3 acre, which is what it had been in 1931. But a good deal of the land that was asweddumized in the 1960s was only marginally irrigable. After 1970 very little further expansion was possible, and by 1983 the mean per capita holding had dropped below 0.2 acre. No less decisive was the increasing pressure on high land cultivation, which led to a reduction of the *chena* cycle and a scarcity of land that had lain fallow long enough to give the best yields for traditional crops. Under these conditions, the people of Kukulewa were increasingly forced more and more to go outside the village to obtain the means of livelihood, and they did so increasingly as wage laborers.

Between 1953 and 1968, in association with a significant increase in the proportion of the rice crop that was marketed rather than consumed at home, and doubtless also affected by legislation intended to promote the interests of tenants, *ande* was largely replaced by wage labor throughout Anuradhapura district (Brow 1978a). This freed the people of Kukulewa from the taint of status inferiority that attached to their traditional employment as the *ande* tenants of their Goyigama neighbors, but it simultaneously jeopardized their claim to their landlords' paternalistic protection, which was also associated with *ande* tenancy. Many Kukulewa people continued to appeal to hierarchical norms, claiming the right to be employed in the fields that they had traditionally worked on *ande*, and they continued to evaluate their new employers as

they had their former landlords (who were not infrequently the same individuals), that is, in terms of their generosity and concern for the welfare of those who worked for them. For their part, many Goyigama landlords were not averse to such appeals and remained willing to extend their patronage, which both provided them with a retinue and reinforced their sense of status superiority (Brow 1981).

By 1970, if not earlier, wage labor had become the principal source of income for most Kukulewa villagers. By that time, payments in cash had also become acceptable between kinsmen. But opportunities for wage labor within the village were restricted, as most people were able to do the bulk of their own paddy cultivation using only unpaid household labor. In 1969–70, Kukulewa villagers performed nine times as much wage labor outside the village as they did inside it (Brow 1978a:455). Most of this work was done within a few miles of Kukulewa, in the paddy fields of neighboring but better endowed villages. But already, in the late 1960s, it was not uncommon to find groups of men, mostly young and unmarried, who would leave the village for two or three weeks at a time to work at some more distant location. This practice became increasingly widespread through the 1970s, stimulated by the expansion of the settlement schemes and the government's big new development projects, and in the early 1980s it was further emphasized by successive years of drought that severely reduced the scope of paddy cultivation in the local area. This development permitted the emergence of one or two villagers whose connections with construction engineers and large-scale commercial farmers enabled them to make a significant income as labor contractors.

High land cultivation remained relatively free from market influences until the late 1970s. Attempts to grow a cash crop of gingelly or chillies in the *yala* season were long established, but this was a significant option only for relatively wealthy villagers who could bear the risk of inadequate rainfall. In 1969–70 the overwhelming majority of high land cultivation was *chena* cultivation of the traditional kind, geared to the production of food crops for domestic consumption. By 1983, however, most villagers were devoting at least some part of their high land cultivation to production for the market. In some cases, the cash crops were ones which had long been grown for domestic consumption, such as millet and pumpkin, but which traders now found profitable to truck from the villages in order to sell in the urban markets at

Kurunegala and Colombo. But the most popular high land cash crops were ones that ten years earlier had been either uncommon, such as gram, or totally unknown, such as cowpea. Kukulewa villagers found that both these crops gave good returns, and that they also both did well on high land that had lain fallow for only a few years.

The increased dependence of Kukulewa villagers on external economic processes that accompanied their greater involvement in regional and even national markets was further accentuated by the more vigorous intervention of government into the village economy. The benefits that resulted from the government's programs to increase agricultural productivity, which included minor improvements in irrigation, agricultural extension work, cultivation loans, guaranteed prices, and provision of fertilizer, insecticide, and new varieties of seed, all incurred a cost in social autonomy. Insofar as the sense that Kukulewa constituted a community rested on local control of the means of production, it was diminished by these developments.

As the intrusion of government into village life gathered pace through the 1960s and 1970s, it changed its form in at least two significant respects. First, allocation of the benefits at the disposal of the state passed almost entirely from the hands of civil servants to elected politicians, and second, an increasing proportion of these benefits came to be means of individual rather than collective advantage, which politicians channeled in directions that would reward their followers and build their support. These developments radically affected political processes within the village. When village leaders of an earlier generation petitioned authorities for construction of a school, or improvements to the tank, or relief work in times of drought, they could plausibly claim to be acting as representatives of the whole community. But when their successors devoted their energies to influencing the political distribution of individual jobs or houses, they were quickly perceived by their fellow villagers as acting in pursuit of purely personal or factional advantage. A new kind of village leadership emerged which, on the one hand, rested on the establishment of effective connections with political powerholders outside the village but which, on the other hand, in order to retain access to external patronage, had to demonstrate its ability to deliver the vote inside the village. In the absence of other bases of influence, the new leaders came increasingly

to rely upon threats, intimidation and the vague promise of prospective benefits.

These trends reached a new level in 1978, when Kukulewa was selected for development as a model village. Politicians and government officials came to the village to make grand promises of improved irrigation facilities, the establishment of rural industries, and so on, but most of these projects were eventually abandoned (although not forgotten by the villagers), and in the end the principal accomplishment was the construction of 60 houses at the northern end of the village. The settlement was named Samadigama, and was ceremonially opened by the Prime Minister in January 1980. The original plan was that the new houses should be distributed among Kukulewa's root families (*mul pavul*), of which it was conveniently determined that there were exactly 60. The villagers themselves had not previously been familiar with the notion of *mul pavula*, but they seemed to be able to agree that there were indeed 60 of them in the village, even if they disagreed as to who belonged in which. As things turned out, however, this difference made no difference, because the leaders of the local branch of the UNP (United National Party), which had been established in Kukulewa in 1975, were able to persuade the authorities that priority should be given to supporters of the party. Each of these leaders was then able to obtain three or four houses for himself and his immediate kin, while other groups of close kin, especially those associated with the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party), obtained none.

The result was a deep rift in the local community for which no precedent could be found in the factional conflicts of an earlier time. The settlers defined themselves as having established a separate village, and for several months the people of Kukulewa and Samadigama refused to attend one another's funerals, weddings or puberty ceremonies. There were even fights when people from Kukulewa came to use the two tubewells that had been sunk in Samadigama. And from 1980 onwards *gambadi rajakariya*, the annual village-wide ceremony that sought divine protection for the village community, was performed separately in Kukulewa and Samadigama. By 1983 kinsmen who had been alienated from one another were again interacting, but resentment about the violation of the communal norms of equity and mutuality remained close to the surface.

These political events might seem to support the plausible inference that the economic changes after 1953 must have brought about a reduction in the sense of community within the village. If it was the case, as I have argued, that in Kukulewa as in Pul Eliya, 'in 1954 there was still an emphatic feeling that the payment of cash wages is not compatible with a transaction between friends or kinsmen' (Leach 1961:251), then the rapid penetration of wage labor into the village economy during the next few years would appear to indicate a drastic retreat of the sense of community. By 1970 Kukulewa villagers were freely hiring one another to work in their paddy fields, and twice as much surplus was being appropriated by means of wage labor as by *ande* tenancy (Brow 1978a:455). Only among very close kin, such as full brothers or fathers and sons, was it still considered improper to offer or take a cash wage. Yet, already, a different and, indeed, opposite sentiment was being expressed which by 1983 had become widespread. It was said that villagers who hired wage laborers should *first* employ their kin, and those who did so prided themselves on their fulfilment of communal responsibilities.

Thus, despite the threat posed by agrarian change, the traditional value of village community was still upheld, and it was still expressed in norms that accorded kinship an economic privilege. But if the value was maintained, the norms that expressed it were radically altered, as a practice such as hiring one's kinsmen for wages, which had formerly been construed as antithetical to community, was now considered peculiarly virtuous. Because of this, the introduction of wage labor did not produce a totally anomic hiatus between unchanged norms and changed practice but instead, through the redefinition of economic norms, led to a widening of the range of actions that could be considered proper. It was now possible either to treat the relationship between employer and laborer impersonally and universalistically, or to give it a personal and particularistic stamp. This created a measure of ambiguity and uncertainty, and some villagers did indeed complain that their kinsmen's conduct was neither what it used to be nor what it ought to be. But the change of norms also afforded new opportunities to those in a position to profit from capitalist relations of production. And by employing their kin as wage laborers they were now able, to borrow Bourdieu's phrase, to 'compound the satisfactions of enlightened self-interest with the advantages of ethical impeccability' (1977:22).

The Agrarian Practice of Kukulewa Households, 1982–83

The preceding examination of the general economic and political changes of the last thirty years provides the context for a closer analysis of the agrarian strategies pursued by Kukulewa villagers in 1982–83.⁴ This will show the extent to which villagers had become dependent for their livelihood on external markets and superior authorities. It will also reveal something of their scale of economic priorities, as well as the norms that guided their interactions with one another. The latter topic will be explored further in the following section on village leadership.

For the third successive year the monsoon rains at the end of 1982 were deficient, and very little paddy cultivation was attempted either in Kukulewa or in the surrounding villages. Employment for wages was therefore hard to find in the local area, and villagers who sought it had to travel a considerable distance to places such as Maduru Oya, where there was construction work in the government's big development program, or to Nochchiyagama and Rajangana, where there was agricultural work in the Mahaweli Development Project. Most of this labor was recruited by contractors who organized groups of men to work away from the village for several weeks at a time.

Despite the poor rains a good deal of high land cultivation was attempted in Kukulewa and its surrounding area, both for subsistence and for the market. Almost all Kukulewa households undertook some high land cultivation, and most gave priority to millet, the traditional *chena* subsistence crop. Many also produced something for the market, either one of the more familiar crops such as mustard or chillies, or one that had only recently been introduced and for which the market was expanding, such as gram or cowpea. Most attempts at commercial high land cultivation were quite modest, involving no more than a couple of acres, and the most substantial enterprises in the area were all in the hands of powerful outsiders who controlled both the capital necessary for investment and the influence needed to avoid official harassment. Old jungle that promised the highest yields when cleared was strictly protected

⁴ Here and elsewhere, unless Samadigama is specifically differentiated, references to Kukulewa include both Kukulewa and Samadigama.

by law, but the law was very selectively enforced. Where large-scale, commercial cultivation was undertaken, it usually provided an opportunity for Kukulewa villagers to gain an additional cash income. Village men were employed to clear the land, either on contract or as wage laborers, and subsequently women could also find work in cultivation, weeding and harvesting. In some cases villagers were also able to work under the shadow of the entrepreneurs who employed them, and to cultivate an adjoining acre or two on their own account.

High land cultivation was constrained as much by the growing pressure of population as by the law. Jungle that had not been cultivated for at least eighteen years was extremely scarce, and a large part of the only extensive stand of it near Kukulewa was being cultivated commercially, as well as illegally, by some well connected outsiders. For the most part, therefore, villagers had to grow their high land crops on land that had lain fallow for less than eighteen years. When deciding which crops to grow, villagers took account not only of how long the land had lain uncultivated before it was cleared but also whether it was newly burned (*navadeli*) or had already been cultivated since it was last burned (*kanatu*).

Kukulewa villagers considered that millet and other traditional *chena* crops grew best on land that had lain fallow for at least eight years, if it was the first year of cultivation, or at least eighteen years, if it had been cultivated the previous year. But there was very little of this kind of jungle left. Millet cultivation gave poorer yields on land that had lain fallow for less than eight years, or less than eighteen years if it was being cultivated for the second time, but villagers believed that this kind of land gave good crops of gram and cowpea, which could be marketed. Indeed, many people were confident that these two crops could be grown year after year on the same land without a serious decline in the yield, but since they had only been growing cowpea for two or three years this had yet to be demonstrated.

Under these conditions, a commonly preferred plan was to make a *chena* on land that had not been cultivated for at least eight years and to grow millet on it in the first *maha* season. If there was adequate rain during the minor cultivation season (*yala*), the cultivator might attempt a cash crop of chillies or gingelly and then, in the following *maha* season, he would either grow millet again or he might convert the plot to cowpea or gram and transfer his millet

cultivation to a new piece of land, preferably one that had been fallow for at least eight years.

The main problem with this strategy was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find land that had been fallow even for eight years, particularly close to the village where those who frequently went outside for wage labor preferred to cultivate. Men who depended heavily on wage labor tended to confine their high land cultivation either to their own permanent garden (*vatta*) or to land close to the village, most of which had lain fallow for less than eight years. Yet they continued to cultivate millet, even though they recognized that they could expect only very modest returns.

This policy, which aimed to limit dependence on the market for the means of subsistence, was criticized in some quarters. D. B. Wimaladasa, a young villager who, as we shall see, was much more deeply involved in the market than most, pointed out that

Anyone can easily cultivate one or two acres of gram or cowpea with his own household labor. He can even grow it in his own garden. But most villagers still grow millet, even though it doesn't do as well in gardens. Millet grows best on land that has been fallow for more than eight years, but there's very little jungle like that any longer. So villagers grow millet on land that has been fallow for only two or three years, where it doesn't yield much. If they were to grow gram or cowpea, which give good yields on land like that, they could use the money they made to buy all the millet they need.

Very few villagers were prepared to risk such total dependence on the market. But, equally, few held the opposite extreme and tried to avoid dependence on the market altogether. U. Appuhamy, a cultivator whose production did tend towards this latter extreme, provided a spirited defense of his practice:

I have never cultivated gram or cowpea. I don't like them. I prefer millet, and when I have enough millet in my grain bin (*atuva*) I relax. I don't need to worry about having enough food. I don't need to run all over the place looking for wage labor. Those who don't have any food at home have to go out for wage labor. And then they don't have time to cultivate a *chena*.

Almost all Kukulewa households derived some income from wage labor, and almost all of them also undertook some high land cultivation. The way they divided their labor between these two activities, and their preference within high land cultivation for subsistence as against cash crops, were principally determined by factors of household demography and the amount and kinds of other resources that they commanded.

Households headed by young men, and others that contained only a single adult male, depended most heavily on wage labor. Their high land cultivation was often confined to their home garden, or to a small *chena* close to the village that could be tended with household labor even though the man was often absent doing wage labor. Millet was the principal crop, accompanied by smaller amounts of other traditional *chena* crops intended for domestic consumption, such as maize, chillies, pumpkin and gourds. Some also grew a little gram or cowpea for the market, but this was clearly subordinate to the subsistence crops. The extent of their cultivation, however, was too small to meet their own consumption requirements. Most felt that if they grew a *chena* large enough to provide their household with millet throughout the year, they would not be able to seize opportunities for wage labor when it was available. And in order to be able to look after their *chena*, they grew it close to home, where available land had been fallow only for a short time and returns from millet cultivation were much reduced.

Households with grown sons, and others that contained more than one adult male, also grew millet as their subsistence staple, but the scale of their high land cultivation was usually greater, and a larger proportion of it was devoted to the production of cash crops. These households also remained in the wage labor market, which their greater labor resources enabled them to do while simultaneously cultivating four or more acres of high land. This policy of diversification, or spreading the risks, in which significant contributions to household maintenance were made by the production of both cash crops and subsistence crops, as well as wage labor, was further developed by those households, large or small, that commanded other resources beyond access to high land and their members' labor power. If they controlled the necessary capital, villagers were tempted to branch out into other activities such as stock-raising (cattle or goats), milk production, tobacco cultivation

under contract with the Ceylon Tobacco Company, brewing liquor, and, in a very small number of cases, money-lending, shopkeeping and labor-contracting. For the most part these operations remained small, involving no more than an acre of tobacco, 20 or 30 goats, or 10 liters of milk a day, but they were sufficient to raise those who undertook them above their fellow villagers. A few people, among them several of the 12 villagers who enjoyed regular employment outside Kukulewa, mostly as menial laborers in one government department or another, were also able to hire wage laborers to increase the range of their agricultural or other production.

This brief account of household strategies indicates how little economic independence and security were left to Kukulewa villagers by 1983. Their continued preference for millet, even where the cultivation of other crops might have been more profitable, and their tendency to diversify the sources of income where possible, may be seen as 'safety-first' procedures that helped reduce the level of risks to their subsistence (cf. Scott 1976:15-26). But deteriorating ecological conditions allowed traditional *chena* practices to offer only a meager safeguard against the combined uncertainties of the market and the climate.

What this account also suggests, and even exaggerates in the absence of paddy cultivation in the village, is that the social relations of production forged few economic connections among the various households. Most high land cultivation was done by households independently, while wage labor was mainly performed for outsiders. Likewise, the marketing of high land crops linked the villagers to external traders (*mudalalis*) rather than to one another. There were a few exceptions to this pattern, and these will be examined in the next section on village leadership, for it was precisely those who aspired to wield influence in the village who were most likely to use economic relations to bind their followers to them. Analysis of these relations will also reveal more about how community, or its absence, was experienced, and how the idea of community was used both to mobilize political support and to legitimate economic action.

Village Leaders

From 1930 to 1960 Kukulewa was dominated by H. V. Bandathe, the village's Irrigation Headman (*vel vidane*). Throughout this

period the Irrigation Headman was the only representative of official authority resident in the village, and his responsibilities and powers extended well beyond the supervision of the village irrigation system. He became, in effect, the sole mediator between the villagers and state officials. The former depended on him to bring their concerns to the attention of the administration, while the latter relied on him as a source of authoritative information about his village. This enabled him to intervene decisively in such matters as inheritance disputes, which he could often turn to his personal advantage.

Throughout Bandathe's time as Irrigation Headman, members of the local aristocracy, the Vanniyars, held leading positions in the district administration, as *rate mahatmaya* and, subsequently, as Divisional Revenue Officer, and the local bureaucracy maintained a distinctly patrimonial style. Bandathe skilfully established and cultivated personal relationships of loyalty and respect both at the *rate mahatmaya's* manor house (*valavva*), where his sister was married to a member of the household staff (and was herself reputed to be the *rate mahatmaya's* mistress), and at the government offices in Anuradhapura, where he successfully represented himself not just as Irrigation Headman of Kukulewa but as the chief of the whole Vedda *variga*. With these connections and credentials, he made himself the vital link between the village and the state, able to promote himself and reward his followers with the benefits he could secure by his mastery of the idiom of patrimonial politics. But Bandathe was also an indifferent rice farmer, and although he was able to acquire possession of several acres of paddy land, he failed to develop an agricultural enterprise that could hold his political followers with the further chains of economic dependence. Moreover, his arbitrary and overbearing treatment of his fellow villagers provoked resentment, and the loyalty of many was more instrumental than personal. Some people even attributed the poverty of the village to the displeasure of the gods at Bandathe's violation of communal norms. Referring to what he claimed was the Irrigation Headman's fraudulent acquisition of a plot of paddy land, K. Wannihamy, Bandathe's principal rival in his later years, asserted:

Whenever that land was cultivated there was a drought in the village that destroyed not only his paddy but everyone else's as well. This is the country of the gods, and the gods were angry with him.

The office of Irrigation Headman was abolished by the Paddy Lands Act of 1958, and although Bandathe's patrimonial and bureaucratic connections remained useful even after the act was implemented, much of his following faded away and attached itself to other prominent men in the village. He was a member of the first Cultivation Committee that took over his former responsibilities, but was not subsequently re-elected.

One of his successors was B. Undiyarala, a man of Bandathe's generation who was widely respected within Kukulewa but not well known outside it. He was a man of moderate means who subsisted from his own *chena* and paddy cultivation and lived quietly in the old part of the village surrounded by many of his close kin. He was a rich source of traditional custom who was often sought out by his fellow villagers for his wise counsel and his skill in the judicious resolution of disputes within the village, but he lacked the outside contacts that he would have needed to be an effective broker in the larger political arena. He was, however, usually allied with K. Wannihamy, who did have such connections.

Wannihamy was the first native of Kukulewa to run a shop successfully in the village. He went into business in the late 1950s, at about the time that sharecropping tenancy began to give way to the use of wage labor in paddy cultivation, and his success was undoubtedly attributable, in large measure, to the growing toleration of a cash nexus among members of the same community. Previous native shopkeepers had quickly gone bankrupt, as they were unable to resist their kinsmen's claims for privileged treatment, and the most successful village shops in the district were run by outsiders (cf. Leach 1961:131). Wannihamy's business brought him into contact with more powerful traders outside the village and, in contrast to Bandathe's patrimonial demeanor, he took on something of the trader's aggressively egalitarian manners and appearance. By the skilful advance of credit, by taking mortgages on villagers' lands, and by buying land when it came on the market, within a few years he had made himself the wealthiest man and biggest landholder in Kukulewa. From this base he was then able to extend his patronage to a large number of his fellow villagers who, as his debtors, tenants and wage laborers, became also his following of dependent supporters.

Bandathe remained a man of some influence until his death in 1976, but already by the mid-1960s Wannihamy was clearly the more powerful. The rivalry between the two men was expressed, among other things, in their connections with the major national political parties. Bandathe was a staunch supporter of the UNP in which, within Anuradhapura district, the Vanniyar aristocrats were prominent. Wannihamy, on the other hand, supported the SLFP and was closely connected to the MP for Anuradhapura until 1977, a cabinet minister in the Bandaranaike government of 1970-77 who had kin and land in the Goyigama village immediately adjacent to Kukulewa.

Wannihamy's commercial success required him to subordinate his kinsmen's appeals for privileged treatment to an impersonal and calculating business ethic. He took paddy land into his own hands wherever possible, and advanced credit only to those he considered to be good risks. He preferred to lend to those who were regularly employed or who owned substantial amounts of paddy land or livestock. In times of scarcity, poorer villagers might have to wait until the government announced that there would be relief work before Wannihamy would allow them to take goods on credit. In 1983, he was advancing goods only to people who were willing to sell him their ration stamps, for which he paid two-thirds of their face value.

Wannihamy saw his activities as providing a great benefit to his fellow villagers:

I am the only person who lends these people what they need. I am the only one who buys their ration stamps. Who else is going to advance them what they need? I take pity on these people. I help them in these ways. I lend to them because they are starving, and we are all human beings. I am of great service to them. Even so, they are not always grateful to me.

Wannihamy's views were shared by villagers who were in good standing with him. One of his regular clients, U. Appuhamy, provided a typical defense of his policies:

I always buy from Wannihamy, and he gives me credit because he knows I am a hard-working man. He has never refused me. I borrow provisions from him, never money.

I know goods are cheaper in Sippukulama and Kahatagasdigiliya. That's where Wannihamy buys provisions. But you can't expect him to sell them for the same price at which he buys. He has to make a profit to stay in business.

It is wrong to go to Sippukulama to buy goods when you have money, and to try to borrow from Wannihamy when you have no money. Wannihamy doesn't like that. I buy from him when I have money and borrow from him when I don't. We have nowhere else to go to get loans. Is there anyone besides him to lend things to us? He is feeding the whole village. If it were not for him most of our people would be starving to death.

It is true, however, that he only lends to those who will pay him back. He does not like people who are lazy. He prefers to lend to hard-working people. It is very difficult to do business with our people. If they can avoid paying back what they owe, they won't hesitate to do so. But they can't do that with Wannihamy. He knows how to recover his debts. People pay him back because they know him, and they know he's very tough. And the other thing is that if they don't settle their debts it will be very difficult to borrow from him the next time they are in trouble.

Wannihamy, however, was not without his critics, among whom was D. B. Wimaladasa, who seemed to echo Wannihamy's own words about Bandathe when he attributed the lack of prosperity in the village to the anger of the gods at the flouting of communal values:

I am Wannihamy's son-in-law (*bana*). My sister is married to his son and my brother is married to his daughter. But when I borrow money from him he charges me 20 per cent interest per month. Is that not exploitation? And if he treats me like that, what can other people expect from him? You could write a book about his dirty work.

Wannihamy gives credit and lends money to people who have paddy land, or cattle, or a good *chena*. Then he begins to press them for settlement. Sometimes he goes to their houses, stands in their doorways, and abuses them. So they give him what they have in settlement of their debts.

All the people in this village are our kin (*ape nayo*). It is wrong to take their property away like that. It is because of

people like my father-in-law that it doesn't rain here. The gods are angry at people like him and so they don't send the rain.

Wimaladasa's own rise to prominence took a different course from those of Bandathe and Wannihamy. In the mid-1970s, when he was still closely allied with Wannihamy, Wimaladasa was involved in organizing the Kukulewa branch of the SLFP, and he was also able to find a job as a casual laborer with the Highways Department. After the 1977 election, however, he was threatened by the local leaders of the successful UNP and found it prudent to leave the village for a while. He gave up his job and went to Tantrimalai. A year later, he came back to live in Kukulewa and re-established his contacts with officials in the Highways Department, for whom he began to organize contract labor. After 1977 a good deal of construction work, not only of roads but also of canals and irrigation works, that previously had been done by government departments, was given over to private contractors or Rural Development Societies. Engineers and other officials in the Highways and Irrigation Departments were not allowed to take such contracts themselves, but Wimaladasa was willing to front for those who saw the prospect of the profits to be made. Wimaladasa would use materials and equipment supplied by government officials and would take, say, Rs 9,000 to construct a mile of road, which he could do by spending Rs 4,000 to Rs 5,000. He hired his kinsmen and neighbors from Kukulewa to provide the labor for these projects.

I only hire people who are prepared to work hard. I can only make a profit if they work hard and do the job in a few days. So I only hire people who I know to be good workers and who I know are prepared to work long hours. Sometimes they work from six in the morning to nine at night, and for that I will pay them as much as forty rupees a day.

With the profits from his labor contracting, Wimaladasa invested heavily in high land cultivation. In *maha* 1983–84 he was involved in the cultivation of more than 20 acres of high land, 15 acres of it directly on his own account and the remainder by means of *ande* relationships. *Ande* was unknown in the old days of subsistence *chena* cultivation but was spreading with the development of

cash-cropping. The standard arrangement was for Wimaladasa to provide the seed and pay the cultivator to clear the land and sow. Subsequent work, including protection of the plot, was the cultivator's responsibility, and the crop was equally divided between the two partners. This kind of arrangement was welcomed by villagers who wanted to undertake high land cultivation for the market but were short of funds, and who would otherwise have had to cut back on their *chena* cultivation in order to look for wage labor. As K. B. Dinapala put it:

If elder brother (*ayiya*) Wimal had not helped me I would have been in a lot of trouble. It is kind of him to help me cultivate my *chena*. There's nobody else in the village like that. He has helped me a great deal and I am indebted to him forever.

On the other 15 acres of high land that he cultivated, Wimaladasa employed the wage labor of his kinsmen and fellow villagers. He also mobilized some unpaid household labor, but the scale of the operation was such that this was only a small proportion of the total. Altogether, between August and the end of October, he paid for more than 250 man-days of wage labor on this land.

Wimaladasa also lent money to his fellow villagers, mostly to those who worked for him as wage laborers. Unlike Wannihamy, he did not charge interest on these loans, and he recovered what was owed to him by paying his debtors only half their wages when he employed them. One day Wimaladasa organized a *kayiya* (work party) to clear 4 acres of his *chena*. He claimed that he had been asked to hold the *kayiya* by those who worked for him so that they could make some return for the help he had offered them when they were in need. Forty men, most of them people who had been employed in his other *chena* operations or in his contract work, came to the *kayiya* and worked all day to clear the jungle. Wimaladasa spent Rs 750 on food and drink for those who came to work, but he was well satisfied, for he reckoned that it would have cost him Rs 1,000 to clear the land if he had employed wage labor, or Rs 1,200 if he had contracted to have the work done at current rates. He recognized that there were also less tangible benefits:

Villagers like to take part in a *kayiya* because they know they will be well treated. They also enjoy the good food. And a *kayiya*

also helps to create a feeling of unity (*ekamutukama*). When workers are hired for a daily wage, they do not work hard unless they are on good terms with the employer. The people who came to my *kayiya* are my wage laborers and the *kayiya* helps create solidarity with them because on such occasions I work alongside them in the *chena*.

I never make a contract to get my *chena* cleared. People who work on contract try to get the job done as quickly as possible, and in their haste they leave weeds and bushes all over the place. I don't like to see a *chena* looking like that when the work is supposed to have been finished.

Wannihamy was scornful when he heard that Wimaladasa had held a *kayiya* to get his *chena* cleared.

I never get my work done on *kayiya*. I pay people to work and get it done that way. People who come to a *kayiya* don't like to work hard. And you can't force them to work because they've come to help you and you're not paying them.

But Wimaladasa was even more contemptuous of Wannihamy.

Our people (*ape minissu*) only go to work for him because they need his credit. If he asks them to come to work, they can't refuse. If they did, he would retaliate. He would refuse to make loans to them. So they go to work for him, but only because they depend on him.

The people prefer to work for me because I pay them well and I give them good meals for fifteen rupees. I am the only person in the village who pays a man thirty rupees for *chena* work. I also pay women and boys twenty rupees a day. But Wannihamy only pays twenty rupees to a man, fifteen rupees to a woman, and twelve rupees to a boy. It is very unjust. People go to work for him only because they can't find work anywhere else. I can't employ them all.

In contrast to both Wannihamy and Wimaladasa, the power of J. K. Jinadasa, the dominant figure in the settlement at Samadigama, was not based on the credit or employment that he could offer to his followers. Jinadasa was the oldest son of J. K. Anthony Fernando, whose own parents had come from the Low Country and settled in Kukulewa in the 1920s. Anthony's mother had run a

shop, and Anthony too had made his living as a trader, as well as by working as a laborer for the Village Council. In the course of his business transactions, a certain amount of paddy land had passed through his hands, but neither he nor Jinadasa was an experienced cultivator. Anthony found work for his son outside the village, and by 1983 Jinadasa had been employed for ten years as a driver for the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation in Anuradhapura.

Jinadasa was the principal organizer of the local branch of the UNP that was started in Kukulewa in 1975. But a more traditional villager, U. Naidurala, was elected the first president of the local branch, and it was Naidurala who obtained the contract to provide labor for the construction of the houses at Samadigama. Jinadasa and Naidurala quarreled over the latter's handling of this contract, but it was not until the question of how the houses were to be allocated came to the forefront that Jinadasa was able to have his way. While Naidurala favored an equitable distribution of the houses among the 60 root families (*mul puvul*) of Kukulewa, Jinadasa argued that the houses should go to supporters of the UNP, and on this issue he was able to mobilize the support not only of the local party members but also of the Member of Parliament. Naidurala was removed from the presidency and it was Jinadasa who led the move of 60 households to Samadigama in early 1980.

Jinadasa's strongest supporters were his own close kin, some of whom, however, were more closely assimilated into the Veddha *variga* than he was himself. His chief lieutenant, for example, was his cross-cousin, P. B. Wijeratne, whose mother (Jinadasa's father's sister) had married a native villager. That marriage had been approved by the *variga* court and Wijeratne was included within the category of 'our kin' (*ape nayo*) by many villagers who excluded Jinadasa, whose father had married an outsider. In any case, Jinadasa and his close kin came to dominate both the new settlement at Samadigama and the local branch of the UNP. In 1983 Jinadasa was president of the local UNP, Wijeratne was secretary, Jinadasa's younger brother, J. K. Sugathapala, was treasurer, and two of Jinadasa's younger sisters were also on the committee. These people and their other close kin occupied more than 25 per cent of the new houses.

The people who followed Jinadasa to Samadigama felt grateful to him for obtaining their new houses for them. But the model village contained no new irrigated land, and opportunities for

securing their livelihood were not significantly enhanced. Jinadasa himself spent most of his time in Anuradhapura and was not deeply engaged in the village economy. He had no regular employment to offer to his followers. On one or two occasions, he was able to use his political connections to obtain a job outside the village for one of his supporters, but this did not benefit the bulk of his followers. His domination of Samadigama became arbitrary and tyrannical, and provoked increasing resentment among his erstwhile supporters. He used threats and intimidation to keep his following in line and to secure the vote in the election of 1982, but he had few new benefits to offer. On the other hand, villagers in Samadigama believed him when he claimed he could have them evicted from their new houses, and by 1983 they were looking wistfully back to their kin in Kukulewa, from whom they had been alienated by the outrage over the allocation of the houses. Many people, including a considerable number of those who occupied the new houses, came to see Samadigama not as a welcome extension of the Kukulewa community but as Jinadasa's private domain.

With Jinadasa absent from the village much of the time, day-to-day leadership in Samadigama was left in the hands of his ally and cousin, P. B. Wijeratne. But Wijeratne commanded very few material resources. He possessed very little paddy land, and his political work for the UNP had so far failed to secure him the regular job he sought outside the village. He managed to get himself appointed as the agent who organized relief work in Samadigama, but was dismissed from that position because of fraud. In the middle of 1983, however, he made a new bid for leadership on quite a different basis, one that had nothing directly to do with economic relations but that did allow him to address the issues of community. That basis was religious.

A few weeks before the time to perform *gambadi rajakariya*, the annual ceremony at which the villagers collectively sought the blessings of the gods and afterwards enjoyed a communal feast, Wijeratne's sister Seelawathie was attacked by a demon. Seelawathie went into trance while she was being treated for this condition, and the demon who had possessed her then confessed that he had been sent to attack Samadigama by people in Kukulewa who were still angry over the allocation of houses. This accusation of sorcery among kinsmen brought all the lingering resentments to the surface

and starkly raised the issue of community. Shortly afterwards Wijeratne himself began to go into trance and intimated that he was possessed by the same guardian deity who had formerly used Kandappu, the old spirit medium (*anumatirala*) as his vehicle. Kandappu had died in 1978, just before the years of drought began, but the god's sacred ornaments, which were themselves believed to have protective powers, were still kept by his sons in Kukulewa and were publicly displayed every year at the performance of *gambadi rajakariya*.

Wijeratne and his sister, who had quickly and apparently successfully redefined her possessor as a benevolent deity, both went into trance at the performance of *gambadi rajakariya* in Samadigama, and the gods who possessed them took the opportunity to address directly the problems in the community. Wijeratne's god, speaking through Wijeratne's voice while he was in a trance, said that the people's immoral behavior had angered the gods and that the gods had withdrawn their protection, as a result of which the conflicts in the village had been further aggravated. The god then reminded the people that they were all one another's kin and should be united. They should forget their petty jealousies and quarrels, and in the future there should be just one performance of *gambadi rajakariya* in which the people of Kukulewa and Samadigama would participate together.

When the words of Wijeratne's god were reported to them the people of Kukulewa generally agreed that a single ceremony was desirable, since the Samadigama people were indeed their kin, but they insisted that the ceremony would have to be held in Kukulewa. After all, they said, it was the Samadigama people who had left Kukulewa, so if they now wanted to be re-united they would have to return. Some Kukulewa people remained skeptical of Wijeratne's god's plea. They saw it as a bid by Wijeratne to remove the god's protective ornaments from Kukulewa to Samadigama, and they said the god would have to use his magical powers to come and get the ornaments himself.

All this excitement may seem to have had little to do with agrarian practices, but the people of Kukulewa did not fail to make a connection. As they went ahead with preparations for their own *gambadi rajakariya* there was prominent talk of the communal responsibilities of different villagers. Shareholders in the village paddy field (*pangukarayo*) were supposed to contribute to the

offerings in proportion to the size of their holdings, and it was the duty of the village chief (*gama rala*, holder of the *gamvasama* plot in the main paddy field) to take the lead in organizing the ceremony. Nobody had to be reminded that there were no paddy fields in Samadigama, and consequently no *pangukarayo*, no *gamarala*, and no *gamvasama*. The point was clear: Samadigama lacked the agrarian basis necessary for the proper performance of *gambadi rajakariya*, the quintessential collective celebration of village community.

Conclusion

Between 1953 and 1983 the agrarian economy of Kukulewa, which had earlier been characterized by its relative autonomy and its subsistence orientation, was transformed by its increasing and continuing incorporation within a larger economy that was predominantly governed by market principles. Unpaid household labor remained important in both high land and paddy cultivation, but other pre-capitalist forms of the social relations of production were largely replaced by wage labor. To the extent that agrarian practices were disengaged from the matrix of kinship and caste, and villagers came to seek their livelihood through connections with employers and traders outside the village, their economic relations with one another became both more impersonal and more atomistic. This tendency was doubtless exaggerated by the virtual absence of paddy cultivation in the village in the early 1980s because of the drought, but paddy cultivation in their own fields had in any case come to provide only a small proportion of most villagers' livelihood. These trends, which were paralleled by developments of a more political nature, were, however, somewhat mitigated by the activities of one or two influential men who bound their fellow villagers together in their economic operations and who mediated relations with outsiders.

The changes that occurred involved a complex interplay between symbolic and material aspects of agrarian practice. The traditional economy assigned different practices to different social contexts, which they then served to define. Thus cash payments were held to be inappropriate between kinsmen and members of traditionally

linked castes, and so to offer someone cash wages was to deny him membership in one's own community. Correspondingly, the *ande* relationship was an affirmation that the parties belonged together, which itself served to recreate the sense of community. In some cases the same material relationship appeared in different social contexts, and was accorded different significance according to that context. Thus the material terms of *ande* were the same whether the parties were members of the same or different castes, but in the former case the relationship was represented as one of mutual aid and reciprocity, while in the latter it was one of domination and subordination. In the absence of a material difference this symbolic distinction was not always easy to maintain, as I have indicated earlier, but it was reinforced in other areas by the ritual exchange of caste services, as well as by the permanently unidirectional flow of material appropriations; that is, it was always Veddas who worked as the *ande* tenants of Goyigama landlords, and never the other way around.

The penetration of capitalist relations of production introduced certain agrarian practices into social contexts from which they had previously been excluded, and allowed practices that had formerly been segregated to co-exist in the same social context, where they now appeared as alternative forms of the relations of production. This was accompanied, or shortly followed, by a change in the significance that was accorded to the practices. Thus, on the one hand, the wage relationship acquired a range of meanings that varied, like the traditional *ande* relationship, according to the social context while, on the other hand, it now became just one among several approved ways, along with *ande*, the free gift of labor 'for nothing' (*nikam*), *kayiya*, and so on, of enacting the sense of community.

These changes resulted in some ambiguity, and normatively disposed villagers were often uncertain which course of economic action was the proper one to pursue. But while traditionalists deplored the loss of firm guidelines, there were others who recognized the opportunities that the new situation afforded. It is difficult to determine with precision the intentions behind any particular set of actions, even in the absence of normative ambiguity. Habitual repetition of customary practice, active attachment to collective ideals and cynical manipulation of norms to promote one's private interests, were doubtless all involved to

varying degrees. But whatever the combinations of conventionalism, altruism and cynicism in particular cases, the general direction of change was clear. The social process through which a few men like Wannihamy and Wimaladasa were able to make themselves prominent and powerful in the village was the same process whereby wage labor and interest-bearing loans became almost unavoidable means to making a living. And it took no more than a generation for wage labor, the basic capitalist form of surplus appropriation, which had formerly been considered antithetical to the values of community, to penetrate and permeate the village economy. But, during the same period, those villagers who offered wages to their fellows, and thereby appropriated the surplus value they produced, came to be described as they described themselves, that is as honorable men whose employment of their kinsmen was evidence of their commitment to the spirit of community.

Nor was it irrational for villagers to describe those who exploited them as their benefactors. Short of water, short of land and lacking other opportunities, almost any wage was better than none. And those who could attach themselves to a patron with employment and credit at his disposal did find it easier to secure their livelihood than those who lacked such connections. Whatever their deepest convictions, it would have been imprudent of clients in this position to challenge their patrons' claims to ethical propriety.

Networks of dependency within Kukulewa, however, did not encompass all the households in the village, and in this sense, even if the new ethics of the wage sustained community as effectively as traditional practices had, there was some reduction in its scope. Not only Wannihamy and Wimaladasa themselves, but also other villagers, said that those to whom they gave employment and credit were all hard-working people. Cause and effect are hard to separate here. The manifestly greater poverty of some who lacked effective connections with a patron may indeed have resulted from their failure to work hard, but it may also have been the case that their poverty stemmed from their exclusion, which in turn was justified by the charge of laziness. In either case, however, it is notable that the personal characteristic of devotion to labor was now used to draw significant distinctions within the community of kin.

No less threatening to the maintenance of the village community was the declining number of agrarian practices that were either

confined within it or excluded from it, but which in both cases served to define it. Where such distinctions were maintained the practice in question carried its communal message, so to speak, in itself. But where the distinction was abandoned, as with the universal toleration of wage labor, the symbolic significance of the practice had to be separately asserted on each occasion. Increasingly, agrarian relations between fellow villagers came to differ from those established with outsiders only in the significance that was attributed to them and not in their material form.

Similar trends were observable in other areas of social life, although the changes were less drastic. Rates of *variga* endogamy were declining, rules of commensalism were increasingly ignored, and the performance of ritual services among the different castes was less frequent than before. These developments might have indicated absorption into some larger community, but there were few signs of it. The emergence of a solidarity based on common class position was no more than rudimentary, while a sense of participation in the moral community of Sinhalese Buddhism was normally quite diffuse. If anything, the tendency was rather a retreat into the instrumental solidarity of factional alliance and the constricted community of a more narrowly defined family (*pavula*).

Yet the village and the *variga* remained the principal and largely overlapping foci of the communal ideal. Both were continuously invoked in everyday life and occasionally celebrated in ritual performances. There was still a lively sense that, as the descendants of Kuveni, the people of the Vedda *variga* were a single people who shared a common identity. It was also believed that Kukulewa enjoyed the protection of its own tutelary deities, whose benevolent gaze brought prosperity to the village when the people behaved with propriety, but whose anger when communal norms were violated brought suffering not just to the immediate offender but also to his fellow villagers. It was uncertain, however, how long such appeals to traditional ideas of community could, in the face of the material changes the village was experiencing, continue to sustain anything much more substantial than nostalgic yearning for an imagined past.

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10

Agrarian Relations and the Seasonal Influx of Agricultural Labor in a Sinhalese Village in the North Central Province

SIRI HETTIGE

Introduction

Seasonal migration of agricultural laborers from densely populated Wet Zone districts of the Central and the Northwestern Provinces to the North Central Province in the Dry Zone is a significant factor affecting agrarian relations in host villages where agriculture is already commercialized.¹ An inquiry into the phenomenon draws attention to two major issues: the forces that promote seasonal migration on the one hand, and the effects of seasonal migration on agrarian relations in the host villages on the other. It should be noted at the outset that studies of seasonally migrant agricultural

¹ The terms 'host village' and 'donor village' are borrowed from Crooks and Ranbanda (1981). While the first term refers to villages and settlements that seasonal workers move into in search of work during peak months of the agricultural cycle, the latter denotes villages in which seasonal workers are permanently resident.

labor in Sri Lanka are few and far between (Crooks and Ranbanda 1981; Perera and Gunawardena 1980) and that they deal almost exclusively with the first of these two issues, namely the forces promoting the supply of, and the demand for, seasonal migrant labor. The main objective of this paper is to address the second of these issues, by examining the implications of the inflow of seasonal labor for agrarian relations in a Sinhalese village, which I call Niltanne,² in Polonnaruwa district in northcentral Sri Lanka. Neither the circumstances that lead to the outflow of migrant labor from the donor villages nor the factors that promote the demand for seasonal labor in the host villages are discussed in this paper in detail. They are dealt with only in the context of describing the background to the study.

Background

The transformation of pre-capitalist social formations in Sri Lanka, particularly during and after the period of British rule, has now been fairly well documented. These writings include detailed accounts as well as a number of sociological interpretations of such historical change. As this literature demonstrates, pre-capitalist production and exchange relations in the country in general, and in the plantation areas and maritime provinces in particular, were substantially altered by a number of factors that included, among others, the growth of plantations, monetization of the economy, commercialization of agriculture, and social and economic policies backed by state legislation.

In the densely populated rural areas of the Wet Zone, these forces were also instrumental in squeezing out a sizeable section of the rural producers from their traditional habitats (Ali 1972:17). The expansion of plantation agriculture, population growth and the fragmentation of landholdings through inheritance left many peasants landless or near landless in these areas. Although confronted with inadequate land resources, however, they seem to have regarded migration only as a last resort. Instead, they adopted

² Niltanne is a pseudonym. Field research was conducted in 1976-77 and again in 1984-85.

various modes of landsharing that enabled small family holdings to be shared among members of a family or kin group, thus avoiding the fragmentation of land into minute parcels. These diverse strategies for survival, which amounted to a form of social insurance against starvation, allowed many peasants to remain in their native villages, although under conditions of shared poverty. These strategies, however, did not hold good forever. When landsharing and fragmentation reached saturation point, peasants had no option other than to leave their traditional habitats in search of land or other sources of subsistence elsewhere.

The migration of landless peasants from the densely populated Wet Zone districts to the thinly populated Dry Zone, particularly the North Central province, began long before the launching of state-sponsored peasant colonization schemes which, in fact, regularized and facilitated a process already underway. It should be noted, however, that the rehabilitation of irrigation tanks and the provision of basic infrastructural facilities associated with the colonization programs have attracted more and more landless peasants into the Dry Zone (Hettige 1984:49-59). Today, there are many dense concentrations of people in this part of the country, particularly around major irrigation schemes. In recent years these new settlements have become the major rice-producing centers of the island.

The economic and social policies of post-independence governments in Sri Lanka, coupled with emerging market forces, have been largely responsible for the expansion and modernization of peasant agriculture, particularly in the Dry Zone. State intervention in the forms of new legislation, guaranteed minimum prices for agricultural produce, and provision of extended services, agricultural credit, fertilizer subsidies, and higher-yielding varieties of seed, is a case in point. As peasant agriculture became more and more commercialized, peasants ceased to be mere subsistence producers. In the process, traditional forms of production relations as well as many old agricultural techniques gave way to new ones.

Fragmentation of family holdings into small, uneconomic parcels of land is not a common feature of land tenure in the newly developed areas of the Dry Zone.³ While there is already a sprinkling of

³ The situation in 'ancient' (*purana*) villages like Niltanne, however, is different. Agrarian change there has meant both a concentration of land in the hands of a few families and fragmentation of some family holdings into small parcels of land, mainly among descendants of the early inhabitants (*purana* villagers).

individuals who own or control large acreages of land, other peasants, having lost their land to speculative buyers through mortgage or sale, have already become landless laborers. Nevertheless, many peasant families still hold on to their few acres of land. In other words, the family holdings of many peasants, particularly in the new settlements, remain economically viable.⁴ This enables the peasant to produce a sizeable surplus with the help of new agricultural practices.

The general picture is vastly different in the Wet Zone, where the average family holding is very small. Since small, uneconomic holdings do not even produce the subsistence requirements of peasant families, peasants are often forced to rely on supplementary sources of income or subsistence. As is well known today, these poor peasants constitute a sizeable segment of the seasonal workers who temporarily migrate to the Dry Zone during peak months of the agricultural cycle there. The composition of the seasonal workers who stayed and worked in Niltanne during 1976–77 conformed to this general pattern. Data gathered during my most recent fieldwork indicate that this pattern has remained remarkably similar in the years since 1977, as will be discussed later.

The Setting

Niltanne, which had been a small, remote, peasant hamlet with a population of about 30 persons (about ten families) in the 1880s,⁵ is now a relatively large village characterized by a differentiated agrarian structure. Today, there are about 170 households with a population of about 1,000 persons. While the influx of new settlers was largely responsible for population growth in the 1940s and 1950s, more recently natural increase has been a major factor behind the expansion of the village population. Most of the new

⁴ The holding is viable in the sense that it is large enough both to produce enough to meet the subsistence and other needs of the family, and to facilitate the adoption of new farming techniques such as tractors and transplanting.

⁵ Many of the tank-based villages in the region contained only a small number of families in the nineteenth century. There were only 10 families in Niltanne in 1881, with a population of 31 persons. The village population rose to 47 persons by 1891, but the number of families remained unchanged (Hettige 1984:49).

settlers have come from districts in the Central Province, while a sprinkling of immigrants have come from the Southern and Western provinces.

Prior to the arrival of new settlers in Niltanne towards the end of the colonial period, only a small number of families had inhabited the village. Being almost isolated from the outside world, their existence had been precarious (Ievers 1899: 3). The tank, which had no doubt supported a much bigger population and irrigated a much larger area in the remote past, had been too large for a population as small as that of nineteenth-century Niltanne, and was used only marginally for agricultural and other purposes. Much of the available water supply was not used by the villagers. Then, immediately before and after independence, more and more people moved into the area and took up residence both in the village and in nearby state-sponsored settlements. Thereafter, the village tank was used to support not only the enlarged population of Niltanne itself but also the new settlements adjacent to it. Prior to the arrival of new settlers in Niltanne, its inhabitants had brought under cultivation only a small part of the village fields. The area cultivated had been dependent on the size of the local labor force, the subsistence requirements of the villagers, the prevalent physical constraints, and the nature of the agricultural techniques and practices used. Later, with population growth, the removal of physical constraints, adoption of new cultivation practices, and the commercialization of agriculture, the area of cultivated land grew steadily. In recent years, almost every square inch of irrigable land in the village has been brought under cultivation.

In the last few decades, both the physical and the social organization of production have been altered substantially. Some age-old techniques of rice and *chena* cultivation have been replaced. Use of animal power in the cultivation process, which was common about fifteen years ago, is of little significance today. While a few peasants still use buffaloes, many more use tractors, both two- and four-wheeled.⁶ Transplanting and the use of chemical fertilizer, higher-yielding varieties of seed, agrochemicals, and hired labor have become common agricultural practices in Niltanne (Hettige 1984:87-90).

⁶ In recent years, however, under the pressure of rising tractor charges, some poor peasants have tended to revert to the use of buffaloes instead of tractors.

Today, agriculture in Niltanne is highly commercialized. Even those who cultivate small parcels of land sell their produce in the market. Payment of land rent in grain and traditional forms of labor exchange have virtually disappeared, and even those peasants who earlier relied on the exchange of labor with kinsmen and neighbors now employ wage labor in order to meet additional labor requirements.

Before the influx of new settlers in the early 1940s, socioeconomic differentiation was virtually non-existent in Niltanne, where the peasants owned or controlled the land they tilled. There was no shortage of land. The size of the individual family farm, which was cultivated with the cooperation of kinsmen and neighbors, was largely determined by the size of the family labor force. There had been no landlords, either resident or absentee, at least in the recent history of Niltanne, until some village land passed into the hands of a few outsiders towards the end of British rule.⁷ By contrast, the present village population is highly differentiated in socioeconomic terms. There are landowners on the one hand, and landless laborers on the other. The bulk of productive land and other resources is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, while the overwhelming majority of villagers own little or no land or other productive resources. But the agrarian population in Niltanne is not simply divided into two distinct classes—landowners and landless laborers. Rather, a number of agrarian classes can be identified in terms of their different relations to the means and the process of production. These are capitalist landowners, rich peasants, poor peasants, tenants and agricultural laborers. Even though the extent of ownership of productive resources, mainly land, is a significant factor distinguishing different agrarian classes in Niltanne, the classes identified above are not defined simply in terms of this variable.

Capitalist landowners are those who bring under cultivation a relatively large extent of land using only wage labor. They do not take part in the physical process of production themselves but, unlike pre-capitalist landowners, they do 'manage' their family enterprises. Capitalist landowners produce almost exclusively for the market.

⁷ The land acquired, either through mortgage or outright purchase, was returned to the villagers on sharecropping tenancy (*ande*) by the new owners.

Rich peasants, unlike capitalist landowners, take part in the physical process of production along with their hired laborers, but unlike poor peasants, they employ substantial amounts of wage labor. The landholdings of rich peasants in Niltanne, although significantly smaller than those of capitalist landowners, are much larger than those of poor peasants, who subsist in great measure on what they produce from their small parcels of land. Unlike rich peasants, poor peasants seldom employ wage labor.

Tenants are distinguished from all the other agrarian classes in that they are neither landowning peasants nor landless laborers, but cultivate small parcels of land owned by others. It should be noted, however, that tenants do not exist in relation to an affluent class of pre-capitalist landowners, for such a class does not exist in Niltanne. Tenancy, commonly known as *ande*, was widely practised in Niltanne prior to the enactment of the 1958 Paddy Lands Act, which was aimed primarily at the protection of tenant rights. Nevertheless, the period since 1958 has seen a decline in *ande* tenancy, mainly because many of the landowners who had given parcels of their land to tenants on *ande* withdrew such lands in order to avoid the effects of the act (cf. Pieris 1976). While informal *ande* and other forms of short-term tenancy are widely practiced, only a few tenants appear in the official registers.

Agricultural laborers are distinguished from all the other agrarian classes in that they subsist almost entirely on wages earned as day laborers. They neither own nor possess cultivation rights to irrigated land. The few relatively large landholdings in the village have been converted into capitalist farms employing substantial wage labor. Rich peasants who own or control economically viable family farms also rely heavily on paid workers for their labor requirements. Poor peasants who possess only small parcels of land rarely employ paid labor (see Tables 10.1, 10.2 and 10.3).

Seasonal Migrant Labor in Niltanne

It has already been noted that studies dealing with seasonal labor migration in Sri Lanka have focused almost exclusively on factors that promote the supply of, and the demand for, seasonal labor. These studies seem to imply that 'demand' is simply a function of the

Table 10.1
*Distribution of Productive Resources among Three Classes of
 Landowners in Niltanne*

<i>Productive Resources (Percentage)</i>	<i>Capitalist Landowners</i>	<i>Rich Peasants</i>	<i>Poor Peasants</i>	<i>Others</i>
Agricultural Land	45.5	34.5	16.0	6.0
4-wheel tractors	66.6	33.3	—	—
2-wheel tractors	33.3	66.6	—	—
Plow cattle	—	55.5	44.5	—
Pump sets	66.6	33.3	—	—
Sprayers	50.0	25.0	—	25.0
Rice mills	33.3	16.6	—	50.0
Trucks	100.0	—	—	—
Cars	60.0	20.0	—	20.0
Percentage of the Total Number of Agricultural Families	2.59	12.93	25.0	—

Note: Since tenants and agricultural laborers are not landowners, they have been excluded from this table.

sharp rise in labor requirements in Dry Zone agrarian settlements during peak months of the agricultural cycle. In fact, however, this demand is a manifestation of a complex state of affairs in recipient villages and settlements.

Agrarian change in Niltanne, particularly since independence, has been far-reaching.⁸ The differentiation of agrarian classes, the commercialization of production and exchange, the transformation of the physical organization of production, the spread of new farming techniques and the growth of the village economy in terms of its productive resource base and the volume of production, have all been part of this process. How do these diverse aspects relate to one another?

By itself, the expansion of the productive resource base suggests that the local economy can now support or absorb an enlarged population. But given the skewed distribution of productive resources, particularly land, the fruits of economic growth have tended to become concentrated in the hands of a few. Moreover,

⁸ For a fuller discussion of agrarian change in Niltanne, see Hettige (1984:85-94).

Table 10.2
Landownership Patterns in Niltanne

Size of Holding (in Acres)	Agricultural Families			All Families		
	%	Number	Persons	%	Number	Persons
25.0 +	1.7	2	9	1.2	2	9
10.0 to 24.9	2.6	3	18	1.8	3	18
5.0 to 9.9	11.2	13	66	8.3	14	88
1.0 to 4.9	14.7	17	101	12.5	21	118
Less than 1.0	10.3	12	78	10.7	18	92
Landless	59.5	69	370	65.5	110	607
Total	100.0	116	642	100.0	168	932

Table 10.3

Farm Size in Niltanne in Acres

	<i>Average</i>	<i>Largest</i>	<i>Smallest</i>
Capitalist landowners	29.0	45.0	12.0
Rich peasants	4.6	10.0	3.0
Poor peasants	1.1	2.5	0.1
Tenants	1.4	3.5	0.1

modernization of agriculture often leads to the adoption of mechanical tools of production, such as tractors, which reduce the amount of manual labor required. As noted earlier, the use of tractors is widespread in Niltanne. However, as is common in much of the underdeveloped world, mechanization has not embraced the entire process of agricultural production. While certain agricultural operations in Niltanne are mechanized, many others, including newly introduced ones, remain labor-intensive. For example, tractors are extensively used for land preparation and threshing, but transplanting and harvesting are still entirely manual operations. Transplanting is a labor-intensive technique that has replaced the traditional practice of sowing broadcast, which required much less labor. Although in some respects modernized, therefore, agriculture in Niltanne continues to be relatively labor-intensive.

Family labor has always been an integral aspect of peasant production. Members of a peasant family, almost by definition, take part in the production process. Today, this holds true only for certain agrarian classes.⁹ Capitalist landowners in Niltanne do not take part in the physical process of production. Their land is worked entirely by paid workers. The upwardly mobile members of rich peasant families also do not engage in physical labor. They either attend school, often away from the village, or engage in white collar employment. Furthermore, women in these families concentrate on domestic work. The reduced involvement of family

⁹ Abstention from physical labor had been an attribute of the traditional landed elite stratum of the Goyigama (Cultivator) caste. Such a category of landowners has not existed in Niltanne, at least in its recent history. Only after independence did a well-to-do class of entrepreneurs emerge whose members could afford to abstain from physical labor.

labor in the physical process of production has been facilitated by increasing agricultural surpluses, which permit the employment of wage labor. This situation, coupled with the fact that the holdings of capitalist landowners and rich peasants are much larger than those of poor peasants and tenants, has led to the employment of substantial wage labor in the village.

As Table 10.2 shows, families holding no irrigated agricultural land represent well over 50 per cent of the families engaged in agriculture. This means that the class of agricultural laborers has grown enormously over the last few decades. Since these local laborers do not find sufficient work even during the peak season, it is pertinent to ask why there is a need for migrant workers. There are at least two factors involved. First, there is the often noted fact of seasonal fluctuation in the demand for labor. Second, there is a clear preference on the part of many employers to hire seasonal migrant workers.

In Niltanne, as in other settlements in the region dependent on major irrigation schemes, rice growers are forced to conform to a pre-determined time schedule in carrying out various agricultural operations, particularly land preparation and transplanting. When tank water is released to the fields, land must be prepared within a short period of time. Thus villagers who cultivate plots of land located adjacent to each other have to carry out a particular operation almost simultaneously. This leads to a sudden but temporary increase in the demand for labor. The influx of migrant labor coincides with this seasonal rise in the demand.

But why is there a preference for seasonal migrant laborers over landless laborers resident in Niltanne? From the point of view of the employers, there are certain advantages of hiring seasonal workers with whom the relationship of employment is often strictly contractual, sporadic and short-lived. To hire a migrant laborer involves no long-term, continuing social obligation, such as providing assistance in emergencies. During my fieldwork, there were several instances where migrant workers who fell sick during their stay in the village were immediately sent back home. Their employers did not feel obliged to render any assistance.

It was also evident that seasonal migrants work longer hours than village laborers. They stay in huts provided by employers and can be sent to the field as early as 6 a.m., whereas the local laborers usually start work at about 8 a.m. Moreover the migrants, who are

temporarily separated from their families, do not have to perform routine domestic tasks, and therefore can stay in the field almost until dark. I estimated that most of the migrant workers spend ten to twelve hours in the field, as against eight to nine hours usually spent by local workers. But despite these longer working hours, migrant workers in Niltanne are paid less because they are provided with food and shelter. In 1976, an average of Rs 5 was paid to village workers, whereas a migrant worker was paid an average of Rs. 4. These disparities continued into the 1980s despite a general rise in agricultural wages. Domestic workers were paid Rs. 18 to Rs. 20 per day in 1984, while itinerant workers were paid Rs. 17 to Rs. 18. Finally, those who employ migrant workers in large numbers also feel that it is more convenient to use migrant labor for certain operations that require a large number of workers, rather than to mobilize scattered village laborers. So the growing demand for seasonal migrants does not stem merely from labor requirements rooted in the seasonality of agricultural operations. As is evident, itinerant workers often compete with, and at times replace, locally resident workers.

One final note about the sexual division of labor in agriculture will conclude this section. In Niltanne today, this division is a significant aspect of agrarian relations. Certain agricultural operations are clearly the domain of male workers and no females are supposed to engage in them. The initial task of land preparation is the prerogative of male workers, followed by sowing, normally performed by male workers, and transplanting, a task performed mainly by females. Minor tasks performed between sowing or transplanting and harvesting, such as water management, weeding, manuring, and so on, are again in the hands of male workers. Harvesting is an activity in which both sexes take part.

Harvesting, like transplanting, is a labor-intensive activity that requires the employment of large numbers of workers. But female migrant workers are rarely employed for this operation. Only male seasonal workers arrive in the village at harvest time. Those females who take part in harvesting operations in Niltanne are from the village itself. It is significant that farmers prefer to employ male workers for harvesting, which is considered to be heavier work and therefore more suitable for males. Resident female workers do not remain inactive, however. They organize small work groups consisting of family members and others, both

male and female, and enter into contractual agreements with certain employers to undertake harvesting work on a piecemeal basis. In this way female workers manage to secure some work during harvesting time.

Threshing is the final operation of the agricultural cycle. While some peasants still use buffaloes for threshing, tractors fitted with mechanical threshers are widely used today. Since these operations do not require the employment of a large number of wage workers, only a few seasonal migrant workers stay on to take part in this activity. Those who stay are usually male workers.

As is evident, the only agricultural operation in which female seasonal workers take part in large numbers is transplanting. But even transplanting is not a female monopoly, as a sprinkling of male workers are also engaged in this activity along with female workers. Today, male workers are extensively employed for harvesting, which has traditionally been a task performed mainly by women. In other parts of the country, particularly in the southwest, it is still the prerogative of women.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Seasonal Migrants

Around October, when the main cultivation season (*maha*) begins, groups of workers—young and old, male and female—migrate to the northcentral Dry Zone, mainly from districts in the Central Province. At this time of year over-crowded buses carrying these workers are a common sight. In some cases, whole families temporarily migrate to the area. In others, adults migrate leaving young children behind, often in the custody of elders.

Between October and December 1976, well over 100 migrants stayed and worked in Niltanne. 54 migrants were interviewed during this period and information was gathered on diverse matters such as socioeconomic background and reasons for temporary migration. A similar number of itinerant workers moved into Niltanne seeking work between October 1984 and January 1985. On this occasion 61 were contacted and interviewed in order to gather comparable data.

Table 10.4 gives the age distribution of the 54 workers interviewed in 1976–77 and the 61 workers interviewed in 1984–85. In 1976–77, 77.7 per cent were less than 31 years old. By 1984–85, this figure had dropped only slightly (to 72.1 per cent). However, it is evident from the decrease in the proportion of workers aged 10 to 20, and the increase in the proportion of workers aged 31 to 50, that the average age of the migrant population had risen significantly. While it is difficult to explain this change comprehensively, the evidence suggests that many of those who worked as migrant laborers in 1976–77 have continued to do so, while the rate of recruitment of young workers has declined.

Table 10.4

Age Distribution of Migrant Workers in Niltanne (1976–77) and 1984–85)

Age Group (Years)	1976–77		1984–85	
	Number	%	Number	%
10–20	18	33.3	10	16.4
21–30	24	44.4	34	55.8
31–50	9	16.7	16	26.2
51 and above	3	5.6	1	1.6
Total	54	100.0	61	100.0

Table 10.5 shows that in 1976–77, women comprised nearly 76 per cent of the seasonal workers, but that by 1984–85 this figure had declined to 60.7 per cent. This change may be related to the fact that more and more smallholding peasants have opted to migrate in search of seasonal wage labor. Table 10.6 indicates that while more than 90 per cent of all seasonal workers both in 1976–77 and 1984–85 owned less than 1 acre, in the earlier year most of these were totally landless, whereas in 1984–85 the majority held some land, but not more than 1 acre. Since land is more commonly held by men than by women, the reduced proportion of women in the seasonal labor force is at least partly attributable to the increase of small landowners. In accounting for this increase, I have observed that in some 'donor villages' in the vicinity of Kandy and Gampola, landless laborers who are now employed in the Mahaweli Development Project cannot normally get the leave they need to be also able to work as seasonal laborers. Smallholding peasants who are adversely affected by the rising cost of living, however, are increasingly forced to seek supplementary forms of income. Since

exchange labor, which does not produce a cash income, is still widely practised by Kandyian smallholders, seasonal migration has become an attractive option for those who need to supplement their cash income.

Table 10.5
Distribution of Migrant Workers by sex
in Niltanne, 1976-77 and 1984-85

	1976-77		1984-85	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Males	13	24.1	24	39.3
Females	41	75.9	37	60.7
Total	54	100.0	61	100.0

Table 10.6
Landownership of Migrant Workers
in Niltanne, (1976-77 and 1984-85)

<i>Extent of Landownership</i>	1976-77		1984-85	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Landless	37	68.5	16	26.2
Own less than 1 acre	15	27.8	40	65.6
Own 1 acre or more	2	3.7	5	8.2
Total	54	100.0	61	100.0

Table 10.7
Province of Origin for Migrant Workers
in Niltanne, 1976-77 and 1984-85

<i>Province</i>	1976-77		1984-85	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Central	34	63.0	39	63.9
Northcentral	8	14.8	4	6.6
Northwestern	12	22.2	18	29.5
Total	54	100.0	61	100.0

As Table 10.7 shows, the seasonal migrants to Niltanne have come from three different provinces, the Central, the North Central, and the North Western. The majority (more than 60 per cent) reside in the Central Province, as a result, in addition to the factors mentioned

earlier, of the direct public transport links between the Central Province and Polonnaruwa. There have been no significant changes in this pattern over the last eight years.

With regard to educational attainments (Table 10.8), the majority of seasonal workers, both in 1976-77 and 1984-85, received no more than a few years of schooling. At the earlier date, however, 30 per cent of the workers had received at least secondary education. Indeed, two were female university arts graduates who were unemployed and who joined the migrant labor force because they were reluctant, for status reasons, to take on paid physical labor in their own villages. By 1984-85, however, the percentage of seasonal workers with a secondary education had dropped to 9.8, and none of them had gone beyond the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level). It is also worth noting that the percentage of seasonal workers without any formal education at all declined from 16.7 to 3.3 between 1976-77 and 1984-85. This appears to be due to the fact that those who lack any formal education tend to be concentrated in upper age cohorts, and that most of the older people in the 1976-77 group have subsequently moved out of the seasonal labor force.

Table 10.8
Educational Attainment of Migrant Workers
in Niltanne, (1976-77 and 1984-85)

Level of Attainment	1976-77		1984-85	
	Number	%	Number	%
No formal education	9	16.7	2	3.3
Grades 1-4	21	38.9	32	52.5
Grades 5-7	7	13.0	21	34.4
Grade 8-G C E (O Level)	13	24.0	6	9.8
Advanced Level	2	3.7	-	-
University Degree	2	3.7	-	-
Total	54	100.0	61	100.0

Recent Developments

Although this paper has focused on the agrarian situation in a single

village, it is not possible to discuss micro-level agrarian change without reference to macro-level phenomena (such as market forces, inflation, changing wage structures and the resuscitation of private enterprise). In this regard, there have been significant macro-level changes in Sri Lanka since 1977, the impact of which has been felt, with variable intensity, throughout the country. This is not the place for a detailed examination of all aspects of these far-reaching changes, but it is useful to identify the main developments that have occurred since 1977, particularly those that bear directly on the central themes of this paper.

The term 'liberalization' is widely used as a summary description of the economic and social policies adopted by the United National Party (UNP) government that came into power in 1977. Domestically, more and more economic activities were expected to be removed from state control and handed over to private firms and individual entrepreneurs. Thus the private sector began to play a more significant part in internal trade and commerce, in the purchase of agricultural produce, in the supply of agricultural inputs and machinery, and so forth, while the role of public sector organizations (such as multipurpose cooperative societies) was reduced. Externally, new import liberalization policies allowed private and public sector importers to bring in a whole range of commodities from foreign countries. The high rate of inflation caused by factors such as the enhanced money supply and devaluation of the local currency, inevitably forced the cost of living to rise, and also led to wage and salary increases, though the latter did not always keep pace with the rate of inflation. What are the implications of these changes for the agrarian economy of Niltanne?

Before 1977, state sector enterprises (such as the network of multipurpose cooperative societies) played a dominant role in rural commerce and trade. The cooperative outlets at the village level not only supplied many essential and subsidized consumer items at controlled prices, but were crucial to such activities as the provision of agricultural credit, the purchase of agricultural produce, and the supply of agricultural inputs. The liberalization policies introduced by the UNP government have substantially changed this state of affairs. When essential consumer items ceased to be subsidized, private traders expanded their activities. While there were only three private grocery shops in Niltanne at the end of 1976 (not including small tea shops), in 1985 there were six.

The period since 1977 has witnessed a steady rise in the costs of agricultural production. The guaranteed price of paddy has risen less than twofold, from about Rs 35 per bushel at the end of 1976 to Rs 65 in 1985, but the costs of production have more than doubled, from about Rs 1,250 per acre to about Rs 3000. It is mainly the poor peasants who have been adversely affected. As producers of the smallest possible marketable surplus, they can hardly absorb the increased cost of agricultural inputs. Affluent farmers who own agricultural machinery, such as tractors, are not affected by rising costs to the same extent. Moreover, those who own tractors can increase their earnings by hiring out their vehicles.

Today, the initial capital outlay required to meet cultivation expenses is so substantial that, in many cases, it is beyond the means of smallholding peasants, who are forced either to return to cheaper but less efficient techniques of farming or to lease out their land. Many poor peasants in Niltanne today resort to one or other of these options. Since tractor charges account for a substantial proportion of their expenditure, many of them now use buffaloes for land preparation. Others no longer work their own small parcels of land. Instead, they lease them out to those who possess the necessary capital. Under this system, which is known as *vi porondwva*, the lessee agrees to pay a land rent in paddy. The owner of the plot of land does not contribute anything, either in cash or labor, but collects this rent in kind when the crop is harvested. The current rent amounts to about one-fourth of the total yield. This new leasing system differs from conventional share tenancy (*ande*) in two respects. First, it is not an ongoing contractual agreement, but a temporary arrangement which can be renewed or terminated at the end of each season. Second, the land rent is fixed and, unlike the rent in conventional share tenancy, does not vary with the total yield.

Another significant feature of agrarian change over the past few years has been the general rise in agricultural wages throughout the country. In Niltanne, agricultural wages ranged from four to five rupees per day at the end of 1976. Today the daily wage of agricultural laborers is Rs 15–20. Although this wage increase appears substantial in comparison with the rate of increase in the price of agricultural produce such as paddy, one has to note that it has not kept pace with the rising price of essential consumer items, some of which have increased as much as tenfold since 1977.

Moreover, essential consumer goods are now no longer subsidized by the state. Thus, despite an increase in agricultural wages, the living conditions of agricultural laborers have been stagnant at best, and may even have deteriorated. The following statement by a day laborer in Niltanne summarizes his experience.

Those days we were paid a few rupees a day. But, then, with little money we could buy our day's requirements. Besides, the essential goods were cheap those days. Now we earn more but, with what we earn, it is not possible to buy even the most needed things. Those days, we could afford to be out of work for a few days, but not any more

It is significant that the wage differential between local workers and seasonal migrants has been maintained to this day. While the former are paid as much as Rs 20 per day, the corresponding wage for seasonal migrants is Rs 15 to 18. As indicated earlier, most of the itinerant workers originate from Kandyan villages where the daily wage paid to manual workers is reported to be about Rs 15. So the wages paid to them in Niltanne are attractive. It is also significant that most of the seasonal migrants originate from villages where no new and more lucrative forms of employment have been created over the past few years.

While market forces have tended to levelled agricultural wages across regional boundaries, such wages still lag behind those paid to unskilled workers in other sectors, such as urban services and the construction industry. There is little doubt that this results from specific conditions prevailing in the countryside, where a significant proportion of the population is affected by landlessness, unemployment and underemployment. While these conditions persist, seasonal migration of agricultural labor continues unabated.

Reasons for Temporary Migration

The circumstances that encourage seasonal migration have already been outlined, but it should be noted also that the reasons given by workers themselves refer to the same factors that I have identified—unemployment and underemployment, indebtedness, the inability

to earn enough to live on due to low wages and the high cost of living, inability to save for specific and emergency needs such as illness, and regional variations in the agricultural cycle.¹⁰ During their stay in Niltanne, seasonal workers experience unfavourable working conditions and undergo many hardships. To begin with, they have to stay away from their families. Some parents leave their young children behind, usually in the custody of relatives and friends. While in Niltanne, most migrant workers live in temporary huts provided by their employers. These huts are often located adjacent to paddy fields, and those who occupy them are thus constantly exposed to fast-breeding malarial mosquitoes.

Despite unfavorable working conditions, most seasonal migrants try to stay in the host village for as long as there is work. Although they can save virtually nothing in their own villages, almost everything they earn as seasonal workers can be saved because they are provided with food and accommodation free of charge. Some employers also bear the cost of their travel by public transport. The money they save helps them in numerous ways—in repaying loans, buying new clothes, renovating their houses, celebrating the new year, and so on. In short, their temporary migration is a great relief for these poverty-stricken families living at or below the subsistence level. There is, therefore, a tendency among most migrant families to contrive to leave their villages each year in search of seasonal work. In the process, some workers have established informal contracts with their employers. Such contracts help both the employer and the workers. Every year, the employer informs the workers of the number of workers needed and the date that work will begin. Other migrants have no fixed employers, but enquire about work opportunities from friends, relatives and personal acquaintances before they leave their homes. Still others only begin their search for work on arrival in the area. Some farmers send someone to the bus terminal to meet and recruit such workers.

Implications for Agrarian Relations

As already mentioned, well over 100 seasonal migrants worked

¹⁰ Reasons identified by other recent researchers are remarkably similar (see, e.g., Crooks and Ranbanda 1981; Perera and Gunawardena 1980).

in Niltanne during the 1976–77 *maha* season and an almost equal number came in 1984–85. These workers did not all stay in the village throughout the peak months. Individual workers stayed in the village for differing lengths of time, ranging from a few days to a few months. So it is difficult to determine the total number of man-days of work they contributed.

It has also been noted that the class of agricultural laborers resident in Niltanne has grown enormously over the past few decades. Several factors have contributed to its expansion, including the decline of tenancy, the influx of new settlers, population growth, and the concentration of village land in the hands of a few landowners.

The early inhabitants of the village (*purana* villagers) were landowning peasants. The landless people who arrived there in the 1940s either became tenants or acquired small parcels of land. But those who arrived later were unable to acquire land because, by then, all irrigable land had been brought under cultivation. These people became wage laborers.

Most of the agricultural laborers in Niltanne are recent settlers who arrived in the village in the 1950s and 1960s. A few people have moved into the village as recently as 1984 and have been given plots of high land, up to one acre in extent, under what is known as the Village Expansion Scheme. Most of the settlers have built simple wattle-and-daub houses on their land. They have no access to irrigation water and, therefore, can cultivate their high land plots only when it rains. But many poor settlers who subsist as wage laborers find no time to grow food crops in their home gardens, because the cultivation season is exactly the time when they hope to find employment. The well-to-do farmers who grow high land crops on a commercial basis employ a large number of workers. Landless laborers faced with problems of securing their livelihood will take paid work rather than grow subsistence crops in their home gardens. In other words, the high land plots do not constitute a regular or a significant source of subsistence. For most of those who occupy them, the only significant source of livelihood is wage labor.

Apart from commercial high land cultivation, paddy cultivation, and other related activities such as rice processing, there are no significant sources of wage employment in the locality. The owners of the few rice mills in the village usually bring in workers from other areas and, therefore, do not depend entirely on village workers.

Chena cultivation, once a significant source of subsistence for the villagers, is no longer possible because the forest land in and around the village has been cleared for settlement and other purposes. During the dry season, some landowning farmers use some of their paddy fields for growing subsidiary crops such as chillies and cowpea. Those who do not own paddy land but possess substantial capital can lease blocks of land by paying a lump-sum in cash as land rent. But this is beyond the means of landless laborers.

Many of the resident agricultural laborers are almost as much strangers in Niltanne as the itinerant workers. In the first place, they have migrated from areas far away, and although they have ties of marriage and kinship among themselves, such links between them and the longer-established villagers are uncommon. Moreover, most of the laborers live separately, outside the cluster of houses in the main village settlement, away from the main road and the market place. This physical separation, coupled with their relatively inferior social position, prevents the kind of constant social intercourse, particularly with the well-to-do, that might otherwise facilitate the establishment of economically useful informal contacts.

Against this background, it is not difficult to understand why the wealthier landowning farmers prefer to employ seasonal migrants, particularly when they require workers in large numbers to carry out certain mass agricultural operations. Thus, seasonal workers who arrive during the peak months do not merely meet additional labor needs but actively compete for employment with local workers. This is evident in the fact that few local laborers find work for more than 20 days a month during the peak period, despite their ambition and need to earn as much as possible during these months.¹¹

Seasonal workers withdraw from the local labor market at the end of the peak period. But given the size of the local labor force, the slack period, particularly the dry months, is very unfavorable for village laborers. Since the demand for labor is very limited, workers must compete with one another for the little work available in the village and the vicinity. Some often find no work for weeks on end and subsist entirely on what they receive under the Food

¹¹ Almost all adult members of the families of agricultural laborers engage in wage labor during the peak months. Often parents even leave infants behind in the care of school-age children, who usually stay away from school at this time of year.

Stamps Scheme.¹² The following statement by a middle-aged woman worker indicates the gravity of their plight.

Last month we were all without work for about ten days at a stretch. We had to live entirely on food stamps. It is not easy to obtain food on credit from village shops. If we don't settle accounts for one week, they stop giving any more. We can't go to another shop. We cannot borrow money from our neighbors because they have no money. Those who have money won't give because they know that we cannot pay back. One of my children was sick and she was without medicine for five days because it took so long to borrow ten rupees from a person known to me to take the child to the nearest hospital by bus. If it was some other serious illness, she would have died.

Market forces clearly do not favor the landless workers in the village. Moreover, the working of the labor market is beyond their control. How do they survive under these circumstances?

As mentioned earlier, agricultural laborers constitute the largest single agrarian class in Niltanne. Yet, unlike the landowning classes, they are not an independent power group with their own collective identity and organization, so they cannot engage in independent political action. The best they have been able to accomplish so far has been to align themselves with certain other agrarian classes in the hope of reaping some benefits through joint struggle.

At the time of the 1970 general elections, Niltanne was divided into two broadly defined camps, one supporting the ruling United National Party, and the other aligning itself with the United Front opposition, consisting of the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Hettige 1984: 128–66). While the UNP supporters were mobilized and led by a few wealthy landowners, the United Front (UF) supporters, comprising people from a number of social strata including rich peasants, poor peasants and agricultural laborers, were led by a few emerging rich peasants. At the national level, the election campaign of the opposition was introduced by its

¹² The new government that came into power in 1977 abolished the system of food subsidies and introduced a new Food Stamp Scheme. Under the new scheme, families with less than a certain minimum monthly income are entitled to receive food stamps, the value of which is determined by the size of the family.

leaders as a struggle of the common man against the capitalists (*danapatiyo*). In the local context, leaders of the group supporting the opposition front translated the national campaign objectives into a local idiom.

For ordinary villagers, the UF campaign appeared to oppose dominant local interests. The whole exercise was aided by the fact that most of the leaders of the UNP faction were wealthy landowners and businessmen who by then had not only acquired substantial village land but had moved into other areas of business as well, such as rice processing, transport and the hiring out of agricultural machinery. Leaders of the UF group impressed upon their supporters that the concentration of productive wealth, particularly land, in the hands of a few was largely responsible for the problems, such as landlessness, poverty and unemployment, that faced ordinary villagers. Interestingly enough, the leaders hardly discussed the specific grievances of agricultural laborers. Instead, they cited landlessness as the main problem facing many categories of villagers including the laborers. The plight of agricultural laborers was attributed almost exclusively to the general issue of landlessness. In other words, the United Front campaign in Niltanne contained no discussion of the problems of agricultural laborers in terms of their working conditions.

Landless laborers found no reason to resist this tendency because, given the unfavorable market conditions which were beyond their control both in perception and in reality, they hoped to become landowning farmers themselves. Thus they thought and acted in keeping with the dominant ideology and values, at least for a time. Despite the change of government, the harsh realities that landless laborers faced prior to the 1970 general election persisted virtually unaltered after the election (Hettige 1984: 128-66). Moreover, they remained landless even at the end of the term of office of the newly elected government. In the absence of a collective voice of their own, agricultural laborers were forced to handle their day-to-day problems in individual rather than class terms. Thus, when the campaign for the 1977 general elections was launched, old alliances had already broken down and given way to new ones.

On the one hand, the United Front no longer existed as a national-level coalition. On the other, local leaders of the alliance, who had failed to find solutions to the problems facing ordinary

villagers, particularly landless laborers, could no longer pretend to represent their interests. Moreover, local UNP leaders had already begun to question what the socialists had done to solve the problems of the poor. Poor villagers in general remained confused and ambivalent, unconvinced by the rhetoric of the UNP and probably unable to identify themselves with its affluent local leadership.

Landless laborers, in general, remained uncommitted during the 1977 general election, neither becoming identified with nor openly supporting either of the two main parties. The actual experiences of agricultural laborers reinforced their passivity. Their political identities and alliances have not helped them survive under difficult circumstances, nor have such alliances assisted them in solving problems such as landlessness. Rather, it has been their personal ties and individual efforts that have done more to help them secure their day-to-day subsistence. As the following statement by a young landless laborer indicates, these realities have persisted into the mid-1980s.

Being landless, we can survive only if we find work. There is nobody to help us in this regard. We have to wander about in search of work, particularly when there is not much work in the village. If we do politics and antagonize some people, we might not be employed by them. We should be able to work for anybody.

Objective conditions conducive to the growth of contractual employer-employee relations already exist in Niltanne, but prevalent market forces and local power relations make it unlikely that agricultural laborers will benefit from an impersonal market situation. It is, therefore, in the interest of laborers to establish and maintain personal relationships with landowners, but they can do this only as individuals, not as a class.

Many agricultural laborers have entered into dependent relationships with landowning families in the village as a result of successful manipulation of their personal and local ties. Once established, these relationships tend to be enduring and informal. But the laborer is so dependent on his master that the relationship is highly unequal. In short, it becomes virtually a master-servant relationship. The master is in a position to dictate the terms of the relationship, and the servant accepts these terms because the relationship

guarantees survival under unfavorable market conditions. The servant also sacrifices his freedom and individual dignity for the moderate gains he makes.

One should not infer, however, that all relationships between agricultural laborers and their employers in Niltanne are enduring and informal. In many instances, the relationship tends to be impersonal and contractual. It is this tendency that agricultural laborers attempt to change. Change is all the more important in an uncertain economic situation in which bondage, more than freedom, guarantees subsistence and survival. Local laborers not only have to face competition during the peak months, but must also struggle for survival during the off-season when employment opportunities are scarce. Moreover, prolonged droughts do not permit home gardening, which would otherwise be a potential supplementary source of subsistence for poor families. Laborers, however, are clearly faced with a dilemma. Given the prevalent local power structure and the forces operating in the labor market, their ability to confront the situation as a class is slight, but their capacity to manipulate personal ties is also limited. If one succeeds in establishing a continuing personal relationship with an employer, one's bargaining power and freedom are often lost. If one does not succeed, one is placed in a precarious situation with little recourse in emergencies.

Despite the fact that landless laborers constitute a significant proportion of the rural population of Sri Lanka, their significance has not been recognized either by the state or by the diverse political parties engaged in national politics. Even the Marxist parties (such as the Communist Party of Sri Lanka and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party), which have been active in mobilizing the urban working class for trade union and political action, have not recognized the existence of a numerically significant class of agricultural laborers in the countryside. Even the loosely organized peasant associations (*govi sanvidhanaya*), often affiliated with one or the other of the leftist parties, which existed or still exist in some parts of the country, derived their memberships from among poor peasants. The main concerns of these associations have been the rising cost of production, water taxation, inadequacy of market facilities, landlessness, exploitation by middlemen, and so on. In other words, they have focused attention on problems facing land-owning peasants. Specific problems of agricultural laborers, such as poor working conditions, low wages, and seasonality and

uncertainty of employment, have not been addressed by the peasant associations. These grievances appear to have been subsumed under the common issue of landlessness.

Perhaps the only time in the recent history of agrarian change in Sri Lanka in which the interests of agricultural laborers received some attention was when the Paddy Lands Act of 1958 was introduced. Under the provision of the act that established cultivation committees at the village level, intended to represent diverse agrarian interests, special efforts were made to ensure the representation of landless laborers on the committees. Later, however, the act was amended so as to exclude them (Pieris 1976: 31). The problems facing agricultural laborers have never been the subject of national political debate. As a result, such issues have never surfaced during national or local elections. The general practice has often been to group rural peasants together, thereby ignoring structural differentiation among them. Solutions for diverse problems affecting distinct agrarian classes, such as rural poverty, inadequacy of civic amenities, and lack of rural credit, do not attempt to identify and address specific problems facing agricultural laborers.

The circumstances outlined above have been largely responsible for a tendency among both peasants and outsiders to interpret the problems of agricultural laborers in terms of landlessness. In other words, the concept of peasant proprietorship has been the all-pervading ideal guiding both the peasants' thinking and the state's actions. Thus, the aspiration of the landless has been to obtain land, and agrarian policies have focused on the issue of landlessness. Whether it is redistribution of land through land reforms or alienation of new land through peasant colonization programs, the objective has been to convert the landless into landowning peasants. Most of the landless, however, fail to achieve this transformation. For many, the actual transition has been in the opposite direction. Yet, they have been compelled, both by the realities that surround them and by diverse forces ranging from local level political groupings to the state, to look in one direction, that is, towards peasant proprietorship. But for agricultural laborers in general, this goal has so far been more of an illusion than a reality. The following excerpt from an interview with an elderly laborer in Niltanne sums up their predicament.

We arrived in [Niltanne] in 1945. We did not have money to buy land and, therefore, began to cultivate a piece of land belonging to a (*purana*) villager. In 1959, the owner withdrew it from us saying that he had to pass it on to his son. Ever since we have been living as day laborers. Our only hope was to obtain one or two acres of paddy land because it is very difficult to live as day laborers. But no land was available in the vicinity as, by now, we were surrounded by colonies [new settlements]. Many local political leaders said that they would give us land but they never kept their promises. Nobody cares about our problems either. We are struggling to survive year by year. When there is work, we have to share it with outsiders. When there is little work, we still have to share it with others in the village. Sometimes, there is no work at all.

Despite their attempts, the reality has continued to be at variance with the ideal. This of course is not surprising, because the recent history of Sri Lanka has been a history of the dissolution of pre-capitalist production relations and their replacement by increasingly capitalist forms. This process invariably involves, among other things, a concentration of land and other productive resources in the hands of a few, leading to the dispossession of many peasants. It is a process which, coupled with population growth, contributes to the swelling of the ranks of the agricultural proletariat. This tendency is further reinforced by the fact that the dispossessed peasants are not absorbed into non-agricultural pursuits and urban industries, owing to the absence of significant urban industrial growth. Agricultural laborers in Niltanne are sandwiched between two forces. On the one hand, they suffer the harsh realities associated with their landlessness, which include seasonal fluctuations and uncertainty of income, poor living and working conditions, competition for work with seasonal migrants, near lack of independence and bargaining power, and social stigma. On the other hand, they are told that the only way out of their present misery is to become peasant proprietors, which is exactly what most agricultural laborers in Niltanne have been unable to do.

In conclusion, one final observation will be offered. Landless laborers who are anxious to escape from their present dilemma tend to identify landlessness as the basis of their plight. They do not appear to believe that an agricultural laborer is capable of

solving his problems as an agricultural laborer. The ideal of transforming landless laborers into landowning peasants conforms to the dominant ideology prevalent in an underdeveloped agrarian situation where opportunities for non-agricultural employment are scarce. However, it is certainly not in keeping with the reality that landless laborers confront in Niltanne.

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4

Perceptions and Representations of Agrarian Change

The Ideological History of the Sri Lankan 'Peasantry'

MICK MOORE

Introduction

The Sri Lankan rural economy has long been categorized into a plantation sector producing tea, rubber and some coconuts for export, and a smallholder sector producing mainly food, especially rice, for domestic consumption.¹ While incomplete, this dichotomy is still usable. One of the significant features of Sri Lankan rural history over the past half century has been a partial transfer of tea and rubber production from the plantation sector to the smallholder sector. In this, and in related respects, the traditional plantation-smallholder

¹ A slightly different version of this paper was published in *Modern Asian Studies* 23 (1): 179–207, 1989. It is reprinted here with permission. The paper is in part both a condensation and an expansion of arguments found in M. Moore, *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka* (Cambridge, 1985). Evidence may be found there for points made here in a rather sweeping fashion. I am grateful to James Brow and Joe Weeramunda for comments on an earlier version. The tentative nature of my own commitment to the interpretations put forward here should make clear that I implicate no one but myself.

dichotomy has been weakening (Moore 1985:22–24, 65–73). Yet, in another important respect, there has been no convergence between the two sectors. The plantation sector has remained fully capitalist in the commonsense meaning of that term, while capitalist relations of production appear to have made few further inroads into the smallholder sector. It is true that a great deal of the labor used in smallholder production is hired. But that has long been the case. The evidence suggests that since World War II the small family farm has at least held its own as the dominant form under which land is owned and managed. This has happened despite rapid population growth on a terrain already densely populated.

The proximate reason for this slow rate of change is that for the past half century, since control of domestic affairs was assumed by Sri Lankan administrations directly elected under universal adult suffrage, all governments, regardless of their party composition, have persistently redirected material resources in such a way as to continually reproduce the peasant or smallholder form of small-scale agricultural production. Inherent tendencies towards capitalism arising from the play of market forces have had to contend with redistributive government policies which have continually strengthened non-capitalist forms of agricultural production.

The reasons why all Sri Lankan governments have supported peasant farming are complex, and do not exclude the perceived self-interest of governing elites. The set of factors on which this paper concentrates is ideological. In order to support and sustain its claim to be the legitimate political heir to the British colonial power, the Sri Lankan nationalist elite became 'locked-in' to a particular interpretation of the historical and moral nature of Sri Lankan rural society and of the proper role of state power in reconstituting that society out of the 'deformed' patterns of social and economic relationships created by colonial rule and alien influences generally. This interpretation of society has involved the notion of a 'peasantry' as the historical moral core of Sinhalese (as distinct from Sri Lankan) society. Rural policy, and thus the continual reconstitution of smallholder agriculture, has been significantly determined by a set of beliefs which were fitted together and embodied in an elite nationalist interpretation of history to meet the political needs of the 1920s and 1930s.

These beliefs have remained influential in part because of the remarkable (relative) stability of the Sri Lankan political system

from 1931 until very recently. Yet they have also helped set the scene for the undermining of that stability, and for the recent descent into severe ethnic conflict, political repression by the government party, and the incipient disintegration of the whole mechanism of rule. For the primacy assigned to the majority Sinhalese community in this dominant ideology has helped legitimate a wide range of symbolic and material aggressions against the perceived 'privileges' of the minority Sri Lanka Tamil community. And it was from the responses to these aggressions that the current tragedies were born.

The Persistence of Small-Scale Farming

Sri Lanka is a mainly rural country. It is also, for reasons explained below, unusual among developed countries in having experienced no significant net rural-urban migration in recent decades. The urban proportion of the population increased from 15 per cent in 1946 to only 22 per cent in 1971, and remained at the same level in 1981.² Because of the relatively high incidence of rural non-agricultural employment, the proportion of the workforce engaged in agriculture is lower than these figures might suggest, and has indeed declined somewhat. The entire agricultural economy, including for statistical convenience small numbers of persons engaged in forestry, fishing and hunting, accounted for 53 per cent of the employed workforce at the 1953 and 1963 censuses, 50 per cent in 1971 and 45 per cent in 1981.³

It is not, however, the size of the total agricultural workforce which is relevant here. My concern is with the number of persons employed in the smallholder, rather than the plantation, sector; and more importantly, with the number of persons within that smallholder sector who obtain a livelihood from their own family farms, as opposed to working as hired laborers.

² Government of Ceylon (1971: Volume 2, Part 1, Table 4); and Government of Sri Lanka, (1981: Preliminary Release No. 1, Table 2).

³ Government of Ceylon (1953: Volume 4, Part 1, Table 3); Government of Ceylon (1963: Volume 2, Part 1, Table 2); Government of Ceylon, (1971: Volume 2, Part 2, Table 9); and Government of Sri Lanka (1981: Preliminary Release No. 4, Table 12). Here, as elsewhere in this paper, the occupational rather than the industrial classification of the workforce is used. In the case of agriculture the two are virtually identical.

The employment statistics in Sri Lankan censuses, in many ways fairly detailed, are not easily adapted to present needs. Any attempt to identify quantitative trends in production relations within the smallholder sector will encounter two main statistical problems. One is the inadequate disaggregation of published data. The other is the long-term decline in the size of the plantation sector relative to the smallholder sector, and the consequent need to treat separately data for the two sectors which are presented in an aggregated fashion. Because the tea, rubber and coconut producing sector is organized on capitalist lines, its long-term relative decline has led to a corresponding decline in the proportion of wage laborers in the total agricultural workforce.⁴ That, in itself, does not necessarily indicate a relative decline in the proportion of wage laborers in the *smallholder* sector.

This is not the place to detail the inadequacies of the available statistics. One might, however, note a point relevant to the later argument: the employment categories used at the 1946 census distorted reality by making it impossible for anyone to be recorded as obtaining the bulk of his or her income by hiring out his or her labor in the production of rice (Moore 1981:382–83). On my reading of the evidence, this is part of a much broader tendency to deny the existence of a proletariat in the ideologically sensitive, ‘traditional,’ rice-growing, smallholder economy.

Such relevant employment statistics as are available from census reports from 1953 onwards are summarized in Table 11.1. Persons earning a living mainly from work on their own family farms have comprised an almost constant proportion of the total national labor force (Col. 1), and a steadily rising, proportion of the agricultural labor force (Col. 2). Because of the relative decline in the size of the plantation proletariat, this latter trend does not conclusively refute any claim that, within the smallholder sector, the relative size of the proletariat has been growing. The census employment statistics are neither sufficiently disaggregated by crop and employment status nor sufficiently consistent over time in definition and presentation to permit a definitive test of the latter claim. However, a number of

⁴ The proportion of the total agricultural labor force recorded as paid employees declined from 57 per cent in 1953 (Government of Ceylon 1953: Volume 4, Part 1, Table 5) to 45 per cent in 1981 (Government of Sri Lanka 1981: Preliminary Release No. 4, Table 9).

estimates and, above all, the figures in Col. 3, suggest that the claim is extremely implausible.

Table 11.1
Percentage of Smallholders in the Sri Lankan Workforce, 1953-81

Year	Persons Classified in the Census as 'Cultivators and Farmers'* as a Percentage of:		
	Total Employed Workforce 1	Workforce Employed in Agriculture† 2	Workforce Employed in the Smallholder Sector** 3
1953	28	43	85
1963	25	47	n.a.
1971	27	54	93
1981	25	57	n.a.

Note: *The actual terms used in the censuses were 'farming occupations' (1953), 'cultivators' (1963), and 'cultivators and farmers' (1971 and 1981). In each case, the category relates to farm enterprise owners and managers and their family labor force, and excludes hired labor.

† Because of the way in which statistics are aggregated in the sources, these data include very small numbers of forestry, fishing and hunting workers.

** These figures are estimates. For 1953, the smallholder workforce was taken to be all persons engaged in agricultural and livestock production (not forestry, fishing and hunting), except those engaged primarily in the production of tea, rubber and coconuts. The 1971 figure for the smallholder workforce is derived by excluding from the total agricultural workforce (defined narrowly as in 1953) (a) all 'farm managers, estate supervisors and estate superintendents,' and (b) all persons employed mainly as hired laborers in the production of tea, rubber and coconuts.

Source: Government of Ceylon (1953: Volume 4, Part 1 Tables 3 and 5); Government of Ceylon (1963: Volume 1, Part 2 Table 7); Government of Ceylon, (1971: Volume 2, Part 2 Table 5); and Government of Sri Lanka, (1981: Preliminary Release No. 4 Table 6).

One may object that the census data on employment status in agriculture are misleading. Small farmers, whose main income source is the hiring out of their labor, tend for status reasons to claim cultivation of their own land as their primary occupation (Moore 1985: 186-187; cf. Kirk in this volume). There is a similar tendency, relevant to the main theme of this paper, for rural dwellers to exaggerate the importance of rice when compared to other crops in the provision of employment and income (Moore 1985: 86-88). The degree of proletarianization in the smallholder economy is thus greater than

indicated by the figures in Col. 3. However, unless the incidence of such misreporting has drastically increased over time, the conclusions about trends are unaffected. And these conclusions are supported by official data series in the number and size of cultivated holdings in the smallholder sector.

A comparison of the results of the 1973 and 1982 agricultural censuses makes the point. Over that period, the number of smallholdings increased by 12 per cent, at a much faster rate than the 2 per cent growth in the size of the total agricultural workforce. More significantly, the number of holdings grew fastest in the smaller land size classes (below 3 acres), while the average size of holdings within each land size class stayed virtually unchanged.⁵ Statistics relating to the entire period since independence point in the same direction. The average size of holding has declined in all size classes of holding, but the distribution pattern appears not to have changed significantly, and the total number of agricultural holdings has increased almost as fast as the total number of rural dwellers (see Table 1.6). There are questions about the accuracy of these statistics which need not be discussed here. The important point is that, at the very least, the landholding statistics do not support any claim that there has been a significant extension into the smallholder sector of capitalist production relations involving the dispossession of the smaller farmers.

The smallholder sector in Sri Lanka does not comprise a large aggregate of more or less homogeneous small farmers depending mainly on family labor. There is considerable crop and ecological diversity, and there are substantial inequalities in the distribution of land, albeit fewer than in comparable Asian countries. Part-time farming is common. Hired labor comprises a high proportion of the total farm labor input, although the source is perhaps more often small farmers than a landless proletariat. A substantial proportion even of rice farmers fails to produce enough rice to meet domestic consumption needs (Moore 1985: 22–24, 87–88, 134–40, 141–66, 182–88; Moore 1980). It is not, however, the extent of inequality, commercialization or proletarianization at any given point in time which concerns us here. My focus is rather on trends in the period

⁵ The figures on the number of smallholdings are from Government of Sri Lanka (1982: Smallholding Sector, Preliminary Report, Table 4). The population growth rate figures are from Government of Sri Lanka (1981: Preliminary Release No. 2, Table A).

since independence. The statistics, for all their inadequacies, give strong support to the claim that the small family farm has at least held its own, if not actually expanded, *vis-a-vis* more capitalist forms of production in the non-estate sector. It is this remarkable tenacity of small-scale family farming, rather than any marginal inroads which may or may not have been made by capitalist production relationships, which appears to demand explanation.⁶

Reproducing Small-Scale Farming

The tenacity and vitality of small-scale farming in Sri Lanka is remarkable when viewed in the light of predictions based on the abstract analysis of the workings of market economies. The cause for wonderment, however, disappears abruptly when one examines the historical background and the policies pursued by all governments since 1931. These factors indicate five sets of reasons for the tenacity of the family farm (Moore 1985: *passim*).

First, the pattern of plantation and commercial development in the colonial period resulted in the creation of good transport and communication networks, local commercial opportunities outside the estates themselves, and non-agricultural jobs in both private and public sectors throughout most of the densely-populated Wet Zone, especially in the southwestern coastal districts. This provided rural people with relatively good opportunities to benefit materially from the growth of dynamic (i.e., non-smallholding) sectors of the economy without permanently leaving the rural areas or abandoning agriculture. The practices of part-time farming and of temporary residence outside rural areas for employment became deeply ingrained.

Second, these trends have been strengthened by the pattern of resource redistribution practised by all governments since World War II. The state has taxed very large financial surpluses away from the export crop sector (i.e., tea, rubber and coconut) and used them to establish a relatively highly developed welfare state. Relatively good rural communications, large numbers of public

⁶ A similar *problematique* features prominently in the only substantial published work examining 'the agrarian question' in Sri Lanka from a Marxist perspective—C. Abeysekera (1985).

sector jobs located in rural areas, good rural health and education systems, and universal or almost universal (until 1978) cheap food rations have protected the rural poor against impoverishment and permitted them to retain the land they already owned; discouraged them from following the usual Third World pattern of emigrating to cities in search of work and welfare; and encouraged the rural less-poor to stay in rural areas rather than move to cities in search of good education, health services, and easy access to centers of commercial activity and political power.⁷ There has been relatively little net rural-urban migration, but levels of daily personal mobility (job commuting, etc.) have been exceptionally high for a poor country (Moore 1985:250), and the practice of part-time farming has become very common.⁸

Third, these same resources extracted from export crop production have been used to finance a major, long-term, and continuing program to develop 'colonies' in the Dry Zone, where *small*⁹ farmers are settled in newly irrigated and developed land (see below). The expansion of the production of rice, the main single smallholder crop, has been heavily subsidized both by this process of land colonization and by more general subsidies to rice production in particular, for example, subsidies on fertilizer, farm power and credit. At independence Sri Lanka was dependent on imports for about two-thirds of its basic cereal supplies, but has subsequently made considerable progress towards self-sufficiency (Moore 1985:85-106).

Fourth, all governments have relied heavily on cheap subsidized rice and wheat imports to keep the public food system and the mass of consumers supplied at low cost. These imports have exerted a continual downward pressure on producer prices of the main domestically produced food—rice. Profit levels in rice production have been relatively low and thus the incentive for larger surplus rice producers to expand the size of their landholdings at the expense of the poorest farmers has been relatively muted (Moore 1985: 85-106).

⁷ The relationship between welfare policies and the lack of emigration from rural areas is explored in Gunatilleke (1973).

⁸ In 1962, 29 per cent of all land operators declared non-agricultural activities to be their main source of income, and a further 16 per cent admitted to supplementary non-agricultural earnings. These figures are likely to be underestimates (Government of Ceylon 1962: Vol. 1, Table 1).

⁹ The standard size allotment has declined from 5 acres of paddy land and 4 acres of high land in the 1930s to 2.5 acres of paddy land and 0.25 acre of high land today.

Fifth, and most important from the present point of view, since 1935 the state has continually allocated to the landless and near-landless plots of land from a formerly large bank of land which had been acquired by the Crown in the early nineteenth century to facilitate plantation development. This release of state land has not taken place solely or even mainly in the context of the development of Dry Zone irrigation colonies. Far more significant in terms of both the number of persons benefited and the area of land distributed has been a range of programs to allocate small homestead plots of non-irrigated high land. The total area of state land alienated under the programs listed in Table 11.2 amounts to 8.5 per cent of the total land surface area of Sri Lanka. It has been estimated that in 1970, more than one-quarter of all Sri Lankan householders resided on plots originally distributed under Village Expansion Schemes alone (Moore and Perera 1978:41). In addition to the land formally alienated by the state, a large number of households occupy or reside on encroachments on Crown land, which are almost always tolerated and eventually legalized. A special survey conducted in 1978-79

Table 11.2
Alienation of State Land to Private Citizens Under the 1935 Land Development Ordinance and Later Legislation

<i>Type of Scheme</i>	<i>Area of Former Crown Land in Private hands at the end of 1975 (Hectares)</i>	<i>Number of Legal Allotment Holders at the end of 1975</i>	<i>Average size of Allotment (Hectares)</i>
Village Expansion Schemes	3,14,798	5,96,566	0.5
Alienation from acquired estates	19,033	80,622	0.2
Major colonization schemes	1,42,336	82,359	1.7
Middle class schemes	53,740	11,113	4.8
Highland settlement schemes	12,311	9,371	1.3
Alienation of marginal lands	3,926	564	7.0
Special leases	3,335	84	40.0
Total	5,49,479	7,80,679	0.7

Source: Govt of Sri Lanka (1975: Schedules A-G).

revealed that 3,77,000 hectares were being illegally occupied by 6,05,000 persons or households (Government of Sri Lanka 1983). The proportion of the nation's households involved could have been as high as one in every six. Most of these holdings were legalized in the succeeding few years.

'Reside' is generally more appropriate than 'cultivate' to describe the use of this former Crown land. For the majority of allottees, a homestead plot rather than a farm has been the main motivation and result of land allotment or encroachment. Yet 'home gardens' (*ge vatu*) on homestead plots are important in the smallholder economy. Cultivated with a variety of vegetables, tree crops and perennials, they are an important source of income and a barrier against the total material dependence of the poor on the less poor. In 1982, 43 per cent of all smallholder land operators cultivated only a home garden (Government of Sri Lanka, 1982: Smallholding Sector, Preliminary Report, Table 2). The alienation of state land has helped make home garden cultivation important by providing almost every poor household with at least a homestead plot. There are no satisfactory figures on the extent of landlessness in rural Sri Lanka. It is, however, certain that, unusually for a poor and densely populated agrarian country, there are very few rural households that do not at least have a valid *de facto* ownership claim to the land on which their home stands, and thus to the nucleus, however small, of a farm enterprise.

The Ideological Imperative

Why have successive Sri Lankan governments continually used state land and state financial resources to expand the number of smallholdings and to subsidize the family reproduction and enterprise production costs of small farmers? To point to the benefits to the national economy is inadequate. What about the interests of wealthier groups that are politically powerful? A part of the explanation is, quite predictably, that the benefits have not all gone to the poorest groups. Loose criteria for state land allocation and the influence of politicians on the choice of allottees have meant that the less poor have sometimes received state land. Subsidies on fertilizers, tractors and credit have often benefited the less poor. And subsidies to rice

production in particular benefit middle income rural groups rather than the poorest. The rural poorest, typically, do not own rice land but cultivate instead a range of high land crops that have not been subsidized (Moore 1985: Chapter 5).

Yet once all this is said the problem remains. Indeed, the problem is magnified when one examines the language and discourse used by politicians and officials in explaining and justifying the policies associated with the successful reproduction of the peasant economy. For there is a strong sense that the leading actors see themselves as fulfilling a historic mission which involves the recreation of an authentic, traditional family-farming and rice-based Sinhalese society. The state is pursuing an enterprise which has a moral and historic justification extending beyond immediate political necessity or economic rationality. It was, in fact, the way in which educated, English-speaking Sri Lankans—politicians, officials, intellectuals, journalists, and so on—interpreted Sri Lankan history and the relation of rural policy to that history which generated the curiosity underlying this paper. I was struck by the way in which Sri Lankans continually but unselfconsciously explained and validated current policies and programs by reference to history, and expressed a common *and* relatively coherent interpretation of that history. I call this interpretation of history the Sinhalese nationalist myth (Moore 1985:27–29, 36–38, 44–48, 53–63, 66–83, 117–19, 243–47). The term 'myth' is used not to indicate that the interpretation is necessarily false, but to signal that the more significant issue is that it is transmitted and accepted with scant regard for, or enquiry into, its veracity. It is arguable whether it is appropriate to talk of *a* single myth. That perhaps reflects the intellectual's imperative, and imposes a greater degree of coherence on many different images of the world than another observer might detect. For heuristic purposes I shall continue to talk of a single myth, but attempt to separate out two different versions.

The argument, in brief, is (a) that this myth was 'codified' and incorporated in the realm of 'ruling ideas' in the early part of this century to meet a particular political need; (b) that, as a result, 'the state' (to reify dangerously)¹⁰ became committed to the mission of recreating an image of the peasant-, rice-, and village-based 'traditional'

¹⁰ In reality I refer to 'the political class'—the category of Sri Lankans, almost all from elite backgrounds, who have occupied almost all leading political positions from the 1930s to the present day.

Sinhalese society; and (c) that this mission continues to influence both the strategic thrust and the details of rural policy, especially land policy. The various dimensions of this argument are dealt with below after the presentation of the substance of the myth itself.

The Sinhalese Nationalist Myth

Bearing in mind the pitfalls involved in attempting to extract coherence from fragments of worldviews held by a wide range of different people, I would argue that there is a high degree of implicit consensus among the Sinhalese on the essential features of their history, on the relation to this history of the present conditions of rural society, and on the appropriate role of state action in alleviating the consequences of this history. I would also argue that adherence to this ideology—or, at least, different emphases within a common framework—enables those nominally on the left and on the right of the political spectrum to find considerable common ground at emotional, symbolic and practical policy levels.

On necessarily impressionistic and therefore contestable evidence, I suggest that, in relation to rural policy, the myth can be usefully analyzed according to degrees of specificity. At one end of the continuum, the myth is premised upon assumptions about the broad historic nature of Sinhalese and Sri Lankan culture which are common currency. The core ideas here include (a) the notion that Sri Lanka is historically a uniquely Sinhalese and Buddhist land and polity; (b) the assumption of a fundamental, primordial, cultural, linguistic and genetic distinction between the 'Aryan' Sinhalese on the one hand and, on the other, an undifferentiated category of 'South Indians' or 'Tamils,' all of Dravidian race, among whom the Tamil-speaking population of Sri Lanka is included; and (c) the belief that almost throughout history the Sinhalese people have been fighting a continuous defensive battle against the Indian/Tamil 'Dravidian' hordes who, whether through warfare or exploitation of commercial relations, continuously threaten to subjugate or destroy the Sinhalese.¹¹

¹¹ Because of the increasing ferocity of Sinhalese-Tamil communal conflict, an increasing amount of work has been done by liberal and progressive Sri Lankan scholars to expose the way in which these kinds of ideas have developed and been incorporated

Remaining at the level of popular belief, there is a widely accepted version of Sri Lankan history, founded on these assumptions, which is essentially the story portrayed in school texts, in politicians' speeches, and in the concrete presentation of history through pilgrimages to the great national and popular shrines. There are perhaps four main themes to what one might call this 'popular history'. One is that, as witnessed by the ruins of great cities and other allegedly Sinhalese archeological monuments in the Dry Zone, the Sinhalese were historically a great and culturally highly developed people. Another is that the downfall of Sinhalese civilization dates from the devastation of these ancient Dry Zone civilizations by Indian/Tamil invaders, and has since been continued and exacerbated by other alien forces (Muslim, Tamil and Indian traders, and Portuguese, Dutch and British armies and colonial rulers) and by the malign economic and cultural influences with which they have infected the Sinhalese—commercialization, alcohol, Christianity, materialism, Western culture, and, for the leftists at least, capitalism. A third theme is that the traditional Sinhalese culture and society, which has been so distorted by foreign influence, was united at the apex by monarchy and Buddhist institutions, but based essentially on self-sufficient villages of small peasant farmers growing mainly rice for self-consumption. Rice cultivation is closely associated with irrigation, and thus with the elaborate and technically sophisticated irrigation systems on which the economy of ancient 'Sinhalese' civilizations was largely based. The whole picture is neatly encapsulated in the slogan used in campaigns for rural regeneration—'*vava, caitya, yaya*'—'(irrigation) tank, temple, paddy field'.¹² The fourth theme in this popular history is that a major historic function of the independent Sri Lankan state is to develop the country in such a way as to repair the material, cultural and moral damage done to the land and to the Sinhalese people by colonialism and foreign rule. A

into history, written and unwritten, official and unofficial. See especially the papers by Bandaranayake, Goonatilake, Gunawardena and Siriweera in Social Scientists' Association (1984).

¹² The temple is normatively incomplete without the *dagaba*—the rounded structure within which Buddha relics are housed. Jonathan Spencer (private communication) relates how, when asked to draw a picture of their village, the schoolchildren in the locality in which he did field research almost universally turned in a picture which included paddy fields, an irrigation tank, and a temple with a *dagaba*—and this despite the fact that the village irrigation tank had only very recently been constructed, and that the village temple had no *dagaba*.

major component of this project is the recreation of the glories of ancient Sinhalese civilization through irrigation, land development and the implantation of Sinhalese family farmers in 'raja rata'—the land of the kings, i.e., the Dry Zone. To quote Sinhaputhra: 'In the end it is the Sinhala peasant and the new civilization he will build on the banks of the Mahaweli that will determine the future of Sri Lanka.'¹³

It was not simply egotism and pride which led the first two Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka and the major architects of the Dry Zone colonization policy, D. S. Senanayake and his son Dudley, to attempt to claim descent from the Sinhalese kings (Jiggins 1979:111). A similar intention to reinforce personal position by capitalizing on 'popular history' led J. R. Jayawardene, when elected Prime Minister in July 1977, immediately to revive on a regular annual basis the *vap magula* ceremony, in which the Sinhalese kings traditionally entered the paddy field behind a bullock to plow the first furrow in preparation for the main rice crop. The Prime Minister, of course, played the monarchical role. After becoming Executive President in 1978, Jayawardene frequently drew comparisons between his rule and that of the Sinhalese kings.

Sri Lanka's long history of mass education, high levels of literacy, the high degree of popular exposure to the mass media and to politicians' speeches, and the frequency with which people go on pilgrimages to Buddhist and historic shrines, in addition to the long-term increase in Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic consciousness and conflict, all help explain why this popular history has been so widely and deeply internalized among the mass of the Sinhalese population. The state has played a major role in propagating it, notably through school text-books, the support given to the development of pilgrimage centers, and through the activities of the Department of Archaeology, which has consistently (mis)interpreted archaeological evidence to suit the myth.

The next level of myth, according to my schema, is not 'popular' in the same way. While building upon and feeding into popular consciousness, it is more specifically the product and property of the

¹³ 'Sinhaputhra' is a *nom de plume* meaning 'Son of the Lion.' The Sinhalese are the 'People of the Lion'. The Mahaweli is the main river, currently being tapped for major irrigation projects in the Dry Zone. The quotation is from an exchange of letters in a Sri Lankan journal over ethnic conflict in which Sinhaputhra was taking a very pro-Sinhalese line. See *Lanka Guardian* (Colombo), 6 (16), 15 December 1983, p. 24.

intelligentsia in the loose sense of that term, and especially of social scientists and historians, academic and 'popular' (see also Spencer in this volume).

The intelligentsia's version of the myth concentrates on the impact on Sri Lanka of the plantations in particular, and of British colonial rule and capitalism more broadly. There are seven core components of the more elaborated versions of this aspect of the myth.

1. Above all, a dichotomy between the foreign—British-owned and Indian Tamil-worked—plantation and the neighboring Sinhalese village.
2. The use of force and fraud in the original process of land acquisition by British planters.
3. The occupation by plantations of land either used by villagers at the time of acquisition or currently required for village agriculture.
4. The damaging effect of plantations on local ecology and the village economy, through such mechanisms as the appropriation of land required for grazing cattle and buffaloes and the deforestation of hillsides for plantation crops, leading to the drying-up of small streams used to irrigate village paddy fields in the valley bottoms.
5. The absence of benefits to the village population from plantation enterprise.
6. The general disintegration of village society and culture as a result of the monetization and commercialism associated with plantations and the uncouthness and viciousness of the immigrants attracted to them.
7. Somewhat paradoxically in view of the last point, the total insulation from one another of the plantation and village spheres. The paradox is, however, more apparent than real, for point 6 seems to refer mainly to history, and point 7 to the contemporary situation.

The relationship of this interpretation of the plantation episode to the historical record need not detain us unduly here. Let it suffice to say that the myth involves simplification, stressing the supportive evidence, refusing to take seriously the evidence which is not supportive, and ignoring substantial regional variations in the nature of

the plantation system and its impact on local economy and society (Moore 1985:68–73). It is important to note that variants of this myth are written up as accepted contributions to history and contemporary social science, both in academic literature and in official reports, notably the report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission of 1951 (Moore 1985:243–47).

'Capitalism,' 'Peasantry' and the Nationalist Elite

To explain the connection between the myth and public policy, one needs to examine the circumstances in which the images of 'peasant' society and of the appropriate peasant-state relationships which it supports became incorporated in the realm of 'ruling ideas'. My point of departure is Samaraweera's (1981) analysis of the politics of land policy in the 1920s and 1930s. As he and others argue, the main political conflict in Sri Lanka was between the British colonial authorities and the Sri Lankan capitalist elite. The elite was wealthy, educated, Anglicized, and furnished with firm political roots in parts of the countryside, especially the Low Country, in the form of its large plantation holdings and the consequent patronage it was able to dispense. Sections, at least of the elite, were emboldened to toy seriously with the idea of attempting to displace British colonial rule without organizing mass nationalist mobilization or conceding to the mass of the population the access to councils of state which the elite itself already enjoyed.

The claim to be the legitimate rulers of the country had, however, to be provided with a strong moral basis. And in certain respects the elite was poorly placed to make this claim. For its wealth, Anglicized culture, and Colombo-centric life clearly marked it off from the majority of the population. The British colonial authorities, and especially the line of territorial administrators (Government Agents and Assistant Government Agents) were able to make fairly strong claims to be more in touch with, and the more genuine guardians of, the 'peasantry' than were the Sri Lankan elite. By the early part of this century, the British colonial bureaucracy had become very separate in personnel and ethos from the British planter population, which was anyway increasingly becoming an impermanent class of plantation managers working for large corporations based in

Britain, and returning to Britain on retirement. Colonial legislation and administrative practice—probably influenced by British colonial policy in India—had shown an increasing tendency to 'protect' the smallholders against what were viewed as the adverse aspects of plantation development, partly, it had been argued, because those seeking new land for estate development were increasingly members of the Sri Lankan capitalist class rather than Britons.

There was thus a conflict between the colonial authorities and the Sri Lankan elite over guardianship of the mass interest, especially that of the 'peasantry'. Samaraweera convincingly argues that this conflict was initially focused more on moral claims than on any attempt to mobilize mass support. Given the size of the Crown's landholding and the salience for all sections of the rural population of land alienation policies, it was natural that land policy should be a major arena in which this conflict was fought. The rapid conversion in 1927 of D. S. Senanayake, the leading nationalist politician, from advocacy of Crown land sales for plantation development to support for alienation to the landless¹⁴ is symptomatic of the way in which the elite, joined by a few prominent colonial officials like C.V. Brayne, made the alienation of Crown land to the landless a central plank in their program. The elite dominated the 1928 Land Commission and began to put its recommendations into effect after taking control of domestic policies through the system of democratic internal self-government, in part foisted on them (the 'democratic' element, that is) by the 1931 Donoughmore Commission.

My concern here, however, is not with the policies themselves but with the ways in which they were represented and justified. And here the nationalist myth was central. In essence, it could be used to condemn not just the details of colonial policy, but the whole moral and historical basis of British rule. This, it was argued, had been the cause of the material and cultural degradation of Sinhalese society.

The report of the Land Commission of 1928 is a very useful source of information on the key concepts that entered into the elite's analysis of rural society and rural problems. Two terms used in symbiotic opposition to one another—'capitalist' and 'peasantry'—are especially important.

¹⁴ Eric Meyer, in a personal communication, informed me of the rapidity of this change in Senanayake's views.

Taken in isolation, the Report of the Land Commission could be read as an uncompromising indictment of capitalism. At the general level, and along the lines set out above, it identifies capitalism, as embodied in the plantation economy, to be the main single cause of the material and cultural poverty of the Sri Lankan villager. More significantly, the capitalist is labelled as an exploiter, engaged in a zero-sum game with the villager, and against whose activities the villager must be protected. Given the membership of the commission, this critique of capitalism is intriguing. It is odd, to say the least, to find the nationalist elite, itself so deeply involved in plantation ownership, purveying an interpretation of recent Sri Lankan history which appears to undermine the whole ethical basis of plantation capitalism. There appear to be two main reasons why the political elite committed itself so fully to an ideology which contained such a powerful potential, at least at the level of logic, to explode in its face.

The first reason was that, as Samaraweera (1981) explains, the incentive to give anti-plantation sentiments a prominent place in the myth was the result of the elite nationalists' need to strengthen a weak point in their claim to speak for the nation. The landowning aristocracy of the central, tea-producing Kandyan highlands, little involved in direct plantation production or in capitalist enterprise, and lagging behind the Low Country¹⁵ elite in acceptance of formal education and cultural Anglicization, was very weakly represented in the nationalist movement. Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s some of its members, with British encouragement, advanced the idea of Kandyan separatism in order to escape Low Country economic and political domination. Anti-plantation sentiments provided a way of encouraging the Kandyan notables to accept the nationalist program. Not only did these sentiments pose no threat to the economic and political position of the Kandyan notables themselves, but they also helped give the Kandyan areas—the main sites of foreign plantations and Indian Tamil estate labor—the symbolic supremacy which the Kandyans themselves claimed by virtue of the alleged authenticity of their own Sinhalese Buddhist culture in contrast to that of the long Westernized Low Country. Moreover, they also provided

¹⁵ The term 'Low Country' refers to the southwestern coastal plain north and (mainly) south of Colombo. For a discussion of the crucial role of the more educationally and commercially developed Low Country population in shaping the agenda of Sri Lankan politics over the past century, see Moore 1985:126–39, and Chapter 10.

a symbolic rallying point for the grievances of Kandyan villagers against the estates and their Indian Tamil populations.

While building anti-plantation sentiments into the Sinhalese nationalist myth was not in the direct interests of the Low Country elite which dominated the nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, it was a price which had to be paid for broadening the movement. The latent challenge to the Low Country elite's own position could be, and was, minimized by focusing the interpretation of the plantation episode on those areas where the disjuncture between the village and plantation was extreme, i.e., in the Kandyan areas. The attack was concentrated here, not on the circumstances in the Low Country and Coconut Triangle, where plantations, generally smaller and owned by the Low Country elite, were to a large extent integrated into village society: villagers grew the same crops as plantations and provided much of the estate labor force (Moore 1985:68-72). At the very least, the Low Country elite found that its ownership of plantations was safe until the 1970s, although by independence it had painted itself into a corner from which it was unable to argue effectively against the very heavy export taxes on plantation produce.

The second reason that the elite committed itself to an apparent critique of capitalism was that in the Report of the Land Commission and in other fora, the burden of the critique was focused on the capitalist as an isolated individual exploiter rather than on capitalism as a social system. 'Capitalist' was thus used more in the popular than the social scientific sense. And, used this way, it was a convenient way of appealing covertly to the ethnic consciousness of the Sinhalese. The image of the non-Sinhalese trader or moneylender (Tamil, Muslim, Indian Chetty, Borah, and so on) exploiting the poor, innocent, unsophisticated Sinhalese farmer recurs sufficiently frequently in Sinhalese popular culture for this kind of anti-capitalism to evoke communal sentiments by allusion.

In the reports of the 1928 Land Commission and the 1951 Kandyan Peasantry Commission, and in many other sources, Sri Lankan small farmers are described as a 'peasantry'. In itself this is not especially significant, for 'peasant' has a range of connotations in English, some of them purely neutral and descriptive. To divine the significance of the use of this term in Sri Lanka, one needs to appreciate two other things.

The first is that there was, not until, recently, in the Sinhala language an equivalent to that usage of the term 'peasantry' which implies a

distinct subordinate social stratum in some degree isolated from the urban or 'high' culture of the society in which it is located. 'Traditional' Sinhalese feudalism did not incorporate any marked dichotomy, along European lines, between a small landed class and the mass of the cultivating population. Insofar as *goviya* (the Sinhala term for farmer) is etymologically and normatively identified with *Goyigama* (the highest, 'farming' caste), it is an honorific term. At some point in this century the neologism *gramiya janatava* was coined as an equivalent to 'peasantry,' to refer, with implications of a distinct rural culture and way of life, to the mass of the small farming population (Moore 1985:46-48, 169-75).

The second point about the use of the English term 'peasantry' by the Sri Lankan elite (and the British colonial administration) derives from an examination of the overall context of the documents and speeches in which it appears. Such an examination makes evident that the term had definite connotations of both cultural and moral inferiority and of a non-commercial, traditional, subsistence, non-modern orientation to economic activities. That is perhaps a one-sided statement of the case, for the essence of 'peasantry' was its ambiguous nature. On the one hand, insofar as the village-based Buddhist peasantry was seen as the historical and moral core of Sinhalese society, no implication of inferiority was involved. On the other hand, insofar as the term 'peasant' was used to imply a species of person degraded and corrupted, morally and economically, by the colonial plantation episode, and dependent on committed external guardians for material and moral regeneration, then the notion of inferiority, however well-intentioned, was inescapable. The Sri Lankan political elite did talk and act as if the 'peasantry' was incapable of bearing the burden of its own moral and material rehabilitation. The very name of the government agency created as a result of the activities of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission—*The Kandyan Peasantry Rehabilitation Department*—indicates the conceptual framework which was applied. The language of a range of official documents, speeches and programs in the period since 1928 clearly indicates a tutelary or custodial attitude towards the 'peasantry' on the part of the elite. Idealized on the one hand, on the other the 'peasantry' was believed to have fallen into vicious ways due to the impact on rural society of colonialism and capitalism. Sexual mores were loose, and thus basic moral education was required. Even more frequently, alcoholism introduced by outsiders, or a general

irresponsibility with money and harvest earnings, was thought to be a major obstacle to the development of the small farm economy, and ample justification for detailed supervision of the small farm economy by agents of the state. Similarly, because of the machinations of capitalist land speculators, peasants were not to be trusted with fully-alienable titles to the land.

The assertion that these kinds of custodial attitudes towards small farmers have suffused the political discourse of the Sri Lankan elite could not be fully justified by any set of references, however long. For one would need to refer to thousands of speeches and documents to demonstrate the point at all adequately. I rely ultimately on my experience, and am emboldened by the fact that no observer of Sri Lanka who has been subjected to the views put forward here has challenged them fundamentally. Space constraints permit the presentation of only a few of the more significant pieces of evidence.

Among the more useful sources of evidence are the views of those politicians who have a strong claim to have been the leading spokesmen for poor rural people in Sri Lanka during the past half century. One such person was S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who created the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the main recipient of the electoral support of rural Sinhalese Buddhists (Jupp 1978:Chapter 7), and who led the party to the surprising electoral victory in 1956 which has been described as the 'Green (i.e., ruralist) Uprising' (Huntington 1968:438, 451). One of the best-known pieces of legislation passed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's government (which was shortlived because of his assassination in 1959) was the 1958 Paddy Lands Act, aimed at improving the conditions of paddy land tenants. While speaking in support of the Act, Bandaranaike (1961:891) informed Parliament that the 'vast majority' of the population were 'peasants'—a claim which appears distinctly odd when set alongside the figures in Table 11.1. If Bandaranaike did indeed see the peasantry as his constituency, as opposed to a powerful symbol through which to validate his claim to power, he had long exhibited a surprising disregard or disdain for its material motivations or interests. As a young but prominent politician, he made a speech in the State Council in 1932 complaining that the British had discouraged rice cultivation and diverted the peasantry into the production of rubber, an activity 'of no real value to the community'. 'Value,' however, had a historical and moral rather than a material referent, for he went on to admit that rubber production was financially more attractive to the peasant.

That Bandaranaike proceeded to demand the nationalization of *all* land and complete state control of all rice procurement, processing and marketing, rather than, for example, simply manipulating price ratios to encourage rice production, clearly indicates distrust of the peasant's capacity to respond to market forces to advance his (the peasant's) or the nation's interests (Bandaranaike 1961:880–84).

Similar attitudes were held by Philip Gunawardena, Bandaranaike's Minister of Agriculture, architect of the 1958 Paddy Lands Act, and the 'Father of Sri Lankan Marxism'. In 1958 Gunawardena was challenged in Parliament about his order to the cooperatives that they should withhold a proportion of the purchase price paid to farmers for rice procured under the State Guaranteed Price Scheme, and substitute the provision in kind of fertilizers and other farm inputs. In his reply Gunawardena pointed out the advantages of forced saving for fertilizer when the feckless peasant—on whose nominal behalf Gunawardena had just pushed through his Paddy Lands Act against bitter opposition from within the ruling party—was all too inclined to waste harvest earnings on celebration and alcohol without making proper provision for the next season (Govt of Ceylon 1958:3891). Preservation of the peasant from the consequences of his own moral frailty was considered a legitimate goal of rural policy.

Lest we believe that such attitudes have disappeared I quote from a recent newspaper report of a speech by the District Minister for Anuradhapura, a purely agricultural area and one of the main rice surplus producing districts of Sri Lanka:

Our farmers are only keen on making a quick buck and are not bothered about the future. Their methods of cultivation too are still slipshod in that, instead of growing crops in demand, they grow a little of everything, and when the time comes to dispose of their produce—they just sell them [*sic*] at any price to middlemen.

Speaking further Mr Bandara said that cultivations [*sic*] were started with loans borrowed from *mudalalis* [traders] in advance. If the anticipated crops failed the cultivators became indebted to the moneylenders.

They [farmers] should also be *prevented* from selling their produce at low rates to middlemen...(*Sri Lanka Daily News*, 27 December 1984:6–7; emphasis added).

This minister, it should be noted, is a member of a government and political party nominally devoted to the virtues of private enterprise and the market.

The final piece of evidence I will cite is by far the most comprehensive. It is virtually the entirety of a book authored by Tilak Hettiarachchy, a staff member of the Department of Sociology of the University of Colombo (Hettiarachchy 1982). The title is *The Sinhala Peasant—not*, and with no explicit justification, *The Sri Lankan Peasant*. The illustration on the front cover incorporates the 'vava, caitya, yaya' slogan and imagery mentioned above. It is a village scene in which the main elements are an irrigation tank, a temple (complete with *dagaba*), paddy fields, and a humble peasant hut. The illustration is riven with fissures, symbolizing the disintegration of village society.¹⁶ While essentially concerned with the changes that took place in the nineteenth century, the mode of argument follows the myth in assigning a dominant role in explaining contemporary social, political and economic formations to the impact of colonial plantations in the nineteenth century (Hettiarachchy 1982: 1). Echoing the first quotation from S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike cited above, the author makes the grossly exaggerated claim on the opening page that contemporary 'peasant agriculture...constitutes the occupation of nearly 80 per cent of the total adult population' (*ibid.*).

This book is by far the most elaborated version of the myth I have encountered. It provides a treasure-house of quotations relevant to the theme of this paper. Due to space constraints a summary of the salient points will have to suffice.

In Chapter 1 the pre-colonial social formation is presented in almost idyllic terms. The village, the basic unit of social organization, was a self-sufficient economic unit, land tenure was communal, and labor was organized collectively (see, for instance pp. 5–6, 29 and 40). Relationships between peasant families were egalitarian, and the primary unit of political organization was the democratic village council representing all heads of families (pp. 20, 31). Hierarchical relationships were harmonious and based on consent and contract (pp. 11–12 and 18–19). The chief representing the state could be replaced at the request of his subjects (p. 20). 'Sharecropping generally

¹⁶ The notion of 'disintegration' has been prominent in contemporary sociological analyses of rural Sri Lanka. See especially Sarkar and Tambiah 1957 (*The Disintegrating Village*), and Morrison *et al.* (eds) 1979 (*The Disintegrating Village: Social Change in Rural Sri Lanka*).

operated, comparatively speaking, to the advantage of the tenant rather than the landlord' (p. 16). The caste system 'restricted the concentration of the land' (p. 9). 'Although slavery was an extreme form of social degradation,' it was mild and relatively unobjectionable in practice: 'the conditions of slaves were so salutary that very often slaves gave up all hope of liberating themselves and were content to be loyal to their masters' (pp. 39-40). Polyandry existed but 'all this did not mean promiscuity. Laws of marriage in the Sinhala society were sufficiently strict to safeguard the institution of the family' (pp. 35-36).

Within this idealized picture there is passing but significant reference to the seeds of decay implanted by earlier events. Rice was

the staple diet of the Sinhalese. However, the destruction of the ancient irrigation system [of the Dry Zone] with the downfall of the Northern Kingdom in the thirteenth century, and the shift of the centre of the native kingdom to the central mountains during the sixteenth century, made it impossible for the peasants to obtain sufficient produce from wet rice cultivation (p. 27).

The need to depend in part on 'inferior' non-rice crops grown on high land is thus, for those familiar with Sri Lanka, allusively associated with Tamils, who are popularly (but with little evidence) believed to have destroyed the ancient Dry Zone civilizations.

The remainder of the book is devoted to assertions about how colonial rule and the plantation system destroyed, distorted and pauperized traditional society. The primary mechanisms were, apart from the intrusion of capitalism itself, the abuse of compulsory labor by the state, heavy taxation, and the enforced cultivation of cash crops (Chapters 2 and 3). A prominent theme in the overall argument is that these processes sparked off destructive conflicts within 'traditional' society. The native chiefs became more powerful, ceased to be responsible to the people, and became exploiters (for instance pp. 55, 59, 65-66, and 88). A more exploitative system of sharecropping developed (p. 57). Inequality and disharmony rent the village (p. 63). Irrigation systems were neglected and ruined (p. 64). The local ecology was disrupted to the cost of the peasantry (p. 119). Alcoholism became rife (pp. 105-6), and a large, landless peasantry was created (Chapter 4).

The British administration, when they systematically, and deliberately destroyed the traditional institution, i.e., the system of chiefs, which kept the peasant society and its social relations (including those of economic relations) in order, brought about complete disorganisation and confusion in the peasant society (p. 97; parentheses in the original).

The implicit communalism indicated by the title of the book is realized more by omission than by commission. Non-Sinhalese are rarely mentioned. The only significant mention of the Indian Tamil immigrants who came to labor in the estates is worth quoting in full:

The result was the inflow of thousands of South Indian labourers to obtain work in the estates. In the middle of the nineteenth century, about 130,000 labourers from South India were employed in the estates. They were a kind of migratory labour, without having any permanent interest in the Island. And every year between 50,000 to 100,000 labourers travelled in both ways. The effects of this migratory labour were twofold. There were some immediate effects which did not receive the attention they deserved. These labourers crossed the Palk Straits with primitive devices and trekked all the way from the north of Sri Lanka to the estate regions, walking nearly 200 miles. For a long period no proper measures were taken by the government to see that they did not bring disease into the Island. The consequences were disastrous. They brought deadly diseases, cholera and small-pox, devastating the countryside which lay along their route. Few European travellers who visited the North Central Province through which the 'highway' of these labourers lay, point out the tragedy which overtook these regions; year after year peasant villages fell victim to these deadly diseases and thousands of villagers were carried away, the villages being later claimed by the advancing forests (pp. 123-24).

One looks in vain for a gesture of concern about the sufferings of the Indian Tamils themselves.

One can conclude with two general comments on the way in which Hettiarachchy's approach exemplifies the myth more generally. The first is that he quotes very selectively from the available documentation, totally ignoring the work of those historians who have

questioned the veracity of the interpretations which he reproduces. The second point is that Hettiarachchy combines a simple nationalism—almost everything of significance in the period he deals with was done by the British, for venal motives, and with tragic consequences for the Sinhalese masses—with a crude and populist version of Marxism in which capitalism features purely as demon. Such an approach can elicit approving sentiments from almost all shades of the political spectrum. Perhaps the very last word on the significance for the Sinhalese of colonial rule should go to a historian who has traced the creation of contemporary Sinhalese ethnic consciousness:

It was during the period of colonial rule that the Sinhala consciousness underwent a radical transformation and began to assume its current form. In developing their group consciousness the social classes created by colonial rule drew as much on European thought as their own past traditions (Gunawardena 1984:33).

The very notion of 'race,' as well as the Aryan-Dravidian racial dichotomy, was drawn from Europe. So, too, was 'peasantry' and the 'Victorian' ideal of the nuclear family and the permanent, monogamous marriage into which all sexual activity was channelled.

Myth and Policy

We now come to the central issue of the relationship between myth and policy. The argument here is not that all dimensions of rural policy have tended to reproduce smallholder farming. There are contradictions—or unintended consequences—arising from policy itself. For example, the subsidization of tractors, an important component of a range of policies to promote agricultural development in the Dry Zone, has tended to concentrate economic and thus political power in the hands of a relatively small number of tractor owners, permitting them to engross land and thus extend the scope of capitalist production relations.¹⁷ Nor is it being suggested that adherence to the

¹⁷ My own experience indicates that this is especially common outside the boundaries of official colonization schemes. Tractor owners can encroach in and cultivate relatively large areas of unallocated common land. Within colonization schemes, there are substantial constraints on land accumulation by tractor owners. See Farrington and Abeyratne (1982: Appendix 5.4).

myth is even the main factor explaining the set of policies outlined earlier that have tended to reproduce the smallholder economy. Many other factors enter in. Notable among them are the availability of land and financial resources to the state (see above); the electoral imperative, in a highly politicized society, for the political elite to be seen to be ruling on behalf of the mass of the population; the fact that agricultural policies have treated relatively generously the wealthier rural strata who form the local cadres of both major Sinhalese political parties (Moore 1985:Chapter 7); and the fact that the political elite itself has been little involved in non-estate agricultural production and therefore has had no major vested interest in the disposal of resources within that sector of the economy (Moore 1985:208-9). Nevertheless, I believe that the way in which the myth has shaped perceptions of rural society and of the appropriate historic role of the independent Sri Lankan state has significantly influenced rural policy, and influenced it in such a way as to reproduce smallholder farming.

There are five main sets of policies or political programs which are to some degree the outcome of the myth. The first and most important is the long process of alienating Crown land in small lots to the poor. This has already been discussed above. One only needs to add here that Crown land has not been alienated outright, but issued on restrictive, conditional, long-term lease, for which a small annual payment has to be made to the state. This leasehold system is extremely irksome for the recipients. The restrictions on mortgaging, renting, selling, or transferring the land are mainly honored in the breach. Illegal transactions of all kinds are very common and are largely made with the knowledge and connivance of the local officials of the Land Commissioner's Department. Yet there are substantial costs incurred in obtaining this connivance and in securing formal bureaucratic approval for acceptable transfers. Crown land held on leasehold is universally valued less than land held in outright ownership, and thus weighs less when, for example, evaluating the social standing of the occupier.¹⁸

The second set of policies—or, perhaps, non-policies—influenced by the myth concerns provision for the needs of the agricultural laborer. As was indicated above, the proportion of the rural population dependent mainly on the earnings from agricultural

¹⁸ In the early 1980s the government initiated a program to convert Crown leasehold into outright ownership.

labor is certainly higher than official statistics indicate. Yet the very existence of an agricultural proletariat has been consistently ignored or denied (cf. Hettige, this volume). Insofar as the problem is recognized at all, it is described as a problem of a 'landless peasantry,' with the implication that it is an aberration from the natural condition in which all rural families cultivate their own land. Solutions are seen entirely in the provision of land to abolish landlessness, despite the evidence of simple arithmetic that, without the imposition of very low land ownership ceilings in the kind of land reform that has never been on the political agenda, the continued existence of an agricultural proletariat is inevitable. In the Dry Zone land colonization schemes, land is allotted only to cultivating families, despite the very evident need for, and widespread use of, hired labor. No provision is made, for example, for house plots for landless laborers. They are left to shift for themselves: to encroach on state land around colonization sites, or to migrate seasonally from the Wet Zone. Under the 1958 Paddy Lands Act, agricultural laborers were given representation in Cultivation Committees only as an after thought and on the insistence of one independent MP sitting in committee. When the act was amended a few years later, laborers lost this right and have not since regained it. Few of the Marxist politicians and parties who provided the impetus behind the Paddy Lands Act have shown much concern for the interests of the agricultural proletariat (Moore 1985:62-63).

Third, and relatedly, the Marxist political leadership, which might have been expected, for reasons of both ideology and practical politics, to seek to develop and exploit conflicts of class interest among the smallholding population, has signally failed to do so in relation to the tenancy issue. Instead, it has expressed concurrence with the concept of a homogeneous 'peasantry' assailed by external forces—landlords, traders, the state, and so on. Although the 1958 Paddy Lands Act was Marxist-inspired, it aimed solely at improving the security of the paddy land tenant and reducing rents. At no stage then or since have the Marxists attempted to develop a constituency among tenants through a program of 'land to the tiller'. The absence of such a program is anomalous in the South Asian context, especially when set alongside the strong veins of radicalism and Marxism in Sri Lankan electoral politics. The Marxists, too, have 'lived' the myth by failing to develop a political program based on a realistic class analysis of rural society. They have, instead, accepted a slightly

more reformist definition of the kind of rural program which has proved acceptable to the elite as a whole. The Marxists' failure to garner significant electoral support among the smallholder population is perhaps partly due to their conservatism on this issue (Moore 1985:53–63).

Fourth, the policy of importing cheap foodgrains and thus indirectly depressing the output prices received by domestic food producers can be, and has been, indirectly bolstered by the argument that the 'peasant' is not an economic animal, is not really to be trusted with cash, and thus cannot and should not be manipulated through price incentives, especially output price incentives. Exhortation and the subsidizing of the cost of agricultural inputs are more favored approaches (Moore 1985:90–113).

Fifth, public policy has been unusually—and, most people would argue, ineffectively—focused on rice, the symbolically potent crop, at the expense of other agricultural products. The whole focus of the work of the Department of Agriculture has been on rice, and 'rice bias' can be seen in the spheres of extension, research, credit, irrigated land development, and subsidy (Moore 1985: Chapter 5).

The combined effect of these policies has been to physically reproduce small-scale family farming; to reduce the profitability of food production and thus the incentives for capitalist investment and land accumulation in agriculture; to extend the apparent common interest of smallholders in the production of rice; and to obscure differences or conflicts of interest between sections of the smallholder population, thus helping to sustain the political dependence of the smallholder population as a whole on the initiative and guidance of the political elite.¹⁹

Concluding Comments

The extremely rudimentary nature of the social scientific frameworks and concepts available to analyze the kinds of issues dealt with here prevents one from making any claim about the causal significance of ideology which could be subjected to satisfactory verification. Readers' judgments about the argument will be influenced both by their

¹⁹ This is the central theme of Moore (1985).

personal experience in relation to Sri Lanka and by their broad theoretical and ideological predilections. Rather than concluding with a defence of the importance of examining ideological motivations in political analysis, it is more useful to indicate how this paper relates to a debate about how ideology enters into political life.

Much of the recent impetus behind the social scientific study of ideology is of broadly Gramscian inspiration. Theorists of Marxian orientation have taken their cue from Gramsci and explored the extent to which ideology, conceived as a product of the ruling classes, has played a role in reproducing the political order by misrepresenting the true nature of society to subordinate social strata. 'Hegemony' is the key term here. In this paper, the main political role of the Sinhalese nationalist myth is not conceived in terms of hegemony. It may indeed to some degree be the case that the myth has played a hegemonic role, i.e., helped reproduce the political order by persuading the Sinhalese rural masses that the political elite has been using its control of the state mainly to the benefit of the masses themselves. Two factors prevent me from even attempting to explore the validity of any such claims. One is the paucity of my knowledge about how the rural population understand their society and the state in a holistic sense. The other is that, even were such knowledge available, it would be very difficult to determine how far mass beliefs or images about society have been shaped by the 'ideological apparatuses' of the state and the political elite. For the Sinhalese nationalist myth is clearly the product of a long-term iteration between popular belief and imagery and the way in which the intelligentsia (in a broad sense) has selected, sharpened, made consistent, reacted to and otherwise manipulated and extended these beliefs.

Side-stepping the issue of Gramscian hegemony, I find my analysis of the nationalist myth to fit more comfortably with a different interpretation of the role of ideology. This emphasizes the significance of a common interpretation of the world in giving smaller groups—dominant classes or revolutionary groups aspiring to dominance—a sense of coherence, common purpose, moral correctness, or historic mission (Abercrombie *et al.* 1980, Skocpol 1979:168–71). In this interpretation, ideology is not solely an instrument wielded by these dominant or hopefully-dominant groups. It is a worldview to which they themselves have a greater degree of commitment than is implied in the Gramscian model. Insofar as they have a commitment to the ideology, these groups may also to

some degree be manipulated by it. This is consistent with the analysis set out above: the Sri Lankan elite has adhered to the policy prescriptions of the nationalist myth to a greater degree than its self-interest, political or economic, would require.

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12

Representations of the Rural: A View from Sabaragamuva

JONATHAN SPENCER

In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson 1983:15).

Searching for Tradition

This essay explores some of the implications for sociological research of the powerful symbolic or ideological weight borne by ideas of 'the rural' in contemporary Sri Lanka.¹ That 'the rural' (*gambada* or *pitisara* in Sinhala) is an important concept should be clear enough; that those whose voices are most often heard on the

¹ Fieldwork in Sri Lanka was funded by the then (UK) SSRC, now the Economic and Social Research Council. I am grateful to James Brow and R. L. Stirrat for comments on an earlier version of this paper, as well as audiences in Anuradhapura and London. For a fuller and more recent evaluation of some of the themes of this paper, see Spencer (1990), especially Chapter 5.

subject are also often the most remote from rural experience should be sufficient to alert us to the possibility of significant biases in commonly received ideas. In fact, the greatest clamor on the subject emanates from the cities, and it takes little ethnographic skill to discover that the townsman's view of the rural order is at some distance from anything that might actually be encountered in the countryside. Here I will be concerned with one rather specialized set of representations—more or less academic views of rural change—although I will briefly mention some other popular views and their implications in my conclusion. Against these academic views I will set some evidence from my own fieldwork in eastern Ratnapura District.

One theme, commonly expressed by academics, politicians and administrators, is of rural decline. So, for example, the Kandyan Peasantry Commission, reporting in the early 1950s, observed that 'The village community, with its communalities and obligations, has in a great measure disappeared and so also the old conceptions of community effort' (Govt of Ceylon 1951:12). A few years later, a survey report from the then University of Ceylon substantiated many of the points made by the Commission, not least the idea of a crisis in the countryside: 'What we wish to emphasise is that the rural society in the Kandyan areas, and perhaps in other areas too, under the dual pressure of population rise and a stagnant and exploitative economy, is fast disintegrating and approaching a critical stage' (Sarkar and Tambiah 1957:xiii). This survey was published as *The Disintegrating Village*. Twenty years later, in the late 1970s, the same title was used for another collection of village studies. And, while the editors of this later collection were rightly critical of some earlier assumptions about rural change, similar broad apprehensions are endorsed in one passage in their introduction: 'Poverty shows no sign of fading away; inequality is often alleged to be worsening, and the sense of mutual interest and mutual responsibility which formerly characterised relationships between villagers is on the wane' (Morrison *et al.* 1979: 5). So, the 'village community' and 'community effort' are disappearing; 'rural society' is 'disintegrating'; and a past in which villagers considered each other in terms of 'mutual interest and mutual responsibility' is contrasted with an impoverished present. In all of these generalizations the rural is presented, implicitly or explicitly, in terms of loss—loss of community, loss of harmony.

This sort of valuation of rural change is by no means confined to Sri Lanka. English agriculture, the English countryside, has been subject to a very long process of social and economic change, stretching back over many centuries. Yet, in the 1960s, it was still possible for one writer to present a similar contrast between a very recent past of rural harmony and a present of loss: 'A way of life that has come down to us from the days of Virgil has suddenly ended'; and 'A whole culture that had preserved its continuity from earliest times had now received its quietus' (Ewart Evans cited in Williams 1973: 9). These judgments are quoted by Raymond Williams in his important study of ideas about town and country in English literature, *The Country and the City*. As he shows, they merely echo a host of earlier judgments: thus Leavis and Thompson in the 1930s—'The 'organic community' of 'Old England' had disappeared; 'the change is very recent indeed' (Williams 1973: 9); Hardy in his novels of the 1870s to 1890s harking back, like George Eliot before him, to the lost world of the 1830s; in the 1820s Cobbett lamenting the passing of the rural order of his own childhood in the 1770s and 1780s, a time when Crabbe and Goldsmith wrote their verse laments on an even earlier decline of the village. Williams likens his literary pursuit of the old rural order to stepping on an escalator: as we move back in time so too the laments for the loss of the old, timeless order always situate it 'just back, we can see, over the last hill.' And the hills go back a long way; in Virgil's *Eclogues*, composed two millennia ago and supposedly the source of that 'way of life' invoked at the start of the pursuit, we find an explicit contrast between a remembered rural harmony and threats to that harmony in the form of wars and evictions. In other words, we must ask just what it is we are dealing with here. Are these historical accounts of a single historical process, in which case we have to explain the constant recurrence of something said to have died in earlier generations; or are we, perhaps, in the presence of something closer to myth than to history?

We can, I think, step on board a similar escalator in Sri Lanka. Obeyesekere, in a recent public lecture in Colombo, provided a picture of social devastation in the countryside wrought by demographic pressures and consequent inter-village migration:

In the sixties and after, things had changed; the population explosion produced a generation of children of migrants, and

there was increasing competition for village resources. Moreover outsiders, who had no kin ties with the village, also began to move in, for a variety of social and economic reasons. The effect of these social conditions was to radically alter the pattern of traditional village society, and produce division, social conflict and economic crime in village society (Obeyesekere 1983:18–19).

What was destroyed was 'the kin-based homogenous nature of traditional village society,' something which had managed to survive, albeit under pressure, until these changes of the last twenty years. But what of the 'disintegrating village'? Morrison and his co-editors claim the need for some siting of the traditional, if only as a benchmark for the assessment of change. 'For our purposes "traditional" refers to the period around the end of colonial rule, and especially to the time before the dramatic explosion of the Island's population which began in the late 1940s as a consequence of improvements in health services and control of malaria' (Morrison *et al.* 1979:15). The 1940s as the period of the traditional? Wasn't this the time when the Kandyan Peasantry Commission was carrying out its investigations into the rural crisis? And didn't these investigations spring from political anxieties in the 1930s about the condition of the countryside?

The 1920s and 1930s were the period when nationalist politicians 'discovered' the rural crisis (Samaraweera 1981; Meyer 1980) but in this they depended on earlier views like Woolf's classic portrait of the death of a village, *Village in the Jungle* (Samaraweera 1981:135). Even earlier than that, in the 1890s, we find a local official discussing the effects of the Grain Tax and concluding, 'In brief the old Kandyan Feudal system and village life have broken up and are rapidly disappearing' (Fisher in Sessional Paper IV, 1891; cited in Obeyesekere 1967:288). And, prior to that, in the 1850s we find civil servants already expressing fears about rural decline and initiating new measures in irrigation policy as a result. But

(Sir Henry) Ward and his advisors quickly realised that mere provision of water was inadequate; 'the spirit and practice of mutual obligation which was so important a feature of peasant agriculture' had either died out or become moribund because of new forces—such as individualism—which had come to the fore with British rule (Samaraweera 1978a:71).

The sense of 'mutual interest and mutual responsibility' said to be merely 'on the wane' in the 1970s appears, in fact, to have 'died out or become moribund' by the 1850s. The escalator moves us back; the view remains the same.

In fairness I should point out that the dangers of romanticizing the past have been mentioned by more than one of the authorities I have quoted. Morrison *et al.* warn us of the risk of 'simple-minded nostalgia' about the past and criticize a view of the village as being traditionally 'egalitarian' and 'self-sufficient' without, however, being able wholly to abandon the image of the traditional community:

Our traditional paddy-centred village was not necessarily harmonious, egalitarian or free of poverty and exploitation. Indeed, one might argue that it was rarely so. It did however form a community of a kind, a community in which people had shared interests, where there was considerable interdependence, and where almost everyone was provided with some means of making a livelihood. People might sometimes have gone hungry, but few were abandoned by their fellows. Each had some kind of place, and could feel a part of a community (Morrison *et al.* 1979:16-17).

Obeyesekere takes a somewhat different tack when, in the same lecture that I cited earlier, he attacks the romanticization of contemporary rural life:

Colombo elites, even educated persons, still naively believe in the myth of the harmonious village. The middle class myth model of the harmonious village is the very opposite of the social reality of contemporary villages. It is a fantasy of the urban middle and upper classes who have a personal need to uphold a myth of a harmonious world that is radically at variance with the rather drab and impersonal existence of the city (Obeyesekere 1983:19).

But the irony is that Obeyesekere himself also subscribes to a very similar image of the rural, except that he situates it not in the present but, like so many others, 'just back, we can see, over the last hill'.

There is, however, one kind of voice that I have not yet mentioned. That is the voice of the villagers who have lived through the

recent past and may have their own somewhat different valuations of change. One old man I interviewed recalled his youth in the Sabaragamuva village where I carried out my fieldwork: 'In those days there was fever everywhere. Then after that hospitals were built and temples were built. Before that there was nothing—no temple, no school. Men only worked, ate and lived. They lived unhappily.' Or, another man: 'People in this village were like Veddas. They got together, went to the jungle, and killed animals. That was their work. In the old village that's the way people lived.' In general, I found it virtually impossible to induce the old men to express a fond nostalgia for the circumstances of their own youth. For them, the past meant disease, ignorance and poverty. An idea like 'community,' its presence or absence, which is so prominent in outsiders' assessments of rural change, was not a salient feature in their descriptions of the changes they had lived through. For all their grumbles about the present, it had never occurred to them to describe the past as a harmonious golden age. While this observation should serve as a warning to those outside observers who would impose their own valuations on rural change, it should not be treated completely uncritically. What follows is as much concerned to put the villagers' own evaluations into context as it is to contrast them with urban preconceptions about the same processes.

The Modes of Community

There are, then, a number of questions to address; we need to consider a number of different perspectives on rural change. First I will discuss two closely related views: the broad theme of loss of community and rural disintegration, and Obeyesekere's important and influential empirical tracing out of this as a historical process brought on by the legal changes introduced by colonial rule in the nineteenth century. A third perspective is that—or those—of the villagers themselves, some of whom, as we have seen, make a contrast between an unhappy past and a relatively benign present. A fourth perspective is afforded by the documentary evidence about this area left by the colonial administration. I should perhaps stress that no single perspective can provide us with a complete or true picture, least of all that dependent on my own field observations.

The point is, rather, to compare different kinds of evidence from different contexts, looking for the significant presences and absences in each source. The key term so far has been 'community,' so I propose to start by looking for some of the roots of the particular idea of community so often invoked in this context.

One genealogy that can be traced is from Western Orientalist scholarship. Samaraweera (1978a; 1978b) has described the impact in particular of Maine's view of the 'village community' on the 'official mind' in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka. This view of the village as self-sufficient, self-governing and kin-based was in marked contrast to the litigious and fractious peasantry of administrative caricature. But—such being the workings of colonial prejudice—it was the metropolitan scholar's model which was taken as authentic and the problem then became one of *restoring* the villages to their pristine harmony. The solution most enthusiastically put forward was the revival—perhaps, more accurately, the reinvention—of the 'ancient' village council (*gamsabhava*) mentioned by D'Oyly earlier in the century, which was agreeably reminiscent of the Indian village council (*pancayat*). Curiously, if not atypically, the one view on this reform not sought was that of the villagers themselves:

The Village Communities Ordinance was formulated with village society in mind but as Morgan's biographer, William Digby, pointed out, 'efforts were not made to ascertain the opinion of the great mass of the people on the subject of the proposed reform; they were believed to be in favour of the proposal and their acquiescence was assumed' (Samaraweera 1978b:199).

The brief reflorescence of the village council, now remembered in the area where I worked chiefly as a particularly inscrutable administrative device for extracting labor for road repairs, may be of little significance in itself for observers of the contemporary rural scene. But the attitudes behind these administrative measures—assumptions about the village, reliance on received wisdom rather than local opinion—still, I think, color our expectations and constrain our work.

Most field research, my own included, still takes the form of the village study and, despite repeated criticisms of the assumption that the village is a sociologically salient unit, it has proved difficult

indeed to escape the almost reflexive use of 'the village' as the frame for analysis. 'Anthropologists,' says Clifford Geertz, 'don't study villages...they study in villages' (Geertz 1973:22). But, however conscious we may be of this assertion, the problem of finding a sociologically meaningful and bounded (because it is impossible to work at first hand above a certain physical scale) unit of study remains. This is especially true of the characteristically non-nucleated settlements we find in Sinhalese rural areas. Yalman, for example, tells us that he 'searched for a village which would be traditional, isolated, and fairly large. I found the village I was looking for in the distant Walapane division on the eastern approaches to the Kandyan highlands. This was Terutenne' (Yalman 1967:10). In fact this 'village' is divided into some thirteen named 'hamlets,' each of which, in Sinhala at least, could itself be described as a 'village' (*gama*, pl. *gam*). Indeed, the unity of Yalman's village would seem to be more dependent on administrative than on local definition. The exception to this would be certain religious contexts, to which I will return later, in which a wider unity may be asserted (*ibid.*: 29). Obeyesekere, on the other hand, has argued that these 'hamlets' are of prime sociological significance, claiming that they represent the primary referents of the term *gama*, which he defines as 'an estate, owned originally by a founding ancestor' (Obeyesekere 1967:13). The village, then, is far from being a self-evident entity; many of our conclusions about its nature will depend on the criteria by which we define and isolate it.

The idea of the village community has a complex historical and ideological provenance. In its nineteenth century European formulation, it connects with the images I quoted from Williams. 'In the rapidly industrializing societies of late nineteenth century Western Europe, the village community came to symbolize the world men had lost—an "alternative society", compulsively compared with the present for signs of "progress" or "degeneration"' (Dewey 1972:292). The importance of South Asian evidence for this construct was its potential use, under the guise of the comparative method, as a living equivalent to the lost past of the European countryside. As such it could be employed, as Dewey points out, by conservative or radical in argument and counter-argument about progress and degeneration. But the evidence taken from Asia was selective and ideologically distorted. What is characteristically missing from accounts of the Asian version of the village community

is power (in particular, the relationship between village and state), and inequality (intra-village relations between castes, and between landlord and tenant) (cf. Dumont 1970). And, as the European debate gradually fizzled out in the late nineteenth century, the image of the village community remained for the use of nationalist thinkers and ideologues, people for whom these significant absences were ideally suited.

One important study in Sri Lanka has attempted to vindicate this image of the traditional village community—Obeyesekere's *Land Tenure in Village Ceylon* (Obeyesekere 1967). Despite the title, this is in fact a study of land tenure in one remote village in Hinidum Pattu, Madagama by name. This study, I should emphasize, is by far the best and most detailed account we have of a changing Sinhalese rural community. It is because of its quality and its influence that Obeyesekere's study requires the most careful scrutiny. Although his argument is ostensibly limited to changes in land tenure, his real concern is to propose a model of rural change in general. He presents an ideal model of land tenure together with a list of empirical preconditions for the survival of any system of land tenure which approximates to his model. In this model each hamlet (*gama*) comprises a body of more or less equal co-sharers in a single estate of paddy land. The holders of shares in an estate view themselves as co-descendants of the founding ancestor of the estate. The holdings are not of specific plots but of shares in a system of rotating tenure, such that each shareholder gets to take his or her turn on good land and bad land alike. The *gama* is, then, a corporate group with common interests in the same piece of land and at least nominal ties of kinship under an ideology of common descent. For this system to work in practice, provision has to be made to ensure a workable balance between population and land. Traditionally, the most important such provision was the option, in the event of a chronic excess of population, of the surplus moving out to found a new settlement. Smaller imbalances could be corrected by the practices of *diga* and *binna* marriage. In a *diga* marriage the wife went to live with her husband, possibly taking movable property with her, but renouncing all claims on her natal lands. A *binna* marriage was contracted if a landholding family had a shortage of males to work the land; a daughter would marry uxorilocally, retaining her rights in her natal estate, with the incoming husband (presumably from a household with a surplus of hands to land) working the lands

that she would inherit. The empirical consequence of these related institutions would be a group of co-resident, more or less economically equal kinsmen. The existence on any significant scale of extra-village landholding, or intra-village landlessness, or non-kin or non-landholding co-residents, can thus be taken as pathological symptoms of the breakdown of the traditional pattern. It is this model, I presume, that lies behind Obeyesekere's subsequent references to 'traditional kin-based homogeneous villages'.

In his monograph, Obeyesekere details some of the colonial changes that prevented the continued working of the traditional land tenure system, and which thus led to the break up of traditional village communities. Changes introduced in inheritance law meant that *diga* marrying women could, after all, still claim shares in their natal lands, the result being the alienation of shares to non-resident holders. Crown lands policy, most damagingly, prevented the foundation of new villages if population grew too much for the land. The Grain Tax commutation of the 1880s, which led to widespread evictions for non-payment in some areas, affected other areas by forcing residents to sell or mortgage their lands to outside speculators. The combined effect was the ending of the old unity of kinship, residence and economic interest, as the village lands passed into the hands of outsiders, and, in response to the new phenomenon of landlessness, people started to drift from village to village, thus upsetting the old norm of kinship homogeneity.

What Obeyesekere has done, of course, is to rediscover the village community—in its classic nineteenth century form—but to locate it not in any observable present, but in the recent past. In fact, the temporal site of this community is not any specific documented time; it is rather a particular point in genealogical time. Obeyesekere's model depends on the genealogies used in contemporary land disputes being treated as historical documents; historical documents on the other hand, when they do appear, immediately start to reveal anomalies. What we have to ask is whether it is legitimate to interpret the differences between qualitatively different sources as evidence of a historical transition.

Inequality in the Past

The Meda Korale of Sabaragamuva province where I worked is, like

Hinidum Pattu, something of a marginal area, on the border between the old Kandyan kingdom and the more remote hinterland of the Low Country. The village I worked in is on the southern edge of the foothills of the central mountains and a couple of miles from the border between Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces. It lies on a plateau about 1200 feet above sea level and is bounded on the northwest by a circle of hills rising to about 2500 feet, behind which can be seen about ten miles away the great wall of mountains on either side of the planting town of Haputale. To the southeast it is possible to walk a mile or so from the center of the village and stand on a cliff edge looking down on the Walawe Ganga as it flows across the dead flat plain which stretches out to the sea about forty miles away. Climatically this is border country too, the village lying between the Wet and Dry Zones. Until recently it was possible to grow only one crop of rain-fed paddy a year, although the plateau never became as parched as the Dry Zone plains 1,000 feet below.

On first acquaintance the shape of the village is reassuringly familiar, at least at its center where there is a road junction, a number of shops, the cooperative store, a sub-post office, and the temple (*pansala*). I first arrived at the end of a month of travelling in the area, during which I became increasingly bewildered by official lists of villages that might have anything from one to one hundred households in them. It was the rather misleading familiarity of the scene—a clustered, named, tangible settlement—which commended itself to me. I was misled, though, because what I saw as the village were only the superficial markers of community, and they were new. To find the older parts of the settlement I would have to hike a mile back from the road to the two 'old' villages on the hillside above the paddy fields. The village I lived and worked in was, to a large extent, dominated by the old villagers and their descendants, but its shape and location were relatively new.

The identity and distinctiveness of the two old villages puzzled me for some time. The old paddy fields are found in two clusters, about a mile from each other, on the lower slopes of the encircling hills. One such cluster was referred to generically as Udawela, the other as Medawela, and not surprisingly these were also the names of the old villages. But official documents (such as the electoral list) actually drew the boundary between the two along a stream that runs between the paddy fields at the place people referred to as Udawela. So people who, in conversation, were described as living

at Udawela were officially resident at Medawela. Although two houses might be only a hundred yards apart, administratively they might belong to different villages.

On enquiring about this, I eventually discovered that the two villages, although both were of Goyigama (Cultivator) caste, were sociologically distinct in the past. In particular, they would not inter-marry. The reason lay in their different relationships to the village lands. Most of the Udawela lands formerly belonged to the provincial governor (*disava*) and his family; these lands were known as lord's land (*bandara idam*, the equivalent of what is known elsewhere as *nindagam*), and those who worked as tenants of the outside owners were regarded as being of lower standing than the freeholders of Medawela. Moreover, in Obeyesekere's strict definition of the term, we could say there were two further *gam* in this settlement: a cluster of Berava (Drummer) caste houses with their own attached lands; and one further group of Goyigama, owners of another group of fields at a higher elevation who, for reasons no one clearly remembers, were 'avoided' (*konkala*) by both other Goyigama groups. Thus, according to oral tradition, this small cluster of houses and paddy fields concealed no less than four distinct, separate groups. At the same time, an elaborate system of field rotation—upper and lower fields fed from the same stream alternating in paddy production—meant that, economically, all four sub-communities had to cooperate in coordinating irrigation.

The divisions among the different Goyigama groups did not persist. Around the turn of the century, a marriage was contracted between a child of the overseer (*vidane*) of the lord's land of Udawela (ostensibly of lower status but by now relatively prosperous because of his position) and one of the Medawela households. Another marriage united the other Goyigama group (of the mysterious 'avoidance') with the Medawela people. The old divisions are remembered even now by some, most notably a few old men still nursing elaborate land claims based around furtive marriages between women from Medawela and men from Udawela, marriages which had resulted in the formal disinheritance of the errant women by their wrathful relatives. But for younger people the matter is of little interest, and few know much if anything about these earlier distinctions. What the erosion of these barriers signified was the expansion of networks of kinship—and, one suspects, cooperation—outside a small kin- and land-based group to include other, contiguous

settlers. It might have marked the end of the old, estate-based *gama*, but it was also the beginning of the *gama* as a wider social and residential unit.

This broadening of local kinship networks was still, of course, confined to members of the Goyigama caste; restrictions on relations between them and lower castes remained as strong as ever. As one old Drummer remembered it, 'Now the customs (*sirit*) are good. Before it was very harsh. You could not enter a house. You could not wear a new shirt. Now it's not so. Wherever you go now everyone will be treated alike.' He dated the change to the time when a Buddhist temple (*pansala*) was first constructed in the village and the incumbent preached against the iniquities of caste. The fact that the idea and energy behind this first village temple came from a relatively rich settler of the Vahumpura (Jaggery Maker) caste doubtless also played a part in it. His family, engaged in a mixture of trade and agriculture, had established themselves in the area around 1920. They, and some of their more powerful relatives, were reluctant to show the old Goyigama families the respect they felt they deserved. As one of them recalled:

We had an uncle who was an ayurvedic physician. He used to come here and do *chena* (slash and burn) cultivation. One day I told him how the people here used to give us food and drink. So my uncle drank toddy and went to the old village and scolded those men like this: 'I am a low caste man. Without me you would all be dead. Because of my medicine you are alive. Why do you talk like that to our boys?' So saying he scolded them thoroughly. After that he told me, 'Look here, boy, from now on these people won't treat you like that, they will not give you water in coconut shells, nor will they talk to you in that way.'

Although caste remains a source of potential tension there is no denying that there has been a marked decline in the public expression of caste differences. And even the old 'respectable' men are reluctant to decry this development, possibly conscious, if nothing else, of Buddhist teaching on the subject. As one Goyigama school teacher told me: 'Now all the children go to school together and play together. When they grow up caste will be forgotten.' This may or may not turn out to be the case; for the moment all I am

concerned to establish is that, on the surface of social life at least, the decline of caste is another sign of a more inclusive and egalitarian idea of the village as a community.

Another facet of the same shift can be seen in the way the high caste men remember their own former superiors. The Village Headman (*aracci*) is, in folk memory at least, depicted as fierce and exploitative, using his power to induce the other villagers to work *gratis* on his fields, and settling disputes most often by recourse to brute force and a harsh tongue. His successor, the *grama sevaka*,² and other minor government officials freely admit that they could not operate like that today because people simply would not tolerate it. One critical factor here has been the intrusion of party politics into the village. In the pre-independence period, all contact with the state and its powers was channelled through the headmen and aristocratic (*radala*) holders of higher administrative positions to the all-powerful GA (Government Agent) many miles away at Ratnapura. The effects of electoral politics were felt early and dramatically. In a bye-election in 1943, the largest local landowner was defeated by another aristocratic candidate from the other side of the constituency. Until then, in addition to the sharecropping (*ande*) payments from the lord's land, the villagers had been used to carrying one-fifth of all their *chena* produce to the lord's house (*valavva*), which was some miles away, in return for the necessary *chena* license. In 1943 the victorious candidate arrived in the village and told the men that they no longer needed to make this payment. The axis of local economic and political power, if anything strengthened by colonial rule, was now broken. Now the local administration is, as everyone is well aware, dependent on the support and approval of political bosses. And they too are—with the vicissitudes of electoral change—far from secure in their power in the long run.

These changes, in caste as in politics, represent a change in the *texture* of social relations, the potential to bring into question all hierarchical relationships. They are not, for all that, indices of the decline of community, or of relations of mutual cooperation, unless we are to regard the expropriation of labor and crops by headmen

² The *grama sevaka* (literally "village servant") is the bureaucratic post created in the late 1950s to replace the old Headman (*aracci*). In theory the *grama sevaka* is an outside bureaucrat, functioning as the lowest level of the administration; these days the post carries little or no power in itself.

and landlords as somehow markers of reciprocity. There is a new instability in the nature and expression of power in the area. And, whatever the injustices and excesses of the politically connected, nobody showed the slightest interest in a return to what they saw as the permanently institutionalized injustice of the headman system. As someone said, summing up all these changes, 'now there is less status/pride' (*dan nambuwa aduyi*).

If these are indicators of a more egalitarian texture in daily social relations, there still remains the suggestion, frequently made, that the broad sweep of rural change is towards greater material inequality. At its strongest, as I suggested, this may be put as a blunt contrast between a past of equality (*within* the village) and a present of inequality. The strongest argument for this is Obeyesekere's contrast between the traditional *gama* of co-sharers of a common field and the modern facts of indigence and landlessness. This is, in fact, a contrast between two different kinds of evidence from the present: on the one hand, strategically-honed genealogical representations of the past, used as a representation and legitimation of property claims in the present which, by their very nature, will exclude the propertyless from their picture of the past; and contemporary observation in which the propertyless are only too sadly in evidence. The Medawela people, like those of Madagama, trace their landholdings back to an ancestor figure, known variously as the 'great village lord' (*maha gamarala*) and as Medawela Dingirihami, said to have been the original owner (*mulinma ayiti karaya*) of the entire *gama*. Logically, we are faced with one fundamental problem (as indeed we are when we look at Obeyesekere's reading of equivalent statements in Madagama): why on earth should one man require quite so much paddy land and how could he have worked it?

Other evidence for the early colonial period that I have uncovered comes from the Grain Tax Registers for the years 1826 to 1830, long before British tax and legal reforms could be expected to have left any impression on the pattern of village landholding.³ The most striking feature of the figures presented in these volumes is the inequality in landholding. In Udawela, as one might expect, just over half the land—the lord's land—is registered in the name of the locally based provincial governor (*disava*). In Medawela almost the same amount is held by one man, Dingirihami the *gamarala*, the rest being

³ The records are to be found in the Department of National Archives, Colombo, under file 45/2737.

shared among other villagers with the second largest share being held by a Drummer. Altogether, 15 owners are listed for 23 *amuna* (roughly 23 acres) of land; the largest holding is 8 *amuna*, while 7 owners have 2 *pala* (roughly half an acre) or less. Structurally, in the present, Dingirihami, that largest landowner remembered as the "original owner of the entire village" is in the same position as the founders of Madagama; according to the colonial record, he owned just over a third of the village lands. Given the size of his holding, it may be reasonable to assume that some of his less fortunately endowed co-villagers worked his land as tenants, which in turn implies that even then there were households with insufficient wet land of their own to cultivate.

There is, of course, no *a priori* reason to grant a privileged status to the evidence of colonial documents against that of oral tradition, still less to suggest that the Meda Korale tax registers are "true" and Obeyesekere's oral sources are 'false'. Each source has its own bias, dependent in large part on the project to which it is attached. What one needs to know about landholding in the 1820s is clearly different for a local official of the time, trusted with the job of collecting the revenue, than it is for a small farmer over a hundred years later who is using his version of the past to advance his claims to property in the present. Nor should it be thought that I am suggesting that my evidence is more representative than Obeyesekere's; a strong case can be made for abandoning a single model of Sinhalese (or Kandyan Sinhalese) land tenure altogether and instead exploring the empirical diversity of cases. What the colonial sources do suggest, however, is that it is very difficult to maintain a view which would deny any major inequalities in access to resources within "traditional" villages.⁴ And this view is corroborated by what we know of pre-colonial conditions when the higher echelons of the state were dependent on rurally generated surpluses; why work for a lord (or temple, or king) if land is available for all?

Making Community

How then did this area change in the years between those tax entries

⁴ The question of the relative increase or decrease in rural inequality is another matter altogether which, as far as I know, has barely been touched on in analyses of

and the present? Two factors, normally cited as modern developments, seem to have been permanently threatening to the survival of the settlement: demographic pressure and consequent disintegration. But the pressure in question, until very recently indeed, was the threat of depopulation. *Chena* and hunting are remembered as being of at least equal importance to wet rice cultivation, in which case, and given my argument about land inequalities in the previous section, it may well have been, *pace* Leach (1961), that paddy ownership was as much an important way of 'talking about' relative social position as it was some materially privileged, hard economic fact. Communications in the area were, in the past, extremely difficult and famine was not unknown in the nineteenth century:

It is in the Kolonna Korale and in the Bintenna of the Atakalam and Meda Korales that the food-supply is meagre—often inadequate, and generally of a very poor quality ... the main food-supply is *kurakkan* and dried elk-flesh, Indian corn, and *tanna* (except for paddy in one or two places). The dry grain thus raised on *ben* is largely bartered by the cultivators for salt and dry fish with the Moor traders from Hambantota district, who bring up large *tavalam* droves every harvest.... The people are too poor to import rice or other food, and are entirely dependent on the *chena* cultivation and occasional yield of their paddy lands. The consequence is that distress and sickness are very prevalent in the Bintenna, and at the close of the year it was necessary to apply to government for relief to some of the villagers, which was given in the supply of *kurakkan*, till the *chena* crops were ready for reaping (Govt of Ceylon 1885:139).

The author of this report, Herbert Wace, the Assistant Government Agent in Ratnapura, took a continued interest in this poorest area under his administration. He lobbied long and hard for irrigation works at Gantota on the plains below the village. Although much new rice land was opened up there at the turn of the century, the scheme was plagued by two problems: transport and sickness. It was not until the 1940s that a metalled road was completed. Prior to that paddy, from the fertile new fields had to be expensively

rural change in Sri Lanka. Simply denying any inequality in the pre-colonial period, however, would hardly seem the best point of departure for such an analysis.

transported by caravans of pack-oxen (*tavalam*) over slow and difficult hill paths.

While the whole area remained notoriously unhealthy, the low lands along the river were the worst of all. The villagers vividly recall the fearsome impact of malaria: 'Malaria everywhere. It was the same here. People got fever but were rarely cured. When I came here (1933) there were no children at all in Gantota. Only one house there had children. They all got fever.' The healthy men in the higher-lying villages found themselves working paddy lands at Gantota where there was insufficient labor for the available land. At about this time too, one small cart trader was able to amass a large amount of land in the district by buying up a lot from illness-stricken households. The Gantota lands were well enough irrigated to provide two sure harvests a year yet, I was told, it was only after the passing of the 1958 Paddy Lands Act that, under pressure from the owners, the sharecroppers there started to work both *maba* and *yala* seasons. In other words, population pressure on resources, even as late as the 1950s, can hardly have reached crisis point if potentially valuable rice lands were allowed to lie fallow for half of the year.

The beginnings of demographic expansion go back to the 1920s. It was then that, for the first time, three households established themselves down on the plateau, where the center of the contemporary village now lies, about a mile from the other 'old village' houses. After World War II, as land became less restricted by the government, the residents of the old village moved down to the plateau where, with their descendants, they form the core of the new village. Of those original three households, two had moved from even more marginal, declining settlements a few miles to the north. The third family were of Vahumpura caste and had come from a village about twelve miles to the west. They, and the relatives who subsequently settled around them, involved themselves in a little trading and occasional work for the lord's house, as well as *chena* and paddy farming. As part of the food drive during World War II, the metalled road from the nearest town was finally pushed through to Gantota, missing the old villages but passing through the center of the newer settlement on the plateau. At the same time, a British company cleared much of the plateau for commercial *chena* operations, moving on after a couple of years but leaving acres of *patana* grass behind as their legacy. Throughout this period immigration to the area continued, turning from a trickle into a flood after the war

as, with the introduction of effective spraying, malaria all but disappeared.

The new settlers came from a number of places. Some, like their predecessors, came from the more inaccessible hill villages to the north, many of which have finally been abandoned. Others have come from the overpopulated Wet Zone villages around the nearest town some fourteen or so miles to the west; many of this second group have relatives settled nearby on colony schemes that have been opened along the Walawe Ganga since the late 1950s. The most recent arrivals have often come the furthest—many from beyond Ratnapura, sometimes by way of a number of earlier stops, *chena* farming elsewhere in the Dry Zone. In addition, about thirty Muslim families have settled around the Sufi shrine and pilgrimage center, which is perched on the cliffs of the southeast edge of the plateau. Just under half the households on the plateau had, at the time of my fieldwork, moved in during the preceding ten years. But about half of these have close kin settled around them; altogether, the extent of kinship connection among the settler population is much higher than one might anticipate. Very few of the newcomers are without some supportive kin nearby, and some have married into the old core village families who, as I have already mentioned, form most of the physical and ideological core of the new sprawling settlement. Despite the heterogeneity of origins, it is not unknown to hear the rhetorical assertion that “We are all kin in this village” and, often, there is more truth in this than one might expect.

It is only in the last decade that *chena* farming has ceased to be the economic mainstay in the area. Now firmly forbidden on government land, it is almost extinct except on small pockets of private land. Large-scale *chena* operations have moved further east towards Wellawaya, Tanamalwila, and Kataragama (see Vitebsky in this volume). Sporadically successful gemming has, since the 1960s, provided an occasional alternative, as well as being a lure for further new settlement in the area. But, in recent years, the main economic activity has been permanent, dry land cash-cropping. During my stay, the dominant crop was beans, much of the cultivation of which involved relatively high inputs of insecticide and fertilizer which were financed by the traders (*mudalalis*) who control access to the Colombo markets.

Before looking more closely at the problems of community in this radically changing setting, I want to digress a little and mention

an important parallel colonization of the area. A question frequently raised in the period of religious revival that followed independence was that of the proper role of organized religion in the new society that was forming. And, as a context for that question, a particular version of the Buddhist past was widely propagated. Here is one example of that version of the past:

Each village had two important institutions which helped to knit the people together into an organic unit. One was the village council or *gamsabhava*, the council of elders which met and decided all important issues within the village and settled local disputes. Often the monks participated in these proceedings. The other was the village temple where the monks made their contribution to the welfare of the village in many ways. The village was a close-knit community, enjoying a large measure of autonomy and held together by these institutions (Siriwardene 1966:538).

This is, of course, a classic nationalist representation of the rural past. Ironically, it is only now, after the political successes of that same nationalism, that we can witness a living approximation of this vision of rural order (at least in the area we are currently discussing).

There are, in fact, very few village temples in this area that can be dated back to the Kandyan period—perhaps four or five within a fifteen mile radius of my field site. All of the Sabaragamuva temples belonged to the Siamese sect (*Siyam Nikaya*), entrance to which was restricted to members of the Goyigama caste, and controlled from the royal temples of Asgiriya or Malwatte in Kandy. In the 1830s and 1840s, with the backing of the aristocratic elite, branches of the Amarapura sect began to establish themselves in this area. By 1847, one observer reported,

The object of the Amarapooa priests is to bring back the doctrines of Buddhism to their pristine purity, by disentangling them from caste, polytheism, and other corruptions to which they have been subject for ages, and these priests, how difficult soever the task may be, have made considerable progress in this reformation in the low countries, but especially in Saffragam which may at present be regarded as the chief seat of this reformation, and where the difference in the tenets and principles of the two sects is wider and greater than anywhere else, though the Amarapooa sect

originated with the Chalia priests of Amblangode and Galle about 40 years ago (de Silva 1847:276).

This reformation, it should be noted, did not extend as far as the removal of caste barriers to ordination in Sabaragamuva; the leading branches of the Amarapura sect are still restricted to Goyigama ordinands. But the enthusiasm attested to in the 1840s is still present, not least in the founding of a whole string of new temples. The first of these was established in the nineteenth century under aristocratic patronage; more recent additions have been endowed in some cases by wealthy donors—lately the running has been made by gem traders—while others have been the fruit of villagers' own initiatives.

The old men I knew were disparaging of their own past performance as Buddhists: 'In those days we knew nothing of the *dharma* here'; or, as I quoted earlier, "People in this village were like Veddas". To reach the nearest temple (*pansala*) was a difficult journey of eight miles. Some people might visit it for Vesak, but otherwise it could only have been of peripheral importance to people's lives. If someone died in the old villages, efforts might be made to bring a priest for the funeral, but as often as not the dead would have to be buried without the benefit of clergy.

It was an 'outsider' who changed all this. The head of the first family of Vahumpura settlers dreamed up the idea of a village temple in the mid-1930s (literally, in some accounts; village legend has it that the idea came to him in a dream as he slept at the foot of the fine old bo-tree around which the temple was subsequently constructed). He gave a piece of land on which to build and persuaded the old villagers to participate in the project. It was also he who went to the chief monk and asked him to send a monk, initially just for the three-month rainy season retreat. This is the monk, now the chief monk at his old temple, whose anti-caste preaching was remembered so fondly by low caste villagers.

Two other similar initiatives have altered the face of the village. The nearest school had, in the past, been as distant as the nearest temple. While a few of the old men had stayed near a school with relatives, others had learned their letters from their fathers. The overseers of the commercial *chena* operation during World War II helped the villagers to build a preaching hall at the new temple and persuaded someone to come and give lessons to the village children. In due course, the priest was able to lobby the government and the village received its first full-time schoolteacher. A more recent innovation was the construction of a large tank below the old paddy fields.

The idea for this came from a local organization (now, like so many others of its kind, defunct) calling itself the Mangara Youth Committee.⁵ This committee put forward the idea of the tank and organized all the labor for clearing the jungle on a voluntary basis. With the support of prominent local clergymen they were able to obtain the then Member of Parliament's backing and the government provided support in the form of earth-moving equipment and technical expertise in the construction of sluices and anicuts.

When I arrived in 1982 the temple administration had just been reorganized. Whereas before there had been two lay committees—one for men and one for women—there was now one all-purpose village Buddhist Protection Society. At the same time, a Welfare Society had been formed. The members all paid a small monthly contribution, and the society was to help out in the case of death, illness or other emergency. Both were very formally organized with office bearers and deputy office bearers, and meetings characterized by lengthy speeches, the proposal and seconding of motions, the reading and approval of minutes, and so on. Although the most prominent members of both organizations tended to be young men from the richer, old village families, at least as many recent settlers also participated and active efforts were made to involve even the most recent arrivals. No doubt partly encouraged by my presence, the two committees spent much of the first year of my stay on a heavy round of merit-making (*pinkama*), fund-raising, and miscellaneous good works.

So, for example, at Vesak that year there was a three-day merit-making, featuring a number of processions (*perahara*) with school children, drummers and dancers, a play put on by youths from the village, an auction of devotional offerings to raise funds for the temple, loudspeakers, a 'sound offering' (*sabda pujava*, a dawn-to-dusk playing of drums by the image-house of the temple), and a very large crowd of people from all over the area. At Asala there was a *sil* campaign (*sil viyaparaya*) organized at the village school, at which all the village schoolchildren, dressed in devotional white to take the Eight Precepts, sat alongside the usual handful of elderly pious laymen (*upasaka*). For the rainy season retreat, the next major phase in the Buddhist calendar, an elaborate cycle of merit-making was planned. Each quarter-moon day, for the duration

⁵ Mangara is the name of the deity considered to hold sway over the area.

of the rainy season retreat, there was to be a formal preaching at the temple, preceded by a collective offering at the image-house, and a procession. For the procession, the village (effectively the whole sprawling settlement across the plateau) was divided into four quarters, each quarter taking its turn to organize a procession on one quarter-moon day. Meanwhile, an elaborate rota was worked out so that each family that wanted to would have the opportunity to provide at least one meal for the monk during his retreat. At the end of the three months there was to be the special merit-making to mark the end of the rainy season, when the entire village would make offerings to the order of monks assembled as a whole (and, in so doing, see if it could upstage neighboring villages in their offerings). The whole organization—fragmenting the village into neighborhoods, and then households, before bringing it together again as a collectivity to pay homage to the order of monks—is almost Durkheimian in its sociological precision. But it is not in any sense a traditional ritual. Rather, it is a quite self-consciously created innovation intended to create something like a community from a rather heterogeneous assemblage of people.

One general phenomenon calls for comment here: the growing emphasis on the *collective* worship of the Buddha. This has been paralleled by the decline in collective rituals to the gods like the *gam maduva* which, although still remembered, has not been performed for many years. In the past, as it was explained to me, people went to the temple and made offerings to the Buddha on an individual or family basis. Now no major date in the religious calendar is allowed to pass without at least one collective offering to the Buddha (*budupujava*). For this, the participants gather in a semicircle around the entrance to the image-house while the items to be offered (generally food, flowers and incense) are brought around for everyone to touch, and thus share in the merit of the offering, by young girls dressed in the white of piety. Then, after the offerings have been made to the image of the Buddha, all squat as the monk leads them through the recitation of a number of verses in unison. In the second year of my stay, a monk was brought in from Embilipitiya especially for the performance of a *bodhipujava* (offering to the bo-tree) in honor of a new wall which had been erected around the temple bo-tree. This represented a further development of the other rituals I had witnessed as the visiting monk, using a microphone, led a sizeable congregation through devotional verses in demotic Sinhala

rather than the Pali and high Sinhala more usually employed (cf. Seneviratne and Wickremaratne 1981). The *sil* campaign is another manifestation of the same spirit; whereas the taking of the Eight Precepts had in the past been the concern of the elderly or the exceptionally pious, now, particularly under the enthusiastic patronage of a younger generation of schoolteachers, almost every school in the area where I worked had at least one, if not more, such campaign every year.

Whereas older forms of collective ritual might serve to mark differences of status and position among the participants—differences of caste, gender or generation—these newer rituals serve to express an equality of communion among all lay worshippers in the face of the Buddha and the order of monks. At the village level the moral community being created and expressed in this way is the village as a community of Sinhala Buddhists.⁶ But, at Poson in 1983, all those taking the precepts gathered in the preaching hall at the temple to listen to the sermon being broadcast on the radio. The 'imagined community' of which they now formed a part embraced all those who might be listening to that same sermon on the radio at that time—nothing less than the nation as a Sinhala Buddhist nation. The old men who could remember the time before there was a temple when, as one of them told me, they all used to hunt, eat meat, and drink toddy because they did not *know* these things were wrong, have lived through an extraordinary growth not only in their own consciousness of themselves as Buddhists, but also in the use of this consciousness in the attempted creation of a sense of community at both local and national levels.⁷ Some, at least, of the old people's lamentations about the awfulness of the past are, it should be realized, heavily colored by the acquired standards of a *style* of Buddhism to which their mothers and fathers had no access.

The last thing I want to do here is to substitute a romanticization of the present for a romanticization of the past. The developments I am describing spring from more complex motives than a simple overriding aspiration to 'community'. One source of continuing vitality in the long revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been the

⁶ It should be obvious that this idea of community in Sri Lanka serves to exclude as much as it includes—this is as true for the Muslims in the village as it is for whole linguistic or religious communities elsewhere in the island.

⁷ The blood that stains that sense of community in Sri Lanka as I write is another story, a few roots of which may be discernible in the processes I am describing.

recourse to conspicuous piety by those denied access to other means of social advancement. Under colonial rule low-caste groups used Buddhism in this way, just as the politically ostracized do today. And, as can be fairly pointed out, a perceived need to create and emphasize a sense of community implies a prior perception of its absence. It is precisely *because* community is not a self-evident feature of daily life that it requires such insistent symbolic emphasis. One story from the latter part of 1982 will illustrate some of these qualifying considerations.

The area I worked in had been, until 1977, part of a consistently SLFP (Sri Lankan Freedom Party) parliamentary constituency and most of the richer villagers, by and large the former residents of the old villages, had equally consistently identified themselves with the SLFP. In 1977, for the first time since 1956, a UNP (United National Party) candidate was elected in the constituency and effective political power—control of access to jobs and sources of patronage—passed to UNP members in the village. The core of the village UNP was an unlikely coalition of Muslims, some disaffected younger members of the old village families and a few well-placed newcomers. Their leader was a shopkeeper who had moved in from the nearest town and whose brother was the chief aide and confidante of the new MP (Member of Parliament); after the election he was given the job of Cultivation Officer and became the effective link for all important dealings between the village and the state. He and his closest allies were regarded by their opponents as immoral drunkards and trouble-makers. The new temple and welfare societies which were formed in early 1982, while not exclusively SLFP, did provide a forum for some of the SLFP supporters who had little or no prospect of political advancement under the existing government. Moreover, the incumbent of the village temple was perceived by some of the more fiery UNP supporters at least to be an 'SLFP monk' (although he took no active part in politics himself at this time).

The elaborate weekly processions and merit-making organized for the rainy season retreat were in full spate when the 1982 Presidential election was called. They came to an elaborate halt soon afterwards. As the procession was moving back to the temple one night, an argument broke out between one of the young UNP leaders who had been watching it and one of the men leading the procession. A small gang of UNP supporters set off after the procession and there was a brief scuffle outside the temple. The *grama sevaka* and the

chairman of the temple society (a school teacher) went outside to remonstrate with the UNP gang but were rebuffed with insults and the threat of immediate punishment transfers for all government servants after the election. The next few weeks were taken up with emergency meetings and the hatching of plans for obtaining redress against what some of the SLFP villagers were only too ready to see as an outrage against the village. A delegation, carefully balanced between UNP and SLFP members of the temple society, was sent to enlist the help of the chief monk of the area in appealing to the MP to request his followers to respect the village's religious activities. Contact was never quite established with the MP himself, but one of his secretaries was seen to arrive in the village and have what looked like an admonitory word with the Cultivation Officer. Meanwhile, by now it had been discovered that, under electoral law, all processions were forbidden, so the processions had to stop and the whole elaborate order of ritual for the rainy season retreat gently fizzled out. Even so, the fact that the UNP had attacked a Buddhist procession was a constant assertion in SLFP oratory during the election build-up in the village.

The election itself was a triumph for the UNP, in the village—where it almost doubled its vote—as much as nationally. But the deepened schisms of the campaign and the memories of the procession meant that the young UNP men were as excluded (or, as they liked to think, excluded themselves) from the affairs of the temple as ever. It was about this time that a group of poor squatters decided to raise some support to build their own temple on the other side of the plateau.⁸ One of the first people they approached was the Cultivation Officer. He immediately adopted the idea and threw all his support behind it. He also made sure that the first projected merit-making at the new site should clash with a planned merit-making at the existing temple. Faced with this challenge, the leading personalities at the old temple simply postponed their own plans and settled back to watch the progress of their rivals' efforts. The ensuing merit-making was impressive, if not without its comic aspects. One steward, more

⁸ The idea was not confined to them; some time later, another group of settlers a little further down the road started to organize themselves to clear the ground around a bo-tree in their vicinity. It was confidently expected that they too would eventually begin the construction of a temple. This enthusiasm for the construction of religious edifices is, of course, evidence of further efforts to *make* a community around the resultant temple.

used to political rallies than public piety (and a Christian as well), had to be retired early due to conspicuous intoxication. In a speech to the assembled crowd, the Cultivation Officer made it clear that the event was to be understood as the UNP helping the poor people of the area, unlike the rich people in the village (by which he meant the coterie of SLFP supporters prominent in the affairs of the old temple) who were interested only in themselves.

Unused to their new role as pious laymen, the UNP leaders did not sustain their enthusiasm after the initial merit-making. Some months later, after a series of political reversals, the Cultivation Officer broke with some of his closest allies and, in a series of very public gestures, realigned himself with the leadership of the old temple society. Perhaps the most public of these gestures was his attendance at the wedding of the daughter of a man who, a year before, had been one of his most implacable political enemies. In a very well-received speech, he reminded the gathering of his former opponents, 'We are all relatives; we are all friends; we all want to work for the village and help the village.' The next speaker was the school-teacher who had been so roughly treated outside the temple the previous year. Rather than comment directly on the preceding speech, he chose instead to concentrate on the virtues of their host: 'He is one hundred per cent Sinhala Buddhist; this village is a Sinhala Buddhist village; this country is a Sinhala Buddhist country.' The implication was clear enough: if the Cultivation Officer wanted to ensure *his* support, he should quit allying himself with Muslims, and never repeat the previous year's assault on their religion. With these symbolic exchanges the reconciliation was complete and the village, for the time being, was able to present some semblance of a united front to the world.⁹

The strongest thread running through these incidents is the fragility of the public expression of community in the light of factional divisions, especially as expressed in political alignments. They also illustrate the way in which, at different times, the two sides in the village sought to appropriate the control of religious events in order to exclude their rivals. The fact that both sides sought to use a common set of symbols for the unity of the community serves to emphasize the

⁹ When I returned in the summer of 1984, the Cultivation Officer's chief henchman and master of collective ceremonies was the secretary of the village branch of the SLFP. The personal politicking behind this state of affairs is too complex to go into here.

power of those symbols. Yet, the manner in which they sought to use them—the motives for their use—almost undermined the very aims they were supposed publicly to assert. All the time it was symbols of community—the temple, the villagers as members of the moral community of Sinhala Buddhism—which were being used by both sides in a dispute that threatened to split the community down the middle. In the same way, on a national level, it could be argued that it is the most ardent believers in the unity of the nation as a community who pose the gravest threat to that unity. It would seem that every community is as much defined by those outside it—beyond the pale, for whatever reason—as by those inside.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is one other style of speaking about the rural that I would like to consider briefly. Every visitor to Sri Lanka, or so it often seems, is encouraged by urban acquaintances to spend some time in the villages because that is where they will find the 'real Lanka'. At the same time anyone who, like me, actually puts this advice into practice, also has to endure warnings that villagers are dirty, ignorant, stupid, inarticulate and superstitious. One quickly discovers that the authors of such warnings are themselves quite strikingly ignorant of what actually exists in the countryside around them. Clearly, at this level of everyday urban discourse, the rural is a highly-charged category and the vehicle for a number of apparently contradictory sentiments. It is at once supposedly the home of all that the townsman would want to cherish and much that he would like to deny. So, although I was first told that the village was the repository of all that was good and traditional, I was again and again told that if I really wanted to find out the truth about something I should not waste my time asking 'ignorant, uneducated people' about it. From time to time educated Sinhalese have warned me against using a particular word in Sinhala, saying that it was a 'rural' word, which means somehow outside the canon of correct language. In the field I frequently found myself being referred out of the village to local intellectuals for answers to questions that, as I eventually discovered, only the villagers themselves could properly answer. This attitude of denying villagers knowledge of their own

world suggests that the simple dichotomy of town and country may serve to obfuscate and conceal other powerful divisions—between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, knowers and known-about. For this reason alone our first responsibility as researchers must be to the people whose voices we hear most immediately.

Finally, perhaps a last word is called for on the definition of 'community'.¹⁰ As it has been used in what might be called the rhetoric of rural change, it actually covers two distinct semantic areas: it is at once both a thing, a particular and peculiar aggregate of people, and a feeling, a set of attitudes towards one another held by the members of that aggregate. Social scientists, like so many others, have been too quick to assume that the one necessarily implies the other. Also, as we saw earlier in this essay, community is somehow easier to spot in its absence, left behind in the immediate past, than it is to find in the present. It thus becomes a powerful and emotive word, perhaps better suited to politicians and other practitioners of the discourse of manipulation, than to the sober assessments of social science.

I am not arguing here that representation of the rural present as the loss of past community is simply wrong, still less that the evidence from my fieldwork is 'right' and some other evidence is 'wrong'. What I am arguing is that an idea like 'community,' which is an increasingly self-conscious aspect of the present, is *for that reason* a dangerous tool with which to evaluate the past. While the old villagers summed up their past in terms of material misery, it was the younger leaders and would-be leaders who evaluated the present in terms of the need to 'bring people together'. This is not solely a contrast in generations; it is also, as my introductory quotation from Benedict Anderson suggests, a contrast in genres. We are talking about different styles of describing the world, styles that answer to different needs. The old villages, their boundaries and divisions, were for their inhabitants simply given; they 'went without saying' as James Brow has put it, following Bourdieu (1977:167). But the present social universe is not given to anything like the same extent. What might once have been taken for granted now has to be imagined and consciously created. The self-consciousness that now surrounds terms like 'community' (and 'culture,' 'tradition,' 'history') is at once both the symptom and cause of the complexity of the world we are trying to describe.

¹⁰ This conclusion owes a great deal to comments made by James Brow at the Anuradhapura conference.

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13

Perceiving Agrarian Change: Past and Present in Ratmale, a Sinhalese Potter Village

COLIN KIRK

Introduction

Ratmale is a small village in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone, about thirty miles south of Anuradhapura.¹ Its people are mainly Potters by caste, and also potters by occupation, producing simple, utilitarian earthenware for local sale.² They are also farmers, cultivating both paddy

¹ Fieldwork in 'Ratmale' was carried out between October 1980 and September 1981, while studying for a Master's Degree in Sociology at the University of Colombo. The results were written up in the form of an M.Phil. thesis presented in 1983. The research was supported by a Commonwealth Scholarship, administered through the Association of Commonwealth Universities; by the Emslie Horniman Anthropological Scholarship Fund; and by the Netherlands Universities' Fund for International Cooperation (NUFFIC). I am grateful to all of these bodies for their support. I also owe thanks to all those who have assisted the research in various ways, particularly R. D. Gunarathna and P. D. Nandasena for their assistance in the field. I am also grateful for the advice of my supervisors at the University of Colombo, Dr A. J. Weeramunda and Dr H. Heringa, and to Dr R. L. Stirrat, my supervisor at the University of Sussex. I owe special thanks to the villagers of Ratmale for their help and hospitality. 'Ratmale' is an old name for the Potter village in which I worked, and 'Heratgama' is a pseudonym.

² The word 'Potter' spelled with an uppercase 'P' indicates a person of Potter caste; the word 'potter' spelled with a lowercase 'p' indicates a person who is a potter by

and *chena* (swidden) crops. In this paper I describe the occupational changes that have taken place over the past fifty years or so in Ratmale, particularly the shifting balance between farming and pottery-making, and reflect on the way the villagers talk about these changes.

I initially chose to work in Ratmale because it was a village where pottery was being produced in quantity.³ I wanted to study what I took to be a traditional craft, and after visiting a number of Potter villages in the region, I selected Ratmale because its pottery industry seemed to be thriving, and because I had heard that Ratmale had a reputation in the area for producing good pottery.⁴

However, I quickly learned that this 'traditional craft' had undergone considerable change within the lifetimes of the older Potters whose acquaintance I made in Ratmale. In the words of one of them, G. Kalinguva:

Formerly, this job [i.e., pottery-making] was not at this level. This job was not like this earlier. In the cultivation season, we didn't do this job. When the farmwork was over, we did this. Formerly, when the cultivation was finished and the harvest divided, we used to knead a little clay, shape it, and went and took [the pots] around the villages and sold them. Then, after digging and cleaning a little more clay, we again did that work. But we didn't make pots in this way, at this level, working day and night. At that time, there was no [pottery] trading. We did not go to earn at the markets (*pola*). If we went, we didn't sell. Prices were lower; for a *nambiliya* [kind of bowl] only one cent, two cents. Selling a big pot, we got ten cents, like that. Because of these [low] prices, we didn't go trading at that time. The present is not like that, however. Now, if we make 1,000 pots, traders come to take them away and we make much money; this is the way. Because we have begun to work in this way, now we can develop a little.

occupation. By no means do all persons of Potter caste make pottery, although most people who make pottery are of Potter caste.

³ At the time I began fieldwork in 1980, it seemed to me that there was a strong bias in the ethnographic literature on Sri Lanka towards the study of agricultural communities of predominantly high caste Sinhalese (e.g., Leach 1961; Obeyesekere 1967; Robinson 1975; Ryan *et al.* 1958; and Yalman 1967). Significant exceptions were the monographs on the Veddas by the Seligmanns (1911) and Brow (1978), which derive much of their interest from the contrastingly marginal status of the people they describe. Artisans had received only passing attention.

⁴ Pottery is made in several Potter villages in the area, although in others the craft appears to have declined, or never to have been practised. Ratmale is therefore rather atypical.

Another man, G. Kapuruva, expressed a similar view:

The pottery industry (*valan karmanta*) is the main thing now, at present. We make a living today because of the pottery industry. We've been making pots like this for five or six years. Formerly, the work was farming—clearing *chenas* and so on. In those days, we made pots at times when we had nothing much to do. We didn't make pots at every moment as we do now.

Pottery trading increased when these colonization schemes were started. Why, because the population grew. In those days, a *nambiliya* or a *madakkuva* [types of pots] was three cents, those days. Now, it's not like that, right away we get three if not four rupees. Now we can even sell from home; in those days we had to go out, go somewhere or other [to sell the pots].

He also drew attention to the declining importance of agriculture:

The main occupation now, at the present time, is this: pottery making. But formerly, it was cultivation. The reason it changed was because of the lack of rain. Also, there is now no forest as there used to be. There's no forest to cultivate *chenas*. So therefore we work in the paddy fields, but to cultivate the paddy fields there has to be water—we haven't had a harvest for three years now.

Again, Kalinguva had a similar point to make:

In those days, we went with our sickles and worked in the paddy fields, made fences and so on. There was forest. Now that forest is no more, isn't that so? Now there is no forest for us to clear a high land or *chena* plot. Today, we can't live by farming. We must make pots. In those days, if we cleared a *chena*, we could get enough food for a year. We didn't need to make pots. We got chillies, we got brinjals, we got vegetables: pumpkins, cucumbers, all kinds of vegetables; we got finger millet (*kurakkan*), we got maize, we got gram, we got green gram, we got pulses; we got all those things, we got Indian corn, and we got gingelly. From the paddy fields we got only a little paddy; from these high land plots we got everything.

From the remarks of these two villagers, it seems clear that a marked

shift in occupational activities has taken place. Both emphasize the former importance of *chena* cultivation, now decreasingly feasible as the available forest is becoming exhausted, and paddy cultivation, too, appears to be less and less practicable. Pottery-making, however, has acquired increasing importance as an alternative occupation and as a source of income which appears to have brought the village a relative, if still very modest, prosperity.⁵

Almost every household in Ratmale is presently engaged in the production and sale of pottery, and I estimated that the craft afforded as much as 70 per cent of the average household income in 1980–81. Pottery is made all through the year, although there is something of a lull in the monsoon months from October to December, when wet weather makes the work difficult, and agricultural activities occupy the villagers' time. The recent influx of settlers to the nearby 'System H' of the Mahaweli Development Project has meant an expanding market for the potters' wares, apparently triggering something of a boom in the village economy from about the end of the 1970s, although the potters had begun to orient their production to the market several decades earlier. Today, pottery-making dominates the village economy.

In contrast, agriculture has been suffering a decline, both relatively, in comparison with the increasing importance of pottery production, and absolutely, as the availability and fertility of land has declined. *Chena* cultivation is increasingly difficult as the once abundant forest around the village has been reduced to infertile scrub. Little paddy land is owned by the villagers, on average only about 0.1 acre *per capita* in 1980–81, and more than 50 per cent of the households own no paddy land. In any case, paddy cultivation under the small tanks in the village is a risky undertaking in the difficult environment of the Dry Zone. The Ratmale villagers can cultivate paddy only in the major season between October and March (*maha*). The crop is probably lost more often than not, and even the moderately successful harvest I witnessed provided an income equivalent which accounted for less than 10 per cent of the average household income in 1980–81. The material returns from

⁵ It is, however, a very limited prosperity. I estimated the annual *per capita* income to be only slightly over Rs 1,500 in 1980–81. The Potters complain of rising prices, and the price of firewood essential to fire their pots almost doubled during the year of fieldwork in 1980–81.

agriculture are therefore meager, both relative to the income from pottery-making and in absolute terms.

Nevertheless, while they acknowledge the increasing importance of pottery-making, the villagers like to think of themselves as farmers. In response to a survey I made soon after arriving in the village, over 50 per cent of the householders described agriculture (*govitan*) as their principal occupation, and a further 30 per cent gave it as a secondary occupation. Some of the villagers see a complementarity between their work as pottery producers and their agricultural activities and, in practice, most households do in fact engage not only in making and trading pottery, but also in some form of agriculture. It is said that farming provides food, while pottery-making provides a cash income. This is a neat complementarity but, lacking sufficient land, few households are actually able to realize it.

Land offers the means to a potentially secure and independent subsistence, and this is a very material and compelling reason for aspiring to be a cultivator. I recall one man saying that he hoped to provide each of his sons with a house and a couple of acres of paddy land. These are modest ambitions which most of the Ratmale villagers would doubtless like to realize. However, owning about 3 acres of paddy land, and holding the village level administrative post of Farmer's Representative (*vaga niladari sahayaka*—popularly, *vel vidane*), this man was better placed than most of his neighbors to achieve such goals. While some Potters in recent years have indeed been able to purchase or asweddumize paddy land, and several others have received land in colonization schemes, the increasing pressure on cultivable land of any kind means that opportunities to acquire land are diminishing. Nevertheless, in spite of the increasing importance of pottery-making and the declining feasibility of agriculture, the Ratmale villagers prefer to represent themselves as farmers. Why should this be so?

Although the villagers are in many ways practical people, in identifying themselves as farmers they scarcely seem to be offering a realistic appraisal of their present situation. Nor, I believe, are they overmuch inclined to wishful thinking. Given the meager and declining material return from the land and the poor prospects of augmenting it, it seems unlikely that their identification with agriculture is prompted by immediate material interests. Rather, I will argue that, in identifying with agriculture, the Potters are identifying

with a conception of the social from which their sense of the enduring and collective character of their community takes its meaning. I will show that this agrarian identity is related both to the practical organization of occupational activity in Ratmale and to conceptions of time and society which villagers hold and which appear in the representations they make about change in their community.

The importance of grasping the perceptions rural people have of the changes they have experienced is not confined to its intrinsic interest, or indeed to the dubious pleasure of some kind of anthropological voyeurism. In seeking to understand processes of 'agrarian change,' urban-based and formally educated outsiders like ourselves have most to learn from those, like the Ratmale villagers, who have a lifetime's firsthand experience of it; that is, from the people who actually live in the world's rural areas. Indeed, given the scarcity of alternative sources of information about the minutiae of the rural past—and, for that matter, many aspects of its present—we are often obliged to rely on the accounts of rural people. Furthermore, on the practical side, it seems advisable to employ the knowledge of rural people in planning and implementing efforts towards 'rural development,' if only because they generally know more than the 'developers' themselves about the rural situation.⁶ Finally, of course, it is rural people who will be the immediate victims and beneficiaries, objects and agents, of rural development and agrarian change in the future.

Ratmale: The Present

Ratmale is situated in the northern part of Kurunegala district, about four miles from the local market town and administrative center of Galgamuwa. Lying within the Dry Zone, the locality suffers from relatively low and unreliable rainfall and has more in common, both ecologically and in terms of its general socioeconomic character, with the arid plains of Anuradhapura district to the north than with the lush regions to the south.⁷

⁶ This point is made by Chambers when he argues the importance of rural people's knowledge in his remarkably humane and jargon-free book on rural development (1983).

⁷ Cf. Leach 1961; Brow 1978.

The village is a fairly small one, the Potter population numbering about 250 individuals distributed among 47 households at the time of fieldwork in 1980-81. The Potters are all Sinhalese and Buddhist. However, there are ten non-Potter households settled on the margins of the village, mostly people of Goyigama (Cultivator) caste from the same area, but also including several households who are Catholics of Karava (Fisherman) caste, immigrants from the southwestern part of the island. These few non-Potter households impinge little on life in the village, which is dominated by the more numerous Potters. The neighboring village of Heratgama has a population of about 50 individuals, divided among 14 households whose members claim aristocratic (*radala*) ancestry.

These villages are ancient (*purana*) villages that exhibit the common pattern of land use in the north central Dry Zone. Small, rain-fed tanks or reservoirs irrigate, somewhat unreliably, tracts of wet paddy land (*mada idam*). Houses and home gardens are located on unirrigated high land (*goda idam*), while in the scrubby remnants of what was once dense forest surrounding the villages, *chenas* (*hen*) or swiddens are cleared where dry grains and vegetables are cultivated. The scrub also affords grazing for village livestock. Contrasting with this pattern of largely subsistence-oriented agriculture, the region also contains a number of colonization schemes—state-sponsored irrigation and resettlement schemes—in which the cultivation of irrigated paddy dominates. Indeed, only a dozen miles to the north lies 'System H' of the Mahaweli Development Project, an extensive tract of recently colonized land. Much of the paddy and subsidiary crops that are grown here reach the market, and seasonal employment of hired labor is widespread.

Almost every household of Ratmale Potters is engaged in pottery manufacture, giving the community an occupationally homogeneous character. As I noted, work is carried out practically all the year round, and provides something like 70 percent of the average household income. Tools and materials required for pottery production are mostly cheap and locally available, and the easily and informally acquired skills are relatively simple. The means of production are therefore equally accessible to all producers, and are independently owned. Within the production process itself, a minimal degree of cooperation is found, the potter requiring only an unskilled assistant to turn the wheel as the pots are thrown. Materials, tools, skills, and labor sufficient to undertake production can usually be mustered

from resources available within each household, with no necessity to look for help elsewhere, and the usual practice is indeed independent domestic production. Households are therefore units not only of consumption, but also of production.

Pottery, however, is made to be sold, and although production can be carried on independently, the potters are dependent upon the market to realize a cash income from their labor. Most pottery is sold in weekly periodic markets (*polas*) up to 30 miles away, but some is sold to shops or hawked around villages in the region. Transactions are generally made directly between trader and customer, pots for cash, with limited scope for haggling over prices. Pots are not offered on credit, and the exchange remains a more or less impersonal one. At most periodic markets, several traders can be found selling much the same range of pottery independently of one another, and this competition keeps prices down. Shops tend to retail pottery at slightly higher prices. The selling price for 100 'graded' pots (about 300 individual pieces) was up to Rs 700 at the time of fieldwork.⁸ In general, customers are individuals each buying only a few earthenware vessels for domestic use. The market is therefore individualistic and competitive. Traders compete among themselves to sell their wares, and transactions between traders and customers are also competitive. Credit is generally absent.

A number of potters sell the pottery they have made directly to consumers, each touring the markets with his wares loaded in a bullock cart. Many potters, however, sell their pots to middlemen, usually petty traders living in or near Ratmale, who cart the pottery away for resale. Indeed, several members of the Ratmale Potter community are themselves engaged in this trade. The trader purchases wholesale directly from the producer. In 1980–81 traders were offering advances of up to Rs 100 in order to secure the next batch of earthenware a potter would produce, but as potters could take advances from several traders at any one time, buyers might be played off against one another while the potter took his own time to supply the goods. Nevertheless, because of the limited number of traders in

⁸ Potters and traders in the Ratmale area reckon the wholesale value of pottery in accordance with a grading system by which large pots are assigned the value of unity; smaller pots, the value of two; those smaller still, three; and so on. For example, a large pot of grade one is matched by two smaller pots of grade two, or five of grade five. Normally, only five grades are used, the value of very large or very small pots being independently reckoned outside the system.

the locality and the relatively personalized relationships between potters and traders, potters must sooner or later honor their obligations or forego wholesale trading through these middlemen, who will of course avoid trading with a potter who is known to be a 'bad risk'. Buying at the more or less standard price in 1980-81 of Rs 300 per 100 'graded' pots, the trader would pay the balance on the advance when collecting the batch of pots, thereby closing the transaction. Competition to secure the potters' wares exists among the traders, some offering to buy at slightly over the 'going rate' and thereby helping to raise prices. The traders' transactions with their customers on resale are similarly competitive and individualistic.

Although the trader's investment is limited to the cash advances and purchases he makes, together with the cost of acquiring and maintaining his cart and bullocks, his outlay is considerable relative to his modest profits, and traders' incomes are generally above the locally accepted level of subsistence. Traders operate independently, assisted only by an unpaid household member, or in some cases by a hired hand, and they operate in competition with other pottery traders in the region. Further south in Kurunegala district, potters often sell to large-scale wholesalers, who trade in trucks as far afield as Amparai (Winslow 1982), but they do not visit Ratmale or its region. Consequently, the potters and traders in Ratmale neither deal with nor face competition from these relatively big wholesale traders.

The Potters' other major occupation is agriculture. Almost every household is engaged in *chena* cultivation which, like pottery production, is principally a household-based form of production. Independent households enjoy more or less equal access to the means of production—simple tools and plots of scrub land around the village—with labor generally being recruited from within the domestic unit. Some households do in fact occasionally hire labor, usually from a neighboring village, to assist on a contract basis with the heavy work of clearing the scrub, but this is not practised on an extensive scale. Production of dry grains, especially finger millet (*kurakkan*), pulses, and vegetables, is oriented partly towards subsistence and partly towards the market, for a portion of the crop is sold, chiefly to shopkeepers in Galgamuwa. As far as I could ascertain, relations with these shopkeepers rarely involve substantial amounts of credit, and there is therefore seldom any compulsion to deal with specific traders.

Paddy cultivation is the other major agricultural activity and, again, most Ratmale Potters are involved in this activity in one way or another. Here, however, there are some important contrasts to be drawn. Paddy cultivation differs from pottery manufacture and *chena* cultivation in that the means of production are not equally available to every household. Irrigated paddy land is a prized resource which is individually owned, but over half of the households in Ratmale own no paddy land. The tools necessary for cultivation are not especially elaborate, but not every household possesses them, nor does every household own the buffaloes necessary for plowing and muddying the fields. Fertilizer and seed constitute expensive cash inputs. Further, labor over and above available household hands is likely to be required for transplanting and harvesting. As a result, few Potter households appear to possess sufficient resources to undertake paddy cultivation independently, and consequently a certain amount of inter-household cooperation is required. Indeed, with regard to the sharing of water, a basic level of cooperation is necessarily demanded of all individuals who cultivate under the same irrigation tank (cf. Leach 1961). The pattern of independent domestic production is therefore interrupted by the inter-household cooperation required for paddy cultivation.

The Potters own relatively little paddy land, altogether not much more than 30 acres, with a *per capita* average of only about 0.1 acre. No household owns more than four acres. Ownership is not evenly distributed, but economic differentiation between those who own land and those who do not is to some extent blurred. Most land is owned by older men, and a variety of sharecropping arrangements with sons and sons-in-law often provides these younger men with access to land. In this way, 'cultivation teams' are established among groups of close kin that pool land, labor and equipment and ultimately divide the harvest.⁹ Typically, such teams are composed of men who stand to inherit either directly or, through their wives, indirectly. Participation in such cultivation teams affords several Ratmale Potters access to land owned by their kinsmen elsewhere, for example in nearby colonization schemes.

We have already seen that the material returns from paddy cultivation are poor. *Chena* cultivation, agricultural laboring and, above all, pottery production and pottery trading are much more reliable and remunerative sources of income. What seems significant nonetheless

⁹ Cf. Brow's 'basic cultivating groups' (1978:115).

is that paddy cultivation, unlike these other occupational activities, demands a basic degree of cooperation between households, entailing various kinds of reciprocities that extend over an entire cultivation season and, in the long run, throughout the domestic cycle, as heirs gradually assume control of the land they will inherit.

Participation in cultivation teams is generally limited to cooperation between close kinsmen, and there are a number of households which remain unattached to such teams. Sharecropping arrangements, however, are also undertaken with non-kinsmen, in several cases with landowners in neighboring Heratgama. This draws some Ratmale Potters directly into a system of production relations that involve a measure of dependency. Further, some Potters occasionally work as agricultural laborers, and several depend upon such work as a major source of income. Sharecropping tenancies with non-kinsmen and employment as agricultural laborers indicate that at least some Potters are drawn out of Ratmale directly into the wider system of agrarian relations in the region. However, only a small proportion of the Ratmale population is so engaged, and the resulting income is paltry compared to the income earned from pottery manufacture.

To conclude this sketch of occupational activities in Ratmale, we can say that the different occupations of the villagers hold contrasting implications for the pattern of social organization in the village. Pottery is produced independently by each household, and competition in the sale of pottery reinforces the separation of households from each other. The pattern of independent domestic production is repeated in *chena* cultivation, further encouraging the trend towards individuation. Paddy cultivation, however, demands a level of cooperation above that of the household. Households engaging in paddy cultivation are obliged to cooperate with kinsmen or, alternatively to enter into relations of dependency either as tenants of non-Potters or as agricultural laborers. Paddy farming consequently promotes ties of rather diffuse reciprocity between close kin who cultivate together. Ties of debt seem to be more or less limited to the few cases of sharecropping tenancies undertaken with non-Potters.

Overall, however, the pattern of individuation seems to predominate. Villagers themselves are well aware of this pattern. They describe themselves as living one by one (*eka eka*), without unity. It is felt that village solidarity is declining and that the sense of community is being eroded by new economic opportunities. It therefore appears

that occupational activity is closely linked to the pattern of social organization in the village. In the following section, I will trace the shift in occupation and assess how far this has indeed influenced social organization in Ratmale.

Ratmale: The Past

At the time of the Kandyan kingdom, Ratmale was located in the province of the Hat Korale, in what became, under British rule, the revenue division known as Wannī Hatpattuwa. It therefore lay close to the border with the remote, semi-autonomous province of Nuva-rakalaviya, described by Knox in the seventeenth century as being a wilderness covered by thick jungle (1911 [1681]). Falling within the same ecological region, the villages of Wannī Hatpattuwa must have been similarly remote and isolated: small, subsistence-oriented communities scattered through the forest, and relatively loosely linked to the centers of royal or ecclesiastical authority (cf. Pieris 1956:231–61).

The Kandyan kingdom fell to the British in 1815, but little attention was paid by the administration to the wilderness of the arid northcentral plains until the 1870s, when the North Central Province was created, and a program to restore irrigation tanks and introduce welfare provisions was implemented.

The state has continued to play a significant role in the development of the region throughout the present century, notably in the construction of the transport and irrigation infrastructure underpinning the regional economy. For example, Denham, in his Census report for 1911, celebrated the opening of the 'Northern railway' to Anuradhapura, observing that subsequent 'marked improvements have to be recorded' in the area (1912:96). Irrigation works have been reconstructed and extended throughout the region, with the establishment of several colonization schemes including, in the past decade, the settlement of 'System H' of the Mahaweli Development Project only a few miles to the north of Ratmale. Provision for welfare and education has also been made with the establishment of hospitals and schools. Legal and economic arrangements fostered the development of markets in land, labor and goods of all kinds, leading to the increasing diversification and commoditization of the regional economy.

Rural producers have become involved in relations of production and exchange which integrate them increasingly closely into the national economy. Busy market towns have emerged, that also serve as local centers of services and administration. Galgamuwa is such a town, with a population today of about 2,000, including many Muslim and Low Country traders, whose shops line the main road. There is also a busy weekly market fair (*pola*), which was formally instituted in 1934.

Villagers also participate more and more in the national political system, through a variety of institutions that link them to the administration and to political parties. Given the salience of state initiatives in this region, political influence and connections—or the lack of them—have been of considerable importance in channelling state patronage. In this regard, the local Member of Parliament is now a central figure in a widespread net of patronage. It is, however, a net to which the Ratmale villagers are only tenuously connected, and they must rely for the most part on their own independent income.

An important consequence of these developments has been a rapid rise in the population of the area, especially after about 1930 (Table 13.1). The rise in population was due partly to reduced mortality rates, but also to substantial immigration, which has considerably increased and diversified the population of the region.

For Ratmale, as the villagers quoted in the introduction to this paper pointed out, one of the most important and obvious results of these processes, and especially the rise in population, has been the establishment of a relatively extensive market for pottery. It has

Table 13.1
Percentage Increase of the Population of Kurunegala District, 1911–81, and of Wannī Hatpattuwa, 1911–53

Year	Kurunegala District	Wannī Hatpattuwa
1911–21	15.4	2.6
1921–31	12.2	1.1
1931–46	22.1	19.3
1946–53	29.1	38.4
1953–63	36.1	N.A.
1963–71	20.3	N.A.
1971–81	18.2	N.A.

Source: Census Reports.

been in the last half-century that the weekly markets and bazaar towns where pottery is mainly sold have emerged. It is said that, a generation ago, there were no carts in the village, but now there are over a dozen. A carpenter who settled in the village appears to have had much work building carts and constructing potter's wheels.

Villagers are emphatic that more pottery is produced now than in the past, when production appears to have been limited to local needs. With an expanding market in pottery, created by the growing immigrant and urban population, more households seem to have taken up pottery production, or begun to devote more time to the craft. As one man said, 'In those days, people had more leisure than now. They didn't need to work so hard.' Now people can earn a good income from selling pottery, so they work 'day and night'. The villagers say that in the past pottery was not made by women. Today, however, men and women alike engage in pottery production, although the job of firing pots is generally left to the men. While it is true that Potters in other villages in the area have abandoned the craft, in some cases because they have received land in colonization schemes or found alternative employment, it would appear that the Ratmale Potters are now more actively engaged in pottery production than ever before. And I have also heard it said that the pottery made in Ratmale today is of better quality than before.

The essential point, however, is that pottery-making in Ratmale at the present level of production is in no sense a 'traditional' feature of life in the village. It is premised almost entirely on the development of the market for pottery over the last halfcentury, and upon the enterprise the Ratmale Potters have shown in supplying this expanding market. We have already noted that it is upon this market that the potters now depend for the bulk of their income.¹⁰

A revealing episode in the development of the villagers' pottery industry occurred in 1953 with the establishment of a Potters' Co-operative Society in Ratmale. The initiative came at a time when the administration was concerned with developing what were picturesquely referred to as cottage industries. In 1949, a ban had been imposed on the import of clay wares to protect local potters from competition from 'very much better quality Indian wares' (Govt of Ceylon 1955). Steps were taken to improve the quality of local wares by providing training and improved manufacturing equipment to replace

¹⁰ I have discussed this issue elsewhere as well (1984).

what was described as the 'primitive type' in use, and to provide marketing channels to eliminate middlemen who, it was believed, 'exploited the potter by appropriating most of the increased profit to themselves' (*ibid*).

In 1953, then, a Potters' Cooperative Society was founded, and a resident manager-demonstrator introduced new equipment, principally a modified type of potter's wheel that revolved on steel bearings set in a wooden frame instead of on the traditional stone pivot set in the floor.¹¹ It was also intended that the Cooperative would provide a better marketing channel for the potters' wares. Accordingly, the potters were supposed to sell their wares at a fixed price to the Society, which was to be solely responsible for marketing activities.

However, the Minutes of the Society show that it folded up about five years after its enthusiastic inception, chiefly, it seems, because the manager—an outsider appointed by the administration—failed to organize a profitable marketing outlet. Pottery piled up unsold (and eventually unsaleable) in the Cooperative store, while individual potters found that they could obtain better prices for their wares from outside traders. The familiar pattern of competitive individualism was reasserted.

The failure of the Cooperative reflects more on the incompetence of the manager than upon any supposed 'backwardness' among the potters themselves. They quickly saw the advantage of using the new type of wheel, and the village carpenter was soon employed in turning out copies of it. With regard to marketing their wares, the potters quite rationally opted for the best price they could find for their pots, which undermined the fruitless attempt to establish a common marketing outlet. It would appear that the tendency towards economic individuation was already apparent. In any event, it is clear that by the 1950s, Ratmale pottery was already a saleable commodity, and that pottery production in the village was directed towards commercial ends.

Before the expansion of the market, when pottery production was limited to meeting local needs, the work of the Ratmale villagers must have been focused upon agriculture, as it was in most of the villages scattered through what was still, a generation ago, the dense forest of the region. Yet, the evidence from the 1950s is that the Ratmale villagers owned little land.

¹¹ For a description of traditional pottery-making techniques, see Coomaraswamy (1956 [1908]).

In 1955, the villagers drew up a document setting out their difficulties, and submitted it to the Administration through their Rural Development Society.¹² The villagers' document records that 39 families (a total of 134 individuals) were confined to a settlement plot (*gammadda*) of less than five acres, and that total holdings of paddy land amounted to less than a dozen acres (i.e., less than one-third of an acre per household). *Chena* cultivation and encroachment on Crown land appear to have been strictly controlled.

It seems plain that at this time, the village was cramped, practically landless, and impoverished; older villagers recall this period as a time of poverty and difficulty. Their houses, some of which still stand, were small and joined end to end in the cramped compound. One man, recalling the poverty of his childhood, said that in the wet season a spring would bubble up from the floor of his parents' house!

That the villagers' petition aroused a sympathetic response is clear from an administrative memorandum of the time, which offers confirmation that poor conditions indeed prevailed in the village:

Want of lands is one big problem for them, and has made the village very poor. 3 or 4 families there live in the same house, which means that at one time only one craftsman can work in each house.

If land is given to them, and if each family has a house, the earnings should increase.... Earnings are on the very low side here.¹³

Half a dozen households subsequently received land in colonization schemes, relieving the pressure on land within the village to some extent, and in the 1950s and 1960s the villagers were able to clear house sites scattered over the nearby high land. Most households now occupy separate dwellings, and most have their own facilities for making pottery, a further indication of the increased proportion

¹² This society, the *grama sanvardhana samitiya*, was founded in 1949, and to judge from the activities recorded in the Society's Minute Book and the recollections of its members, it was in its first few years a well-supported and vigorous association. However, it has now been more or less dormant for a number of years.

¹³ From a memorandum dated 4/27/56 by the 'D.O. (R.D/C.I.)' (i.e., the Divisional Officer, Department of Rural Development and Cottage Industries), in a file in the Kurunegala Kachcherie titled *Pottery Society*, 'Ratmale'.

of households engaged in producing pottery. As the potters began to earn a more substantial cash income from the sale of their wares, some were able to purchase paddy land, often from the landowning villagers in Heratgama.

Prior to these developments, however, because they were without land of their own to cultivate, Ratmale villagers were obliged to depend upon the landowning families in Heratgama. They cultivated the landowners' fields, presumably on sharecropping (*ande*) tenancies, although the Ratmale villagers today tend to say that they rendered assistance (*udav*; cf. Leach 1961:250). They also seem to have been obliged to perform domestic duties, including cutting wood for Heratgama funerals. Older villagers today recall the period as a time of poverty and oppression, for they were dominated both economically and politically by the locally powerful landowners and petty officials in Heratgama. One Potter bitterly recalled that the Ratmale people were obliged to endure the oppressed, subservient lives of slaves (*vahallu*). Another said that they had been treated like servants (*vada karayo*). Kalinguva described it in the following terms:

Those people were high people (*usas minissu*), people of the big houses (*valav karayo*, big people (*loku minissu*). We went to do their work because of our caste and lineage: we were low people (*pahat minissu*). We were forever going to do the work of those people who used to be there [in Heratgama]. When we went, they said 'Come! There's an errand for you to run.'

...We went to do their work in the paddy fields. If we were short [of food], they gave us paddy: a meal or a little paddy to take and eat. We worked because of our subordination (*yatat-bhave*). Today, we don't do that work.

It becomes apparent from Kalinguva's words that the economic dependence of the Ratmale villagers on their landowning neighbors was compounded by the stigma of caste subordination and service. The administrative memorandum from which I quoted previously also referred to the 'caste problem' in the locality, and expressed the view that the Potters were suffering from 'exploitation' by their high caste neighbors. The Potters were formerly obliged to perform caste service, or *rajakariya*, for the Heratgama families. Apart from the agricultural and domestic services already mentioned, the Potters

were expected to provide their patrons in Heratgama with pottery, particularly on festive or ceremonial occasions, such as the New Year or weddings. In return, gifts like food, cloth, areca nut and betel leaf, were made by the recipients to their Potter servants.¹⁴

Perhaps the Ratmale Potters did indeed at one time receive what little ancestral land they own from their erstwhile masters in Heratgama, but that rationale was rarely offered in justification of their performance of *rajakariya*. Rather, *rajakariya* was often described as a series of somewhat agonistic transactions involving the exchange of pots for clay, and one man even went so far as to say that it was like extortion (*kappan*).

An elderly villager, K. Kirinayide, recalled:

In those days, we had a struggle with the landowners in the village over taking clay from the tanks when we made pots. Because they were landowners, they showed us their power. They didn't allow us to take clay. By that, they showed their power. They said to us: 'At the New Year, bring pots to our houses, once a year.' Now, suppose today is Old Year's Day; in the evening we go from house to house, divide our pots out and give them. After giving the pots, there was no trouble. There was no prohibition on getting clay. But they made a prohibition if we did not give the pots! Because we gave the pots, there was no prohibition. Our difficulties were like that. Afterwards, of course, the very big people in Heratgama died. The *ralahamila*, *araccila*, *koralala*, *kale koralala*, *vidanela* were there; many were there. Those people died. Now there are no big people, no landowners.

...A Society was started [i.e., the Potters' Cooperative Society]. There was a gentleman in our Society [i.e., the Cooperative manager], he said that no one should go there, like that. He said, 'You don't need to give those pots to them.' After he said that, we gave them to the Society. From the time that the Society took the pots, we didn't give them pots again.

¹⁴ In the literature, *rajakariya* is generally described as service performed in return for a holding of land, an institution sanctioned by the idea that all land ultimately belonged to the king (see, for example, discussions in Pieris 1956:95ff; Gunasekera 1978; Obeyesekere 1967:215ff; and Brow 1978:49). In practice, by a devolution of rights in land, it came to mean, by extension, service to any lord. In common usage today, it simply means 'duty'.

Kalinguva also mentioned the struggle for access to the potting clay. He said that *rajakariya*

stopped fifteen or twenty years ago. I myself stopped it. Those people [in Heratgama] held Government posts such as Headman (*muladaniya*). They were the lords of these villages and tanks. After the Government took control of the tanks, we didn't give them this thing [*rajakariya*]. But in those days, we had to go and give pots to get the clay. If not, they wouldn't give it; they'd put up a prohibition marker (*bola*),¹⁵ and forbid us, saying we couldn't take the clay, they wouldn't give it!

...They wouldn't even let the children catch fish from the tanks! They forbade it. Well, now those things are not so.

Today, caste service is no longer performed, but some villagers continue to offer informal gifts of pots 'for the goodwill' (*santose*), and Heratgama people will often borrow (*illagannava*) a few pots.

As these villagers point out, the dominance of the Heratgama families as landowners was compounded by their tenure of local administrative offices such as Forest Ranger (*kale koralala*), Village Headman (*aracci*), and, in an earlier generation, the more influential post of Division Headman (*koralala*). As local representatives of the state, they appear to have wielded considerable local power. However, in the 1950s their authority waned as the government, through its professional civil servants, took a more direct interest in Ratmale's affairs, through the channels, for example, of the Rural Development Society and the Potters' Cooperative Society. As a result, the mediation of the Heratgama people was by-passed, and their influence weakened.

It appears, then, that the economic and political dependence of the Ratmale villagers on the landowners and petty officials of Heratgama was breached in the 1950s. Regulations regarding encroachment on Crown land were relaxed in the late 1950s, and the Potters were able to acquire more land and cultivate more freely. Further, they were now receiving an independent cash income from the sale of their pottery, to the extent that they began to be able to purchase land, often from the apparently less and less solvent Heratgama villagers. The administrative functions of the Heratgama

¹⁵ *Bola* is defined by Pieris as 'a bundle of leaves ... set up at a field to show that it has been appropriated by the party setting it up (1956:290).

officials were largely taken over by the professional administrative service, reducing their influence. Something of a separation replaced the ties which formerly existed between the two communities.

As a result of these changes, the poverty and oppression that the Potters experienced in the 1950s has given way to a modest prosperity and increased social and economic autonomy. The villagers own more land, both high land and paddy land, and none of the paddy land below the two village tanks is owned by non-Potters, an index of the relative robustness of the village's economy. The cramped little houses of the old settlement area have been replaced, first by more ample, wattle-and-daub dwellings rooted with *cadjan* (palm-leaf thatch-work), and later by more substantial houses built of brick and tile. These new houses are considered to be prestigious improvements on the simpler, cheaper structures they replace, and there is a certain amount of competition to build them. Not only carts, but also bicycles are now to be seen in the village, and radios and wristwatches are further signs of household incomes at least a little above simple subsistence.

Nevertheless, the villagers today complain of what they call the food problem (*kama prasne*). Forest resources are exhausted, precluding large-scale *chena* cultivation, and both high land and paddy land are said to be less fertile, and rainfall not only less abundant but also less dependable. Although the villagers now own more land, the *per capita* holding of land has only increased in the past twenty-five years from slightly less than 0.1 acre to slightly over this figure.¹⁶

It is evident, therefore, that the Ratmale villagers' modest prosperity has emerged largely as a result of the expanding market in pottery. We have already noted that income from the sale of pottery now constitutes by far the largest share of the average household income in the village. Combined with the increasing population, the dispersal of settlement over a wider area, and emancipation from the control of their Heratagama neighbors, it seems to me that this shift to the competitive, household-based occupation of pottery production for the market has probably served to weaken ties of interdependence among the Ratmale villagers. For, in establishing the conditions for a novel degree of household autonomy, the development of pottery-making activities has fostered the separation of households and a

¹⁶ In fact, this constitutes a substantial achievement when it is considered that the village population has almost doubled in the same period, and that, generally, pressure on land in the region has greatly increased.

concomitantly individualistic pattern of social organization.¹⁷ In this light, the villagers' sense of a decline in communal solidarity is no doubt justified. In short, the Ratmale villagers' shift in occupation has not only transformed their way of making a living, but has also, more generally, changed their way of life.

Representing Ratmale

The Potters themselves are keenly aware of these changes—of the break in ties of dependency upon the landowning Heratgama families, and of the loosening of ties of interdependence within Ratmale itself. They contrast the unity of the past with the individualism of the present. Kalinguva made this observation:

Capable people work, they work hard, earning money by their efforts. After buying some pots and going trading, they earn a little. There are goods. So because of this, of course, things are good, better than before. The level of development (*diyunu tavvaya*) is good. But unity (*ekamutukama*), that is less. The reason it became less is because of this job [pottery-making]. It's a loss making the effort of going to do someone else's work. Going to help with some idle person's work for a day, doing that work, my own work doesn't get done, does it? Thinking of that, doing this work [pottery-making], things are improving. So now the village is a bit better. There are no fights or feuds, but unity is less. Even so, if there is a death, illness, or some problem, people get together. For a wedding or whatever, everyone gets together.

Clearly, the solidarity of the past is seen to be undermined by the new economic opportunities. Indeed, the old solidarity can appear to be a block to individual advancement, as Kalinguva again pointed

¹⁷ A more rigorous analysis of these developments might be possible by conceptualizing them in terms of a process of 'commoditization' whereby personal ties of direct reciprocity, both horizontal and vertical, are replaced by commodity relations, indirect ties through the market. In these terms, the production of pottery for the market can be considered as a species of simple commodity production (cf. Bernstein 1979; Friedmann 1980; Kahn 1980). However, my concern in this paper is with the ways the Potters themselves apprehend the changes they have experienced.

out: 'If there is unity, all are in the same situation and think in the same way. But without that unity, a person who works hard can earn a little and improve his own situation.'

The villagers say that sharing and interdependence were important aspects of their former unity. Recalling his youth, B. N. Appunayide had this to say: 'If we went hunting or went anywhere or cooked a curry, we shared those things. We all lived together.' Such close cooperation no longer obtains. A tension is felt between the perceived individualism of the present, and the recollected solidarity of the past. The Potters' sense of community is felt to be threatened by competition and self-interest.

The villagers' rather abstract sense of community (*ekamutukama*) is often expressed in terms of kinship. As in other Sinhalese villages, the Ratmale Potters often choose to represent themselves as a community of kin (*nadayo*; cf. Leach 1961; Robinson 1975; and Brow 1978). I was often told that the villagers were all members of a single family (*eka pavula*). Indeed, the village was seen as part of the larger kin community of the *varige* or sub-caste, an ideally endogamous group with its members distributed among Potter villages throughout the region. All *varige* members are supposed to share common status (*tatvaya*) and bear the common *vasagama* name 'Jayakodi Araccilage,' an honorific title said to have been bestowed upon an illustrious ancestor. Their caste status, too, is described as an inheritance from a misty, mythical past. In discussing questions of caste with me, the Potters were apt to recount the story of King Mahasammata, 'the primaevial king of Buddhist tradition' (Gunasekera 1978), who divided society into separate castes and allocated each an occupation (cf. Pieris 1956:169). Caste and kinship are represented as principles of a social order rooted in custom and tradition.¹⁸

Indeed, in the continued observance of *varige* endogamy by the Ratmale families, custom is seen to endure, and the villagers' claim to be a 'single family' appears in genealogical terms to be more or less true. In 1980-81, I was aware of only a single marriage in the village which had been contracted outside the *varige*, and this involved a man from another Potter sub-caste in the region.

¹⁸ This accords with Stirrat's analysis of caste in a Sinhalese Catholic fishing village north of Colombo, where caste is associated with 'an idealized past where social order existed'. It offers 'a view of society which is holistic, which denies change. It is a highly conservative, anti-individualistic ideology' (Stirrat 1982:20).

Kin are expected to help each other especially, as Kalinguva remarked, in times of crisis such as sickness or death. Much informal visiting takes place between close kin both within the village, and with kinsmen elsewhere in the region. Rites of passage can be important public occasions for the assembly of kin, and the funerals I witnessed in Ratmale were impressive displays of village solidarity. Occasionally, the villagers cooperate to hold collective rituals in the village or, annually, to offer alms (*dane*) at the hospital in nearby Galgamuwa. The unity of the village is therefore occasionally demonstrated, typically in some public ceremonial. 'Community' is not only an abstract ideal, therefore, but is also to some extent expressed and substantiated in practical activity.

Nevertheless, the Ratmale villagers are well aware that kinship ideals of cooperation and mutual assistance (*udavvata udav*, literally, help for help) are scarcely matched in daily practice. Many villagers lament the fact that the community is fragmented and individualistic, the households separated one by one (*eka eka*), the people divided by suspicion and jealousy. The unity of the village is said to have declined, and it is felt that *varige* endogamy, too, will soon be a thing of the past.

The decline of solidarity in the village is sometimes associated with the physical dispersal of the village from the old, crowded settlement area. Although they remain most densely clustered near the old tamarind tree that used to mark the center of the village, where the collective village rituals were once celebrated, the villagers' houses are now widely scattered across a couple of miles of high land and along the track through the village: a tangible sign of the increasing individualism.

The old community was close, therefore, in both a physical and social sense. Its physical dispersion has brought freedom from the former constraints of communal life, and in spite of their regrets regarding the loss of community, this freedom is welcomed by the villagers. For their former proximity and interdependence are said to have brought their own problems. An elderly villager, K. Kirinayide, was of this opinion:

Living separately is good. There's less trouble. Living separately is convenient for us. Why? It's convenient because there are no fights. We should stop that. Now, in the days when we lived close together, law cases used to start. If there were disturbances, we

had to go to the court to give evidence, in those days. Now there is nothing like that, now that we've separated, isn't that so?

Appunayide expressed similar views:

In general, living separately like this is better. The reason is that there is space (*ida kada*) anywhere, isn't there? We can do anything, keep cattle; the children can come and go anywhere. There is space, isn't there? Formerly, there was no room to do anything. Let's think, now. Our village used to be in the lower area. The land above was unoccupied. There were odd little houses, and more than ten families in the space of only one acre. So there wasn't even a *lavana* tree in the yard (*vatta*). Why not? No space! Houses everywhere, not even a compound (*midula*)!

...Now there is space of course. Not formerly. If we have cattle, we look after them in our own yard. It wasn't like that before. Now things are more developed (*diyunu*) than before.

Probably the main reason that the villagers were obliged to live so closely crowded together in the past was the domination of the village by the landowners and petty officials of Heratgama. Another reason mentioned by the villagers was their fear of the wild animals which used to inhabit the thick forest around the old village. Life in the little settlement is recalled in images of vulnerability and oppression from both natural and social forces. Now, as we have seen, the power of the Heratgama people has diminished, the forest has been felled, and the villagers enjoy a new autonomy. As Kapuruva remarked, 'There is more freedom (*nidahasa*) this way.'

A certain ambivalence is thus apparent in the representations made by the villagers regarding both the past and the present. On the one hand, the past is remembered as a time of interdependence and mutual assistance. If the villagers at that time were poor, it was at least a shared poverty. Custom and tradition, it is felt, were respected. In effect, the past is recalled in somewhat nostalgic, idealized terms as 'the good old bad old days'. In the present, it is regretted that the old ideals of cooperation and solidarity are no longer realized as, it is supposed, they were at one time—not that this would matter, of course, were such ideals not still valued. On the other hand, a more negative view of the past recalls the problems and conflicts created by the very intimacy of their former interdependence.

The days of poverty and oppression are recalled with bitterness. Relatively free now of former constraints, individuals are said to be able to pursue their own interests independently, without interference and without troubling others. There is a new prosperity to show for their efforts. This is the view which is most commonly stated, and often with greater feeling. Yet, it is admitted that the new independence carries with it a sense of separation from the collective life of the community, and a certain loss of solidarity.

Perceiving Agrarian Change

Ambivalence about past and present seems not to trouble the Potters unduly. The positive view of change, as a trend towards a new prosperity and independence, is generally proposed in different contexts from the more negative view, which sees in the present a lamentable decline from the standards of the past. If questioned directly about the inconsistencies and ambivalence apparent in these divergent views, the Ratmale villagers tend to offer the bland reflection that on the one side, things were bad, but on the other, perhaps not so bad after all. Posed abstractly by the anthropologist, such a question has little meaning for the villagers.

In general, however, these contrasting views tend to crop up separately, in different contexts, and with reference to different topics. While some villagers seem more inclined to one view than to another, the same individual is likely to express widely varying opinions at different times, according to the circumstances. Indeed, in the special situation of responding to the enquiries of the anthropologist, the answers are likely to depend very much on the kind of questions posed by the inquisitive outsider, and upon the interviewee's perception of and relation to him or her.

Nor is it necessarily the case that the Ratmale villagers are any more inconsistent or muddled in their thinking than the rest of us. Their contrasting, sometimes incompatible views address different situations and serve different ends. Their representations are not referred to one another systematically, but only contingently; their references and meanings are situational or contextual.

Here, I feel, we can usefully follow Bourdieu's distinction between 'official' representations, and expressions and actions of a more

'practical' character. For the Potters' more idealized views of the past generally seem to have a formal or public reference; we may consider them as 'official' representations 'reserved for official situations in which they serve the function of ordering the social world and legitimating that order' (Bourdieu 1977:34). Weddings, funerals and other rites of passage are of course classic occasions for making such 'official' verbal and ritual statements about the social order and the enduring character of the collectivity. It is often of such occasions that Potters speak when talking abstractly of 'community' (*ekamutukama*). Similarly, in explaining general principles of caste or kinship, or in expounding the values of kinship and community, the Potters tend to offer representations of a comparably abstract and formal character.

In contrast, the Potters' more positive views of change seem to refer to the 'unofficial' or informal situations of everyday practice, emerging often in stories and gossip about specific people, places and events or, for example, in explaining the practical business of their work as potters and farmers. In such accounts, often in elaborate circumstantial detail, we hear of the plans and purposes of certain individuals, and of their particular actions and reactions. Of central concern here, Bourdieu notes, are the strategies pursued by various actors: strategies 'directed towards the satisfaction of the practical interests of an individual or a group of individuals' (Bourdieu 1977:35).

The distinction between official and practical representations can be illustrated with reference to stylistic contrasts in the accounts Potters give of the caste order and the demise of *rajakariya*. In response to general enquiries about caste or caste service, Potters often recount, in relatively formal or stereotyped fashion, the story of King Mahasammata, and sometimes, in explanation of their *varige* status, or their *vasagama* name, for example, they tell other tales about mythical ancestors. Such accounts tend to be concerned with abstract principles and remote origins. However, in relating their personal experience of *rajakariya*, the tone is often livelier—sometimes one of hilarity and irony—and the Potters' reminiscences are filled with details of familiar people and places.

Thus the Potters' official representations and their more practical ways of talking not only offer rather different views of the past and of change, but tend to be expressed in different styles and sets of circumstances. The inconsistencies and contradictions which appear

through comparison of the differences remain indistinct because of this contextual insulation and, as far as the Potters are concerned, generally remain rather unimportant.

However, they are of greater concern to us if we wish to understand clearly and unambiguously the changes that have taken place in Ratmale. It would seem likely that the Potters will know most about the changes in their village, but how are we to make sense of the apparent incoherencies and contradictions in what they say? I have tried to indicate that their seeming ambivalence is not simply a matter of confused recollections and muddled memories. But if this is not so, how are we to interpret the differences in their views?

I suggest that the divergent views the Potters express regarding the past and change reflect a profound and significant division in their perceptions of their changing world. Underlying the apparent confusion are divergent conceptions of time and society, in terms of which we can more successfully interpret the Potters' contrasting representations.

I have suggested that the villagers' more positive views of change, involving a rather critical appraisal of the past, have a very much a practical character. The difficulties of the past are recounted in detail, and the problems of living independently in a small, closed community are recognized. It is an individualist's view which values personal effort and hard work over mutual aid and collective activity. It welcomes the advantages of the present: the emerging independence and prosperity premised on the development of the pottery industry. Clearly it allows—indeed, welcomes—the recognition of change and the passage of time.

In contrast, more official views of change seem to idealize the past and evaluate change in rather negative terms. The present, it is felt, is characterized by a loss of community, a weakening of the moral order, and a decline in established custom and tradition. The past is nostalgically recalled as having been a time of solidarity and interdependence, a time when social values were accepted and respected. By laying emphasis on the idea of social solidarity, such representations oppose the recognition of individual or sectional idiosyncracies and stratagems; by giving prominence to images of social continuity, the awareness of time and change is suppressed. Such representations admit change and a place for the individual only by way of a rather invidious contrast with an ideal and timeless moral order. Present actions and interests are evaluated in the light of an idealized past.

Indeed, such a view seems to speak of the past only to address the present. It is a way of debating and defining not so much the past as the present.¹⁹

On the one hand, therefore, there exists a practical awareness and apprehension of change and the passage of time, while on the other we find perceptions mediated by a timeless model of the moral order, which is projected on to the past in order to evaluate the present. The former addresses the Potters' practical experience of change; the latter refers to an ideal order imposed on the world. Insofar as they are referring to different ideas, therefore, there is no contradiction, and in practice, as divergent views tend to be expressed in different ways, in different contexts and, for different purposes, these alternative views are not generally seen to come into conflict.

To address more explicitly the epistemological problem of this kind of inconsistency, as raised in the introduction, it seems to me that we can more usefully interpret the Potters' contrasting representations of the past and of change in terms of these divergent perceptions of time and society, than by trying to assess which of these representations of the past may be 'true' in terms of some putative 'objective' history. For, within the limits of the multiple contexts in which they are employed, either set of representations can be seen to form more or less coherent and meaningful ways of apprehending the world. To be sure, the Potters' more practical views seem to be drawn more directly from their experience of change, and because they appear to admit the 'fact' of change, such views may seem more congenial to us as we try to understand the processes of change. Their official views ultimately seem to be more concerned with the moral order of the present than with the minutiae of the past, yet insofar as official accounts put the past to work in defining the present, they too are surely an important (if much more nebulous) part of the changing world we seek to understand. To leave such accounts out of the picture is to abandon a whole arena within which the Potters talk and think about themselves. The official and the practical, as

¹⁹ This discussion owes much to Bloch's remarks regarding 'the presence of the past in the present' (1977:287). However, I find his sharp distinction between 'ritual' and 'practical' modes of communication arbitrary. Consequently, I see his attempt to accord practical communication a greater degree of 'reality' to be untenable. Bourdieu's distinction between the 'official' and the 'practical' is less sharp: he speaks for example of 'officializing strategies' in practice (1977:38ff); and his approach has the advantage of accommodating the ways in which people act as well as the modes in which they communicate.

they appear in the multiplicity of diverse situations, are therefore better interpreted as offering not contradictory, but complementary versions of the world.

The other epistemological issue raised in the introduction concerns the relationship of the Potters' representations to their practice, and specifically the problem of why they should claim an occupational identity in agriculture when their work is primarily pottery-making. The distinction between the official and the practical can be usefully invoked here also, for the Ratmale villagers can be seen to evaluate their work both in ideal and practical terms. Pottery-making has its official or public aspect as a caste occupation inherited from the past, associating it with the lingering, rather negative, associations of low caste status and servitude, ritually expressed in the abandoned practice of *rajakariya*. That the Potters themselves feel uneasy with this public identity is indicated by their avoidance of their old caste name 'Badahala,' redolent of low status and servitude, and their preference for neutral, descriptive terms such as 'pottery people' (*valan karayo*) or 'pottery-making people' (*valan hadana minissu*). It is further significant that, since the demise of *rajakariya*, pottery-making is not specifically associated with any kind of public ritual. However, the daily work of making pots is, as we have seen, pragmatically viewed as having brought a new prosperity and autonomy. It has the practical character of a domestic activity that is also a source of private profit. Through competition, the work promotes division rather than solidarity. Consequently, it offers little scope for any evocation of the social.

Agriculture is recognized in practical terms to be less and less feasible, given the changes in the environment. Like pottery-making, *chena* cultivation is unsuited to expressing any notion of the social, for it too is essentially a domestic enterprise. Moreover, its associations with the forest on the margins of the village symbolically situate it on the margins of the social. Nor is there any public ritual specifically associated with the work.

In contrast both to pottery-making and *chena* cultivation, however, paddy cultivation is essentially a collective enterprise, and I suggest that, as such, it offers itself to the villagers as a social model. We have already seen that its practical logic generally demands a level of cooperation between households. The significance of this cooperation and interdependence goes beyond the rather limited material return it affords, for in the collective activity engendered

by paddy cultivation, a context is established for the public expression of kinship solidarity and, by extension, a community sentiment. I shall briefly elaborate this point.

As is well known, ownership and control of land in rural Sri Lanka are intricately keyed into the kinship system through laws of inheritance (Leach 1961; Obeyesekere 1967; and Brow 1978). Although a market in land exists, inheritance remains a fundamental principle in the transmission of land rights. As heritable family property, land constitutes a tangible link between the generations, a symbol of the enduring character of the community of kin. This close association of land and community is reflected in the twin meanings of the Sinhala term *gama*, which means both village and estate or field (Pieris 1956:48n).

Paddy land, although individually owned, constitutes an arena of practical cooperation in the work of cultivation. In Ratmale, such cooperation is typically organized within teams of close kin, often composed of a man who owns or controls land and his heirs. In the mobilization of kin, paddy cultivation affords scope for the identification of interests shared by close kin, and for the affirmation of kinship loyalties; through practical activity, it lends the intangible ideal of community a measure of phenomenal reality. Paddy cultivation is therefore not only a process of material production, but also, and simultaneously, a process of symbolic production, fostering an ideal image of agrarian community: an image of the enduring and collective nature of society.

As a collective activity associated with inherited property, paddy cultivation is therefore well suited to evoking an official image of the social order. In this connection, it is significant that the villagers recall the collective ritual which traditionally marked the production process (cf. Pieris 1956:78-85), and harvest rituals continue to be held in Ratmale. Paddy cultivation therefore affords the Potters a public symbol of their collective life: a model of the enduring social order, in the image of agrarian community.

Of course, at a more practical level, social life is not so tidy, as the Potters themselves are well aware. Precisely because it is a focus of mutual interest, paddy cultivation provokes jealousies, squabbles and worse. Yet because their communitarian ideals and this more prosaic, practical apprehension are not systematically referred to each other, the inconsistencies and contradictions embodied in the conflicting representations generally remain latent. These divergent

ways of apprehending work and social relations are screened from one another through their expression in separate contexts.

To sum up, then, the activities and contexts of pottery-making and *chena* cultivation are essentially practical and domestic, and offer little scope for the expression of community sentiment. In contrast, paddy farming demands inter-household cooperation in the cultivation of heritable property, linking it closely with kinship institutions, and thereby affording a public platform for the expression and substantialization of a sense of community.

Here lies the reason why the Ratmale villagers prefer to represent themselves as farmers, in spite of the salience of pottery-making in their lives. For in representing themselves as farmers, the Potters are identifying with this ideal image of agrarian community. The identity of the farmer interlocks with this model of the social order, and with the values of kinship and community it encompasses. Although the sense of solidarity among the Potters is felt to be declining, challenged by an emergent individualism, this image is sustained, and it is sustained precisely because it affirms the enduring and collective character of society. The erosion of community by time and individual interest is denied by the timeless, organic character of the image. In the face of individualism, then, paddy cultivation serves the Ratmale villagers as model of the social. In the face of change, it serves as a symbol of continuity.

Conclusion

As the Ratmale villagers have moved away from a basically agricultural mode of livelihood towards a type of craft production for the market, they have nevertheless retained—if not, indeed, developed—a sense of themselves as cultivators and members of an enduring agrarian community. But this affirmation of an agrarian identity is not a sign of some reputed peasant conservatism. I have tried to show, on the contrary, that the Potters have been quick to turn new opportunities to advantage. Nor does this identification with agriculture seem to be founded simply on immediate material interests or some basic economic rationality, for the material returns, from paddy cultivation in particular, are meager and uncertain. Rather, this sense of agrarian community is rooted in the practical logic of paddy farming, which

lends itself more readily to the expression of collective identity than do the other occupational activities pursued in the village. The divisive, individuating character of pottery-making and *chena* cultivation runs counter to the expression of collective ideals.

The shift from making a little pottery for local needs to much more extensive production for the market has been central among the changes that have been transforming the village. However, in seeking a thread of continuity in the face of change, the villagers nevertheless choose to emphasize their agrarian identity. It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that it should in part be the income from pottery-making that has enabled the Ratmale villagers to acquire a little more land, and thereby lay claim to this identity with greater plausibility.

The representations that Ratmale villagers make of their changing world appear in their diversity to be inconsistent, if not contradictory. Yet these inconsistencies cause the villagers little concern, for contrasting views tend to be expressed in different contexts and to address different purposes. I have interpreted such alternate emphases (which contrast, for example, the ideal and the practical, agricultural and non-agricultural occupations, community and individualism, continuity and change, and so forth) not as conflicting views expressed within the same frame of reference, but rather in terms of the divergent perceptions of time and society upon which they seem to be based. The alternative perspectives held by the villagers are therefore better considered complementary than contradictory. Given such a complementarity, it is possible to interpret both sets of emphases in the villagers' representations in their own terms, without sacrificing their diversity and thereby impoverishing our own representations of the Potters' changing world.

Finally, although the specific circumstances of change in Ratmale are probably far from typical, I do not expect that apparently ambivalent or inconsistent attitudes to such changes are to be found only among the Ratmale villagers. In interpreting such ambivalence in the views of rural people elsewhere, we might usefully identify similar pluralities of perception as they inform the range of representations made by rural people of their world and of their experiences of change.

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Glossary

A number of the terms listed here are used somewhat differently in different parts of the country. Some of them have also changed their significance in the course of history. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the terms for officials and units of administration, the uniformity and continuity of which sometimes mask regional variation and temporal modification in their definition and function. The entries here generally follow the usage of the particular authors who cite the terms. They do not pretend to be universally authoritative definitions.

<i>akkara vela</i>	acre field; paddy field measured in acres
<i>alut sahal mangalaya</i>	new rice festival
<i>amuna, amunam;</i> pl. <i>amunu</i>	measure of grain also; used as a measure of land
<i>anavasara</i>	encroached (land); held without title
<i>ande</i>	sharecropping tenancy
<i>anumatirala</i>	spirit medium
<i>ape</i>	our
<i>ape aya</i>	our people
<i>aracci; pl. araccila</i>	village headman
<i>attam</i>	exchange labor, cooperative labor
<i>atuva</i>	granary, grainbin
<i>ayiti karaya; pl. ayiti karayo</i>	owner
<i>ayiya</i>	elder brother
<i>ayurveda</i>	indigenous homeopathic medicine
<i>badu</i>	leasehold
<i>baldu vada</i>	demeaning work
<i>bana</i>	son-in-law; a man's sister's son, a woman's brother's son
<i>bandara</i>	lord
<i>bappa</i>	father's younger brother

<i>basnayaka nilame</i> ; pl. <i>basnayaka nilamavaru</i>	chief lay official of a temple
<i>bhupati</i>	lord of the soil
<i>bidi</i>	local cigarette
<i>binna</i>	uxorilocal
<i>bodhipujava</i>	offering to the bo tree
<i>bola</i>	bundle of leaves used as a prohibition marker
<i>budupujava</i>	offering to the Buddha
<i>bulat hurulla</i>	sheaf of betel leaves
<i>caitya</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>candala</i>	untouchable
<i>dagaba</i>	a stupa; dome-shaped structure within a Buddhist temple which contains sacred relics
<i>dane, danaya</i>	alms-giving
<i>danapatiyo</i>	capitalists
<i>davadda</i>	dowry
<i>devalagama</i> ; pl. <i>devalagam</i>	village or estate held by a <i>devale</i>
<i>devale</i> ; pl. <i>devala</i>	shrine or temple of a god
<i>dharma</i>	religious doctrine or truth
<i>dhatu</i>	relic
<i>diga</i>	virilocal
<i>disava</i>	provincial governor in Kandyan times
<i>diyunu</i>	developed
<i>duraya</i>	Deputy Headman of low caste
<i>eka</i>	one, single
<i>eka eka</i>	one by one, without unity
<i>ekamutukama</i>	unity, community
<i>gabadagama</i> ; pl. <i>gabadagam</i>	royal village
<i>gama</i> ; pl. <i>gam</i>	village, estate
<i>gam ande</i>	village tenancy; a form of sharecropping
<i>gamarala</i>	village chief
<i>gambada</i>	rural
<i>gambadi rajakariya</i>	annual ceremony in Kukulewa
<i>gammadda</i>	area of settlement within a village
<i>gam maduva</i>	collective village festival
<i>gamsabhava</i>	village council
<i>gamvasama</i>	plot of paddy land held by the <i>gamarala</i>
<i>ge vatta</i> ; pl. <i>ge vatu</i>	home garden
<i>goda idam</i>	high land, unirrigated land, dry land
<i>gode</i>	backward
<i>govi sanvidhanaya</i>	peasant associations

<i>govitana</i> ; pl. <i>govitan</i>	agriculture, cultivation
<i>goviya</i>	farmer, cultivator
<i>grama sanvardhana samitiya</i>	Rural Development Society
<i>grama sevaka</i>	local government official; literally, village servant
<i>gramiya janatava, gramya janatava</i>	peasantry
<i>gramodaya mandalaya</i>	Village Awakening Council
<i>gurunanse</i>	teacher (usually referring to a member of the Drummer caste)
<i>hataren ande</i>	one-fourth tenancy; a form of sharecropping
<i>hena</i> ; pl. <i>hen</i>	<i>chena</i> , shifting cultivation
<i>idam</i>	land
<i>ilavva</i> ; pl. <i>ilav</i>	funeral ceremony
<i>illagannava</i>	borrow
<i>illuk</i>	a perennial grass, <i>Imperata cylindrica</i>
<i>isthira</i>	permanent
<i>kale korala</i> ;	Forest Ranger
pl. <i>kale koralala</i>	
<i>kama prasne</i>	food problem
<i>kanatu</i>	previously cultivated <i>chena</i> land
<i>kankanama</i>	overseer, supervisor
<i>kappan</i>	extortion
<i>kapurala</i>	priest of a <i>devale</i>
<i>karuma, karma</i>	law of moral causation, fate
<i>kattu ande</i>	combined tenancy; a form of sharecropping
<i>kayiya</i>	work party
<i>kon kala</i>	avoided, shunned
<i>korala</i> ; pl. <i>koralala</i>	Headman of a <i>korale</i>
<i>korale</i>	unit of administration in Kandyan times, maintained through much of the colonial period
<i>kuli</i>	hired
<i>kuli karaya</i> ; pl. <i>kuli karayo</i>	hired laborer
<i>kumbura</i> ; pl. <i>kumburu</i>	paddy field
<i>kurakkan</i>	finger millet
<i>lacham</i>	Tamil measure of land, approximately one-tenth of an acre
<i>lajja</i>	shame, embarrassment
<i>loku</i>	big
<i>mada idam</i>	paddy land, irrigated land, wet land

- madakkuva*
magula; pl. *magul*
maha
mahataya, *mahatmaya*
maruvana
- midula*
minissu
mudalali
muladaniya
mulinma ayiti karaya
mul pavula; pl. *mul pavul*
muttettuva; pl. *muttettu*
- nadayo*, *nayo*
nambiliya
narakadiya
navadeli
nayo, *nadayo*
nidahasa
nikam, *nikang*
nilame
nila panguva; pl. *nila pangu*
nindagama; pl. *nindagam*
nirvana
niti ande
- otti*
- pahat minissu*
palaya; pl. *pala*
- palata*
pancayat
pangu karayo
panguva; pl. *pangu*
pansala
paraveni
paraveni pangu
pavula; pl. *pavul*
pelantiya
- perahara*
pin
pinkama; pl. *pinkam*
pirit
pita minissu
- type of earthenware bowl
 marriage ceremony
 large, great; main cultivation season
 sir, lord; honorific term of address
 temporary or conditional tenure;
 tenure-at-will
 compound
 people
 trader, merchant
 headman
 original owner
 root family, original family
 lord's domain
- kin
 type of earthenware bowl
 hell
 newly burned *chena* land
 kin
 freedom, leisure
 for nothing, gratuitously
 honorific title
 duty share, service share
 village or estate held by an aristocrat
 Buddhist enlightenment
 legal tenancy; a form of sharecropping
- form of ground rent in Jaffna
- people of low status
 measure of grain also used as a measure
 of land; 4 *pala* = 1 *amuna*
 province
 village council in India
 shareholders in village paddy field
 share; share of land
 Buddhist temple
 hereditary, ancestral
 hereditary shares of land
 family
 status group formed on the basis of
 feudal ideology
 procession
 merit
 Buddhist merit-making ritual
 Buddhist ritual of protection
 outsiders

<i>pitisara</i>	rural
<i>pola</i>	periodic market
<i>poya</i>	quarter day of the lunar month
<i>pujava</i>	act of worship or offering
<i>purana</i>	ancient, traditional
<i>purana gamkarayo</i>	original inhabitants of a village;
	members of an ancient village
<i>purana udaviya</i>	original group
<i>radala</i>	aristocrat, aristocratic
<i>rajakariya</i>	service owed to a king, lord, or temple;
	caste service
<i>ralahami</i> ; pl. <i>ralahamila</i>	honorific title
<i>rata</i>	divisions of the central Kandyan
	kingdom; retained as a unit of
	administration in some Kandyan areas
	under colonial rule
<i>rate mahataya</i> , <i>rate mahatmaya</i>	lord of a <i>rata</i> in Kandyan times; senior
	official in the local administration under
	colonial rule
<i>sabda pujava</i>	religious offering by means of sound
<i>santose</i>	for the goodwill
<i>sila</i> ; pl. <i>sil</i>	Buddhist precept
<i>sil viyaparaya</i>	campaign to promote the observance
	of <i>sil</i>
<i>sinnakkara</i>	freehold
<i>sirita</i> ; pl. <i>sirit</i>	custom
<i>soothiram</i>	device for drawing water from wells
	in Jaffna
<i>sramadana</i>	voluntary collective labor
<i>tatvaya</i>	status, level
<i>tavalama</i> ; pl. <i>tavalam</i>	caravan of pack-oxen
<i>udavva</i> ; pl. <i>udav</i>	assistance, help
<i>udavvata udav</i>	mutual assistance; literally, help for
	help
<i>ukas</i>	mortgage
<i>ukas ande</i>	mortgage-tenancy; a form of
	sharecropping
<i>upasaka</i>	pious Buddhist layman
<i>upasthanaya</i>	assistance, attendance
<i>upavasa</i>	fasting as a form of protest
<i>usas minissu</i>	people of high status
<i>vada</i>	work
<i>vada karaya</i> ; pl. <i>vada karayo</i>	servant, workman

vadda; pl. *vaddo*
vaga niladari
vaga niladari sahayaka

vahala; pl. *vahallu*
valan
valan badana minissu
valan karayo
valan karmanta
valav karayo
valavva; pl. *valav*
vandinava
vap magula
varama; pl. *varam*
variga, varige
variga atto
varigen pita minissu
vasagama
vasama

vatta; pl. *vatu*
vava; pl. *vav*
vel duraya
vel vidane
vidane; pl. *vidanela*
vihara
viharagama; pl. *viharagam*
vyapara idam
vyapara udaviya

yala
yatatbhave
yaya

aboriginal, Vedda
 Cultivation Officer
 Farmer's Representative; assistant to
 Cultivation Officer
 slave
 pottery
 pottery-making people
 pottery people
 pottery industry
 people of the *valavva*
 manor house; residence of an aristocrat
 worship, pay respect
 first-ploughing festival
 power, authority
 endogamous kin group; sub-caste
 members of the *variga*
 outsiders to the *variga*
 family name with caste associations
 area administered by an *aracci* in
 colonial times
 garden, yard
 irrigation tank, reservoir
 Irrigation Headman of low caste
 Irrigation Headman
 overseer, headman
 Buddhist temple
 village or estate held by a *vihara*
 Village Expansion land
 members of the Village Expansion
 Scheme

minor cultivation season
 subordination, subservience
 a tract of paddy fields

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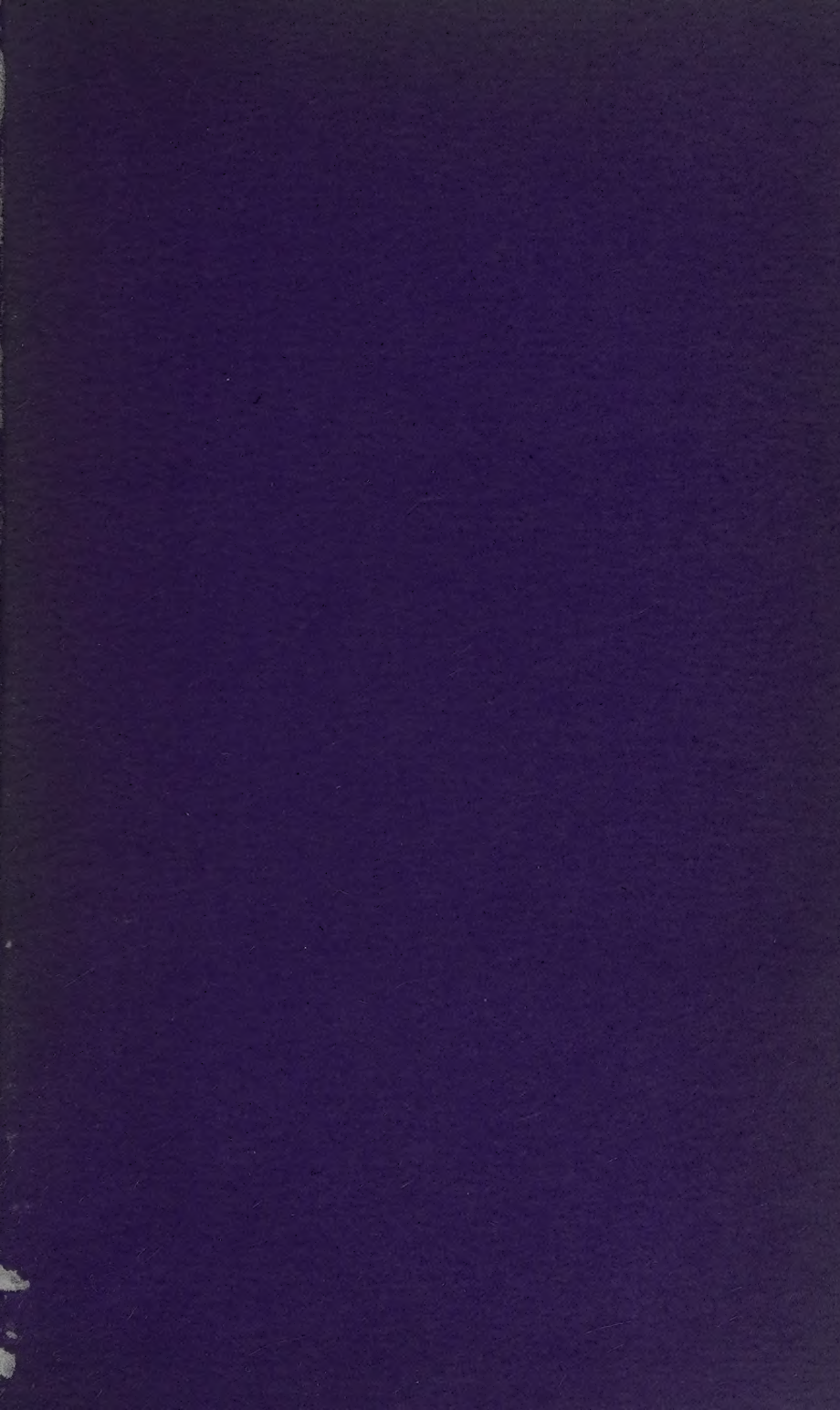
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