

CEYLON

*Today*

*and*

*Yesterday*

THE MAIN CURRENTS OF  
CEYLON HISTORY

C. MENDIS



# CEYLON TODAY AND YESTERDAY

## G. C. MENDIS

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**MAIN CURRENTS OF CEYLON HISTORY**

**by**

**G. C. MENDIS, B.A., Ph. D., D. Litt. (Lond.)**



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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THIS Preface is meant to be read. It is written to help the reader to understand what follows. This book is essentially an historical account, though does not start from the past and come to the present but starts from the present and explains it through the past. It is an attempt to draw attention to the main historical factors that have made Ceylon what it is today.

The past is not viewed here from any other standpoint. It is not valued ethically though moral judgements cannot always be avoided. No attempt is made to stand in judgement over the acts of rulers. The aim here is to account for their behaviour. This is not a treatment from a religious standpoint; it is not an unfolding of religious principles or of a divine plan. Nor is the past analysed according to Buddhist or Christian values. The aim is to give a continuous story, one event leading to another. This is not a view of the past from a nationalist standpoint; a record of our achievements and of our grievances or of heroic deeds to stimulate the living to action. This account is meant to help the reader to understand the present. It is not a literary work; an attempt to express a view or ideas through past stories or to give a selection of facts which would provide a dramatic story. The aim is to describe the past as far as possible as it really was, as much as the confines of a little book, the evidence available and the author's capacity would permit. This is not an attempt to fit facts to any theory. What is done is to collect facts, select whatever is historically important and show what meaning they provide.

It will not be surprising, therefore, if many disapprove of what is stated in this book, disagree with its assumptions, and object to its choice of facts and the significance attached to them. Some may attribute the awakening of the Sinhalese people within the last hundred years not to any developments under British rule but to the strength of their ancient civilization which the South Indian invasions and all the forces of the West failed to stamp out, and conclude that I have not attached sufficient importance to the period before 1505 in which Buddhism considerably influenced the Sinhalese way of life.

There is no doubt that recent developments have revealed the strength of the ancient civilization. They have shown the

capacity of Buddhism and of the Sinhalese language to survive in spite of the forces of destruction which began to affect Ceylon from the fall of Polonnaruwa. As the ancient civilization grew and flourished prior to that event, it has begun to revive and flourish once more. These developments have shown the need, if we are to lead a creative life, to take our roots seriously and draw inspiration from them. But the strength of the ancient civilization alone cannot account for what is happening today.

This is not an attempt to prove that the British came here for our good. They occupied Ceylon to increase their power and strengthen their empire with the aid of this strategic base. They continued to hold it also for the economic and other advantages they derived from it. Whenever their power was challenged, as it happened in 1817, or imagined it was challenged as they did in 1848 and 1915, they did not hesitate to crush their opponents with severity. It is also true that the British in the early stage of their rule took steps which were destructive of our ancient civilization and tried to replace ours with theirs. Thus there is much to condemn in British rule if an assessment is made from a moral standpoint according to ideas held today.

But the British system of government had also its virtues. It had certain characteristics which enabled the survival and the growth of living forces within the old system. Further it contained a series of inner contradictions which led to the growth of forces destructive of itself. For instance, along with an autocratic form of government the British permitted from 1832 the growth of freedom of thought, speech and action. Maintaining English as the language of government they continued to establish Sinhalese and Tamil schools, without English even as a second language. Imposing a British system of government, they placed in 1931 the ultimate control of power in the hands of persons who had their roots and background in the ancient civilization. Hence many recent developments are due as much to British rule as to the efforts of the people themselves.

What is said here also does not deny that the British conquest and rule are a part of a world process, especially of a European movement. But what matters to us is that the impact of the West came to Ceylon mainly through the British and therefore has to be explained as the results of British rule. It is the British who modernized our traditional system of

government. It is they who gave us first a liberal state and then a welfare state. It is also owing to British rule that certain forces in the old social order gained a new vigour and produced the revolutionary changes through which we are passing today. Besides, this book is written mainly to explain the present; and what is impinging on us just now more than anything else, is what took place under British rule.

In short a monk, a priest, a nationalist, a philosopher, an economist or a sociologist may view Ceylon's past from his own angle and come to his own conclusions. Sometimes even historians may differ in the emphasis they place on certain aspects of the past. All that is expected here is not an abandonment of other points of view but a consideration of the historical interpretation of Ceylon's past given in this book.

The contents of this book with a few exceptions were first given over the radio or published as newspaper articles. The first ten chapters on Ceylon and India, Ceylon and the West and The Periods of Ceylon History were given as talks in 1956, 1955 and 1961 in the Schools Broadcasting Service. The Rise of the Middle Class and the Beginnings of Communalism appeared under another title in April 1953 in the *University of Ceylon Review*. The rest, with the exception of the Introduction, the Donoughmore Reforms, the Reassertion of Buddhism and the Ceylon Tamil Problem appeared in the *Times of Ceylon* from time to time between 1956 and 1958. But all these have been revised and sometimes rewritten to mould them as far as possible into a single coherent whole. I have tried wherever possible to avoid repetition, but this has not been always possible as I have had to keep each chapter a coherent whole.

This Edition is different in many respects from the First Edition. The Introduction, The Periods of Ceylon History, The Donoughmore Reforms, The Reassertion of Buddhism, The Old Order Changeth and The Ceylon Tamil Problem are new chapters.

I have to thank the Director-General of Broadcasting for granting me permission to print the talks, the Editors of The *University of Ceylon Review* and of *The Times of Ceylon* to reproduce the articles referred to, and the Publishing Department of Lake House for their assistance in producing this book.

G. C. MENDIS

17, Swarna Road  
Colombo 6, September 1963



## INTRODUCTION

**T**WO of the most striking features of the history of Ceylon are the influence of India up to the end of the fifteenth century due to Ceylon's proximity to this sub-continent and the influence of the West thereafter owing to its position on the highway of sea traffic from the West to the East. But if the changes within the Island and not foreign influences are made the basis of judgment, the history of Ceylon would roughly fall into four divisions. The first would be the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva Period when Ceylon was on the whole united under a single ruler. The second would be the period from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century (1235-1815) when Ceylon was disunited and more than one ruler governed at a time. The third would be roughly the British Period when Ceylon was united once more under a single government. The fourth, the period thereafter when, with the removal of British control, the forces of disintegration began to rear their heads once more, failing so far to break up or to modify to any considerable extent the framework of the powerful unified system of government, established by the British and handed over to the people of Ceylon.

### *The First Period*

Any visitor to Ceylon who leaves Colombo and goes to the Dry Zone will be struck by what he sees in the three cities of Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Polonnaruva. The first and the third will indicate to him the powerful influence Buddhism exercised over this country during this period. The remarkable fortress of Sigiriya, built by the usurper and parricide Kasyapa (473-491) and adorned with frescoes similar to those in Ajanta in the Deccan, will reveal to him the heights to which architectural and artistic activities reached during this time. The huge reservoirs around these cities and outside and the various irrigation channels will give some idea of the nature of the agricultural economy that sustained the people, the government and the Buddhist monastic organization.

When he visits these places he will soon learn of Devanampiya Tissa (c. 250 B.C.) in whose reign Theravada Buddhism

was introduced to Ceylon, of Dutugemunu (161-137 B.C.) who built the Mahatupa or Ruvanvali Saya and the Mahavihare, the chief abode of the Theravada sect, of Valagamba (89-77 B.C.) and Gajabahu I (A.D. 112-134) who were responsible for the Abhayagiri Dagaba and Vihare, associated with rival Buddhist sects, of Mahasen (A.D. 276-303) who built the Jetavana Dagaba and supported a Buddhist sect opposed to the Theravadins, of Parakramabahu I (1153-1186) and of Nissanka Malla (1187-1196) who were mainly responsible for the buildings in Polonnaruva. He will also hear of the Minneriya Tank constructed by Mahasen, of the Kalavaya and of the Parakrama Samudraya built by Dhatusena (459-477) and Parakramabahu I respectively.

He will naturally inquire how this ancient civilization broke down. Then he will learn of the various Tamil invaders whom Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Dhatusena and Vijayabahu I (1055-1110) expelled; how Parakramabahu I even carried Sinhala arms into South India and Burma, and how, owing to disunity in Ceylon in the thirteenth century, the South Indian invaders finally brought about the destruction of this civilization.

### *The Second Period*

The first period was one when on the whole the centripetal forces prevailed. The second was one when the centrifugal forces divided the country. It was a period of disunity and insecurity. Any visitor to Ceylon would learn that during this period Ceylon had many capitals, as the centre of power gradually shifted from Polonnaruva in the direction of the Wet Zone. Shortly after the break-up of the Polonnaruva Kingdom a Tamil Kingdom came to be established in the north. A Sinhalese chief tried to rehabilitate the Sinhalese Kingdom from Dambadeniya. The work he started was continued by his son Parakramabahu II (1236-1270), but he could not bring the whole country under his control or restore the irrigation works mainly owing to further invasions from without. One of his sons had to take himself to the rock fortress at Yapahuva to resist these invaders. One of these invaders who came from the Malay Peninsula appears to have realized Ceylon's strategic position on the highway of sea traffic from the East to the West and from the West to the East. Others came from Pandya, and made Polonnaruva

once more the capital of Ceylon. The Siva Devale No. I was probably built during this time.

After the fall of this South Indian Pandya Empire, Kurunagala, Gampola, and Rayigama, which is situated to the east of Panadure, came in turn to be recognized as the capitals of Ceylon. At Gampola in the reign of Bhuvanekabahu IV (1341-1351) the Lankatilaka and the Gadaladeniya Vihares were built. They indicate the growing influence of Hinduism with which Buddhism allied itself at this time of insecurity when the people needed the protection of the gods more than ever before. Rayigama, which has no monuments to boast of, is remembered as the city of Nissanka Alagakkonara who checked the southward expansion of the Tamil Kingdom and of Vira Alakesvara who came into conflict with the Chinese.

The last of the Rayigama rulers, Parakramabahu VI (1412-1467), shifted his capital in 1415 to Kotte, which continued to be the capital city of Ceylon till 1565 when it was replaced by Colombo. He is well known for two reasons. By waging wars he succeeded in becoming the ruler of the whole island. The peace and prosperity which resulted led to an efflorescence of Sinhalese literature. But, for the want of an able successor and proper means of communication between the capital and the other parts of the Island, the Kotte Kingdom established by him disintegrated after his death. The Jaffna Kingdom became independent once more. The highlands, along with the eastern parts of the Island, developed into the independent Kandyan Kingdom.

The diminished Kingdom of Kotte came to be divided further in 1521 and before long developed into the two independent kingdoms of Kotte and Sitavaka. As a result of wars both these kingdoms fell in 1597 into the hands of the Portuguese. They had come in search of spices and supported the Kings of Kotte in order to maintain their hold on this trade. For similar reasons the Tamil Kingdom too fell into the hands of the Portuguese in 1621.

The Dutch, who wanted to secure this trade in cinnamon for themselves, ousted the Portuguese in 1658, but they ruled over a much smaller area than did the Portuguese. Just as the Catholic churches serve to remind us of Portuguese rule in Ceylon, the Dutch Reformed Churches in Colombo, Galle

and Jaffna, the Dutch fortresses and Roman-Dutch Law draw our attention to the Dutch occupation of the north and south-west of the Island. The British drove out the Dutch in 1796, and obtained control of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. Thus on the one hand the people of Ceylon lost their independence completely and on the other hand benefited by being under a single government once more.

#### *The Third Period*

The developments in the British Period can be seen in the network of roads and the railway, in the plantations of tea, rubber and coconut, in the Colombo harbour, in the expansion of the old towns and in the rise of new ones mainly for commercial reasons, in the restoration of the ancient irrigation works, in the administrative offices in all parts of the Island, in the houses of Parliament in Colombo, in the town halls in Colombo and in the towns where local bodies function, in the section of the population that speak English, in the large number of schools that came into existence and in the growth of Buddhist vihares in the south-west which came to be built after the British occupation.

The main features of this period are the development of a modern system of administration on a territorial basis and of a modern economy based on commerce. Both these led to the development of a system of communications. All three helped to unify Ceylon both economically and politically.

The chief factor that led to these changes were the Colebrooke Reforms. They abolished *rajakariya* or the Sinhalese form of feudalism, and gave people the freedom to take to any occupation they liked. They did away with trade monopolies giving freedom of trade to all. They deprived communities such as races and castes of their unequal customary rights and conferred all rights on individuals making them all equal before the law. They established a common system of administration and of judiciary and prepared the way for a common system of law. They set up a liberal system of government abolishing the autocratic powers of the Governor and setting up Executive and Legislative Councils. They made English the language of government and the medium of instruction in government schools.

But the Donoughmore Commission, that came to Ceylon in 1927 to inquire into the system of government that then

existed, found that the objects of the Colebrooke Reforms had not been achieved in the way expected by their authors. The country had been developed unequally. Some regions and some communities remained backward while others had advanced. The old social groupings had not sufficiently broken down and given way to modern forms of association. The study of English had spread only among seven per cent of the population. Further, the English-educated class wanted self government and they had to be satisfied.

The Donoughmore Commissioners, in order to strengthen Ceylon's nationhood, abolished electorates based on race, which had been introduced in spite of the Colebrooke recommendations. They extended the system of territorial electorates on a population basis placing emphasis on the rights of individuals. They granted adult franchise in order that the interests of the masses may not be neglected and placed Ceylon on the path to self-government by giving the people of Ceylon a semi-responsible system of government.

#### *The Fourth Period*

The first to benefit by these reforms were the English-educated middle class. Taking advantage of the changes brought about by the second world war, they secured political independence for Ceylon in 1948 and maintained their power till 1956. The next were the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists and the workers.

Though Colebrooke wanted English to be the medium of instruction in government schools, this practice was abandoned as time passed, and Government made itself responsible mainly for Sinhalese and Tamil schools. The result was that in ninety per cent of the schools Sinhalese and Tamil became the media of instruction. Further in recent years, Sinhalese and Tamil became increasingly the media of instruction even in most of the so-called English schools. The Sinhalese and Tamil languages began to develop further with their use in newspapers and books, in novels, short stories and drama.

A Buddhist and Hindu revival took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though towards the end of the nineteenth century, this, like the Sinhalese and Tamil languages, had a temporary set-back, the Buddhist agitation against Christian denominational schools, run almost entirely with

government aid, continued and received an impetus after independence.

There was also a movement to improve the conditions of labour, and the trade union movement, which received encouragement under the British Government, grew in strength with the growth of socialist and communist ideas.

One of the dominant ideas after the Colebrooke Reforms of 1832 was the idea of equality before the law, and as a result the socially backward castes began to object to being treated as inferiors. After the Donoughmore Reforms of 1931 and the grant of adult franchise, the idea of equality of opportunity began to gain ground, and the have-nots and those who had lagged behind began to demand that they be given equal opportunities for advancement along with those who had got ahead under British rule. The different racial and caste groups which came down from pre-British times, being in different stages of development, did not break down under the political, administrative and economic changes. Some of them, during the last days of British rule, encouraged by the system of communal electorates introduced by the Mc Callum and Manning Reforms and the opportunity afforded by adult franchise, became more united in a competition for political power. In fact conflicts arose not only between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, but also between the Low-country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese, the Jaffna Tamils and the Batticaloa Tamils, who up to 1815 lived under the control of the Kandyan Kings. The Tamils of the north who earlier came to be distinguished from the Sinhalese by their language-Tamil, and their religion-Hinduism, now came to be influenced by the fact that they lived in the Dry Zone and thereby did not have an equal chance of development with the Sinhalese who lived in the fertile Wet Zone. To overcome this disadvantage they took to English education increasingly and secured a greater share of government posts out of proportion to their numbers. The Kandyans who came under Western influences after 1815 had an unequal struggle with the Low-country Sinhalese. Similarly the Eastern Province Muslims and Hindus found themselves at a disadvantage as against the Jaffna Tamils. Hence the Kandyans were unwilling to unite freely with the Low-country Sinhalese, and the Muslims and the Hindus of the Eastern Province with the Tamils of the north. As a result of Portuguese, Dutch

and British rule there grew powerful Christian communities, and, as a consequence of British rule, an English-educated class which became the most influential section of the people.

Instead of working for nationhood and individual rights the communities that lagged behind under British rule began to fight for equality of status and of opportunity. Of these groups the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists came into power in 1956, ousting the English-educated class in which Christians exercised considerable influence. They changed by law the language of government, replacing English with Sinhalese. They brought under government control most of the assisted denominational schools which were run mostly by Christian bodies. They improved further the conditions of the workers who helped them to come into power. They gave the Tamil language a subordinate status, an act which united the Ceylon Tamils and drove them into opposition.

These developments led to an anti-Western attitude among the Sinhalese-educated, the Buddhists and the workers. The desire to make Sinhalese the language of government and the medium of all education along with Tamil led to an opposition to English as well as a feeling of hostility to the British under whose rule the development of the Sinhalese language suffered certain handicaps. The desire to place Buddhism on an equal footing with Christianity led to a certain amount of opposition to the Christian Churches and the privileges they enjoyed as well as to Western culture in general. The socialist movement led to a dislike of Ceylon's continued connection with capitalist Britain and the system of colonialism in general.

In this context three problems, for which there seems to be no immediate solution, emerged. The Indians who settled in Ceylon during British rule continue to demand citizenship rights. The Ceylon Tamils want Tamil made a language of government along with Sinhalese and ask for the control of the Northern and Eastern Provinces through a federal form of government. The Kandyans who believe they are the worst off economically demand an improvement of their conditions and object to the Indians being given citizenship rights or to the Ceylon Tamils being given the control of the Eastern Province, as such action would make their conditions worse.

Finally, there are three forces which tend to disintegrate the existing system of government. Races and castes often place their interests before those of the nation. People of certain backward areas, like the Kandyans, think more of their regional needs than of those of the country as a whole. Others, mainly some intellectuals and workers, want to replace the existing democratic form of government with a Marxist system in the hope that such a change would hasten economic development and the improvement of the conditions of urban and plantation workers. The desire for nationhood has not emerged sufficiently owing to these race, caste, and regional inequalities, the outmoded social distinctions that linger on, and the failure on the part of most people to grasp the necessity for economic development as a means of solving most of the problems that confront the country.

## THE CIVILIZATIONS OF S. E. ASIA, INDIA AND CEYLON

SINCE the attainment of independence in 1948, Ceylon has looked out in three directions for association with the outer world. Having been under British rule for one and a half centuries and having formed close bonds with Britain in diverse ways during this period, Ceylon naturally—like India and Pakistan—joined the British Commonwealth which consisted of Britain and other countries which had once been her colonies.

From 1954 Ceylon, however, began to look in another direction. She was not satisfied with being a member of the British Commonwealth alone, and began to form another union with India and other countries of South-East Asia. This finally led to the Bandung Conference. To this sponsored by Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan many other Asian and African countries were invited and most of them sent representatives. Among those invited were the other independent S. E. Asian countries like Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand and North and South Vietnam.

This urge on the part of Ceylon to ally itself with India and S. E. Asian countries arose from a number of reasons. All these countries realized that they were under-developed in many respects and needed peace for further progress. Most of them had adopted a democratic way of life and thus were linked with the Western powers as far as the form of government went. India, Pakistan and Ceylon were also linked with Britain in the British Commonwealth. Not one of them, however, was in a position to defend itself. India, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam, all had China to the north of their frontier and India and Pakistan had Russia as well. Thus most of these countries had reason to keep away from both the American and Russian blocs for their security. Hence they allied themselves to form a third bloc in order to exercise their influence in the cause of peace, and try and bridge the gulf between the American and the Russian blocs. Also these countries with the exception of Thailand had been under the

rule of European powers, and as a result of the changes that took place during the period of foreign rule they had developed similar interests and were faced with common problems.

However, after the General Election of 1956 and the advent of a new political party into power, Ceylon has begun to look more and more in the direction of India and seek guidance from the leaders of that vast sub-continent. Hence it will not be irrelevant to make a special study of Ceylon's relations with India in the past and see what history has to tell us about them.

It is understandable why, since the new political party took over the government of the country, the enthusiasm for maintaining the connection with Britain waned. But why was there no further development in the relations with S. E. Asian countries which began to be established anew only a few years earlier? Geographically, though Ceylon is in close proximity to India, she is also on the highway of sea traffic between the West and the East. Hence, before her connections with India are examined, it may be worth while to take a glance at Ceylon's connections with S. E. Asia, and see why after 1956 they were not further developed and strengthened.

Ceylon had no doubt relations with S. E. Asian countries from very early times. Ships that plied between China and India, often touched at Ceylon. But direct political relations with S. E. Asia began only in the eleventh century due to certain developments in South India. In the ninth century Ceylon came into the orbit of South Indian politics when the Kingdom of Pandya began to expand her power beyond her frontiers. Then Ceylon allied herself with other South Indian rulers to check this expansion and prevent an invasion of Ceylon. With the decline of the kingdom of Pandya, the Kingdom of Chola began to extend her frontiers in the north, south and west, and finally gained control of the whole of the region south of the river Krishna and its tributary the Tungabhadra as far as the northern part of Ceylon. Some-time later the Chola emperor Rajendra I led an expedition to the north as far as the Ganges, and by naval action, established suzerainty over the maritime empire called Sri Vijaya, which held sway over the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Java and controlled the sea routes between India and China.

When Vijayabahu I (1055-1114) made it his aim to free Ceylon from the Chola yoke he sought the alliance of rulers who feared Chola aggression. One of these was King Anawratha (1044-1077) the ruler of Upper Burma, who at this time had extended his power over Pegu or Lower Burma. It is not known how long this alliance lasted but it was probably not very long as there is evidence to show that the Chola Emperor Kulottunga (1070-1118) had diplomatic relations with the Burmese King Kyan Zittha (1084-1113) at the beginning of the twelfth century. In any case Ceylon came into conflict with Burma in the time of Parakramabahu I. According to the Devangala inscription, by which his admiral Kit Nuvaragal was rewarded for his victory over Burma, the King of Burma refused to contract a treaty with Ceylon, and Ceylon thereupon made war and compelled Burma to come to terms. The *Culavamsa* gives a long account of this war but does not explain why the Burmese King broke off diplomatic relations with Ceylon, put obstacles in the way of Ceylon's trade and tried to obstruct her relations with Cambodia. It is clear that Burma adopted a similarly hostile attitude to a king of India, but the evidence is insufficient to infer whether the break with Burma was due to a break in the system of alliances in South India or to considerations of trade or both.

The next significant political event which brought Ceylon into contact with S. E. Asia was the invasion of Ceylon by a S. E. Asian King. The Kingdom of Sri Vijaya which extended over an immense territory, though it recovered after the Chola invasions, broke up again in the thirteenth century. One of its important dependencies in the Malay Peninsula was Tambralinga which had its centre in the region of Ligor. Its importance lay in the fact that it controlled the Isthmus of Kra. Ships that went to the Far East had either to pass through the Strait of Malacca between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra or the Strait of Sunda between Sumatra and Java. In order to avoid the attacks of pirates in these narrow seas, travellers avoided them and went overland, and the most popular of these routes was across the Isthmus of Kra.

Tambralinga appears to have made itself independent around 1230. In 1247 its ruler, Dharmaraja Chandrabhanu with an army of Javanese invaded Ceylon and devastated the country. Though defeated in the south he appears to have

gained a hold over a part of the north of Ceylon. In 1270 he returned with both Javanese and South Indian troops and probably in alliance with Pandya, extended his territory in the north of Ceylon. After that he marched south and fought the Sinhalese king, but was severely defeated.

From that time onwards Ceylon had no direct political relations with S. E. Asia till the seventeenth century. The Dutch, when they came to the East, established themselves in the East Indies, as the Portuguese were securely established in India and controlled the Indian Ocean. In 1609 they made Batavia in Java their headquarters and began to extend their trade. In 1638 they started on their conquest of Ceylon and by 1658 gained a firm hold over a part of Ceylon. For the next one hundred and forty years the Dutch activities in Ceylon were directed from Batavia, and the developments in Ceylon in some respects followed that of the Dutch colonies in S. E. Asia.

It is likely that before the arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch, Ceylon's economic relations with S. E. Asia were closer than the political. The ships that touched at Ceylon ports from early times no doubt engaged in a certain amount of trade between Ceylon and S. E. Asia. The account of Parakramabahu the Great's war against Burma makes it clear that at this time Ceylon had direct trade relations not only with Burma but with other S. E. Asian countries like Cambodia. It is possible that one of the reasons for the conflict between Ceylon and Burma was their competition for trade with S. E. Asia, especially, as the Kingdom of Burma at this time appears to have extended as far as the Isthmus of Kra. Similarly whatever were the causes of the war with Chandrabhanu in the thirteenth century, it is clear that he had a certain amount of control of the trade between India, S. E. Asia and the Far East.

In the last quarter of the thirteenth century Ceylon clearly became a definite unit not only of S. E. Asian trade but also of the trade which extended from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf as far as China and Japan. The Muslims began to trade as far as China in the eighth century and by the ninth century they had a series of outposts along the route. Bhuvanekabahu I (1273-1284) took part in this trade. In 1283 he sent an embassy to the Sultan of Egypt offering to supply him with

cinnamon, precious stones and elephants. In 1344 Colombo fell into the hands of a Muslim ruler called Jalasti who maintained his hold over the town with the assistance of a garrison of about five hundred Abyssinians. At this time the Muslims also established a settlement in Beruvala and penetrated into the interior.

China too participated in this Asian trade and regarded Ceylon as one of its units. It is related that the Emperor Kublai Khan sent an embassy in 1284. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Ming Emperor Yung-Lo sent one of his officials Cheng-Ho with the object of increasing China's participation in this trade. Cheng-ho made a series of voyages between 1405 and 1433 and visited Vietnam, Java, Sumatra, India, Ceylon and even Arabia and East Africa. It was during his first visit to Ceylon in 1405 that he came into conflict with Vira Alakesvara and on his second visit he captured Vira Alakesvara, his queen and his officers and carried them away to China.

Though Jalasti does not seem to have maintained his hold over Colombo for long, the Muslims continued to come to Colombo in the course of their trading activities. In fact in the fifteenth century the entire eastern trade seems to have fallen into their hands. Making use of the monsoons they travelled from Basra and Aden to Gujarat and Malabar, from Bengal to Malacca, and back from Malacca to Malabar. Further they travelled from port to port, providing each country with the goods it needed and taking away from it what they could sell elsewhere.

It was this trade that the Portuguese took over in the sixteenth century, occupying strategic positions such as Goa, Ormuz on the Persian Gulf, Socotra near Aden and Malacca in the Malay Peninsula. To them Colombo was equally important, as it was from here and from Malacca that they could control the trade in the Bay of Bengal. It was also this trade in the South-East and the Far East extending from India and Ceylon to China and Japan that the Dutch took over from the Portuguese.

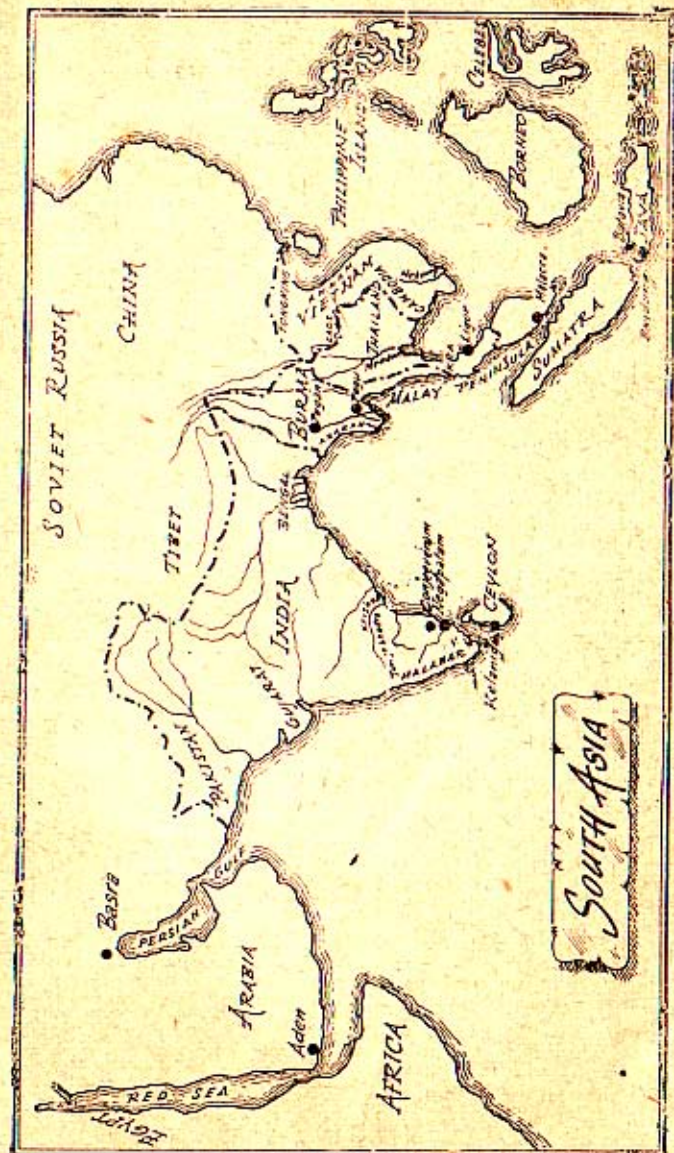
Religion linked Ceylon with S. E. Asia even more closely than politics or trade. Buddhism appears to have reached Arakan in the fourth century A.D., Lower Burma and the

Malay Peninsula in the fifth century, and Thailand, Cambodia, Sumatra, Java and Upper Burma later. Buddhist missionaries of the Theravada school appear to have gone from Conjeevaram to Lower Burma. To the other countries they went mainly from North India and the Deccan. There is little doubt that the Buddhist monks of Ceylon had relations with the monks of these countries.

With the decline of Theravada Buddhism in India, Ceylon Buddhists turned more and more to Burma. When Vijayabahu I sought the alliance of Burma against the Cholas, Anawrahta was glad to extend his friendship to a Buddhist king. Vijayabahu I after destroying the power of the Cholas sent envoys again to Burma to restore the *upasampada* in Ceylon. After that the Ceylon monks maintained friendly relations with their Burmese counterparts in spite of the hostility between Parakramabahu I and his contemporary in Burma. In the reign of Narapathisu (1173-1210) Chapata, a Burmese monk who came to Ceylon, returned with four monks from Ceylon and ordained monks in Burma according to the Mahavihara tradition. This form of ordination was passed on from Burma to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. As a result Theravada Buddhism became the dominant religion in S. E. Asia. It is with King Narapathisu that Vijayabahu II and Nissanka Malla corresponded.

Tambralinga too was a country which, like Burma, followed Theravada Buddhism. Before Chandrabhanu first invaded Ceylon, he, along with the ruler of Siam (Thailand) sent a request for a statue of the Buddha. On his second invasion he demanded the Tooth and the Bowl relics of the Buddha.

Again in the fifteenth century Queen Shinsawbu of Lower Burma (1453-81) sent a mission to Ceylon. The monks who came here received ordination at Kalaniya, and they on their return passed on this form of ordination to others. King Thiathura of Upper Burma (1469-1481) too had communications with Ceylon at the same time. In the eighteenth century Buddhists of Ceylon sought help in turn from Siam. The King of Kandy, Kirti Sri Rajasinha, sent a mission to King Boromokot (1733-1758) requesting him to send Buddhist monks to restore the *upasampada* in Ceylon. The Siamese sect was established by the monks who came on that occasion. The names of the other two nikayas, Amarapura and Ramanya,





reveal their debt to Burma. They were both formed by monks who received their ordination in Burma in 1802 and 1865 respectively.

The political and economic relations with Ceylon did not lead to any significant changes in the conditions of these S. E. Asian countries. The political relations were of a temporary nature. The economic connection too did not link Ceylon with these countries in any permanent import and export trade. The chief link that connected Ceylon with Burma, Thailand and Cambodia was Buddhism. Buddhism in Burma developed in a manner similar to Ceylon and was influenced both by Mahayanism and Tantrism. In all these countries too as in Ceylon Theravada Buddhism asserted itself at the expense of all the others.

Even this connection with Buddhism failed to produce in these countries except superficially a civilization similar to that of Ceylon. Buddhism in Ceylon grew on a background similar to that in India. In these countries it grew on a background radically different. The racial type there was mainly Mongoloid. The local cults which Buddhism met there were Nat and Naga worship. It is true that the Hindu civilization influenced these countries but even here there was a difference. It spread to them and influenced the royal courts and the upper classes before Buddhism spread there and not after. It had to compete with a no less powerful Chinese civilization. In fact, China influenced Annam, Tongking and Indo-China more than India. Further, neither Hindu civilization nor Chinese by their impact basically altered the way of life in these countries. Hinduism, for instance, did not succeed in introducing the caste system and alter the structure of society. On the other hand, as is evident from their architecture and sculpture, these countries, though influenced by India and China, did not lose their individuality. Thus, an examination of the civilization of Ceylon on the one hand and of that of the countries of South-East Asia on the other, reveal the fact that they do differ considerably.

In contrast there is a close connection between India and Ceylon. Though Ceylon is separated by sea from India, it is geographically a projection of the Deccan. The Wet Zone of Ceylon is a projection of the Malabar region and the Dry Zone of the Coromandel region. At the same time it is far

away from all other lands on the West, East and South. Whether we examine the racial types, the religious systems, the languages, the literature, the architecture, the sculpture and painting, the political systems, the economic conditions or the social structures, we notice at once a close affinity between India and Ceylon.

This affinity has been recognized by those who have studied both Indian as well as Ceylon conditions. In 1801 when Ceylon was about to be made a crown colony, Henry Dundas, the Secretary of State, considered what system of government should be adopted in Ceylon. There were two main systems of government among the British colonies at that time. One was found in some of the West Indian islands where most of the settlers were British. The other was found in the colonies which had been captured from the French, and the settlers were mainly non-British. Dundas decided to adopt neither of these systems in Ceylon. He realized how similar the conditions of Ceylon were to those of India and wrote to Governor North "On the present resumption by His Majesty of the temporary power of interference in the affairs of Ceylon formerly delegated to the East India Company, it was far from being proposed to assimilate that Island or its Government to our colonies in the West Indies. But on the contrary whatever experience has shown to be politically wise in the Government of the British Territory on the Continent of India, and appears, as is the case in this instance, applicable to the situation in Ceylon, it is the inclination of His Majesty's Government to preserve or to adopt."

This similarity between India and Ceylon was also noticed by others. As far back as 1831, Colebrooke, one of the Commissioners sent from England to report on the Government of Ceylon, considered a knowledge of Ceylon helpful for an understanding of India. "Although administered by the Crown, the Island of Ceylon was originally a Hindu province," he wrote, "and from not having been subject to the inroads of the Mohamedans, it offers at this day the most perfect example to be met with of the ancient system of Hindu government. A short analysis, therefore, of the system may be useful not only with reference to the particular interests of Ceylon but in elucidation of some questions of considerable importance in relation to the British settlement in India."

Even after the Colebrooke Reforms conditions in Ceylon continued to be similar to those in India. Changes akin to those brought about in Ceylon by these Reforms were carried out in India, though over a longer period. Ceylon generally followed or kept in line with India in matters of administration, and when at the close of the century Lord Curzon carried out far-reaching reforms in India, a similar set of reforms were introduced in Ceylon by Sir West Ridgeway.

The agitation for constitutional reforms in Ceylon too followed closely that in India and was partly inspired by India. The Mc Callum Reforms of 1912 and the Manning Reforms of 1921 and 1924 can be understood only in relation to the Morley-Minto and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

In short, Ceylon is in many respects a miniature of India, and it is not surprising that in a time of national and cultural revival, whatever objections may exist on political grounds, Ceylon should turn once more to India for guidance rather than to a union of South Asian and S. E. Asian countries.

## POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH INDIA

IT is not proposed in this chapter to do anything more than to sketch the political relations between India and Ceylon from the earliest times up to the present day. It is true that it is not possible to separate altogether economic, social and institutional developments from political changes, and in order to understand the history of any country it is necessary to follow its development as a whole. But for convenience of study I propose to separate these important strands and deal first with political and then with cultural developments, and it is hoped we shall not fail, as we proceed, to note the interrelation between them.

What do we understand by political history? A simple definition is: the story of those who exercise power in any state. Any attempts on their part to maintain or extend their power will also come within that term. So will any attempt on the part of others to oust them from power. Today, according to our constitution, ultimate political power lies with the people. When at the General Election in 1956 the people ousted one political party and replaced it with another, their action was political. Thus, political history includes wars and rebellions and changes in those who exercise power.

If it is accepted that political history deals with questions of power it is understandable why Ceylon had hardly any political relations with North India except for the four years, 1798-1801, during which Ceylon was under the Governor-General of Fort William in Bengal. The kings of North India hardly ever extended their power to the very south of India, and therefore they had no reason to secure control of Ceylon. Besides, they built no large navies to control the seas around, and, therefore, the harbours of Ceylon were of no importance to them.

There are, however, records which may suggest that Ceylon rulers accepted the suzerainty of the Maurya Emperor, Asoka, who in the third century B.C. ruled from Pataliputra over a very large part of India and of the Gupta Emperor,

Samudragupta, who in the fourth century A.D. reigned from the same city, and extended his power by conquest as far as the River Krishna. But there is no evidence in India to show that Asoka exercised any control over Ceylon. All that we know from his edicts is that Ceylon was among the countries in which he arranged for the care of men and animals, the planting of medicinal herbs, and the spread of the Dhamma. It is the Ceylon chronicles that state that as a result of an embassy sent from Ceylon, Asoka asked that Devanampiya Tissa be consecrated a second time. If this story means anything it does not imply that Asoka wished to exercise suzerainty over Ceylon, but that the King of Ceylon wanted to be under his suzerainty. It is clear from Asoka's edicts that he did not place Ceylon within his domains, but treated it along with the South Indian kingdoms as independent territory.

It is different in the case of Samudragupta. The claim to suzerainty is suggested by him, while Ceylon records accept no such inferior status for Ceylon. In his famous Allahabad Pillar Inscription, Samudragupta gives a detailed account of his conquests and divides the rulers of India into four categories. The fourth consists of rulers who showed him their respect by personal surrender, by sending him gifts as tribute and by petitioning for a charter with the Gupta seal for the enjoyment of their respective territories. Among these were the Saimhalakas or the people of Simhala. Did the people of Ceylon then accept the suzerainty of Samudragupta? A Chinese record sheds some light on this obscure question. In the reign of Kitti Siri Meghavanna (301-328) two Ceylonese Buddhist monks went to Buddha Gaya to visit the sacred places of Buddhism. On their return they complained of the inconvenience they went through while there for want of accommodation. Thereupon the King of Ceylon sent to the Indian Emperor an embassy with presents seeking permission to build a monastery there. The request was granted probably by a charter and a monastery was built. It is probably this incident that led the King of Ceylon to be included under the fourth category of kings. Even if Kitti Siri Meghavanna accepted the suzerainty of Samudragupta on this occasion, there is no evidence to show that it led to the payment of a regular tribute or to any control of Ceylon by the Indian Emperor.

On the other hand, it was natural for South Indian rulers to attempt to gain control of the Island. Ceylon was comparatively more fertile and wealthier than any part of South India and whoever conquered it acquired prestige, power and wealth.

As far back as the second century B. C. according to the Pali chronicles, three Tamils, Sena, Guttika and Elara ruled over Ceylon. We have neither sufficient evidence about Sena and Guttika, nor reliable information about Elara to say anything definite about them. It is not clear whether they were invaders from South India or members of a Tamil trade guild, which had a building of their own in Anuradhapura, or both. Nor do we know what factors helped them to come into power or to maintain their hold on the throne for so many years. The other legend that King Karikala of Chola invaded Ceylon about the second century A.D. and carried away many prisoners and that Gajabahu I retaliated with a counter invasion and brought back twice as many, has no basis of fact, and it will serve no useful purpose to devote any time to the examination of this story.

There were two definite invasions of Ceylon in the first century B.C. in the time of Vattagamani Abhaya (Valagam Ba) and in the fifth century A. D. when the rebel Mittasena was ruling over the Island. It is not known who exactly these invaders were. Their names suggest that they were connected in some way with the Pandya royal family. In the first century B. C. there were often wars in South India between the rulers of Pandya, Chola and Kerala in which many chiefs took part. In the fifth century South India was in the hands of the Kalabhras and it is likely that many princes and chieftains who fought against them were deprived of their territories. It appears as if in both these instances some such chieftains, taking advantage of the unsettled state of the Island at that time, invaded Ceylon successfully and made themselves masters of the northern plain. They maintained their power with the aid of their armies and seem to have won over some of the Sinhalese chieftains to their side. They do not seem to have kept up any connection with their mother country, and before long lost their sovereignty over Ceylon.

It will be clear from what has been stated already that in order to understand Ceylon's political relations with India,

it is necessary to keep note as well of the political developments in India during these times. From the seventh century onwards we shall not be able to follow our relations with them unless we have a clear idea of the political changes, the rise and fall of kingdoms, that took place at least in the Deccan. Further, to understand the rise and fall of these kingdoms we have to know something of the geography of the Deccan and the nature of those kingdoms.

The Deccan consists of India south of the Vindhya. It was roughly divided into two sections by the River Krishna and its tributary the Tungabhadra. To the south of this river was the region generally called South India which was divided in ancient times into Chola, Pandya and Kerala. There was a fourth region in the north-west of this section, the Mysore plateau. This part will henceforth be called South India and the region to the north of the River Krishna the Deccan. The eastern part of the Deccan was divided by the River Godavari into two sections and were called Vengi and Kalinga.

The political history of the Deccan and South India consisted mainly of a series of wars between the different kingdoms for supremacy. Sometimes the kings of South India fought with one another, and the kings of the Deccan did the same. At other times, if a ruler in South India became powerful enough, he fought with the rulers of the Deccan, or the rulers of the Deccan took the initiative and fought with the ruler of South India who was growing in power. These kingdoms consisted also of many sub-kingdoms ruled by hereditary princes or chiefs. These feudatories had their own military forces to maintain themselves in power and generally went to the aid of their suzerain during wars, or if they felt that their suzerain was weak and his kingdom was likely to break up, they asserted their independence or accepted the overlordship of another. Thus these kingdoms were constantly compelled to shift their boundaries and it is by no means easy to follow their fortunes.

Another fact we have to remember about these kingdoms is that they were never states in the modern sense. They cannot be compared with the post-fifteenth century European states such as England, France and Spain. These Indian rulers interfered very rarely with the social life of the people apart from building temples and endowing them. What they

were mainly concerned with was the collection of the revenue with which they maintained their armies and the royal courts and endowed religious establishments. So did the sub-kings or the feudatories in their own territories, but they paid in addition a part of their revenue as tribute to their suzerain. It was in order to escape this tribute that feudatories looked forward to becoming independent. Very often these wars were nothing more than raids to collect booty and exact tribute from the defeated rulers. If the ruler who was attacked did not submit, the general practice was not to appoint one of their own generals as rulers, but to replace him with another member of the same royal family who agreed to accept the conqueror as the suzerain.

The relations between the Sinhalese kings and these Indian rulers from the seventh century onwards depended mainly on four factors. Rival claimants to the throne of Ceylon often sought help from Indian rulers. Whenever a ruler of Pandya was successful in expanding his territory or when any ruler of any other kingdom occupied Pandya, he often raided Ceylon and carried away booty, imposing at times a tribute. On two occasions, Chola first and Pandya next not only invaded Ceylon and occupied a portion of it, but even placed one of their own generals as the ruler of Ceylon. From the ninth century, Ceylon entered the orbit of South Indian politics and took part in South Indian struggles in order to prevent a single ruler in South India from becoming too powerful and invading Ceylon. Ceylon itself in the time of Parakramabahu I supported one of the claimants to the throne of Pandya. Parakramabahu I in doing so waged war against the powerful Emperors of Chola, and, had he been successful, would have made Pandya a feudatory state.

If we wish to follow these developments in detail, as stated already, we have to acquaint ourselves with the political developments of India stage by stage. After the break-up of the Maurya Empire, the Deccan came under the rule of the Satavahanas who continued to rule it till the third century A. D. With their fall, a number of petty rulers divided their territory. One of these, a Pallava of North Indian origin, became the ruler of S. E. Deccan. With the fall of the Kalabhraas at the end of the sixth century A. D. his descendant, Simhavishnu, extended his kingdom southwards as far as the Kaveri, i.e. the region originally occupied by the Cholas,



Pallavas. But when the Rashtrakutas defeated the Pallavas and occupied Kanchi about 804, Aggabodhi VIII appears to have sent an embassy and accepted their suzerainty. The Rashtrakutas claim that, nine years after they defeated Parantaka I, they invaded Ramesvaram and exacted tribute from Ceylon. The Ceylon chronicles on the other hand only state that the Sinhalese general of Mahinda IV checked their advance and entered into a treaty with them. Mahinda IV (956-972) assisted Pandya against Chola, and when Parantaka II after defeating the Pandyas invaded Ceylon, he is said to have been defeated by the same Sinhalese general at Kayts.

The rise of the Cholas in South India in the tenth century was followed by a change in the situation in the Deccan in the latter half of the same century. In 973 the Western Chalukya feudatory, Taila II, ousted the Rashtrakutas and became master of Western Deccan. The Chalukya dynasty was divided into two at this time. One was called the Eastern, the other the Western. Some years later Rajaraja I (985-1015) began to expand the Chola Kingdom. He subdued Pandya and Kerala and occupied the northern part of Ceylon. After that he expanded his territory northwards occupying Mysore as well as Vengi, the territory between the Krishna and the Godavari, ruled by the Eastern Chalukyas. His son Rajendra I (1014-1044) continued the expansion of the Chola Empire. He drove further back the Chalukyas, and subdued the East Ganga ruler of Kalinga with whom Mahinda IV had formed a marriage alliance. In the case of the Gangas too, one set from their location was called the Eastern and the other the Western. From there Rajendra I made an expedition as far as the Ganges. In the south he completed the conquest of Ceylon and subdued the kingdom of Sri Vijaya, which included the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and other islands and commanded the trade routes to the East. It was against this Rajendra I and his successors that Vikramabahu and Vijayabahu I of Ceylon waged war and their successes depended on the extent the Cholas were pressed by their opponents in the north. It was finally a war of succession in Chola itself that helped Vijayabahu I to expel the Cholas from Ceylon. After that it was to safeguard himself from Kullotunga I, the new ruler who restored the Chola dominion, that he allied himself with the Western Chalukyas and the Kalingas.

It was when the Chola power was declining during the latter half of the twelfth century that Parakramabahu I interfered in the affairs of South India. The Chola power then was so ineffective on its borders that Kulasekhara of Tinnevely contested the right of Parakrama Pandya to the throne of Madura. Parakrama Pandya sought the help of Parakramabahu I. Kulasekhara, who could not resist the Sinhalese forces, obtained the aid of the Cholas who carried the war into Ceylon. But the war did not end then. The new Pandya rulers in turn tried to free themselves from the Chola yoke with the aid of Ceylon and thus Ceylon came into conflict with Chola on three further occasions.

The Chalukya Empire disintegrated at the end of the twelfth century and the Chola Empire at the end of the thirteenth century. Pandya made use of these developments to expand its power. Its power at first was checked by the new Hoysala power in Mysore. But Jatavarman Sundara Pandya (1251-1268) fought the Hoysalas and made himself supreme over Chola, Kerala and North Ceylon. North Ceylon had more than one ruler during the thirteenth century and a minister of one of them appealed to Pandya for help. This led to a second invasion of North Ceylon by a Pandya prince Jatavarman Vira Pandya. But it was Maravarman Kulasekhara (1268-1309) who, taking advantage of a famine, finally conquered Ceylon around 1280. After his representative, Arya Chakravarti had ruled over Ceylon for about twenty years, South Ceylon was handed over to Parakramabahu III, who acknowledged the suzerainty of Pandya. His successor Bhuvanekabahu II asserted his independence about 1310 when a war of succession broke out in Pandya and Pandya was invaded by a Muslim Army.

From the confusion that followed in the Deccan and South India there arose two kingdoms, that of the Muslim Bahamanis in the north and the Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagar in the south. The Bahamanis kept the Vijayanagara kings busy. Hence the Vijayanagara rulers interfered very little with Ceylon. However two of them, first Harihara II (1377-1404) and then Deva Raya II (1426-1446) invaded the Tamil Kingdom in the north and exacted tribute from it. It was the death of Deva Raya II and the Muslim invasions that followed that enabled Parakramabahu VI to restore Sinhalese rule in the north.

After the Portuguese came to the East and gained gradual control of the seas, Ceylon had little to do with South Indian rulers. However, when there were rivals to the throne of Kotte and Jaffna, and one party obtained the support of the Portuguese, the other party tried to obtain help from India. Vijayabahu (1518-1521) received help from the Zamorin of Calicut and Sangkily of Jaffna was aided at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the Raja of Tanjore.

Once the Portuguese gained control of the coastal provinces, Ceylon's political connections with Indian rulers ceased, but not with India. The Portuguese in Ceylon were controlled by the Viceroy of Goa and the Captain-General of Ceylon ruled directly under him. Even when the Dutch replaced the Portuguese this connection with India continued for the Dutch governors of Ceylon controlled the southernmost part in India. When the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon were captured by the British, from 1796 to 1798 they were ruled by the Madras Government, and from 1798 to 1801 they were treated as a Presidency of India.

These in the main were the political relations Ceylon had with India, and the most important results were the Chola and the Pandya occupations of Ceylon and the break-up of the ancient Dry Zone civilization of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa to which the Pandya invasions made a considerable contribution.

## 3

## THE CIVILIZATION OF CEYLON AND INFLUENCE OF INDIAN CULTURE

THE culture of a people is reflected in their religion, literature, music, dancing, architecture, sculpture and painting. In Ceylon till recent times religion was the fountain-head of her culture. Therefore this chapter will be limited mainly to religious influences, and the other aspects of culture will be dealt with only incidentally. This does not mean that cultural history can be studied in isolation any more than political history. Though it is an expression of mind and spirit, it cannot be separated from life as a whole. It has to be studied in relation to the political and economic systems and the social institutions which form the basis of cultural life.

The economic, political and social background of Ceylon was practically the same as that of India, and the modifications, which it went through till the end of the fifteenth century and to a limited extent after that, were mainly due to Indian influences. In other words, till the end of the fifteenth century Ceylon was a unit of the civilization of India. This does not mean that the culture of Ceylon was uniform with that of India. In India itself owing to its vast size the culture of the people varied from area to area due to differences in the physical background, racial types, economic and social systems and religion. This difference applied to Ceylon as well.

It has been pointed out already that though Ceylon was an island it is geographically a projection of the Deccan with two zones corresponding to the Malabar and the Coromandel regions. The early settlers too corresponded to the races prevalent in India, and definitely came from there. The Vaddas are a mixture of the Negritos and the proto-australoids, two of the first races that came to India. Their counterparts are still to be found among the hill tribes of Orissa. After the Vaddas, there came from North India the Aryans, so called because they spoke an Aryan tongue. Some think they were Aryan by blood, but the evidence available suggests an opposite view. The tribes referred to in the *Mahavamsa*

appear to be totemistic, and therefore could not be Aryan in origin. As the Aryans spread throughout India, their language was adopted and modified by non-Aryan peoples. Such modifications are revealed by all the Aryan dialects of ancient India; and they were greatest in the Sinhalese language. Another people that came to Ceylon from India were those who spoke the Dravidian tongue. They began to come from South India from very early times, but their numbers became considerable only after the tenth century A.D.

The chief occupation of the early settlers was mainly rice-cultivation. This form of economic activity was carried on in many parts of India. Rice, as is well known, requires a considerable amount of water for its cultivation. In the Dry Zone water was obtained either by collecting it in reservoirs or by diverting it from rivers into channels. These methods of irrigation were in vogue in India prior to the Christian Era. Rice-cultivation also led to the establishment of villages by the side of tanks, rivers and canals. Thus as in India, the village became the economic, social and finally the administrative unit.

Society also developed on lines similar to those of India. At the apex was the royal family; then came the chiefs, priests and monks, followed by the cultivators and the craftsmen at the base.

In India the original four divisions of society—warriors, priests, traders and craftsmen and cultivators, gradually divided themselves into castes and sub-castes. In Ceylon, in earliest times there were the castes of Brahmins and Chandalas, and as time passed, with the establishment of the joint family as the unit of society and the spread of Hindu ideas of karma and rebirth, the caste system gradually came to be adopted by the rest of society as well.

In matters of religion, the early Aryans of Ceylon followed North India. Royalty and probably the upper classes followed Brahmanism and the worship of Vedic gods, as well as the forms of Hinduism which emerged around the sixth century B. C. such as the worship of Shiva and of Vishnu. All other classes seem to have worshipped local gods and yakshas, some of whom were worshipped in India as well. Vedic culture appears to have influenced the upper classes, as the earliest kings had Brahmins as priests, teachers and physicians.

In matters of government and administration too the Indian system was followed in Ceylon. In pre-Christian times, Ceylon developed a monarchical form of government. The administration was in the hands of a hierarchy of officials ranging from the royal princes to village headmen. The form of succession in the royal family from brother to brother, instead of from father to son, was also not altogether unknown in India. The aims, methods and scope of government, the administrative organization, the nature and methods of taxation, the royal court, the recruitment and organization of the army, all showed that Ceylon generally followed Indian practice.

The ancient kings both of India and Ceylon, though they did issue a few decrees and regulations, were on the whole not law-makers or reformers of society. They only protected society and as a rule followed custom. Custom in Ceylon till the sixteenth century was not very different from that of India, as the social background in both was similar.

On the whole, Ceylon developed a background similar to that of India, and this enabled her to absorb fresh cultural influences that came from there. These came as a result of developments that took place in India mainly in the religious sphere. Hinduism, the chief religion of India covered all aspects of social life. Literature, music, dancing, architecture and sculpture were its handmaids.

In dealing with cultural history one cannot follow exactly the method we pursued in studying political history. Till the ninth century Ceylon played no part in Indian politics, but from that century till the end of the twelfth, Ceylon entered into the orbit of South Indian politics and influenced to some extent developments in South India and the Deccan. But the cultural relations on the whole were one-sided and there was only a one-way movement in the direction of Ceylon. It is true that Ceylon developed a commentary literature on the Pali Canon in Sinhalese which was translated into Pali for the use of Buddhist monks in the sub-continent. There is also evidence of missionary work in India by the Theravada monks of Ceylon. An inscription at Nagarjunikonda shows that Ceylon monks spread their faith in North India and the Deccan. But we have no evidence to show how far that literature or the activities of the Ceylon monks influenced



Buddhism in India. Therefore in order to understand cultural developments in Ceylon, we have to go beyond South India and the Deccan and trace in outline the main Indian religious developments up to the end of the fifteenth century.

The first great event in the cultural history of Ceylon after the coming of the Aryan speaking peoples is the introduction of Theravada Buddhism in the third century B. C. It brought to Ceylon a new form of Indian religion and a new civilization which has continued to be the most important factor in our social life. Western technology and the scientific attitude have not as yet entered into serious competition with religion in the cultural sphere.

Theravada Buddhism in a century or two penetrated into every inhabited part of the Island and became closely interwoven with the culture of the Sinhalese. It did not eliminate the old religious cults and was influenced in turn by religious movements from India and the West; but in spite of the vicissitudes it went through after the thirteenth century nothing hindered it from being the chief influence in the life and thought of the Sinhalese people. It is not without reason that R. S. Copleston, once Bishop of Colombo and later the Metropolitan of India, wrote in the nineteenth century. "All their stories of home and childhood, all their national literature, all that was grand to them in history and science, the conquests of their kings, the great buildings of their country, all were engaged in the interests of Buddhism."

In order to understand all this influence on our cultural life we must have a correct idea of Theravada Buddhism, and to do so we have to know something of its origin and development. A philosopher, or one interested in religion, will probably concentrate on philosophical ideas, or religious beliefs, but as this is a historical work, they will be dealt with in as little as possible. Instead I shall concentrate on the material and social factors that influenced the rise and growth of this religion, the signs of a revival of which we see so clearly today.

Reference has already been made to the religious system in India as described in the Vedas. The early Aryans worshipped objects of nature such as the sky, the sun, rain, thunder, and fire, and offered sacrifices to them. The Aryans

who came to Ceylon worshipped these gods, as there is evidence that Varuna, the sky-god and Parjanya, the rain-god were known in Ceylon in early times. As time passed these sacrifices were elaborated in India, and it was believed that by the correct performance of sacrifices, priests could compel the gods to do their bidding.

This Vedic religion began to lose credit around the seventh or the sixth century B. C. Brahmins as well as members of the Indian nobility began to doubt the efficacy of the performance of such sacrifices and questioned the belief in the need for such gods. They refused to accept the Vedas as an infallible source of spiritual truth and the rituals prescribed therein as the sole means of salvation.

It is not clear what causes led to these developments. It is not likely that they were merely the results of changes taking place within the Aryan system itself. It is more likely that by the time the Aryans had spread to the central parts of North India they had begun to be influenced by non-Aryans in their beliefs and ways of life. As a result, they either borrowed new ideas and cults or evolved new beliefs and practices. Whatever the causes were, there emerged at this time a belief in rebirth and *karma*, that men and women were born over and over again in this universe either as human or as other living beings, and that the position of an individual in each birth depended on the karma or the actions of his previous lives. These beliefs made many persons dissatisfied with the mere performance of rites which assured them only of a birth in a higher state of life. They began to look upon life with its endless cycles of births and deaths as unsatisfactory, and considered that the object of religious activity should be to obtain a release from life itself.

As a result there arose a number of new religions, the objects of which were to gain complete release or salvation in this life itself. Some were monotheistic, and advocated the way of *bhakti* or devotion to a personal god. Others were atheistic, denying the necessity of the Vedic gods and objecting to the pre-eminence given to Brahmins in spiritual matters. Of these, four sects played an important part in later times viz. the Vaishnavites and the Shaivites, the worshippers of Vishnu and Shiva and the Jains and the Buddhists who followed the great teachers Mahavira and Gautama. The first two emphasized *bhakti*, an intense love and devotion on the part of

the worshipper to his beloved god, and *prasada*, or grace which brought salvation to the devotee. Though both Shaivism and Vaishnavism, which repudiated the Vedic religion, were founded by persons outside the Brahmin fold and were developed in Western India away from the home of the Vedic religion, the Brahmins looked upon them with favour. They finally espoused them as reformed religions and dealt with them in the Epics, the later Upanishads and the Puranas.

Buddhism and Jainism arose in Eastern India where the pre-Aryan culture had not been fully submerged. The people in these regions differed to some extent from those of the central region of North India in race, language, and culture, and this probably explains why Gautama and Mahavira preached doctrines which deviated most from the path of Brahmanism. Both teachers kept within the Aryan system, but unlike the early Aryans, they accepted the ascetic view that the world is full of misery and sought deliverance from the cycle of birth and death. They repudiated the Vedic religion and the necessity for sacrifices and prayers to gods, and advocated as a means of salvation a vigorous system of discipline based on a code of moral and spiritual behaviour. Thus, they not only discouraged the worship of the Vedic gods, but also objected to the pretensions of the Brahmins. Hence Buddhism and Jainism may be looked upon as a revolt against the Brahmanical religion, or as a development and modification of it with its emphasis on asceticism, renunciation of life in this world, self denial and *ahimsa*. The Brahmins naturally did not view their doctrines with favour; as they did the doctrines of Shaivism and Vaishnavism and looked upon them as heterodox teachings.

Gautama and Mahavira both realized that a life of austerity and discipline was possible only for the homeless ascetic and exhorted their followers to join an order of monks. In this way they could cut themselves away from the hindrances of worldly ties and pleasures and lead a life of celibacy and poverty depending for their food and clothing on the alms of laymen. In doing so they did not ignore those who were unwilling to give up the life of a householder. The life of a householder was looked upon as a preparatory stage and a different form of moral and spiritual life was prescribed for him.

The Buddha enjoined the laity to take refuge in him, the Dhamma and the Sangha; and urged them to follow five of the ten precepts. They in turn supplied the needs of the Sangha and by these means hoped to secure happiness in this life and to be born in a higher state of existence in the next. But it is important to remember that the Buddha did not establish any organisation for the laity. Nor did he make a serious attempt to wean them away from the worship of gods or other religious beliefs and practices of the proto-Hinduism of the time. Thus, organized Buddhism remained essentially a monastic institution of which the laity formed no integral part. The layman held on to certain Hindu practices accepting Buddhism as the best means of salvation or of attaining a higher state of life in the next birth.

So it is, that the history of Buddhism from the death of the Buddha is, in the main, the history of the Sangha. As Buddhism spread, the Sangha divided itself into various schools or sects. The chief reasons for these divisions do not seem to have been differences with regard to ideas about the Buddha or his doctrines or any forms of ritual, but differences with regard to the rules of discipline. The Sangha were bound by the rules of the *Vinaya* and at the fortnightly meeting they had to confess their errors if they had not conformed to any of them. If there was disagreement with regard to rules, the monks could not live in harmony within a vihare, or hold the fortnightly *uposatha* ceremony, and, as it was accepted that the rules should not be revised, those who disagreed, if they did not leave of their own accord, had to be expelled. The result was that such disagreements led to the rise of rival sects who became more inclined to accept new ideas and practices and deviate from the original doctrines. This was inevitable as the Buddha did not nominate a successor. In the absence of a single head or even a supreme body of men, there was no possibility of settling rival claims or coordinating the diverse views held by them.

The first great division in the Sangha is said to have taken place a century after Buddha's death, due to disagreements between the monks of the east and those of the west. The result was that the Sangha divided into two sections, the Mahasanghikas or the Acariyavada in the east and the Theravada in the west. The chief centres of the Theravada sect at this time were Kosambi near modern Allahabad and Ujjeni

in the district of Avanti. The Mahasanghikas later divided themselves into seven sects and the Theravada into eleven. Thus the history of Buddhism became the history of a number of monastic sects and each of the important ones compiled its own canon and claimed that it contained the original teachings of Buddhism.

The Theravada Canon or the *Tipitaka* consisted of the *Vinaya* which dealt with the rules of discipline for the monks, the *Sutta*, the discourses of the Buddha and of his disciples and the *Abhidhamma* which dealt with the philosophy of Buddhism. The *Tipitaka* is also called the Pali Canon. It was composed in an Aryan dialect or Prakrit. The Buddha preached to the people in their own dialects and enjoined upon his disciples that his teaching should be studied by the people in their own dialects. Buddhism at first spread in the eastern part of North India. From there it seems to have made its way westwards along the well-known routes to Kashmir in the north-west and Avanti in the south-west. Pali, though it is called Magadhi in Ceylon, is said to be closer to the language of Avanti than to any dialect of the east.

Another point to be remembered is that the Buddhists established monasteries wherever they went. These monasteries were originally intended to give accommodation to the monks for purposes of study and meditation. As time passed, many of them developed into centres of learning which produced men well grounded in religion and philosophy for propagating Buddhism and to which students and teachers flocked from various parts of the country.

Buddhism spread quickly with the establishment of the Maurya Empire and the peaceful conditions that prevailed thereafter. It spread even quicker when Asoka became a lay disciple of the Buddha. About this time, if not earlier, Buddhism spread into the Deccan by the two well-known routes, along the east coast, and through Mandhata on the River Naramada and Paithan on the River Godavari. The Mahasanghikas who took the first route settled in the Andhra country, while the Theravadins and those who broke away from them, seem to have gone from the district of Avanti over the Deccan into South India.

When Theravada Buddhists came to Ceylon and carried on their missionary work, the Sangha, being a monastic

organization, did not come into conflict with Vedic Brahmanism, the worship of Shiva, or other Hindu gods or the worship of yakshas or local gods. Their chief object was to make people give up the worldly life and join the Sangha. They preached to the laity too, but they did not try to wean them away from the worship of local gods or cults, though at times they seem to have tried to give a new significance to old practices. One of their main contributions was no doubt the establishment of monasteries, which as centres of learning and culture, influenced considerably the life and thought of the people in a way neither the few Brahmins nor those who preached the local cults ever did.

The next great event in the cultural history of Ceylon is the coming of Mahayana Buddhism. Dr. Paranavitana has described its growth in Ceylon and shown to what extent it influenced the life and thought of the people. In Ceylon, however, it never replaced Theravada Buddhism. The chief difference in Mahayanism is that, apart from differences in doctrine, it incorporated the conception of a number of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, encouraged the worship of certain gods and goddesses, and recommended the use of mantras for attaining emancipation from life. It had other features also, but these were up to a point developments that took place in Theravada Buddhism too.

The Buddha in his lifetime was treated with great reverence not only as a teacher of the way of release from eternal misery but as one who lived the highest form of life and who attained great spiritual powers. His followers appear to have developed a loving faith in him which took the place of devotion shown to a particular god like Shiva and Vishnu. As time passed they developed certain practices to show their reverence for him like paying homage to bo-trees, under one of which they believed he attained enlightenment, and to dagobas, which were believed to contain his relics. They made pilgrimages to the four places where he was born, gained enlightenment, first promulgated the Dhamma, and attained *nirvana*. The Pali commentaries, as Dr. Adikaram points out, went even further and endowed him with supernatural characteristics. In one place for instance, he is referred to as not being subject to decay like other human beings.

These developments probably took place as a result of attempts on the part of the monks to make Buddhism popular

and attractive to the laity. The same reason probably led to a new emphasis in Buddhism. In the first four Nikayas of the Pali Canon the chief emphasis is on the attainment of the state of an *arahat* by the pursuit of self-culture and self-control. But, later on, emphasis began to be laid, as in the *Nidana Katha* on the career of the Buddha as one who, as a bodhisattva or one destined to be a Buddha, put off the attainment of *nirvana* and followed an arduous career performing certain meritorious acts or *paramita* to prepare himself for Buddhahood in order to save others. The Sarvastivadians, one of the sects that sprang from the Theravada, went further and accepted the view that a few beings might as bodhisattvas acquire the ten virtues, or *paramita* and aim at becoming Buddhas. The Mahasanghikas who spread to the Andhra country and deified the Buddha went even further and preached that every being should become a bodhisattva by acquiring these virtues and aspire to be Buddhas. Thus they emphasised not so much the effacement of self but at being of service to others. About the same time the worship of Buddha images came into vogue and in most parts of India monasteries came to be built with image-houses. These developments led to the rise of Mahayanism in the Andhra country around the first century B. C. and it spread first to North-Eastern India and then all over North India in the first and second century A. D. Mahayana was so called because the Mahayanists followed the career of becoming a Buddha. In contrast, the Theravadins were called Hinayanists, as they followed the lower career of becoming an *arahat*. The Hinayanists contended that Mahayanism was not expounded by the Buddha and that it was not possible for every being to attain the ideal of Buddhahood.

The Mahayanists not only worshipped the Buddha as a god, but also extolled the advantages of worshipping bodhisattvas and winning their favour. The Buddhist layman, who followed the moral precepts, now found in the bodhisattvas a substitute for his earlier objects of devotion such as the yakshas and the gods if he cared to adopt them. At times he even attached more importance to bodhisattvas than to the Buddha, as the former, he believed, could confer boons on him and save him from all sorts of misfortunes.

There are five points to be noted about Mahayanism. The Mahayana monks did not evolve any new rules of discipline

to replace the old ones but followed those of the Hinayana sects. Thus, very often, they lived in the same monasteries as the Hinayanists and influenced them. They did not insist on a person becoming a monk or a nun to benefit by Mahayanism. Its portals were opened equally to the laity and afforded them greater scope for worship and devotion. They adopted Sanskrit as the vehicle of expression thus making the culture embodied in Sanskrit works available to their followers. Mahayanism soon became the most important form of Buddhism in India, if not the most important form of religion. It imitated the practices of the new Hinduism, the worship of Shiva, Vishnu and the other gods, thereby gradually becoming closer and closer to Hinduism.

The next important event in the cultural history of Ceylon is the growth of Hinduism. Reference has already been made to the Brahmanical religion of the early Aryans. With the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, and Shaivism and Vaishnavism the sacrificial forms of worship of the Vedic gods declined. The Brahmins, however, absorbed Shaivism and Vaishnavism and extolled these religions in the new literature, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and the *Purana*, which overshadowed the *Veda* and the *Brahmana*. These semi-historical works also dealt with other gods who were included in the Hindu pantheon such as Ganesha, Skanda and Murugan as well as yakshas and tree deities, but they all gave the supreme places to Shiva and Vishnu.

The evolution of the worship of Vishnu can be traced in this literature. The first step was the identification of Vasudeva-Krishna with the Vedic deity Vishnu. Next he is identified with Narayana. Vaishnavism first flourished in Mathura and in the north-west. From there it spread to Western India, Northern Deccan and South India. Images of Vishnu were fashioned in the first century A. D. Like Buddhism and Jainism it also adopted *ahimsa* as one of its tenets. Shaivism is probably pre-Vedic in origin. From very early times Shiva was represented by images of phallic symbols. Like Vaishnavism it spread all over India.

One of the causes that helped the spread of Buddhism was that in North India and the upper part of Deccan Prakrit was the medium of expression till about the fourth century A. D., not only among the people but in the courts of most

rulers. Asoka and many other kings from the third century B. C. up to the end of the third century A. D. used Prakrit in their inscriptions. Sanskrit at first was mainly the language of the learned in the central parts of North India. But just as Aryan forms of speech replaced many earlier languages in India, so Sanskrit gradually replaced Prakrit as the language not only of the learned but of the royal courts and the upper classes. It was studied by scholars even in South India where Dravidian tongues were spoken. The spread of Sanskrit naturally helped the new Hinduism. Brahmin literature was in some form of Sanskrit. The *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranayakas* and the *Upanishads* were composed in Sanskrit. This language was also systematized and kept pure by works on grammar as far back as the fourth century B. C.; and from early times it also became the language of expression for subjects such as law and custom, music, dancing, politics and administration, grammar, metrics and phonetics. Thus it is understandable why by the fourth century A.D. Sanskrit replaced Prakrit as the language of the upper classes, and even Buddhist writers such as Asvaghosa, Aryasura and Nagarjuna wrote their works in Sanskrit.

Just as Buddhism received an impetus with the establishment of the Maurya Empire, so Hinduism began to spread more quickly with the establishment of the Gupta Empire in the fourth century A.D. and the peaceful conditions resulting from it throughout the greater part of India. The Gupta Empire itself broke down in the sixth century A.D., but Gupta civilization continued to flourish and influence all India for another two centuries. In fact India reached the peak of its civilization during this period. Poetry, prose and drama reached their highest level and the six systems of Indian philosophy were given their final form. Advances were made in lexicography, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, music, dancing, architecture, sculpture and painting. This was the age of Kalidasa, and it was at this time that the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* assumed their final form and the *Puranas* came to be written. The sculptures of Saranath and the paintings of Ajanta, too, belong to this age.

During this time Shaivism and Vaishnavism made rapid progress at the expense of Buddhism and in many parts replaced it altogether. In South India, the Vaishnava saints

called Alvars and the Shaiva saints called Nayanmars went about the country spreading Vaishnavism and Shaivism which gradually replaced Jainism and Buddhism.

From the ninth century it was the Hinduism and Sanskrit culture of South India that influenced Ceylon most. North Indian influence practically ceased with the invasions of the Muslims. Even after the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire these cultural influences from South India filtered into Ceylon from the Kingdom of Madura and Tanjore.

With the British occupation of India, the influence of Hinduism and Sanskrit receded to the background. But the revival of Hinduism in India influenced Hinduism in north, Ceylon and Buddhism in the south. The cultural revival which influenced the movement for independence in India also affected Ceylon in the spheres of art, music and drama. Finally as a result of the cultural revival and the political change in 1956, Ceylon has begun to look to India once more as it did before the sixteenth century.

## THE DIFFERENCES IN THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA AND CEYLON

IT has been pointed out earlier that two geographical factors influenced the history of Ceylon: the proximity to India and Ceylon's central position on the highway of sea traffic between the West and the East. This position on the highway of sea traffic did not affect the course of Ceylon history very much up to the end of the fifteenth century. The proximity to India on the other hand was the main factor in the history of Ceylon up to that time.

Till the end of the eighth century Ceylon was influenced mainly by the Maurya, Satavahana, Gupta and Pallava civilizations. From this time both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism were on the decline even in South India, and Ceylon gained little from that region in the cultural sphere as the South Indian languages were Dravidian and the religions were mainly Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

From the ninth century onwards the culture of South India did affect Ceylon to some extent as South India had already adopted Sanskrit as the language of learning and South Indian influences could penetrate into Ceylon through this medium. Further, South Indians came to Ceylon from about the tenth century in larger numbers than before and in the thirteenth century established a kingdom of their own in the north. As a result South Indian religion and culture came into direct contact with Sinhalese civilization and exercised an influence on Buddhism, on the social life of the people, and on architecture and sculpture. Thus, as the influence of North India over Ceylon weakened, South Indian influence gradually increased and Ceylon continued to be a unit of the Hindu civilization of India.

It is easy to understand why Ceylon ceased to be a unit of the civilization of India from the beginning of the sixteenth century. As stated already, Theravada as well as Mahayana Buddhism had gradually declined in India owing to the inroads of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, and Ceylon Buddhists had begun to turn away from India to Burma where Theravada

Buddhism flourished. When North India and the Deccan fell into the hands of the Muslims, these regions ceased to exercise any influence over this island, and Ceylon could no longer look to them for the development of her cultural life. We have already noted that from the ninth century onwards Ceylon was influenced culturally by South India. These influences were cut off to a great extent by the Portuguese, who controlled the Indian seas as well as the highway of sea traffic from the West to the East from the beginning of the sixteenth century until their place was taken by other European powers. During the three centuries that followed, Ceylon was influenced more by the West than by India and from the nineteenth century, Western influence became supreme, as India too during this time came more and more under direct British influence.

In what ways then did Ceylon differ from India up to the end of the fifteenth century? Why did Ceylon develop a variety of life and culture of its own? Was it due to geographical reasons-- the fact that it is an island and, unlike other units of Indian civilizations, not connected by land? Was it due to the fact that Ceylon was at the southernmost end, and as a result all movements that arose in North India lost their force by the time they came as far as Ceylon? Or was it due to the fact that though Sinhalese was an Aryan dialect and Theravada Buddhism was a North Indian religion, North Indian developments had to penetrate through a belt of Dravidian life and culture before they reached Ceylon?

These factors undoubtedly influenced the civilization of Ceylon. Being an island, Ceylon was not affected by the great upheavals that took place in India and was able to maintain a continuity of civilization more effectively than any other part of the sub-continent. Owing to the intervening Dravidian region the civilization of Ceylon gradually began to differ more and more from that of North India. But these were not the main causes that distinguished the civilization of Ceylon from that of India.

The difference between Ceylon and India arose mainly from differences in the development of the two areas. The civilization of Ceylon, or that of the Sinhalese, derived its characteristic features from two factors: the Aryan settlement and Theravada Buddhism. It is true that the original

racial type has been modified to a considerable extent by immigrants from South India and Theravada Buddhism has undergone changes due to the influence of Mahayanism and Hinduism. But these changes have not been so radical as in India, to completely transform the early racial type or to eliminate the main features of Theravada Buddhism. The Sinhalese language has continued up to the present day and has replaced English as the language of government. Theravada Buddhism which, unlike in India, has survived the pressure of other religions, is attempting to adapt itself to the new conditions, and play a prominent part in the life of the people as it did before.

Why did this happen? When the Aryan-speaking people came to this island there was no civilized society to contend against such as the British found when they came to Ceylon. Thus their language and way of life took root in this country without any opposition.

Similarly when Theravada Buddhism was introduced, it did not have to contend with any advanced religion. There were in existence religions like Brahmanism and Jainism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism as well as local cults. Brahmanism as a religion was practised by a few and it was not a missionary religion like Buddhism. The worship of Shiva and Vishnu was also followed only by a few. Jainism demanded extreme forms of asceticism and thus could not become a popular religion. In any case all these religions do not seem to have exercised much influence on the religious and intellectual life of the people. Theravada Buddhism on the other hand provided not only a moderate form of asceticism for those who sought release from a life of birth and rebirth but also a limited form for the layman as a preparatory process. Further, it did not interfere with the local cults which assisted the people to secure their wants in this life. Above all, through the Pali Canon and its monastic institutions, it influenced the ideas of the people and guided them in their intellectual and moral life. In other words, the contribution which Theravada Buddhism made was complementary and filled a vacuum which existed in the life of the Sinhalese people. It enriched their life with new ideas, beliefs and religious practices. Its language, Pali, in which the new teaching was embodied, along with the art of writing which

the monks introduced, assisted the growth of the Sinhalese language. The monks developed a commentarial literature in Sinhalese for the understanding of the Pali Canon and it was written down before three centuries elapsed. The Sinhalese language, enriched in this way with words derived from Pali, became a better vehicle for the expression of moral and religious ideas.

Moreover, Theravada Buddhism in Ceylon did not have to contend at any time, as in India, against powerful religions like Shaivism and Vaishnavism or a more expressive language like Sanskrit. Mahayanism to some extent was a development of Buddhism on the lines of Hinduism to withstand the pressure of the latter and in the process it allowed itself to be absorbed by Hinduism. In Ceylon there was no such struggle against Shaivism and Vaishnavism and the need for such a development within Theravada Buddhism did not arise.

Nevertheless Mahayanism did come to Ceylon. Though some of its doctrines differed from Theravada Buddhism, Mahayanist monks, who followed almost the same rules of discipline as the monks of the Theravada sect in Ceylon, were able to live in the same vihares and influence the monks of the Theravada sects. But Mahayana Buddhism did not replace Theravada Buddhism. It only added something to it, and the only thing it did replace sometimes was the worship of local gods, for whom bodhisattvas were substituted.

In the greater part of India, Buddhists also adopted the Sanskrit language for the expression of their religious ideas and beliefs. This was necessary because by the fourth century Sanskrit had become the language of the learned in India. But the learned men in Ceylon were interested in Theravada Buddhism, the Canon of which was in Pali, and few cared to study Sanskrit. The study of Pali received a new impetus in the fourth century A. D. Theravada Buddhism still flourished at this time in South India and in many parts of the Deccan as well as in pockets in North India. Buddhaghosa came to Ceylon and began to translate the Sinhalese commentaries into Pali for the benefit of those in India. This led to a revival of the study of Pali in Ceylon and it became thereafter the language used by the learned monks. Hence, Sanskrit, though it was studied by many in Ceylon later, did not replace Pali. Instead, Pali itself was studied

as a language and grammatical works and glossaries were produced on the lines of Sanskrit works to make it a more suitable vehicle of expression.

Nevertheless, it is true that the increasing use of Pali from the fourth century A. D. retarded to some extent the development of the Sinhalese language just as English retarded its development during the last century. But in any case Pali was responsible for the continuance of Theravada Buddhism and the development of the civilization of Ceylon on lines different from that of India.

But what distinguished Ceylon even more from India was the use of the Sinhalese language for literature from about the thirteenth century. Sinhalese which had been enriched by Pali as well as by Sanskrit came to be used more freely for religious purposes. Further, the Sinhalese language was analysed in the way Pali had been examined earlier and was made a more suitable means of expression and thought. Thus, when Sinhala became the language of expression of the learned, Ceylon began to differ in language too from the rest of India.

How far did Hinduism affect life in Ceylon? We have already noted how Mahayanism went beyond the bounds of Theravada Buddhism, embodying the new developments in Theravada Buddhism and Acariyavada Buddhism in India, and going still further by treating Buddha as a god and advocating the worship of bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva images such as that at Valigama, and devales built for the worship of Natha, the use of *mantra*, the ritual connected with the Tooth Relic, and the spread of the study of Sanskrit show how it influenced Buddhism in Ceylon. Natha is no other than Avalokitesvara or Lokeshvara Natha, the chief of the bodhisattvas whom the Mahayanists looked upon as the embodiment of compassion.

The gulf between Mahayanism and Hinduism is not so great, but if we are to trace the developments in Hinduism we shall have to go back to the period prior to the introduction of Buddhism. We have already noted that the early Aryan settlers probably introduced the worship of Brahmin gods such as Varuna and Parjanya. Brahmins accompanied them and worked as *purohitas*, teachers and physicians in

the royal court. The evidence available seems to suggest that Sinhalese kings, in spite of their patronage of Buddhism, always employed a *purohita* to perform sacrifices on their behalf. The early Aryans also seem to have worshipped Shiva and Rama, who later came to be identified with Vishnu. The worship of these gods, though limited to a small section of the people, continued even after the introduction of Buddhism.

In the very early days there appear to have been residences of Brahmin priests in Anuradhapura but there is hardly any evidence to show that they had anything like Buddhist monastic establishments where they carried on any studies or intellectual activities. There were villages where Brahmins resided and there are references to *chaturveda mangalam* and *agrahara* but they do not seem to have been anything more than residences of temple priests.

Other gods too were worshipped. One was Upulvan for whom a shrine was built at Dondra in the seventh century A. D. Dr. Paranavitana identifies him with Varuna. In later times he was identified with Vishnu. Other Hindu gods such as Ganesha and Kuvera too seem to have been worshipped from very early times. It is not clear when the worship of Murugan or Skanda was introduced. The evidence available is late. The worship of the god Saman on the other hand was very early. He has been identified with Yama.

Shaivism and Vaishnavism began to exercise a definite influence in Ceylon only as a result of their revival in South India in the seventh century. It was mainly Shaivism which influenced Ceylon at first, and temples for the worship of Shiva were set up at Mantai and Trincomalee, probably by Tamil settlers. Hinduism received definite encouragement during the Chola occupation and both Shiva and Vishnu temples were built. But the Shiva devale No. 2 of the Chola style in Polonnaruwa was built away from the Buddhist shrines. On the other hand the Shiva devale No. 1 of the Pandyan style was built in the thirteenth century in the same city in the Dalada Maluva among the Buddhist shrines. From the ninth century there are also references to the support of Brahmins by Sinhalese kings. After the Chola occupation ceased, Sinhalese kings are said to have built, repaired, and even endowed Hindu temples.



In the fourteenth century there is clear evidence of some sort of alliance between Buddhism and Hinduism. Some of the Buddhist monks themselves, in spite of the opposition of certain others, sought the aid of gods for favours in this life. In some Sinhalese poems the poets after paying their homage to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha invoke the Hindu gods for their blessings. Some poets wrote *sandesa* poems in which they definitely asked for some favour from a god. In architecture we see the same development. Not only were devalas built by kings and officials, but at times they were attached to vihares themselves. In the Lanka-tilaka Vihare the inner shrine is the Buddhist Vihare and the surrounding corridor is the temple of the gods. The images of the gods there include Shiva and Vishnu in addition to the tutelary deities Upulvan, Saman, Vibhishana and Skanda. Alagakkonara when he fortified Kotte built temples to the same tutelary deities.

This alliance did not lead to Hinduism replacing Theravada Buddhism in any way. Hindu gods merely replaced the local gods and the bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva Natha appears to have been identified by some with Shiva and the god Saman with Lakshman, the brother of Rama and Upulvan with Vishnu. The gods were invoked for favours in this life but Theravada Buddhism continued to be followed for the attainment of *nirvana* or a better state in the next life.

Thus, Ceylon's development differed culturally from that of India and its main features were the development of the Sinhalese language and of Theravada Buddhism.

## WAS PORTUGUESE RULE A TURNING POINT IN CEYLON HISTORY?

**I**N this chapter I propose to deal with the historical importance of Portuguese rule in Ceylon. To estimate it we have to examine the changes brought about by the Portuguese in Ceylon. To gauge the importance of these changes we have to examine the conditions prevailing in this Island at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese and see how far the Portuguese modified them. In other words, we have to see how far the occupation of the Maritime Provinces by them was a turning-point in Ceylon history.

It is quite a common practice to refer to the period of Ceylon history from 1505 to 1658 as the Portuguese Period, and to deal with it at least to some extent from the Portuguese point of view. In other words, the Portuguese Period is reckoned as beginning with the arrival of the Portuguese in Ceylon in 1505 when Vira Parakramabahu agreed to become a vassal of the King of Portugal and to pay him tribute, and ending with their expulsion from Ceylon by the Dutch.

This period has been divided into three sections: (a) From 1505 to 1551, (b) from 1551 to 1597, (c) from 1597 to 1658. In the first of these periods the Portuguese were more or less allies of the Kotte kings. In the next period the Kingdom of Kotte became a Portuguese protectorate. In the last period the Portuguese ruled directly over the Kingdom of Kotte which by this time included the Kingdom of Sitavaka. The developments in the Kingdom of Jaffna were not very dissimilar. In 1542 the King of Jaffna became a vassal of the Portuguese and the latter thereafter assisted some of the kings to maintain themselves in power. In 1591 by the Nallur Convention the Jaffna Kingdom became a Portuguese protectorate, and from 1620 it became a Portuguese possession till the Dutch conquered this territory in 1658. Thus, though the so-called Portuguese Period extends over a century and a half, the Portuguese ruled directly over the Kingdom of Kotte only for about sixty years and over the Kingdom of Jaffna for only thirty-seven years. Even during the period

they ruled directly over the Kingdom of Kotte, they could not effect any changes as they were busy for the most part fighting either the Kandyans or the Dutch.

Further, in the period from 1505-1597 the Portuguese could not exercise even an indirect influence over a great part of the Kingdom of Kotte. From 1509 to 1518 Vijayabahu who ruled over the southern section of the Kingdom was opposed to them. For a considerable time after 1518 Mayadunne and Rajasinha, who were hostile to the Portuguese, ruled over the greater part of the original Kingdom of Kotte. During this whole period the Portuguese exercised little influence over the Kingdom of Kandy which consisted not only of the highlands but also of the area on the east up to the coast.

This is not all. When the Portuguese ruled directly over the Kingdoms of Kotte and Jaffna, they did not change to any considerable extent the forms of government they found in these areas. They did not rule these territories according to the laws of Portugal. In 1597 on the death of Dharmapala, Jeronimo de Azavedo agreed at the Convention of Malvana to rule the Kingdom of Kotte according to the customs of the Sinhalese. Similarly in the Kingdom of Jaffna the Tamil customs were followed. It is true that the Portuguese compiled *tombos* or land-registers but these too were based on the *lekam-mitis* of the Sinhalese kings. There is no doubt the Portuguese officials often disregarded Sinhalese and Tamil customs, but on the whole Portuguese rule meant more a change of rulers than a change in the form of government.

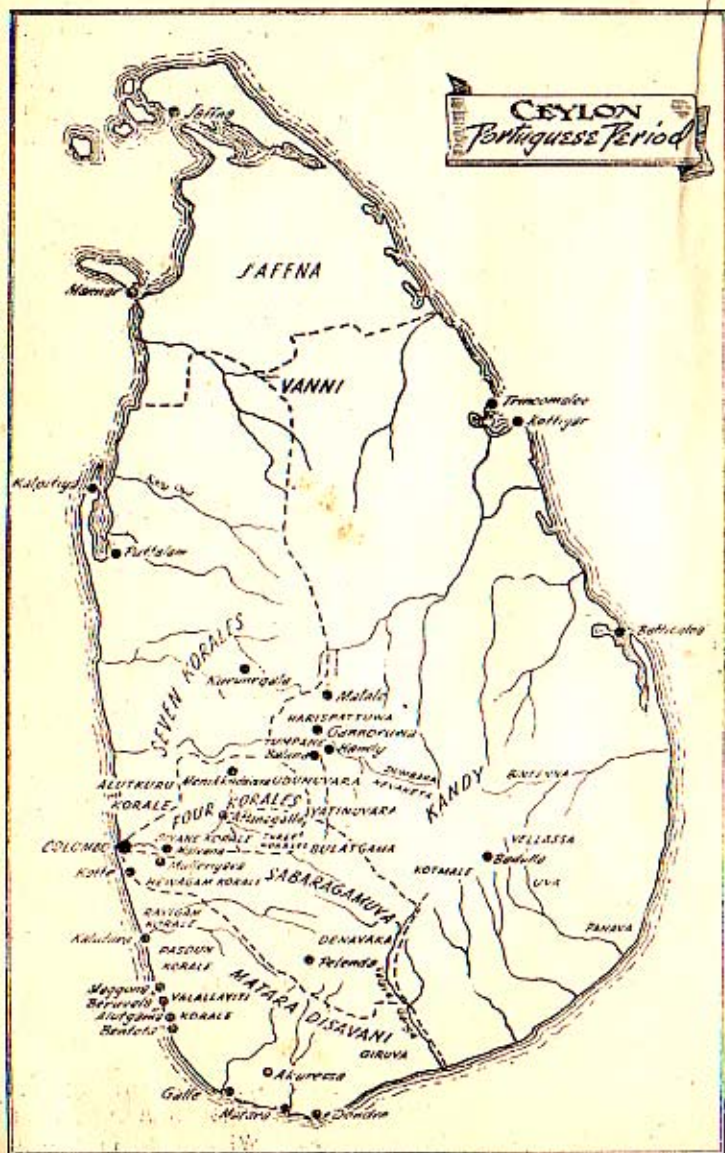
In fact the Portuguese Period may be looked upon as a continuation of the developments that took place after the abandonment of Polonnarua as the capital of Ceylon and the consequent disappearance of the old divisions, Rajarata, Mayarata, and Ruhunurata. In the thirteenth century a Tamil Kingdom appears to have been established over a part of the north of Ceylon. From this time onwards the rest of Ceylon was more or less ruled by independent or semi-independent chiefs. First the rulers of Dambadeniya, then those of Yapahuva, Kurunegala, Gampola, Rayigama, and Kotte came in succession to be recognized as the chief rulers. The Kingdom of Kotte came into existence in 1415, and the Kingdom of Kandy was established by Vikramabahu around 1480.

Thus, on the arrival of the Portuguese, there existed in Ceylon three different kingdoms—Jaffna, Kotte, and Kandy. The history of the so-called Portuguese Period is more or less a continuation of the history of these three kingdoms. Had the Kingdom of Kotte not been divided in 1509 and 1521, and had Vijayabahu VI and later Mayadunne and Rajasinha been content with the areas they ruled, the Portuguese may never have ruled directly even over a part of Ceylon. They were not anxious to acquire territory, at least, at the beginning. They only desired trade. It was the ambition of the Sitavaka kings to be the rulers of the Kingdom of Kotte and perhaps of Kandy too that brought the Portuguese to the field. But for Portuguese intervention Mayadunne may have become the ruler of the Kingdom of Kotte and of the Kandyan Kingdom thereby bringing to an end, at least for a time, the internal wars which were the bane of the country.

If the Portuguese Period is really a continuation of the history of the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms, what is the justification for calling it by this name? If at all, should not this name have been applied only to the period from 1597 to 1658 when the Portuguese ruled directly over the Kingdom of Kotte? There is hardly any justification but an explanation is possible.

Till recent times, most historians thought of history in terms of political history, changes of dynasties, wars, etc., and paid little attention to social, economic and institutional changes. If we treat the history of Ceylon as political history, it cannot be denied that during this period the Portuguese were the most dominant section in Ceylon. The Kotte and the Jaffna kings were for the most part their vassals. Alliance with the Portuguese was what the Sinhalese and Tamil kings sought most. The Portuguese army was well trained and efficient. It was well equipped with hand-guns and cannon, and in the open field it could defeat a local army more than ten times as large. The Portuguese navy controlled the Indian Ocean and the Portuguese could not be dislodged from Colombo as they could always obtain aid by sea.

Moreover the chief sources for the reconstruction of the history of this period are Portuguese works and they deal primarily with Portuguese activities. What is to be learnt of the activities of the Sinhalese and Tamil kings is derived



mainly from these works. Hence it is difficult to trace the history of this period from the point of view of the Sinhalese and the Tamils or to discuss the real nature of the part they played. It is probably for these two reasons that this period came to be called the Portuguese Period.

If the Portuguese contributed little in the sphere of government and administration, what then was their contribution to the development of Ceylon? They certainly expanded the trade of the country. The Portuguese came to the East to capture its trade and to Ceylon in particular, for her cinnamon. The trade of Ceylon had been from the earliest times in the hands of foreigners. It was carried on in turn by the South-Indians, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Persians and the Muslims. The Portuguese took over this trade and carried Ceylon's products direct to Europe. They were so concerned with the export of cinnamon that they appointed a special officer, the Captain of the *Mahabadda*, to supervise the villages occupied by the cinnamon peelers.

This was not their only contribution. They taught the Sinhalese and the Tamils new methods of warfare, especially the use of guns and cannon.

The Portuguese also brought about certain social changes in the area occupied by them, and, to a lesser extent, even outside. They did not look down upon the Sinhalese and Tamils, but mixed with them, and intermarried with them. As a result many persons, including a section of the upper classes followed Portuguese customs and manners. The Portuguese style of architecture was used in building houses, especially the broad window called the *janela* and the round tile which is still commonly used in the Island. In their houses they sometimes used furniture similar to that used by the Portuguese. Words like *mese* (table) and *almaria* (wardrobe) are derived from Portuguese. It also became the fashion, at least among the upper classes, to adopt the Portuguese form of dress. Words such as *kamisa* (shirt) *kalisan* (trousers) *mes* (stockings) *sapatu* (shoes) *lensuva* (handkerchief) *alpenetti* (pins) *bottama* (button) are also derived from Portuguese.

The most important contribution of the Portuguese, however, is the introduction of the Roman Catholic form of Christianity. When the Portuguese first came to Ceylon they

were accompanied by Franciscan friars who ministered to their spiritual needs. But on Bhuvanekabahu's invitation Christian missionaries came in 1543 to the Kingdom of Kotte to convert the people to Christianity. Some of these went to the Kandyan Kingdom on the invitation of its King, Jayavira II. Others on the invitation of the people of Mannar went to the Jaffna Kingdom.

The clergy that came to Ceylon were the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Augustinians and the Jesuits. The Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Augustinians were not monks who lived in isolated monasteries, but friars. It is true they remained unmarried and lived a life of poverty, but they did not cut themselves away from the world. They lived among the people and ministered to them. The Jesuits came with the definite aim of educating the people.

The Church itself came to be established under extraordinary circumstances. During wars, the military authorities destroyed Buddhist vihares and Hindu devales. When, as a result, Buddhist monks and Hindu priests left Portuguese territory both in the south-west and the north, the Roman Catholic religious orders stepped into the breach thus created, and obtained for the people through the Roman Catholic form of Christianity the divine protection and the spiritual satisfaction which the people wanted. Soon there came into existence a large number of churches in the Jaffna Peninsula and along the coast from Mannar to Matara. To the people of the sea coast among whom were probably more Hindus than Buddhists the external forms of Roman Catholicism do not seem to have appeared very different to what they had been accustomed. The Roman Catholic religious rites and forms of worship and the use of symbols such as the images of Christ and of saints seem to have appealed to their emotions just as much as Hindu practices appealed to them in the past.

In spite of these external similarities the Roman Catholic form of Christianity differed in many ways from Buddhism and Hinduism. It was controlled by the Pope in Rome by a hierarchy of church officials. Its clergy not only preached and performed religious rites but demanded an adherence to the rules of the church from the laity and punished them if they did not obey. In fact each church appointed a *merinho* or constable to seek out offenders and punish them. The

dogmas and the doctrines of the Church too differed in some respects. For instance they went against the beliefs in *karma* and rebirth.

All this, however, does not mean that the so-called Portuguese Period was one marked by progress. Rather it was a period of decline. The wars waged by the Portuguese led to the devastation of many parts of the country. Hence there was a definite set-back in the economic, religious and cultural spheres in the areas in which the Portuguese came into contact with the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In this way the Portuguese accentuated the process of decline which had begun in the thirteenth century.

The changes referred to earlier were not of such significance as to conclude that Portuguese rule marked a turning-point in the internal history of the Island. But as far as external influences are concerned it was certainly a turning-point. At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese the chief foreign influence was from South India. Our Indian problem today is a South Indian problem and it started many centuries ago. From the time of the occupation of Rajarata by the Cholas South Indian influence over Ceylon increased. It later led to the establishment of a Tamil kingdom in the north. This kingdom grew in power until it exacted tribute from the south. If we visit the Lankatilaka Vihare in Gampola we shall see that the grants of land to it are recorded in Sinhalese and Tamil. In the fifteenth century Tamil influence over the Sinhalese court was considerable, and Ceylon may have come under the rule of Madura or Tanjore but for the timely arrival of the Portuguese. It is undoubtedly the Portuguese who checked this growing influence of South India and laid Ceylon open to the influence of the West.

There was also another growing influence that came from the Near East and India. The Muslims had been expanding their trade with the East from the eighth century onwards. In Ceylon they had established themselves in Colombo and at Beruvala and were taking part in the internal trade of the Island. The trade of Ceylon at this time was in the hands of the Muslims, and it would not have been surprising if finally some parts of Ceylon came under Muslim rule as it happened in Indonesia. This expansion again was checked by the Portuguese who destroyed Muslim trade in the Indian Ocean

and opened the trade of the East finally to the Dutch and the British.

Nevertheless if we examine the history of Ceylon from 1505 to 1658 we can hardly call it the Portuguese Period. In the administrative sphere there was very little change. Apart from the emphasis placed on the export of spices, the economy of the Island underwent no serious modification. Though there was a certain amount of change in the social sphere, this too was limited to the areas over which the Portuguese directly ruled. Thus this period is really a continuation of the history of the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms.

## A HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF DUTCH RULE IN CEYLON

**I**N the last chapter the importance of Portuguese rule in Ceylon was assessed. Did the rule of the Dutch East India Company which replaced it exercise a greater influence? Was it a turning point in Ceylon history?

The Dutch undoubtedly ruled for a much longer period, from 1658 to 1796. During these 138 years they were involved in very few wars. They fought first with the Kandyan king, Rajasinha II, in order to stabilise their position in the territory conquered from the Portuguese, and then towards the end of their occupation when their rule was threatened as a result of the King Kirti Sri Rajasinha's negotiations with the British. Their aim was to live peacefully as long as they could carry on their trading activities knowing very well that war would not only hinder their trade but would also involve the Company in heavy expenses of which the shareholders would not approve.

Nevertheless we have to remember that they ruled directly only over a small area of Ceylon, an area much smaller than that over which the Portuguese had governed. In the south-west they ruled only over the coastal belt, extending for about twenty miles inland, from the Mahaoya to the Valave Ganga; in the north only over the Jaffna Peninsula and the district of Mannar. In the other parts of the country they occupied only seaports such as Trincomalee, Kottiyar, Batticaloa and Kalpitiya in order to prevent foreigners from entering the Kandyan Kingdom and taking a share in the trade of the Island.

Even in this limited area over which they ruled directly their influence was not widespread. They established a Dutch form of government only in the towns of Colombo, Galle and Jaffna. It was only in these places that they established law courts, such as the *Raad van Justitie*, the *Civiel Raad* and the Fiscal's courts, and enforced Roman-Dutch law which was suited to a commercial society. It is true

that they established *Landraads* in rural areas to settle the disputes of the Sinhalese and the Tamils relating to lands, contracts and debts. But these courts followed the customs of the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and among the judges were Sinhalese and Tamils who were conversant with these customs.

The rural areas were ruled by the Disavas who were stationed in Colombo, Jaffna and Matara. They dealt with the collection of revenue, the improvement of trade, the cultivation of land, and the production of commercial crops. They interfered little with the customs of the people and their way of life apart from prohibiting religious practices which they disapproved. They continued the form of feudalism that came down from the time of the Sinhalese kings and made full use of it to get the services they required. Far from meddling with the system of caste, they observed it strictly in order to get the cinnamon peeled and other essential services performed. Thus, as under the Portuguese, the Sinhalese and Tamil society changed little. The system of government and the economy as a whole remained more or less as before.

What then did the Dutch do for the development of Ceylon? In what ways did they modify or change the conditions that prevailed at the time they occupied the Maritime Provinces?

The Dutch definitely helped the advancement of agriculture in their territory. They repaired irrigation works in order to develop paddy cultivation. We have already referred to the constant warfare of the Portuguese who took to fighting as ducks take to water. During these wars much of the country was devastated. In the early days of Dutch rule too wars led to the regions around Colombo being abandoned by those who inhabited them. In these areas the Dutch settled slaves from Tanjore and gave them their freedom if they cultivated their lands efficiently. Further, they encouraged the people to cultivate in their gardens commercial crops such as coffee, pepper, cardamom, arecanut and coconut. They themselves opened cinnamon plantations instead of depending entirely on what grew wild.

Being interested in trade and its development, the Dutch improved the means of communication in the south-western parts of the Island. Under the Sinhalese kings little was done in this direction as there was little trade and the economy

of the villages was in the main self-sufficient. The roads constructed were limited mainly to towns. Canals were made primarily for irrigation purposes and to drain marshy lands. The Dutch on the other hand were greatly interested in trade and therefore in transport. They conveyed goods in vessels both by river and by sea along the coast. They opened up a road from Mannar to Matara building bridges over streams and providing ferry boats across rivers. They improved the canal from Puttalam to Colombo, and in order to transport cinnamon during the south-west monsoon when it was difficult to ply vessels along the coast owing to the strong winds, they connected the Kalani Ganga with the Kalu Ganga by means of canals.

The Dutch improved the standard of building construction in the Island. They erected in Ceylon massive fortresses similar to those built in Europe in the seventeenth century. Like the fortresses, some of the houses they built can be seen even today. It is from the Dutch that we have borrowed the words *istoppuwa* (verandah), *soldare* (upstairs), and *tarappuwa* (staircase). The need for buildings also led them to develop certain crafts. It was they who established the carpentry industry in Moratuwa and the tile industry in Kalaniya. The word *baas* used for a master carpenter is also derived from Dutch.

Considerable changes in the social sphere too were carried out in the areas over which the Dutch directly ruled. The Portuguese, during wars, destroyed Buddhist vihares and Hindu devales. The lands given as endowments to them were transferred to their own religious orders. Thus there was little of Buddhism and Hinduism left as forms of public worship within their territories. The Dutch at first persecuted the Roman Catholics and the Muslims, the former mainly for political reasons and the latter on economic grounds. Though they assisted Kandyan kings to obtain Buddhist bhikshus from Siam to restore the *upasampada* they discouraged the revival of Buddhism in their own territory.

In this background the Dutch introduced the Protestant form of Christianity, the Dutch Reformed Church, which came into existence with the modern developments in Europe, and through it they exercised considerable influence over the people in the south-west and in the Jaffna Peninsula. The



organization of the Dutch Reformed Church was different from that of the Roman Catholic Church and followed the form set up by Calvin in Geneva. It was governed by the clergy elected and sent from Holland and the 'elders' elected by the local congregation. Few Dutch clergymen came to Ceylon. The work of spreading Christianity was carried out through schools. The Dutch had a network of schools in their territory and education was imparted in them through the medium of Sinhalese and Tamil. Those who attended the schools learnt not only the elements of Christianity, but also reading, writing, and arithmetic. The Dutch introduced the printing press to Ceylon and printed parts of the Bible in Sinhalese to be used in these schools. Thus a good percentage of the people in Dutch territory became literate.

The Dutch developed a system of government more thorough than any to which the people had so far been accustomed. It has already been mentioned how the Portuguese prepared *Land Tombos* based on the *Lekam mitis* of the Sinhalese rulers. The Dutch not only compiled *Land Tombos* describing the lands and gardens of each village within Dutch territory and giving details of high and low lands, buildings, trees, and taxes due, but also prepared *Hoofd* or *Head Tombos*. These described the age, occupation and the services and taxes due from each person. They also kept *School Tombos*, which gave a list of all persons baptized and married in each village. These also gave details of genealogy, birth, marriage and death.

The Dutch law courts too were efficiently conducted in comparison with the courts in the Kandyan Kingdom. A Dutch Disava presided over the *Landraads*, though he made use of Sinhalese and Tamils conversant with custom to assist him in deciding cases. The Dutch codified the customs of the Tamils, *Tesavalamai*, and made a collection of Muslim customs so that the judges might have something definite to go on and not depend on the opinions of the chiefs alone. Whenever Sinhalese and Tamil customs did not cover a case they applied Roman-Dutch law. They also followed a certain definite procedure in their courts and kept records of their proceedings.

In addition to these two, other factors made Dutch rule important. The Dutch system of government was continued for some decades with little modification by the British and

thus Dutch influence lasted beyond their period of rule. It is also to Dutch rule that we have to trace the beginnings of modern developments in Ceylon history.

When the British East India Company occupied the Maritime Provinces they did not alter the Dutch system very much. As far as the economy of the Island was concerned they continued the Dutch mercantilist system, and took over the trade of the Dutch Company. In the sphere of agriculture they continued to repair irrigation works and encouraged the cultivation of paddy and of commercial crops both in gardens and plantations. They made use of the canals built by the Dutch and continued the construction of roads. They too built fortresses and other buildings thereby giving employment to carpenters and tile and brick manufacturers. The Protestant Missions that came to Ceylon after the British conquest began to work mainly in the areas where the Dutch Reformed Church had established itself, and thus built their churches on Dutch foundations. They themselves established schools on the lines of the Dutch as a means to spread Christianity, and established printing presses to publish books and journals. At first the British continued in many respects the Dutch system of government. They established in the towns law courts similar to those that existed in Dutch times. They adopted the Roman Dutch law and gradually began to apply it throughout the Maritime Provinces. They tried to rule the Sinhalese and the Tamils as well as the Muslims according to their ancient institutions and customs, and thus did not at first interfere much with either their existing form of feudalism or the caste system.

We have seen already that the Portuguese checked South Indian and Muslim expansion in Ceylon and laid Ceylon open to Western influences. But the Portuguese themselves did little to turn Ceylon in the modern direction.

Those who have studied European history will remember that European historians divide the history of Europe into three periods: Ancient history, Medieval history and Modern. Ancient history deals mainly with Greek and Roman civilizations. Medieval history begins with the fall of the Roman Empire and ends round about 1500 A. D. and Modern history begins with the break-up of feudalism and the Voyages of Discovery, the rise of the Nation State, the Renaissance and the Reformation.

The Voyages of Discovery are associated with the development of commerce and the break-up of feudalism. The Portuguese who came to Ceylon were responsible for some of these voyages of discovery. But the coming of the Portuguese to Ceylon did not lead to the break-up of feudalism or the development of commerce within the island to any appreciable extent. Hence the Portuguese did not usher in the modern period of Ceylon history. It is the Dutch who did it, though the changes they introduced affected the people of the Island only to a small extent. Though the Dutch too preserved the feudal system that existed in the Maritime Provinces it was with this difference. The people of Ceylon up to this time produced crops mainly for consumption, but the Dutch encouraged them to cultivate crops for sale and thereby developed the trade within the Island. There was no Reformation in Buddhism or Hinduism as a result of Dutch rule in Ceylon. The Dutch, however, introduced the Reformed Church into Ceylon which placed little emphasis on religious ceremonial and stressed the education of the people in order that they might be able to read the Bible and learn the teachings of Christianity by themselves. This Church undoubtedly exercised some influence on the people, and it is also responsible for the establishment of the first printing press in Ceylon though it did not exert much influence at this time. Though the Dutch system of law courts was limited to towns, the Dutch accustomed the people to the rule of law more than had been done ever before. The codification of the Tamil *Tesavalamai* was a definite step in the development of the rule of law.

Two features of more recent times in Europe are the development of communications which followed the Industrial Revolution and the spread of elementary education by the State. In respect of both of these the Dutch were ahead of many European nations, and Ceylon benefited as a result. Even in England, in the eighteenth century, elementary education was not so widespread as in the Dutch territory in Ceylon.

If we examine Ceylon as it is today, we shall find that the most advanced parts are those that were ruled directly by the Dutch, and at least a part of the credit for this must go to the Dutch. People in Dutch territory became literate and got accustomed to the rule of law and the cultivation of commercial crops. As a result they benefited more than the



others by the developments that took place under British rule.

All these, however, did not lead to any radical changes. On the whole the Dutch left the Sinhalese and Tamil systems alone. It is true that they encouraged the cultivation of commercial crops and developed communications by the construction of canals; that they improved the standard of buildings and gave an impetus to the development of crafts. They spread elementary education and accustomed people to the rule of law. But these changes were limited to the area over which they directly ruled and made little difference to the life of the people of the Island when taken as a whole.

## THE COLEBROOKE REFORMS

### *The Dividing Line Between the Past and the Present*

IN this chapter it is proposed to discuss the Colebrooke reforms. They cover only a few years in the history of Ceylon but they led to far-reaching changes in the life of the people, though the process is not yet complete and is now receiving a set-back in certain directions. It is these Colebrooke Reforms that constitute a definite turning point in the whole course of Ceylon history, and if we understand them clearly we shall be able to grasp better the exact nature of the earlier period as well as that of the developments that followed. These reforms led to radical changes in the economy of the country and in the system of civil and judicial administration. They undermined the very foundations of the ancient Sinhalese and Tamil social systems, and in doing so helped to usher in a new era of administrative, economic and social progress.

The Colebrooke Reforms abolished *rajakariya* and paved the way for the development of commerce in the Island. *Rajakariya* was service rendered to the king. In Ceylon those who held land rendered various services according to their caste. This system roughly corresponded to feudalism in Europe. In the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva periods land, on the whole, seems to have been held without any definite forms of service, but after the break up of the Polonnaruva Kingdom almost all owners of land had to render some sort of service. This system of *rajakariya* was modified by the early British governors, and on the eve of the Colebrooke Reforms the people paid a grain tax instead. But they were bound to render service, if demanded by the state, either for payment or for exemption from the grain tax. In any case they had to work free for a fortnight every year repairing paths and bridges in the villages in which they lived. Governor Barnes utilized this fortnight's service for the construction of roads. For the same purpose he exacted also services either in lieu of the grain tax or for payment.

The chief objection to *rajakariya* in the eyes of Colebrooke was that it bound the people to the land. They were unable to give it up and had to render services for holding it. They could not change their occupations, and therefore could not take to new crafts or to new types of work such as business or trade as their sole means of livelihood. In short, *raja-kariya* stood in the way of the transition from a feudal to a commercial capitalist economy.

These reforms also did away with monopolies and other government activities in agriculture and trade. The monopolies were worked through *rajakariya* and, when *rajakariya* was abolished, they could not be continued unless some other means were found to work them. Colebrooke did not want them continued in any form whatsoever as they impeded the twin causes of free trade and private enterprise which he championed. Unless the monopolies were abolished there was little opportunity for people to take to trade and commerce.

The Colebrooke Reforms established a unified system of government over the whole Island. At that time there were three systems of administration in Ceylon: one in the Sinhalese districts of the Maritime Provinces, one in the Tamil districts of the Maritime Provinces, and the third in the Kandyan Provinces. Each of these areas was ruled in accordance with the particular customs of its inhabitants. The chief objection to this arrangement was that it prevented the assimilation of the people of these different areas. Therefore a common system was established for the whole country. The number of provinces was reduced from sixteen to five. In fixing the boundaries of the new provinces the old divisions of Kandyan and Maritime provinces or of Sinhalese and Tamil areas, were ignored. The Kandyan provinces in the lowlands were annexed to the Sinhalese and the Tamil provinces on the coast. For instance, the Nuvarakalaviya District became part of the Northern Province, and a portion of Sabaragamuva, part of the Southern Province. Further, officials were recruited under a common system for work in government offices throughout the Island.

This process of unification on a territorial basis was also carried to the sphere of the judiciary. At this time there were two sets of courts in the Maritime Provinces, one under

the supervision of the Supreme Court and the other under the control of the Governor. In the Kandyan Provinces a different organization existed. All courts there came under the final authority of the Governor. To replace these a uniform system of courts and judicial procedure was adopted throughout the Island, and all courts were placed under the supervision of the Supreme Court, thereby separating the judiciary from the executive.

The autocratic system of government was liberalized. At this time the Governor was all powerful. He was the chief military, executive and legislative authority in the Island. He was the chief judicial authority in all civil matters. In the Kandyan Provinces, he was the final judicial authority in criminal matters too. The right to *rajakariya* gave him further powers. He was able to compel people to work, regulate their wages, and employ them with or without payment according to caste or custom. The system of monopolies gave him indefinite control over their resources. He was also beyond the jurisdiction of the courts. He could imprison or banish any person without trial or assigning any reason; and no court could question his right to take such action. It is true he was under the control of a Secretary of State in England. But at this time a letter from England to Ceylon or vice versa took four to six months and the Secretary of State was hardly in a position to control his actions.

On the recommendation of Colebrooke and his colleague, Cameron, the arbitrary powers exercised by the Governor to imprison or banish a person without trial were withdrawn. With the establishment of a common system of law courts under the supervision of the Supreme Court, his judicial powers came to an end. With the abolition of *rajakariya* and monopolies he lost the powers he exercised through them over the people and their resources. His powers were further reduced by the establishment of the Executive and Legislative Councils. Henceforth in matters of revenue and expenditure he had to make decisions in consultation with the Executive Council. This Council further expanded by the inclusion of other officials and six unofficials, was to be responsible for all legislation for which he alone had hitherto been responsible.

On another of Colebrooke's recommendations English was adopted as the language of government and to implement it

schools were established with English as the medium of instruction. Today many may consider this an unwise step, but at that time no one appears to have raised any serious objection to it. In India, the adoption of English as the language of government about the same time was preceded by a controversy. The issue in India was not whether Bengali or English or Tamil or English should be the language of government, but whether it should be Sanskrit or English. No one seems to have considered that it should be a vernacular.

The study of English even by a small section led to far reaching results, similar in many ways to what took place subsequent to the study of Latin and Greek in Europe after the thirteenth century. The literary works of the Sinhalese and the Tamils at this time were mainly religious and a large proportion of them emphasized the other-worldly view of life. Though early Buddhist teaching was rationalist in some respects and permitted people to exercise their own judgment, later writings had accepted the ancient social system with its ideas of status and emphasis on authority. On the other hand English presented its students with the progressive and liberalizing ideas of the civilization of modern Europe. Stirred by these, those who studied English began to think and act differently and did not merely follow the ancient customs. They began to study the arts and sciences of Europe and learnt what was happening in other parts of the world. The study of English history made them acquainted with new forms of government. They learnt how the middle class gained control of the government in England, and as time passed they demanded a reform of the Legislative Council in order to gain control of the government of Ceylon.

Reference has already been made to ideas of status in the old social system. The structure of Sinhalese and Tamil societies at the time was based on the institution of caste by which the status of a person depended on his birth and not on wealth or his intelligence. It was therefore impossible for a man to change his caste, and throughout life he had to be in the station to which he was born. Colebrooke and Cameron believed that all persons should be treated as equals by the state. Having on this ground already objected to *rajakariya* with which the caste system was closely woven, they now objected to caste distinctions in any form. Thus the Colebrooke Reforms altered radically the hierarchical basis of

Sinhalese and Tamil society. Colebrooke and Cameron further objected to the observance, in matters of government, of distinctions of race and wanted both Europeans and Ceylonese treated alike. Hence they objected to reserving the Civil Service exclusively to the British, and wanted Ceylonese admitted into it. They thus legally did away with all the special privileges enjoyed by certain races and castes.

As a result of these reforms, trade gained a freedom of action which did not hitherto have. The abolition of *rajakariya* enabled people to dispose of their lands, migrate to other places, and take to any new occupations. The abolition of monopolies gave greater opportunities to people, thus freed, to take to trade and business. But these changes alone were far from adequate for the development of trade. In a country where each area was ruled according to its own customs and had different laws for different communities, trade could not thrive. But the unified system of administration and the common system of law courts however removed those obstacles. The withdrawal of the judicial powers of the Governor and the placing of all courts under the supervision of the Supreme Court separated the judiciary from the executive and gave it the freedom to act independently of the executive. By making the rule of law thus effective throughout the country, traders and businessmen could always appeal to the courts against persons who broke their contracts. By the establishment of the Legislative Council the unofficials were in a position to criticise government proposals for legislation if they were contrary to their interests.

It is clear that Colebrooke and Cameron realised that if any change in Ceylon was to be effective it was not sufficient to make reforms in one sphere alone, but that the whole system in all its aspects had to be transformed. It has been seen that the Portuguese and the Dutch brought about some changes especially in the social sphere, but these did not seriously affect the life of the people as a whole. The Portuguese for instance introduced the Roman Catholic form of Christianity but they did not destroy the caste system. The Dutch Reformed Church too failed to weaken it as the Dutch adhered even more rigidly to caste for economic reasons. Colebrooke and Cameron on the other hand attacked the Sinhalese and Tamil social systems from all sides. By abolishing *rajakariya* they not only freed people from serfdom but also helped them

to do away with caste. Each caste had hitherto been associated with a definite occupation, but now any person had the right to change his form of work. By abolishing *rajakariya*, and by making the conditions in the Sinhalese and Tamil areas similar, they were able to establish a unified form of administration and a common system of law courts where all people would be treated equally. Further, Colebrooke and Cameron realized that, if the people were to benefit by the changes that were being introduced, they had to adopt a new attitude towards life. This was not possible unless they studied English and imbibed the new ideas that came from the West.

The Colebrooke Reforms are historically important as they mark the transition of Ceylon from the old to the new. The abolition of *rajakariya* in Ceylon corresponds to the break-up of feudalism, and the abolition of monopolies made possible the development of commerce. The establishment of a unified form of government is similar to some of the developments that led to the growth of nation-states in Europe. The establishment of the rule of law and the use of the printing press which were introduced by the Dutch became effective as a result of other changes introduced by the Colebrooke Reforms. In Europe the change from medieval to modern was a natural process, resulting from a series of events which covered more than two centuries. The Colebrooke Reforms were a series of administrative and legal changes, interconnected with each other, that produced similar results. The normal process is for economic changes to lead to social changes, and social changes to lead to institutional changes. In this case the process was practically reversed. Institutional changes led to economic and social changes more far-reaching than any that had been experienced in Ceylon before. The Colebrooke Reforms are thus the dividing line in Ceylon History. From them we can look back to the past, to the ancient Sinhalese and Tamil systems; and from them we can also look forward to the future to the development of Ceylon on modern lines.

## THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AFTER THE COLEBROOKE REFORMS

**I**N the last chapter it was shown how the Colebrooke Reforms altered by law the basis of the economic, the social and the administrative system of Ceylon. With the abolition of *rajakariya* people ceased to be bound to the land, and were no longer expected to keep to the occupations determined by caste. Further, all persons were equal in the sight of the law and no one could be punished by the courts differently from others on account of his birth. The abolition of monopolies made it possible for men, thus freed, to take to trade if they so desired, while the adoption of a unified system of administration for the whole Island with a common system of law courts made it easier for traders to carry on their activities with people in different parts of the Island. The liberalized system of government also assisted traders as it enabled them to inform Government through their representatives in the Legislative Council of the obstacles that hindered their activities. By learning English the people were in a position to understand the implications of these changes which were leading to a liberal form of government, and benefit by the new openings for employment which the new system created. If anyone desired to take to the cultivation of commercial crops he could buy crown land at a nominal rate and if he opened up plantations near Kandy or Kurunagala or along the roads from these towns to Colombo, he was able to convey his produce to Colombo at a cheap rate. At this time a load of 1200 lbs. of coffee could be conveyed by road from Kandy to Colombo for the small sum of £1.

A sudden change, however, did not take place owing to the conditions prevailing in Ceylon on the eve of the Colebrooke Reforms. Ceylon at that time was a land of villages. There were hardly any towns besides Colombo, Galle, Jaffna and Kandy. The villages usually lay in valleys where water was available for paddy cultivation. Apart from the paddy fields and the land bordering them in which chena cultivation was carried on, the rest of the area was generally covered with jungle. In the mountainous parts of the Wet Zone most of the land

covered by tea and rubber today, were dense forests. There were a few plantations but these were limited mainly to the Peradeniya and Gampola areas. The villages on the whole were self-contained and self-sufficient. There were few roads to interfere with their isolation. In these areas there were three classes of people: chiefs, blikshus and peasants, and among the last a few craftsmen. The chiefs possessed a certain amount of wealth as they owned *nindagam*. So did the vihares in the Kandyan provinces, as they were usually endowed with land. But the peasants and craftsmen on the whole were poor.

The only area which was different to some extent was the south-western region. Here there were a few plantations of cinnamon, coffee, cotton, sugar, indigo, opium etc., while cinnamon, coffee, pepper, cardamoms and other spices were also grown in gardens. Large areas along the coastal belt were cultivated with coconuts. There was a little trade, and it was confined mainly to Colombo and the surrounding region. But even in this area there were hardly any Ceylonese with sufficient capital to start trade on a large scale or open plantations and wait for years to benefit from the investment.

There were also few roads. The chief of these was the Colombo-Kandy Road. From this another branched off at Ambepussa which went through Kurunagala as far as Dambulla. Kandy was connected with Dambulla *via* Matale and with Kurunagala *via* Galagedera. There was also a coast road from Chilaw to Matara which the Dutch had constructed. All these were little more than rough clearings through forests or jungle. The approaches to rivers and streams were sloped so as to enable carts to cross in ferry-boats. The only exceptions were the Colombo-Kandy Road and the Ambepussa-Kurunagala Road where bridges spanned the rivers and streams. These roads had been constructed not for economic reasons but to satisfy military needs and assisted the development of plantations only incidentally.

The Colebrooke Reforms themselves were more negative than positive. They only removed obstacles that hindered change. Thus in 1834 Government sold only about fifty acres of crown land. Neither the internal nor the foreign trade expanded much. History has taught us the inevitability

of gradualness. However radical the reforms, it was not easy to change either the ways or the attitude to life of a conservative and ancient people. They had to be instilled with new ideas and shown the possibilities that lay in their path. The study of English progressed very slowly and very few of those who took to it really grasped the implications of these radical changes.

The situation in Ceylon, however, began to change after about five years as a result not of internal but external causes. The demand for coffee in Europe suddenly increased. Production in the West Indies was disorganized by the liberation of the slaves, and the planters could not satisfy the British demands. In 1835 the Imperial Government helped Ceylon further by reducing the import duty on Ceylon coffee to the same level as that of West Indian coffee. About the same time Robert Tytler, who had studied the methods of coffee cultivation in Jamaica, demonstrated how coffee cultivation could be made a profitable enterprise in Ceylon. The British officials in Ceylon, who alone had capital, rushed to grow coffee. They were followed by capitalists from India and Britain. The sale of crown lands went up. Within ten years 367 plantations were opened and about £30,000,000 was invested in the enterprise.

It is not proposed to deal here with the coffee crash in 1847, the revival of the industry in the fifties and its expansion till about 1880, after which date, as a result of a pest, it declined and ceased to be of any importance. Nor will the attempts to plant cinchona, and how finally tea took the place of coffee, be dealt with. Nor will an account of the establishment of the rubber and coconut industries and their subsequent expansion be given. What is far more important is that as a result of the development of the plantations, the economy of Ceylon, which up to the time of Colebrooke Reforms was dominantly agrarian, became dominantly commercial and capitalist. Ceylon's revenue is chiefly derived not from paddy but from tea and rubber which are sold almost entirely to foreign countries. Even coconut products, owing to the development of coconut plantations, are to a considerable extent sold abroad.

The opening of plantations led in turn to the development of communications. Cordiner points out that at the beginning of British rule there were no roads in the strict sense of the

word. Wheeled carriages were used only in the neighbourhood of the larger European settlements situated on the sea coast. Such carriages were unknown in Kandy, and, when the Kandyan ambassadors were conveyed in one of these in Colombo, they insisted on the doors being kept open during the journey lest they be mistaken for prisoners! Elsewhere, travelling was done by foot. The richer folk rode on horseback or were carried in palanquins. Transport was mainly by river and canal and by sea. The British ambassador and his party in 1803 took a month to reach Kandy. He completed the return journey in about fifteen days only because he was able to do the greater part of it by boat from Ruanvalla downwards. The first roads in the hill country area were built for military reasons. These were extended by Sir Wilmot Horton for administrative purposes. He connected Colombo with the remaining two chief towns of the provinces, Jaffna and Trincomalee, and with Arippu, Nuwara-Eliya and Badulla. After 1837 it was the establishment of plantations that led most to the development of roads. The planters needed roads to send their produce to Colombo as well as to get foodstuffs and other supplies from there. In the forties a number of roads were built in the Western Province and in the district of Sabaragamuva. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, roads opened up the Matale, Kandy, Hatton, Badulla and Galle districts. In the last quarter, roads were also built in the Dimbula, Nuwara Eliya, Uda Pussellawa, Kalutara and Ratnapura districts.

Road construction went through various phases to meet the requirements of the plantations. The early roads were mainly forest clearings and had no bridges or culverts. In 1841 the Colombo-Kandy Road was metalled. It created a revolution in transport, as a cart which took 30 to 40 days for a return journey between Colombo and Kandy now took six to eight days, and after this all the important roads were metalled. Their next substantial improvement came with the introduction of motor traffic. As cars, lorries and buses required a better type of road than was required for bullock carts and horse carriages, the width of the metalled space was increased, sharp bends were curved and the gradients were better regulated.

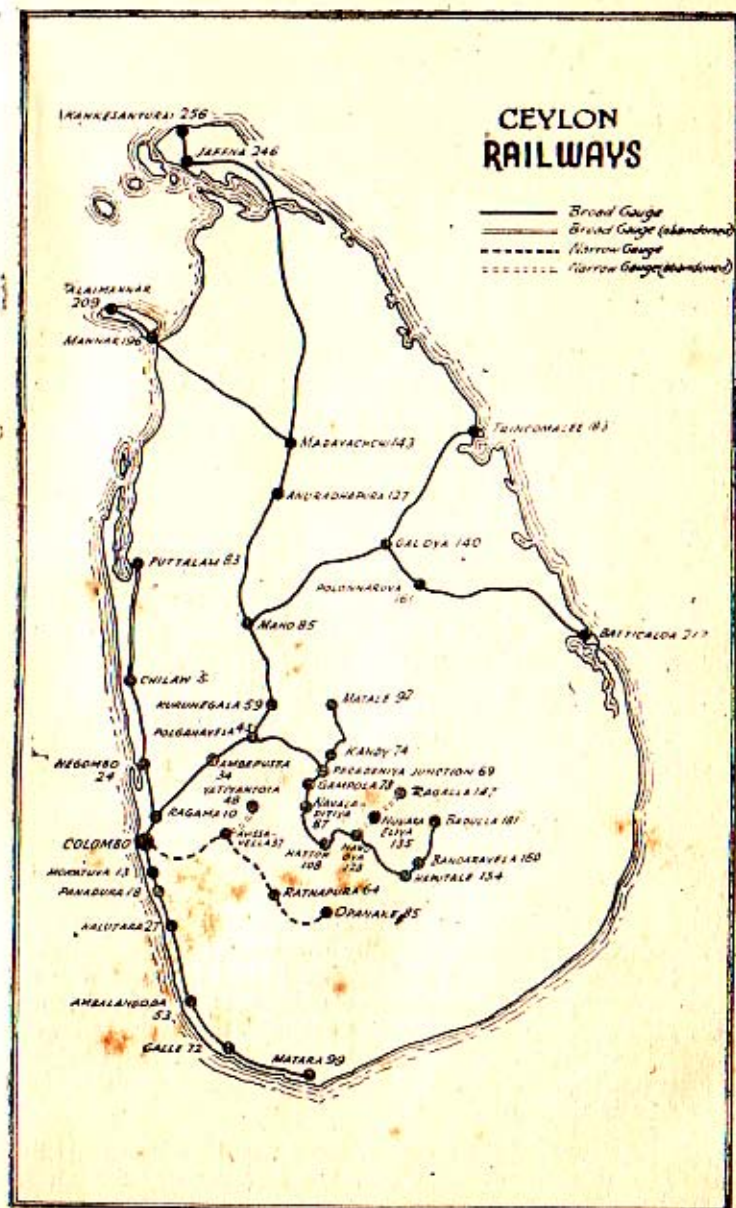
It is again to the plantations that we owe the construction of the railways. When the cultivation of coffee began to



expand once more in the fifties it became clear that transport by bullock cart would soon be inadequate to meet its growing needs. In 1854 for instance, about 30,000 to 36,000 cartloads were taken from Colombo to Kandy and back. As a result the pressure on the roads was so great that a cart which normally returned in six to eight days took fourteen to eighteen days and sometimes even four to six weeks. The planters had to get their coffee conveyed to Colombo before the South-West Monsoon. Due to the insufficiency of carts many planters failed to get their crop transported in time while competition among themselves led to a rise in the cost of transport by about fifty per cent. The result was that the construction of a railway was begun in 1858 and the line was extended to Kandy in 1867. To satisfy the needs of other coffee-growing areas, this line was gradually extended northwards to Matale and southwards to Badulla. Other lines were built from Nani Oya to Ragala in Udapussellawa, from Colombo to Avissawella, and then to Yatiyantota and Opanake.

It has been noted that there was very little internal trade at the beginning of British rule. The foreign trade that existed was a government monopoly in which the people had no direct share. The growth of plantations gave an impetus to the development of trade both within the Island and with foreign countries. The planters did not produce food for local consumption like the villagers. Their products were sent to the ports to be shipped to foreign countries, while their food and other requirements were imported from other parts of Ceylon or from abroad. The result was that the foreign trade increased tremendously. In 1825 it amounted to a little more than Rs. 5,000,000. In 1840 it more than doubled. This in turn led to the development of a cash economy. Before 1832, as most work was done by *rajakariya* and there was little circulation of cash, the grain tax was paid in kind, and the trade in the interior was mainly by barter. After this date the use of money gradually increased, and barter gave way to cash transactions.

The growth of plantations, communications and trade also led to other developments such as the growth in size of Colombo and the rise of a large number of towns mainly in the plantation areas. In central places, traders opened shops and boutiques, transport agents set up their forwarding establishments, and craftsmen leaving neighbouring villages



established their workshops. The towns that came into existence provided a market for the surplus produce of the peasants. They became the nerve centres of the country now just as tanks and irrigation channels were in the old economic system.

The growth of trade also linked the various parts of the country. Many people began to have interests in more than one locality, while others by the exchange of goods and in other ways began to be dependent on persons and places outside their towns and districts. Communications further helped to develop these relationships. For instance, the Jaffna Peninsula and the Eastern Province were first linked by road, but, owing to their distance from Colombo, this made little difference to the people of those areas. But, with the establishment of the railway, the Jaffna Peninsula, which in matters of education had followed India, began to fall in line with the rest of the Island. These changes gradually made the people think in terms of the country as a whole rather than in terms of a particular locality, and gradually a spirit of nationalism grew among them.

The plantations, communications and trade also led to developments in the administrative system. They led to the establishment of the Department of the Surveyor-General, the Public Works Department, the Postal Department, Harbour and Customs Departments and the Agricultural Department. This naturally increased the number of white-collar workers and helped to swell the growing middle class.

The development of plantations led to the immigration of Europeans and Indians into the Island. The Europeans found it profitable to exploit the resources of the country and thereby helped to develop it. The result was that about half the tea and rubber estates are still owned by them. These planters were in turn followed by European businessmen who took over a part of the trade. The Indian labourer who in his own country had little chance of eking out a decent existence found it profitable to come to Ceylon. They were followed by Indian traders. The Indian labourer has no doubt helped to enrich the country, but he has also created an Indian problem in Ceylon.

Of the people of the country, those who benefited most by the growth of plantations were the Low-country Sinhalese.

They were fortunate in that they had advanced considerably under Dutch Rule. They had benefited by the education provided by the Dutch. They had got accustomed to the rule of law which the Dutch had tried to introduce into the country. They now took contracts to open up the country for plantations. They had learnt from the Dutch crafts like carpentry and house-building to satisfy modern requirements. They built bungalows and coffee mills for the planters. They engaged in transport, using bullock carts, and began to trade in the new towns that arose as a result of the establishment of plantations. With the capital thus accumulated, they themselves took to coffee planting. After the coffee crash in 1847 they exported half the coffee sent out from Ceylon. Even in 1869 when the cultivation of coffee was at its height, one fourth of the coffee exported belonged to them. When coffee failed, however, these people did not take readily to the cultivation of tea, as it required more capital and greater organizational skill. Instead they took to coconut planting almost exclusively and developed almost half the rubber plantations.

The establishment of plantations and the construction of roads and railways led to a revolution in the economic sphere. An exclusively agrarian economy began to change into a commercial one. The system of communications broke up the isolation of the villages and the districts of the interior, undermining to a considerable extent the family system and the caste structure. People began to congregate in towns. Both these led to the expansion of the middle class by the addition of transport agents, contractors, traders and planters.

Thus the establishment of plantations led in turn to the development of communications and of trade, to the growth of towns and to changes in the administrative and social system.



## THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BRITISH PERIOD

**I**N the last chapter the revolutionary changes that took place in the economy of the country were dealt with. In this chapter I shall deal with the administrative and the constitutional changes that took place in the British Period. I shall show how the personal form of government through a hierarchy of chiefs, which came down from ancient times, changed into a bureaucracy which was responsible to the Governor and ultimately to the Secretary of State, the British Parliament and the British people. I shall show how this system came to be modified further and how the bureaucracy finally became responsible to the people of this country. In other words I shall show how the British autocratic system of government, which superseded similar Dutch and Kandyan systems, gradually gave way to a parliamentary democracy.

When the British conquered this island, the government of the country was carried on chiefly with the aid of a hierarchy of chiefs. The chiefs acted like petty kings in their districts. In the *nindagam*, which they were given in place of salaries, they exercised almost sovereign powers. In the absence of a satisfactory system of communication they were controlled little by the central government. There were no codes of law to guide them and there were few administrative regulations which they had to follow. They exercised both civil and criminal jurisdiction and they were all powerful if they were in favour with their superiors. The people, who were imbued with ideas of caste, accepted their rule as the natural form of government.

The Portuguese and the Dutch did not interfere with this system. The Dutch realized the danger of giving such extensive powers to the chiefs, but the only change they made was to appoint Dutchmen to the highest posts. The British, from the very beginning tried to curtail the power of the chiefs. They deprived them of their *nindagam*, in which the

people were beholden to them, and made them salaried servants. Judicial duties exercised by them were transferred to magistrates. The chiefs gradually lost their power thereafter, and in 1938 they began to be replaced by Divisional Revenue Officers. Now the village headmen are being replaced by a new order of *grama sevakas*.

Along with the attempt to reduce the power of the chiefs, the British tried to make the Civil Service efficient. They extended and improved the postal system to enable the officials at headquarters to keep in touch with those in the outstations. Detailed instructions were issued to all officials with regard to the way in which they were to carry out their duties.

Reference has already been made to the administrative changes carried out as a result of the Colebrooke Reforms. It has been shown how the system of administration was unified both in the civil and the judicial spheres; how the judiciary was separated from the executive, and how an attempt was made to treat people on a territorial rather than on a communal basis. These changes were carried further in the following decades. An attempt was made as far as possible to have separate officers for the judicial services. Roman-Dutch law was increasingly applied in the Maritime Provinces and introduced into the Kandyan Provinces. In matters of commerce British law was adopted. The personal form of government was modified in other ways too. At first, most of the work of government was directed by Government Agents and their assistants, but gradually much of their work was taken over by technical officers. Reference has already been made to the establishment of a number of government departments. More were set up as the need arose.

With the development of communications, control from the centre increased. There was greater supervision of the officers in distant districts and the Governor's responsibility for the entire government was better realized. Though the Colebrooke Reforms reduced the powers of the Governor, with the growth of the bureaucracy and the developments of communications, his power increased once more though after a time the control of the Secretary of State over him in turn became greater.

But the control exercised by the Governor and the Secretary of State was again gradually reduced and brought to an end. It has been seen how, on the recommendation of Colebrooke, a Legislative Council was established. It was formed with nine officials and six unofficials. The unofficials consisted of three Europeans, a Burgher, a Sinhalese and a Tamil. The Europeans were chosen from among the merchants, and the Ceylonese from among the upper classes. But this Council was merely an appendage to the executive and had no power of its own. The unofficials, appointed mainly for purposes of consultation in making laws, were in a permanent minority. Since they owed their position to the Governor who nominated them, they could exercise little independence.

It has been seen how in the nineteenth century after the economy of Ceylon came to be radically altered a highly organized bureaucratic system of government came to be established. But the constitution of the Legislative Council did not undergo a corresponding change. It was not due to the fact that there was no demand for a reform of the constitution. The European unofficials wanted it changed in order to gain wider powers to secure what they wanted. The only result however was that the Legislative Council gained some financial control in 1839, 1867 and 1903, but even this did not help much, as the Council continued to have an official majority.

In the twentieth century the demand for a reform of the Legislative Council came from a new quarter, the Ceylonese middle class. This class came into being as a result of British rule. Towards the end of the nineteenth century it increased in numbers and became powerful and influential. It found the Europeans holding all the high posts in the government and together with the planters and the merchants more or less forming a separate ruling caste, while the members of the old ruling families more or less governed the people in the rural areas. This was in spite of the Colebrooke Reforms of 1832-1833 which made all people equal in the sight of the law irrespective of race or caste. The middle class was naturally dissatisfied with its lot, and demanded a reform of the Legislative Council as the British middle class had done in 1832 in their own country. It is true that the Ceylonese were not a nation and their society was multi-communal.

But the territorial form of administration, roads and railways, and the common English language, which was studied by the middle classes of all communities, had linked them and developed a national spirit sufficiently strong to unite them against the British Government.

A definite demand for the reform of the Legislative Council was made around 1908. The middle class asked not for self-government or even representative government. It asked for far less. The problems of government were now more economic and territorial than racial, as the administration for some time had been conducted on a territorial basis. Hence they demanded that territorial representation should replace communal representation. In order to make the members of the legislature responsible to the people, they demanded that election should be substituted for nomination and that they should be given the franchise. They asked for a new council of thirteen officials and twelve unofficials; for the association of Ceylonese with the administration and the inclusion in the Executive Council of one or two Ceylonese.

This demand was a step in the direction of parliamentary government. But the British at this time did not think it possible to establish even the beginnings of parliamentary government in Ceylon. In their opinion this required a homogeneous society. The Ceylonese were not a nation in this sense. They were divided racially; and even the middle class was not a homogeneous body. As the demand for reform came from the English-educated middle class of the south-western sea-board and the Jaffna Peninsula, and as the new Ceylonese middle class, consisting of Sinhalese, Tamils, Kandyans and Muslims, had no separate representation in the Legislative Council, the British gave them a seat called the Educated Ceylonese seat. They also gave the Low-country Sinhalese and the Tamils an additional nominated seat each. The right to elect members was conceded to the Europeans, the Burghers, and the Educated Ceylonese. Thus, four members no longer owed their seats in the Council to the Governor but to their electorates and thus could act independently of the Government. The new Legislative Council of eleven officials and ten unofficials came into existence in 1912, but continued to be nothing more than an appendage of the executive.

Five years later the middle class again pressed for reforms. This time the situation was more hopeful, as the British giving up their old view that a parliamentary system could thrive only in a homogeneous society had decided to introduce the beginnings of parliamentary government in India. The Ceylon National Congress demanded semi-responsible government. It asked for a Legislative Council of fifty members consisting of forty territorially elected and ten officials and nominated unofficials; the control of the budget; an elected Speaker; a wide male franchise and a restricted female franchise. They also asked for unofficials in the Executive Council with portfolios, two of whom were to be elected members. In other words, they wanted a combined British and Ceylonese executive which would reflect the wishes not only of the Governor and the Secretary of State but also those of the Council. Had their demands been granted the territorially elected members would have dominated the Council, and the two elected members who were elected to the Executive Council and held portfolios would have been responsible to the Council rather than to the Governor.

The British could have agreed to this demand only if they were prepared to hand over the government of Ceylon to the Ceylonese themselves within a short period of time. But they were not prepared to change the basis of the existing system of government. They wanted the executive to continue to be responsible to the Governor. A Council with twenty three unofficials and fourteen officials was granted. Superficially it looked as if representative government had been granted. But a closer examination of the unofficial representation revealed that the British executive would still be in power. Of the twenty five unofficials, sixteen alone were to be elected. Of these only eleven were to be territorially elected, and they were expected to be Sinhalese and Tamils. Three were to be Europeans and one was to be a Burgher. The seven others were to be nominated. In a crisis it was expected that the fourteen officials would be supported by the three Europeans and the seven nominated members who owed their seats to the Governor. In other words the Government was in a position to influence 24 votes in a Council of 37.

The Ceylon National Congress objected to the reforms and, as the new constitution denied even the beginnings of self-

government, decided not to co-operate with the government. The Governor thereupon agreed, if the Congress co-operated, to give a further instalment of reforms based on the recommendations of the new Council. The Congress on this assurance co-operated and the new Constitution came into existence in 1920.

After a prolonged discussion in the new Council a further set of reforms was granted in 1924. The Council was to consist of forty nine members, twenty three territorially elected (16 for Sinhalese areas and 7 for Tamils); eleven communally elected—three Europeans and two Burghers, one Ceylon Tamil for the Western Province, three Muslims and two Indians; three nominated unofficials, and twelve officials. Ceylon was thus granted representative government. The Secretary of State who conceded more than the Government of Ceylon recommended probably expected that the executive would be able to carry out the wishes of the Governor, as the Sinhalese and Tamils, who alone were anxious to secure self-government, were still in a minority in the Council. He appears to have held the view that owing to the communal divisions in the country the minority members, though elected, would support the British Executive in all vital matters.

But the Council of 1924 belied these expectations. The communally elected members who were responsible to their electorates and not to the Governor did not always support the Government. As the problems of Ceylon were more economic and territorial, they did not always vote on communal lines. As a result, the British Executive found it difficult to act according to the wishes of the Governor and the Secretary of State. Therefore the Donoughmore Commission was appointed to make fresh proposals for the reform of the Legislative Council. The Commissioners after examining the working of the Constitution of 1924 decided to place Ceylon on the road to self-government by recommending the establishment of a form of semi-responsible government.

The Donoughmore Constitution came into existence in 1931. The State Council that replaced the Legislative Council consisted of fifty elected and eight nominated members. These were divided into seven Executive Committees each of which chose a Minister. These seven Ministers together with three Officers of State formed the Board of Ministers.

It is clear that the British in granting these reforms gave up the view they had clung to earlier, that a parliamentary form of government required a homogeneous society. They, however, took steps to unify the multi-communal society in Ceylon. They eliminated communal electorates which divided the various communities instead of uniting them. In the last council there were eleven communally elected members. In the new one there were only eight nominated members representing communities. In establishing the Executive Committee system they deviated from the parliamentary system of government. They felt there was no alternative as there was no party system in Ceylon. The most revolutionary step they took was the grant of adult franchise, for the number of voters went up from about two lakhs to about one and a half million. In addition, to a homogeneous society, what is necessary for a democratic form of government is a literate, if not an educated, electorate. But the Donoughmore Commissioners took the risk of granting to the masses of the people, not by stages but at one step, a right which they did not even demand.

From the time the Donoughmore Constitution was established demands were made for its modification. The chief criticisms were directed against the Committee system, the curtailment of the financial powers of the State Council and the abolition of communal electorates. But the Secretary of State refused to yield to these demands. In 1942 the State Council asked for Dominion Status, and in 1944 the Imperial Government appointed the Soulbury Commission to go into the reform of the Constitution. The Commission on the whole supported the scheme put forward by the Board of Ministers. They refused to yield to the demands for restricting the franchise or for restoring communal electorates. But they suggested the delimitation of electorates so as to help the minorities to secure more seats. They agreed to the replacement of the Executive Committee system by the Cabinet system, and recommended the establishment of a second chamber. The new constitution came into existence in 1947 but it still fell short of Dominion Status. Then in 1948 on the insistence of the late Mr. D. S. Senanayake, Ceylon was granted full responsible government and thus British rule came to an end in Ceylon.

## THE PERIODS OF CEYLON HISTORY

### *The Modern Conception of History*

IN a historical work an author divides his subject matter into chapters and sometimes into larger sections. In the older histories, written in Ceylon and outside, the divisions were made generally according to reigns of kings. But today, hardly anyone divides histories in this manner. Historians spot out landmarks in the history of a people, such as the arrival of the Aryans in Ceylon or the conquest of Ceylon by the British, and divide their works into stages of development showing the features which distinguish one from another. For instance, some have divided the history of Ceylon into two main periods: that before 1505, and that after 1505, as they believed that these two periods differed from each other in many respects because Ceylon was influenced mainly by India during the former and mainly by the West during the latter.

To understand new divisions such as this, we shall have to ascertain first the new ideas of history which are held today. The conception of history has undergone a radical change in the West since the nineteenth century, and it is this new conception which we are gradually adopting. Before this time history was, generally speaking, only a part of literature. Those who wrote histories went through no special training. They did not make an intensive study of history in general as a part of the necessary equipment for collecting facts and interpreting them in the historical manner. Many approached their work with similar assumptions and adopted similar methods as those in other literary fields. The main difference was that they dealt with their subject chronologically and gave special attention to what they considered historical events. Further, being mainly priests or monks, they wrote historical works to teach religious or moral lessons. The authors of the *Mahavamsa* and the *Culavamsa* aimed at rousing serene joy and religious emotion among the pious. Queyroz wrote his *Conquista*, the history of the Portuguese in Ceylon, to teach the Portuguese lessons from history in order to induce them to reconquer Ceylon and prevent them repeat

the same mistakes they made when Ceylon was under them. After that some thought as some do in Ceylon even today that history should be written to create a sense of nationalism and patriotism. But such books cannot be considered histories in the modern sense.

What then happened to history since the nineteenth century that historical works written since then differ so much from earlier works? The chief thing is that history since then has come under the influence of science. It is now treated as a discipline distinct from literature and is included under the category of social sciences along with geography, economics and sociology.

History as such is made up of demonstrable facts. Earlier writers too collected material but they did not scrutinize them sufficiently to see whether they dealt with events which actually took place. Along with facts they included in their works, legends, myths and fictitious stories. Modern historians on the other hand examine and sift the material they collect. They normally take into account only the events which occur within the realm of natural law. They exclude stories of divine intervention, though they do not ignore such beliefs and ideas if people were influenced by them. At the beginning of this century historians were so absorbed in this scientific process of separating facts from fiction that Prof. J. B. Bury declared that history was a science, no less, no more.

The collection and examination of facts involved so much labour that before long historians had to limit their research to short periods of time. The result was that they began to learn more and more about less and less. This led them to emphasize the uniqueness of events and the individuality of the periods with which they became conversant and in this process often forgot that history had also to explain how man came to be what he is today.

History was influenced in another way by science. As a result of scientific studies, Darwin and others proclaimed the theory of evolution about the middle of the nineteenth century and people generally accepted it. This theory influenced history profoundly and henceforth history was looked upon not as a mere chronological list of events but

as a series of events that evolved one from another. Historians ceased to be satisfied any longer with merely describing when, where and how things happened, and began to concentrate in addition on the causes that led to them. They began to consider as significant in history not any and every event but those that led to changes. In other words historians no longer looked upon the past as something static but as something dynamic. They took for granted not merely the stable features of human nature and the rational basis of the universe but also that the present is something that has been evolved for centuries before it came to be what it is today.

In the past what was accepted was not this linear view of history like a tree that has grown, but the cyclic view of history in some ways similar to that adopted by Arnold Toynbee in dealing with the rise and fall of civilizations. The cyclic view adopted in Ceylon was that of the Hindus in India. According to the *Purana* the universe undergoes an endless series of creations and dissolutions; each of which equals 1000 great periods of 4,320,000 years. These were divided into four ages of deterioration called *Krita*, *Treta*, *Dvapara* and *Kali*. Of these the *Kaliyuga* is the shortest and the most degenerate, and constitutes what today we regard as the historical period of the world. It is in accordance with this view of degeneration and dissolution that, in the *Katikavata* of Parakramabahu the Great, Buddhism was expected to last only five thousand years.

Science has also revealed to us the importance of the physical and social environment as an influence on the lives of people. In the past, most people looked upon history as an account of individuals and attributed events to persons rather than to forces and movements, failing in that process to observe, that in most matters affecting a community the chief actor often made little difference. It is owing to this view that they defined the history of the world as the biography of great men and divided chapters in a history according to the reigns of kings. We realize today that we are very much the creatures of our environment, of our family, caste and race, and in our actions we generally respond to the pressures of our surroundings. Therefore in history we look upon individuals as the products of the historical process and not so much as its agents, as the representatives of their age and not so much as its creators. As a result, today,

history is studied as a social process with a nation or a civilization as its unit.

This is also the reason why each generation demands a new history. The historian, being but a creature of his age, reflects on the past from the view he holds of the world of his time, and interprets it accordingly. When this view changes, the historian of the new age with the changed view has to reflect on the past and interpret it in the way demanded by his contemporaries.

Lastly, science has led to a change in the content of history. In the nineteenth century and even in the early part of this century, history was looked upon mainly as political history. When the scientific study of economics became popular, some began to take economics as the basic factor in history. In more recent times we have begun to look upon society as a whole with economic, social and political factors interacting on one another. Thus in history today we emphasize not only the political aspect but also the economic and the social aspects.

What has been stated so far can be illustrated further by comparing a modern history with the *Mahavamsa*. The *Mahavamsa* is undoubtedly a notable work, highly valued from a religious point of view as an account of the progress of Buddhism in India and Ceylon. Even when examined from the historical angle it is far superior to any historical work produced in India up to that time and compares well with European Christian chronicles of the same time. But naturally it is very different from modern histories. It is more a literary work than a history. In parts it is epic in character. Every statement in it is not a demonstrable fact. It contains in its early chapters some myths and legends among the large number of historical facts. Hence any modern historian of the early history of Ceylon will have to examine critically the evidence in the *Mahavamsa* and take into account only those events which actually took place and those statements which described Ceylon and its people as they really were. In order to interpret the development of the Sinhalese people he will have to select the facts which are historically significant, those which led to changes in society. As to why these changes took place he will in the main have to guess, as the *Mahavamsa* rarely gives reasons

for events and, even when it does, gives not so much natural but supernatural ones or other causes such as *karma* which are beyond the power of historians to test. He will have to ignore the cyclic view of deterioration. The author of the *Mahavamsa* naturally could not have presupposed the evolutionary view of life as explained in the nineteenth century. The modern historian will have to think of new divisions, as those in the *Mahavamsa* are mainly according to the reigns of kings and as it looks upon the past in some ways as a series of biographies of kings. He will have to omit some matter in it, and if possible fill in some gaps. Its main topic is the history of Buddhism in Ceylon. It gives a certain amount of political history, but very very little of economic history or social history apart from the history of Buddhism.

Thus in writing a history, a historian collects facts and then interprets them. He does not present a mere mass of facts. He makes a selection just as a builder to construct a house makes a selection of materials after being satisfied they are sound. He will have to see which facts are most significant just as the builder will have to take into account which materials will give the building the strength it needs. After he does all this, he will have to present his facts in a readable form. In doing this he will probably follow the patterns that others adopted before him. In other words what he does now partakes of the nature of art. That is one reason why history is also placed among the arts.

As it has already been stated most historians find it possible to deal with only short periods of history. Works of such authors will be read mainly by students of history and by specialists interested in the period. But historians have to relate also how the present state of things evolved from the past and in order to do this they have to deal with longer periods and sometimes with the entire history of a nation or of a civilization.

In doing this, in order to make history intelligible, they divide their histories into periods. In the past, Indian histories were divided into three periods: ancient, medieval and modern. The ancient period was the Hindu Period, the medieval the Muslim, and the modern the British. These are clearly rough divisions. In making them, historians

appear to have been guided by the fact that India was ruled mainly by Hindu, Muslim, and British rulers respectively. But when the recent Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's *History and Culture of the Indian People* was planned, it was divided in a very different way. Four volumes were allotted to the Hindu Period, one to the Muslim struggle for empire, two to the Muslim Period, one to the British Period and the last to India since 1918. This is not a history in the ordinary sense. It is an account of the history of the Indian people and of Indian culture. Hence it is understandable why unlike in earlier histories so small a section was allotted to British activities.

### *Is 1505 the dividing line in Ceylon History?*

How then shall we divide the history of Ceylon in accordance with this modern conception? Can we be satisfied with 1505, the year in which the accidental arrival of Lourenzo de Almeida took place, as the main dividing line? After the advances made in the study of history and the increasing knowledge of Ceylon that we have gained within the last fifty years, do we find it a sound division? If we look at the history of Ceylon from within and examine it, shall we not discover other divisions which will help its study better?

There are undoubtedly many grounds on which the year 1505 could be accepted as a dividing line in Ceylon history. For instance, if we view the history of Ceylon from the angle of the collection of facts, we shall find that the main evidence for the period before 1505 and that for the period thereafter fall into two distinct groups. Thus it is understandable why the University History of Ceylon adopted this division. It is a co-operative history where each writer covers one or more aspects of a period. In such a work the chief object will be the collection and selection of facts and the arrangement of them in some rational order. Besides, it is not a popular work and is meant primarily for students of history and for specialists interested in selected topics. But divisions in a normal history cannot be based on the nature of the evidence available.

Another ground, apart from sources, on which such a division was made was the conception of history that was held up to about thirty years ago. Most historians then

thought of history as political history or dynastic history, and did not devote to economic, administrative, social and cultural developments the attention that is paid today. They considered these aspects subsidiary and many of them relegated them to a chapter at the end of the book or to a section at the end of each chapter. They looked upon history as a record of the achievements of rulers and not of the people. Hence, from this point of view they considered the period up to 1505 as a record of the achievements of Sinhalese rulers and the period after 1505 as an account of the activities of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British rulers.

Even this assumption is not in accordance with facts. The rule of the Sinhalese and the Tamil kings did not come to an end in 1505. In that year there were in Ceylon three kingdoms: the Jaffna Kingdom which came into existence in the thirteenth century probably about the year 1235, the Kotte Kingdom which may be traced back to about 1415, and the Tamil Kingdom which came into being towards the end of the fifteenth century. Though both the Kotte Kingdom and the Tamil Kingdom came under Portuguese influence early, Sinhalese kings ruled over the Kotte Kingdom till 1597, and the Tamil kings ruled over their territory till 1620. The Kandyan kings maintained their independence till 1815. Hence 1597 or 1620 or 1815 is on a political basis more suitable than 1505 as a dividing line in Ceylon history.

Some judge Ceylon history from external influences and support 1505 as a dividing line on the ground that it ended the period of Indian influence in Ceylon. There is much to be said for this point of view too. Ceylon was a unit of Indian civilization from the beginning of recorded history and there is no doubt that Indian influence was cut off considerably once the Portuguese gained control of the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese dominance over the seas also ended the threat of South Indian control of Ceylon and proved a setback to the growing Muslim influence over the Island. Otherwise Ceylon might have become a part of a South Indian Kingdom or like Java might have come under the sway of the Muslims. But it is not correct to assume that Ceylon immediately came under Western dominance to such an extent as to alter the Sinhalese and Tamil ways of life hitherto influenced by India. The main effect of the coming of the Portuguese on

the internal history of the Island was an intensification of warfare and a further decline of the Sinhalese civilization.

There are others who take 1505 as a dividing line on the ground that the Portuguese ushered in the modern period of Ceylon history. Such persons usually group the so-called Portuguese and Dutch Periods and the British Period together as being of the same character and look upon them as the Western Period of Ceylon history. As the modern period of European history is said to have begun in the sixteenth century they imagine that modern developments in Ceylon began with the coming of the Portuguese. These persons have not realized sufficiently that direct Portuguese rule was limited to a part of Ceylon and that too only for a short period of time. That part covered roughly the present North-Western, the Western and the Sabaragamuva Provinces, the Jaffna Peninsula and a part of the Northern Province. The period of time the Portuguese ruled directly over the Kotte Kingdom was only about sixty years, and over the Jaffna Kingdom less than forty years. The Dutch, though they governed for nearly one hundred and forty years, ruled directly, for most of the time, over an area much smaller than that of the Portuguese. It consisted roughly of parts of the Western and the Southern Provinces, the Jaffna Peninsula and a part of the district of Mannar. In short, the greater part of Ceylon during this time was ruled by the independent kings of Kandy and the chiefs of the Vanni and these regions came directly under foreign rule only after 1815.

Even within this limited area the impact of the West was not seriously felt. The Portuguese and the Dutch did not bring about any radical changes in the Sinhalese and Tamil ways of life. They governed these regions according to the ancient customs of the people though in some instances they disregarded them. They kept up the caste system for economic purposes. They made no serious attempt to spread their languages with the object of civilizing the people of Ceylon or to open the windows of the the world to them. They retained in most respects the Sinhalese and the Tamil economic systems. They made no important change in the Sinhalese and the Tamil systems of administration. Within this restricted region, the only important alteration they made was the introduction of the Roman Catholic and the

Protestant forms of Christianity in opposition to Buddhism and Hinduism.

In fact even the British up to 1832 roughly continued the Dutch system and ruled the people in accordance with their own institutions and customs, dealing with them in their own languages, Sinhalese and Tamil. The only difference they made during their rule was that they gave the people the freedom to worship any religion they liked.

There are yet others who consider 1505 as a dividing line as they believe the decline of Ceylon began with the coming of the Portuguese. It is true that the so-called Portuguese Period was a period of decline in many respects. Buddhism and Hinduism in particular and the Sinhalese and Tamil civilization in general suffered owing to wars and the effects of Portuguese rule. But if it is assumed that the decline of Ceylon started with the Portuguese wars, such a view cannot be upheld by any stretch of imagination. Indeed, even the limited success the Portuguese and the Dutch achieved in their attempt to subjugate Ceylon was due to the fact that the decline of Ceylon had begun long before, shortly after the death of Parakramabahu the Great.

After the death of Parakramabahu the Great there was a civil war in Ceylon, a war of succession, which lasted nearly fifty years. During this war the claimants to the throne from Kalinga appear to have come with South Indian mercenaries and waged war on their opponents. This protracted war was followed by further South Indian invasions which led to the occupation of Ceylon by Pandya for some years. During this warfare, as a part of strategy, the tanks were breached and consequently the irrigation system broke down. As a result, the resources of the kings dwindled and the Sinhalese civilization declined. Buddhism suffered for want of royal patronage, and there is little evidence from this time of Buddhist activities in the Dry Zone regions of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Magama.

Ceylon thereafter ceased to be politically united. There came into existence a Tamil Kingdom in the north, and in the south Sinhalese power was split among the chieftains. Consequently in the Sinhalese area nominal overlordship passed from the chief of one region to that of another till the Kotte



Kingdom came to be established in 1415 and the Kandyan Kingdom towards the end of the fifteenth century. After the arrival of the Portuguese the Kotte Kingdom was further divided, and there came into existence the rival kingdom of Sitavaka. Had Ceylon been under a single monarch in the sixteenth century as in the days of Parakramabahu the Great the course of Ceylon history might have taken a different turn. It is more likely in that case that the Portuguese and the Dutch would have merely formed alliances with the rulers of Ceylon and come to trade agreements with them. In fact the Portuguese and the Dutch at this time were more interested in trade than in the acquisition of territory.

How then shall we divide Ceylon history if we reject 1505 as a turning point? Where can we find more important landmarks or a satisfactory division? Can we learn from the experience of European historians? European histories are generally divided into three periods; ancient, medieval and modern. The ancient period extends from the earliest times up to the fall of the Roman Empire. Its main topic is the Greek and Roman civilizations. It deals with Greek rationalism and Roman law and administration. The medieval covers the period from the fall of the Roman Empire up to about the end of the fifteenth century and its chief features are feudalism and the Roman Catholic Church. Then comes the modern age as a result of a number of important events. The chief of them are the Voyages of Discovery, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Rise of the Nation State, the Invention of Printing, the Rise of the Middle Class and the Establishment of Capitalism. The Voyages of Discovery ushered in the commercial age, helped to break up feudalism, and enabled the rise of the Middle Class. The Renaissance led to an acceptance of a "this worldly view of life" and an emphasis on reason as against authority. The Reformation not only led to revolutionary changes in the Christian Church but also destroyed its unity and gave an impetus to the rise of the Nation State. The Printing Press made it possible for learning to spread outside the religious orders. In fact what is important is that so many events took place at the same time interacting on one another and bringing about changes in society in so many different directions.

Some divide this modern period into two, the first section ending with the eighteenth century and the second begin-

ning from the French and the Industrial Revolutions. There are still others who think that a third section began with the Russian Revolution in 1917.

These divisions are made according to the modern conception of history. Can we divide Ceylon history in a similar way? There are undoubtedly two landmarks in the history of Ceylon important enough to divide it into three periods, ancient, medieval and modern. They do not necessarily correspond to the periods in European history except perhaps the modern. The first period is in no way similar to that in European history with its Greek and Roman civilizations while the difference between the first and the second is not so fundamental as in European history.

The first of these is in the thirteenth century and if a more exact date is to be given it may be placed about 1235 when Magha of Kalinga appears to have established a Tamil Kingdom in the north. Then the Sinhalese Buddhist civilization of the ancient Dry Zone broke down. The unity of Ceylon, established about the time of Devanampiya Tissa and maintained thereafter except for a few interruptions, disappeared. The irrigation system, which had gradually grown and reached its highest stage of development in the time of Parakramabahu the Great, collapsed. Buddhism, which depended on royal endowments, began to decay in the Dry Zone and the great advances in art and architecture which accompanied its growth and expansion came almost to an end.

The second landmark with which the modern period emerged is the British conquest. If we need a more exact date the modern period may be said to begin about 1832 with the Colebrooke Reforms. It certainly did not begin earlier if we judge by European standards. The Portuguese did not make Ceylon a modern country. The Voyages of Discovery affected Ceylon and increased the trade in spices, but it brought about no appreciable change in the economic life of the people. The spice trade was a government monopoly and the Sinhalese and the Tamils had hardly any share in it. The Dutch introduced the Printing Press and even made a start with the rule of law and an organized system of elementary education; but these too did not lead to any fundamental changes in Ceylon society. It did not begin in

1815—though in that year Ceylon once more became united under a single ruler—because the British continued for some years more the three different systems of administration that existed up to this time.

The change, corresponding to that in Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century and thereafter, took place about 1832 with the Colebrooke Reforms. It was then that the abolition of *rajakariya* and the government trade monopolies based on it, made possible the development of plantations, free trade, private enterprise and the growth of capitalism. The establishment of a unified system of government with a common system of law courts made Ceylon a nation state on a territorial basis and brought it under the rule of law. The making of the English language the medium of instruction in government schools and the freer use of it in the administration, led to a change of thought at least among the upper classes, somewhat similar to that which took place in Europe as a result of the study of the Greek and Roman classics. The abolition of the arbitrary powers of the Governor made possible a free press and the expansion of printing in the Island. The Colebrooke Reforms went even further and established a Legislative Council with unofficial members initiating a democratic form of government in Ceylon.

#### *The Ancient Period*

The ancient period of Ceylon history therefore may be taken to extend from about the fifth century B.C. when a people who spoke an Aryan dialect settled in this Island, to about the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D., when Polonnaruva ceased to be the capital of Ceylon as a result of the invasion of Magha of Kalinga. It was the period of the greatest creative achievements of the Sinhalese. It was then that the three ancient cities of Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Polonnaruva, which still attract visitors from all parts of the world, came into existence. Dutugemunu and Parakramabahu the Great, who, more than other kings, captured the imagination of the Sinhalese people, ruled during this time, and Buddhism which is yet professed by nearly two-thirds of the inhabitants of Ceylon reached its zenith. To it also belonged the construction of irrigation works, described by John Still as 'the finest item of the ancient Sinhalese culture and the most beautiful feature of the country excepting only the mountain peaks and valleys'.

The civilization of this period was essentially of the Dry Zone. The south-western part of the island, the Wet Zone, which today is the most thickly populated was, the least developed. The people in the main lived in isolated villages having their own form of village government, producing their food and most of their other necessities, and depending little on other parts of the country or on the central government. There was however one problem which they found difficult to tackle by themselves. Living as they did in the Dry Zone they had rain only during the north-east monsoon. This rain was inadequate for the cultivation of enough rice to satisfy them. If the north-east monsoon rains failed, they suffered further from famine and pestilence. The peasants tried to overcome these drawbacks first by building small tanks and canals in their villages. When such action proved inadequate, kings, provincial and district rulers, utilizing rivers and large streams, built a net work of large tanks and canals with the assistance of the people. As Reginald Farrar points out in *In Old Ceylon*, these tanks were the pulsing hearts and the irrigation channels the arteries which carried life and nourishment to the wide cultivated fields which at that time covered the plains of the Dry Zone.

It is this extensive production, enabled by these vast irrigation works, that helped the people to maintain themselves, the thousands of Buddhist bhikkhus, who satisfied their religious, spiritual and cultural requirements, the hierarchy of officials throughout the country who maintained peace and order, and the host of craftsmen who constructed vihares with dagobas and other buildings as well as tanks and canals. In other words it was these irrigation works that enabled the Government and the Sangha to maintain the high standard of civilization attained in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva times.

The social organization which the people gradually developed during this period was that of caste. Buddhism provided no organization for the laity as Hinduism and Christianity did. Hence society in Ceylon which was originally tribal continued at first without much change. With the spread of Hindu ideas, tribe gradually gave way to caste. Like the tribe, caste is based on kinship and this relationship gives it sufficient cohesiveness to endure vicissitudes it has to go through. It has no form of organization of its own to

link its various members and enable them to act as a body; it depends on its unit, the family, to maintain it. It has more stability than the tribal system as it is supported further by religious beliefs and practices. It rests on the Hindu doctrine of *sva karma* and the religious unity of the family. According to the doctrine of *sva karma* the state of life or caste to which a man is born is due to his actions in his previous births and therefore it is his duty to perform the obligations from those of his status or caste. The Brahmin priests performed rites not for congregations but for families and these rites kept together the family which saw that caste rules were observed and that individuals, who had no rights as such in this society, placed the interests of the family and of the caste before their own. The caste system suited agrarian conditions of life. In such a society a man's occupation normally depended on his birth and he had little opportunity of changing it. Hence emphasis on birth seemed natural, and the hierarchy of castes according to occupations like the hierarchies of gods and chiefs was accepted.

Religion played a very important part in this agrarian society. The chief religion of Ceylon during this period was Theravada Buddhism which was introduced in the time of the great Emperor Asoka (c. 274-237 B.C.). As time passed, it spread into every important village in the Dry Zone and the Buddhist vihares that came to be established served as centres of religious and spiritual life, education and culture. The ruins of these vihares, embellished often by sculpture and painting, reveal the heights which Buddhism reached, the extent to which it influenced the people, and the regard in which it was held. Buddhism at first was mainly an other worldly religion of the bhikshus though the laity had some part in it. After the coming of Mahayanism, with the worship of bodhisattvas it became more popular, and satisfied the needs of the laity better.

The Buddhist bhikshus helped people to lead good lives and prepare themselves for the attainment of happiness in the next life. They also chanted *piti* to influence the elements and to prevent disasters over which the ordinary beings had no control. As time passed, being monastic in organization, it did not prevent the worship of Hindu gods, who partly replaced local deities and Mahayanist bodhisattvas, for favours in this life. Thus while in India

Buddhism was almost absorbed by Hinduism, in Ceylon it survived by expanding its own activities and allowing Hinduism to supply some of the elements of popular religion it lacked. Ceylon derived its religion and culture from India. Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism came from the empire of the Mauryas, Mahayana Buddhism from that of the Satavahanas, while Hindu influences reached Ceylon mainly from those of the Guptas, the Pallavas and the Cholas.

The system of government during this period reflected to some extent the geographical, economic and social conditions of the time. Ceylon during the Anuradhapura period was at first divided into two geographical divisions, the northern plain and Ruhuna. With the developments in irrigation, the northern plain surpassed Ruhuna in importance and the rulers of its four divisions became politically powerful. From the sixth century, generally speaking, the heir to the throne became the ruler of Dakkhinadesa, the southern division. This area, which on that account came to be known as Mayarata, became so important by the end of the Anuradhapura Period that Ceylon came to be divided into three regions, Rajarata, Mayarata and Ruhuna later called the Tri Sinhala.

The government in this period owing to the agrarian economy was hierarchical. The King formed the apex of the pyramid. Then came the princes who ruled the provinces and the important districts. Next came the district rulers and finally the village headmen. The King's main duty was to maintain peace and order. He did this in normal times with the help of his court officials and district rulers. He maintained an army to check invasions and suppress rebellions. As we have noted already, he also satisfied the economic needs of the people by building tanks and canals. He assisted the religious bodies such as the Sangha by gifting vihares and endowing them with a part of his revenues. He paid also his officials from these revenues which consisted mainly of the share of produce given to him by the people.

Political power during this period was exercised by a number of dynasties. At first it seems to have depended mainly on the strength of the clan to which each belonged. From the time we have some reliable evidence up to the first century A.D. Ceylon was ruled by Devanampiya Tissa and his descendants, the name of whose clan is not known. They

were followed by the Lambakarnas, who ruled Ceylon for four centuries, and then by the less powerful clan of the Moriyas. During the rule of the last clan there was constant warfare as it was small and did not get sufficient support to maintain itself in power. Finally there was civil war between the descendants and followers of Sangha Tissa II (614) and those of Silameghavanna (619-628). The party of the latter triumphed in the end when Manavamma (684-718) established himself firmly on the throne with the aid of a Pallava army from South India. After that the country on the whole was free from internal wars up to the end of the Anuradhapura Period.

The peace of the country was disturbed also by foreign invasions. In the second and first centuries B.C. and in the fourth century A.D. for a short period Ceylon was ruled by South Indian invaders. After the reign of Sena I (833-853) whenever South Indian rulers began to expand their kingdoms at the expense of others, Ceylon entered into the orbit of South Indian politics and took sides in wars in order to prevent invasions of the Island. During these wars Ceylon was often attacked. In the eleventh century with the establishment of a great South Indian Empire by the Cholas, Ceylon came to be ruled by them for over fifty years. Thereafter Polonnaruva, which the Cholas made their seat of government, took the place of Anuradhapura as the capital of Ceylon. Not long after, owing to conflicts in the royal family, there were wars among the rulers of Rajarata, Mayarata and Ruhuna. Ultimately however all three regions came under the rule of Parakramabahu the Great. His death was followed again by a civil war as he had no son to succeed him, and then by South Indian invasions. These led to the disruption of the Polonnaruva Kingdom.

Thus, on the whole, the factors that worked towards unity prevailed during this period. Though the central government was a skeleton one and its rule rested lightly on the provinces and the districts, and the Sinhalese political, economic and social system was not conducive to unity, the Sinhalese except for short periods continued to be united under a single monarch. But ultimately the South Indian invasions became the dominant political factor, and they proved too strong for the Sinhalese to resist.

Many features of our present civilization had their beginnings in the ancient period. The Sinhalese and the Tamils, the chief races of today, settled in the Island during this time. Buddhism and Hinduism, which still have the largest number of adherents, became firmly established. The caste system, which has persisted in a modified form up to the present day, took deep root during the Polonnaruva Period. The irrigation works in which we are once more interested were almost entirely a product of this period.

### *The Medieval Period*

The medieval period extended from about the time Magha of Kalinga established an independent kingdom in the north up to the end of the eighteenth century. It began with the breakdown of the central government at Polonnaruva, the consequent neglect of the irrigation system and the decline of the Buddhist vihares in the Dry Zone, and ended with the British conquest of the Maritime provinces and the Kandyan Kingdom.

The political history during this period was marred by constant warfare except during the Dutch occupation of the Maritime Provinces. There were wars between Sinhalese and Tamil kings, between Sinhalese Kings, between Sinhalese and Tamil kings and the Portuguese, and between Sinhalese kings and the Dutch. Agriculture, which flourished mainly in the Wet Zone, depended on uncertain rains rather than on a system of tanks which ensured a regular supply of water. Rulers developed foreign trade to compensate themselves for this loss of revenue from land. In this period of insecurity Buddhism declined and Hinduism and Christianity began to compete with it.

The invasion of Magha, the final event of the war of succession that followed the death of Parakramabahu the Great, led to a disintegration of the ancient Sinhalese kingdom, and the chiefs of the different districts began to act as independent rulers. But before long, a process of integration took place though it did not go far enough. In the north Magha and Jayabahu became the chief rulers and in the south Parakramabahu II brought a good portion of the country under his control. Then, as a result of the disintegration of the Chola Empire and the expansion of the Pandya Kingdom, there were further invasions from South India,

and possibly on grounds of trade others from Tambralinga in the Malay Peninsula. Finally from the chaos that ensued, there emerged in the north a Tamil Kingdom and in the south two Sinhalese Kingdoms, the Kotte and the Kandyan, which divided the Sinhalese politically into low-country and up-country.

The Tamil Kingdom which covered the present Northern Province, survived the invasions of the Vijayanagara Empire that came into existence in the fourteenth century, and of the Kotte Kingdom under Parakramabahu VI. It came to an end only in 1621 when it was conquered by the Portuguese.

Magha's invasion forced the Sinhalese rulers to abandon the ancient centres of civilization in the Dry Zone like Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and gradually establish themselves in the Wet Zone which comprised the south-west region. Most of them were weak, and exercised little control over the semi-independent chiefs of the districts under them. This led to claims for political supremacy, civil wars, and invasions from without, and Dambadeniya, Yapahuva, Polonnaruwa, Kurunagala, Gampola and Kotte becoming the capital of the Sinhalese Kingdom in turn.

The Kotte Kingdom covered the present North-Western, Western and Sabaragamuwa Provinces and the Galle and Matara Districts. In the sixteenth century the government of this territory was shared by the Kings of Kotte and Sitavaka until it fell into the hands of the Portuguese. The only Sinhalese kings who had some measure of success against the Portuguese were Mayadunne and Rajasinha of Sitavaka who might have expelled the Portuguese but for the fact that the latter controlled the seas and were able to get help in time from Goa, their headquarters.

The Dutch seized the Portuguese possessions in the middle of the sixteenth century, but for the greater part of the time they were in this Island they had direct control only over the Jaffna Peninsula, a part of the Western Province, and the Galle and Matara Districts.

The Kandyan Kingdom covered the highlands, the present North-Central and Eastern Provinces and the Hambantota Districts. It survived the invasions of the Kings of

Sitavaka, the Portuguese and the Dutch, and lost its independence only in 1815 when it was occupied by the British with the assistance of the Kandyan chiefs. It was able to hold on till the nineteenth century as most of it was like a hill fortress perched on mountains not easy of access.

The only kings who attempted to be sole rulers of the Island during this period were Parakramabahu II and Parakramabahu VI. Parakramabahu II failed probably as he could not restore the irrigation works and did not have sufficient resources to carry on the war with the Tamils. Parakramabahu VI was successful, but his less able successors were not able to maintain their hold over the outlying provinces around Jaffna and Kandy as they had no quick means of communication with them from their capital in the south-west. Had the Portuguese not been here and Mayadunne or Rajasinha of Sitavaka gained control of the whole of Ceylon the same fate would probably have befallen their successors.

The fall of the central government at Polonnaruwa had its repercussions in the economic sphere too. The civil war and the invasions from South India, which broke up the Sinhalese Kingdom, also destroyed to a considerable extent the network of tanks and canals, and, in the absence of a powerful ruler in that region, there was no serious attempt to restore them. Even Parakramabahu II, who tried to restore Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, did not have the power or the means to restore this ancient irrigation system.

In the Tamil Kingdom there was no important economic change. It retained the ancient allodial system with its grain tax, and the Portuguese and the Dutch, when they occupied this area, did not make any significant change in its economy. But it was not so in the Sinhalese Kingdoms. As in the Wet Zone, where land suitable for the cultivation of paddy was limited, the kings gradually converted the freeholdings into service lands, and the occupants of these lands, ceasing to pay the grain tax, rendered instead diverse services to the King. Thus their relations with the rulers became feudal.

Another important economic change took place in the Kotte Kingdom. Its rulers became more conscious of the value of trade. Receiving far less revenue than their predecessors who reigned in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa,

they encouraged the foreign trade especially in cinnamon. This trade brought Muslims in increasing numbers into the Island and later led to the occupation of the Maritime Provinces by the Portuguese and the Dutch. The Portuguese and the Dutch modified the Sinhalese system of *rajakariya* or service due to the king to suit the needs of their trade and government. But they made no radical alteration of the system as a whole.

The Dutch made a few other changes too in the Sinhalese areas. They constructed canals not for irrigation but for the purpose of transporting cinnamon. They established minor industries like carpentry and brick manufacture as they helped them to construct houses for their merchants and buildings for storing their goods. They encouraged the cultivation of commercial crops like coffee and established a few plantations.

In the social sphere too there were important changes. As in the case of the economy, in social conditions too differences arose in the three kingdoms, widening the gulf between the Sinhalese and the Tamil areas and between the low-country and the up-country Sinhalese.

In the Tamil area South Indian forms of Hinduism and of caste became firmly entrenched and Tamil became the language of government. In the Dry Zone Sinhalese area Buddhism declined as a result of the South Indian invasions, the decay of the irrigation works and the disappearance of the central government at Polonnaruva which gave it protection and patronage. It flourished to some extent in the Wet Zone Sinhalese area from the time Dambadeniya became the capital city up to the end of the fifteenth century. It declined thereafter in this area too. The Portuguese during their wars with the Sinhalese kings, destroyed the Buddhist vihares as well as the devales; and the Roman Catholic missionaries filled the void to some extent by establishing Roman Catholic churches. The Dutch, after they expelled the Portuguese, persecuted the Roman Catholics and tried to replace Roman Catholicism with the Calvinist form of Protestantism. During this period Buddhism in the lowland areas had no chance of revival, and a large section of the population became Christians. Even in the Kandyan Kingdom, owing to

warfare within and invasions from without, Buddhism declined until it revived once more under the leadership of the saintly Valivita Saranankara about the middle of the eighteenth century.

Buddhism during this time had no great buildings to its credit apart from the Lankatilaka and the Gadaladeniya Vihares in Gampola and the dalada maligavas or the tooth-relic temples, on which during this period of insecurity the kings depended much for the maintenance of their power. But it did make a contribution in the field of Sinhalese literature. Buddhist bhikshus during the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva periods wrote a number of Sinhalese works but they were mainly commentarial. Their chief works, including historical writings like the *Mahavamsa*, were in Pali, the language of the Theravada Canon. But by the end of the Polonnaruva Period Buddhist bhikshus had begun to use more freely, the Sinhalese language, now enriched by Sanskrit in addition to Pali, in the writing of poetry and prose. During this period along with a few laymen they wrote a number of Sinhalese works of a more popular character which have continued to be read up to the present day. Thus there was a definite development in Sinhalese language and literature.

It has been noted already that Hinduism entrenched itself during this period in the north. It spread also in the Sinhalese areas. In fact Buddhism allied itself with it during this period. In this time of constant wars and other misfortunes the people, probably more keen on gaining security in this life than in attaining *nirvana*, sought the protection of the gods more than what the vihares could confer on them. Hinduism too suffered in the coastal districts during the wars with the Portuguese. Its devales were destroyed and, like Buddhism, it had little chance of revival till the end of Dutch rule.

As a result of the influence of South India and of Hinduism and on account of the insecurity in which people lived, the caste system became more rigid during this period. The Portuguese and the Dutch disregarded the caste system at times but they did not weaken it as they needed it to get their services performed for the maintenance of the government and the pursuit of their trade.

The Dutch, within the restricted limits of their territory, took other measures which changed the social life of the people. They established a widespread system of elementary education. They set up a system of law courts, codified Tamil customs, and applied Roman Dutch law where Sinhalese and Tamil customs failed to meet the changing ways of life. Thus they made a section of the Sinhalese and Tamil people literate and established the beginnings of the rule of law in the Island.

The most powerful rulers during the period were the Portuguese and the Dutch. Though the Sinhalese and the Tamil ways of life changed little under their rule, it was clear by the end of Dutch rule, that it was Ceylon's situation on the highway of sea traffic from the West to the East, and not her proximity to India, that was to influence her development in the years to come.

#### *The Modern Period*

The modern period may be said to begin in 1796 with the British conquest of the Maritime Provinces from the Dutch. From 1796 till 1801 the British East India Company ruled the Maritime Provinces, and from 1802 the British Crown. The British occupied the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815 and this brought the whole of Ceylon under their rule. They at first attempted to govern according to the ancient customs of the country, the Northern and the Eastern provinces according to Tamil and Muslim custom, the Kandyan Provinces according to Kandyan custom, and the Low-country Sinhalese areas according to Sinhalese custom as modified by Portuguese and Dutch rule. The British Governors and Civil Servants, however, could not forget their own ideas of government and ways of life and at times altered some of these customs in accordance with their own.

From 1832 the British reversed this policy and began to rule Ceylon according to British ideas and to bring the government of Ceylon wherever possible into line with that of Britain. They established in 1832-1833 a common form of administration on a territorial basis for the whole island uniting the three separate administrative units of the Tamil, the Kandyan and the Low-country Sinhalese areas. They re-arranged the provinces uniting the Kandyan lowlands

with the Low-country Sinhalese and Tamil districts. They abandoned arbitrary forms of government, established a common system of law courts for the whole island and brought all persons under the rule of law. They did away with practices which discriminated between races and castes, and made all persons equal in the sight of the law.

After 1832 the Government intended to concern itself mainly with the maintenance of law and order and the carrying out of a limited number of other essential duties and give an impetus to change mainly by a reform of the legal system. But in the absence of a powerful middle class, as in Britain, to undertake economic and social work it continued what it had already undertaken and took to others as the need arose. Earlier it had constructed roads to maintain military control over the Kandyan highlands. Now to facilitate the administration of the whole island, the chief towns were connected by road. After that, roads were built to help the development of plantations and to connect Colombo with distant towns. It restored irrigation works in the Dry Zone to increase paddy cultivation and thereby improve the conditions of the peasants. In order to do all this efficiently the Civil Service was reorganized in 1845 and gradually the number of provinces was increased from five to nine.

From about 1870 the Ceylon Government following the Government in Britain began to take more positive action in these and other directions. It took responsibility for providing health services and elementary education in Sinhalese and Tamil. The Colombo harbour was built to facilitate the export of Ceylon products. The Government began from about the beginning of this century to expand all these services and start others. This expansion was so far-reaching that the Government began to influence the life and thought of the people in a way it had never done before and government service became the chief occupation of the English-educated.

When the British occupied Ceylon, the economy of the people was on the whole agrarian and the little trade that existed was in the main a government monopoly. The revenue from the grain tax, the cinnamon monopoly and other sources were not sufficient to run the modern form of government which the British tried to establish with highly

paid Europeans at the top. Therefore they gave concessions to encourage the people to follow the Dutch in opening plantations. But few were able to take advantage of these opportunities. The few Europeans who did so met with only a small measure of success.

In 1832 the British went further to encourage trade and industry. They abolished *rajakariya*, which hindered the mobility of labour, and the government monopolies, which left little room for private enterprise and free trade. They provided, as we have seen already, a unified administrative, judicial and legal system to enable trade and industry to thrive. But all this produced no immediate results.

The situation began to change from about 1837. There was an increased demand for coffee in Europe and many Europeans began to open plantations. As the abolition of *rajakariya* did not produce the necessary labour, they secured coolies from India to work them. Before long the number of coffee plantations grew rapidly and covered a large part of the hill country. But in the seventies the planters gradually abandoned the cultivation of coffee as the coffee plant was attacked by a pest and took to the planting of tea. Later they opened rubber and coconut plantations and in these the Ceylonese too participated. Thus the cultivation and manufacture of tea and rubber and the cultivation of coconut for the manufacture of copra, desiccated coconut and oil became the chief industries of the country. The development of plantations also led to the growth of trade within the country and with foreign lands. As a result the country became prosperous, government revenue increased, and the Government was able to carry on the multifarious services which it planned to render from time to time.

The British officials at first conducted their office administration through the medium of English and their work with the people through Sinhalese and Tamil. The Government also established a few English schools and encouraged others conducted by private bodies in order to recruit persons who knew English to work in their offices. In 1832 it took the responsibility to establish English schools on a wider scale. Though it gradually abandoned this responsibility, the number of English schools increased. By the beginning of the twentieth century the demand for men with a knowledge of English

increased owing to the rapid expansion of government departments. Then all the religious bodies, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Buddhist and Hindu began to establish English schools.

The British gradually neglected to maintain the network of Sinhalese and Tamil schools established by the Dutch. The Protestant Christian missionaries filled the void in the areas they worked in order to convert the people to Christianity. These schools gradually increased in numbers. From about the middle of the nineteenth century the Government once more began to establish Sinhalese and Tamil schools and from 1869 took responsibility for elementary Sinhalese and Tamil education. After this not only the Protestants but also the Roman Catholics, Buddhists and Hindus began to establish Sinhalese and Tamil schools in increasing numbers; and the number of children undergoing education quickly increased and literacy became widespread. As time passed the scope and content of education in Sinhalese and Tamil schools widened and they began to form a system parallel to the English Schools.

The system of government imposed on Ceylon by the British and the activities pursued by it did not go unchallenged. The first to object to it were the Sinhalese chiefs whose powers were curtailed. In 1797 they rose in rebellion against the Madras Government of the British East India Company which ruled Ceylon from 1796 to 1798. In the Kandyan Kingdom they rose against the British in 1817. In the Low-country, the chiefs were supported in 1797 by people who objected to any change in their customs and in the hill-country areas they were encouraged in addition by the Buddhist bhikshus who did not like the reduction of their influence. After the suppression of these rebellions, the chiefs made no serious attempt to upset British rule and from the latter half of the nineteenth century they generally co-operated with the British.

The next body of people to object to the way the government was carried on were not Ceylonese. With the growth of the plantations there came to this country a large number of British merchants and planters. The British Government on the recommendation of Colebrooke had established a Legislative Council with unofficial members as an appendage



to the executive to give them a chance to express their views on the laws it proposed to enact. The merchants and planters were not satisfied with British policy with regard to plantations and trade. They did not, like the chiefs, rise in rebellion but criticized the Government through newspapers under their control and in the Legislative Council where they had three representatives from 1837. They even pressed for a reform of the Legislative Council whereby the unofficials might obtain a greater control of the Government. On the whole they obtained what they wanted as far as their commercial and planting interests were concerned but failed to get any control of the Government.

The next set of people who questioned the policy of the British Government were the Buddhists and the Hindus whose interests were neglected by the British. When the British at the beginning of their rule granted religious toleration, a large number of persons, who were nominal Christians, reverted to their old faiths. From that time Buddhism and Hinduism began to revive gradually. The Protestant churches as in Dutch times, made many converts to Christianity mainly by taking advantage of the opportunities afforded them by the schools. The Buddhists and Hindus naturally opposed this action of the Christian missionaries. They entered into public controversies with them and, adopting the methods of the missionaries themselves, began to counteract their work. The British Government at first favoured the Protestants and, as time passed, the Buddhist and Hindu movements became not only anti-Christian and anti-Western but also anti-government.

The final challenge to British rule came from the middle class educated in English schools. The developments in administration led to the rise, in addition to government servants, of lawyers, doctors, and teachers, while the opening of plantations led many Ceylonese to cultivate tea, rubber and coconut and to take to trade. These had no political power or any important share in the control of the administration. Influenced by British liberal ideas and following the example of British merchants and planters, they demanded a reform of the Legislative Council in order to change this state of affairs. In 1921 they gained an unofficial majority and in 1924 full representative government. In 1931 they succeeded in making the Executive partly responsible to the Legislature.

In 1947 they gained full responsible government under the Crown in all matters of internal civil administration as well as some control over defence and external affairs and in 1948 they gained complete self-government within the British Commonwealth.

The English-educated middle class maintained their power till 1956 when the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists assisted by the working classes defeated them at the General Election and gained control of the Government. In 1931 the Donoughmore Constitution had granted adult franchise and thereafter political leaders had come into power only by the popular vote. In 1832 all people of the Island had been made equal before the law. From 1931 as a result of the adult franchise they were in a position to attain equality of opportunity. As they became gradually conscious of this fact they began to demand the removal of privileges which gave some people advantage over others. The workers began to ask for greater rights and an improvement of their economic and social conditions. The Sinhalese-educated, who consisted of very much more than half the population, wanted Sinhalese made the language of Government. The Tamils in turn wanted their language placed on an equal footing. The Buddhists demanded that Christians should be deprived of the privileged position they had attained under British rule; that the state should make itself responsible for the education of children; and that it should put an end to the system of assisted schools managed by religious bodies which gave religious education only to the children who were adherents of their faith though the schools were attended by children of all religions. Sinhalese has now become the official language by law. Most of the denominational schools have been taken over by the Government. The working classes have improved their economic and social status. The Tamil problem has yet to be settled.

Thus vast changes have taken place since 1796 in the political, economic and social spheres; and further changes can be expected in the years to come.

## 11

## THE DONOUGHMORE REFORMS

THE Donoughmore Reforms require a complete chapter as much as the Colebrooke Reforms. They constitute the second turning-point in the British Period, and without understanding their implications it is not possible to understand what is happening today. They led to the establishment of a parliamentary form of government and of a welfare state in Ceylon; to a positive decision and action to weld the various communities into a Ceylonese nation; to the grant of adult franchise which enabled the whole community to partake in the government of the country. These in turn led to independence and finally to the indigenization of Ceylonese society, as adult franchise placed the ultimate control of the Government in the hands of those who had their roots in the tradition and history of the country.

These Reforms of 1931 were in many respects a fulfilment of the Colebrooke Reforms. It has been shown how the latter led to the administrative, legal and economic unification of Ceylon; how they deprived the various races and castes of their special rights and placed all individuals legally on an equal footing so that they might weld themselves into a Ceylonese nation and form into associations of the modern type as the need arose. Colebrooke and Cameron also wanted English made the language of government and English schools alone conducted by the Government. In making these recommendations they probably expected English to supersede Sinhalese and Tamil and become the language of communication of the various races. It has also been shown how an English speaking middle class consisting of the various races and religions arose as a result of these developments.

But there was no conscious attempt after 1832 to weld the various communities together. The result was that the Colebrooke Reforms themselves led to the creation of further divisions in society. Before two decades passed the British officials realized that Sinhalese and Tamil children could not be taught through the medium of English unless they had a

grounding in their own languages first. The result was that Government went back to the establishment of Sinhalese and Tamil schools, but in the three types of schools, Sinhalese, Tamil and English, that came into existence, little or no attempt was made to bridge the gulf between the English and the vernacular schools. The British continued this policy throughout their rule right up to 1931 and after; and took no account of the anomaly in continuing to run the Government increasingly through the medium of English while most of the schools continued to be either Sinhalese or Tamil.

Colebrooke entrusted the control of the government schools to the Anglican Clergy and allowed the Protestant Missionaries to conduct schools with the object of converting the children to Protestantism. This led in time to the rise also of Roman Catholic, Buddhist and Hindu schools which further hindered the people of Ceylon from merging into a single nation. The redeeming feature in these schools was that they did not lead to religious segregation. But the fact that Buddhist and Hindu children did not receive in Christian schools any education in their religions led to conflicts between Christians on the one hand and Buddhist and Hindus on the other. Further, as it has been shown, the development of plantations led to the addition of two more racial communities, the European and the Indian Tamil.

The divisions did not end with these. The English-educated middle class demanded in 1908 the reform of the Legislative Council and the establishment of territorial electorates, in harmony with the administrative and economic unification which had already taken place. The British Government then, deviating from the objectives of the Colebrooke Reforms on the ground that society in Ceylon was still divided by race, established communal electorates instead of trying to weld the people into a single nation by the creation of territorial electorates as requested. In 1921 and 1924 it extended them further to maintain a balance in the Legislature in their favour thus giving these racial divisions a further lease of life by recognizing them legally.

The calculations of the British Government, however, went wrong. The English-educated middle class rarely divided on communal lines, and the Governor found it difficult to run the

Government as he wished. The result was the appointment of the Donoughmore Commission to recommend further changes in the constitution.

The Donoughmore Commission found that the problem of the Ceylon Government was one of representative government. It was not possible to go back to the Crown Colony form. Nor was it possible to continue the form of government established in 1924 with a few palliatives to solve the immediate difficulties. The constitution of 1924 was unsatisfactory for two reasons. It continued the form of government in which control was still in British hands. It gave a subordinate status to the people of Ceylon who were indoctrinated by the British themselves with ideas of liberty and equality.

It is clear that both Colebrooke and Cameron wanted to prevent such an eventuality. They wanted no distinctions made between the British and the Ceylonese and recommended the admission of Ceylonese both into the Civil and the Judicial Services on an equal footing. But their proposals were not adhered to after the reform of the Civil Service in 1845. The British thereafter gained ascendancy in the Government and in the Government Services and little was done to educate and train Ceylonese to fill the higher posts in the Services.

The only step left was to establish a responsible form of government within the British Empire. It was probably such a Government that Colebrooke envisaged when he recommended the establishment of a Legislative Council which would eventually constitute an essential part of any colonial legislature for which the people may be prepared at a future period.

The establishment of a responsible form of government was a step to end British rule. The earlier Legislative Council was at times looked upon by the British as a sort of Durbar for consultation with the leaders of various communities in passing legislation. This they did as they thought in terms of a permanent trusteeship. To establish a responsible form of government amounted to an admission that the ward had come of age. It also meant the transfer of power from the Secretary of State and the British Parliament to the Legislative Council and the people of Ceylon.

There were, however, many difficulties in the way of establishing a parliamentary form of government in Ceylon. All that the Commissioners could do was to establish a form of government with a fair share of responsibility that would finally lead to full responsible government and in the meantime prepare the people of Ceylon for such an eventuality.

A parliamentary form of government requires a homogeneous society. The people of Ceylon were far from being a national unit. They did not possess sufficient corporate spirit and their loyalties were more to race and caste than to the country as a whole. The deprivation of the legal status given to race and caste as a result of the Colebrooke Reforms had made little difference. On the other hand the legal status given to races since 1912 by the creation of communal electorates had led to further antagonism among them. In 1912 communal electorates were given probably in order to grant a fair representation to the different elements of the population. They had led to no unity or to a diminution for their need. Instead they had created an appetite for more.

Therefore, the Commissioners took the same stand with regard to these communal electorates as E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, did in 1917 in India. "We have unhesitatingly come to the conclusion," they declared, "that communal representation is, as it were, a canker of the body politic eating deeper and deeper into the vital energies of the people, breeding self-interest, suspicion and animosity, poisoning the new growth of political consciousness and effectively preventing the development of a national or corporate spirit. There can be no hope of binding together the diverse elements of the population, in a realization of their common kinship and an acknowledgement of common obligations to the country of which they are all citizens, as long as the system of communal representation, with all its disintegrating influences, remains a distinctive feature of the constitution. Under the circumstances they had no alternative but to suggest the abolition of communal electorates and the extension of the territorial system to assimilate the different races into a united progressive people and to stimulate the development of a national as against a sectional outlook."

The second difficulty was that according to the British ideas of the time, the Commission had to abandon the *laissez-faire*

state envisaged by Colebrooke and Cameron and establish in its place a welfare state. The Colebrooke Reforms were an attempt to give Ceylon a system of government similar to that of Britain in the third decade of the nineteenth century. What was then established was a state which would abstain from economic activities and leave them to the individual; which would carry out the minimum of duties required for maintaining law and order and such essential duties as the people were not prepared to undertake. It was, for instance, to establish a number of schools, construct roads and irrigations works, and assist the people to develop the resources of the country.

To convert the *laissez-faire* state into a welfare state, meant in the context of a parliamentary form of government that adult franchise had to be granted. But adult franchise could be granted only to an educated or at least a literate people but at this time as many as forty five per cent of the children of school-going age received no education. On the other hand, to limit the franchise to the literate or to any limited number who were fit to exercise the vote would be to exclude those who needed most attention. It would be tantamount to placing an oligarchy in power without any guarantee that the interests of the remainder of people would be looked after by those in authority.

The Commission was too greatly concerned about the conditions in which the mass of the people lived to exclude it from power. It is true that from about the last quarter of the nineteenth century the conception of the functions of government in Ceylon had undergone a change; and there had been government intervention once more for economic development and social reform. But the measures taken so far had not by any means been adequate. The Commission found that in many provinces poverty and ill-health were the lot of many villages. The depressed classes, especially in the Tamil areas, with their low wages and backward conditions of life, had lost all self respect and initiative. Many sections of the people had not even decent housing or adequate facilities for primary education. There were, besides, many gaps in the social structure. There was no poor law system for relieving destitution, no system of compensation for injured workmen, no up-to-date system of factory legislation and no control over hours and wages in sweated trades. There was further a lack

of administrative symmetry between the provincial government and the comparatively advanced central government. There was a wide gulf between the rural workers and the educated Westernized classes in Colombo.

The Commissioners also took the view that domestic and private charity were unequal to the solution of these problems, and that the state had to take responsibility for the conditions of the people and intervene in economic and social matters. They do not seem to have been satisfied with equality before the law but seem to have accepted the need to provide for equality of opportunity, at least to a limited extent, in the fields of elementary education, health and housing.

Under such circumstances the Commissioners took the view that the extension of the franchise was even more urgent than any grant of responsible government. The depressed classes by receiving the vote would be placed in a better position to obtain redress for their grievances and gain a new status and self-respect as possessing one of the highest privileges of citizenship. The franchise would further provide the masses with an opportunity of influencing the Government, of improving their conditions and of making themselves fit to exercise the vote. Therefore they recommended, as in Britain, that the franchise be granted to all males over twenty one and all females over thirty years of age.

Another problem the Commissioners had to face in devising a constitution for Ceylon was that the members of the Legislative Council were more interested in administration than in legislation as such. In spite of the *laissez-faire* state envisaged by Colebrooke, circumstances had led the British Government to establish a number of services to meet its needs and those of the people. From the last decade of the nineteenth century these services had expanded considerably. The educated classes had become deeply interested in them as they provided the chief means of secure employment. As a result, the middle class had at times shown greater interest in them than in constitutional reforms.

The members of the Legislative Council under such circumstances had often interfered in administrative matters. They had criticized heads of departments and officials in the same way they criticized other members of the Council,

Those who felt that the reforms did not go far enough objected to the wide powers granted to the Governor, to the Executive Committee system and to the abridgement of financial and other powers and privileges which they had hitherto enjoyed.

Finally it was decided to grant the vote to all over twenty one including women and restrict the vote to those who have an abiding interest in the country or who may be regarded as permanently settled in the country. Further the number of territorially elected members was reduced to 50 and the nominated members to 8. With these modifications the proposals were accepted by the unofficials by 19 votes to 17.

It has been shown that the Donoughmore Commission took the radical step of abolishing communal electorates. They realized however that their abolition would not immediately put an end to communalism which had existed for hundreds of years. It is on this strength of communalism that they believed that there was no immediate prospect of the emergence of political parties on political issues. Therefore to safeguard the interests of the minorities they took action in three ways. They reserved 12 seats for nominated members so that unrepresented minorities may be included in the State Council. By the Executive Committee system they ensured the minority representatives a knowledge of the matters that came up for discussion and an opportunity of stating any objections they might have to any proposals. Lastly they recommended that the Governor be given the power to refuse assent to any Bill "where persons of any particular community or religion are made liable to any disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not also subjected or made liable or are granted advantages not extended to persons of other communities or religions".

But the Commissioners do not seem to have foreseen that with the extension of the franchise to all adults communalism would play a greater part in the politics of the country. Under the Manning Reforms only about 200,000 exercised the vote, and most of these were knit together by a knowledge of the English Language and certain common interests. Even then at election time they had generally divided on communal lines. When the mass of the

people, who had no ostensible common interests and were divided by religion, language and race, were granted the vote there was even a greater possibility of division along racial lines whenever a struggle for power arose.

The Commissioners also failed to see that when they extended the franchise, the history and the traditions of the people would thereafter exercise a greater influence and that their languages and religions would assert themselves once more. Colebrooke and Cameron made English the language of government and the medium of instruction in government schools. The Government from 1869 took responsibility for the establishment of Sinhalese and Tamil schools alone, while continuing to maintain English as the language of government. The Donoughmore Commission ignored this anomaly, and placed the ultimate control of the government in the hands of the mass of the people who had their roots in the Sinhalese and Tamil languages and in Buddhism and Hinduism.

The Donoughmore Commission also do not seem to have foreseen that the Sinhalese language would as a result replace English and Buddhism would become the dominant religion of the country; that such developments might impair national unity once more and conflicts would arise between the English-educated middle class and the Sinhalese-educated, between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, between the Buddhists and the Christians, especially the highly organized Roman Catholics, and perhaps between Buddhists and Hindus.

This chapter would be incomplete if no reference is made to the Soulbury Reforms. The Donoughmore Reforms which were accepted only by a majority of two continued to be criticized in the succeeding years. Those who wanted full responsible government objected to the powers of the Governor and the Executive Committee system, and demanded the restoration of the financial powers of which they were deprived. The minorities wanted the restoration of communal representation in some form to regain at least to some extent the privileges they had lost. By the time the Soulbury Commission arrived in Ceylon, on 22nd Decembr 1944, the Executive Committee system had got into disrepute and there was hardly anyone who wanted it continued. The Commission

recommended the establishment of a cabinet system of government in its place. They found that communalism had not weakened and considered that the problem of the Ceylon constitution was essentially "the problem of reconciling the demands of the minorities for an adequate voice in the conduct of affairs so as to ensure that their point of view was continuously before the administration and that their interests received a due measure of consideration — with the obvious fact that the constitution must preserve for the majority that proportionate share in all spheres of Government activity to which their numbers and influence entitle them". But they refused to restore communal electorates in any form as that would be no solution. The Ceylon Ministers in order to give the minorities an opportunity of securing a larger number of seats had recommended the establishment of smaller electorates taking into account both area as well as population. The Soulbury Commission accepted these suggestions and recommended further the delimitation of electorates so as to help the minorities to secure more seats. They also refused to restrict the franchise as they believed that subsequent events had justified its grant. The only restrictions they placed on the Legislature was the establishment of an Upper House giving it even less powers than the British House of Lords possessed. But they did not devote sufficient attention to the dangers that might arise from communalism or an uneducated electorate. They abolished the Executive Committees depriving on the one hand the means of education provided for the members of the Legislature and on the other hand the opportunity given to the minorities to partake in the activities of the Government, without providing other substitutes in their place.

The Soulbury Commission also did not see any reason to amend the constitution on the ground that it was not based on the tradition and history of the people. At the time they arrived it had been decided to make Sinhalese and Tamil the languages of government to replace English. An attempt had been made to give Buddhism its rightful place by making the government responsible for the education of the country or by making the Christian schools give Buddhist and Hindu children an education in their religions. They could not envisage what happened later, probably as the masses at that time had not become conscious of their political rights.

In any case they recommended, completing the work of the Donoughmore Commission, the establishment of a system of responsible government for Ceylon with a greater degree of autonomy than any Dominion legally possessed before 1930, thus making it possible for Ceylon to attain independence within a short period of time.

## THE RISE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF COMMUNALISM

COMMUNALISM was a factor which divided the body politic in Ceylon in the early forties of this century. Arguments were advanced in favour of and against it, and remedies were suggested for its eradication. But few persons tried to understand the root causes of this communalism. Many persons had their own explanations. Some traced it to caste, race and religious distinctions. Some considered it a creation of crafty politicians or of an unscrupulous British Government. There is no doubt that communal divisions in Ceylon are usually based on caste, race and religious groups. It cannot be denied that communalism would not have been so acute if there was no foreign government to take advantage of these divisions or no local politicians to exploit them to maintain themselves in power. But the reasons for the continued existence of such divisions or the presence of a few to exploit them were not necessarily the root causes of the excessive attachment to them. Others got nearer the truth when they attributed this communalism to economic causes, especially the struggle to secure government and other appointments.

An attempt is made in this chapter to examine the communal conflict in 1943 in the light of historical developments. Communalism came into existence as a result of the rise of the middle class. The conflict was mainly due to a struggle within the middle class itself for the spoils won from the British through the recent constitutional reforms.

Ceylon, during the period of British rule, developed more or less into a nation state. It went through a political unification in 1815 when the British occupied the Kandyan Kingdom. It went through an administrative unification in 1832 as a result of the adoption of a uniform system of government for the whole island. It further went through an economic unification. The roads, the railways and the telegraph broke down the isolation of the various villages and districts while trade linked the interests of the various

parts of the Island. These changes in turn so knit together the interests of the various races, castes and religious groups that no community could act independently any longer. Ceylon could not again be divided into three separate divisions of the Low-country Sinhalese, the Kandyan and the Tamil. But though the country had been unified in the ways already mentioned and in spite of the fact that all rights and privileges possessed by races and castes had been abolished by law in 1832 and all individuals had been made equal before it, the people did not grow into a Ceylonese nation sufficiently cohesive, for instance like the British nation consisting of the English, the Scots and the Welsh. They consisted of a number of communities such as the Sinhalese, Low-country and Kandyan, the Tamils, the Muslims and the Burghers among whom there was very little intermarriage. In addition to these were the major and minor caste groups in the various parts of the Island. Though the interests of these groups were linked together and their welfare depended on the advancement of the country as a whole, the members of these groups often placed the interests of their community before those of the people as a whole, creating communal conflict and hindering national progress.

This Communalism seen in 1943 was undoubtedly a new development. European writers such as the Portuguese Jesuit Fernao de Queyroz and the Englishman Robert Knox of the seventeenth century and James Cordiner and other English writers of the nineteenth century have left us pictures of Ceylon with its various divisions of society but in none of their works does one come across communal conflicts of the type we saw then.

The Sinhalese-Tamil problem, which was the most acute in 1943 could hardly be traced back even to the last century. Before the tenth century A.D. there is no evidence of any serious antagonism between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Up to that time the Tamil immigrants seem to have intermarried with the Sinhalese, as they do today in the Sinhalese coastal districts of Negombo and Chilaw, and gradually merged themselves in the Sinhalese population. After the Chola occupation of Ceylon in the eleventh century they appear to have come in larger numbers and formed a fairly powerful body in the northern part of the Island. When Magha of Kalinga at the beginning of the thirteenth century

established an independent kingdom in the north, it appears to have developed into a Tamil kingdom. The centres of Sinhalese civilization at this time, partly owing to South Indian invasions, began to drift from the Dry Zone, first to the north-west, then to the highlands and finally to the south-west of the Island. Thus the Sinhalese and the Tamils became divided by territory, one occupying the Wet Zone and the other the Dry Zone; by language, one speaking Sinhalese and the other Tamil; and by religion, one following mainly Buddhism and the other Hinduism. But there arose no conflict as such between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples. They had no voice in politics and they carried on their agricultural activities, each race trying to eke out an existence for itself.

The same was true of the Kandyan Sinhalese and the Low-country Sinhalese. Before the seventeenth century there was little or no difference between these two groups, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the contact with the West transformed to some extent the conditions in the Maritime Provinces. In the highlands, where the Kandyan rulers tried to exclude their people from all foreign influences, hardly any such change took place. But during these centuries there was hardly any friction among the two peoples. Even when the British occupied the Kandyan provinces and gradually developed a common system of administration for the whole Island, there arose no conflict as the people of each region found that their interests did not clash with those of the other.

The position of the Muslims was somewhat different but they too hardly ever came into conflict with the other communities in the nineteenth century. The Muslims consist of Moors, most of whom are of Indian origin and Malays who have come from the East Indies. In 1943 most of the Moors were either agriculturists or traders. They were at first mainly traders but a large section of them settled in the Batticaloa district as agriculturists when the Portuguese expelled them from their territory. The rest, after the British occupation, carried on their trade with little competition or opposition from the other races of the Island. The Malays were soldiers under the Dutch and served in the same capacity under the British till the Ceylon Rifles was disbanded. After that, they either entered the Police force or took to other occupations.

The Burghers differed from the other permanent inhabitants of the Island owing to their European origin. The occupation of Ceylon by the British gave them a definite advantage over the other races, and they held high posts under the Government and rendered eminent service as doctors, lawyers and teachers. During the nineteenth century they worked together with the other communities, and led most of the Ceylon movements against acts of British misrule.

In the nineteenth century there was a certain amount of conflict in this country. The Sinhalese chiefs at first opposed the British, and the Government gradually crushed their power. Later they accepted their subordinate position and gradually became supporters of British rule. During this period there was conflict between the European unofficials and the British Government. But there was little or no conflict between the various communities, apart from struggles for social status among castes.

Why did not these communities live in the same manner any longer? Whenever constitutional issues were raised why did they not for the common good abandon their conflicting demands? To answer these questions it is necessary to go back to past history once more. This island at the time of the British occupation, was a land of villages more or less self-contained, and the chief occupation of the people was the cultivation of paddy which they grew for their own consumption. Society was co-operative and static. The life of the people was based on ideas of caste, and they did not ordinarily expect to change the position into which they were born during the course of this life. The system of government was feudal and its work was carried on with the services performed by the people, each according to his caste.

The British Government from the beginning of its rule did not approve of a social system in which each man had his place according to his caste or of a form of government which gave little opportunity for commerce and the mobility of labour. It was further anxious to develop the resources of the Island and increase its revenue. Therefore it abolished *rajakariya* in 1832, breaking down the ancient co-operative feudal system and preparing the way for the development of the present competitive commercial society which allows every man irrespective of his caste to choose



whatever occupation he likes, Next, in order to place society on a commercial basis it encouraged the establishment of plantations. It sold crown lands at a nominal rate, exempted plantations from the land tax, and used most of the revenue derived from the sale of land to construct roads to the plantations.

These changes not only brought European capital and European planters into this country but also brought about an important change in the social system. At the time of the British occupation the society of Ceylon consisted mainly of two groups: the ruling class, consisting of the officials of the court and the rulers of the districts, and agricultural peasants and craftsmen. There were few traders, as trade was mainly a government monopoly. The British by their reforms brought into existence a new class between these two groups, the present middle class.

The establishment of the plantations provided new avenues of work for the people of the country. The clearing of the jungles and the construction of mills and factories gave employment to contractors in addition to skilled and unskilled labourers. As the plantations did not produce food for their workers, it had to be brought from Colombo and elsewhere. The produce of the plantations had to be sent to Colombo for export to England and other countries. This led to the rise in plantation areas of small towns with boutiques and shops. All this provided employment for hundreds of contractors, traders and transport agents. Colombo developed into a commercial city providing further work for such persons as well as white-collar workers. Those who accumulated wealth by taking to these new enterprises and new occupations began to open or buy estates themselves and gradually a small proportion of the tea estates and more than half the rubber estates and most of the coconut estates came to be owned by Ceylonese.

The new system of administration created by the British required a large number of government servants, and gradually a large number of persons from all races and castes, though in unequal proportions, found employment in the government services. In 1833 the British Government established a system of law-courts throughout the Island bringing all people from the Governor downwards under a common system of law. The establishment of these courts led to a demand for lawyers.

The agreement to give grants to private schools and the opportunities for employment in the government services, which used English for the performance of their work, led to an increase in the number of English schools. As a result a large teaching profession gradually came into existence. The rise of towns and the development of estates led to a demand for doctors trained on modern lines to look after the sanitation of these places and the health of the people who lived in them. This in turn led to the establishment of the Medical College and the development of the medical profession.

Thus arose a new middle class consisting of planters, merchants, transport agents, lawyers, doctors, teachers and government servants; and they soon found that though they formed the most influential part of the community they had very little political power. In the rural areas the descendants of the ancient ruling families still carried on the work of the Government while in the urban areas in which they lived all the high administrative posts with a few exceptions were in the hands of the British.

The new middle class did not plan to rise in rebellion against the British as the Sinhalese chiefs did in order to acquire power. They were educated in English and knew how the British middle class came into power. Before them was the example of the European unofficials who tried to gain control of the Government by securing an unofficial majority in the Legislative Council. Therefore they began to agitate for a reform of the Legislative Council. In 1912 they gained a few concessions and in 1924 they obtained an unofficial majority and exercised a certain amount of influence over the Government. In 1931 they gained a considerable amount of political power under the Donoughmore Constitution which granted Ceylon a semi-responsible form of government. Soon they secured most of the high posts in the Government which were once almost exclusively held by the British.

The middle class differed from all other groups. It crossed all existing group boundaries and drew its members from all of them. It ignored the foundations on which other groups rested and based itself on wealth and enlightenment. It united for various purposes especially to safeguard and

develop its interests. But as there was very little inter-marriage between members of the various communities it did not develop into a completely separate group. And with the achievement of a certain amount of power which, with the grant of adult franchise, rested ultimately on the rest of the community, the various sections of the middle class instead of uniting further, began to compete with one another.

This struggle within the middle class itself was explained in 1943 in various ways. Some pointed out that the demand for territorial electorates by the Ceylon National Congress, though justifiable on the ground that they alone satisfied a modern state, alarmed the minorities. The leaders of small minority communities feared that they would have little chance of being chosen by a general electorate. The Tamils feared that it would lead to a reduction of the proportion of their seats in the Legislature. Others pointed out that the growth of national feeling, which arose as a result of the unification of the Island and grew in strength with the opposition to British rule, led to a revival of the ancient cultures. This, instead of uniting the various communities divided them. As a result the Burghers who were of European origin feared that the growth of a Ceylonese nation would lead to their own extinction as a community. Some of the Sinhalese became keen to preserve their civilization and culture as they feared that they would be swamped by the Indians or that a small community such as theirs would not be able to survive the pressure of world forces. There was no doubt, some truth in all these statements. But the attempt to preserve and develop ancient cultures need not necessarily lead to conflict. In fact such an effort deserved every encouragement as it helped to enrich the culture of the nation as a whole.

But the chief reason for the conflict seemed to be that the various sections of the middle class soon realized that the spoils won from the British were insufficient to satisfy all groups. The number of places in the Legislative Council and the local bodies was limited and the posts in the government and other services were insufficient to meet their growing needs. This was why they began to compete with one another and seek the aid of their respective communities to attain their ends. The various communities had not

attained the same stage of development. Some were backward educationally while others had not the same economic advantages. These inequalities helped to sharpen communal feelings and to develop a greater sense of group solidarity especially in those communities whose members felt that they had an inadequate share of the spoils or would soon lose a part of what they had attained.

The Low-country Sinhalese found opportunities for advancement at their very doors. They had acquired wealth as businessmen, contractors, transport agents, planters and proprietors of estates. They had taken advantage of the English schools opened by the Christian Missions and other religious bodies and had taken to government posts and the legal, the medical and the teaching professions.

The Tamils living in the Dry Zone could benefit little by the planting enterprise. Hence there was not much economic change in their area and they changed little socially. They were slow to give up their caste ideas and did not take easily to crafts and trade. But a considerable number, especially those of the advanced castes, had taken advantage of the "English education" provided by the Missions and entered government service and the professions. As opportunities for becoming lawyers, doctors and teachers were limited they concentrated on government appointments.

The Kandyanans, who were deeply attached to their village economy, feudal ways of life and caste ideas had neither the capital nor the necessary education to take sufficient advantage of the new enterprises though these were located within their own areas. Education spread slowly among them because the Government had left it chiefly to the Missions. The Missions at first established themselves mainly in the areas where the Dutch had already been at work, and paid little attention to the Kandyan districts. Thus, when the plantations were opened, it was the Low-country Sinhalese who flocked into the highlands as carpenters, masons, contractors, transport agents and traders. The result was that in 1943 it was the low-country Sinhalese and not the Kandyanans who were the most influential in the urban areas of the Kandyan districts. In fact the Kandyan advancement had been so slow there was yet no powerful Kandyan middle class, and their representatives in the State Council, unlike those

of the Low-country Sinhalese and the Tamils, were drawn mainly from the old ruling families. That the Kandyan middle class had yet to develop was also seen from the fact that Kandyan communalism was at this time a development mainly among the young people.

The position of the Moors was not very different from that of the Kandyans. It is true that those who were traders found at first ample opportunity for extending their old pursuits. But owing to their social conservatism and attachment to their religion, not many had attended the English Mission schools. The result was that few could take advantage of the new opportunities in trade or secure positions in other walks of life. And they, like the Kandyans, felt that they had been left behind by the other communities.

The Burghers though small in number were an influential community as they were almost exclusively a middle class body. Their main object in 1943 was to avoid a deterioration of that position to which they had attained before other communities entered into competition with them.

The position of the various castes was not very different. It is not possible in this chapter to show how they had abandoned at least in the Sinhalese urban and suburban areas their old foundations and had changed into communal groups. Some castes, owing to the privileged and advantageous position they held at the time of the British occupation, had been able to benefit more than the others by the new change. In 1943 their progress varied and the middle classes of those communities who had been left behind were struggling to keep pace with those of other communities who had got ahead of them.

When the Donoughmore Commission arrived in Ceylon in 1927 to deal with the question of constitutional reforms the communal claims were put before them. But the Commissioners showed little sympathy with these demands. They realized that communal representation through communal electorates would only impair the unity given to Ceylon by over a century of British rule. The Earl of Donoughmore who accompanied Montagu on his mission to India and took part in the discussions on constitutional reforms, knew how difficult it was to abolish special electorates once

granted. The Commission recommended exclusively territorial electorates and the grant of the franchise to all men and women of a certain age. In other words they did not concern themselves with the division of the spoils to be won from the British. They showed greater interest in the development of the country as a whole and in the upliftment of the masses who had little interest in communal squabbles that had developed in the body of the middle class.

But the middle classes did not give up the struggle. They found that with the universal franchise the ultimate power lay with the masses. They realized that the racial groups that formed the masses were not hostile to one another as the causes of conflict enumerated above did not operate among them. But they knew that they were communal for other reasons. The masses were not influenced to the same extent by the new economic and social forces that brought together the various sections of the middle class and gave them a common outlook. The middle classes now began to exploit the latent feeling of race and caste in the masses and spread their conflicts and jealousies among them for the attainment of their objectives.

The exploitation of this communal feeling was most apparent in 1943 in the struggle of the middle classes for the attainment of power and status, especially at elections to the State Council and the local bodies. But it was not many who could be members of the State Council and the local bodies, and the interest in the rise of these to status and power could not extend to a very large circle. The conflict in reality was due much more to appointments in the government and other services and it was in the securing of these posts that communalism was most exploited.

The situation in India did not seem to be very different at the time. Lord Morley dealing with Indian constitutional reforms wrote to Lord Minto: "I half suspect what they (Indians) really want a million times beyond political reforms, is access to the higher administrative posts of all sorts, though they are alive to the inseparable connection between the two." Another well-known authority pointed out that the Hindu-Muslim problem in its modern form emerged first in connection with the demand for simultaneous examinations for the Indian Civil Service in England and India.

The Muslims realized that such a change would not benefit them and refused to take part in the agitation.

It is not maintained that there were no communal conflicts at all among the masses in Ceylon at this time. Such a conflict was seen not much earlier between the Indian and the Ceylonese workers. Nor is it suggested that all communal conflicts in India and Ceylon were due to economic causes alone. Local communal riots due to other causes were a common feature in Indian villages. What is pointed out here is that communalism of the type seen in Ceylon in 1943 was a new development. The British helped to change the society of Ceylon from a co-operative and feudal basis into a competitive and commercial basis. The changes effected led to the rise of the middle class, but the middle class did not develop into an entirely separate community. The various sections of this class soon realized that the posts available in the Government and in the mercantile services were insufficient to satisfy their growing needs and began to compete with one another. And in order to achieve their ends they sought the aid of their respective communities and transformed their individual conflicts into a communal conflict. Thus communalism was essentially a middle class problem in 1943 and the chief causes of conflict were economic.

## THE POLITICAL CHANGE OF 1956

**M**ANY will agree that a very important change took place in 1956 in the political sphere. The United National Party whose leaders had governed the country for over twenty-five years was overthrown, and a new government with a new outlook and new ideas came into power. The English-educated class with its doctors, lawyers, teachers, planters and businessmen lost their leadership over the country and in the rural areas their place was taken by the Buddhist monk, the Sinhalese schoolmaster and the Ayurvedic physician.

Diverse reasons were attributed to this change at the time. It was said that the United National Party had been too long in the saddle, and people wished to see new faces. Among the other reasons given were the diminution of the strength of the U.N.P. by the withdrawal of one of its leading members from active politics and the corruption that had set in as a result of the Party's long period of power. Most of the explanations given were clearly superficial. Just because the U.N.P. had been too long in power it need not necessarily have become unpopular. Sometimes tried friends are preferred to unknown ones. But if by such a statement it was implied that its policy was out of date it was perhaps nearer the truth. If in stating that the U.N.P. had become corrupt it was meant that it had not spread its favours far enough, then its unpopularity can be better understood. If by the diminution of the strength of the U.N.P. was meant that the resignation of one of its leading men was a great loss to the U.N.P., many would no doubt agree with that statement.

It is clear that one single key cannot unlock all doors. The conditions in Ceylon vary from district to district, and different influences affect different regions. The factors for instance that influence the townsfolk and perhaps those in the south-western coastal districts are not always those that affect the rural areas, and the results of the General

Election of 1956 in the towns and coastal areas cannot be placed in the same category as those in the country districts. But what is most remarkable is that the results of the General Election took by surprise not only the defeated but even the victorious; and the ordinary people who could not account for the change thought it was the work of the gods. This shows that we have yet to search for the causes for the rejection of one section of the middle class and the enthronement of another.

Not only the causes but even the significance of the change was not understood by many at the time. Was the change for the good of the country? Was the clock of progress set back? Was the current of Ceylon's life turned backwards? As against those who answered the last two questions in the affirmative there were others who answered them in the negative. The latter felt that the current of Ceylon's life had been obstructed by foreign influences and almost choked by the impact of British rule. Now that independence had been achieved it was once more flowing unimpeded and if it was to continue thus all remaining vestiges of foreign rule had to be removed. The Sinhalese language had suffered. Buddhism had suffered. The ayurvedic system had suffered. They were now once more coming into their own. They had to be rehabilitated in order that they might influence the life of the people as they had done in the past.

Were they correct? Does history support their judgement? The only way to answer these questions is to go back about one hundred and thirty years and see what happened then. The British for nearly thirty years after their conquest of Ceylon tried to rule it according to its ancient institutions and customs, protecting Buddhism and Hinduism and preserving the Sinhalese and Tamil way of life. But Ceylon continued to be governed on deficit budgets. This made the British people think that there was something wrong with the government of Ceylon and a Commission was sent from England to examine the system of government and make recommendations for its improvement.

The Commissioners, Colebrooke and Cameron, were Radicals. Like certain people in Ceylon today, they had a tremendous faith that not only the conditions in the country but even human nature could be transformed by a change in institutions and laws. They were also at times irrational enough

to believe that people would act according to reason. Nevertheless, in spite of his preconceived ideas, Colebrooke, after a study for two years, made a thorough analysis of the political, social and economic conditions of the Island and came to the conclusion that the river of life in Ceylon was practically stagnant. There was a slight flow as a result of certain changes, but there was a tendency for even that to be choked up. He searched for the causes that obstructed this flow, and came to the conclusion that it was not British rule but the continuity of the ancient system. Therefore, he made recommendations to liberate Ceylon from the burden of its past heritage.

What Colebrooke discovered was that Ceylon's development was obstructed by *rajakariya* (the Sinhalese form of feudalism) the caste system, the ancient system of learning and the absolute form of government. He found that *rajakariya* prevented economic development and hindered efforts to develop commerce and industry. The caste system militated against people being treated as equals before the law and proved an obstacle to the development of a democratic way of life. The absolute form of government stood in the way of the growth of a liberal system of government in which the people could have some share. Colebrooke therefore recommended the abolition of *rajakariya* and the encouragement of the cultivation of commercial crops. He wanted the abandonment of the observance of caste distinctions and all persons treated as equals before the law. He recommended the establishment of a unified system of government on a territorial basis in order to enable the development of commerce and the integration of the various races and castes into a Ceylonese nation. He wanted the establishment of the rule of law to give civil liberty and of an executive and a legislative council to liberalize the system of government. He suggested the adoption of the English language for the purpose of administration in place of Sinhalese and Tamil which he considered inadequate to satisfy modern requirements. He even went against the avowed British policy of religious neutrality, and recommended that the education of the Island should be entrusted to Christian missionaries, as he believed they would help the intellectual and moral advancement of the people. In making these recommendations he wanted to undermine the ancient political, economic and social system in order that the current of life may not only flow but flow in the way it had done in Britain.

What were the results of these far-reaching reforms? The current of our life began gradually to stir and move. The economy began to change. Agricultural industries and commerce developed, and the country became prosperous to some extent. The caste system weakened and this enabled the rise of a middle class on an economic basis. The study of English led to the growth of new ideas which began to influence pupils even in Sinhalese and Tamil schools. The old personal system of administration was gradually replaced by a modern bureaucratic system. The absolute form of government gave way to a democratic parliamentary form of government.

This was not all. Buddhism and Hinduism supported by the new middle class began to revive, and the Buddhist movement, begun by Valivita Saranankara in the Kandyan Kingdom in the eighteenth century, began to spread into the low-country where Buddhism had weakened and almost disappeared as a result of the ruthless treatment it had received from the Portuguese and to some extent from the Dutch.

But the river of life on the whole moved mainly on the surface. The changes that resulted did not penetrate very much deeper than the English-educated middle class who alone adopted new ideas and took to new economic interests and new forms of life. This section of the people, once they realized their power, began to oppose foreign rule and demanded self-government. But the British were not prepared to hand over the government to them as they were not representative of the people as a whole. Therefore, they granted adult franchise and placed the ultimate responsibility for the government of the country on the entire community.

The English-educated class was not deterred by this step. The grant of the adult franchise did not lead to a sudden awakening of the masses as this privilege did not come to them as a result of agitation on their part. The English-educated class thought out the grounds on which they could solicit the support of the people and put forward their programme. They extended their organizations and with the revenue at their disposal did much for the betterment of the people in many ways.

What then were the reasons for the political change that took place in 1956? Was it due to independence as some think?

If so, why did not the change take place earlier? Was it due to an awakening of the masses? If so, why were the changes in the budget, that immediately followed, mainly in the interest of the lower middle classes? The landslide in the General Election of 1956 was due mainly to the fact that there was yet another section who had made some progress under British rule, but who felt at the same time that they were doomed to suffer, if not meet with extinction, as a result of recent developments. This section consisted of Buddhist monks, ayurvedic physicians, Sinhalese schoolmasters and the Sinhalese-educated without any form of employment.

What were the grievances of the Buddhist monks? Before British rule they were the leaders of thought in the country, and most of the literary works were their products. They exercised a great influence over the people who in turn treated them with reverence. With the advance of British rule English became the language of government and their influence came to be limited mainly to the stagnant parts of the country. In recent years some of them began even to feel insecure as they believed that Buddhism too was rapidly declining. Buddhism in the past had adjusted itself to the village community system and the Sinhalese form of feudalism and in more recent times to the caste system. With the development of the new economic forces, these institutions which were the traditional supports of Buddhism were being undermined.

The ayurvedic physicians too exercised great influence in the villages in which they lived. With the advance of Western medicine their position deteriorated. In recent times, to check this decline there had been a tendency on the part of some of them to combine the ayurvedic system with the Western system and the use of scientific instruments. This alarmed other ayurvedic physicians who feared that these developments would gradually lead to the extinction of the ayurvedic system itself.

The Sinhalese schoolmaster is a more modern product. He came into existence under Dutch rule. He was at first more than a schoolmaster, as many other duties were entrusted to him. With the growth of the British administration, other officials encroached on his sphere of activity. With the expansion of English education his status deteriorated further.

Though education in Sinhalese was advanced to the Senior School Certificate level, pupils in the Sinhalese schools who passed the S.S.C. Examination were faced with unemployment as they had few openings except as school teachers. As government services provided the greatest scope for employment to the people of Ceylon, they demanded that the language of government should be made Sinhalese. They expected that thereby those educated in Sinhalese would be able to secure government posts while those who carried on their activities in Sinhalese thought that they would at least be on an equal footing with those who conducted their affairs in English. It is not strange that before long, the agitation for Sinhalese became an agitation for Sinhalese only. In a multi-communal society it was almost inevitable. The exclusion of English logically led to a cry for the exclusion of Tamil, through fear that Tamil would finally swamp Sinhalese.

This class, unlike those in the saddle, thus had definite grievances. They had suffered as a result of British rule or had found that, under the old system which was being continued by the U.N.P. without any radical change, opportunities for advancement were limited. They found that after independence was attained, their conditions had not improved. In fact their very security was at stake. Thus they were not merely concerned with the redress of grievances; they were fighting for their very existence. They began to organize themselves as the English-educated class had done in order to get rid of British rule. The Buddhist monks for instance realized what great power a highly organized institution like the Roman Catholic Church exercised in the country and over their adherents. Therefore they too began to organize themselves to gain what they felt was their due place in Ceylon society. When this class found that their agitation did not get them very far, they planned political action and decided to influence the General Election. They realized that the only way they could secure power was by getting people to vote for candidates who supported their claims. The ordinary people, except in the towns and perhaps the coastal districts, were still passive and did not take an active part in politics. This class was in close touch with these people in the rural areas and had up to a point common interests. Hence they were in a better position than the U.N.P. to persuade the masses to act in accordance with their wishes.

In short, the currents which earlier had little force and had been pushed into the backwaters by the main current of active politics rose suddenly and overpowered the main current itself.

The problem then was whether the flood would continue to overwhelm the main current or whether it would gradually subside after making its contribution and, if it did subside, whether the main current would be able to reassert itself once more. The outcome depended on the strength of the conflicting forces and in the way the challenge of the new forces were met.

We cannot ignore the fact that Ceylon lies not merely to the south of India but also on the highway of sea and air traffic from the West to the East. The question therefore was whether the Sinhalese would ever be able to replace completely a growing world language like English? Would ayurveda be able to withstand the pressure of modern medicine and surgery? How far would *traditional* Buddhism be able to resist both Christianity and modern science and materialism? No small country in Europe has yet discarded its national language whatever importance it has attached to a second language. Even Westerners have shown an interest in Buddhism and to some it has a deep religious appeal. It could not be expected therefore that the new movement would subside altogether.

But would this new movement ultimately absorb all life or would it be absorbed once more by the forces which it swamped? When the Minister of Education declared that the Burghers would be absorbed by the Sinhalese and the Tamils, a cartoon in the local press portrayed a Burgher girl accompanied by a young man in national dress and two old ladies watching them posing the question 'Who absorbs whom?' What will ultimately happen no one can predict with any certainty. It depends not on individual action but on forces over which individuals have little or no control.

The results in the General Election showed that the leaders who went ahead taking no notice of the new forces that had emerged met with disaster. They failed to realise that a government, in order to survive, has to widen its basis to accommodate new forces; it has to study new developments, search deep for their causes, and redress genuine grievances.

It is equally clear that people cannot be fed for ever on half truths. New rulers, however correct their analysis may be, cannot make headway for long with superficial or partial solutions. In meeting temporary needs and demands they cannot ignore altogether the course Ceylon has taken for over one and a half centuries and, if they want to be successful, they must take note also of what past history has to teach them whenever they take a new line of action.

## THE REASSERTION OF BUDDHISM

### *The Buddhist Commission Report*

ANOTHER of the chief causes of the defeat in 1956 of the United National Party was the publication, earlier in the year, of the Report of the Buddhist Commission. It appeared in Sinhalese, and in an abridged form in English under the title *The Betrayal of Buddhism*. It claimed, as the Theosophists did eight decades earlier, a higher status for Buddhism than for Christianity. It pointed out that the Buddha had made Ceylon sacred by his visits and predicted that his religion would flourish here. But now as a result of Western rule it was in danger of its very existence, and it was left to the Buddhists to save it and to see that it played its rightful part in the affairs of Ceylon.

The Report diagnosed the ailments of Buddhism, prescribed remedies for their cure, and proposed ways for its rehabilitation and restoration. It provided a case for Buddhist action, a set of objectives and a concrete programme which replaced the immature ideas and vague proposals which up to that time held the field. Its value, however, lay not so much in the correctness of the diagnosis, the soundness of the remedies or the methods proposed for the restoration of Buddhism as on its appeal to the sentiments of a large section of Buddhists whose imagination it captured.

A considerable amount of criticism was levelled for some time against the Report. What was most objected to was its account of the past events. It was pointed out that the British and the Christians were at times credited with unfair motives. It did not take sufficient notice of the difference in the conditions and the ideas that prevailed in earlier times. The contribution made by the Christian schools in raising the standard of life and thought of the people was ignored. Above all it represented British rule as a period of decline ignoring all the advances, including those in Buddhism, that were made under it.

The most comprehensive criticism was made in the *Companion to the Buddhist Commission Report* published in 1957.



by the Catholic Union of Ceylon. Its main value lay in the way it pointed out the factual errors in the Report and placed the past events in a correct historical perspective. Undoubtedly the historical introduction of the Report is not a balanced account of the facts; consequently the interpretation based on them is lop-sided. But this historical introduction does not seem to be an attempt to provide a background for the rest of the Report. It too appears to have been written as an expression of the emotional conviction that led to the writing of the Report. Therefore the attack in the *Companion* on the causes ascribed to the decline of Buddhism does not reduce the value of the Report very much. The strength of the Report lies in its description of the plight of Buddhism and the need for its rehabilitation. Buddhism was in danger of further deterioration, if not extinction, and with it the Buddhist and Sinhalese way of life. Hence a battle had to be waged for its preservation. There was little to contend against this conviction whatever were the causes of the decline.

The *Companion* does not get sufficiently into grips with the real issues of the Report. It does not seem to take any notice of the changes that were taking place as a result of the establishment of the Donoughmore Constitution and the growth of socialist ideas. While the Report makes its claims on the socialist basis that every citizen had a right to equality of opportunity, the *Companion* still seems to think in terms of the Liberal idea of equality before the law. While the Report argues on the basis that a system of state education was the only feasible one under the existing conditions and therefore religious instruction had to be provided within it, whatever objections there may be to such an arrangement, the *Companion* seems to expect the denominational system to continue along with a state system to supply its deficiencies. The *Companion* also fails to face squarely the claim that it was the duty of a national government to compensate Buddhism for the losses sustained under the rule of foreign powers. There is no doubt Buddhism suffered under British rule. During this period it was underprivileged and was engaged in an unequal struggle with its opponents. Therefore it is not surprising that the Buddhist Commissioners, viewing from the Buddhist angle, picture British rule as one of decline, the Portuguese Period as one of destruction and the Dutch Period as one that conferred no benefits. Their view is that Western civi-

lisation is something that contributed to the disintegration of the Buddhist and Sinhalese way of life; that the period from 1505 is of little importance to the Buddhists; and that the period before 1505 is the most fruitful period of Ceylon history. These views had the further effect of making the Commissioners take at times an anti-Christian, anti-British and an anti-Western attitude and develop a nostalgia for the period before the Western conquests.

But it is equally striking that the Buddhist Commissioners make no recommendations to restore the past or to re-establish any outmoded institutions which had disappeared under British rule. They do not suggest the adoption of any ancient methods to deal with modern problems. They certainly want to preserve whatever is still living and of value, especially the Buddhist heritage; but it is to be done where necessary by providing it with a new habitation and new objectives in accordance with modern conditions and ideas. The claims to the restoration of Buddhism are also made not on the basis of any ancient ideas or even that of equality before the law but on the new idea of equality of opportunity, first made possible by the Donoughmore Reforms.

In fact, the Buddhist Commissioners in many respects make a definite break with the past. Earlier under the Sinhalese kings Buddhism often declined. The action taken to revive it on such occasions is described in the *katikavatas*. The first *katikavata* known to us, issued in the time of Parakramabahu I, deals briefly with the history of the Sangha, the vicissitudes it went through up to the unification of the sects, and proceeds to give the rules to be observed by the bhikshus. The last of these, issued by Kirti Sri Rajasinha, contains in addition rules to be observed regarding the property of the Sangha.

These *katikavatas* incidentally reveal the ideas held in those times. According to the *katikavata* of Parakramabahu I the Buddha Sasana is expected to last only five thousand years from the Parinibbana of the Buddha. This shows that the Buddhists of those times accepted the Hindu ideas of cosmogony; that the world was gradually deteriorating and would come to an end with the *Kali Yuga*, the last of the four ages. Another idea that these *katikavatas* accept is that this world is a place of pain and misery from which

those who desire to attain *nirvana* must withdraw in order put an end to this cycle of birth and rebirth.

Anyone who reads these *katikavatas* will also notice that the ideas expressed in them are similar to those in the Pali chronicles. The postscript to each chapter in the *Mahavamsa* states that it is written to rouse *pasada* (serene joy) and *samvega* (a feeling of revulsion from the world and its misery). The author of the *Culavamsa* reveals further the attitude of the Sangha to foreign invasions. He attributes the Dutch invasion of Kandy not to the greed and rapacity of the Dutch but to the *karma* of the people and the displeasure of the guardian deities whose worship the people had neglected.

The Buddhist Commissioners, like their predecessors, are undoubtedly determined to purify the Sangha and safeguard Buddhist property. But the manner in which they try to do this has little or no relation to the *katikavatas*. Instead of emphasizing the vanity of life and suggesting a withdrawal from the world and its misery to put an end to birth and rebirth they suggest the transformation of the political and social system of Ceylon in such a way as to enable Buddhism to thrive. Far from taking the view that the world and Buddhism are destined to deterioration and extinction, they seem to accept the modern evolutionary view of life and take human progress for granted. Without attributing events to the former *karma* of the people, as the Pali chronicles usually do, they trace them to natural causes. They do not consider the Tamil invasions, Portuguese, Dutch and British rule as a medium through which the *karma* of the people worked itself out or as a means by which the gods punished their misdeeds; but attribute to them the decline of Buddhism.

The Buddhist Commissioners also do not suggest that Buddhism should have the same relationship to the Government as in ancient times. They want it, once it is rehabilitated, to break away completely from it, and form an autonomous body. They recommend that it should have a central council (a Buddha Sasana Council) consisting of the Sangha and the laity to safeguard its temporal interests. The Sangha should have its own tribunals, central and district, to maintain discipline among its members; and its own educational institutions for the training of the novices.

What then is the significance of this Report? What is its real objective? Is its aim to restore Buddhism to the point it held before 1505? Or does it propose to finalize a movement which has been going on for over a hundred years to adjust Buddhism to the new conditions created by British rule? Does it not want the removal of the remaining obstacles that stood in the way of its advance, that it be compensated for what it suffered under foreign rule, and that it be given a new organization in accordance with the changed conditions so that it may manage its affairs independent of the state?

#### *Buddhism from 1235 to 1796*

The best way to understand the significance of the Report and its objective is to see what actually happened to Buddhism under Western rule, especially under the British occupation, and how the Buddhists met the challenge. The decline of Buddhism in Ceylon actually began long before the coming of the Westerners. The palmy days of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva came to an end with the break-up of the Polonnaruva Kingdom. Then Ceylon came to be divided into a number of kingdoms. In the absence of a single or powerful ruler, the irrigation system, which maintained the people, the government, and the Sangha, broke down. As a result the vihares suffered. The people themselves began to feel insecure, became more concerned with the needs of this life, and began to lay more emphasis on the worship of gods than on worship in the vihares.

This decline of Buddhism continued during the reigns of the Kandyan Kings. There too internal wars and invasions from without interfered with the life in the vihares. At the end of the seventeenth century Buddhism reached its lowest ebb. There was, it is true, a revival of Buddhism about the middle of the eighteenth century led by Valivita Saranankara. But Buddhism in the Kandyan Kingdom thereafter did not reach even the level it rose to in Kotte in the time of Parakramabahu VI.

Buddhism in the Maritime Provinces after the arrival of the Portuguese had a somewhat different experience. Sinhalese kings even in their worst days protected the vihares and the lands belonging to the Sangha and provided the latter with their needs. They helped the Buddhist bhikshus

to write books on Buddhist subjects. The Portuguese on the other hand followed a religion very different from Buddhism. During wars they destroyed Buddhist vihares and devales and many Buddhist bhikshus had to leave their abodes and seek shelter in the interior. From the middle of the sixteenth century when a Christian king became the ruler of Kotte some of the lands that belonged to the vihares were gifted to the Roman Catholic Orders for their maintenance. These Orders filled the void created by the destruction of the vihares and the devales, with churches, and presented Christianity to the people in a form they could appreciate. The converts were given a Christian education and were segregated wherever possible from Sinhalese society. Others were tempted to embrace Christianity by the preference given to converts in filling government posts and in allotting agricultural holdings.

The Dutch were less hostile to the Buddhists than to the Catholics and the Muslims. They even helped Buddhism by the conveyance of bhikshus in their ships for the restoration of the *upasampada* in the Kandyan Kingdom. But they did not allow, during most of their rule, the public worship of Buddhism within their territory. Through their schools they tried to convert the children to the Protestant form of Christianity. The Dutch Scholarchal Commission, consisting of clergy and officials, established a large number of schools for this purpose and fined those who did not send their children to schools. As under Portuguese rule, they tried to wean the converts away from the rest of society and make them loyal to the new rulers. They too rewarded them with government posts and agricultural holdings.

The Buddhists could do nothing to counteract such action. The Portuguese and the Dutch claimed the right to do what they liked on grounds of conquest. The Sinhalese tried to expel them from Ceylon but failed to dislodge them. Buddhism, therefore, in spite of the revival under Valivita Saranankara was practically in a decadent state at the time of the arrival of the British.

#### *Buddhism under British Rule*

With the establishment of British rule in the Maritime Provinces all people in Ceylon were granted liberty of conscience and freedom of worship and children were not com-

pelled to attend Christian schools. This certainly made a difference to the Buddhists. Though Roman Catholicism had gained a hold in some parts of the coastal areas, to many who had become members of the Reformed Church, Christianity had not meant much more than memorizing the Protestant Catechism, the Commandments, the Creeds and a number of prayers. In private they had continued to practise their old religions.

The Portuguese and the Dutch attempts to desocialize the converts also had not met with much success. Both the Portuguese and the Dutch had not destroyed the traditional forms of Sinhalese and Tamil life. They had allowed the people to preserve their ancient institutions and customs which were associated with Buddhism and Hinduism. Though they kept their records in their own languages they had used Sinhalese and Tamil as the languages of administration. They had also conducted their schools in Sinhalese and Tamil.

Further, the Dutch, during the last part of their rule, had become tolerant towards other faiths. They had allowed their followers freedom of worship, and the disciples of Valivita Saranankara had come to the coastal districts and revived Buddhism.

Therefore, as a result of British action, a large number of nominal Protestants went back to Buddhism. Further, in 1802 a novice of the Salagama caste, probably influenced by the changes under Dutch rule and the possibilities provided by British rule, went with five others to Burma and got themselves ordained. On their return they formed the Amarapura Sect and opened it to all castes defying the Kandyan practice which limited ordination more or less to those of the Goigama caste.

But recovery continued to be difficult for Buddhism. The British at the beginning of the nineteenth century were influenced not only by selfish motives such as a desire to maintain their conquest and to help British commerce, but also by humanitarian ideas, a faith in the beneficial influence of individualism, an awakened sense of trusteeship for backward races, and above all by a conviction that their Christian civilization and their own institutions were the best for all mankind.

Influenced and actuated by these motives the British gave Ceylon a centralized form of government and administration. They developed communications, helped the establishment of plantations by importing capital and labour, and began to change gradually the agrarian society into a commercial one. Western medicine and surgery were introduced. Education was spread wide and a large portion of the people were made literate. By introducing the English language they enabled many persons to learn of the advances made in the West. They revised the law, and, ignoring caste distinctions, made all persons equal in its sight; and introduced the rule of law throughout the Island. They established a system of law courts and granted to their subjects the right of appeal against any injustice.

These innovations could not be made except at the expense of the ancient Sinhalese civilization and at some cost to the indigenous inhabitants. The British abolished slavery, but in making slaves free they disregarded the rights exercised hitherto by their owners. They did away with the system of land tenure and services; but in doing so they not only freed the peasants from serfdom but also disorganized considerably the life of the peasants themselves. The development of communications undoubtedly helped the economic development of the country, but it broke up the village community system and weakened the caste system on which the economic and social life of the people depended. The establishment of a modern form of administration was essential for the economic and social advancement of the people, but it gradually diminished the powers of the chiefs. Making English the language of administration and of the law courts led many Ceylonese to study English which was needed for an understanding of modern developments and the absorption of new ideas, but it placed the people educated in Sinhalese on an unequal footing and retarded the development of the Sinhalese language for more than a century. The rule of law was an advance on the old system of summary justice but it did not suit the villagers for a long time. The concentration on the Western system of medicine improved the health of a section of the people and helped to eradicate such diseases as malaria, but it led to the neglect of ayurveda on which the peasants mainly depended. Government's espousal of Protestant Christianity and the encouragement given to Protestant Missionary societies helped the advancement of education

in certain areas and raised the moral standard of the pupils in those schools, but it weakened Buddhism and left the Buddhists at a disadvantage in the public life of the country.

Buddhism formed part and parcel of this ancient civilization and the Buddhist way of life was affected by its deterioration. Buddhist vihares and devales depended on the system of land tenure and *rajakariya*. Though these were continued as far as vihara and devala lands were concerned, they nevertheless suffered as a result of their abolition elsewhere. The Buddhist bhikshus maintained their rights with the help of the headmen. When the latter were deprived of their judicial powers, they had to resort to the law courts to safeguard their rights. As members of a religious order they were not accustomed to make use of them. They had adjusted themselves to the village community system and when it gradually broke down with the development of the centralized system of administration and communications, they began to lose one of their main supports. Buddhism was expressed in Pali and Sinhalese. When English gradually became the language of government record and of administration and the medium of instruction in secondary schools, the Buddhist bhikshus became isolated from the active currents of life. English books, if at all, expressed Christian ideas and helped the understanding not of Buddhism but of Christianity. The vihares, as centres of education, could not compete with either the Government or the Missionary schools or produce books to counteract the work of Christian Missions.

These are not the only ways in which Buddhism suffered. The British in the early decades of their rule, also took action against Buddhism itself. British Governors, fearing that the Buddhists would be hostile to their rule, followed the Dutch methods against Buddhism in the low-country. They maintained the Church of England as the state church. Its clergy managed the government schools and gave instruction in Protestant Christianity. The Government also helped the Protestant Missions to carry on their propaganda. As the Dutch did, they ignored *poaya* days in fixing government holidays. Following the Portuguese and the Dutch they gave government appointments mainly to Protestants.

The Buddhists were helpless against all these changes and all the direct action taken against them. Social welfare was

not one of the direct objectives of British rule at this time, as it was towards the end of their rule; and the sufferings of the people received little attention. The Buddhists were not in a position to oust the British from power; nor were they yet in a position to check the work of the Missionaries.

This British attitude to Buddhism, however, began to change about the middle of the nineteenth century. At this time they began to have misgivings about their own form of civilization being suitable to other peoples. They began to doubt the efficacy of British methods of administration in Ceylon and to see certain advantages in the indigenous system. As a result they began to go back wherever possible to the ancient institutions such as the *gansabha* and to make greater use of headmen in administering the country. They gradually abandoned the policy of Christianizing the people, and in the sixth decade refused to give grants to Protestant Mission schools unless religious instruction was made optional.

#### *Buddhist Temporalities*

This did not mean that thereafter Buddhism was able to compete with Christianity on an equal footing. Though the Government began to change its policy the Protestant Missionaries who exercised considerable power did not. In the fifth decade they began to press the Ceylon Government to dissociate itself from its connection with Buddhism.

In earlier times Sinhalese kings through their officials looked after the larger vihara and devala properties and saw to the requirements of the Sangha, giving validity to the important appointments in the Order. In 1815 when the Kandyan Convention between the British and the Kandyan chiefs was signed, the British agreed to protect Buddhism, its places of worship and the rites performed in them. The British Governors then assumed the duties exercised by the King. They held the custody of the Tooth. In the Kandyan Provinces they appointed and dismissed the heads of the Sangha and the lay officers who looked after the vihara and devala properties. They maintained certain vihares and devales and provided the requirements for their festivals and ceremonies. In short they supervised the administration of Buddhist temporalities.

The Imperial Government was not happy over the responsibilities assumed by the Government of Ceylon. In the fifth decade it was its policy to give its support to the Christian Missionaries who tried to convert their subjects in the colonies to Christianity. Hence when at that time the Christian Missionaries objected to the Ceylon Government's association with Buddhism, interpreting it incorrectly as an idolatrous faith, the Imperial Government sympathized with their demand, and in spite of the protests raised by the local British officials, it wanted the Ceylon Government to dissociate itself from Buddhism and provide the Buddhists with an honest working constitution so that the Buddhists may manage their own affairs.

It was easy for the Government of Ceylon to dissociate itself from Buddhism but it was not so easy to provide it with a working constitution. The Sangha was not expected to concern itself with worldly affairs. The laity had no integral connection with its organization and no vital interest in its property. Any lay body, appointed or elected, would work only if it consisted of good and capable Buddhists keen enough to work for the welfare of the Sangha. But it was not always easy to find such men and even if they were found they would not work satisfactorily for long unless they were made responsible to another interested body.

The result was that all attempts made from time to time to establish an honest working organisation by the Government did not produce satisfactory results. The temporalities were mismanaged till in 1931 the Government pressed by the Buddhists took over once more the responsibility and vested their control in the Public Trustee. The criticism in the Report against this arrangement is that all Buddhist properties as in the Christian churches were not in the first instance placed under a central organization. Had this been done they would have been managed better and larger revenues would have been secured for the vihares and devales.

The Government's dissociation from Buddhism without providing a working constitution affected it in other ways too. Sinhalese kings settled disputes when the Sangha could not agree among themselves, and when requested expelled those members who led unworthy lives. The British at first took some steps to meet such situations. An ordinance was passed

to see that all bhikshus were registered. But it was not adequately enforced and many passed as bhikshus who were not ordained while others who lived unworthy lives continued in the Order. Provision was also not made for the succession of incumbents of vihares in such a way as to prevent it being contested in the courts. Ordinances were passed to see that vihara and devala lands were made secure. But it was not easy to get them all registered. As a result many vihara and devala properties were lost and services due to them ceased to be properly rendered.

#### *Protestant Mission Schools*

Buddhism continued to suffer also from the Christianisation of Buddhist children in Protestant schools. Whatever views the Christians held about their religion and those of others, the Buddhists could not appreciate other religious bodies taking away their followers or weaning them away from their faith. There was no widespread system of education under the Sinhalese kings. The only education given was in Buddhist vihares where a few children learnt reading and writing in Sinhalese and young novices and a few laymen studied Buddhism and languages like Pali and Sanskrit.

The Dutch were the first to develop a regular system of schools in Ceylon. They did this primarily with the idea of Christianising the children partly for political and partly for moral reasons. They believed that those who became Christians would be loyal to them and that the study of Christianity would lead to the moral improvement of the pupils. The Dutch system at its best had thousands of children in schools and literacy became widespread in the Maritime Provinces.

The British continued the system of schools established by the Dutch with similar aims but haphazardly. The only difference was that they did not make attendance compulsory. The Colebrooke Reforms did not lead to any change in government policy. The School Commission established in 1834 continued to be dominated by the Anglican clergy, though it included government officials as the Dutch Scholarchal Commission did. The Central Schools Commission that replaced it in 1841 was more secular and contained a majority of officials; but it made no serious difference to the Buddhists.

This situation continued till 1869 when the control of education was taken away altogether from the clergy and placed under a government department and Christianity ceased to be taught in government schools.

Though government schools ceased to be a danger to Buddhism from this time onwards, the danger to Buddhism from Christian missionary activity continued. The Christian Missions established themselves in the second decade of the nineteenth century. They, like the Dutch clergy, began immediately to establish schools wherever they started work. At first they began to work mainly in places where there were Protestant Christian communities, and then gradually spread into other areas. In 1832 there were 235 Protestant Missionary schools as against 90 government schools. They were better organized and more efficiently run. Their main objective was to spread the Christian gospel among non-Christians and convert as many of them as possible to Christianity.

The British Government, as stated already, at first gave every encouragement to Protestant schools. It no doubt appreciated the services they rendered to the education of the people. There was no serious objection to them at first also from the Sangha. The Sangha did not object to the laity worshipping gods and probably did not see at first much objection to the God proclaimed by the Christians. But when they realized that the Christian Missions weaned their people away from their attachment to Buddhism they began to take a different view. The laity naturally preferred some schools to no schools, and it took some time before the Buddhists stirred themselves to action.

It has been pointed out already that British policy towards the ancient civilization of Ceylon had begun to change about the middle of the nineteenth century. Soon afterwards the Legislative Council objected to the grant of aid to Mission schools unless religious instruction was made optional. This went against the very object of the Mission schools and the Christian Missions objected to this restriction. It was too early then for the Government to have thought of a system of state education. In 1869 it repealed the conscience clause rather than lose the schools and agreed to give grants to any society that gave a sound secular education. It thus

made all religious bodies equal in the sight of the law and left them free to teach any religion they liked.

This provision of equality before the law did not meet the needs of the Buddhists. Though they along with the Hindus and the Muslims formed nearly ninety per cent of the population, they had not the men, the means or the organization to establish schools. Hence they were not in a position to compete with the Christian Missions aided from outside.

All Buddhist education was hitherto given by the Sangha in their vihares. The vihares could not be turned into schools of the modern type. Nor could such schools be established in them without a revolution of thought among the Sangha. Therefore the lay Buddhists made no attempt to transform the vihara educational system into schools of the modern type. Instead, in the seventies a few of them began to establish schools, but owing to the reasons given already made little progress at first. It was after the Buddhists organized themselves into a society called the Buddhist Theosophical Society that they began to establish schools in large numbers. But they soon found they had to contend against other difficulties. The Government was now interested only in secular education and refused to give grants to schools in places where there was already provision for secular education. The Buddhists, however, were primarily interested not in establishing schools as such but in preventing their children from being converted to Christianity, and, therefore, in opening schools where there were already Christian schools. Further, grants were given only to schools which had a certain number of pupils and had reached a certain level of efficiency. The Buddhists in many places had to wait a long time before they could fulfil these conditions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Government wanted to make education compulsory. It could not compel Buddhist children to attend schools where instruction was given in Christianity. This was a good opportunity for it to examine the existing system of education anew and reform it in such a way as to be fair to the Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. The existing system was undoubtedly unsatisfactory. As the Education Commission appointed in 1904 pointed out there was something anomalous in a system of education in which funds raised by taxation were

used to support a movement to change the religion of the taxed. Further, the spread of education owing to this system was uneven, and the education of children in predominantly Buddhist and Hindu areas such as the Kandyan Provinces and the Eastern Province was being neglected. The Buddhists and the Hindus were not in a position either to compete with the Christian Missions which had a well-established system already, or to establish sufficient schools in the neglected areas. The best solution, as the American and the Wesleyan Methodist Missions suggested, would have been to establish a system of state education taking over as a first step the Christian schools in predominantly non-Christian areas.

The British Government was not yet prepared to establish such a system. Instead, they decided to set up schools in the neglected areas and to insist on the observance of a conscience clause in all denominational schools. Thus a system of state education did not replace the state control of schools, and the Buddhists were left once more to compete with the Christians as well as they could. The most the Buddhists could demand was equality before the law and this could not help them much. No one made any claims at this time on the ground of equality of opportunity.

But around 1920 the Government changed its view. It proposed to establish a state system and give grants only to such schools as had a majority of pupils of that denomination. But this proposal was again dropped. There was a division of opinion even among the Buddhists, the Hindus and the Muslims as to the suitability of a state system for Ceylon. This was not surprising. Society in Ceylon was not yet secular. It was divided not only by race and caste but also by religion. Its ideas were influenced considerably by religious beliefs, and its social activities generally could not be separated from religion. In such a society many no doubt considered that a secular system of education which a state could provide was not enough. Hence many preferred the denominational system. The Buddhist and the Hindu had already established a large number of schools and a vested interest was growing in them.

Around 1940 the question of the suitability of the existing system of education came up once more for consideration.

At this time many Western governments had taken responsibility for education as the only way by which educational opportunities could be provided for all. Many Buddhists and Hindus who realized that they could not run enough schools to meet the needs of their co-religionists began to advocate a system of state schools where Buddhist and Hindu children did not come under Christian influence.

But the Education Commission which issued its Report in 1943 did not propose a radical change. It emphasized the importance of religious education, but at the same time it did not approve of a system of denominational schools which would lead to the segregation of children of different religions and denominations. Therefore it proposed that provision be made in all denominational schools for all children to be taught their respective religions. But the Christian Missions did not agree to teach other religions in their schools. The only result was that the conscience clause was tightened further. Then an attempt was made to limit grants in all new schools to the children of the religion of the proprietor, but this too was foiled.

Thus the Buddhists were left with a grievance as a large number of their children were left with no education in Buddhism, and, more than that, they came under Christian influence which weakened their hold on Buddhism. The only solution appeared to be a state system with some concessions to the continuance of denominational and private schools. The chances of such a system being adopted was better than ever before. Education had been made free and almost the entire cost of education even in denominational schools was being met by the Government. Therefore there was very little reason to continue the denominational system on grounds of finance. What was now necessary was a government which was prepared to replace the denominational system with a state system, and such a government had been made possible by the Donoughmore Reforms.

### *The Sinhalese Language*

Buddhism, as stated already, also suffered when English was made the language of the Government and gradually of the administration. The Sinhalese language began with the coming of the Sinhalese to Ceylon. With the introduction of Buddhism it became interwoven with it. From that

time it became a vehicle for the expression of religious, psychological and philosophical ideas. Its development was retarded to some extent from about the fourth century A.D. when Buddhaghosa translated the Sinhalese commentaries into Pali, and Pali became the chief medium for the study and expression of Buddhism. But Sinhalese continued to be the language of the people and of the administration even if at times it ceased to be the language of the royal court. Influenced by the study of Sanskrit there was a further growth of the Sinhalese language both in vocabulary and expression, and, as a result, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century many Sinhalese works were produced. They were however mainly religious as their authors were mainly bhikshus. A few dealt with subjects like medicine and grammar.

This development received a set-back with the coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch, as Sinhalese then ceased to be the language of the rulers and of government record. But it continued to be the language of administration, of education and of Christian propaganda. A certain number of books were written by Christians, and, in these, Christian ideas too came to be expressed in Sinhalese. Further, the Missionaries tried to produce Sinhalese grammars and dictionaries in a new style. In Dutch times as a result of the establishment of a widespread system of schools, thousands of children learnt to read and write Sinhalese.

The British at first continued the system of Sinhalese schools. The Christian schools in the Sinhalese areas were also conducted mainly through the medium of Sinhalese. Hence the number of those able to read and write Sinhalese continued to increase.

There was however an important set-back to Sinhalese in 1832. With the Colebrooke Reforms English increasingly became the language of the Government and of the administration and the medium of instruction in government schools. The result was that those of the Sinhalese who wished to improve their status began to pay more attention to the study of English than to that of Sinhalese. The Sinhalese language henceforth made little progress and the Sangha became isolated from the active currents of life. No objection was raised against these changes at the time, probably because



the Sinhalese Buddhists did not realise what the consequences would be. What is even more striking is that no serious attempt was made to upset this arrangement till recent times.

By the middle of the nineteenth century there was a reaction to these changes. The British realizing that teaching English to Sinhalese children without making them first literate in Sinhalese was unsatisfactory, began once more to establish Sinhalese schools. In 1869 they decided to take responsibility for vernacular elementary education and gradually abandoned the running of English schools.

About 1890 Sinhalese studies once again received a setback. This was not due to any direct action on the part of the British Government. There was about this time an expansion of the existing government departments and the establishment of many new ones; and numerous avenues of employment became available to those who knew English. The result was that the Christian Missions, Buddhist and Hindu societies, and private bodies began to establish English schools or to expand those already in existence.

This did not put a stop to the spread of Sinhalese schools. The Government continued to establish them in increasing numbers. They were however only elementary schools. At the same time the Sangha established a large number of *pirivenas* where the level of learning was much higher.

From the beginning of the twentieth century the importance of giving a child an education in his own language first was once more emphasized. In 1945 the mother tongue was made the medium of instruction in all schools in the primary stage; and in 1953 it was decided to continue it in the mother tongue from standard six upwards.

After the Donoughmore Reforms and the grant of the adult franchise Sinhalese schools began to receive more attention. The teaching in them was gradually improved and in many of them classes parallel to those in English secondary schools were established. In 1944 it was decided to make Sinhalese and Tamil the languages of government in place of English and steps were taken to implement this decision.

It was thus only a matter of time for Sinhalese to be the main language of the country and the chief medium of instruction in the upper forms of the secondary schools and in the University. It was clear that any reassertion of Buddhism had to be accompanied by a reassertion of Sinhalese. This was already taking place in 1955 when the Buddhist Commission was sitting. The only thing left to do was to accelerate the process.

#### *The Secularisation of Government*

The Buddhist Commissioners had also to take into account the fact that the Ceylon Government at this time had become secular apart from its connection with the Buddhist temporalities. It had become responsible only for secular education and had finally given grants only to schools which observed the conscience clause. It had even attempted to establish a system of state education, and, when it failed, had tried to make all assisted schools give children of all religions instruction in their respective faiths. It had disestablished the Anglican Church in 1881 and ceased to have any direct connection with any Christian Church. It was not easy for any government to reverse this position and support any special religion. It was now left to the Buddhists to take over the Buddhist temporalities as soon as they were in a position to create a satisfactory organization to manage them.

#### *The Buddhist Reaction*

Lastly, the Buddhist Commissioners had to build on what had been done for over a century to rehabilitate Buddhism. The first important step to revive Buddhism seems to have been taken in 1839 when the *Parama Dhamma Cetiya Pirivena* was established in Ratmalana. One of its pupils established the *Vidyodaya Pirivena* in 1872 and another the *Vidyalkankara Pirivena* in 1876. As time passed *pirivenas* began to be established in other Buddhist areas. In all of them Sinhalese, Buddhism, Pali, Sanskrit and other subjects were taught.

The next important step taken was the establishment of the *Ramanya Nikaya* in 1865. At this time there was a considerable amount of criticism of the way of life of the bhikshus. It was no longer possible to obtain a purification of the Sangha with the aid of the Government. This *Nikaya*

was established for those who wanted to live a pure form of Buddhism rejecting even the worship of gods.

The third important step taken was to counteract the work of the Missionaries. The Buddhists published tracts, magazines, and newspapers defending Buddhism and attacking Christianity. From 1865 to 1873 they entered openly into controversy with Protestant Ministers at public gatherings, and this roused considerable public interest.

The most important step taken however was in 1880. What Buddhism lacked hitherto was a powerful lay organization. Colonel Olcott of the American Theosophical Society read of the public controversy in Panadure in 1873 and came to Ceylon. He claimed a higher status for Buddhism than for Christianity. With the assistance of the Buddhist laity he set up a headquarters, adopted a Buddhist flag and established the Buddhist Theosophical Society. The last was to set up Buddhist schools in competition with Christian Mission schools.

After this the Buddhists tried with greater vigour to make the Government change its attitude to Buddhism. They wanted it to give the same rights to Buddhism as to Christianity. They asked that the Vesak day be made a government holiday. They objected to the Christianization of Buddhist children in Christian schools and agitated for the removal of the obstacles in the way of establishing Buddhist schools and obtaining government grants.

The main consequence of Colonel Olcott's work was that there came into existence a large number of Buddhist Sinhalese and English schools. As a result, by 1948 there came into being a new generation of persons educated in Buddhist schools with a greater knowledge of Buddhism and having more of an indigenous background than those educated in Christian schools. Consequently there was a definite body of persons to press the claims of Buddhism and see that it was given its rightful place.

By 1948 the Government had dissociated itself completely from Christianity and had become secular. Its only connection with religion was in its administration of the Buddhist temporalities. These as stated already had once

more been placed under government control by vesting them in the Public Trustee as no alternative arrangement seemed possible at the time. Mission schools had been completely deprived of their right to teach Christianity to non-Christian children, and a large number of Buddhist schools had come into existence side by side with state schools. Sinhalese and Tamil were becoming the languages of government and the medium of instruction in most schools. It was only left to complete the process. This had to be done by removing all the remaining obstacles that stood in the way of the progress of Buddhism and by developing an autonomous Buddhist organization to take full charge of Buddhist affairs.

Such changes had been made possible by the establishment of the Donoughmore Constitution. This gave Ceylon a considerable amount of self-government with the prospect of independence in a not too remote future. In 1832 the British had deprived races and castes of their rights and conferred them on individuals. But in the constitutional reforms of 1912 to 1924 the rights of races had been recognized once more and Buddhists who formed nearly two-thirds of the population had not even a third of the representation in the Legislative Council. In 1931 by the grant of territorial representation and adult franchise the Buddhists had an opportunity, if they so desired, to obtain a representation commensurate with their numbers, do away with the disadvantages they had hitherto suffered from, and obtain equality of opportunity with the Christians.

The Buddhists were thus in a position to get the Government to deprive the Christians of the special privileges they had gained under British rule. The Donoughmore Commissioners took the view that domestic and private charity in Ceylon was unequal to deal with economic and social problems. They wanted the Government to safeguard the interests of the underprivileged and bridge the gulf between the English-educated class and the rural workers; to give more attention to the rural areas and bring them more into line with the urban areas. Ceylon gained political independence in 1948. Since 1931 it had taken a few hesitant steps to be economically independent. It was now left for the Sinhalese and Tamil-educated classes to make the rest of society take a more indigenous form by accelerating the process of making Sinhalese and Tamil the languages of government, by re-

habilitating Buddhism and Hinduism, and by placing them on an equal footing with the Christian churches. This could be done by getting the Government to take over the denominational schools and other social service institutions which were mainly in the hands of the Christians, and to fulfil the request of Gladstone and give the Buddhists an honest working constitution such as the Christians had.

The Buddhists had been exercising the vote for twenty-five years. They were now conscious to some extent of the rights and the powers they possessed. What the Buddhist Commission Report did was to stir them to action and make them support the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which they believed would grant their demands and put the finishing touches to a movement that had gone on for over a hundred years.

What the Buddhist Commissioners wanted the Government to do was to make all schools in Ceylon state schools placing all religious communities on an equal footing; to compensate Buddhism for what it had suffered under British rule; and to provide Buddhism with an independent organization in accordance with the changed conditions brought about by British rule, so that the Buddhists could manage their own affairs. There is no proposal to make Buddhism the state religion as Christianity was under early British rule. There is no suggestion to restore any of the ancient institutions which had disappeared during British rule. What is recommended for Buddhism is a central organization—a Buddha Sasana Council consisting of the Sangha and the laity—to fit in with the centralized system of government established by the British. The Sangha is to maintain discipline among its members but without the assistance of the Government. Assisted by the Buddha Sasana Council it is to give a suitable education to the novices without any interference from the Government. A monastic organization cannot deal with all the problems of the modern age. It did not deal with all problems in the past either. It had to depend on kings and chiefs. In the new set-up the Buddhist laity has to come in to take their place. Hence the necessity to associate the laity with the Sangha in the Buddha Sasana Council and wherever their assistance was needed. But all this had to be done with the consent of a divided Sangha. Everything depended on the methods adopted to win them over and to the extent to which they would respond to these proposals.

## THE RISE OF SINHALESE COMMUNALISM

ONE of the significant problems in 1957 was the gulf that existed between the English and the Sinhalese Press. It is true this gap varied from newspaper to newspaper, but anyone who read both the English and the Sinhalese newspapers could not help being struck by the wide divergence in their views and sympathies. Both seemed in many respects to live in a world of their own with little concern for the other's point of view. They seemed to move on different planes avoiding any understanding of the fundamental issues that separated them.

It would not have been such a catastrophe if this gulf had been limited to the English and the Sinhalese Press. In fact it reflected a rift in society itself. It was only another aspect of the gulf that existed between the English-educated and the Sinhalese-educated classes, the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the Buddhists and the Christians—especially the Roman Catholics, and the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The English Press and the English-educated class were impatient with what was taking place at the time. They were concerned about the lowering of standards, the disregard for efficiency and discipline, and the ignoring of English as a *sine qua non* for progress in any direction. They could not understand the demand for making Sinhalese the medium of instruction in the University when such a step would make education at university level, other than in Oriental studies, difficult. They deplored the precipitate way the Sinhala Only Bill was passed when the object of that Act could have been achieved peacefully if only time had been allowed to take its own course. They were perturbed when Ministers and Members of Parliament gave vent to utterances which ignored issues they considered fundamental and made proposals which in their opinion would set back the clock of progress by decades and probably plunge the country into chaos.

On the other hand the Sinhalese Press and the Sinhalese-educated class were equally impatient with the pace of the new

Government in carrying out the reforms they demanded. They accused their opponents of being selfish. They felt that the latter were clinging to their vested interests and objecting to the advancement of any but their own section. It was for this reason, they thought, the doctors opposed the improvement of ayurveda and the lawyers the immediate use of Sinhalese in the law courts. Those who sympathized with the Tamils or emphasized the need for English were regarded enemies of the Sinhalese race and language. Some of the Ministers who represented them therefore attacked the English Press and the English-educated class for their opposition to the changes they wished to introduce.

Such divergences in outlook and aims, admittedly, did not benefit either party or the country as a whole. But what was little realized was that this gulf was due to fundamental issues, and the most urgent need of the day was to bridge this wide gap. Further, the solution of most other problems also depended upon how far this major problem was resolved. On this depended whether we would be able successfully to put an end to the impasse between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Only then would we be able to give to the study of English the importance it deserved and prevent the lowering of standards in the schools and the University and chaos in the economic life of the country. On it also depended the future of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and of good government for many years to come.

What were the fundamental issues that brought about this divergence of outlook and aims between the Sinhalese and the English Press, the English-educated and the Sinhalese-educated classes? Why was the Sinhalese Press opposed to the interests of the English-educated class, of the Tamils and of the Christians—especially the Roman Catholics? The causes were many; but in the main the division was due to certain actions of the British, who expected very different results.

The British decided to spread the study of English for the advancement of the people of Ceylon. That was at least one of their objectives in 1832, whatever people may say to the contrary. According to the beliefs held at that time they thought that if the people were imbued with new ideas these would transform their outlook and probably change

their very natures. At that time neither the evolutionary view of life nor the study of modern psychology had emerged. Hence they did not take into account the heritage of Ceylon or the culture of the Sinhalese. The result was that the Sinhalese, who went to the English schools established by Government, adopted English ways of life without either assimilating them sufficiently or transforming the old ways of life and thought. They gradually lost sight of their cultural background while those who studied through the medium of Sinhalese absorbed little of the new ideas. Thus there was not sufficient blending of the old and the new. It might have been different had bilingualism been adopted and the two cultures been allowed to influence each other. Instead, this process drove a wedge into Sinhalese society and divided it into two sections.

Further, the British, in order to integrate the various races and castes, established modern institutions and expected the old ones to wither away gradually. They were successful to a great extent in the economic sphere. The Sinhalese form of feudalism as well as the village community system gradually broke down. But they met with less success in the social sphere. Though they weakened the foundations of society they failed to break it up completely. Even the rise of the English-educated middle class, based on the English language and the new economy, affected little the old groupings, and in some respects it formed a fresh division apart from the old.

The old social groups, however, abandoned some of their original objectives, and, adopting new ones, acquired another lease of life. Those groups which had already attained a privileged position did their best to retain it. Others, which lagged behind, united in order to come into line with the rest. Minorities and even caste groups closed their ranks as far as possible to safeguard their interests. The last to organize itself in this way were the Sinhalese-educated class which consisted mainly of Buddhists.

The Sinhalese-educated Buddhists benefited by the British constitutional reforms. The Colebrooke Reforms, although they placed all persons equal in the sight of the law, did not provide opportunities for all persons of shrewdness and capacity for hard work to climb the social ladder. But the

Donoughmore and Soulbury Commissions attempted to do this. The Donoughmore Commission was struck by the inequalities of life in Ceylon. It tried to eliminate these differences by providing a welfare state, and giving to all, whether Sinhalese, Tamil or Burgher, equal political rights. The Soulbury Commission went further and, by providing greater representation to minorities, actually increased the representation of backward areas, thus giving the backward sections of the population a greater opportunity of coming into line with the rest.

The Sinhalese-educated Buddhists, being the majority community, had found it difficult to unite. They had to overcome the barrier of caste. They had no strong opposition except that of the Tamils to bring them together. Besides, the English-educated Sinhalese, separated from the rest, had not sufficient sympathy with the Sinhalese-educated class to lead them. The result was that the new communalism sprang within the Sinhalese-educated section and those who followed the Buddhist faith.

The Sinhalese-educated Buddhists realized, on the one hand, that they were not disunited as before, and, on the other, that they now had a chance, if an effort was made, to improve their position. What had to be done was to capture the government, just as the English-educated middle class had captured it from the British. The grant of adult franchise and the establishment of a welfare state had made it possible for them to gain their ends.

But the Sinhalese-educated Buddhist community realized that it was no easy task to maintain their ascendancy once they gained political power. They had to fight against great odds in order to establish themselves and play an important part in the affairs of the country. The only way they could attain their objects was by developing the Sinhalese language and rehabilitating Buddhism, two factors with which they thought their own development was bound up.

There were already two rival languages to compete with Sinhalese. English was a world language, and there was every danger that it might replace Sinhalese. If they succeeded against English, they feared that Tamil might take its place in the near future if not immediately. Tamil was the language of South India and so had every opportunity of developing faster than Sinhalese.

Buddhism similarly was in a backward state. Some of the institutions on which it depended were becoming obsolete. It had to reorganize itself, but the obstacles in its way were great. Above all it had to compete with Christian organizations which had made great advances and established themselves firmly under British rule.

Thus the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists, fighting not merely for privileges but for their very existence, desired to preserve their language and religion. They thought that the only way they could preserve Sinhalese was by making it the language of government and the medium of education up to university level. Similarly they wanted to deprive the Christians of the privileged position they had attained, as otherwise the Buddhists would be at a disadvantage in the final struggle with the Christians. It appeared at the time that until the Sinhalese language was secure and Buddhism was firmly established, the new movement was not likely to lose its force unless some catastrophe took place.

These facts explain why some Sinhalese became so communal and some Buddhists so intolerant. That was why for instance they opposed the Tamil demands for parity, for to yield to them, some thought, would be to commit suicide. The Sinhalese Press therefore had little sympathy with Tamil claims. The Sinhalese-educated Buddhists had not forgotten that the break-up of their ancient civilization was at least partly due to Tamil invasions, and that in the fourteenth century, Ceylon nearly came under Tamil domination. They interpreted the opposition to Sinhalese demands for constitutional reforms, shown from time to time by the main body of the Tamils, not as a fight for rights and privileges but as an attempt to gain dominance over the Sinhalese. Remembering how Sinhalese disunity helped the election of a Tamil to the Educated Ceylonese seat in 1912 they looked upon the fight for fifty-fifty in 1945 as a means to gain ascendancy, counting on the disunity prevailing among the Sinhalese. As long as the Tamil language and Hinduism were fostered in South-India, Tamils had nothing to fear for their language or culture. The Sinhalese on the other hand could not look to any other source for the continuity of their language and religion which had survived for over two thousand years in spite of the vicissitudes which the Sinhalese people had gone through.

In this context it can be understood why the Sinhalese Press diverged from the demands of the English Press. It had to advocate something much more vital than the maintenance of efficiency and high standards. The development of the Sinhalese language was far more important to it than the maintenance of a high level in secondary or university education. It did not deny the importance of English, but it took the view that this was not the time to emphasize it. Once Sinhalese was securely established, English could be given its due place. Similarly, once Buddhism was placed on a sound footing, Christianity could be allowed the tolerance it deserved.

But one of the chief difficulties in the way of achieving these objectives was the limited wealth of the country. Funds were necessary to develop the Sinhalese language to enable it to take the place of English, to set up Buddhism on an equal footing with Christianity and to raise the Sinhalese-educated class to the level of others, say the Tamils, in the government services and other walks of life. If the Sinhalese-educated people, the Sinhalese language, and Buddhism could not be lifted up, the only alternative was to level down the others. That would create much more heart-burning and discontent among those who had already reached a higher position than the Sinhalese-educated. But even if they had reached this level by their own merit, justice demanded, in the view of the Sinhalese Press, that they should make sacrifices for the sake of those who had been left behind.

Many were no doubt unimpressed by such arguments. Some questioned the advisability of such measures or the justice inherent in them. Would the Sinhalese language ever attain the position aimed at by the Sinhalese Press? If Buddhism organized itself even in a small way on Christian lines or in some other modern form, would not such institutions change the very nature of Buddhism itself? Such doubts however did not deter those who were fighting for their very existence. Nor were they concerned about fairness to others until justice was done to them.

The English Press went further and pointed out that the radical reforms demanded by the Sinhalese-educated would not solve problems but only create others. Whatever were

the motives of the reformers, they had to realize that no progress was possible in Ceylon unless there was communal harmony. Even if Sinhalese was made the state language, neglect of English would retard the progress of Ceylon. Moreover, Sinhalese, for its own development, for the evolution of its terms, ideas and concepts, had to come into close contact with a living world language like English. Had it not improved in the past by its contact with Pali and Sanskrit? True religion can never be aggressive. If Buddhists conquered the whole of Ceylon through political pressure, they might destroy the spiritual values of Buddhism in the process.

More than anything else the pre-requisite for any progress in Ceylon was economic development. When Colebrooke recommended radical reforms in Sinhalese society he also proposed vast changes in the economy of the Island. But for this economic development, even the Buddhist revival in the seventies of the last century would have been feeble and the present movement equally weak.

What had been stated already has no doubt made it clear that the wide gulf between the English and the Sinhalese Press was due to fundamental issues. Whatever arguments were brought forward, the gulf between the two classes represented by them could not be bridged without an appreciation of these basic differences. Even if the Sinhalese Press abandoned its policy and took up the causes advocated in the English Press it would not have made much difference. The last General Election showed that the Press was effective mainly when it expressed public opinion and not when it tried to mould it.

The English Press might have placed before the English-educated class the point of view of the Sinhalese-educated class and the meaning of their demands. The Sinhalese Press would have performed a similar service if it explained the point of view of the English-educated class—that the latter were thinking in terms of a united Ceylon, and not merely in terms of the Sinhalese-educated and Buddhism, and that the Sinhalese-educated and the Buddhists could make no real progress unless they took into account the objectives and views of other sections of society.

But neither the Press nor the politicians who have to deal with day to day questions can solve complex problems. Men

of goodwill of all communities had to undertake this task and bridge the gulf by taking into account fundamental differences in aims and outlook which affected varied interests. If they did not do so not only the Sinhalese and the Buddhists but the country as a whole would suffer the consequences of hasty and precipitate action.

## THE LANGUAGE ISSUE IN 1957

ON a visit to Batticaloa and Jaffna in June 1957 I was struck by the intensity of feeling over the language issue. The Tamils I met were mainly concerned with the Sinhala Only Act, and not with the demands of the Federal Party. Hardly any interest was shown in the enfranchisement of the Indian Tamils. A few were concerned about the establishment of the Sinhalese colonists in the Eastern Province which was considered the special preserve of the Tamil-speaking peoples. Others were interested in Federalism as a means to an end. But everyone considered the Sinhala Only Act as something detrimental to their self-respect and dignity, and looked upon it as an attempt on the part of the Sinhalese to humiliate them by allotting the Tamil language an inferior status.

The emotional situation was such that even the adverse effects of the Sinhala Only Act which created this intensity of feeling was hardly discussed. This act placed the Tamils at a disadvantage. It reduced the number of appointments open to them in the Public Services, in addition to diminishing the prospects of promotion of those already in service; it brought about a feeling of complete despair among the youths who were already perturbed about securing employment commensurate with the education they had acquired. It was precipitately forced through Parliament by a majority vote without prior consultation or the acquiescence of those it affected adversely. The Tamils who openly expressed their opposition to the Bill were humiliated and treated with violence. In addition to all this, disaffection was intensified by the inaction of the government for more than a year in guaranteeing by law even "the reasonable use of Tamil" promised to them. This delay led to a loss of confidence in the Government, to a fear that it had no intention of fulfilling its promises. Hence there grew among these people a feeling of insecurity and this drove them to demand a federal state where in spite of the hardships they might have to endure they could follow their inclinations and a way of life dictated by themselves.

However, I did not find the Tamils socially hostile to the Sinhalese. The Tamils admitted that they mixed with the Sinhalese in all strata of society and that they had good friends among them. They knew that Buddhists were not antagonistic to the Hindus, and, they, being Hindus, looked upon Buddhism as a branch of Hinduism. A few of them at least were aware that the Buddhist Commission Report which was produced by the Sinhalese did not attack the Hindus and that it had recommended that Hinduism like Buddhism should be assisted by the state. As far as social customs were concerned they knew that the Sinhalese had much in common with them. Yet driven by this feeling of insecurity they imagined that the Sinhalese people were determined to deny them justice and equality.

This distrust of the Sinhalese by the Tamils in the north and the east was due also to other causes. One was ignorance of the implications of the developments in the Sinhalese area. They could not understand the causes that led to the Sinhala Only Act, as there had been no corresponding development in the same proportions in the Tamil area. Among the Tamils there was no strong Hindu movement against Christianity. English education had permeated even the lower middle class, and there was no clear-cut division between the upper and the lower middle class. Further, there was no powerful Hindu Tamil-educated section who fought for their rights against the Christian English-educated Tamils.

The Tamils therefore found it difficult to grasp the fact that the movement in the Sinhalese area was not really directed against the Tamils. It was a movement of the Sinhalese-educated Sinhalese against the English-educated Sinhalese. They failed to understand that the English-educated Sinhalese were as much victims as themselves; it was primarily a movement of the Buddhists, especially of the Sinhalese-educated section, against the Christian Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church. It was only in a lesser degree that the attacks in the Sinhalese Press were directed against the Tamils. The primary object of the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists was not to liquidate the Tamils, but to establish their language and their religion on a firm footing.

The Tamils also did not understand that there was a similar emotional situation two years earlier among the Sinhalese-educated Sinhalese. After Ceylon attained independence

the Sinhalese-speaking Sinhalese found that this event had made little difference to them. In spite of some of the actions of the U.N.P. Government to help the Sinhalese language and Buddhism the Sinhalese-educated Sinhalese continued to remain socially inferior and counted little in the political and economic life of the country. Their religion, Buddhism, did not receive sufficient attention to put it on a par with Christianity which had attained a privileged position under the British. The Buddhist monk did not play the important role he did under Sinhalese kings and was not granted the status he deserved as a monk of the religion which was followed by nearly two-thirds of the people. The Sinhalese schoolmaster received a lower salary than one who taught in a school where English was the medium of instruction and his status was lower than that of the English teacher. Above all, the pupils in Sinhalese schools, even if they passed the S.S.C. Examination, had very few avenues of employment open to them and had often to take up service as servants. Unemployment was rampant and they began to despair of their future.

Therefore they demanded social justice and those already employed demanded a standard of living on a par with that enjoyed by the English-educated classes. It was felt that the only way they could achieve their objects was by making Sinhalese the language of government and the medium of instruction. This would mean the displacement of the English-educated class from their present position, but this did not bother people who were underprivileged and living in a state of insecurity.

What then of the Tamil language? Was it not to be given equal status with the Sinhalese? The Sinhalese-educated feared, perhaps wrongly, that once English was replaced by Sinhalese, if Tamil was given equal status, the Sinhalese language might not be able to compete with it. What chance, they thought, had the Sinhalese language spoken by less than six millions against a language spoken by nearly thirty million in South India and Ceylon? They were therefore unwilling to give parity of status to Tamil and demanded a Sinhala Only Act. Many Sinhalese knew that this would deprive the Tamils of the opportunity of securing employment under the Government. But they felt they were meting out to the Tamils almost the same treatment accorded to the English-



educated Sinhalese. Besides they did not wish to abandon to the Tamils, the fruits of their victory over the English-educated at the General Election.

There was another similarity in the development that took place among the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In the case of the Sinhalese too, language had ultimately become the main issue. Since it was closely associated with their cultural heritage they fought for its preservation. Is language a master or a servant? Is it a means to an end or an end in itself? In times of crises when a people are faced with insecurity and fear it seems to be a characteristic of human nature to turn away from reason and make an idol of some factor which would draw the community together to face a common danger. On such occasions they sometimes deify a leader, who, they believe would lead them to their goal. At other times they idolize a language or a culture, a religious institution or a state. This idol then becomes the centre of emotion overshadowing the real issues.

Another factor which made the solution of the Sinhalese-Tamil problem difficult was the exaggerated fears and misunderstandings on both sides. Anyone who moved freely among the Sinhalese and the Tamils would have realized that what both really wanted was to live in peace and carry on their normal activities. But the Tamils believed that the Sinhalese were determined to liquidate them, while the Sinhalese held the view that the Tamils wished to dominate over them. The fear of the Tamils was mainly due to recent events. The fear of the Sinhalese was due to past history and the present day demands of the Tamils, especially those belonging to the Federal Party.

The Sinhalese population is nearly six times that of the Ceylon Tamils. How then, the Sinhalese asked, could there be parity in language? Did it mean that there should be parity both in government record and in government communication. In the Sinhalese area, had every deed, every survey plan, every minute, every file, every sign-post to be in both languages? Did it mean that wherever a few Tamils lived both in the boys' and girls' schools there should be a Tamil stream when such an arrangement would be a financial impracticability? If the Tamils did not mean that, why did they not drop the word "parity"?

Further, why did the Tamils want an autonomous linguistic state? Would it not divide Ceylon into two? Would it not enable the Tamils to federate finally with South India and thereby gradually exterminate the Sinhalese? The Tamils did not want the Government to send Sinhalese colonists to the Eastern Province lest the political ascendancy of the Tamils there might be upset. Why then did they demand the complete enfranchisement of the Indians in the Kandyan provinces since this would reduce the number of the Kandyan representatives in Parliament?

There was pressure on land in the south-western areas as much as in the Jaffna peninsula. The Kandyan peasant was often landless or lived on an uneconomic plot of land. In the Southern Province the situation was even more serious. The Southern Province Sinhalese, like the Jaffna Tamils, migrated to every part of the Island, into the Kandyan highlands, into the Dry Zone and even into the very heart of the Jaffna Peninsula, and took up work as labourers, cultivators, bakers, carpenters and boutique-keepers and in other capacities. If colonization was denied to them in the Eastern Province would there be sufficient fertile land elsewhere for them to settle?

If Sinhalese was to be the language of the Sinhalese-speaking areas and Tamil that of the Tamil-speaking areas, some form of federalism was inevitable; but in actual practice it is difficult to break up a small country like Ceylon, which has had a unified system of administration for one hundred and twenty five years. Emotion can create crises but it cannot solve highly complex problems. If only the Sinhalese and the Tamils had met each other round a table on an equal footing and discussed each other's aims and objectives and understood each other's difficulties, they would have probably found a solution satisfactory to both parties. What was most important was not the language question, a federal state or Regional Councils. The real problem was that there was insufficient wealth in the country for all to share. Therefore the urgent need was for the Sinhalese and the Tamils to unite in order to develop the economy of the country and so give security to both. Once this was successfully carried out the pent-up feelings which arose over the language issue would subside.

## THE REWRITING OF HISTORY

Are we going back to the past or drawing out of it?

**S**HOULD history be rewritten? No historian could answer this question in the negative. There is no finality to history. There is no end to the accumulation, evaluation and interpretation of facts. Research into the past is going on ceaselessly. Fresh discoveries of facts force us to reassess the validity of earlier criteria. New developments widen our vision, and as a result, our perspective of the past changes. This does not mean that historians try to change or try to give an untrue picture of the past. When new facts come to light and alter the picture or new experiences widen our horizon, historians consider it their duty to rewrite history altering the old picture and giving it a new perspective.

But the question really at issue in 1957 was not whether history should be rewritten. On this historians and non-historians were agreed. The real question was why history should be rewritten. On this there was disagreement, as the popular views with regard to the need to rewrite history did not coincide with those of the professional historian. The requests put forward then for rewriting history did not seem to arise so much from the new material available to historians as from an emotional set-up which was in revolt with the immediate past as interpreted by historians. Those who made these requests were not so much concerned with the past as with the present. They wanted the past either to justify the present as they understood it or to fulfil the demands of the present. They were inspired not by a genuine desire to investigate a problem and find out the truth but by a desire to confirm a current popular assumption or prejudice. In short, what they asked for was not so much a history as a propagandist treatise, not so much a statement based on facts as a statement of facts which would give expression to their feelings.

One body that put forward the suggestion that the history of Ceylon should be rewritten was the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress. It was not clear why this organization made this

demand. Just as some Christians still ask for a Christian interpretation of history, did the Buddhist Congress want a Buddhist interpretation? The author of the *Mahavamsa* wrote his book to rouse serene joy and religious emotion, an emotion which would produce a revulsion from the world and its misery.

The author of the *Mahavamsa* also had another object in writing this work. He wished to teach moral lessons. When writing about Elara he says: "Only because (this monarch) freed himself from the guilt of walking in the path of evil, though he had not put aside false beliefs, did he gain such miraculous power; how should not then an understanding man, established in pure belief (Buddhism) renounce here the guilt of walking in the path of evil?"

If the object of writing history is to draw men away from the world, then it is almost a negation of the modern conception of history which emphasizes the importance of the events of this life and tries to explain their significance. Historians today do not consider it their business to teach religious, moral or other lessons, as medieval European historians did. Modern historians have also kept aloof from the Christian interpretation of history, as such an interpretation if accepted would alter the conception of history as held by them.

But a Buddhist or an ethical interpretation did not seem to be the object of those who demanded a rewriting of history. The reasons given were that some of the existing history books did not give sufficient importance to Buddhism; instead, they minimized the role played by Buddhism and Buddhists in the history of the Island. They did not give sufficient publicity either to the heroic deeds of the Sinhalese in fighting against foreigners for the independence of the country or to the achievements of the Sinhalese in the field of culture.

Such criticisms are not peculiar to Ceylon. There are Christians who complain that European historians do not bring out sufficiently the important part played by Christianity and the Christian Church in the development of Europe. In Europe there was a time when nationalist histories were the order of the day and the deeds of heroes who fought against foreigners were given great prominence.

There are undoubtedly many reasons for rewriting the history of Ceylon. First, as stated already, our knowledge of the past is not static. Today we know much more of the past than we did before 1890 when the Archaeological Department was established. Before that writers depended mainly on the Pali chronicles for a knowledge of the Anuradhapura and the Polonnaruva Periods. But since 1890 archaeological discoveries of both monuments and inscriptions, and critical studies of the chronicles and other literary sources, have enabled us to learn more about that period and also to get a clearer idea of the value to be attached to it, when one deals with the whole course of Ceylon history. Thus, in view of the new facts available, no one can deny the necessity for re-writing the history of the early period.

Rewriting is necessary not only with regard to the period before 1505. For the period after that date too, there is more evidence available today, though the amount unexamined is much greater. When examined, this material will probably yield us a much better idea of the Sinhalese and Tamil civilizations than the sources of the early period. Besides, this period involves a study of the impact of the West with its science and technology which more than anything else explains the revolutionary changes taking place today.

Second, history should be rewritten because the outlook of historians changes from generation to generation. If we examine historical writings during the British Period by British administrators, Christian Missionaries and Ceylonese, we find that their outlook and view of the past changed from time to time not merely as a result of the discovery of new historical facts but as a result of the widening of their horizon in general, especially as a result of scientific discoveries and an increasing knowledge of the diverse civilizations of the world. Recent developments too remind us once more that the past is still very much alive and draw our attention to the need for a re-examination of our ancient civilization.

Third, the need for re-writing the history of Ceylon has arisen as a result of the radical changes that have taken place during the last one hundred years in the conception and content of history. Histories in the real sense are no longer written to teach religion or morality or any other lessons. The role played by any religion is not described except in relation to political, economic and social developments. History

is no longer rewritten to create a sense of nationalism and patriotism in the rising generation and to build up a nation of self-respecting men and women. An urgent need does exist for the writing of a history of Buddhism in Ceylon. There can be no objection to the writing of a series of national biographies or of a work to create a sense of nationalism and patriotism. But though these include historical material, they cannot be considered historical works.

If what has been stated so far is accepted as valid, it will be evident that the demand for the rewriting of history on the part of certain people was due to a lack of understanding of the modern conception of history. This is not surprising as the art of writing history did not reach a high level in Ceylon in the past. One of the greatest Indian living historians said the other day that though ideas of history and of historical literature are not lacking in Sanskrit writings, it is a well-known fact that with the single exception of the *Rajatarangini* (History of Kashmir) there is no other historical text in Sanskrit dealing with the whole or even parts of India. It is true, he added, there were chronicles, epic poems and *Puranas* which would have come under the category of *itihasa*, chronicles such as the *vamsavalis* of Nepal or historical biographies such as the *Harshacharita*, but they cannot be regarded as history in the proper sense of the term.

Though the Indians produced almost every form of literary work and reached a high standard of perfection, why did they not develop far the art of writing history? This is due to the fact that Indian religious thought in general denied any meaning or value to history. Indians usually did not seek to explain events by natural causes, but traced them to actions of men in their previous lives. Nevertheless the *Rajatarangini* in some respects approaches a modern history. Its author, Kalhana, though he did not always achieve his ideal in composing this work, believed that the mission of a historian is to make vivid before one's eyes the picture of a bygone age. He considered it his duty to keep his mind unprejudiced and, before he drew his conclusions, critically examined the writings of others in the light of available evidence such as inscriptions. It is, however, not known what factors, foreign or local, influenced him to write this unique work.

Ceylon produced many more historical works than any other part of ancient India. It can take pride in the Pali

chronicles, as the accuracy of many of the facts stated therein have been proved by contemporary inscriptions. It has many historical works similar to the *vamsavalis* and also other works of a historical nature. But none of these works ever reached the level of the *Rajatarangini*. One of the long narratives we have is that of the reign of Parakramabahu the Great. But in that account many events unfavourable to Parakramabahu have been suppressed. One of the greatest heroes of Ceylon history is Vijayabahu I. He waged war against the mighty Chola Empire for many years and made Ceylon once more independent of foreign rule. But the *Culavamsa* gives very little information about his marvellous career. The author of the same work dismisses with a few verses the story of Sigiriya, the most striking, if not the greatest of the ancient monuments of Ceylon. Hence it is natural that many, who are versed in the ancient traditions of learning or are not in touch with the more recent developments that have altered the conception and content of history, should express views such as those referred to earlier.

According to modern ideas, history, as far as the collection of material is concerned, is a science of criticism. Once the facts are established, it turns into an interpretation of human development. In this context it deals primarily with facts which leads to changes in human societies. In the past history consisted mainly of political events. Social and economic factors were seldom taken into consideration. Today, history is not so much the activities of rulers as the development of peoples. It thus takes into account not only political events but also economic, social and other factors and their interaction on one another in this process of change. In other words, influenced by the theory of evolution, historians try to explain what is called the historical process: how and why Ceylon society or other societies came to be what they are today.

A fourth reason which led to the demand for rewriting the history of Ceylon seemed to be a conviction on the part of some, especially the non-historians, that the works hitherto written had not attached sufficient importance to the period before the contact with the West. This criticism has been dealt with and accepted. The charge is more dangerous when it is formulated with a slight but insidious alteration of stress, namely that historians have attached too much

importance to the period after 1505, which, in the opinion of the critics, is a period of decline and of little significance until once more the Sinhalese and the Tamil people by their own initiative, put an end to British rule, and began to restore their own way of life. That such a view is held by many is not surprising. No less a person than Sardar K. M. Panikkar in his book 'A Survey of Indian History' wrote: "The true history of India during the British Period does not consist of the activities of the East India Company or its successor the British Crown, but of the upheaval which led to the transformation of Indian society, through the activities of India's own sons."

This view of Ceylon history has been examined in earlier chapters. It has been pointed out that the decline of the ancient civilization of Ceylon began much earlier than 1505, in the thirteenth century. The Portuguese ruled directly over not much more than a third of Ceylon and that only for about sixty years. The Dutch ruled over a much smaller area though their rule covered nearly one hundred and forty years. Though Buddhism had little opportunity to flourish in the restricted areas occupied by the Portuguese and the Dutch, foreign rule affected little the Sinhalese and the Tamil ways of life within them. Even in the larger areas where Sinhalese rulers held sway, Buddhism declined till it revived under the leadership of Valivita Saranankara. Under British rule this movement spread into the areas occupied earlier by the Portuguese and the Dutch, and Buddhism made considerable progress though it did not receive government assistance as in earlier times.

Thus what is needed is a history of Ceylon that depicts among other things not only the developments in Buddhism in Ceylon before 1505 and the relation in which it stood to the ancient form of government but also the vicissitudes which *Theravada* Buddhism went through after that date without suffering extinction as in many parts of India. Such a history will trace in detail the effects of the impact of the West, especially under British rule, on Buddhism, the *Sangha* and the laity, and explain why this great religion with its long history is once more asserting itself.

We shall also never understand the present developments with regard to the Sinhalese and Tamil languages and th

interest aroused in Sinhalese and Tamil literature if we merely study the Sinhalese and Tamil cultural developments before 1505 or even up to 1815. In order to appreciate them we shall have to study the developments of the Sinhalese and Tamil schools from the time of the Dutch, the resurgence of the *pirivenas* under British rule, the development of the Sinhalese and the Tamil press within the last hundred years, the rise of Sinhalese drama, the emergence of the Sinhalese novel and other forms of literature. We shall have to examine the growth of the Sinhalese language not only before 1505 but after that, especially under British rule. Just as the adoption of Pali, the 'world' language of *Theravada* Buddhism, by the educated class for the expression of their ideas retarded the growth of Sinhalese for many centuries, the adoption of English by many as their medium of expression affected the growth of Sinhalese for quite some time. But the Sinhalese language at the same time became enriched, as it did earlier by its contact with Pali and Sanskrit, by acquiring from the English language and its literature new terms and concepts which it did not possess earlier. In other words, today, we are really not going back to the past but trying to grow out of it. It is true that we have been for a while adopting an alien past. We need to correct this and see that the past we grow out of is our own. When we go back to our roots it is only to make them firmer, to grow further, and expand.

We have to note that the present government is not opposing scientific and industrial development but is trying to accelerate it. There is no attempt to abandon the democratic form of government which we inherited from the British for the old absolute or despotic form of government. There is no desire to give up the present bureaucratic administrative system in order to revert to the headman system through which our Sinhalese kings ruled. There is no attempt to upset radically the new economic system and revert to forms of *rajakariya*. Nor is there an attempt to abandon the modern forms of transport for older forms of conveyance. Can we then go back to the past only in our cultural and social life?

It is a striking fact that when a new way of doing something is discovered even the discoverer himself does not fully understand what he is doing. When the automobile

was first invented it was first built like a horse-drawn vehicle and not in its modern form. It took a long time for people to realize that its advent signified a revolution in transport. Though only a pipe was needed to feed gas and only a wire to conduct electricity, electric lights were first designed like the gas lamps they replaced, and these had been patterned on the oil lamps which preceded them. Hence, at first few realized that a revolution was taking place in the methods of illumination. Similarly the present revivalism in our social life does not represent a set-back but a facade which hides the revolution that is taking place in Sinhalese and Tamil society.

Hence, before we lay down what the new history of Ceylon should be, we should know what history is as it is understood today. We must see that we do not allow our emotions to get the better of facts in assessing our past. We should not minimize the vast changes that have resulted in our social life as a result of the impact of the West with its science and technology, though the social changes have not kept pace with those in our political and economic life.

## THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

*This is an age of transition.*

**T**O this self-evident fact our attention was often drawn after the General Election of 1956. But what was most important was to understand what was taking place at that time; from what system of life we were drifting away and after what form of civilization we were groping our way.

We lived in 1956 to 1957 undoubtedly in extraordinary times. As a result of the achievements of science, man-made moons traversed the heavens. In our little world of Ceylon upheavals which we would never have expected ten years earlier were affecting our mode of life. Ceylon which attained independence in 1948, could after she took over from the British the Trincomalee harbour and the Katunayaka air-field, claim that she had no foreign naval or air bases within her territory.

The English-educated class which until 1956 exercised most influence had been overthrown and the Sinhalese-educated class had taken their place. Soon after, English, which for nearly a century and a quarter had been the language of administration, had been replaced by Sinhalese by an Act of Parliament. Sinhalese and Tamil, which had been made the main media of instruction in schools and recently even in those which had used English for over a century were, in 1957, expected in a few years to become the media for teaching in the university.

In 1957 the Paddy Lands Bill was welcomed, as it aimed, on the one hand, at destroying certain feudal practices which had continued up to this time and, on the other, at modernizing the system of production and giving security of tenure to the cultivator. It was opposed on the ground that it might put an end to peasant proprietorship itself on account of the excessive powers given to the Minister of Agriculture by the Bill, and that such powers might ultimately lead to some form of totalitarianism.

In the rural areas there were signs of changes in the sphere of health. During the last hundred years Western medicine and surgery had made headway in the towns and to some extent in the villages, at the expense of ayurveda. European preventive medicine had improved to a considerable extent the health of the countryside. D.D.T. had more or less eradicated malaria in the Dry Zone and campaigns were waged against anchylostomiasis and tuberculosis. After the General Election of 1956 the movement to restore ayurveda, still resorted to by a large section of the people, received a fresh impetus. In order to reorganize this system and bring it into line with modern requirements it was proposed to establish a Department of Ayurveda and to introduce ayurveda as a subject in the new *pirivena* universities.

Striking changes became noticeable at the time within the Buddhist organizations. A few years earlier the Eksath Bhikshu Peramuna and the Lanka Sangha Sabhava, which were organizations of Buddhist monks, had been formed on an island-wide basis. The Eksath Bhikshu Peramuna had included politics in the list of its activities and tried to influence the actions of the Government to an extent the Sangha never did before. The Buddhist Commission Report, issued early in 1956, had planned action for Buddhists to influence government and society. As a result the future of the Christian denominational schools with a majority of non-Christian children, which had their beginning in Dutch times, was in the balance and it was doubtful in 1957 whether they would be allowed to continue for long.

In 1957 the bus services run hitherto by private enterprise were nationalized. In the sphere of commerce, wholesale and retail traders protested against the establishment of multi-purpose co-operative societies which would gradually annihilate private enterprise which was mainly responsible for the development of trade during the last hundred years and more.

A spate of strikes, such as Ceylon had never experienced before, followed soon after. There was a stoppage of work in many government administrative and technical departments. The strike fever spread to the local government services especially the Colombo Municipality. There were

strikes in commercial establishments, warehouses and factories; in the harbour and in the plantations. White-collar workers, skilled and unskilled labourers, participated in them. The strikes were not limited to a special class of people. Doctors in order to improve their conditions threatened to use this weapon and even some schoolmasters in Sinhalese schools considered whether they should not follow their example. The strikes disorganized life in Colombo and to some extent in the rural areas, and endangered the stability of the Government itself.

### *The Old Order*

The best way to understand the significance of these events in 1956 and 1957 is to examine the ancient political, economic and social system that prevailed in Ceylon more or less up to the middle of the nineteenth century and the ideology that buttressed it; and to see how this system was gradually modified as a result of the impact of the West and how this impact had led to the establishment of an island-wide centralized system of administration, the development of a capitalist economy based on plantations and trade, and the application of scientific methods to many aspects of life; as a result of all this, how a new order, in which some elements of the old which had power of adaptability struggled for survival, gradually emerged and took shape in accordance with the pressures exercised by conflicting forces and by the interplay of old and new ideas.

It is not difficult to acquaint ourselves with the ancient system since a good deal of it still survives in the rural areas. The unit of society in it was not the individual but the family; not the family of today but the joint family where not only the parents but also uncles and aunts played an important part. Everyone normally accepted the authority of the head of the family. Any one who did not do so or ignored the wishes of the other members had to break away from the family and seek protection elsewhere. Anybody who injured one of its members had to face the wrath not only of that member but the family as a whole. In fact under the old order it was never enough to punish any single individual for an offence, it was necessary to punish the whole family.

A number of such related families formed a caste. But caste normally had no definite organization, and it was the family that compelled its members to obey its rules. It was justified

by the Hindu theory of *sva karma* on the ground that those of the high and the low castes were born into their present states owing to their *karma* or actions in their previous lives.

In fact in the past Ceylon was a land of villages and even the few towns like Anuradhapura, Magama, Polonnaruwa and Kotte had a rural aspect. In this old order the village was all important. It was the administrative unit. Its headman, and sometimes a council of elders, directed its economic activities and settled quarrels and disputes among its members. It was also the economic unit. Each village was more or less self-sufficient. Trade, if any, was confined to the market place. The larger villages had, in addition to its cultivators, its craftsmen such as the smith who made the agricultural tools and the potter who provided the earthen vessels. It was also the social unit within which the various families had their existence. The Sangha fitted into it by establishing a vihare. There were also, sometimes, a kapurala who looked after the devale and a physician who attended to the needs of the sick.

The people in a village were interfered with little by the rest of the country. The King and the regional and district rulers exercised little control over them. They interfered in their affairs mainly to collect revenue and quell serious disturbances, if any occurred. They normally did not make laws for the people. They themselves generally adhered to tradition and custom which the villagers followed. Nor could the rulers exercise any real control as means of communication were practically absent. The village government itself came into existence impelled by its own needs without any delegation of powers from above as in the case of local bodies today.

In this old system there existed a kind of feudalism which bound the people to the land, to the King and the chiefs. The people had to give a share of their produce or services to the King on account of the lands held. The King often allotted the produce of a village or a part of it to a chief, a vihare or a devale. The villagers then directly came under the control of the chief or of an officer of the King who looked after the vihare or devale properties, and according to custom gave a part of their produce or rendered services. If services were rendered they were not paid wages but were relieved from the payment of the share of the produce. Thus it was

land, and not, as today, a cash contract, that held together master and servant.

In this ancient system the bonds that held the people together were mainly personal. They had few dealings beyond their own village, and they communicated personally with one another or through a messenger.

The people, being in the main agriculturists, lived an open air life. They often lived in fear of wild animals, droughts, famines and pestilences, which sometimes carried them away in thousands. Being unable to control the forces of nature except within very narrow limits or to obtain aid from other parts of the country or from foreign lands, they adopted a fatalistic attitude to life. They believed the gods directed everything. Hence in all their activities they sought their help and tried to appease their wrath whenever they suffered any misfortune.

In this society birth played an important part. It was believed that a man was born as a brahmin or an outcaste or any other state according to his *karma* in his previous lives. According to birth some had the right to rule while others had to serve in various capacities. Such beliefs were natural in an age when a man normally followed the occupation of his father and had little chance of changing it. Under such conditions men and women rarely rebelled against their lot and accepted the hierarchical social system with its pyramid of property rights and obligations. Nor did they or their leaders make any serious attempt to alter the structure of society or to reform it. Those who wished for a better state in the worldly life tried to achieve it in their next birth by acquiring merit in this. Those, who placed spiritual considerations above material gain or were tired of existence itself owing to suffering, withdrew from the worldly life and joined the Sangha in order to put an end to existence itself by attaining *nirvana*.

### *The Impact of the West*

The system of society described above is rapidly disintegrating today.

In the administrative sphere, the British determined on creating a state of the modern type, established a centralized

government on an island-wide basis. They set up a common system of administration and of law courts, and gradually introduced a common system of law. What mattered thereafter was not the village but the central government. All officials down to the village headman came directly under its control. They had to follow the regulations issued by the central government while the people had to adjust themselves to the laws it promulgated. Further, the Government did not limit itself to maintaining peace and order and a few other duties; but began to extend its tentacles in all directions encroaching on practically every aspect of life.

In the economic sphere, the British, in accordance with European ideas, altered the basis of the old system. They abolished by law the old form of Sinhalese feudalism and this enabled the development of a capitalist economy. They introduced a paddy tax in place of *rajakariya* or services due to the King, and finally abolished the system of services itself. Henceforth the Government employed labour on the basis of wages, leaving the persons concerned free to accept or refuse the type of work offered. In other words, as far as government lands were concerned the old system of land tenure was abolished and peasants became landowners. Along with the services, the British abolished government trade monopolies, some of which had come into existence in Dutch times, thereby leaving people free to trade in any article they liked.

In the social sphere the British made inroads into the caste system. They abolished the legal basis of caste and treated all individuals alike in the law courts. Thus no longer bound to any particular type of work, free to take to any employment they liked, and treated as equals before the law, individuals with initiative began to take to new enterprises, accumulate wealth, and invest it in land or commercial undertakings.

Within this framework of a centralized state the British replaced the despotic form of government that hitherto existed with the Liberal form of government by discussion. They established an Executive Council of officials and a Legislative Council, which included, in addition to officials, representatives of the people. The Governor had to consult both. The British also made the Judiciary independent of the Executive and thus by reducing the extent of power



the executive officials had over the people, widened still more the bounds of freedom. The British attempted to inculcate new ideas which were current in Europe at the time. The people had to absorb them in order to appreciate the nature of the centralized government run on a basis of discussion, depending on a capitalist economy, and influenced by ideas of equality. Such a system could not thrive on ideas which accepted a hierarchical system of society, based on birth instead of wealth, on status instead of contract, on authority instead of reason; on worldly life as something to flee from rather than as something to be reformed. The British made English, in which the new ideas found expression, the medium of instruction in government schools, and utilized the printing press to spread further these new ideas. Laws which restricted the freedom of thought and expression were repealed and the publication of books and newspapers was encouraged.

The British, by changing laws and institutions and spreading the use of English, tried to transform the ancient system of life in Ceylon, its basis of government, its economy, its social bonds and its mainsprings of ideas. In this way they tried to establish a system which prevailed in Britain itself and in many other parts of the world.

The transformation of Ceylon attempted in this way would have been very gradual had not two factors come into operation: the rapid development of plantation industries and commerce and the impact of science and technology. The administrative reforms, which provided the necessary background for the development of a capitalist economy enabled, on the one hand, the rise of plantations of coffee, tea, rubber and coconut and, on the other, the development of commerce and communications. The plantations were developed on a basis new to Ceylon. They were opened by capitalists or those who obtained capital through banks or other means. As they had to wait for years before they received any return on their investment and since what they produced was mainly for foreign consumption, they could not offer the labourers a share of the produce as in feudal days but had to pay them wages in order to keep them in service; otherwise the labourers would have left the plantations and sought work elsewhere.

The plantations in turn led to the development of commerce and communications. The food needed by the labourers had

to be conveyed mainly from Colombo, while the produce of the plantations had to be sent to Galle or Colombo to be despatched to foreign countries. Commerce and communications in turn led to the rise of towns and the construction of the Colombo harbour. All these in turn led to an intensification of the administrative reforms, recommended by Colebrooke and Cameron, put into effect from 1832, and carried out thereafter especially in the areas affected by the new developments.

What accelerated the tempo of change most were the developments in science and technology. In ancient Ceylon such knowledge was not entirely absent. This is apparent to anyone who examines the ancient system of irrigation works with their canals and tanks for which there is no parallel in any part of India. These show how carefully the ancient Sinhalese examined the topography of the Dry Zone and with the aid of techniques developed in India and Ceylon began to build themselves dams long and high to conserve vast volumes of water for their use. Similarly the ruins of ancient cities show the extent of their progress in the field of engineering. The rock of Sigiriya transformed into a fortress, huge dagobas, stone and brick buildings, baths and other structures, testify even today to the skill of the ancient craftsmen.

But all this knowledge and its application was the result of accumulated experience gained mainly by trial and error during the course of centuries. On the other hand today men try to discover the secrets of nature by scientific and not empirical methods; by observation and experiment carried out within laboratories and outside. The ancients knew the natural elements such as wind, water and fire and made them serve human needs. Modern man having discovered steam and electrical power harnesses them to satisfy the needs of man in a way the ancients never did. With the aid of modern methods and techniques, engineers construct stronger dams and larger storage tanks. Cranes haul quantities of materials far larger and heavier than elephants ever did. Bull-dozers open up the country and level hills which earlier required the services of thousands of human beings.

Scientific methods have also affected all aspects of learning including the study of human nature. Modern man does not take for granted knowledge accumulated so far. He accepts

nothing on mere authority. Where knowledge cannot be tested by observation and experiment, he examines it critically. What is unsound is rejected and what is sound accepted, and the knowledge thus accumulated is organized systematically. The hypotheses arrived at by these processes are tested further according to reason. He rejects supernatural causes to which the ancients attributed many events and tries to explain all occurrences in accordance with natural laws.

As a result, the content and objects of arts courses in universities have in many cases been revolutionized. Considerable changes for instance have taken place in the study of subjects like language, psychology and history. In linguistics, emphasis is laid on the historical development of languages and comparative philology. In psychology the emphasis is not so much on the study of the mind as on human behaviour. History is no longer a mere chronicle of events or an attempt to teach moral and other lessons, or a mere record of a nation's achievement. In the writing of history in the first instance the evidence is critically examined, eliminating myth and legend, as if it were a science, no less no more. Next a selection of the facts so collected are utilized to interpret, in conformity with modern scientific knowledge, how man has evolved to be what he is today. In other words the passion to make science serve the cause of such objects as industry and agriculture has been equalled by the passion to extend the scientific method to every branch of human knowledge.

As a result of this impact of science and technology the face of Ceylon changed rapidly. This change was first seen in the sphere of communications. Roads soon ceased to be mere tracks. They were macadamized and metalled. Then came the railway, as a result of the invention of the steam engine, and the automobile, as a result of the invention of the internal combustion engine. All these made transport rapid. They in turn contributed to the mobility of labour, the development of plantations and commerce and the unification of the country. These along with the telegraph and the telephone, enabled the central government to secure a better control not only of the towns but even of distant villages.

Most of these changes took place without a clear directive from above or in accordance with a co-ordinated plan. Hence:

there was no uniform development throughout the country. A new Ceylon came into existence side by side with the old. The new features appeared in the administrative and technical services: in the urban and suburban areas where commercial establishments and warehouses came into existence; in the harbours whither the steamships replacing the sailing vessels came to take away the products of the Island and to bring food, cloth and other articles; in the use of electricity for lighting and for industrial power; in the tea and rubber plantations where factories came to be built and labour congregated in large numbers; in the use of machinery in place of human and animal labour.

The new Ceylon became apparent also in the rise of the middle class in the areas affected by these changes. It was based not on birth but on wealth and modern education. As a new class between the aristocracy and the peasants, it disturbed the old structure of society and finally deprived the aristocracy of its position of power.

The rural areas, apart from plantation areas, were at first affected only indirectly; and the old social system began to change only gradually. The construction of roads began to break up the isolation and the self-sufficiency of the villages. The railway and the automobile made further inroads in this direction. A few began to use the bicycle as a means of travel and the electric torch in place of the old lantern or *chulu* light. The family system began to weaken as some of its members drifted to other parts of the Island in search of work or adventure. Consequently caste, which had already lost its legal status, began to lose its rigidity and with the development of communications and the rise of towns it became increasingly difficult for any family to enforce caste rules in social intercourse and marriage. The village schools spread secular knowledge and new ideas such as those of the equality of man. All this however made no radical change in the even tenor of the life of the majority of the villagers, and rural Ceylon continued to have a different background from that of urban Ceylon, the coastal districts in the south-west and the Jaffna Peninsula.

Into such an old and new Ceylon came the Donoughmore Commissioners, with the latest ideas of a welfare state, in order to evolve a new system of government. The Commissioners noticed that though there had been administrative

and economic unification of the Island, society in Ceylon was still primarily divided into caste and racial groups and not into modern groups. Its developments had been irregular. The urban areas had advanced but there had been little improvement in the rural areas. Though the middle class had grown in wealth, sufficient steps had not been taken to safeguard the interests of the industrial workers or to improve the lot of the peasant. Though there was equality before the law there was little equality of opportunity.

The Commissioners therefore advocated the abolition of communal electorates and recommended the grant of adult franchise to eliminate gradually the unequal development that had taken place up to that time. Sixteen years later the Soulbury Commission went further and gave weightage to rural areas by demarcating electorates both according to population and area.

The most important result of all this was that ultimate political power came to rest in the hands of the people. In the first instance it accelerated the movement towards independence. The English-educated class who had become sufficiently modern in outlook made use of British methods to terminate British rule. Eight years later at the General Election of 1956 the Sinhalese-educated class in the rural areas and the white-collar and the manual workers in the urban and suburban areas, who had by this time become mature enough to follow the new methods, joined hands to remove the English-educated middle-class government from power.

#### *The New Trends*

What then was happening in 1957? What new political, economic and social order was coming into existence? In spite of all modern knowledge it is not possible to predict what would happen in human affairs. How Ceylon would develop was a matter for the future to decide. The most one could do in 1957 was to analyse the results of the impact of the West and see in what direction Ceylon society was drifting under the changing conditions.

One of the chief features of life in 1957 was the unrest in the industrial, commercial and administrative spheres where better conditions were demanded by workers. The other features were the demands made on behalf of Buddhism,

that it should be rehabilitated and placed on an equal footing with Christianity; on behalf of ayurveda, that it should be revived and given its rightful place; and on behalf of the Sinhalese language, that it should replace English as the language of government and, along with Tamil, of all education.

The unrest in the spheres of government, commerce and industry was not a feature peculiar to Ceylon. Strikes were taking place in all parts of the world where there were modern administrative services, commercial establishments, factories and industrial workshops. In other words they were a feature of the new Ceylon brought about by the modernization that took place under British rule. The workers who struck had broken away from their ancient background. They were no longer influenced to any considerable extent by the old ideas of the other-worldly view of life, or by a belief that owing to their *karma* they were born to a certain status which they could not easily change. They realized that they worked on a contract basis and not on a feudal one, like the people who lived in villages gifted to vihares and devales. They no longer thought that if the treatment they received from their employers was unsatisfactory the only alternative was to abandon their work and find employment elsewhere as they did in the last century. They knew that they could improve their conditions by compelling their employers to change their original terms of contract, pay them higher wages, and provide them with better social amenities. Traders buy at the lowest prices and sell at the highest. Why should not labourers in this commercial and industrial age get the highest wages they could secure?

Under the conditions in 1957 workers were trying to obtain what they wanted in two ways. One way was by electing to Parliament men who would support their claims. The other was by organizing themselves and using the new collective weapon of the strike to force employers to agree to their terms. In Ceylon where all men are equal before the law and have equal political rights should there not be a better distribution of wealth and should not profits be shared by the employees on a more equitable basis? The workers had no doubts with regard to these issues and some of them convinced themselves that they should get the lion's share. Enlightened employers as well as the rulers appreciated the

demands made by labour and differences of opinion lay only in the extent to which the labourers were entitled to their claims. If their demands were excessive and they were granted, the very institutions in which they worked could topple down. Besides, no large section of the population should acquire rights and privileges if the grant of such rights and privileges would injure the interests of the country as a whole.

Ayurveda, the Buddhist organization, and the Sinhalese language are inheritances from old Ceylon. All three rendered service to a very large section of the population. They were all a part of the old social system which was disintegrating and they were therefore trying to survive by adjusting themselves to the new conditions in their respective spheres. The problems did not end there. The transformation had to be such as to enable them to resist powerful opponents which were trying to oust them in their own fields.

Two reasons help ayurveda to survive and get a further lease of life. The first is that it is still accepted by a large section of the population and in this age of the common man it cannot therefore be ignored. The second is that even some of the English-educated believe that there is something of value in it which ought to be preserved. What was urgent then was to regularize the system by eliminating the quacks and by permitting only those, who are qualified, to practise it. Further, the system had to be modernized. Ayurveda at first was tied up with superstition and astrology but in later times it reached as high a level as an empirical system could develop under ancient conditions. It dealt with medicine, surgery, diet, pathology, anatomy, gynaecology, etc. The drugs recommended were both vegetable and mineral. The ayurvedic physician, in addition to being trained in ayurveda, said many, had to be given a modern education as is done in some universities in India; a grounding in subjects like chemistry, physiology, anatomy etc. as well as the general principles of medicine. What is unscientific in the ayurvedic system had to be gradually eliminated and whatever there is of value, had to be preserved. If it does have something of value, as most people believe, then that had to become a part of modern medicine. In any case an attempt had to be made to modernize ayurveda, as it affects the life of thousands. It could not be allowed to continue as it did then. It had to be put on an efficient and scientific basis.

Buddhism is a world religion, and not the religion of a single national civilization. Certain of its features have attracted many modern minds not satisfied with religions like Christianity or Islam. Its organization varies from country to country according to the needs of each. The Buddhist system in Ceylon which adjusted itself to the old environment, has now to adapt itself to the changed conditions of life, if it is to keep in line with modern developments. Can it any longer, asked some in 1957, look for material support, as it did in the past, to the parochial village community, to feudalism or, as it has sometimes done in recent years, to caste? Will it not have to adjust itself to the new centralized state by establishing a centralized organization? Will it not have to form into one or more corporations, with an executive head and probably a general assembly, which would enable it to maintain discipline among its members, to ensure proper administration and to control its other activities such as the spread of its doctrines? Will it not have to adjust itself to a growing welfare state by forming a closer union with lay Buddhist organizations?

This does not mean that, in the past, though Theravada Buddhism was essentially a monastic religious organization, it ignored the layman. Though the monks did not wean people away from the worship of local or Hindu gods, they taught them morality and made them follow certain Buddhist practices so that they might lead a good life and attain a higher status in their next birth. As time passed, Mahayana Buddhism arose and provided, like Hinduism, a religion which gave a more substantial place to the laity. With its decline, Theravada Buddhism, in spite of the opposition of some monks, often allied itself with those forms of Hinduism which satisfied the 'this worldly' needs of the laity. In this age of science will not the *traditional* Buddhist system, with the accretions it has gathered round it during the last two thousand five hundred years, have to be re-examined and adjusted to suit the changes taking place all around? Will not the Sangha have to weigh whether it will be able to continue to maintain certain minor rules of discipline under the present economic conditions? Will it not have to consider whether the expositions of some of its dogmas and beliefs by the early commentators require a fresh interpretation?

In other words if the traditional Buddhist system in Ceylon is to satisfy the needs of today, will it not have to go through

certain changes? What shape it will take was then not clear. But there were sufficient signs in 1957 to show that the Sangha had been affected by the new administrative system, the new economy, and science and technology. If evidence of such was needed one had only to examine the activities of the Eksath Bhikshu Peramuna or read the Report of the Buddhist Commission.

The problems which face the Sinhalese language are no less complex. Sinhalese was the language of government and of the people up to the end of the twelfth century. From the thirteenth century onwards it shared that privilege to some extent with Tamil and afterwards with Portuguese and Dutch. Sinhalese as a written language was used during these centuries mainly by the monks for religious purposes. It was used little for secular purposes as records were kept by Government only to a limited extent. When the British imposed the form of government recommended by Colebrooke and Cameron it was felt that the Sinhalese language, as it existed at that time, was inadequate to meet the new needs. On account of this and other reasons English was gradually adopted as the language of record, of administration, and of education in government schools.

However, Sinhalese continued to be used by the Buddhist monks and the Sinhalese people as a whole. Christian elementary schools conducted through the medium of Sinhalese were first established by the Dutch. These were continued under British rule in the nineteenth century. Along with the Christian schools, *pivivena* education too expanded and these were followed by the establishment of Buddhist schools for children. After 1869 the Government too began to establish Sinhalese elementary schools and from that time onwards literacy in Sinhalese began to spread more readily. The Tamil language had a similar development especially in the north.

The books needed by the pupils in these schools were made available through the printing presses. These books imparted not only religious but secular knowledge. At the same time, books, magazines, journals and newspapers were published. These further widened the knowledge and outlook of the people. As education in Sinhalese spread, the language too began to expand. Those who took to new ways of life began

to use new terms and expressions. It soon became the medium for new forms of literature such as the short story, the novel and the drama.

With the grant of adult franchise the people who spoke Sinhalese gradually realized their rights and began to demand that the language they used should be the language of all schools in the south, the University and the Government. This was natural, as, apart from their attachment to the language and culture, they did not wish to be taught or governed through a foreign tongue with which they were not familiar. Since the chief occupation of the educated people was government service and English was the language of government, the government services were restricted mainly to those who knew English. They felt that the wishes and needs of the majority should not be sacrificed merely to safeguard the interests of the minority.

Such claims were understandable. But even in this rapidly changing world there is an inevitability of gradualness in matters connected with human societies. In spite of the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms it took about three quarters of a century for a middle class to emerge and attempt the overthrow of the British. After the grant of adult franchise it took another quarter of a century for the lower middle class in the rural areas and the politically conscious workers in the urban and suburban areas to seize power from the English-educated middle class that came into power in 1931. The Buddhist monks are not finding it easy to establish a centralized organization overnight or to take over the activities performed by workers in other religions which had gone through such changes many centuries earlier.

Similarly it seemed no easy task in 1957 to introduce the Sinhalese language overnight for use in the Higher Courts, in the University, in the technical departments, other than for purposes of communicating with the people. It was considered by some that modern subjects like science, medicine and engineering will have to be imparted for some time longer in English as the terms and concepts expressed in English cannot as yet be expressed in Sinhalese without altering the meaning. If this was the case, it was more difficult to teach through the medium of Sinhalese, subjects like history, philosophy, and psychology which too have undergone

radical changes as a result of the influence of science. In fact to adopt Sinhalese for the study of the humanities is even more difficult than to adopt it for the study of science and medicine in which the terms and concepts are much more precise and therefore could be more easily expressed in Sinhalese.

It was natural for people with new and explosive ideas and endowed with new-found power to go at times to extremes. Few people use newly won freedom or power in moderation. They do not take into consideration that if any one of them waves his stick to express his feeling of exhilaration, he must stop where his neighbour's nose begins. Workers may strike and gain what they want for the time being, but in the end if they press their claims too far they may jeopardize the finances of the country and bring about their own ruin. Similarly if Sinhalese was immediately made the medium of instruction in the University in all subjects before there were an adequate number of text books, it would lead to a considerable lowering of standards in the subjects concerned.

What was taking place in 1957 was apparent from what has been stated above. We were trying to abandon an old order and grope our way towards a new. Unless we were guided by wise counsel and firm leadership it was quite possible that we would go through a period of stress and strain before we attained our objectives.

It did not necessarily follow that the new movements would all be successful. It was yet to be seen whether in the future, labour would have the freedom to improve its conditions in a democratic way; whether ayurveda would be able to withstand the pressure of modern medicine; whether a language like Sinhalese would be able to prevent the encroachments of a world language like English.

Therefore the most that could be said was that as a result of the impact of the West our ancient social system was disintegrating, and the people most affected, in order to survive, were trying to adapt ancient beliefs, customs and modes of life to the changing environment. But it was not yet clear what system of government and society would ultimately result from the centralized form of administration, plantations and commerce, science and technology. Would

they finally make Ceylon a democratic welfare state or a communist totalitarian one? Would the democratic ideas of the educated classes and the institutions established by the British replace the authoritarian ideas of the rural peasant and urban workers? Since the historian's main business is to analyse the trends and not to predict the future, we had to wait and see.

## THE CEYLON TAMIL PROBLEM

### *The Real Issues*

**W**HAT led in April 1961 to the *Satyagraha* or the civil disobedience movement in Jaffna and in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces? Was it a language problem which can be settled on its own level? Or was it the racial or communal problem which we have experienced during the last forty years emerging once more in a new garb?

It was in some respects the same old problem but with a difference. One had to deal then not with the Colombo Tamil or the Jaffna Tamil from Jaffna who looks forward to obtain government employment in the south and who would have sooner or later to find a *modus vivendi* with the Sinhalese, but in many respects with quite a different set of people.

The spearhead of the Tamil movement then consisted of Tamils who did not understand the Sinhalese and whose objectives in turn the Sinhalese did not fully grasp. The main object of the Federalists was to break away from the Sinhalese. Therefore what was urgent was not the settlement of a language or a racial issue. It was the bringing of this new group of Tamils, who were moving away, back into the mainstream of Ceylon politics.

Any visitor to Jaffna in April 1961 would have imagined that the question that troubled the Ceylon Tamils was only that of language. He would have learned that they had been denied a fundamental right. What the Tamils wished was to express themselves in Tamil, to communicate with other Tamils in their own language, and to make Tamil the language used in the government offices and the law courts in the Tamil areas. Why should they be second class citizens? They had lived in Ceylon for centuries and had enjoyed equal rights with the Sinhalese. Did they not have a right to use their language in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces just as much as the Sinhalese had a right to use theirs in the rest of the Island?

Many were not interested in the outcome of their demands. They did not think far enough to realize that if all the demands they made were granted, it could only lead to a division of the country on racial lines. In fact a few naively argued that these demands should be granted to prevent such a division.

There was undoubtedly a language problem to be solved. But the issues were clearly much more complex and sprang from a number of different roots. Otherwise it would not have taken the same virulent form that it did among the Sinhalese-educated in 1956. The English-educated Sinhalese, the Muslims and the Burghers all have a language problem but they do not express themselves as do the Tamils. In the Punjab too there is a language problem. The Punjabi-speaking Sikhs want Punjabi to be the official language of Punjab, but the Punjabi-speaking Hindu majority want it to be Hindi. Why did the Tamils act differently? Why did they wish to make a religion of their language?

The Ceylon Tamil problem is partly a political one and cannot be solved on the level of language alone. During the last seven years no Tamil has been included in the Cabinet. Earlier they had held many key-posts in the government services but the number has gradually decreased. It is true that a few Tamils serve on Commissions and Boards, but they feel they lack sufficient opportunity, commensurate with their education and importance, to play a part in the political life of the country. Under the circumstances it is not surprising they have begun to find an outlet for their energy in attempting to gain control of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in order to exercise political power there.

The Ceylon Tamil problem is partly a question of status. The Tamils believe that they are the product of a great civilization which goes back five thousand years and they are proud of the position they have attained today. Hence they are unwilling to accept a status lower than the Sinhalese. Some of the Burghers whose numbers are small have left Ceylon, and others, believing that the only way they can live peacefully in this Island is to adjust themselves to the new developments, have decided to accept their lot. The Muslims, who have now here else to go, are doing their best to get on as well as they can with the majority community.

The Ceylon Tamils, though they are only eleven per cent. of the population, have refused to take a similar attitude. From 1920, whenever constitutional reforms were about to be made, they have pressed for a solution that would prevent the Sinhalese acquiring a dominant position over the rest. Having failed in their objective they now want to be supreme at least in two provinces, and naturally most Tamils even outside these areas sympathize with them.

This attitude may appear unjustifiable to the Sinhalese, but it cannot on that ground be ignored. It is clear that the Tamils will not agree to be ruled by the Sinhalese except with their consent, and no amount of force will make them yield. If they give up their opposition for a time it will reappear again in some other form. In 1931 the Tamils did not co-operate and failed to gain their objectives. In 1936 they co-operated, but in 1945 they came up with a demand for 50-50, *i.e.* fifty per cent of the seats for the Sinhalese and fifty per cent for the rest. After that in 1947 they co-operated in spite of their failure, and began to adjust themselves to the new developments. They began to learn Sinhalese realizing that Sinhalese would gradually replace English as the language of Government. But when in 1956 Sinhalese was made the only official language, they again refused to co-operate and began to turn to federalism which had from 1948 become the objective of those who were dissatisfied with the 1947 reforms.

The Tamil problem is partly an economic problem. Living in the Dry Zone the Tamils find little opportunity for employment except as cultivators. But Jaffna has a large number of good schools and those educated in them at first went to foreign lands seeking employment. When the Government services expanded at the beginning of this century, educated Tamils came in large numbers to the south. When the Federated Malay States closed their services to immigrants in 1922 they found South Ceylon the only field open to them. Since the beginning of this century the existing schools in Jaffna expanded and new ones came into being. As a result the Tamils increasingly secured posts in the government services. With the advance of education in the Sinhalese areas after the Donoughmore Reforms and after the language of Government was made Sinhalese in 1956, they saw the edifice they had built crumbling before

their eyes. They now realize that they cannot expect to hold any longer the same proportion of posts as well as the same number of key-posts in the Government as they did in the past, and are looking for new outlets. Hence the argument that the Tamils still hold a privileged position in the government services with as much as thirty per cent. of the posts or more, has become irrelevant as far as the Federalist Tamils are concerned. What they propose to do in the absence of other avenues of employment is to concentrate on the development of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in order to satisfy their future economic needs. Whether they can achieve this is yet to be seen.

The Tamil problem is partly a geographical or a regional one. Ceylon developed haphazardly in the nineteenth century. Some parts received considerable attention while others were neglected. One such neglected region is the area which belonged to the Kandyan Kingdom which included the Eastern Province. Further, all parts in Ceylon are not equally productive. The Dry Zone yields far less than the Wet Zone, and consequently there is no equality of opportunity for the people in the Dry Zone. The system of representation in the Legislative Council till 1921 was communal and not territorial, and the Council paid little attention during this period to the regional problems outside the Colombo District and the Jaffna Peninsula. The Government was slow to realize these facts and set things right. As a result, a spirit of loyalty to the region is asserting itself in both the Sinhalese and Tamil backward areas.

#### *Tamil Communalism*

The real issues facing Ceylon are mainly political, economic, regional and administrative and not racial, because in 1832 the old political, economic and social system of Ceylon was attacked at its very foundations in such a manner as to prevent it regaining its original form. The system of administration was transformed by substituting a unified system on a territorial basis with a common system of law courts. The economy too was similarly modernized by the abolition of *rajakariya* and trade monopolies. The pre-British social groups based on race and caste were deprived of their legal status, and rights were conferred on individuals in order that the people of Ceylon might modernize themselves and develop into a nation.



Unfortunately, society in Ceylon did not keep pace with the political, administrative and economic developments, and, as a result, socially we still think and act in terms of race and caste. Further the racial and caste groups, being in different stages of development both in the economic and social spheres, instead of disintegrating, integrated further, to fight first for equality of status since all had been made equal before the law in 1832, and second for equality of opportunity because after the Donoughmore Reforms all have been given equal political rights. The consequence is, as Sir Andrew Caldecott noticed as far back as 1938, that true political parties on true political issues have not emerged and when politicians deal even with true political issues they often express them in terms of race, caste and religion to make them understandable to the people in the various electorates.

The Ceylon Tamil Congress did this in 1945, charging before the Soulbury Commission the Sinhalese politicians with discrimination against the Tamils. The Commission after investigation, though they did not deny there were such instances of discrimination, concluded that what was considered racial discrimination was mainly action on other grounds. They considered, and that too on a *prima facie* examination, that in the Legislature only in one instance out of those placed before them had action been taken on account of racial considerations.

Thus, during the last forty years, what were essentially regional and economic issues have been made issues of race or language or status in order to win the support of the entire Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This is exactly what the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists did in 1956. They appealed both to race and religion to stir the Sinhalese people to activity.

The Tamils have so far not pressed their case on grounds of religion. Though in the nineteenth century a Hindu revival coincided with the Buddhist revival, owing to the different conditions prevailing in the north, Hinduism has not raised its head so far against the powerful position held by the Christian churches. Hence the Tamils have stressed the racial and language issues rather than the religious one.

The Tamil problem has now developed more than all into a psychological problem. Having lost confidence in the

Sinhalese in the political sphere they believe that they cannot expect just treatment from them any more. Some argue vehemently that it is quite clear that the Sinhalese are out to destroy the Tamils. Everywhere there is fear, suspicion and distrust; and this has to be cleared before any solution of the Sinhalese-Tamil problem is attempted.

This fear and distrust has led to the misunderstanding of the aims and actions of the Sinhalese. The Tamils see something ominous in every Sinhalese move. It is easy to condemn the Federal leaders for misleading the Tamils, but what is more important is to face the fact that the Tamils in general are in a mood to be misled. The greatest misfortune is that the Sinhalese do not seem to be able to correct these misunderstandings. No broadcasts or communiques to the contrary will have any serious effect on the minds of the Tamils in their present mood.

Some Sinhalese argue that such distrust and misunderstanding are not novel features. Living in the north under a very different environment due to differences in language, religion, tradition and geography, the Tamils have always found it difficult to understand the Sinhalese and have misjudged their motives. In the period of constitutional reforms from 1921 to 1945 they feared that the Government of Ceylon would fall into the hands of a Sinhalese majority. They have also been prone to believe charges of discrimination by the Sinhalese against the Tamils without any proper investigation.

It is also not surprising that what has taken place since 1955 has confirmed the fear of the Tamils. The United National Party, which since 1944 had accepted Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages, decided in 1955 under Sir John Kotelawala that Sinhalese should be the only official language. The Mahajana Eksath Peramuna Government in 1956 made Sinhalese the only official language by law without passing any Act at the same time giving Tamil its due place. The passing of the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act in 1958 evoked no response from the Tamils, as it was passed at a time when the Tamil Federal Party members were under house detention and took no part in the parliamentary proceedings. In addition when some Tamils in protest against the Sinhala Only Bill practised *satyagraha* on Galle Face Green some Sinhalese

attacked and humiliated them. In 1958 some Sinhalese attacked the persons and property of the Tamils in protest against the Anti-Sri campaign in the north in such a way that in some of the Sinhalese areas no Tamil felt his life was safe.

Some Sinhalese admit that after these events it is understandable why the Tamils wish to have a separate area for themselves. But they believe that the question of federalism cannot be decided on racial and psychological grounds and Ceylon should not on any account be divided on lines of race. If it has to be divided it should be on political, economic or administrative grounds on the principles laid down in 1832, 1931 and 1947.

What is even more serious is that their distrust of the Sinhalese has sunk so deep that the Tamils in the north do not think it worthwhile any more to work together with the Sinhalese or to depend on their goodwill to achieve their objects. They believe that henceforth they will have to depend on their own efforts and extract their rights by pressure alone. Since they hold this view they are not concerned with what the Sinhalese think or say. They are not in a mood to listen to the Sinhalese point of view. They seem to think that it is prejudiced and wrong, while their demands are reasonable and should be granted by the Sinhalese.

Further, many Tamils assume that the Sinhalese and the Tamils represent two different nations. Some of them therefore want a federal form of government with limited rights, while others, especially the youth, demand a Tamil Nad in order to manage their own affairs in their own way. If the Sinhalese do not agree to their demands they say they will carry on their struggle, like the Irish, till their own efforts or external causes lead them to their goal.

This attitude is certainly most unfortunate. The Sinhalese-Tamil problem cannot be solved unilaterally and the sooner the Sinhalese and the Tamils realize this, the better it will be. The Tamils should realize that the Sinhalese are not determined to destroy them and that the actions of the Sinhalese have to be understood in the context of their own environment before any settlement of this vexed question is possible.

### *The Sources of the Strength of the Tamil Movement*

The Tamils will not yield so easily as the English-educated and the Roman Catholics as their movement draws its strength from a number of powerful factors. Besides, the Tamil Federalists no longer consider themselves as *haves* but as people who are being reduced to the level of *have-nots*, and, as the Sinhalese-educated Buddhists did, will fight with all the resources at their disposal.

First: The northern part of Ceylon is populated almost entirely by the Tamils, and in the east very little land is occupied by the Sinhalese. The Tamils have therefore begun to look upon this territory as their own property.

In spite of what has taken place between 1832 and 1912 and again between 1931 and 1961 they still cling to rights of "communities" and refuse to give them up. They refuse to take the view that all individuals irrespective of race should have equal rights and privileges in all parts of the Island.

As a result they conclude that the Sinhalese have no right to disturb the Tamil voting strength in the north and the east. Making a subtle distinction between individual settlement and state-aided colonization they look upon Sinhalese colonization in the north and the east as an infringement of their racial rights and probably of their proprietary rights too. They are not concerned with the fact that the Sinhalese refuse to accept their claims and that the Soulbury Commission refused to abandon the stand taken by the Donoughmore Commission against communal rights. The Tamils no doubt gain a certain amount of satisfaction in that at least the members of their community see the justice of these claims even if they fail to convince the Sinhalese, the Muslims and the Burghers.

Second: The Tamils have a distinct language of their own which unites them and separates them from the Sinhalese. They can make use of this language as an issue, and appeal to the emotions, self-respect, dignity and pride of their people. They can in addition win the sympathy of the Tamil speaking Muslims and the Indians. On this issue of language they think that they may be able to gain control of the Northern and the Eastern Provinces.

Third : The Government services in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces are almost entirely manned by Tamils. As long as this situation continues and the Tamils are united, a Government consisting mainly of Sinhalese is faced with a barrier which it will find difficult to penetrate. What the Tamils are asking for today is a political and a legal status to the division that already partly exists.

Fourth : There is now practically complete unity among the Ceylon Tamils, if the minority Tamil group is omitted. In the south, the Sinhalese are divided into English-educated and Sinhalese-educated, upper middle class and lower middle class, Christian and Buddhist, capitalist and worker. There are no such divisions in the north and the east. There is hardly any upper middle class there and the lower middle class is both English-educated and Tamil-educated. There is no deep gulf between Christians and Hindus. There was no disagreement between them over the schools' take-over. The Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, objected to it and the Hindus did not welcome it.

Though the Tamils partly differ in their opinions and aims they are all united in their opposition to the present Government. Even those who are not Federalists accept Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam as their leader in the absence of any other, and are not likely to support any move which would undermine his power or divide the Tamils in any way.

Apart from language, all sections seem to be dissatisfied with the present Government for some reason or other, and this feeling of dissatisfaction unites them in different ways. It is this unity that gave strength to the *satyagraha* movement. When the Tamils did not get cheap, rationed rice or their pay or pensions or allowances, they did not blame the Federal Party, who were responsible for this, but the Sinhalese Government for not finding other ways or means to give them what was their due.

What is said here applies mainly to the Jaffna District. But it is clear that the movement is by no means limited to it. There is discontent in Mannar and Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. If there is a difference it is only a matter of degree.

It is well known that the attitude of the Tamils in the Eastern Province differs from that of those in the north as much as that of the Kandyan from that of the Low-country Sinhalese. The attitude of the Muslims of the Eastern Province also differs from that of the Tamils. If Ceylon is divided into regions, the Eastern Province will want to be a region separate from the Northern, and the Muslims will want the Eastern Province divided so as to have the southern section to themselves. In spite of this there is no doubt that the Tamil-speaking people of these areas are all united on grounds of language and the Tamils have the sympathy of the Muslims.

Fifth : Above all, the Sinhalese have to take into account that the Federalists whom they have to face come from a class different from those they have had to deal with so far. Though this class has much in common with the old, it is also different in many ways. It is not concerned much with the Tamils in Colombo and in other Sinhalese areas who are forced to get on somehow with the Sinhalese. The Federalists, who form the spearhead of the Tamil movement, can be compared to the leaders of the Sinhalese-Buddhist movement in the south. Superficially this is not discernible because the Tamil social structure is so different from that of the Sinhalese and this new class has to express its ideas and objectives in a way very different from that of the Sinhalese Buddhist.

This new class is not interested in securing employment in the government services, as it realizes that it cannot look to them any longer in the way the Tamils did earlier. Hence it does not see any need to work along with the Sinhalese and secure concessions from them. They are not, therefore, interested in learning the Sinhalese language. They want to secure the Northern and the Eastern Provinces for the Tamil-speaking people and acting on their own make the best of it. They no longer fight for equal rights before the law to compete with the Sinhalese on grounds of merit, but demand that the Tamil community should be treated as a separate entity which should be given equality of opportunity within its own area. It undoubtedly makes excessive demands, but probably these arise not because, as some Sinhalese think, that the Tamils are selfish and want to seize whatever they can get, but because they live in the Dry Zone and therefore lack the opportunities for advancement that the Sinhalese living in the Wet Zone have.

*The Sinhalese Attitude*

If the Tamils will break through the barrier of fear and distrust they will realize that there are many factors which they have to take into account if they are to settle their problem.

First, the Sinhalese-Tamil problem does not loom so large in the eyes of the Sinhalese as in theirs. To the Sri Lanka Freedom Party this is only one of a number of problems that have to be solved. Because they are in a majority they probably look at problems far less from a communal standpoint. They have to deal with other communities such as the Muslims and the Burghers who, however unwillingly, are adjusting themselves to the new situation without an open struggle or raising the issue of language. In fact the S.L.F.P. cannot understand why the eleven per cent. Ceylon Tamils do not adjust themselves to the new developments like the Muslims and accept a position commensurate with their numbers.

Second, the S.L.F.P. classify the Tamils in the same category as the capitalists, the English-educated middle class, and the Christians, who are fighting to conserve their position. Their attack has been on four fronts. They have espoused the cause of the workers and undermined the position of the capitalists. They have tried to dislodge the English-educated class from their position in the Government by making Sinhalese the language of Government. They have deprived the Christians to some extent of their privileged position by the take-over of the denominational schools in spite of the strong opposition displayed by the Roman Catholics. In order that the Sinhalese-educated Buddhist might secure his rightful place in the Government services, they think, the Tamils along with the Roman Catholics have to be deprived of the disproportionate number of posts they hold especially since they feel that they use them to assist their own people at the expense of the Sinhalese. They do not realize that with the latest developments in the north this stand of theirs is of no consequence as far as the Federalist section is concerned.

Third, the Sinhalese-Buddhist resurgence is a logical outcome of modern developments, and the attempt to make Sinhalese the only official language did not arise from a desire

to destroy the Ceylon Tamil community in the Island. Its chief object was to displace English in the sphere of Government, and the opposition to Tamil was therefore really incidental.

The modernization of Ceylon by the British had to lead to a Buddhist revival and a renaissance of the Sinhalese language and literature. They are the counterparts of the Reformation and the Renaissance of vernacular languages and literatures in Europe in the sixteenth century. It is true that in Ceylon these two movements have expressed themselves differently in many respects. This was inevitable if we take into account the circumstances and conditions in Ceylon in which they arose.

This resurgence was also due to the Donoughmore reforms. The Donoughmore Commissioners were struck by the inequalities of development in the different areas of Ceylon as well as among the various sections of the people of Ceylon. They attempted to solve this problem by giving regional representation on a population basis and by granting adult franchise. These reforms enabled the Sinhalese-educated Buddhist community, who were under-privileged and lived mainly in the backward areas, to assert themselves and come into power. Once they attained political control they were not prepared to share this power either with the English-educated, the Christians or the Tamils till their objectives were attained.

Fourth, most sections of the Sinhalese believe that the Tamils are fighting for a privileged position. In the movement for constitutional reforms the Sinhalese were forced to oppose the Tamils on this ground. In 1921 when representative government was about to be granted, the Ceylon Tamils who comprised eleven per cent. of the population asked for half the number of seats which the Sinhalese who comprised sixty-nine per cent. were to get, and succeeded. It was the fashion at that time to recognize racial entities and give weightage to minorities. The British, who were determined to retain their power over Ceylon, balanced the minorities against the majority in spite of the fact that they had abandoned this practice of recognizing racial entities since 1832. Under such circumstances one can hardly blame the Tamils for taking advantage of the situation.

But the Sinhalese do not look upon their action in that light especially as the Tamils did not give up such claims even after the British themselves abandoned this policy. When the Donoughmore Commission refused to support any longer this aberration on the part of the British Government in recognizing religious and racial entities as such, and granted territorial representation based on population recognizing individual rights alone, the Tamils opposed the reforms and did not co-operate. In 1945 they harked back to the principle of communal representation and objected to the Sinhalese getting more than fifty per cent. of the seats in the Legislature. But the Soulbury Commission refused to go back to the policy of recognizing races as political entities.

After independence, the Tamils began to press for federalism, demanding for the Tamil-speaking people the control of the Northern and the Eastern Provinces which in area covered 7269 sq. miles out of a total of 25,000 sq. miles, for a population (according to 1959 figures) of 1,118,000 out of 9,651,000. In other words one-eighth of the population wanted to gain possession of nearly three-tenths of the land and half of Ceylon's coast line.

In matters of colonization, thinking again in terms of racial entities, they demanded that the Eastern Province, which next to the North-Central Province is the most sparsely populated, be reserved to the Tamil-speaking peoples at a time when most of the Sinhalese areas were over-populated and the Sinhalese were looking for fresh fields for occupation. It is true the Tamil areas are in the Dry Zone and are not so productive as those in the Wet Zone, but yet the Sinhalese think it to be an extraordinary demand to which they cannot agree. To them it appears as an attempt to secure in territory what they failed to get in numbers in the Legislature. The language demands made after 1956 appear to them as nothing less than another device on the part of the Tamils to secure the Northern and the Eastern Provinces for themselves.

Fifth, the Sinhalese fear and distrust the Tamils as much as the Tamils fear and distrust the Sinhalese. They look upon the Tamil move to ally themselves with the Indian Tamils in the plantation area or any attempt on the part

of even a few of them to associate themselves with the South Indian Dravidian movement as prompted by a desire to dominate over the Sinhalese.

In this respect the evidence of history is unfortunate as far as the Tamils are concerned. Though the Pali chronicles as a rule do not express anti-Tamil sentiments, the Sinhalese of today remember that from the second century B.C. up to the fifteenth century A.D. they suffered as a result of regular Tamil invasions; that the Tamils were mainly responsible for the destruction of the civilization of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, in which they take so much pride, and nearly dominated Ceylon in the fourteenth century; that but for the Muslim attacks from the north and the control of the seas by the Westerners from the sixteenth century, Ceylon may have become a part of South India. They fear a similar development today even if there is insufficient ground for such fears.

The Sinhalese realize the need to solve the Indian citizenship problem. But they also know that it cannot be solved immediately without first solving the Kandyan peasantry problem. To do this there will have to be more Sinhalese colonization in the North-Central and the Eastern Provinces and in the Dry Zone of the Southern Province. To press for citizenship rights for Indians at this stage is not an act of kindness to the Sinhalese but an effort to embarrass them; and the Sinhalese will probably never forget it.

Another fear of the Sinhalese is that the Federal movement has some connection with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. It may be that there is no serious connection at present. In fact the average Ceylon Tamil is not interested either in the Indian Tamil in the plantation areas or in any union with South India. He takes pride in the fact that his variety of Tamil is distinct from the Sanskritized Tamil of South India. He will not fight to keep the Northern and the Eastern Provinces to himself if he had any intention of allowing the South Indian to swamp him. But if the Sinhalese do not act tactfully they may drive the Ceylon Tamil into the arms of the South Indian. It is not always easy to control an emotional movement merely because it is irrational.

Finally the Sinhalese object to the Tamil demands of language as they go against the political unity of Ceylon on a

territorial basis. A similar problem exists in India. In 1948 in the first flush of freedom the Constituent Assembly of India decided that the official language of the Union shall be Hindi, and there does not seem to have been any opposition to the proposal, though those who speak Hindi are not like the Sinhalese the majority community but only the largest single language group. As time passed, people speaking regional languages began to assert themselves and India came to be divided on the basis of regional languages.

The first Commission appointed in 1955 to deal with language issues consisted of twenty members. Eighteen of these felt that the events attending states reorganization had underlined the need for the speedy realization of a pan-Indian language to strengthen national unity. But the two members representing Tamil and Bengali saw in these events a clear warning of the strength of regional sentiments and the danger of the hasty imposition of Hindi on those who spoke other languages. They saw in the recommendations of the majority the signs of a nascent Hindi imperialism. The Sinhalese, generally speaking, take the same view as is held by the supporters of Hindi while the Tamils adopt a view similar to that of the dissentient members.

#### *What next?*

The Emergency declared on 17th April, 1961 was relaxed considerably on 7th April, 1962, and military rule in the north and the east came to an end some months later. What next? is the question now. What is the solution to this complex problem? How can the distrust and misunderstanding on both sides be overcome? How can the Tamil community be brought back into the mainstream of active politics in Ceylon?

Can we hark back once more for a solution to that deviation of the British Government, the principles embodied in the reforms of 1924, for a solution? Can we solve this problem on pre-British racial lines? Must not all citizens of Ceylon have the same rights whether they are Sinhalese or Tamils, Muslims or Burghers, Buddhists, Hindus or Christians? Must they not have the same rights in every part of the country and must not the privileges granted be universal?

If a Tamil wants to live and work in an area populated predominantly by the Sinhalese he must learn Sinhalese.

Similarly, a Sinhalese who lives and works in a Tamil area will have to learn Tamil. This cannot be helped. The Muslims and the Burghers in the Sinhalese areas are already doing it. It is no longer possible to give rights to racial entities as such except in the sphere of culture.

The second point to remember is that the Legislature, at least since the reforms of 1921, has rarely divided on racial lines. The Donoughmore Commission realized that the minority members in the old Legislative Council had risen above narrow communalism. If the divisions in the State Council are taken into consideration, it will be seen that only when it came to questions of power politics that all the Tamils arraigned themselves on the same side against the Sinhalese. In almost all other cases both the Sinhalese and the Tamils were divided. In fact the Ceylon Tamils stated in their memorandum to the Soulbury Commission: 'Discrimination against the Ceylon Tamils arise not so much from legislative as from administrative and executive acts of commission or omission'.

Hence it is irrelevant to argue that Sinhalese colonization in the Eastern Province will place the Tamils at a disadvantage in the Legislature. To say that is to hark back to communalism or to power politics. The Sinhalese colonist and the Tamil colonist in the Dry Zone will have common interests and their representatives will generally vote together. The problem of maintaining peace and order among them has to be left not to the legislator but to the administrator.

How then can the Tamil problem be solved? This is not an easy question to answer. Perhaps it will be possible only if the Sinhalese and the Tamils meet round a table and discuss their problems, grievances and difficulties and come to some compromise. However, let us see how a solution of this problem was attempted in the past and how similar problems were faced in India where, unlike in Canada and in Switzerland, the conditions are closer to our own.

It is assumed by many Tamils that the British Commissions that came to Ceylon to report on its constitution did not realize the depth of the communal problem as did Governors like Manning who knew local conditions, and that was why they did not give enough attention to the sectionalism in the country.

This accusation may be justified when made against the Colebrooke Commission which, according to the ideas prevalent at that time, underestimated the strength of religion, race and caste. But the same charge cannot be laid against the Donoughmore and the Soulbury Commissions which too wanted to create in Ceylon a nation in the modern sense. The Donoughmore recommendations were on the whole backed by Governor Stanley and the Soulbury proposals generally followed the suggestions made by Governor Caldecott.

The Donoughmore Commission realized, as Sir James Peiris did as far back as 1908, that the problems of Ceylon were mainly regional, economic and administrative. It realized also that as long as the structure of Ceylon society remained as it was, communalism in politics could not be ignored. Therefore, while it recommended the abolition of communal electorates it did not object to nominated seats on communal lines.

It went further and recommended the establishment of Executive Committees for administrative purposes in which all minority members would have a place. Thus a Tamil could be in every Executive Committee and could safeguard Tamil interests in the administration and object to any acts which went against the Tamils. There was this further advantage that whenever the motives or acts of the Sinhalese members were questioned the Tamil members who had agreed with them in the Committee had to defend them. This considerably reduced misunderstanding.

The Soulbury Commission too did not underestimate the communal problem. If at all it overestimated it. "The problem of the Ceylon constitution," they declared, "is essentially the problem of reconciling the demands of the minorities for an adequate voice in the conduct of affairs so as to assure that their point of view is continuously before the administration and that their interests receive a due measure of consideration—with the obvious fact that the constitution must preserve for the majority that proportionate share in all spheres of Government activity to which their numbers and influence entitle them."

But, accepting the views of the Donoughmore Commission and those of Sir Andrew Caldecott, they did not want to take

a retrograde step and recognize races or castes as entities as they were bound to break down as a result of modern pressures. Since they recommended the abolition of Executive Committees, they suggested that the Cabinet should consist of representatives of all communities. Thus from 1947 till 1956 the Cabinet consisted of at least two Tamils who could safeguard Tamil interests in the administrative sphere and explain to the members of their community the real motives behind the acts of the Government. Unfortunately since 1956 there has been no Tamil in the Cabinet though it has included Muslims and members of all the major castes of the Sinhalese. The result has been the constant misunderstanding of the motives and actions of the Sinhalese by the Tamils.

It is becoming more and more apparent that the problems of Ceylon are regional. The Manning Constitution of 1924 accepted this fact though it took communalism into account in assigning seats. The Donoughmore Commission agreed and insisted on territorial electorates alone. The Soulbury Commission took the same view and increased the number of electorates and gave the backward areas in the Dry Zone weightage so that the less developed regions received more attention. They felt that by this means they would also allay the fears of the minorities as the Tamils and the Muslims as a result received more seats. In other words the Soulbury Commission tried to solve the communal problem on a regional basis.

In dealing with the Kandyan too considering their problem largely social and economic they thought of solving it partly as a regional problem. "We understand," they wrote, "that a proposal has been put forward for an extension of local government activities by the establishment of Provincial Councils under whose direction many administrative, social service and development activities now carried on by the Central Government would be locally controlled within provincial areas. It seems that such a system would provide favourable opportunities (given sufficient funds) for the Kandyan provinces to undertake the programmes of rehabilitation and development work which are required to enable them to regain their ancient prosperity, and we trust the Government of Ceylon will see its way to provide the necessary funds to augment such local revenues as may be available to the Provincial Councils."

In fact the regional problems are island-wide and their solution cannot be put off any longer. They could be dealt with by a system of Regional Councils. There could be no objection to such Councils as long as their powers are kept within reasonable limits. In fact there is no danger of their ever having too much power as the revenues of the regional councils will be so meagre that they will always have to depend on subsidies from the centre.

If such councils are established, the problem of language too can be settled by making Tamil the regional language while the language of the central government remained Sinhalese. Federalism too implies a regional division and cannot be objected to if it can be proved to be practicable in a little island like ours. But the objection to the Tamil demand is that they want Ceylon divided not so much on territorial lines as on racial lines into a Sinhalese region and a Tamil region.

The language problem is not a new one. It arose as self-government appeared in sight. In 1944 Sinhalese and Tamil were made the official languages, and automatically Sinhalese would have become the chief language as the eleven per cent. Ceylon Tamils would have had to adjust themselves to the sixty-nine per cent. Sinhalese. That situation was upset in 1956 when, no doubt due to powerful pressures, Sinhalese was made the only official language. That is why we are in this quandary today.

Can we learn from India? When eighteen members of the Language Commission wanted Hindi imposed as the language of the Union of India the Indian Government led by Pandit Nehru accepted the recommendations of the two dissentient members and decided not to impose Hindi on any region until the people of the region wanted it and to continue to use English as the language of the centre until such time. In the Punjab, where the language problem is acute, the Indian Government has established regional councils for the Hindus and Sikhs, respectively, so that each section might be able to focus the attention of the Government on their grievances.

So far the Tamil problem has been examined as a political, economic, social, regional and a language problem. It has

been explained why it has become a racial problem and the consequences that have followed from it. The Sinhalese attitude to the problem, which the Tamils should not ignore, as well as the fact that the Tamil movement has considerable strength and is not likely to die out easily, have both been described. It has also been shown that some guidance could be obtained from the ways and means by which this "problem has been dealt with in the past both in India and Ceylon.

It is now left to devise ways and means of getting the Tamils to co-operate with the Sinhalese instead of opposing them. What is needed is statesmanship, courage and quick action, in handling the problem.



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