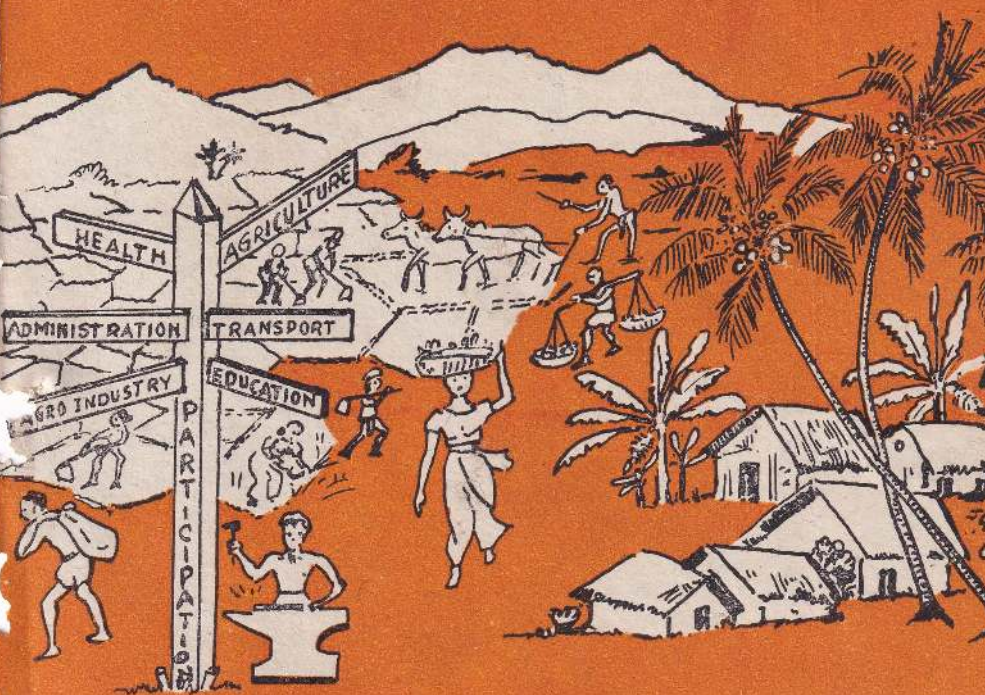


# LIBERATION of The VILLAGE



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THROUGH SOCIALISM

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## TO SOCIALISM THROUGH THE LIBERATION OF THE VILLAGE

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Socialism has been opted for by the people of this country at successive general elections, even though the term has been differently understood by different groups. In the Constitution of 1972 Democratic Socialism is enshrined as the goal of our country and a guiding principle of the State. Today, on the eve of a general election, all the major political parties have declared themselves in favour of Socialism. They have further clarified that they wish the people to be the owners and managers of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

It is good that all the political parties have opted for socialism. There should, however, be an understanding of what is meant by it. Otherwise the term socialism may be used as a means of obtaining the peoples support without a determination to effect fundamental changes in our society.

Sri Lanka still remains a basically capitalistic society in spite of many measures of a socialistic nature. The main motivation in our country is still private profit. The social order permits the private accumulation of capital; it encourages private investment. The power of the property owners is still very strong. Hence the path to socialism will not be easily taken unless the people have a strong determination for it.

### I. WHAT IS SOCIALISM ?

In socialism we can distinguish many strands. Socialism is a form of social organization; it can also be related to a philosophical view of human life and the universe. It is a programme of action for social revolution, as well as a strong case of revindication of justice for the oppressed. Socialism is also a historical process of trying to achieve its desired goals. Socialism is not realized in a day. It takes years and generations for social structures and above all mentalities to change. Thus the ideals of Socialism are a criterion for evaluating the on going social transformation of a country that pledges itself to socialism.



We may not agree on the philosophy of different schools of socialism - e. g. concerning the Atheism of Marx and Engels, or the religious beliefs of Islam, Buddhist or Christian Socialism. We can however agree on the basic values which Socialism upholds viz. equality, justice and sharing in community in freedom.

We can also search for a consensus on the *Priorities* and *Orientations* of Socialism in present day societies viz. that

- the means of production, distribution and exchange should be owned and controlled by the community, state or through peoples organization.
- production must be to satisfy the needs of all and not the luxuries of a privileged few.
- there should be no exploitation of one person by another in economic activity.
- the distribution of incomes, wealth, services and opportunities in a society should be egalitarian. The surplus should belong to the community.
- all the resources, including human work, should be mobilized for the common good and for full employment.
- human rights of all be respected irrespective of race, creed or sex.
- that all participate in decision making in the social processes.
- a social environment be created in which there can be the fulfilment of all persons by being liberated from injustice, marginalization and the alienations created by human beings.

Socialism requires a *struggle* for these objectives. For there are many obstacles to Socialism e.g. Feudalism and Capitalism. People in power and with wealth will not give up their privileges without a struggle. Hence we use the term liberation, which implies more than mere development.

**Liberation** means being freed to be one's better self, to self realization and fulfilment.

Liberation implies freeing ourselves from the internal and external obstacles to our growth as persons and as a people. It requires the conditions for becoming a just society based on sharing,



fellowship, freedom and truth. Liberation is a process of making ourselves and the world more truly human, more just and sensitive to others, of realizing human solidarity – of humanization.

**Socialism is a process of liberation** from the alienations of the capitalistic and feudal societies.

**Development** has generally been proposed as the solution for our socio-economic problems. But not all development is truly liberative and just to all sections of a community.

Liberative development must make persons and groups sharers in the process of production and of its benefits as well as responsible for their own destiny.

**By village** we include the rural areas as different from the cities. The villages may be said to include the estates too. The villages in Sri Lanka contain about 75 – 80% of the country's population i. e. about 10 million people. Hence there can be no true liberation of the people in Sri Lanka if the rural population live in grave want, in fear of nature and human exploiters. There can be no socialism in Sri Lanka unless the entire rural society is restructured on a socialistic basis.

## II. THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGES

The masses of the people of this country have always been exploited. Throughout the centuries and millenia, the vast majority of the people were dominated by the rulers and nobles. This was the position prior to foreign invasions. Colonial domination made the situation worse. After 1815 the British took the lands of the villagers specially in the upcountry areas.—In order to set up the plantations, they chased the people who had lived there further and further into the jungles and the dry zone. The lands which would have been the natural areas for the expansion of the peasantry were forcibly taken by the British. The rebellions of 1818 and 1848 are indications of mass discontent of the people. The British ruthlessly suppressed the 1848 insurrection. They burnt entire villages and chased the people still further into the hinterland.

During the British period the policies of the government were not concerned with the peasantry, specially in the hill country and the dry zone. The tanks and irrigation were neglected; paddy cultivation was not considered a priority of public policy. The processes of village self government were weakened. The Gam Sabhava was neglected. Rajakariya which provided for the



repair and upkeep of tanks and irrigation works were neglected. Imported rice undercut the market for local paddy cultivators. Imported consumer goods tended to kill local enterprise and skill and cause unemployment.

The British built an export-import economy in relation to their own needs and those of the rest of the empire. Thus Sri Lanka was to be their tea garden, and Burma their granary for rice, India their cotton field and Malaysia their rubber plantation. In the process farming was not encouraged. The status values of society were altered in favour of the planter and civil servant. The clerical worker was given a higher income and social position than the villager. Manual work was regarded as a lower social status than supervisory and clerical work specially in the government services.

The period of foreign rule, specially the British era was marked by a break up of the pattern of socio-economic life and value system of the villages. There were certain advantages in the modernization process and the spread of literacy and the scientific attitude to life. But the rural self sufficiency was shattered. There was no organic growth in the economy. Sri Lanka was made a periphery of the colonial empire. The villages were absorbed into the world market system as a distant outpost with no power of its own. Its economy was disrupted and left defenceless. It was subjected to the process of underdevelopment which is the consequence of exploitation. The villages were still further subordinated to the interests of the urban areas, specially Colombo which was the local trading centre in close relationship with the metropolitan centre in London. The absentee landlords lived around Colombo and in Britain.

The growth of our educational system divorced from the employment patterns, the prominence given to English education, the academic type of knowledge and employment inside city offices further cut the village off from the centres of power, influence and information. The imposition of English as the official language further marginalized the Sinhala and Tamil villagers who were made to feel socially inferior to their English educated countrymen.

The school system too favoured the cities and the coastal areas where Christians were numerous. The bigger and better schools were in the big cities, specially Colombo, Jaffna, Kandy and Galle. This drew talented youth away from the rural areas.

The roads, railways and hospitals were built primarily to serve their tea and rubber plantations. The tea and rubber estates



thoroughly marginalized the villagers who could not even go across their former lands. Thus the hinterland of Uva is largely roadless, as are also the North Central and Eastern Provinces.

We were made a dependent economy. Culturally the British established the supremacy of the English educated Westernized Elite. When ultimately the British granted self government to this country power was handed over to the upper middle class that had been nurtured by them. Hence there was a continuance of the basic pattern of society that was capitalistic and Western oriented.

**With internal self government in 1931 and political independence in 1948** there was a change in accent. The extension of free education to the villages gradually brought more social consciousness to the peasantry. With university education a deeper awareness spread to the villages. The colonization schemes in the North Central Province and the vast Gal Oya development scheme helped ease tensions, specially in the thickly populated South Western regions. In these low country areas the large coconut estates too had marginalized the villagers who had become dependent landless workers on estates and mills.

Successive past independence governments effected many changes in the rural areas. Along with free education, the free health services and subsidized rice, reforms of a more significant nature were carried out: e. g. the Paddy Lands Act of 1958, the setting up of Multipurpose Cooperatives, and more recently the Land Reforms of 1972 and 1975, the Agricultural Productivity Councils etc. Several government agencies impinge on the village - e. g. Agrarian and agricultural extension officers and territorial engineering services, officers of local government. Cooperative development, Land Development, district land officers, forestry, veterinary surgeons, paddy marketing board, banks, credit institutions, Divisional Revenue Officers (D. R. Os), Government Agents and now the political authorities. Yet there is no coordination in their work in a given area and its people. This makes for a disjointed effort in the villages. Different ministries, departments, public corporations, politicians, big private companies, local leaders, these all pull in different directions according to each ones interests and priorities. Even at the level of the Cabinet there is no coordinated plan for the development and liberation of the villages. This multiplicity of agencies without a plan make the rural set up a disjointed picture without a single major thrust.

The government officials tend to favour the more affluent farmers and rural elite; it is these groups that benefit mostly from the many subsidies given by the government to the villages. The poor



agricultural workers continue to be badly off in spite of the growth of a new rural elite. The local social hierarchy tend to dominate the poor villages for their own interests.

The villages have profitted from the effort at self reliance in food. The cutting off of importation of onions, chillies and potatoes has helped the villages to get more income from their land. The high sugar prices have also been a filip to sugar cane cultivation and the making of jaggery and honey. In spite of all these the main underdeveloped areas in the country are the villages. *Unemployment* is rampant in most villages. In every village there are scores of unemployed persons who remain idle the whole working day. While the women stay mostly indoors, the male youth gather in boutiques, culverts, junctions and pass away the time. Sometimes the more adventurous among them take to theft and brigandry. They rob the houses, shops and farms, sometimes armed with guns and pistols in addition to knives and even by day. But the root cause is the lack of work and of a means of subsistence. The employment potential of the villages has not been developed.

## LANDLESSNESS

Though Sri Lanka is an agricultural country there is a acute land shortage in many regions. The land shortage is particularly felt in the hill country where the plantations were set up and they have an additional population of 1.1 million Tamils of Indian origin. This is because the land cannot give gainful employment to all and there are a few opportunities for industrial work in the rural areas. Most industries are in the cities and suburbs particularly in the Western Province. The location of industry is such that 96% of the industrial output is from the Western Province. Central Province, Sabaragamuwa and Uva have altogether only 0.7% of the industrial output (1975 Central Bank Report). The big private companies and government departments tend to monopolize the production of basic consumer goods which are demanded in the villages: e.g. shoes, soaps and cosmetics, cigarettes, fertilizers, drugs, ceramics, soft drinks, stationery and even textiles. There is little scope in the villages for additional employment outside of agriculture and animal husbandry or fishing.

Indebtedness is widespread and chronic. The rates of interest are very high ranging from 20% to 120% or even 300% per year. The villagers live so much near the level of subsistence that any untoward event such as sickness put them into debt. Marriages and even funerals are occasions when the burden of debt increases.



In each village there are a few affluent persons, called mudalalis, who are bigger landowners, transport agents, merchants and money lenders. The poor people are generally beholden to them in many respects. They are helpful to the villagers who in turn become dependent on them. The mudalalies sometimes get the real benefit of the paddy lands without actually owning them, due to the indebtedness of the farmers.

Further *the villages subsidize the cities*. For the main sources of wealth in our country are tea, rubber, paddy, coconut, gems, spices, timber, etc. These are produced in the rural areas. Yet over the generations those who work on them in the estates and villages have remained poor - receiving only a little beyond subsistence requirements. The elite in the villages and estates and the urban elite have been the chief beneficiaries of the work of the peasants and plantation workers. Internationally the big companies benefit from their labour, for the prices paid for our exports are not in keeping with their value in the world markets and with the needs of the producers in Sri Lanka.

On the other hand the people in the villages have to pay very high prices for the services of professionals and businessmen in the towns. The managers of business, doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, scientists and other professionals are paid very much more than the farmers who produce the food or the estate labourers who earn the foreign exchange. The terms of trade in the urban-rural relationship is very unfair by the village labourers. This explains the unjust relationships that exist in our society. Thus a bushel of paddy is paid Rs. 36 while a shirt may cost Rs. 60. The labourer who produces the tea obtains about Rs. 1,500 an year while an accountant gets Rs. 20,000. The C. R. A. for non-traditional exports is also given to the urban exporter. But does this benefit the real producer or labourer who is often in the rural areas. The training of the elite is also generally paid for directly or indirectly by the working masses.

**The Cities**, specially the urban elite drain a heavy surplus from the rural areas. It was seen how prior to the recent land reforms 3,000 out of 5,300 landowners of over 50 acres lived in the cities. Most company directors and top government officials are in Colombo or bigger cities like Kandy, Jaffna or Galle. The cities are much better provided with electricity, transportation, health educational and other services. The 93,000 private cars are mainly in the city and these account for much of our heavy foreign exchange bill for oil. On the other hand there are only 4,000 public buses for the rest of the 95% of the population.



The city slums and shanty dwellers are very badly off. But those who live in the "residential" areas are better off than many of the working class even in Europe and North America. The city elite are a privileged "first world" in the Third World. Since they take much more than a due proportion of the nations wealth, their situation is rather *parasitic*. They consume, often even wastefully, what the villagers and plantation workers produce under very hard conditions. The cities have been established and have grown as extractive centres for taking a surplus from the rural hinterland. Slums and shanties created by the exodus from the villages form 60% of Colombo city.

This is because the transfer of power with political independence has been to the local elite who determine policies, even though the masses have a say at election time. The major political change brought about by the victory of the S. L. F. P. led by Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1956 was a significant social landmark in the recent history of Ceylon. Yet the main agents of this change were a combination of monks, teachers and ayurveda physicians – the *veda*, *guru*, *Sangha*. This is a group that is one step removed from the workers and peasants, even though at that point their interests coincided. The *Veda*, *Guru*, *Sangha* represents a category that teaches, and heals others; they are of the leadership level in village society. They do not however bear the brunt of the weight of the exploitative system as the peasants and workers: "Govi-Kamkaru" class does. Hence their interests were reformist and not for a radical change in the social order. Their immediate goals were of a linguistic, cultural and religious order. They wanted a resurgence of the Sinhala language and of Buddhism. They did not push forward actively towards major socialistic changes. At a certain point their social dynamism came to an end. In a sense they became to some extent participants in power in the social order they helped to generate.

From 1965 – 1970 the Government was rather right wing and did not push through major social changes. It helped consolidate production while giving much encouragement to local and foreign capital. It eased the religious and racial tensions considerably. From 1970 we had a government that was more keen on fundamental social changes. The youth insurrection of 1971 heightened the pace and widened the scope of change. But this government too is a loose amalgam of groups with both progressive and conservative trends. The upper classes are also strongly represented in it. Hence any changes effected by it have also enshrined the interests of the elite. This has been the general line of all our governments since 1948.



### III. REFORMS AND ELITISM

Most planning in Sri Lanka is by the elite and substantially for their benefit. Even the major reforms of the recent decades have been so carried out as to give concessions to the poor, but also maintain the privileges of the affluent classes. *The Privileges of the elite are generally safeguarded* even within the apparently socialistic measures of successive governments. Thus -

- (i) The nationalization of the schools left room for elitist private and public schools; there is still an advantage for those fluent in English.
- (ii) Free Health services for all are combined with 'paying' wards in public hospitals, private clinics and private practice for doctors. Ayurveda is still relatively neglected, as also the preventive side of health services. 60% of medical specialists are in Colombo and 90% of Western medical private practitioners are in urban areas.
- (iii) The nationalization of the bus services has gone hand in hand with a large increase in the number of private cars. Over 50% of the motor cars are in Colombo district.
- (iv) The ceiling on housing provides one house for each member of the family for those who can afford.

But there is no provision of a house for every family. A few can have two or more houses whereas very many live in slums and shanties.

- (v) The land reform leaves 50 acres for each rich landowning family, and provides compensation for the lands taken over.
- (vi) There has been no restriction on the ownership of shares in industry or of industrial and commercial combines some of which are mini economic empires.
- (vii) Everybody is equal before the law; but not before the lawyer, who appears for a consideration. The process of litigation is expensive and long drawn out. The legal system defends the rights of possessors but not of those deprived of incomes, work or house.
- (viii) While foreign estates have been nationalized, foreign investment is invited in industry and tourism. "Joint ventures" are encouraged.



- (ix) Measures of austerity affect the poor very harshly, but do not restrict luxury items such as petrol for cars, for any amount or type of travel.
- (x) In every respect the well to do urban and rural families still have the principal advantage in our country, and that at the expense of the poor masses.

The economic structure has not yet changed in favour of the masses of the people though several partial changes and palliatives have been proffered to them. The decentralization of the budget, the development of Janatha Committees and the appointment of political authorities for districts still leave effective powers in the hands of the Central Governmental authorities and of local politicians.

At present decision-making and planning are concentrated in Colombo and the urban centres. Hence the priorities of planning benefit primarily the elite that exercises power. The social and cultural facilities too are concentrated in the cities. The industrial ventures and new investments, specially by foreign companies are generally located in cities or within the urban fringe. Hence the rural areas are depleted of employment opportunities. The villages and plantations are largely the market for urban industries.

The present relationship between the city and village is similar to that of the "developed" metropolises to the peripheric countries of the Third World. It was this relationship in economy, politics, power, culture and information that was strongly objected to at the recent Non-Aligned Conference in Colombo. Just as the poor and former colonial countries want a new international economic order to redress this situation and be self reliant in their development, there must be a similar change in the relationship of the rural and urban areas.

#### IV. CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM

**The two major forces** that dominate and exploit our villages are the local elite who are mainly urbanized and the international capitalist system that denies the poor countries a fair deal in world trade and whose companies exploit us (as we have seen in our studies on multinational corporations).

The combination of these reasons can explain why the needs of the masses in our country are not met. We are enmeshed in a social system that is both local and global in which the poor



masses are inexorably pushed to the wall while the elite and the rich countries over-develop. Political pressures have so far brought many changes in Sri Lanka largely to cushion this unrest.

However, the recent changes, specially the land reform, have generated a great mass consciousness of social change among the peasantry and to a certain extent among the plantation workers. They have been released from many age old fears of the owners and of their own weakness. They are aware of the potential power of the State as an agent of social transformation. After thousands of years of oppression they are beginning to raise their heads. New difficulties are doubtless in their way. But a positive step forward has been taken on the road towards the liberation of the people. But the contradictions also exist and tend to get heightened both due to internal difficulties and the world market forces. We need to understand the overall capitalistic system which undergirds our whole society.

#### **SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WESTERN CAPITALIST SYSTEM ARE :-**

- a free enterprise economic system with profit maximization as the motive force of production.
- a technology geared to capital intensive industry.
- production to meet demand backed by money, hence a trend to wasteful consumption mainly by the well to do.
- Urbanization, slums, shanties, migration from rural areas to city.
- openness to foreign companies, accent on tourism, export promotion and foreign "aid"
- neglect of social justice and self reliance; instead accent on palliative social services, population control.
- and eventually martial law and the imposition of dictatorships to save the power elite and the system.

#### **FAILURE OF CAPITALIST SYSTEM**

The pro-Western capitalist urban industrial pattern of development has failed to resolve the problems of our villages and is incapable of doing so because it -

- neglects the rural poor, makes them insecure before the vicissitudes of weather, markets and disease.



- marginalizes the villages, and increases the slums in urban areas.
- aggravates unemployment specially in the rural areas; the exploitation removes motivation for their own economic development.
- takes away the capital from the poor countries to the rich ones.
- does not have a technology appropriate to our countries.
- imposes a very high cost for the transfer of technology.
- gives unfair prices for our exports and charges highly for our imports.
- makes central planning impossible due to foreign companies.
- increases inequalities locally and globally.
- creates dependence rather than self reliance, makes the villagers powerless.
- neglects the use of local materials, e. g. fruits, or exports them cheap.
- increases indebtedness among the villagers. The country as a whole too becomes indebted to its so called benefactors or "aidees".
- does not welcome workers and peasants participation in effective decision making.
- subverts cultural values and encourages individualistic consumerism and the rat race of capitalism.

The system fails fundamentally because it does not transfer incomes and wealth to the poor who can then demand goods. Hence lack of demand—goods not sold—unemployment—economic crisis. Economic disequilibrium and crises are endemic in this system. The absence of an effective world authority means that this global free enterprise system is terribly oppressive of the poor peoples and countries. The failure of UNCTAD I, II and III and the difficulties of UNCTAD IV show the incapacity of the system to reform itself.

We have to understand clearly the nature of this model of development to see why the basic needs of our people are not satisfied, unemployment increases, and unrest mounts, and why dictatorships have become quasi universal in the Third World free enterprise countries. Thailand is the most recent victim of this trend.



## V. PATH TO LIBERATION OF THE VILLAGE

An alternative path to development must be characterized by other approaches that would remove the evils of the present system and engender a self-reliant growth pattern with justice. There must be a *radical restructuring* of the country in economic and political life so that the benefits of the resources and productivity of the villagers are first and foremost for them and thereafter for the rest of the country. We need an institutional set up in which the country can be self-reliant, by the villages themselves becoming self-reliant, beginning with food. We must evolve a technology relevant to our needs, the raw materials and the skills we possess. The officials, scientists and qualified persons in the country must serve the majority of the people i.e. the rural areas and come up together with them. This requires a value system in which all bear the burdens of our common poverty. The costs and benefits of our development effort must be shared by all equitably. A social-economic system is required in which the people are responsible for their own destiny, where they receive the fruit of their labour, and the community cares and provides for all in an equitable manner.

### A NEW BASIC UNIT OF SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION

For such an alternative approach to development, we think that the present institutional framework is inadequate. It is not coordinated in the service of the people of the area. Nor is there a structure or a policy for the ownership and control of the means of production by the people of the area as a whole. It should be possible to come to an agreement on this approach since all the major political parties are today agreed on the country's option for a socialistic system within a democratic pattern of life. We may say that this is the broad consensus of our politics in Sri Lanka today.

### We must evolve our own path to Socialism in Sri Lanka.

For this we must take into account our own background of culture and history and the efforts we have made in this direction. We have not yet arrived at full scale socialism, however, we are also not without some experience in the process of socialization.

The trend of the liberation of the villages needs to be carried further. Therefore we recommend the necessity of a new basic unit of socialist organization like a commune which can be the main coordinating agency towards the regeneration of the rural areas. The whole social organization of the country should be



redesigned on decentralized socialist lines. Viable peoples organizations should be set up in both the rural and urban areas.

- These peoples community organizations should eventually own and control the means of production and distribution in the area in the service of all the people of the country.
- be responsible for planning and implementation at the local unit level subject to national coordination.
- Provide employment, incomes and the essentials for living for all the persons within its area, in as self reliant a manner as possible.
- Be responsible to peoples representatives from the villages or the sectors of the city.

They would be organs for the people to exercise power over their own work and life in their day to day context.

The present local government bodies such as municipalities, town councils and village committees should be incorporated within this new basic peoples community organization. The powers of Gam Sabhas should be related to it. The central government authorities in the area should also belong to and work in close collaboration with this new administrative unit.

**The whole land of the country has to provide for all and should be vested primarily in the people as a whole for the common good of all. It should be reallocated to the local community organization, statutory authorities and farmer-cultivators in order to maximize productivity, peoples participation and the equitable distribution of the returns. *The system of absentee landowners should be eliminated.* Cooperative and collective methods of production, marketing and distribution should be progressively developed.**

Land is our primary resource. It is in limited supply and the pressure on the land is growing specially where it is suitable for cultivation. We therefore recommend that in this way the 'Ande' cultivation system be eliminated so that those who work on the land get the principal benefit of their toil.

The peoples community organization should own the tractors, small industries, storage facilities and the means of transportation in the area. It should have responsibility for the control over the water resources in the area, under the provincial and national authorities.



The commune or peoples organization would be able to bring about a consolidation of fragmented agricultural holdings and thus maximize the return from the land. Crop diversification, crop insurance, the obtaining of credit, fertilizers, seed material, marketing, pest control etc. should also be its responsibility.

The District Development Councils, Janatha Committees, Cultivation Committees, Agricultural Committees, Multipurpose Co-operative Societies, Village Committees etc. should also come within the purview of this new commune type organization. It will be different from the present set up, because the land and the means of production will belong to the people of the area. A unit may consist of 15,000 - 25,000 persons. There will thus be about 500 - 600 such units, i. e. more or less the number of present Village Committees. The areas could be delimited to suit better the geographical and social factors such as - the type of soil, crops, and the social grouping of the people.

The planning in the country towards a self reliant socialism can be based on both the national goals and the recommendations from the basic peoples organization or commune. This will also mean a *further stage in the land reform* so that the land belongs to all and is co-ordinated for production. This may be done in stages as the people are prepared for a more communitarian approach. The land used for a home garden and the house should belong to the resident or allocated to him for use by the community organization. The government services of credit facilities, technicians, subsidies, could be made available through these basic peoples community organizations.

Likewise radical changes in industry, trade, education, health, transportation and other services will have to be undertaken.

The economic policies of the peoples organization would have to be based largely on locally available skills and raw materials, and be labour-intensive and small-scale. The area will also have to undertake the development and upkeep of its economic infra structure such as tanks, roads, public buildings, electric plant etc. The district development councils should function within this frame work of communes and their linkage within one province or region.

The local political authority too should be made responsible to the peoples representatives. This could be one way of overcoming the corruption and the M. P's chit for employment that bedevil the present system. The commune must provide for all irrespective of party politics. This will require that there is a broad



consensus on the goal of socialism and the path to it: even if different parties *offer themselves as alternative governments*. We must have national agreement on the broad goals of our socialistic advance. At regular intervals the politicians, administrators, scientists and other officials of the commune must be answerable to the peoples representatives. Thus the democratic values can be woven into the socialistic system. We have to try to work out our socialistic pattern in the context of our multi-party system. This can be a safeguard of freedom and a preventive against corruption.

Such a policy will have its impact on the plantation areas where the problems of the estate workers and of the surrounding villagers will have to be resolved through the socialistic development of both the estates and villages. The integration of the *village* and the *estates* is another major task. The organization of the communes on the geographical basis of valleys and adjoining hill sides could be a means of linking them in an economically viable manner.

The *State Corporations* can have a role of producing the goods requiring more capital and machinery. They should help and not smother the self sufficiency of the basic communities.

The *cities* will have to be rethought so that they are not a burden to the rest of the country. One way is to relate sections of the city to the neighbouring rural hinterland so as to correlate agriculture and industry.

The *racial problems* too are likely to be partially resolved by a greater decentralization within a socialistic framework.

These peoples institutions should not only be agencies of social and economic reorganization on decentralized lines but also of developing the culture and moral consciousness of the people on socialistic lines. They should be a means of coordinating the educational effort in the area, specially for bringing about a change in the mentality of the people to accept socialistic values. The religious groups in the region too could be harnessed for the building of society on the values of the religious, which too encourage unselfishness, sharing, service, sobriety and cooperation. On the other hand ignorance, narrow racialism, religious rivalries can be combatted by this common effort within given localities.

Such a reorganization can dynamise the people of the villages to a more conscious participation in their own development. The presence of officials, scientists and administrative assistants from



outside to serve them can give strength to their efforts, and help make up for their deficiencies. In the long term the villages themselves will turn out their own leadership even in the lines where it is inadequate today.

Naturally such a proposal is a radical change in priorities in our country. It means that the social initiative has to pass to the masses of the people in a more concrete manner. This will require a re-education of the people, specially of the elite. They will have to accept the values of sharing and non-exploitation – either gracefully of their own free will or by the use of the legal power of State. People will then have an environment in which the social structures will help a communitarian motivation. People will not be induced to ask what each one can get from a task, but what can all of us get together.

Can such a change be carried out peacefully in Sri Lanka? This is the big challenge to us. We are confident that such a socialist approach is in keeping with our history, culture, ancient agricultural practices and the values of the religions in this country.

The country's political constitution too will be influenced by such a reorganization. The members of parliament and the administrative officers will then be responsible in a continuous manner to the people whom they set out to serve.

This is only a suggestion of a way towards the future. It is proposed as a basis for discussion. In the process some approach suitable for Sri Lanka can emerge. The country needs the creation of a radical *political will* to go ahead towards Socialism in freedom and with as wide a consensus as possible. If Sri Lanka does so, it will be making a most significant contribution not only to the people of this country, but to the whole of humanity in its search for socialism with freedom.



# LIBERATING THE FARMER THROUGH SOCIALISATION OF AGRICULTURE

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## WHAT IS LIBERATION ?

The concept of liberation is relative. When we speak of liberation of a people, the term implies freedom in a political, economic and cultural sense. What does liberation mean to a people who have been denied their most fundamental right of determining their own fate for centuries and who have passed from a state of direct colonial exploitation into an indirect and a more subtle form of exploitation and subjugation politically, economically and culturally under neo-colonialism? A country may be considered basically liberated when it has put an end to all forms of foreign control over its internal affairs and abolished all the reactionary remnants of the past. But after its national liberation if a country is going to opt for a social system based on private property and the profit motive in the present international context it amounts to sacrificing its hard won national independence at the altar of exploitative imperialist international order. Internally such a step would bring forth and perpetuate a class society in which a majority of the people will be exploited by a minority. Such a system would be a capitalist system dependent on imperialism and would be hardly different from the old system except in form. Obviously, in such a society the workers and peasants will remain unemancipated.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to speak of a new mode of production that would replace the old one after national liberation. If private ownership of the means of production and the so called free market were to be done away with, in other words if the capitalist road is to be rejected then, what is the alternative that guarantees a more complete liberation of the working people and their productive energies? Socialization of ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange is the only way to reorganize the society to provide the material basis to put an end to exploitation of man by man which is an essential precondition for the final liberation of man, whether he is a worker, farmer or an intellectual. That leads us to the question - When is socialization possible?



The type of socialization advocated here is possible only under Socialism. One of the preconditions for socialism is the capture of political power by the working class under the leadership of a workers' party committed to scientific socialism and the setting up of the Dictatorship of the proletariat. Socialism is impossible without total national liberation.

## THE VILLAGE - A PERIPHERY OF A PERIPHERY

### The Historical Setting

The village is an integral part of a nation and it is liberated only when the entire nation is liberated. One cannot speak of liberating the farmer or the village in isolation from the liberation of the whole country and people from the external and internal forces of oppression. In the present international order, which is the result of centuries of uneven development of capitalism and its growth into imperialism, the vast masses of land and the people who constitute the third world have become the "villages" of the exploitative metropolitan centres of imperialism. Western capitalism developed at our expense. Their primitive accumulation was not merely through trade but through loot and robbery. "Treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother country and transformed themselves into capital" (Marx). The result of this historical process in the colonized countries is the enduring presence of the worst features of both feudalism and capitalism. The tragic situation may be summed up in the words of Baran -

"Their exploitation was multiplied, yet its fruits were not to increase their productive wealth; these went abroad or served to support a parasitic bourgeoisie at home. They lived in abysmal misery, yet they had no prospect of a better tomorrow. They existed under capitalism, yet there was no accumulation of capital. They lost their time honoured means of livelihood, their arts and crafts. Yet there was no modern industry to provide new ones in their place. They were thrust into expensive contact with the advanced science of the west, yet remained in a state of the darkest backwardness". (Paul Baran, Political Economy of Graft).

Over the years the world imperialist order has undergone a centre-satellite polarization through its own dynamics of plunder, conquest and exploitation. The world has undergone division and redivision several times among contending imperialist powers. In



the post Second World War scene U. S. imperialism emerged as the single most powerful centre relegating the rest of the developed capitalist world to peripheral positions in relation to itself while the dependent poor countries became satellites of both.

The centre-satellite relationship between countries is reflected like a mirror image within the satellite countries in the relationship between the city and the country side. The village is exploited by the town and constitutes its periphery. Thus the village is a periphery of a periphery, the most exploited and the most backward part of a country which in turn could be compared to a village in its relationship with the metropolitan country. The village is a relic of the past because of the persisting vestiges of the precolonial feudal past. It is a relic of the present because of the infiltration of a dependent form of capitalism which has long ago become a museum piece in a considerable part of the globe that has embraced scientific socialism.

In the current neocolonial context the village is becoming more and more integrated with the world imperialist system through the neo-colonialist strategy of "modernization" which is essentially an extension of the tentacles of international capital under democratic garb into the peasant sector.

That is to say, the reality a village presents today is different in many ways from the idyllic, romantic image of the so called traditional village many of us carry in our heads. Capitalism has made inroads into the village, and intensified small scale agriculture forms a basis for capitalism in the village. In the circumstances it should not be surprising if the international aid-giving agencies controlled by imperialism support the peasants' demand "land to the tiller", or even go a step further and insist on redistributive land reform as a condition for aid.



## THE SRI LANKA VILLAGE AND THE PEASANT

The transformation of our village is diagrammatically represented here:-

### Pre-colonial Village

Feudal Structure. Self contained natural economy based on Rice; chena; communal grazing lands, conservative agriculture village smithy for tools. Caste system based on division of labour.

400-500 years of Colonialism and Neo-colonialism

Present Village - Periphery of a Periphery



Integrated with a world system capitalistic and feudalistic relations. Impact of the Plantation economy. Landlessness. Economic, Cultural, Technological backwardness  
Urban values  
Unemployment

The present village is more or less a "show piece" of the different phases of imperialist penetration. An important phase in the development of Colonial dependence in Sri Lanka was the stage at which big capital began to flow in for the creation of a plantation sector in the 19th century soon after the capture of the Kandyan kingdom which marked the total takeover of the island by the British Colonialists. The impact of the hectic expansion of the plantation economy in the villages of the Up-country could be seen from the extents of landlessness and uneconomic holdings in the Kandyan districts. Shown in table-I a & b. Table c is illustrative of the neglect of the native economy, the food production sector and the priority given to the development of the plantation crops.

Sri Lanka's land reform laws (phases I & II) have certainly introduced notable alterations in the property relations as far as land ownership is concerned. While phase I sought to attack landlordism phase II nationalised estates owned by foreign and local companies. The law in both instances provided for the payment



of compensation to those whose properties were taken over. But as long as our country is a part of the world imperialist system we have to work within a neo-colonial framework. Democratisation within such a framework will foster only the growth of dependent capitalism. We shall return to this point later.

## LIBERATING THE FARMER FROM WHAT ?

Let us identify the forms of exploitation which the peasant is subjected to. These may be broadly enumerated as follows in our context

(Table I **Impact of the Plantation Economy on the village**

a - *Uneconomic holdings (1946)*

b - *Landlessness (1946)*

*land owning families with less than 1 acre*

<i>District</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>%</i>
Kandy	82.1	Nuwara Eliya	41.8
Matale	85.3	Matale	38.3
Nuwara Eliya	75.4	Ratnapura	32.2
Badulla	76.9	Kegalle	20.5
		Kandy	19.4

Table c **Neglect of the Native Economy**

Year	Population	Acreage	
		Food Crops	Cash Crop
1881	3,014,000	860,000	1,070,000
1946	7,122,000	960,000	2,260,000

Population doubled

Cash crop area doubled

Food crop area increased by about 12%

1. Dependence fostered by neo-colonialism manifested in the direct transfer of technology and the adoption of modernization packages prescribed by foreign aid agencies.
2. The survival of primitive - medieval forms of land tenure which provide no incentives to the tenants to increase productivity.



3. Richer farmers exploiting poorer farmers and the landless as wage labourers.
4. The middlemen who squeeze both the peasant producer and the urban consumer.
5. The private money lenders who begin as shopkeepers and graduate into absentee landlords reducing the peasant to pauperism. The private money lender capitalises on the inadequacies of the state sponsored credit facilities.
6. Landlessness/uneconomic holdidgs/unemployment.
7. Technical backwardness.
8. Cultural backwardness/cultural imperialism.
9. Another important contradiction is observable between the state bureaucracy and the colonist-farmer in the settlement schemes in which government officials wield great authority over the disorgaized, re-settled peasants.

### **DEVELOPMENTALISM VS LIBERATION - which road?**

The major features of exploitation of the peasantry listed above hardly need any further explanation or documentary evidence. These are among the more glaring realities of the present day village. The village represents in a microcosm the dynamics of underdevelopment and dependence. In the present era of the MNC's industrial development of the poor countries is controlled by the imperialist centres which enjoy a powerful technological monopoly. For the type of industrial development advocated by the development theorists, who play the role of academic props of neo-colonialism, call for the preservation of the present export economy in order to obtain foreign exchange for the importation of machinery and raw materials. One would agree with Dos Santos in that such an approach to industrial development while being strongly conditioned by fluctuations in the balance of payments will limit the expansion of the internal market by preserving the backward relations of production. The panacea prescribed by developmentalism to uplift the peasant from his down troddenness is an extension of the same principles of dependent capitalist development into the agricultural sector.

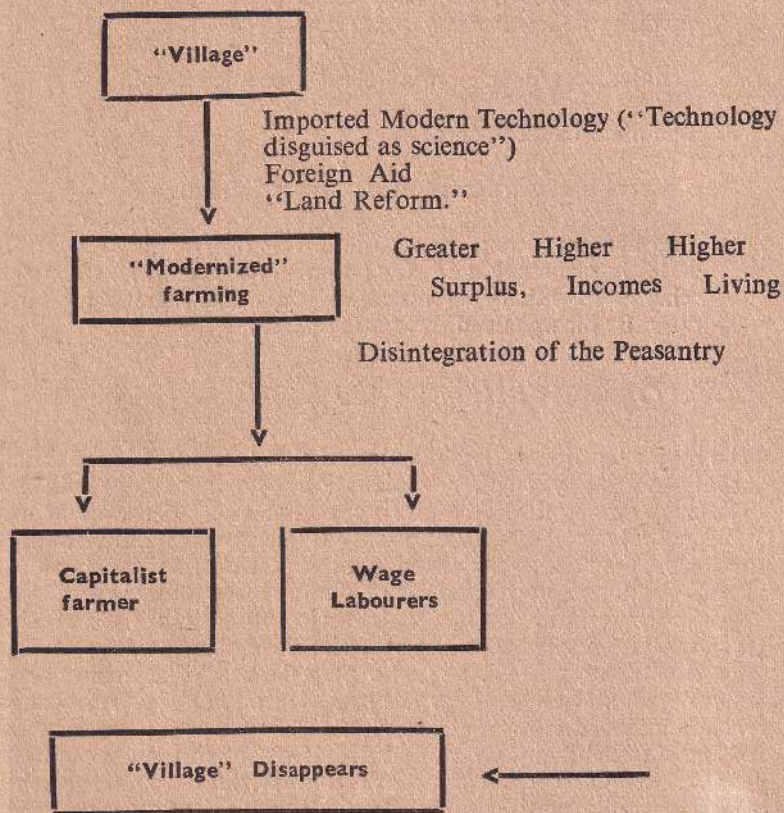
The path of modernization of the village advocated by development theory is represented in a simplistic manner in Chart I.



Chart I

**DEVELOPMENTALISM**

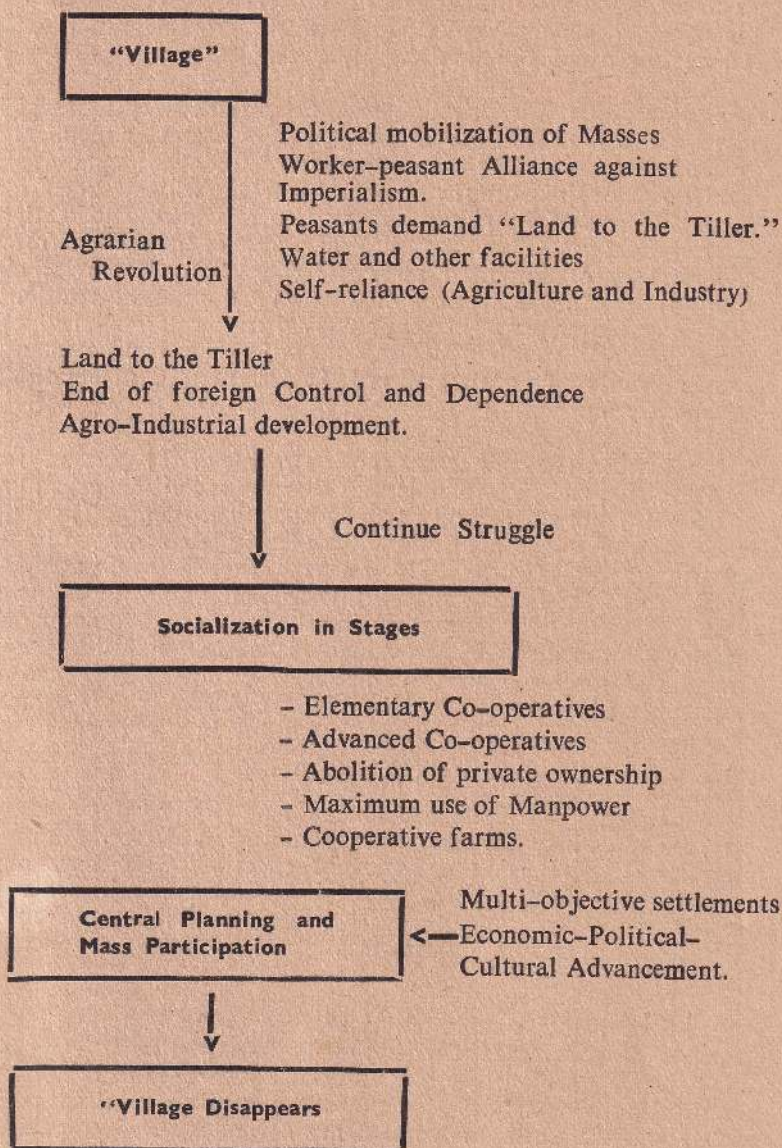
Laws and things first:



Fosters: Neo-Colonial Dependence  
Consolidation of Capitalism  
Inequalities, stronger class conflicts  
Exploitation, Profit motive  
Environmental Degradation



Chart II  
**LIBERATION**  
People first





By any means the process of development shown in Chart I does not lead to the liberation of the masses of peasants. On the other hand what is most likely to happen is the disintegration of the peasantry under the onslaught of capital into two hostile classes, the capitalist farmers and a rural proletariat. The village will be transformed with the spread of new relations of production dictated by dependant capitalism. With that, its integration with the world neo-colonial empire will be complete.

The other alternative available is the path of liberation which takes the form of a mass struggle. Politics is put in command over development. The transformation of the countryside is in the first place linked to the struggle for total national liberation from all forms of direct and indirect foreign control and vestiges of the feudal past. Developmentalism preaches democratic reforms and the use of imported modern technology with foreign aid within the existing framework of internal and external relations. In effect, it attempts to prevent a radical rupture from the past and present. The path of liberation, on the other hand, demands a radical rupture from the past and the present as a precondition for any development.

Chart II shows the main stages in the struggle of the peasant for his liberation and the attainment of a truly socialist agriculture which will form an integral part of a socialist system. The path of liberation and socialisation of a country is determined by its specific internal factors. No country can repeat the agrarian revolution of another country. While the path varies the ultimate goals are more or less the same in all countries. Moreover one dependent country could learn valuable lessons from the liberation struggles of another dependent country. The Sri Lankan road to liberation will not be a repetition of the Chinese or Vietnamese or Cuban revolution. It is being determined by the specifics of the Sri Lankan situation, its internal structure and its external relations. Nevertheless the Chinese and Vietnamese approaches to socialization of their agriculture have indicated to us the directions in which the agrarian revolution should move to attain a socialist agriculture in a backward country. They have also demonstrated the power of persuasion and example, to win over the peasant to cooperative forms of production which guarantee his ultimate liberation both materially and spiritually in a socialist sense.

The essence of the agrarian question of Sri Lanka at present is the demand of the peasant for land - "land to the tiller" - and for other facilities such as water, credit and technical guidance. These are democratic demands. The peasants must be mobilised politically on the basis of these demands under a worker-peasant



alliance. When the "conservative" peasants are mobilised in a struggle their social consciousness will take great leaps forward. It is in struggle that their own rupture from their old subjective values takes place. After all man's social being determines his social consciousness.

Since the immediate demand of the peasant is for land, how to mobilise him to advance beyond the democratic stage of socialised farming or cooperative farming. This is a crucial issue. Once the age old dream of the peasants: "Land to the Tiller" is realised what results is a small scale private sector in agriculture. Post land-reform experience in almost all countries has shown that the so called equalisation of holdings does not necessarily lead to equalisation of income. There are Kulaks always emerging. The objective of egalitarianism remains unattainable under capitalist conditions. Redistributive land reform provides the objective conditions for class conflicts to sharpen, paving the way for the spontaneous development of capitalism. The small farmers due to their inherent economic weakness, and due to factors like crop failure as a result of national calamities will gradually fall victims of the economically more powerful farmers and traders. North Vietnamese faced a serious situation soon after their redistributive land reform in 1959. They found that all the evils of capitalism had crept into the village and they had to soon make a choice between capitalism and socialism. Both, Chinese and Vietnamese attribute the success of their agricultural socialization to the political leadership given by the Party and the consolidation of the worker-peasant alliance.

Historical experience of socialist countries shows that to achieve success in the establishment of new relations of production and effect technical improvement in agriculture on socialist lines it is imperative to carry out a continuous and thorough-going cultural and ideological revolution in the countryside with the aim of creating a new socialist man who is not a mere cultivator of crops but a discoverer of his own hitherto untapped potentialities and develop them to serve the people.

### **SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGRARIAN SCENE IN SRI LANKA**

The pre-colonial history of Sri Lanka was determined by the internal dynamic of its society and its class struggle. Sri Lankan people through their struggle for production grasped the nature of the essential ecological variables and developed an agriculture to suit our climatic rhythm. One major ecological determinant of our agriculture was the monsoon weather, and the other factors



were the topography of our land and the rivers. The feudal agrarian structure rested on water conservation tanks and supplementary irrigation. Colonialism destroyed and distorted the internal dynamic of our history and denied us any historic chances of developing our own capitalism. The introduction of plantation monoculture marked a most important phase in development of capitalism in Sri Lanka conditioned by external forces, mainly the demand for our exports in Europe.

During the last two decades or so some significant reforms have taken place. However, the major problems of landlessness, low productivity, and backwardness in the village have been solved only marginally. The more conspicuous features of the agrarian scene in the late 70's may be summed as follows :

1. The continuing predominance of the export economy based on monoculture and with that the backward relations of production in the plantation sector.
2. The development of major water conservancy projects in the dry zone and the resettlement of peasants. The settlers are for all purposes owner cultivators. Their main contradiction is with the state bureaucracy.
3. The implementation of land reforms; redistribution and the establishment of large scale joint farming enterprises mostly on plantation lands. The joint enterprises are self managed with state assistance.
4. The prevalence of share cropping in certain parts.
5. The presence of uneconomic rice holdings in the wet zone villages.
6. Regional variations in land tenure.
7. Regional variations in productivity of land, a factor not considered by the land reform law which placed a non-variable ceiling for the whole country.
8. The presence of rich capitalist farmers (the kulaks) who are permitted to own the maximum possible under the ceiling and the middle and the poor peasants including the new recipients of land under land reform.
9. The growth of a rural proletariat and proletariat out of the landless and poor peasants and the unemployed youth.



10. The emergence of the agricultural service centres to provide credit and extension facilities. It is too early to comment on the performance of these centres.
11. The emergence of District Development Centres to develop agro industries based on self reliance using local technology and man power.

Two trends could be discerned from the present agrarian scene. The dominant trend is the development of dependent capitalism. The other trend which is still in an embryonic form is the trend of self reliance which is seen in the sporadic experiments undertaken by enthusiastic, patriotic officials and politicians with the participation of the people. The task is to make this trend of self reliance which is now oppressed by powerful internal and external forces, the dominant trend.

I do not believe I have the capacity to forecast in minute detail the road to socialisation and the final liberation of the farmer. I do not think it is possible for anyone to do so. The road to socialisation may be long; it may be short. That is not the most important thing to debate about. The more important task is to dare to mobilise the people and dare to make that most needed radical rapture to step on that road.



# EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISM

DOUGLAS DE SILVA

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Sri Lanka is in the process of building a new and better society; therefore the structure and content of education would depend on the nature of the society that is envisaged, for it should make a direct contribution to the political, economic and social objectives of the emergent society. The fundamental question, therefore, is education for what? What are our national objectives and what are our development needs? For on these would depend the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes that education should provide. In short till we have decided on our basic social philosophy we cannot plan our educational system.

The first task would be to clarify our national goals, viz, to set up a democratic, socialist state based on equality, freedom, justice, respect for human dignity and participation by everyone in the work of developing and sharing our national resources - these are the basic and fundamental values of society which should permeate our whole pattern of life. It would not be redundant to state that these values totally reject discrimination, exploitation and corruption in public life.

Socio-economic development is the chief concern of a developing society. Hence the *aim of education* should also be the creation of an egalitarian society through an integrated socio-economic development programme in keeping with its fundamental values.

*Motivation* is the key to education, without it teaching would be futile. Development will not emerge merely from economic blueprints but from a sense of social commitment and participation. It is through education that these ideals and attitudes will be fostered both among the teachers and the taught.

*Education for development* cannot be carried out in a vacuum; it involves a mutual interaction of educational, economic, social and cultural changes. Changes in the structure and content of education alone will have little impact on society unless they are accompanied by corresponding changes in socio-economic values and practices. Hence a whole gamut of radical reforms must be pressed into service if the people are to be prepared for a radically new society with new modes of living and work.



There are two important considerations that must be taken into account (1) education for a society that is yet to come into existence means that not only have values and attitudes to be reassessed and, new ones built up, but there is also the need for decolonising mens minds to get rid of values and attitudes that have been a legacy from a colonial past. It is of utmost importance that attitudes and social aspirations should be in keeping with the aims of the nation, and the educational system should be the vitalizing factor of its aspirations. (2) Economic resources will be a limiting factor in educational planning and in allocating the limited educational opportunities, in keeping with our basic values the educational system should serve the community as a whole rather than the interests of a few.

One of the fundamental objectives of educational reform would be the *equalising of educational opportunities* - through -

(1) *Free education* - School farms and workshops, in-carrier training etc. can reduce its costs.

(2) *Compulsory education* for all up to 15 years (Junior secondary level) when the majority will go to work; therefore it must be a complete education in itself where employable skills are taught.

(3) The greater part of the *education budget* should be spent on this sector because it serves the major part of the entire student community.

Grades 1-8 = 80.3% of Student Population

„ 9-10 = 16.6% of „ „

„ 11-12 = 3% of „ „

University Entrants = 0.18% of Student Population

No. of Students; Grades 1-12 = 2,543,600 Cost = Rs. 517,000,000

No. of Varsity Students = 12,000 Cost = Rs. 44,400,000

(4) *Medium of instruction* to be in the Swabasha with English as a compulsory 2nd Language with no job value attached to it

(5) All schools to teach the same syllabus and provide the *same facilities* like teaching aids, libraries, playgrounds etc. Hence there should be no areas of low literacy levels or inferior and superior schools. Private schools should join the national scheme if they confer advantages to a few. Some government schools in the bigger towns have become 'Superior' schools to serve the elites when there are so many shortcomings in the rural and slum area schools.



But these changes alone will not equalise educational opportunities for children come from homes with widely different income levels, some are subject to malnutrition, others are without facilities for study at home, others are too poor to buy even the basic books, or unable to attend school because the parents cannot afford to lose their services at home.

In the past a number of measures have been taken to equalise educational opportunities like (a) Establishment of Central schools in rural areas to bring 'Royal Colleges' to the villager's door step (b) Free education for all from the Kindergarten to the Varsity (c) Swabasha as the medium of instruction (d) Nationalisation of Schools (e) Allocation of 20% of the annual Budget to Education. In spite of all these 'equalising' measures, equality of educational opportunity is a mirage. Why? The sharp polarization of our society into 'haves and 'have-nots' has led to a dual society of 10% elites and 90% poor. The political parties are elitist and they control the political decision-making machinery, while this same elitist sector controls the economy and the educational system. All these 'equalising' measures have loopholes to shift the balance, and as long as there is a privileged class controlling the economy and the decision making machinery there can be no equality of opportunity.

*Therefore these educational reforms will not bring about equality of opportunity unless radical reforms are introduced in the economic and the social sphere as well. Economic planning is an integration of man power planning and employment policy and a wage policy with the coordination of education to employment.*

(6) Hence a *new wage structure* to close the gap between income levels is essential.

(7) *Essential requirements* of food, clothing and shelter must be made available for all.

(8) *Employment opportunities* must be provided for all.

(9) *Mass adult education* to educate illiterate parents to make them aware of the need to educate their children.

(10) *Examination system* to be scrapped; Student competence to be judged on basis of continuing evaluation to eliminate competitive bias.

(11) *Education for Socio-Economic Development* to be introduced. The education system should help to solve the problems of the country - the problem of unemployment by providing the man power needs for agriculture, industry and commerce, as well as the professions. At the same time it should help to expand the economy to create job opportunities. There should be co-ordination between Educational Planning and National Planning to



resolve the problem between man-power needs and student output. Our natural resources are in the rural areas so too are the potential job opportunities, hence

(12) *Broad-base the economy in the rural sector*, and using appropriate technology set up an agro-industrial society at the village level.

The technology we need should be capital and energy saving as well as employment generating. It should promote small production units in the rural areas to satisfy need-based consumption in the form of inexpensive essential goods for mass consumption.

(13) *Re-orient education and relate it to the world of work* by teaching employable skills and integrate the school to the life of the village community to become centres of rural development and craft training. This is envisaged in the new educational scheme with its emphasis on pre-vocational studies, project work, in plant education etc.

(14) *Redesign the village as a suitable habitat* with all essential amenities to end the lure of the city.

(15) *Non-Formal education* to be introduced through all available means to provide the motivation in the changing society. Values, aspirations and attitudes of all to be oriented in keeping with the needs of the nation, and thus liberate the mind from the values of a colonial past. This aspect of education is extremely important because the educational system is also part of a larger socio-economic plan, and failure in this aspect can inhibit the entire effort towards building a new society.

(16) *Re-education of teachers* to understand and be committed to the values of the socialist society, in order to be able to train the students in the new modes of thought and life and also to acquire the competence to transmit the new skills required in the change-over from qualifying for a job to preparation for life.

(17) *Higher education* to be radically reformed. The University has been a centre of theoretical academic study and divorced from the realistic world of work. Its function has been to supply the personnel to serve the establishment. Its elitist approach must be changed to become a centre of creative thinking in order to bring about a more egalitarian society. Its curriculum should be changed to serve the needs of the country with a greater bias towards the Applied Sciences which directly affect the life of the nation, viz; agriculture, industry, animal husbandry, technology etc. It should also provide adult education and non-degree courses to suit the development needs of the nation.



(18) *Admission to the University* should be from those who are employed, and who show skill and aptitude to follow a particular course, and not by the "Rat race" called the Varsity Entrance Exam.—Only 9.4% of A/L candidates are admitted to the Varsity and about 50% fail the 1st Exam in Science. Which shows that the system and selection is unsatisfactory—in fact many entrants are 3rd shy repeaters. Post-secondary stage would be a period of National Service in State Schemes or Apprenticeship Schemes in different districts. Admission to Higher Education would be after National Service, so that admission could be from those who show aptitude based on the employment needs of the different districts, so that the selected candidates would go back after graduation to develop the area from where they came. That would be one way of developing the so called 'back-ward' or difficult areas. Admission can also be from those who are employed and are following Extension Courses.

### **ESTATE SCHOOLS**

The plantation sector has 1/10 of the population, but 39% of those over 5 years are without any schooling, while 19% drop out after Grade I, further the Teacher-Pupil ratio is 1:64. Hence these children have been starved of educational facilities and are the victims of criminal neglect.

(19) The Estate Schools must be absorbed into the National System and education upto 15 years made compulsory. With the take-over of the plantation sector this could be done if educational planning is on a District basis. (This has been implemented already).

### **(20) EDUCATION AND AGRICULTURE**

Sri Lanka will for a long time to come remain an agricultural country, but with Land Reform and the "take-over" of the estates agriculture has assumed a new significance in our national planning. Our country will depend to a large extent on agriculture not only to solve our problem of food but also the raw materials for our agro-based industries, and employment for our youth. It has been estimated there is a dearth of trained personnel in agriculture especially at the technical and managerial levels. With 1.4 million acres under paddy, 1 million acres under agricultural crops and 2.3 million acres under plantation crops many thousands of trained personnel would be required. Hence there should be greater emphasis on agriculture especially at the University and Secondary School levels. According to the 1970 unemployment figures there were 12,000 unemployed graduates, while the A/Level "Shut-Outs" numbered 13,000 per year. This shows that our education and training have been on the wrong lines.



# NEO-COLONIALISM AND ITS IMPACT

NISSANKA WIJERATNE

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I think all of you are aware that the abolition of the Rajakariya system due to unintelligent assumptions removed a very valuable system of public utility work that obtained for centuries in our country. As a consequence we lost that attention by the rural population to the intricate network of irrigation works and channels on which paddy cultivation was sustained throughout the island. It was left to Governor Ward to attempt to re-vivify our free labour contribution system through the Irrigation Ordinance he put into effect.

Before the Paddy Lands Bill the former system of Vel Vidanes looked after irrigation systems carefully, because they obtained a percentage in the increased production. When it ceased, the secretaries of the Committees had no inducement for a continuing interest and like Government Servants forgot that their duties went beyond evening office time.

A further tragedy is that unlike the British period when intimate interest in the affairs of their work were wisely developed by the British administrators, today there is a reduction of that enthusiasm that marked their regime. Moreover, today the institutions for development have ended up by causing more damage by their misuse. The Co-operative Movement has been ruined. State Trading Centres for essential goods and agricultural inputs have not been able to ensure a ready flow of supplies to the primary purchaser. Land Reform has led to fragmentation and in many cases to unparalleled corruption. The nation owes its thanks to Dr. Colvin R. de Silva for his strenuous effort to preserve the economic viability of the consolidated estate system, to prevent the breakdown as viable plantation units and thereby also to preserve the dislocation of the plantation labour sector.

## GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP OF ALL LAND

It would have been more appropriate if Government has assumed ownership of all land in the country permitting existing owners to hold on long term lease what had hitherto been their own by outright possession. Government would thus have been saved a vast expenditure by way of compensation while deriving a regular



lease rent. Agricultural Centres have not been made optimum use of, while Extension Centres are quite often unrelated to traditional crops (other than paddy) that sustained the nation and provided their basic dietary supply. The system of political authorities too have vitiated the administration, divided responsibility, and has led to corruption. Decentralised financing without the precaution of the tender system can lead to misappropriation on a scale of unbelievable magnitude and provide political patronage on the lowest base.

## PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS ACCEPTED TODAY

Not only the rural but the entire economy could be rescued only by a total and revolutionary change out of Capitalism. In this connection I would mention that whether it is a Right, Left or Centre political party they have all accepted the Parliamentary process as a means to social reform, even if some are ideologically committed to a Revolutionary goal. It would also be wise for us to remember that in Asia, early Revolutionary movements in India, the more recent ones in Telengane, Karnata and Naxalbari, similar movements in Burma, Malaysia and in Indonesia, were all unsuccessful. The only movements that succeeded were those in China, that developed in the days of the Nationalists struggle against Japan, and in Vietnam that developed in the context of the national movement against the French and later against the Americans-complicated by religious tensions-were the only ones that succeeded. In our country there has been only one Revolutionary movement that went the whole way after the struggle of 1818. That was the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front) of 1971. We do not know whether it was inspired by the C. I. A. or by North Korea. But, whatever its inspiration was, we must accept the fact that it too failed. We are, therefore, left with the Parliamentary process and however much it may be denigrated as an instrument for patch work reform, it would be realism for the more radical parties to use it.

There is, however, another approach to the Parliamentary process and that is to obtain change through conscious use of the Democratic process out of respect for Democracy and the individual. This should also be in conjunction with religion - which in actual fact means ethical or moral approach-in politics. If it is put through within the framework of the Parliamentary system we should try to seek the approaches and agreements possible between human beings as social persons all of whom are anxious to serve humanity as they would themselves and for all of us to seek the best talent and capacities of everyone in regenerating and developing our land.



# SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES SINCE INDEPENDENCE: THE RESPONSES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

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## IN THE COLONIAL SYSTEM

For a meaningful discussion of the administrative structures, we have to begin with the structures before independence and the reasons for their particular characteristics. The pre-independence administrative structures were designed during the colonial presence and to serve it. *The colonial presence* required that the local population be controlled for the main mission of the colonisation process namely that of extraction of a surplus from the colonised country and transporting this to the "mother" country. Often such control of the local population required a military presence that would suppress occasional revolts, but in addition, it also required a more stable blanket of repression so that the extraction process would be carried on efficiently and unchallenged. This need necessitated the establishment of a particular form of law and order and revenue collecting bureaucracy.

Originally, quite a large percentage of this formalised bureaucracy, whether it be the Indian Civil Service or the Ceylon Civil Service, were manned physically by Europeans. Further, to keep a check on the lower ranking non-European officers, highly codified regulations in the form of administrative and financial regulations were introduced restricting local initiative and leading to, in this sense, a formal tightness in the bureaucracy.

The functions this bureaucracy had to undertake, as well as the decisions it took, were originally in the technically unsophisticated and simple ones relating to law and order and extracting revenue and consequently no deep knowledge was required by members of this bureaucracy. What was required in such situations were rule-obeying functionaries with only a general awareness of the environment and no particular ability to handle in-depth information.



The rigidities in the colonial bureaucracy were also followed in the other management structures that were created to run the new economic activities that grew up with the colonial presence. The plantations for example, were run by rigid bureaucracies that had similarities to the administrative systems.

## **SOCIO - ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE LAST 25 YEARS**

In 1948 the newly independent country inherited this bureaucratic apparatus designed by, and for, alien requirements. The ensuing period has seen a high degree of change in the administrative apparatus and the nature of these changes can be properly appreciated only by also looking at the socio-economic changes that occurred during the last twenty five years or so.

Independence in Sri Lanka was obtained without the mass mobilisation that occurred in the Northern sub-continent or without the armed struggle that accompanied other independence movements. Consequently the inheritors of independence were those who had not seriously challenged the British and who therefore maintained a continuity of perception with those of the colonial presence. Further, the immediate inheritors of independence were themselves closely allied with, and/or were a creation of the colonial presence, in that they were involved with colonial activities like the plantation industry. It was only after independence that internal changes challenging the local colonial elite began to surface strongly, (although precursors of such opposition go back to the 19th century, if not earlier). A significant change was, as is well recognised, the election of 1956 whereby forces purporting to represent the peasants, workers, monks, school teachers and ayurvedic physicians obtained a strong electoral victory. Since then the major political parties in the country have moulded their images and strategies taking to account these social changes.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 1956...**

Although the changes in 1956 and subsequently can be seen as a shift of power from those allied to the plantation sector and associated activities to a broader based group *one should differentiate the propaganda of the victors of 1956 from the actual mechanics of social change.* Thus, although the "Five-fold forces" would indicate that the peasantry was represented in the shift, in actual fact it was the richer and more powerful elements in the rural areas that formed support for the changes in 1956 and continue to provide support for the major parties since then. It is necessary to look more closely at some aspects of the five-fold coalition.



In this coalition of social forces the workers were an organised group which at times, tended to form a labour aristocracy (as it is common with most Third World countries) because of their bargaining power and their association with the formal modern sectors of the economy. Of the other four social elements, the monks, school teachers, ayurvedic physicians and the more affluent farmers constituted the leading social and economic elements in the rural sector. These members of the rural middle class together with traders were often the owners of the means of (largely petty) production in the rural areas. School teachers and ayurvedic physicians were in addition to their profession, often part of the middle-rung land-lord class to the rural areas and the monks were often in turn heirs to hereditary land holdings. Thus the changes in 1956 are to be seen as a partial shift of power from a class tied to (and created by) the colonial presence to one closely allied with the village based petty bourgeoisie. Several studies, (for example *The Disintegrating Village* 1957) have indicated that school teachers, ayurvedic physicians, the richer farmers as well as traders are engaged in economic activity (and cultivations, money lending etc.) that are detrimental to the mass of the peasantry (often most smaller peasants are in debt to these groups).

## A NEW BIG BOURGEOISIE

The shift of power since 1956 to these groups has had a profound impact on the country. It has meant a redistribution of income from the urban to the rural areas and although the main beneficiaries of this shift have been the rural middle classes, those lower down have also benefitted though not to the same degree. Because of the shift of this power, the last 20 years has seen new groups whose social origins are often this petty bourgeoisie rising to prominence in the country and reaching big bourgeoisie status. The rise of several big entrepreneurs who have grown up over the last 20 years specially under the import substitution industrialisation programme (with its overtones of political patronage in licences and import quotas) is also parallel to these changes. Further, the learned professions which were hitherto manned by sons and daughters of those associated with the plantation industry has seen increasing number of recruits from this new strata. Whether it is the administrative services or professions like engineering and medicine or the teaching profession, the sons and daughters of this rural *petit bourgeoisie* are, if not dominant, rising to dominance today.

With the passage of some members of the rural *petit bourgeoisie* to a national bourgeoisie status, a new big bourgeoisie has now



emerged to replace the earlier plantation bourgeoisie. It has expanded from small bourgeoisie status and is now actively forging links with the earlier plantation (and allied sector) bourgeoisie at a time when the latter itself is declining in importance. Having come to national status it is now seeing the limits of the local market as well as other factor inputs like technology. Consequently it now seems to be engaged in an active process of making interlinkages with foreign investment, a process, if we are to see it to its logical consequence would see the re-emergence soon of a new dependent bourgeoisie, different from the old plantation dependent bourgeoisie but under new terms of dependence. This process can be called the *Latin Americanisation of Sri Lanka*, because somewhat similar dependent relationships have grown up specially since the 1930's in Latin America.

## CULTURAL BOOMERANG

The social changes over the last 20 years which saw the growth of the petit bourgeoisie to big bourgeoisie status and the beginnings of a new dependent bourgeoisie was also accompanied by deep cultural changes which are symbolic, parallel to and sometimes preceded the new emerging situation in the socio-economic sphere. A dominant cry in 1956 was that which spoke on behalf of national culture. Symbolic of these demands were for instance opposition to cultural habits tied to the plantation economy and associated with Westernisation (for example against drinking Whisky and Brandy, eating ham and bacon, wearing trousers and the use of English) and sponsoring of national cultural habits (emphasising national foods like kavun, kokis, kiribath, national dress like cloth and banian, the saree and the lama saree).

The changes that were demanded in 1956 and partially initiated immediately thereafter have to a large extent being superceded by deeper unconscious cultural changes. The official language became Sinhala and the medium of instruction became the national languages, the latter process having begun before 1956. But the content of the courses taught in schools continued to be largely the earlier package, although through the medium of Sinhala and Tamil. Further, the school system that rapidly spread throughout the country were that mimicked—down to prefects, the house system etc.—the big schools in Colombo and in turn those of England. Of the other symbolic changes demanded in 1956 one sees also a striking “reversal”. Today consumption of whisky brandy, ham and bacon is much higher in the country than in 1956, kavun, kokis and kiribath is supplanted by the biscuit and the chocolate; the cloth and banian is virtually becoming a relic, almost all persons under forty wearing trousers whilst the saree



is being rapidly replaced by frock and bell bottoms. Part of these changes are due to the continuing and increased cultural impact of the West but more importantly it is also due to the import substitution industrialisation programmes, which itself were a result of 1956. *Import-substitution industrialisation* began manufacturing on a significant scale ham, bacon, whisky, brandy, biscuit, chocolate, trousers, frock and bell bottoms etc. which gradually supplanted the traditional items. These latter cultural artefacts are to be seen only as mere overt symbols of an overall erosion by largely unconscious socio-economic forces of some of the cultural aims of 1956.

Although the last twenty years have seen on the national level, the elements of the rural and other petit bourgeoisie reaching national bourgeoisie status, *deep changes have also occurred at the village level*. Rapid spread of education and mass communication like the film, radio and newspapers have meant that rural aspirations and consciousness are not very different today from those of the towns. In the village level itself, the traditional village overlordship of richer peasants and traders in association with government officials has tended to change somewhat. The richer peasants including school teachers, ayurvedic physicians - and even monks - constituted some of the elements of 1956. But the politicisation of the village - specially since the 1960s - has resulted often in various village level entrepreneurial groups using politics as a form of advancement and entry into the village ruling groups. (*Wanigaratne* for instance has shown how this process has occurred in several villages with the new emergent groups who have risen because of politics, soon forming a coalition of interests with the earlier groups).

## THE CHANGES AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

Although no fundamental reforms have yet been made in the bureaucracy, and although it still bears the imprint of a colonial heritage, the changes within the socio-economic system have made an indelible impression on the administrative structures. Immediately after the changes in 1956, the bureaucracy, specially its upper rungs were subject to constant attack, often on public platforms, by the new M.P's. The attacks rested often on the charge that the bureaucracy was not responsive to the changes that were being carried out. These criticisms can be best understood if one looks at the pre 1956 bureaucracy as more or less an alien presence, created for an alien purpose, and maintained by the setting up of status differences between its members and the society at large, and by the protection given it under the colonial system which helped keep its members insulated from the people.



This latter "coercive cocoon" effect meant that the bureaucracy could function internally on the basis of obedience to rules derived from 'objective criteria' à la Weber (for details of how such an administrative structure was maintained see *Goonatilake* 1971 pages 141 to 146) but externally, as an impinging force on the populace.

It is possible to trace from the late 1950's onwards the gradual growth of *intrusion of political factors into the bureaucracy*. By early 1961, *Harris and Kearney* (1963) had noted that lower rung members of the bureaucracy were being appointed under political pressure and in 1968 *Laporte* recorded that political appointees had entered middle-rung positions. By the end of the decade (*Goonatilake* 1971) the politicisation of the bureaucracy had now extended to the highest positions and was applied virtually across the whole range. Not only did this erode over time, some of the status differences and the disappearance of the cocoon that separated the early bureaucracy from the rest of society, it meant also the collapse of the bureaucracy as an apparently independent arm of the government. Most of the political appointments that were made to it were as a result of patronage and today, minor level appointments, as well as, some major ones are vetted through the local M. P.

This spate of political appointments from the bottom to the top of the bureaucracy can be seen as a result of *horizontal pressures* exerted by society on the bureaucracy and the bureaucratic structure. But the administrative structure itself has changed due to other pressures from within the bureaucratic structures themselves and which may be described as *vertical pressures*. This has been due to pressures from cadres below the earlier Ceylon Civil Service to make the system less elitist. Consequently due to reforms in 1963 and 1972, the entry into the administrative service has now enlarged so that now about 45% of entries into the service are from lower cadres who almost invariably are personnel who began their careers as clerks. Another force for change has been by professionals - doctors and engineers for example - who have successfully brought pressure to have some high level appointments hitherto reserved for the administrative service to be granted to the professional sectors.

## THE POLITICAL AUTHORITY

The horizontal political pressures reached a high point with the introduction of the system of political authority for district administration in 1973, whereby part of the country's budget is now diverted to a decentralised system, the head of each being a "political authority". The political authority, is generally a



leading M. P. of the government in power. This politicisation has also extended now to intermediate and village level appointments such as the governing boards of Co-operatives, Cultivation Committees, Agricultural Production Committees etc. The emergence of the decentralised budget has resulted in a degree of facilitation of work in the provinces and responsiveness to local development demands.

Popular participation in decision making in development has increased to some extent with the decentralised budget with the political authority acting at least as some reflector or popular will. On the otherhand, the institution of political authority has raised the spectre of arbitrariness and even corruption in the exercise of government administration. Political participation, even in its limited form is restricted to those closely allied to the government in power, which on past voting records leaves out well over half the population from the participation process. This selective participation is not to be confused with the selective participation of different classes in socialist countries, where, as in China, different classes are considered part of the "People" (and one "the compradore" not part of the people) the "People" taking part in participation. The selective participation occurring today in Sri Lanka is *not* based on class or any other systematic criterion but is based often on the largely arbitrary likes and dislikes of the particular elected MP holding power. Because of the shadow of corruption and nepotism this type of "participation" has also elements associated with a class in the making, namely part of the largely rural bourgeoisie rising as a class - through the spoils-based political patronage system.

Studies on rural level institutions (Ranaweera 1976, Wanigaratne 1976) have indicated that *at the rural level there exists a coalition of interests between the dominant groups in the village, the government officials and political appointees*. Ranaweera has found that perceptions of village level personnel fit well into this coalition. For example generally government officials, political appointees and the dominant groups are viewed by sections of the dominated as being good to each other, at the expense of the dominated. Social interaction among these three groups are much higher than with the rest of the population and the three groups, Ranaweera has shown, tend to view each other favourably in contrast to those with the larger population. Thus at the village level, there is a tendency for the official bureaucracy, the dominant economic groups and the political appointees to have pre-emptive access to inputs to the village. Consumption items like hard-to-get maldivian fish, milk powder etc. which are distributed by the Co-operatives are often shared out by this group through



informal networks of distribution. Likewise access to farm inputs including credit is disproportionately shared among the groups. Studies (Samuel 1974 ARTI 1974) have also indicated that membership of institutions to help the rural poor like the co-operatives also have this selective bias, through unconscious mechanisms, poorer members of the rural sector being non-members of most such institutions.

The village is the end of the administrative "delivery system" and at the village level we see drawn boldly the main features of the recent socio-economic changes, including both its successes and failures. The skeleton of the colonial administrative system still exists at the village level but it has been much distorted by the pressures of recent socio-economic changes. The changes in the formal administrative system were not made by deliberate design or public debate about fundamentals, but by the effect of pressure groups. Some of these pressures culminating in the increased politicisation were accompanied by, and are partly also due to the growth of a new class rising from rural bourgeoisie status to big, national bourgeoisie status. The dynamics of preemptive access of inputs at the village level show the mechanics of this class formation, the role of political patronage and the role of the formal bureaucracy.

The situation of administration today at the end of the delivery system - the village - is to be contrasted with the administrative systems in both *Western capitalist countries* and in Socialist countries. In the former, the present administration systems grew up organically with the growth to modern industrial status and was the result of felt needs within the country (The administration system in Sri Lanka on the otherhand originally was by no means designed for the felt needs of the country and changes since independence were changes to the initial colonial imprint.) In Western countries there is also preemptive access to inputs based on the particular class nature of the society, and felt needs were often defined by the perceptions of ruling groups. But because, the ruling groups were local and the administration system a product of local interaction there is history of higher degree of democracy and real participation than is apparent in the formalistic participation in Sri Lanka. Further democratic local government (which is virtually dead in Sri Lanka) is virile and active in Western countries and leads to much greater response to felt needs.

In the system in *socialist countries* the concept of democratic centralism prevails, where a two way flow of information and decision making based on internal democracy connects the administrative system from top to bottom. But democracy in this



system too tends to be at times formalistic specially with the concept of the vanguard at the top of the party which makes key overall decisions – apart from the more programmatic decisions (like what to produce and how to produce) which seem to be truly set by the two-way flow system. The vanguard idea originally instituted out of necessity because of the need in the revolutionary phase of the parties for strong leadership still survives today.

There is also another important difference between the administration system in Sri Lanka today and those of Western and Socialist countries and this relates to the control of production processes. In Western countries production is largely in the hands of the private sector and productive organisations are usually in the managerial hands of entrepreneurs or of professional managers. In both cases, actual decision making usually lies with persons who are more or less intimately aware of the production processes they control, whether they be farming or industry. In the Socialist countries, specially the East European variety, management is by persons trained specially in the production processes whether they be in agriculture or industry. In both the Socialist and Western systems there is also at times in the decision making process formal systems of participation by personnel other than the management personnel. These are formalised more in socialist countries with both the union and the local party hierarchy participating.

In Sri Lanka during colonial times production was in the hands of the private sector. With increased state involvement in production activities in post-independence Sri Lanka, the managerial control of production in both agricultural and industrial sectors has been often taken by personnel belonging to the administrative service. This *use of amateur cadres* is in strong contrast to practise in both socialist and Western countries. (Ten years ago there was the well known Fulton report on the administrative system in Britain which recommended a partial shift from generalists to professionals in the administrative system. But this, it should be emphasised was in essentially non-production activities, production in Britain was always in the hands of those who knew it either as entrepreneurs or professionals).

The growth of the State production sector in Sri Lanka saw the appointment of several generalist administrators to both industrial and agriculture production management positions. In the industrial sector as chief executives of State Corporations and in the agricultural sector as provincial and district coordinators of paddy and other agricultural production. It was as key elements in the agricultural production process that the impact of the



generalised administrator was felt. The legitimisation given by the administrators themselves to the reasons for the use of generalists in the production function was that their function was that of integrating various specialist functions. The recent changes have also had a bearing on these aspects of the amateur in production management. The political authority, who is also an amateur and generalist has usurped those functions from the administrators. Further the role of actual production personnel (farmers and professional agriculturists) in the rural case has also tended to increase.

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# THE PLACE OF THE VILLAGE IN A SOCIALIST ADMINISTRATIVE SET-UP

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Any radical transformation of society directed towards the liberation of the village in particular and the realisation of Socialist objectives in general pre-supposes a fundamental change in the complex web of institutions in the political, economic, social, cultural and also administrative spheres.

If Socialism is to be a reality it would need the dynamisation of the structural and functional processes of these institutions. For unless they are able to quicken the tempo of change they may lose their motive force and become moribund. This could lead to a deflection of goals with Statism taking the place of Socialism, with all its attendant ills. This could also result in the perpetuation of some of the structural sins the new order would have sought to eliminate.

The expanding public sector of our economy brought about by the recent radical measures, such as land reform, nationalisation of estates and several industrial ventures and also the steady growth of Public Corporations, of which there are no less than 110, is indicative of the ever-widening area of State activity. This is in addition to the growing number of development and service-oriented Government Departments and other institutions that today have a pervasive influence on the entire life of the nation.

It is in this context that we should assess the administrative machinery in its present form in order to find out whether it has the necessary pre-requisites to play the dynamic role expected of it.

## THE BACKGROUND

The main objectives and functions of the District Administration, according to the Ministry of Public Administration, are:—

- “(a) District Administration for the co-ordination of activities and execution of development programmes for other Ministries and Departments at the district level; and



- (b) Stimulate and develop the enthusiasm and efforts of rural people for the improvements of their social, economic and cultural conditions through the establishment of village organisations as Rural Development Societies." (p. 3 of Budget Estimates for 1977)

The District Administration, as it is constituted at present, has the following structural characteristics:

(a) A widespread network of 20 District and 230 Divisional administrative units together with 4060 Grama Sevaka divisions serving the 23,000 villages in Sri Lanka. The Budgetary estimates for 1977 have allocated a colossal sum of Rs. 67,602,400 for its upkeep. Being the executive wing of the political structure, its present function is to give effect to the decisions made both at Ministerial and legislative levels at the Centre and also those made at the District and Divisional levels.

(b) A vast array of government departments and institutions forms a part of this network. At the District and Divisional levels they function both collectively through the rather loosely-knit structures called District and Divisional Co-ordinating Committees and individually at the behest of the respective District Heads of Government Departments through their functionaries at Divisional and Grama Sevaka levels.

(c) Ancillary to the administrative set-up and intended to supplement the functions of State institutions at the grass-roots level is a host of para-statal institutions. They are semi-official bodies established through the initiative and under the patronage of various Government Departments with the intention of enlisting the participation of people either directly or through their representatives. They have been designed to share certain responsibilities along with State institutions in matters that effect their lives. They could be categorised into two groups, democratic and non-democratic, on the basis of their composition:-

(i) *Democratic*: Rural Development Societies, Cultivation Committees, "*Samupakara Pradeshikas*": Membership is open to all within the areas they serve and they have a right to elect their own representatives to them.

(ii) *Non-democratic*: Agricultural Productivity Committees, Multi-purpose Co-operative Societies, Divisional Development Councils, Janatha Committees, Conciliation Boards: There is no provision for any form of formal membership in them by elected representatives of the people. Those in control of them are



selected on the recommendation of the Member of Parliament of a given area (if he happens to belong to the political party in power) or on the recommendation of the "organiser" of the political party in power (if the MP happens to belong to the Opposition). Of them Agricultural Productivity Committees, Janatha Committees, Conciliation Boards, the Multi-Purpose Co-operative Societies and Cultivation Committees are vested with certain statutory powers and that too of a very restricted nature.

(d) Complementary to this set-up is the recent innovation at the District level called the District Political Authority which consists of the elected representatives of the National State Assembly with the most senior of them in status being assigned this office (usually a Deputy Minister). It enjoys structurally, parallel status with the District Administrative Head (G.A.) who is the chief executive officer at that level) but functionally, has over-riding powers over the administrators on matters of policy.

(e) Enjoying a role and status not necessarily akin to those of the above categories but nevertheless performing an almost parallel function to that of the District Administration, albeit on a modest scale, are four types of Local Government institutions. Each of them is vested with powers in accordance with the needs of the areas they serve: 12 Municipalities enjoy the prestigious status of being the first among equals followed by 31 Urban Councils, 83 Town Councils and down below the 542 Village Committees. Restricted almost exclusively to service-oriented functions essential to the community, they are the only para-statal institutions that are democratic in character and also vested with statutory powers, a feature that is lacking in the other types of para-statal institutions mentioned in (c) above.

## THE PROBLEM

However impressive these objectives and structures appear to be, in reality there is a dichotomy between precept and practice as enumerated below:—

### Politico - Administrative Institutions

(a) *Authoritarianism of the Bureaucracy*: Concentration of power at the apex of the politico-administrative apparatus and the resultant authoritarian character of the bureaucracy are cardinal features particularly the villagers have to contend with. Decision-making is more the prerogative of the upper echelons of the administration. This takes the form of rules and regulations governing policies and procedures of respective State services. These rules are often designed less to meet the needs of the people



than to suit the convenience of the State functionaries, as is evident, for example, in the ordeal a villager has to undergo in a simple transaction of obtaining or changing a rice ration book.

(b) *Insulated character of State institutions:* Although most State institutions are functionally related to the general public, structurally they operate as isolated social units. This is further accentuated by their in-built insulated character which makes them impervious to the pressures and demands of the general public. This is a hang-over from the colonial past which then necessitated an attitude of aloofness of the bureaucrats from the 'natives' in order to maintain 'law and order'. This self-imposed segregation has, since then, become a protective shield against any possible backlash from the people whose wrath they may incur due to their own acts of misdemeanour.

(c) *The absence of vertical or horizontal linkage of institutions:* This could defeat any attempt at overall planning and implementation at national, regional or village levels. A horizontal link-up of parallel institutions at inter-village, inter-Divisional or inter-District levels would have encouraged greater interaction between them through a mutual exchange of views of common interest. Even the semblance of a vertical linkage through the District and Divisional Co-ordinating Committees is more confined to the politic-administrative complex leaving the para-statal institutions to fend for themselves.

(d) *The monolithic character of Government Departments, Corporations & other such institutions:* Power and authority are now concentrated in the uppermost stratum of these institutions to the exclusion of the middle and lower levels. This has bred an authoritarian character within them. This in turn has created an atmosphere that impedes at all levels the free inter-play of intellectual activity that could increase the work out-put and enrich the quality of work. The Employees' and Workers' Councils have had to die an unnatural death due to the machinisations of the top bureaucrats. Their class status would have been at stake if they were subject to a check-and-balance system of their own performance which these Councils would have promoted. This has resulted in a sense of lethargy, boredom and alienation which hangs heavily in these institutions - a living testimony to their lifelessness!

(e) *Politicalisation of the Administration:* The establishment of a new institution called the District Political Authority (DPA) has politicalised the administration and in the process vested the political counterpart at District level (Members of Parliament) with hitherto unknown powers and authority.



This arrangement has many desirable features. It has ensured a speedier execution of work which had earlier rested on the sweet will and pleasure of the functionaries of the administrations. It has also infused into the administration a new urgency and dynamism that were earlier conspicuous by their absence.

Despite these positive features several shortcomings have deprived the people of some possible benefits. Thus: (i) The alleged discriminatory treatment based on political allegiance has become the criterion for rendering most of the services. This could deprive a large section of the people at village level of State services due to them regarding jobs, loans, land and other benefits. This could have an adverse effect on social relationships at village level in particular and encourage divisive tendencies and even conflict at the expense of cohesion and unity which once welded the villages together. This could also be counter-productive economically in that a potentially vast productive manpower force would be kept out of the pale of the development process—a dissipation of the tremendous productive capacity of a large proportion of the population.

(ii) As the executive, under this dispensation, has to be at the will and command of the DPA, State functionaries will have to carry out even certain functions which may be normally considered improper. Protecting favourites for any acts of misdemeanour and subjecting adversaries to all manner of deprivations are often the order of the day. Nevertheless, these State functionaries will have to perform these unpleasant tasks much against their will, on pain of being transferred to outlandish areas for having shown greater impartiality in the execution of their duties!

### **The Para-Statal Institutions**

As the para-statal institutions have the potentiality to share as co-partners the enormous task of transforming society their structures, functions and relationships, warrant closer scrutiny.

It has been observed that:—

(a) There is *no single community organisation* that could play the multiple role of planning, implementing projects, mobilising human and other resources within the community and also co-ordinating the innumerable functions that are at present severally performed by numerous para-statal organisations (see (b) );

(b) *The proliferation of para-statal institutions* has led to the emergence of a multiplicity of leadership roles within the village



structure. These institutions in the hands of ambitious and unscrupulous individuals, often serve their own self-aggrandisement. But the social cost in the form of group rivalry, social conflicts and cleavages is often too heavy a price people have to pay. This contrasts sharply with the centripetal form of traditional, tripartite leadership that was once built around the temple the tank and the State as personified by the Bhikku, the Vel Vidane and the Village Headman respectively, which too has outlived its usefulness in a fast-changing rural society.

(c) *The over-lapping of functions* of some of these para-statal institutions has resulted in the duplication of work and a waste of human effort. This has led to a confusion of their roles becoming worse confounded! This is borne out at least in respect of three such para-statal institutions – the Rural Development Societies (RDS) the Divisional Development Councils (DDC) and the Janata Committees (JC). There is, at least in theory, a similarity of overall objectives between the RDS and DDC as if one is a rival of the other. In actual practice the latter functions in a strictly restricted capacity of promoting most of labour-intensive industrial projects based on appropriate technology, the former operates on a much broader basis which embraces economic as well as social and cultural functions.

There is also a usurpation of functions of the RDSs by the JCs although the former since their inception in 1948 have received much praise from all quarters for the good work they have done in vigilance activities while the JCs have been subject to much adverse criticism for their constant lapses. If there had been a merger of the Janata Committees and the DDCs with the RDSs, as suggested by competent authorities some time ago, their performance would have been productive of maximum results.

(d) *The undemocratic character* of para-statal institutions is due to the selective principle based on narrow and dubious political allegiance being substituted for the elective principle which would have facilitated the expression of the popular will. This has vitiated the growth of democratic institutions at the village-level and instead encouraged authoritarianism.

(e) *Politicalisation of para-statal institutions* (through political appointees vested with controlling authority in them) has resulted in favouritism and discrimination. These appointees are only answerable to the political patrons who appoint them and not the people whom they are to serve. That a new breed of rural power elite has emerged in the villages from the very institutions meant to eliminate such a manifestation makes one question whether the



present procedure of appointing political favourites to man them should not be replaced by another more compatible with justice and fairplay. It would avoid the situation now prevailing in the villages where most of the services afforded by the State meant for the rural folk do not percolate beyond this level. For as recent investigations by the Agrarian Research and Training Institute have shown, the chief beneficiaries of such services is the upper crust of rural society with whom the new power elite has struck a new alliance. The absence of any accountability to the people has undermined the credibility of these institutions which are considered more political appendages than dynamic instruments of social and economic change.

(f) The para-statal institutions have no mandatory powers. Hence they cannot bind State functionaries and institutions that have dealings with them to implement decisions made by them. State functionaries can therefore ignore such decisions. Thus, although in appearance these para-statal institutions are vested with certain powers, in reality they reside with the State functionaries and institutions. It is a case of unequal partnership with bureaucrats as the dominant partners.

(g) *There is no structural integration of para-statal institutions* either horizontally with parallel organisations or vertically with higher level institutions such as the Divisional and District Co-ordinating Committees. It is, therefore, not surprising that co-ordination of para-statal institutions with State institutions and their functionaries has gone by default.

### **Local Government Institutions**

(a) The Local Government bodies are the only institutions vested with *statutory powers* that also retain their *democratic character*, with the people still having the right to elect their own representatives to them. But the failure of the Central Government to hold periodical local government elections which are now long over-due in practically all such bodies, has denied the people of the right to elect their own representatives to them.

(b) *There is a misuse of power* by elected representatives, specially those who hold executive power, such as Chairmen of these institutions and also elected members, who are often guilty of such acts of impropriety. This has contributed to a breakdown of their administration resulting in such bodies being reduced even to penury. The Central Government often takes advantage of this to dissolve them and impose Central Government control, specially if those elected belong to an Opposition political party.



(c) Their *restricted powers and functions* have seriously hamstrung them from assuming a much more dynamic role that could have taken over most of the development and service-oriented functions at present carried out by the Central Government through the District Administration. This would have made the District Administration a superfluous institution and also paved the way for the much-needed decentralisation of the administration.

## THE SOLUTION

The above analysis leads us to the inevitable conclusion that there should be complete re-structuring of the entire gamut of institutions that operate within the framework of the District Administration, including the para-statal institutions. The outcome of the re-structuring process will have to be necessarily within the parameters of (a) Decentralisation of functions through the diffusion of authority to ensure a more equitable balance of power so that the needs and wishes of the people will be fulfilled; (b) Democratisation of all State and para-statal institutions at all levels so that there would be a full and free expression of the collective will of the people (c) Integration of all such institutions both horizontally and vertically so that the present compartmentalisation of institutions will end; and (d) Co-ordination of their functions that would bring about a harmonious and efficient working relationship among them.

There will have to be a structural and functional merger of the District Administration, the Local Government and para-statal institution into one cohesive entity. Their fusion would lead to a new institution incorporating most of the positive features of all these three types of institutions.

At the village level this new institution (upon which there will be a 3-tiered super-structure) will be the basic unit of Socialist organisation.

It will be composed of (a) Representatives of the people directly chosen by them on a neighbourhood basis that would cover each area; (b) Representatives of para-statal institutions that now serve the village (who have to be elected, as against the present practice of being selected by the political authorities); and (c) Representatives of the various State institutions that serve each area.

### The Village Development Council

This basic unit which could be called a Village Development Council (VDC) will have many of the characteristics of the present



Rural Development Society but with statutory powers and administrative status.

This would be in keeping with a recommendation made by the U.N. Evaluation Mission on Rural Development in Ceylon as far back on 1962. It envisaged that such a new set-up at village level in particular will "bring together the representatives of all village organizations to discuss and plan the development of the village as a whole, and the part which each organization will undertake. It would prepare a village plan, with agreed-upon priorities, which would be forwarded to the development planning bodies at higher levels and which would be taken into account, along with the proposals coming from other villages and those originating at the village level, by the departments of the Central Government in allocating funds to the village. It would also make recommendations to the several village organizations for activities which could be carried on directly without dependence on funds from outside." (p. 104: Report of the UN Mission)

The VDC will be vested with the following powers:-

- (a) Ownership of the means of production and distribution.
- (b) Planning, implementation and co-ordination of functions;
- (c) Responsible for overall economic and social development;
- (d) Mobilisation of human and other resources within the community.
- (e) Judiciary powers similar to those of the Conciliation Board but with more legal status that would make their decisions more binding on the people.

All State institutions and their functionaries within a VDC area will have to become an integral part of this basic unit. Grass-root level workers such as those of the Grama Sevaka Service, the Agricultural, Co-operative, Agrarian, Irrigation, Health, Education, Land Development, Land Settlement, Marketing, People's Committees, Police, Post & Telecommunication, Price Control, Small Industries, Social Services, Wild Life, Forest, Banking etc. will be obliged to work in conjunction with this village level basic unit.

The creation of a network of such new institutions at the grass-roots level should ensure the *primacy of this village based organisation* as the fulcrum of the development process and as the catalyst for the Socialist transformation of society and its institutions.



## A Four Tiered - Structure

The Village Development Council will be the base of a four-tiered structure, the others being Area Development Council (ADC) serving an area now covered by a Village Committee, a Divisional Development Council (DDC) (not to be confused with its namesake that functions in a different capacity at present under the Planning Ministry) that would almost be within the same area as that of an AGA's Division and at the apex will be the Regional Development Council (RDC) for each District.

The VDC will be the institutional microcosm, the prototype of which would be replicated at each of the other tiers, with necessary modifications to meet their ever-widening areas of operation and authority. Each of them will be an extension of the other with statutory provisions so that *every tier above that of the base-level would be composed essentially of representatives from the tier just below.* In that way the link-up of the village right up to the Regional level is ensured.

Each such tier will have to be as much as possible economically viable, socially cohesive, culturally homogenous and administratively manageable units. Apart from what the optimum population should be other considerations such as the arable extent of land, natural resources, availability of raw materials, industrial potential, infra-structural facilities etc. should provide its economic viability. Social cohesiveness and cultural homogeneity will have to ensure against any arbitrary demarcation of such a unit which might cut across existing patterns of socio-cultural relationships. An administratively manageable area will have to meet the above requirements and also retain the capacity of efficient control and supervision of all the operational activities within it.

In this manner all state institutions will be subject to periodical review by the community. Promotions, increments, transfers and even appointments of State functionaries would become a part of their activities. This would bring about decentralization of authority to the people and a democratisation of the administration. It would mean the integration of the state structures & functions with those of the peoples. It would render the State functionaries responsive to the needs of the people. It could also bring about a change of mentalities of these State functionaries, helping them shed their supercilious attitude.

This would make the centrally-controlled Departments & other institutions which employ such functionaries to be only suppliers



of personnel, equipment & funds for the needs of a particular area which will be under the control, direction and responsibility of the new institutions.

### **The Relationship with the Central Government**

Much as it would be unrealistic to conceive of a situation that isolates the Central Government from the mainstream of activity at the periphery, it would be equally inconceivable for the District Administrative apparatus to be completely independent of the highest-decision making institutions of the Central Government. For weal or for woe, the Central Government, (as represented by the Cabinet of Ministers, the various Government Departments and institutions under each of the respective Ministries and the Parliament), is an indispensable component of the politico-administrative complex. Any structural maladjustments between them would only perpetuate some of the institutional infirmities the suggested changes seek to eliminate.

While the peripheral institutions will have the right to legislate rules and regulations, make decisions and implement them on matters pertaining to the respective areas they serve, the Central Government will have the power to override any decisions which either undermine the territorial integrity of the country or the overall authority of the Central Government. Once clearly defined and firmly laid down, the Central Government should not use its extraordinary powers to poach into the preserve of the periphery except under very special circumstances. A well-structured, check-and-balance mechanism will have to be evolved to ensure the efficient functioning of these institutions on an even keel.

In this context the political authority (as represented by the elected representatives to Parliament) being the main political link between the decentralised administration at the periphery and the Central Government, the key role it will have to play cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, the excessive power of the District Political Authority which has led to much abuse could be curtailed if it is assigned a place in the new institutional set-up. It should be *mandatory for the political authorities to abide by the majority decisions* of such institutions. Under no circumstances should the political authorities be given the power of veto in such matters. Democratising the decision-making process would be the best assurance against any exercise of excessive powers.

### **The Role of The Grama Sevaka**

As each of the VDCs would cover a present Grama Sevaka area, the nature, scope and relationship of the Grama Sevaka's func-



tions will have to be re-oriented to meet the new requirements brought about by the suggested institutional changes. At present his role is a modified continuity of the office of his predecessor, the Village Headman. There is a strong streak of bureaucratism ingrained in his attitude towards his work and the community whom he is expected to serve. Paradoxically, for the services he renders to the people, he is accountable not to them but to another officer (the AGA). The evaluation of his performance is mostly confined to the notes the Grama Sevaka himself maintains in his official diary which are hurriedly perused by the AGA just once a month on Division days. That the performance of this most important State functionary in the village is to be measured by a cursory glance of his own record of work belies the concern and care for 85% of the country's population by the State.

Under the new dispensation the Grama Sevaka will be detached from his present ties with the politico-administrative apparatus and made responsible to the proposed VDC in which he has to play the keynote role of a multi-purpose nature. His functions will be broad-based to include practically every aspect of village activity. He would be held responsible for the successful execution of all decisions made by the VDC, which will also include the co-ordination of the various activities at the village level. The absence of this function has been detrimental to the growth of the village. This would in fact be one of his principle roles. He could also be the liaison between the VDC and other new institutions that would come into existence. He would be answerable to the VDC and no one else.

### **Re-Demarcation of Electorates**

There should also be a re-demarcation of the electorates so that each of them will correspond to an area that would be served by a proposed Area Development Council. Thus each such administrative unit will be integrated into the political unit not only physically but structurally and functionally too. This would facilitate the assignment of specific functions and status to the Member of Parliament within it. It is suggested that he be made the ex-Officio Chairman of the ADC that comes within his electorate. His presence in that capacity would directly involve him in the deliberations of that body and the ensuing interaction between him and the peoples' representatives and parallel level State functionaries should be an enriching experience of the democratic process at work. Even if any conflict of opinion or divergence of views does arise they could be resolved through mutual understanding and dialogue.



By virtue of the responsible office the MP holds in that capacity he would have to be given an equally important place in the highest District level decision-making body, the proposed Regional Development Council. He would also be a member of that Council along with Members of Parliament from other electorates within the same District, with the senior most of them becoming the ex-officio Chairman of that Council. The mechanics of its own operation will be on the same principles as those of the ADC with no special powers vested in the political authorities to override the decisions reached by majority vote. The office of the Government Agent (which designation will have to be changed) would continue to be the chief executive and co-ordinating officer.

The right to vote in all these bodies - the RDCs, DDCs, ADCs and VDCs will be reserved only to the representatives of the people with State functionaries acting in an advisory capacity. How all this would work out will depend on the ingenuity and resourcefulness of those responsible for their functioning.

### **Participatory Democracy**

Within this pyramid-like structure with the Central Government as the apex there would be an upward thrust in the communication line connecting each institution with the other. As it moves in that direction through each of the intermediary institutions it should gain in intensity and converge at the Centre in a virtual avalanche of new ideas, views, suggestions, plans, which the mass of the people would have debated and deliberated upon before transmitting them to the Central Government.

Such a phenomenon is reminiscent of the Rural Development Movement in Sri Lanka during its formative period in the forties when the 6000 Societies that covered the country were called upon to send their proposals so that they will be the basis for a National Plan of the Central Government. The writer recalls the mass response to this call. But the government of the day abandoned this scheme for reasons best known to it. What an exciting departure it would have been from the present practice of a single Minister of State formulating a fiscal policy for the entire nation. It would have been participatory democracy at its optimum level.

There will have to be some form of institutional facilities to process such proposals at the Central Government level. An elaborate machinery will have to be set-up at the Ministry of Planning. Any such National Plan would not suffer the untimely demise that many earlier plans experienced in Sri Lanka since Independence.



The function of the Parliament will have to undergo a corresponding change to accommodate the new role of the peripheral institutions particularly the 20 Regional Development Councils. Parliament will cease to be a body that will depend on the whims and fancies of its members. For it will have to be made mandatory on the part of the respective Members of Parliament that they should place before that body the decisions these Regional Councils have reached. Therefore most of the legislation that would be debated there would have been earlier deliberated upon by the institutions from the village level upwards. In that manner Parliament will be a true reflection of the people's aspirations for a better life.

### **THE CONCLUSION**

The focal point of the afore-mentioned schema for the radicalisation of the institutional network of the politico-administration will be the 23,000 villages that are spread across the length and breadth of the country. The institutional devise of encompassing the country's entire population and linking it with the highest politico-administrative organs will be a phenomenal breakthrough, revolutionary both in design and effect.

The confederation of 4060 grass-roots level Village Development Councils (one for each Grama Sevaka Division) will give expression to the mass will and draw the people directly into the development process. It will also mark the transfer of the levers of power away from the politico-administrative complex. This shift of emphasis will mean the extension of the democratic concept not only into the domain of the administration but also into the very heart of the village. Planning levels will cease to be heirarchical. A new re-alignment of forces on the basis of an interdependent relationship will bring about a link cadre system. The structural integration of the politico-administrative cum para-statal institutions will be accompanied by a corresponding socio-economic integration of the village through the social ownership and control of the means of production. This will in turn ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth, the elimination of economic disparities and the inevitable disappearance of class distinctions and conflict.

In this manner the entire politico-administrative set-up will be geared to the transformation of society that will ensure the preservation of the basic values of socialism i.e. "of equality, justice and sharing in community in freedom.. based on a fundamental respect for the human person as the bearer of rights and the maker of his destiny in freedom...safeguard and foster the democratic values in all spheres...and create the environment for the integral liberation and fulfilment of all persons in a given community..." (From the CSR Document "An Option for Socialism in Sri Lanka")



## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BISO MENIKE

BERNADEEN SILVA

(Staff, Centre for Society and Religion)

On a visit to the home of Ukku Banda, we were able to get a little insight into the life of the farmer and his wife.

Ukku Banda lives with his wife and five children ranging from the ages of 7 years to 6 months, in a small colony three miles from Norton Bridge. We met him at about 5.30 p.m. returning from his fields. He spoke of the difficulties of protecting his crops from the wild boar and deer, and complained that he had to return again to the fields after dinner to keep watch for about an hour. We told him that we would like to have some idea of his day's programme.

He said that a farmer's life is very very difficult - he gets up in the morning at about 5.30 a.m. has his tea and breakfast and sets out to the field by 6.00 a.m. About 10.30 a.m. he has a chew of betel and tea (given by his wife), and a chat at the little boutique close by. By 11 a.m. he is back in the fields and returns home for his mid-day meal by 1 p.m. He has his lunch and an afternoon nap and returns to the field at about 3 p.m. after an evening cup of tea prepared by his wife. He is back at home again at 5.30 p.m. having had a bath at the well on his way home.

He said that about 6 p.m. he visits the local boutique for his glass of toddy and a chat with friends on national and local politics. The boutique is the farmer's 'club' he said. We asked him our last question, "How much income do you get on the average each month and does your wife contribute to the income?" His reply was, "about Rs. 100/- each month. We farmers have a hard life and we are eternally in debt to the Kade Mudalali. My wife she *does not work she brings in no income!*"

### BISO MENIKE

Biso Menike, his wife was seated close by on the doorstep nursing her six month old child. We thought of interviewing her - after all it was 1975, International Women's Year - so why not find out how her day is spent. This is what she said.



I get up at about 4 a.m. when everyone is asleep and it is easy to get the work done. I clean up the house and the little garden where we have a few Chillies and vegetable plants, that must be watered and a couple of chickens to be fed. The tea and breakfast are prepared for the family. I have already woken twice in the night, once to nurse the baby and the other when the 3 and 4 year olds woke up to go to the toilet. I nurse the child again at 6 a.m. and then my Husband and children must be fed, and the school going children dressed and sent to school. The eldest 7 years, a girl and the boy 6 years attend the local school 2 miles away. They have to walk far and when they return home it is about 1 p.m. So I must also prepare some tea and if possible a little something for them to eat at school. My husband leaves for his fields by 6 a.m. and soon after the 2 children too leave for school.

After they all leave, this is what I do from 6.30 to 11.30 a.m. I gather firewood, some green vegetable for the days meal, bring water from the well and work for two hours 9.30 to 11.30 a.m. doing some weeding on a neighbouring estate for which I am paid Re. 1/- each day. This when I do not have any work in my husband's fields, of course. While I am away from home, the small ones are looked after by the 4 year old daughter. I am lucky the 4 year old is a girl for she can help me with the looking after of the children and the house - work.

I return home to nurse the child and to prepare the afternoon meal, by 1 p.m. for my husband and children who will be back by then, tired and hungry.

All the children and my husband have to be fed and I leave at about 3.30 p.m. after preparing the tea for my husband who leaves for his fields again at 3 p.m., to the well to wash the clothes and the children. I have to wash the clothes daily - they are so dirty and we do not have extra clothes for them. I must be back at home at 5 p.m. other-wise my husband gets very angry if I am not there to receive him with his tea and listen to his woes of the field.

I am happy when he leaves again to meet his friends at the boutique at 6 p.m. for then I am free to prepare a quick evening meal, feed the children, nurse the baby, clean up the house, attend to the garden and my chickens, and get Ukku Banda's meal ready nice & hot when he returns at 7.30 p.m. for his dinner. By about 8 p.m. everyone is asleep except Ukku Banda who chews a betel on the doorstep, while I eat, wash up, and clean the house and get the things ready, for the children & my husband for the next



morning. While I am working Ukku Banda chats with me. This is the only time we are able to chat with each other. At about 10 p.m. after nursing the baby I lie down on my mat, tired but happy that everything has gone off well. "Everyday is more or less the same" she said, smiling.

## **THE STORY OF BISO MENIKE SAME IN EVERY VILLAGE**

This story of Biso Menike is true of almost every rural woman. The rural woman from time immemorial has been working not only in the home which is "expected" of her but in the fields too. She has always supplemented the family income, by way of collecting each day, firewood, vegetables and greens. Since her contribution is not a monetary one neither her husband nor society regards her as an income earner,

## **THE RURAL WOMAN AN ETHERISED PATIENT**

The tragedy is that the rural woman herself accepts this role of being a non-worker, a non-contributor to the family income and the protector of the well being of her family and through this the community. So all pervasive are the socio-cultural structures that condition her role as being a virtuous girl, a good mother, an obedient wife, so compelling are the myths that propagate this so called "ideal" role and so unanimous the public opinion, the voice of society supporting this myth that woman herself guards this traditional role as being sacred and one that should be emulated by all women. This system is often maintained and generated by its very victims and each generation of women prepares the next generation to fit into this and to be imprisoned within this system. These concepts, virtuous, good, obedient etc. are utilized in order to deny the woman's opportunity of personal development and fulfilment and her access to employment and education. This is evident in the manner and attitude of Biso Menike when she says "thank god my 4 year old is a girl and can help me with the children and the home".

She grooms her daughter to continue her role, she conditions her to accept the present system of inequality of the sexes, and again... "happy that every thing has gone of well!" She does not even realise that she has been exploited taken for granted. She is etherised like a patient, merely fulfilling the role that is expected of her.

## **THE PROTECTOR**

Traditions die hard in the village and it is the woman who is expected more than the man to preserve the family's traditions



and through them the community's traditions. The wife-mother was the one who is answerable for any breach of morality (including crime) or convention. Such breeches were most serious, most unbecoming and offensive and completely unforgiveable if a woman committed them. If a man went against the accepted code or broke a convention it was understandable, even expected of him. The tone of the family, the community, the village depended on the example and the discipline of its women. To expect only the woman to be the protector of the well-being of the community and be the one who should maintain the moral standards, is not only lopsided but grossly unjust.

## THE WORST EXPLOITED

In the village, more than even in a town, the woman is the most isolated and exploited human being. The good woman, the accepted woman is the virtuous woman, patient, suffering, hardworking, conventional and venerating the traditions of the past and sacrificing her entire being for her husband, her children, her grand children, her entire family. These are indeed positive values – the fault in this system lies in that these positive values are only meant for the woman and why this double standards. The existing type of system do not promote the well-being of the community, though it is believed it would do so. On the contrary it is detrimental. If a family is to contribute to a community and the community to the nation, it is imperative that both the woman and the man are jointly responsible. The man too should be answerable for any breach of morality or convention. He should *share* with his wife the bringing up of the children and the druggery and difficulties of running the home, often on a shoe string budget. It is in the concept of sharing in love and in justice between husband and wife and between children and parents that makes for a happy and good family which in turn flows into the relationships within the community.

The Rural woman however is happy and content, like Biso Menike, unaware that she is not only exploited by the entire community, but that she is in reality less than a person, devoid of any individuality. This is so because she has been so conditioned over the years to accept this role. To break through the fabric built of the status and position of woman in the family is *very* difficult. In fact the chief obstacle to bringing about any radical change in the woman's role has been this identifying of the woman's role with that of the family role. The family is sacred yet in Sri Lanka's society and more so in the village. There is an unconscious fear that if woman is liberated the family would be destroyed. This is an unwarranted fear born and nurtured by



society to keep the woman oppressed. The family is truly sacred if both man and woman take joint responsibility in all the affairs of the family.

Being a virtuous woman a good mother and wife is not *per se* directly detrimental to any society, neither should the concept of the family unit be broken up. On the contrary there are values in these relationships of the traditional family that should be utilised in the building up of a socialist society. The family is the fundamental matrix of group life and personal development carrying with it mutual obligations and duties—all these are vital factors that are indispensable to socialism.

But unfortunately these concepts though wholesome in themselves have been selfishly maintained in the traditional family to apply to only the relationships within the family itself. They have also been made use by society to condition not only the woman but society itself into a belief that if women are to be involved in the radicalising of society for the building up of a Socialist System, woman will cease to be virtuous, a good mother and a good wife thereby disrupting the family unit. The permissive society of the West which has resulted in an exorbitant increase in divorces and juvenile delinquency has often been cited as a factor against the liberation of the woman.

Here it should also be stated that the very benefits which socialist societies give to women, such as economic independence, equality and maintenance by the father for unmarried mothers, have also resulted in increasing the incidence of broken homes. I was told that in Czechoslovakia, in the city of Prague, every one out of 4 persons are divorced and a high percentage of them are in the first year of married life. This however is not so in the rest of the country particularly in the rural areas. This is an indication that social opinion is a constraint on society and therefore community sanctions should be maintained in a socialist society. All this indicates a radical change in the concept of the family from an individualistic selfish concern to a concern for a person because he is a person in his own rights capable of contributing to the well-being of the whole community and not because he belongs to your family.

## RE-ORIENTING OF FAMILY VALUES

I have dealt in somewhat length on this traditional family role of the woman because it is the fabric built by this role that is difficult to break though in the total liberation of the woman.

This traditional socio-cultural conditioning of the woman has also repercussions in the economic and political spheres. She is bound to the home and hearth so intimately as if she *alone* is



responsible and it leaves her hardly any time to think on matters political or economic, leave aside actively participating in them. Merely to release her into the economic and political field without at the same time changing the attitude of society towards the woman, without re-orienting the family values and without providing the necessary condition to enable her to be involved in the affairs of the nation, is detrimental to the well-being of the country. It is absolutely necessary that society accepts her as an equal to that of man, accepts her as a person in her own right and as a Co-partner of man in every field of activity. Also it is imperative that the community provides creches, nurseries for children, maternity benefits, revolutionize the cooking and eating habits and re-orient the family values from one of family selfishness to community selflessness. If these are not attended to women wanting to develop their personalities and wanting to participate in the affairs of the community and the nation, will only develop a guilt complex in this bourgeois oriented traditional society.

Fortunately with education, the young rural women of Sri Lanka have gradually awoken into a consciousness of wanting to gain their rights as equal partners with that of men. This group is small and the struggle for the liberation of the rural woman is one that needs building up of awareness and organisation on the line mentioned earlier not only among rural woman, but among all women and men of Sri Lanka.

## **LIBERATION OF THE VILLAGE MUST CONTAIN THE LIBERATION OF THE RURAL WOMAN**

Most of the content of the seminar talks on the "Liberation of the Village" covered chiefly the problem of the farmer, the peasant cultivator and solutions were chiefly from a male context. The total liberation of the village can never take place unless and until every organisation, government or otherwise is liberated enough to take into account the contribution that the village woman makes to the family income and to the development of the village as a whole.

From time immemorial the woman has been the gatherer of vegetable foods and it is largely through this occupation that agriculture has developed. In Sri Lanka the rural woman has kept this role for years as she has always worked alongside of man in the field and in developing cottage industries. In the Coconut areas it is the women who make the fibre and the coir, in the rubber areas, women are the tappers, in tea they are the pluckers and in the fishing areas, it is they who clean, cure and sell fish, and in



the rice growing areas they take part in the pre and post harvest work. 77% of the countries population is rural and 50% of the rural population are women and nearly all of these women take part in agricultural activities as listed above, *yet they are not regarded as part of the labour force.*

## THE FORGOTTEN STATISTIC

The rural woman does not also enter the wage earning list. It is she who collects the firewood, the vegetables, the greens and picks fruits daily and yet she is not regarded as contributing to the family income. There are quite a number of families in the village, where the husbands go to the cities for work, and they do not return home for months except send a few rupees on and off to the family and the burden of keeping the home fires burning is on the shoulders of the wife/mother.

The rural woman as contributor to the labour force, does not enter the surveys, the studies and the statistical books. She is the "forgotten Statistic".

## SOLUTIONS

May I suggest a few recommendations to improve the status of the rural woman.

1. Pre-School institutions and creches for children under the age of six, like the schools to be free.
2. All development schemes to include the following.
  - (a) Banks and Credit Councils to entertain applications of women for credit facilities etc. to enable them to set up cottage industries, agriculture and livestock development.
  - (b) Workshops to teach modern techniques on farming, agriculture, light and cottage industries to women as well as to men.
  - (c) Social insurance for women and men peasants.
3. Functional literacy classes where women can be taught the rudiments of economics and arithmetic.
4. Social education with a view to building up a sense of dignity in the woman and her potentialities for the full and equal participation in the establishment of a better society.



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# LIBERATION OF THE VILLAGE

## 2. THROUGH SOCIALISM

### Contents

- TO SOCIALISM THROUGH THE LIBERATION OF THE VILLAGE	1	<i>Tissa Balasuriya, o.m.i.</i>
- LIBERATING THE FARMER THROUGH SOCIALISATION OF AGRICULTURE	18	<i>N. Shanmugaratnam</i>
- EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISM	30	<i>Douglas De Silva</i>
- NEO-COLONIALISM AND ITS IMPACT	35	<i>Nissanka Wijeratne</i>
- SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES SINCE INDEPENDENCE: THE RESPONSES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM	37	<i>Susantha Goonatilaka</i>
- THE PLACE OF THE VILLAGE IN A SOCIALIST ADMINISTRATIVE SET-UP	47	<i>Richard A. Dias</i>
- A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BISO MENIKE	61	<i>Bernadeen Silva</i>
- Charts — Socialism Through Decentralisation at the Village Level.		
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## **Eighteenth Century Indians in Australia**

By P. E. P. DERANIYAGALA

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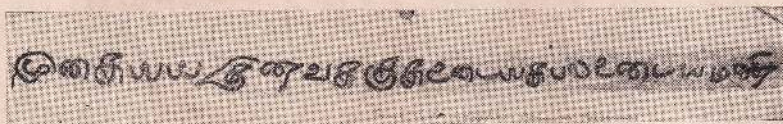
## Eighteenth Century Indians in Australia

BY P. E. P. DERANIYAGALA

(With one Plate)

MEDIEVAL Indians have travelled far afield. Westward the ruins at Zimbabwe in Southern Rhodesia, are probably Indian (Deraniyagala, 1948 and Anandriya, 1951) and Eastward there is evidence now forthcoming that South Indian vessels were visiting Australia in the 18th century.

During the war several Australian or New Zealand soldiers informed me of (a) the wreck of an ancient sailing vessel that is partially exposed for a few weeks each year off their shores, and that the tradition is that it is Indian; (b) the existence of an Indian ship's bell bearing a legend in Tamil script and now kept in the Dominion Museum, Wellington. Enquiry revealed that it is the top of a bronze ship's bell and that it was employed as a cooking vessel by the aboriginals of the interior of North Island, New Zealand for many generations and taken by W. Colenso in 1836 (Reed, 1948). Professor Visvanathan has considered the script to be 400 or 500 years old. The name of the owner of the ship has been put down as (a) Mohoyideen Buks, by J. J. Thompson (b) Mukaideen Vakkusu, by A. Aiyappan.



A pencil rubbing of the inscription upon the Indian ship's bell  $\times \frac{1}{3}$  actual size

Last year (1952) I requested Major R. Raven Hart to secure a rubbing of the inscription when he informed me of his intended visit to New Zealand, and this he has now kindly secured for me (Pl. I), through the courtesy of the Director of the Dominion Museum. I sent a photograph of this rubbing to Dr. A. Aiyappan the Superintendent of the Government Museum, at Madras with the request that he refer it to an expert for translation and for



ascertaining the age of the script. His reply dated 6-3-53 is as follows :—

‘ The characters of the inscription may be assigned to about the beginning of the 19th century A.D. or the end of the 18th century. The inscription reads: *Mukaiyadin Vakkusu-udaiya kappal-udaya Mani*, meaning “ Bell of the ship of Muhaideen Vakkusu ”.’

This supports the view that Australia was visited by South Indian vessels during the 18th century.

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