



# NIRA WICKRAMASINGHE



# SRI LANKA IN THE MODERN AGE

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# Sri Lanka in the Modern Age

A History





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## IDENTITIES AND HISTORIES

'Narratives, then, are never plenipotentiaries over the past.'—Perry Anderson, A Zone of Engagement, p. 180

In the southern Sri Lankan coastal town of Matara in the early nineteenth century a poet recorded the beauty of the city. This was at the height of colonialism, a time when, less than a hundred miles away, the elites of the Kandyan kingdom in the central hills were being stirred into growing forms of resistance. The poet wrote as if the presence or absence of colonial rulers was irrelevant—they did not even warrant a single mention. Was this a feeling shared by most men and women under colonial rule in the deep south? Did their lives go on, unaffected by changes in politics at the level of the state? Was colonialism only a shadow that loomed upon aspects of their lives, other forms of politics, other battles for power? Half a century later a wall painting in the temple of Kathaluwa in the Galle district depicted yakkas (devils) who lived in hell as British colonial masters in top hats and black suits, thus denoting definite derision if not animosity towards colonial rule. How can one fathom the thoughts and feelings of the people? Are they refracted in that poet's musings or in that artist's mural?

Writing a political history of modern Sri Lanka that does not incorporate the richness of multiple experiences is in my view an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> *Kavminikondola*, verses 13–30, cited in Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, 'The Formation of Sinhala Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', MPhil thesis, University of Colombo, 2000, p. 61.

enterprise that lacks heart and soul.<sup>2</sup> Political history in Sri Lanka has been surprisingly static and rigid in the face of the changes that have shaken the discipline of history and the particular study of political history world-wide. There has been at the same time an expansion in scope and a loss of anchors: politics is today an all-encompassing theme that includes all types of power relations in society; in a parallel fashion it is a domain where uncertainties and unevenness prevail, and where figures and results once accepted as given are constantly read anew from different perspectives.

This book is a personal attempt to depict to a general readership what I feel history is made of, on the basis of my own research and a critical reading of recent research by historians and social scientists. Many may disagree with my plot and choice of actors and events. At the heart of my recasting is a recognition of the centrality of the notion of a people-centered politics of identity in order to understand the political yearnings, bargains and alliances that took place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How people moved from vague intimations of identity and difference to pride in collective membership and finally to categorical territoriality and its violent defence constitutes the thread of my project.

Writing a general political history of the last hundred years in a single volume is a task that historians and political scientists have not yet attempted for Sri Lanka. Mainstream historiography has of course dealt with that century in works that focus on particular aspects of twentieth-century Sri Lanka: religious change, communalism, Sinhala nationalism, Tamil separatism are themes that have been covered in a number of excellent books and articles. This book builds upon and draws from these very works.<sup>3</sup> As in the rest of the world, general histories by professional historians in Sri Lanka are out of vogue as most scholars tend to prefer approaching larger issues with the help of a smaller lens. The closest that anyone has come to a general political history of the twentieth century are the works or sections of works written from the 1960s to the 1990s by K.M. de Silva, C.R. de Silva, Robert Kearney,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> James S. Duncan, *The City as Text: the Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1990, and John C. Holt, *The Religious World of Kirti Sri: art and politics in late medieval Sri Lanka*, New York, 1996, stand out as scholars who have read religious-political meanings in the architecture and topography of Kandy and in murals.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I owe much to the insights of Gananath Obeysekere, Michael Roberts, S.J. Tambiah, H.L. Seneviratne and K.M. de Silva, to mention only a few names that will recur in the course of this study.

Howard Wriggins, Wiswa Warnapala, A.J. Wilson, James Jupp and James Manor.<sup>4</sup> In all these books politics is understood in a restricted sense with a focus on regime and constitutional changes, political parties and electoral politics. Rarely do other actors practising a different sort of politics enter the picture.<sup>5</sup>

My own approach departs from that of those authors in three ways. First, the positivist language and choice of themes in these books suggest a nearly exclusive claim to the knowledge of what constitutes history, what has to be recorded—I work with less certainty. Secondly, these books do not sufficiently historicise categories of analysis such as state, nation, Sinhala or Tamil. Thirdly, these books—probably in keeping with their aim of providing an ordered picture of reality—serve as examples of a form of history writing in which a sense of life is absent. Writing with a general reader in mind, I hope to reintroduce a more narrative form of history writing, releasing history from the straitjacket and canons in which it has become constricted and thus evoking a reality that is differentially refracted through varying experiences and positionalities. I have not always relied on unusual sources. In fact books of mainstream scholars have very often been immensely helpful. I have simply emphasised events differently, taken a different reference point or dwelt at length on a footnote of history.

I write, however, with the knowledge and regret that if history is indeed the record of men/women in time, most men and women have never appeared in the written histories of Sri Lanka. Rectifying this bias would mean writing a history from the grassroots, a history of the local based on ethnographical work—something that is quite beyond the ambitions of one individual but can be undertaken through, for example, oral history and the systematic collection of life histories.

The genesis and evolution of critical approaches to identities and categories of analysis in Sri Lankan history have been finely examined in two recent essays and it is not necessary here to dupli-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, London, 1981, Parts V–VI; James Jupp, *Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy*, London, 1978; Robert N. Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)*, Ithaca, NY and London, 1973; James Manor (ed.), *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, London, 1984; Wiswa Warnapala, *The Sri Lanka Political Scene*, New Delhi, 1993; A.J. Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka*, 1947–1979, London, 1979; C.R. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1987; W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, 1960. <sup>5</sup> Wriggins, although writing in the 1960s, saw the importance of other actors that he called interest groups, including caste groups and religious formations.

cate these works. Eric Meyer defined the debate on identities as made up of three contrasting positions: the primordialists conceive the present internal conflict as one reproducing a fundamental antagonism that goes back to ancient times and is anchored in a collective memory transmitted in an uninterrupted fashion through language (Sinhala as opposed to Tamil) and religion (Theravada Buddhism as opposed to Hindu Saivism); the modernists consider that identities as they exist in the present are the fruit of a recent evolution which started in the tenth-thirteenth century period but took shape mainly during the colonial period; more recently a small group of postmodernists has attempted to go beyond this debate and deconstruct the discourse on identities.<sup>6</sup>

A few years earlier John Rogers traced the turning point in the discourse on identities to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when liberal and Marxist scholars developed arguments to counter primordialist understandings of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict. Leslie Gunawardana's 1979 essay became a 'master text' for a certain strand of scholarship.<sup>7</sup> It was written in the context of deteriorating ethnic relations. In the 1980s young scholars, mainly based abroad, whose writings were informed by Edward Said's ideas on orientalism and Foucault's deconstructionism, broadened the base of the critique of mainstream scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing from the modernists' and postmodernists' approach, a recent work attempted to gain a better understanding of the term 'Sinhala' in a particular historical context by locating the term in relation to its 'other' rather than merely tracing its genealogy. The fundamental point was also made that at a given point, for instance

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Eric Meyer, 'Des usages de l'histoire et de la linguistique dans le débat sur les identités à Sri Lanka', *Purusartha* 22, 2000–1, pp. 91–123; John Rogers, 'PostOrientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: the Case of Sri Lanka', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53, 1994, pp. 10–23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, 'The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in history and historiography', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, V, 1979, pp. 1–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Michael Roberts has recently initiated a critical reading of the post-orientalist scholarship in which he critiques the lack of empirical research undertaken by these scholars and their unwillingness to historicise their findings. See Michael Roberts, 'Submerging the People? Post-Orientalism and the Construction of Communalism' in George Berkemer *et al.* (eds), *Explorations in South Asian History: Festschrift for Dietmar Rothermund on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 311–23. See David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, Princeton, 1999 for a thoughtful examination of the need to dehistoricise history.

in the early nineteenth century, there were a number of parallel identitarian discourses giving the term 'Sinhala' more than one meaning. What was questioned here was the entire enterprise of history writing. How should one write history without it becoming a history of the group that became dominant in the modern nation-state? How should one write a history that is not a 'history for'?<sup>10</sup>

Valentine Daniel has argued that communities have different ways of approaching their past and therefore of writing their histories.<sup>11</sup>

Although his claim that Tamils are the only community that conceive their past as 'heritage' rather than 'history' is questionable, more than any other social scientist he has contributed to a rethinking of what constitutes history by adding the qualification 'for whom'. However, few historians have begun to rewrite their history taking these considerations into account.

A critique parallel to that of communities and identities, unmentioned in John Rogers' article, emerged in the 1970s. It was centred around gender, very much an extension of feminist activism. These works pointed out the silences and biases of mainstream historiography where women are absent. Many of these works that tried to retrieve lost histories have been inspired by, if not derived from, similar work undertaken in Western and Indian academia. The influence of Partha Chatterjee's framework for study of gendered renderings of the nation has been crucial. 12 While historical works studying the way gender has been a central trope within dominant Sinhala Buddhism and militant Tamil nationalism have been of some quality, works highlighting more recent trends have been increasingly critiqued as too general in their use of concepts such as patriarchy and little informed by sound fieldwork. Recent scholarship has reestablished the richness and ambiguities of feminism and the existence of a number of social formations within Sri Lanka where gender relations vary considerably.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Devasiri (note 1), pp. 187–201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Claude Lévy-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, London, 1966, pp. 257–60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Cited in Valentine Daniel, Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence, Princeton, 1996, p. 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, New Delhi, 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Janaki Jayawardena, 'Cultural Constructions of the "Sinhala Woman" and Women's Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka', PhD, University of York, 2003.

Unfortunately mainstream political history has remained insensitive to the fact that gender is crucial to the understanding of nationalism. Gender has remained a separate issue in Sri Lankan historiography, where mainstream scholars deny its significance and refuse to read or quote any works from within this discipline; in a parallel situation academics in the field of women's studies rarely read works—even written by women—that do not stem from their own epistemological domain. However, a few political scientists have recently attempted to bridge the gap—gender specialists returning to a social political history, or political scientists who incorporate a gender perspective. In a modest fashion this book tries to capture these two reading and thinking publics, forcing them to confront the 'other'.

Writing about Africa and the political legacy of colonialism, Mahmood Mamdani echoed my own yearnings when he limpidly wrote, 'the challenge today is to define political identities as distinct from cultural identities, without denying that there may be a significant overlap between the two'. <sup>15</sup> Until now indigeneity has been in many postcolonies, as in Sri Lanka, the litmus test for rights with an array of disastrous consequences: rebellions from within the Sinhala people grew out of the state's denial of equality as a directive principle of the state; rebellions by Tamil groups against the legitimate state were premised on the principle that indigeneity allowed territorial claims and legitimised the right to homelands.

Identity and indigeneity have been tied together in the public discourse of multiculturalism and rights and in popular perceptions of Sinhalaness and Tamilness, in a nearly obsessive manner. The time may be ripe to tear them apart and evolve new meanings to express ideas of commonality and being. This book was written from that perspective.

The notion of identity which has been the locus of much intellectual discussion carries several burdens, the main one being its dependence on the meaning given to culture. <sup>16</sup> Scholars in a vari-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See for instance Kumari Jayawardena, Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2000; Neloufer de Mel, Women and the Nation's Narrative, Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, 'Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Over-coming the Political Legacy of Colonialism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43, 4, 2001, pp. 651–64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> See Ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr (eds), *Identities*, Chicago 1995.

ety of disciplines began in the 1980s to address what we might call the politics of identity.<sup>17</sup> Their work expanded on the evolving antiessentialist critique of ethnic, national and racial identities. A parallel shift occurred in the public discourse, from preoccupation with identity in the singular to an effort to think in terms of plurality. Multiculturalism was adopted in many states such as Canada and Australia as state policy to deal with plurality. The tendency was then to read identities as they were situated and formed in relation to one another. There is an obvious contrast between selfunderstandings of identity—which in Europe and elsewhere are often monolithic—and the historical career of identity concepts. Javad Tabatai has for instance pointed out that identity as it is conceived in the world of Islam—in marked contrast with the European conception—is uniform, monotonous and monolithic, founded on an idea of authenticity as something unchanged and unchangeable. European cultural and political identity is as it is because it is plural and in the making, living in crisis and within a crisis. 18 That such a contrast exists between people's self-perception in Europe and in the Islamic world is questionable. A Frenchman still perceives himself as a descendant of the Gauls; generations of schoolchildren learnt about 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois'. The difference resides more in the fact that the academic scholar of Islam can still advocate a monolithic Muslim identity.

Identities, we are constantly forewarned, are dynamic, simultaneously formed and formative. While most would agree today that identities are indeed fuzzy in nature, few scholars have pointed towards a certain scholarly fetishism of fluid and changing identities that has emerged in academia, not dissimilar to the much abhorred essentialism. John Kelly has, for instance, asked whether people are as obsessed with representing themselves as academics are with reading these representations. In many studies there is an assumption that colonised peoples have but one goal, which is to represent themselves in the symbolic, semiotic sense, to constitute an identity for themselves rather than, for example, to seek leverage and varieties of alternatives. People are seen as uncritically ris-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Some of the significant writings of the 1980s in this perspective pertaining to Sri Lanka are Charles Abeysekere and Newton Gunasinghe, *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1987; Social Scientists Association, *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Javad Tabatai, 'L'Incompréhension des civilisations. Le cas de la Perse', Le Débat. Histoire, Politique, Société, 119, March–April 2002, pp. 68–78.

ing to the bait of identity. As Kelly has forcefully put it, it is perhaps time to go beyond the Saidian model of Europe kidnapping others' power to represent themselves and the Andersonian model of utopia where groups are homogeneous, self-defining and exclusive or territory-filling horizontal communities. People are sometimes more eager to say 'This is what we want' than 'This is what we are'. 19

This study will show that many kinds of imagined communities were and still are concurrently sustained, and what sustains them is not only ideas of representations in an exclusively semiotic sense, but also definite structures of legal identification and representation. In Anderson's wake communities, national or otherwise, are best depicted as imagined rather than organically primordial, since they are formed of people who never meet and are unlikely to do so. But from there what are the mechanisms that make some *imagi*naries more foundational than others, and how do some alternatives sustain themselves? Actual regimes of representation, legal and other routines, constitute the communities represented. This work will show that both colonialism and nationalism tried with more or less success to institute specific regimes of representation through the mechanisms of enumeration, the vote, ceremonial ranks and offices, employment through collective religious practices and national rituals and celebrations. Identity is best read as tangible not as a substance, but as something that is embodied in practice.

Through its reflection on identity this book tries to write a history of peoples and communities as opposed to a history of the process of state-building. But in so doing it will not attempt to write a comprehensive history of the 'fragments' of the nation, but rather a history that incorporates the lives of the fragments of society, ethnic groups, small religious communities, caste communities, workers, women's organisations that represent minority cultures and practices.<sup>20</sup> It will do so by charting the historicising process

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> John D. Kelly, "They Cannot Represent Themselves": Threats to Difference and So-called Community Politics in Fiji from 1936 to 1947' in Crispin Bates (ed.), *Community, Empire and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora*, Basingstoke, 2001, pp. 46–86; John D. Kelly, 'Diaspora and World War, Blood and Nation in Fiji and Hawaii', *Public Culture*, 7, 3, 1995, pp. 475–97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> The concept of 'fragment' is borrowed from Gyanendra Pandey, 'In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about the Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today', *Representations*, 37, winter 1992, pp. 27–55, who stresses that the importance of the fragmentary point of view in that it resists the drive for shallow homogenisation and struggles for other potentially richer definitions of the nation and the future political community.

that privileged certain groups and interpretations and sidelined others. Indeed, although multiple oral histories have been collected by anthropologists such as Mark Whitaker in eastern Sri Lanka,<sup>21</sup> undertaking such a study for the entire island is obviously not possible. Furthermore, communities write or relate their own histories, but when recording these one has to be constantly mindful that community leaders and representatives are not neutral parties. Their own agenda is often to aggrandise the caste or religious group they belong to.

To write a history constantly pinpricked by other histories by giving a place to communities and peoples that do not generally appear in the narrative of the state, to reframe the formation of collective identities in Sri Lanka by consideration of the material, institutional and discursive bases, is a less ambitious but more meaningful project than attempting a comprehensive history of the 'fragments' of society.

The ten chapters that compose this book have been with me for a number of years as ideas or unrealised projects. Some parts draw from my own writings in journals and edited volumes, while others are more precisely and obviously reworkings of sections of my doctoral thesis, the book that it spawned and my two recent published works, *Dressing the Colonised Body* and *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*.

The first four chapters, which look at the colonial heritage and the pre-independence half of the twentieth century, focus on the formation of culturally grounded political identities and the ways in which communities negotiated modernity and the birth of democratic politics. The next three chapters look at the framework of rights drawn by the state and the attempts of specific groups and communities—the left movement and the Tamil separatists—to redefine this circle of power. The last three chapters form an attempt to understand the shape of the postcolony as it hesitatingly saunters into the twenty-first century, weighed down by its inheritance and three decades of civil war. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the end of the civil war in 2009 and the new regimes of power and legitimacy that were created by the triumphant and patriotic state.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Mark P. Whitaker, 'A Compound of many Histories: the many pasts of an east coast Tamil community' in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, London and New York, 1990, pp. 145–63.

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land granted in return for duties or services accommedessans

or offices held

chief officer of state in Kandyan kingdom Adigar

ahimsa non-violence almairah cupboard

Amarapura Nikaya fraternity of non-Goyigama Buddhist monks,

> so named because its founder received ordination from Burmese monks in Amarapura, a

former capital of Burma

(literally) 'homeless' anagarika

food made out of rice flour, originally a South аррат

Indian food

Arachchi village level official generally below a Korale,

non-commissioned officer in Lascarin force Arya high status obtainable through the per-

formance of meritorious acts

indigenous system of medicine ayurveda

baddarevenue bana

a Buddhist sermon

Basha Peramuna (literally) Language Front Batgam Sinhalese

caste associated with palanquin bearing and

guard duty

bhikkhu an ordained Buddhist monk

Buddhist teachings and the institutions that Buddha sasana

sustain them

world ruler, universal emperor Cakravarti

Chakra (literally) wheel, circle; denotes the 'wheel of

becoming' or 'round of existence'; also the

spinning wheel

chena forest land brought into cultivation by the

slash and burn method (from Sinhala hena)

Chettiar bankers group of South Indian merchants

and money-lenders.

Comboy type of cloth, originally imported from Cambay coolie 1, Kuli, aboriginal tribe of Gujarat; 2, gener-

ally, unskilled labourer (pejorative)

dagaba also cetiya; domed monument containing rel-

ics of the Buddha, and of other luminaries

a hall where food is given free dayakaya lay

patron of a temple

Dhamma Buddha's teachings

Disava administrative head of a province Disavani province or district under a Disava

Durava Sinhalese caste; generally associated with

toddy tapping

edibala (literally) Great Power

Elu the supposedly pure Sinhalese language, free

from Sanskriti influence

gamsabhava village council

Ganga river

Goyigama Sinhalese caste, cultivators guru (literally) teacher/mentor general strike and shutdown

hatana war Hela see Elu

indi appam also known as string hoppers; originally a

South Indian food

jaggery brown sugar made from the sap of the kitul

palm

jataka tales relating to the previous births of Gautama

Buddha

Kalavava Kala tank

kangany headman, selected from among themselves or

appointed by the employer of gangs of Indian

immigrant labour in a plantation

Karava Sinhalese caste, generally associated with

fishing

katchcheri the headquarters of a district administration

kavi kola leaflets in verse kitul palm jaggery palm

Kola Koti (literally) green tigers

masked drama kolam

rolled-up bun of hair at the back of the head kondeunit of administration, generally part of a Korale

Tamil caste associated with funeral duty Koviyar

kovil Hindu temple

warrior caste, second highest in the four-fold Kshatriya

varna scheme

landraad Dutch civil courts of law with cognisance over

all land disputes of the local population

indigenous soldier Lascarin

districts in the Western and Southern Prov-Low Country

inces, the Chilaw district and the western part

of the Puttalam district

register of lands, cadastral register lekammitti

(literally) central schools Madya Maha

Vidyalayas

Mahabadda (literally) Great Revenue, the Cinnamon

Department

an association of people mahajana

Great Court of Justice in the Kandyan Kingdom Mahanaduwa

Maha Sangha Great Order of Bhikkus Maha Vidyala (literally) college

'Great Chronicle', composed in four parts, Mahavamsa

the first in the sixth century, the second in the thirteenth, the third in the fourteenth and the last in the eighteenth. In the European edition only the first part is called the Mahavamsa. The latter parts form the Culavamsa.

1, a chief headman; until the eight-eenth cen-Mudaliyar

tury a civil and military officer; and an administrator of a Korale in British times; 2, also used only in the Low Country as an honorary

title from the mid-nineteenth century

1, assistant to a Mudaliyar; 2, an honorary title Muhandiram Navalar

Tamil service caste associated with toddy

tapping

Sinhalese caste in the Low Country, astrologers Nekati group of monasteries under single leadership Nikaya drama of operatic character with a large pro-Nurti

portion of prose dialogue

osariya form of wearing the sari in Sri Lanka, mostly

by Kandyans

pada yatra protest march

Pallar Tamil service caste associated with toddy

tapping

Pattu subdivision of a Korale

pansala monastery

Parava caste associated with fishing, found mainly in

South India

perahera procession, pageant pinkama meritorious deed

Pirivena (Buddhist) educational institution attached to

a temple

Pirith Ritual chanting of Buddhist texts

Poson Month of June

pottu a dot worn on the middle of the forehead

Poya day full moon day of the month

Rajakariya lit. King's Duty; encompassed any service to

the king, a lord or a temple in the Kandyan kingdom. In British times also denoted com-

pulsory service to the state.

Rajarata north-central part of the island

Rodis oppressed caste among the Sinhalese, associ-

ated with mendicancy

Ruhuna south-eastern part of the island

Saiva Siddhanta Saiva doctrine

Salagama Sinhala caste, generally associated with cin-

namon peeling

samanera Buddhist novice

Sangha Buddhist monastic community

sarong body cloth stitched together at both ends,

commonly worn by Sinhalese men

satyagraha soul force

Siyam Nikaya fraternity or sect of Buddhist monks domi-

nated by Goyigama caste

swabhasha indigenous language swaraj self-government

thera honorific term for Buddhist monk

Thesavalamai Tamil law toddy lightly fermented drink made

from coconut palm sap

tombo list or register of persons or lands tupasses (derogatory) people of mixed descent

Ukkussa (literally) eagle

Up-Country Central and North-Central Provinces, the

Provinces of Uva and Sabaragamuwa, the Kurunegala district and part of the Puttalam district, the Sinhalese divisions of the districts of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mullaitivu

Vahumpura Sinhalese caste; generally associated with jag-

gery making

Vaishnavites believers in the god Vishnu

Valavva dwelling of chief, manorial residence

Vamsa literature Literature about the lineage

Vedda descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Sri

Lanka predating arrival of the Sinhalese

Vellala Tamil caste; cultivators

Vel-vidane Officer in charge of providing water to the

fields of the village

Vesak second month of the Sinhalese calendar

(May–June); day marking the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha

Vidana/Vidana village level officer

Arachchi

vihara Buddhist temple

Wasala Mudiyanse (literally) Gate Mudaliyar maleficent being, demon

yaktovils healing ritual to chase a demon.

Yodavava Yoda tank

# **ABBREVIATIONS**

B-C Pact Bandaranaike Chelvanayakam pact

BLP Bolshevik Leninist Party

CBOs community based organisations

CIC Ceylon Indian Congress CNC Ceylon National Congress

CP Communist Party

CPSL Communist Party of Sri Lanka
CWC Ceylon Workers' Congress
DDC District Development Council

DJV Deshapremi Janatha Vyapara (People's Patriotic

Movement)

DWC Democratic Workers' Congress

EPRLF Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front EROS Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students.

FP Federal Party

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

IPKF Indian Peace Keeping Force JSS Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya JVP Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna LSSP Lanka Sama Samaja Party

LTTE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

MEP Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United

Front)

NMAT National Movement Against Terrorism

NSSP Nava Sama Samaja Party PA People's Alliance

PLOTE People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam

PR Proportional representation PTA Prevention of Terrorism Act

## ABBREVIATIONS

RAW Research and Analysis Wing SLFP Sri Lanka Freedom Party SVV Sinhala Veera Vidhana

TELO Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation

TSF Tamil Students' Federation
TULF Tamil United Liberation Front

UF United Front

UNCEDAW United Nations Convention on the Elimination of

All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNP United National Party. USP United Socialist Party

VLSSP Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party VOC Vereenigde Oost Indishe Compagnie

WIDER World Institute for Development Economic Research

## PART I

# PRE-INDEPENDENCE YEARS

## CHANGING LIVES

The first four chapters of this book look at the ways in which people, communities and individuals responded to late colonialism, the strategies they devised, the modes of representation they constructed, the forms of identity they assumed for themselves and for others in a variety of situations. As a background to the last five decades of colonial rule in Sri Lanka let us first look at the changes in the way people lived.<sup>1</sup>

In the early twentieth century, beyond the laws and decrees of British colonial rule and often in a parallel development, the lives of the people of Ceylon were changing. Changes visible to the eye were witnessed in the houses built and renovated during this period. Until the early twentieth century tiled houses were not common in villages where most houses had a raised platform of earth with timber posts planted on the platform and a thatched roof on a timber framework. The walls were usually of wattle and daub. The most basic ground plan was rectangular with one or two rooms and an open verandah. Until 1818, when a British proclamation extended the privilege of having a tiled house to a larger group than the adigars, the privilege had been confined to persons having a Commission for office signed by the Governor.<sup>2</sup> But in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This section draws from Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 52–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Adigar was the chief officer of state in the Kandyan kingdom.

# SRI LANKA IN THE MODERN AGE

first decades of the twentieth century the old mud walled houses were gradually being replaced by tiled houses. Official sanction was given to this new development: 'It is a bye-law of most local boards that every new house built must be tiled', testified E.B. Denham.<sup>3</sup> In Jaffna too, two-or three-roomed stone-built houses were signs of prosperity.

For the richer families tiles were imported from British India: Mangalore tiles were in vogue. Granite slabs for the floor and country tiles in temples were traded for glazed flooring of European manufacture, while many of the pigments employed by temple artists—natural products such as roots and brick—were imported from Europe.

One of the few detailed accounts of the furniture in an 'ordinary villager's house' is given in Denham's report of 1911. With the sense of detail of an apothecary he described the furniture in the house of a villager in the Colombo Mudaliyar's division.<sup>4</sup> It was mainly functional but of good quality, for instance, a satinwood *almairah* and a jakwood bed were mentioned. The wall had a few Buddhist pictures and the only concessions to frivolity were the mirrors, wine glasses and clock.

In Kalutara a villager's house contained pictures of the Buddha published and sent out by Mellin's Food Company as an advertisement, together with a portrait of the late John Kotalawela. For commercial companies religious memorabilia reproduced en masse were fast becoming a useful means of promoting their goods.

The pictures on the walls in other simple households were also generally of a religious nature: saints, the Virgin and Child, the birth and renunciation of Prince Siddhartha. Pictures of kings and queens of Europe were also popular, and even available in boutiques in interior villages. These images linked colonised subjects across the subcontinent in an imagined community of servants of the Raj.

In the house of a Vidana Arachchi, Japanese pictures hung on the walls. Western-style hygiene was also entering the home with wash-stands in bedrooms, combs and hairpowder boxes. The custom had long been to have the toilet and bathroom separated from the rest of the house. Highly perfumed soap was in great demand. Even in the interior villages 'Cherry Blossom' and 'Famra' soap

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> E.B. Denham, Report of the Census of 1911, Colombo, 1912, p. 159.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Mudaliyar was the chief headman and the administrator of a Korale in British times.

## PRE-INDEPENDENCE YEARS: CHANGING LIVES

and powder were available in small boutiques and sold in great quantities. Soap was sold at Rs 35c a bar and toilet powders at 40c a tin. A popular perfumed powder was 'White Rose',<sup>5</sup> a name that married in one image the white colonial master with the rose, evoking the gentleness of his civilisation. The irony was that the Sinhala villager had probably never smelt the fragrance of a rose. But through contact with cosmetics the labouring body of the Sinhala man and woman became a desiring body. A letter to the editor of the *Sinhala Jatiya* castigated the new trend of women 'to waste money unnecessarily to beautify themselves, following the latest fashions and using strange things like perfume'.<sup>6</sup>

Denham's interest in collecting such data reflects the colonial ruler's concern with the body of colonial subjects. Hygiene, domesticity and manners were merely components in a larger network concerned with their bodies. The native body was an imagined subject that generated pervasive concern in official, settler and missionary discourse.

Food habits also changed with the import of foreign products. The middle classes drank imported gin, brandy and whisky and, as one would expect, led the lifestyle of English gentlemen and women or what they imagined this to be. Aerated waters were commonly consumed and to meet the demand manufacturers had sprung up on the island. Cream soda was among the most popular drinks. The consumption of meat increased considerably as the rise in the number of butchers and cattle thefts proves. At well-todo village weddings meat was now being served. With festivals being celebrations of belonging and membership through the sharing of food, the sharing of meat created a new basis for social interaction. Although there are no data relating to this matter it was probably in Christian communities that meat was eaten. In the daily food of the people, too, changes were taking place: tea, coffee and milk were gradually replacing rice conjee, cold rice water and buttermilk. Tea boutiques were springing up everywhere especially near railways. The

100 per cent increase in the amount of preserved milk imported between 1901 and 1911 reflected the change in consumption habits. In the same way prepared foods for children such as malted milk and Mellin's and Allebury's foods were being consumed, as this saved time. The Ceylon described by Denham was one at the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> E.B. Denham, p. 170.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Sinhala Jatiya, 1 Feb. 1923.

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threshold of the age of modernity where women went to work and spent minimal time in the kitchen. The popularity of tinned soups, meats and sardines was such that every bazaar was stocked with these products.

Perhaps as significant as the adherence to Western types of food by the middle classes was the wholesale adoption as virtual national foods of various south Indian foods such as appam and indi appam brought to Colombo by the Malayalee migrant workers. In matters of food the island was a crucible of influences.

Even more than changes in food, the rural areas resolutely laid claims to modernity with the conquests of the sewing machine and the gramophone, which brought Sri Lanka into the modern age. While the gramophone—visible in the colony through advertisement and showrooms—became a significant organising principle of a modern colonial private home in urban areas, the sewing machine could be found in the most remote rural areas of the island. It epitomised modernity: easy to work, noisy, faster than humans and an instrument of standardisation. It could create replicable serials. In this sense it was as much a part of the driving power of modernity as photography or print. With the sewing machine the human touch disappeared, the particular was replaced by a reproducible model.<sup>7</sup>

Sari blouses for instance could be made in vast quantities as each person had a block pattern which the tailor referred to. The sewing machine contributed to the *coup de grâce* for traditional weaving by its art of replicating rather than creating unique products.

In the late nineteenth century a number of companies were vying for the market. Among them was Wrenn Bennet and Co. which advertised 'the ideal sewing machine selling by thousands in England'. But Singer was by far the most successful.

The first shop and office of the Singer Sewing Machine Company were established in Colombo in 1877 at 27 Main Street, Pettah. In

1851 Singer introduced the first practical sewing machine with two roller feeds. Subsequently it developed domestic straight stitch hand operated models. The machines were marketed through Singer-owned retail outlets. Branches were next opened in Kandy, Galle and Hatton. Thereafter the Singer Sewing machine Company

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition, 2nd ed. London and New York, 1991, pp. 182–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ceylon Examiner, 23 March 1896, p. 1.

### PRE-INDEPENDENCE YEARS: CHANGING LIVES

established branches in many towns throughout the island. People accepted the machines with open arms because Singer offered the sewing machine on easy payment terms from the start. An advertisement in the Sinhala paper *Lakmina* warned against imitations and expounded the after-purchase servicing as well as the easy payment scheme. The first users were housewives and tailors; the first clothes sewn were jackets, shirts and sarongs.

A typical Singer advertisement went:

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If you wish to reduce your tailoring expenses
If you wish to save your time
If you wish to see your family neatly dressed
If you wish to see your ladies engaged in useful and intelligent work at home.<sup>10</sup>
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The appeal was clearly to the housewife and displayed a conventional perception of a useful occupation for womenfolk. Indeed, at that time middle class women were also becoming involved in leisure activities—such as piano playing—which were not considered useful by many.

Some tailoring establishments such as Whiteaway Laidlaw & Co., Drapers and Outfitters advertised themselves as users of sewing machines—an added proof of quality tailoring—in 1918. With the conquest of the sewing machine the tailor too became modernised. Hannalis, the caste of Sinhalese tailors, had never been numerous since they worked mainly in the courts of the kings. In the early nineteenth century they were described by Davy as 'very few'. A century later tailoring had mainly become the preserve of Tamils and Burghers as the newspaper advertisements indicate.<sup>11</sup>

Competing with Singer were other brands such as National and Pfaff. National advertised its product in the Sinhala papers thus:

New national sewing machine
No home is complete without this machine.

The machine was sold less as a useful item and more as a status symbol. 12 Pfaff sold it as an ideal Christmas or wedding present. 13 The sewing machine would gradually become a central part of a middleclass woman's dowry in Ceylon. Its appeal also came from its un-assuming size. Unlike other machines of the modern age such

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<sup>9</sup> Lakmina, 4 Jan. 1895, p. 1.
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ceylon Independent, 6 Feb. 1904, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Bryce Ryan, Caste in Ceylon, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 113–14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Lakmina, 19 Jan. 1918, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ceylon Independent, 6 Feb. 1903, p. 7.

as trains or cars, it was 'human' in its size and appearance. Not long after Mahatma Gandhi issued a sweeping ban on the use of Western machinery in India in the early 1920s he decided to make one exception: the sewing machine. This, he explained after learning how to operate a Singer during a jail term, was one of the few useful things ever invented.

1

## COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS

'Does Brazil, Arabia, Persia, any of the individual kingdoms of India, Pegu, Siam, the Moluccas, China or Japan produce such wealth in such a small compass as Ceilão?'

— J. Ribeiro, *History of Ceilão with Notes from De Barros, De Couto and Antonio Bocarro*, Part II, transl. from the Portuguese by P.E. Peris, Galle: Albion Press, n.d., p. 340.

'[They] eat stones and drink blood, they give two or three silver coins for one lime or one fish, the sound of their cannon is louder than that of thun-der at the end of the world and the cannon balls fly many leagues and shatter forts of iron and stone.'

— *Alakesvarayuddhaya*, sixteenth century, in A.V. Suraweera (ed.), *Alakesvarayuddhaya*, Colombo, 1965, p. 28.

Colonialism touched Ceylon and its peoples in an uneven fashion. Only in the western and south-western regions of Ceylon had there been early signs announcing the burgeoning of modernity: the growth of towns, a moving labour force and population flows from South India, the spread of the use of money, an increase in production and the expansion of long distance trade had broken the isolation and insularity of many people. Lives had become interconnected across territories, seas and oceans.

Changes that had commenced between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries under the Portuguese and Dutch gathered momentum during British rule. The market society that developed was dominated by the needs and demands of plantation capitalism—coffee, then tea, coconuts, rubber—and commercial capital-

ism. The needs of the economy were answered by an influx of labourers of South Indian origin to service the plantations and to a lesser extent towns, ports and roads. This added a further element of diversity to the population of an island that had received migrants from South India since ancient times and had integrated them into Sinhala society, and through colonial encounters spawned new social formations such as Christian or Catholic Sinhalese or Tamils and people of mixed descent.

The new export economy became an integral though subordi nate part of a vast imperial network of production and exchange which was more or less coordinated and controlled by the metropolis in London. Within the island the extension of capitalism was partial. Even though the use of money spread relatively rapidly and widely, norms and values of an earlier age did not cease to exist. But modernity touched everything, like a light sprinkle of rain that people hardly felt. Tinned food was enjoyed in the most isolated rural hideaways. Ginger ale was consumed far from centres of urban sophistication. There was of course a considerable regional variation in the degree to which the new institutions, norms and practices spread. Modernity was not evenly distributed, as was demonstrated by the multifarious ways in which different social groups creatively recast the 'tradition/modernity' dichotomy imposed by colonialism, both transforming tradition and creating specific, local modernities.

## Conquest and sovereignties

Popular memories of Portuguese and Dutch colonialism are lost in the dust of the lands that were conquered. While the poet Alagiyavanna sang the praise of Rajasinha I of Sitavaka in the sixteenth century, and the triumph of Rajasinha II against the Portuguese at Randenivela and Gannoruva inspired many other poets, the lives and woes of the people over whom these kings reigned remain un-known. How did colonial rule touch people beyond the violence of conversion and forced labour? Did the natives marvel at the technological advance of the Europeans? How did they invent Europe in their minds? How did they invent themselves?

Land. Colonial conquest was predicated on superior sea power and arms, military organisation, political strength and economic

wealth.1 For four hundred years the island of Sri Lanka was the prey of successive naval powers that controlled parts or the totality of its land. Colonial rule was a multifaceted form of control. Popular history has generally differentiated between Portuguese rule (1505–1658), Dutch rule (1658–1796) and British rule (1796– 1948) in the guise of first the East India Company and then the Crown. The 'rule' of these three powers was sometimes nothing more than a presence that grew, spread or declined in space and time. A feature of Portuguese activities in Asia and Africa was the aim not so much of territorial conquest as the control of commerce by means of naval power. For them 'Ceilão', as they called the island, was a strategic point through which the spice trade passed. In 1595–6 Dutch ships appeared in the Asian waters and in 1602 the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), which benefited from extensive state support and monopolistic privileges, posed a deliberate challenge to the Portuguese position in the East. While Portuguese and Dutch claimed sovereignty over the lands they conquered over a period of 150 years by taxing, coercing and converting, the British used an array of subtle technologies of rule that convinced the natives that this rule was real and not virtual.

The extent of land that fell under the sovereignty of colonial rulers in Sri Lanka varied considerably over time. Sovereignty was never total and was often a contested terrain. While one colonial ruler would claim power over a particular patch the inhabitants of that area would often give their allegiance to another ruler. Although the Dutch *Plakkaats* (legal proclamations) displayed elements of systematic rule over the subject, it was British rule that most clearly attempted to create a modern colonial state where natives would become colonial subjects.

European colonisers of Ceylon considered the perimeter of their authority as a frontier, a temporary boundary that they were compelled to push forward until it reached the physical limits of the island. Sri Lankan kingdoms were principally identified according to their metropolitan centre, for example Sitavaka (the exception

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Channa Wickremesekera's book *Kandy at War: Indigenous Military Resistance to European Expansion in Sri Lanka, 1594–1818*, New Delhi, 2004, explores the main elements of Kandyan resistance and its effectiveness against European military power during the period of Kandyan-European military confrontation He argues that Kandy was doomed by the beginning of the 19th century to fail against an adversary far superior in weapons and resources and able to conduct a total war.

being the kingdom of Jaffna with its capital at Nallur), or the region in which they were located, for example the 'hill-country kingdom'. Sri Lanka, from being a cluster of centrebased overlapping societies—galactic states, as it were—became a boundary-based society where the sea played the main role.<sup>2</sup> The topographical propensity is not, however, a privilege of modernity, even if modernity strengthened it. Indeed recent work on popular texts known as 'boundary books' or *kaidaimpot* shows a near-obsessive concern of the premodern polity with the demarcation of the island into divisions, districts and villages.<sup>3</sup>

When stormy sea forced the fleet of the son of the Portuguese Viceroy in India Don Lourenço de Almeida to dock at Galle in 1505, as popular history recounts, there were three native centres of political power: two Sinhalese kingdoms in Kotte and Kandy and a Tamil kingdom in Jaffna. The kingdom of Kotte was only a shadow of the powerful state of the classical period. It claimed over-lordship of Kandy and the entire island, but in fact none of the three kingdoms had the power to assert dominance over the other two. Thus there were no clear boundaries between each kingdom. There were also differences between ritual sovereignty and actual political control, and allegiance of chieftains wavered from one kingdom to another. Some of the Vanniar chieftains, in the Vanni region in the East of the island, appear to have recognised the over-lordship of the Kotte and Jaffna kingdoms equally and at times acknowledged both simultaneously.

Conquest of the land by the Portuguese was a gradual process. They were initially given permission to build a residence in Colombo for trade, but they soon showed their true ambition when they fortified the trading post and displayed hostility towards the island's Muslim traders who monopolised trade in and around the city. The first clash between the Sinhalese and the Portuguese witnessed the Sinhalese forces armed with bows and swords aided by the Muslims attacking the fort and building a stockade alongside it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The metaphor of a galactic model—i.e. a central planet surrounded by differentiated satellites which are more or less 'autonomous' entities held in orbit and within the sphere of influence of the centre—is borrowed from S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge, 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: the Premodern and Precolonial Formations', ICES Ethnicity Course Lecture Series 1, Colombo, 2004.

The Portuguese soon exploited internal divisions among the ruling family to extend their power over the island. They offered protection to the young king of Kotte, Dharmapala, in return for privileges that included a continuous payment in cinnamon and permission to rebuild the fort at Colombo. The young monarch eventually converted to Roman Catholicism, an act that was to be exploited by the rival king at Sitawake Mayadunne. The latter soon succeeded in annexing much of the Kotte kingdom and later his son besieged the Colombo fort a number of times. The Portuguese were on one occasion compelled to eat the flesh of their dead to avoid starvation. The kingdom of Sitavaka (1521-94) rose to become the predominant power in the island but collapsed after the death of King Rajasinha in 1593.4 Without a fleet the Low Country Sinhalese did not succeed in chasing away the Portuguese who could always rely on reinforcements arriving by sea from their base at Goa. When Dharmapala died in 1597 he bequeathed his territories to the king of Portugal (at that time the king of Spain), who asked his emissary the Captain-General to take formal possession of the kingdom. The Portuguese became de jure sovereigns over the lowlands of Sri Lanka. The north of the island was annexed only in 1619 after two failed expeditions.

Attempts by the Portuguese to invade the kingdom in the mountains in the centre of the island met with resounding defeats in 1592–4 and many times later. The origins of the Kandyan kingdom, situated in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, date back according to 'tradition' to the fifteenth century, when Senasammatha Vikramabahu declared his independence from the king of Kotte around the year 1474. The full name of the kingdom was 'Kanda uda pas rata' or the five districts on the mountain. The Portuguese shortened it to Candea, using the name for both the kingdom and its capital Senkadagalanuwara. The Kandyan kingdom became stronger as it welcomed victims of Portuguese religious persecution, and after 1616 instigated rebellions in the Low Country. Again in 1630 the Portuguese were heavily defeated by the army of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> C.R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Sitavaka' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II (c. 1500 to c. 1800), Peradeniya, 1995, pp. 61–104; Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Lorna S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1707–1782*, Colombo, 1988, p. 22, note 1.

King Senarat led by his son Rajasinghe. Rajasinghe II (1635–87) followed a risky diplomatic course, allying with the Dutch to oust the Portuguese.

The Dutch commercial company, the VOC, entered the Sri Lankan scene at the beginning of the seventeenth century under the pretext of helping the king of Kandy wage war against the Portuguese. After wresting control of the island's richest cinnamon lands, the Dutch eventually pushed the Portuguese out of Colombo and Jaffna. The extent of land they occupied was not however as large as the former Portuguese territories. Outside Jaffna, to the west, south and east, the Dutch held less territory. The ports of Trincomalee, Kottiyar and Batticaloa, for example, now belonged to Kandy.

Interestingly, Kandyan officials treated the Dutch as their feudatories and insisted the lands administered by the latter belonged to their own king. People's perception—when it was expressed at times of rebellion against the Dutch—was also that the king of Kandy possessed overlordship of the territories ruled by the VOC.<sup>6</sup> When a war was waged against the Dutch the king of Kandy raised his army by enlisting peasant soldiers from the intermediate belts between the lowlands and highlands. A number of war poems composed during the Portuguese occupation of the lowlands, such as Rajasiha Hatana and Maha Hatana, had emphasised the Kandyan kings' overlordship over a territory that included the Low Country. Whether the people shared the patriotic sentiment expressed in these poems cannot be fathomed. A similar sentiment appears quite clearly in some of the Matara writings emanating from the lowlands, where the kings of the Kandyan kingdom were praised as though the poets lived in an area under Kandyan rule rather than under Dutch colonial rule.<sup>7</sup> One of the prominent works of Matara literature, Kavminikondola, alludes (verses 10-11) to Kirthi Sri Rajasingha as king of the whole of Lanka.8

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> S. Arasaratnam, 'The Consolidation of Dutch Power in the Maritime Regions, 1658–1687' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *A History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II, p. 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The term 'Matara literature' refers to the movement of literary activity that took place mainly in the deep-southern areas of the island at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, 'The Formation of Sinhala Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', MPhil, University of Colombo, 2000, pp. 60–1.

Dutch governors were sometimes identified as regional rulers under the Kandyan king and referred to as 'governadoru', a perception sustained by the practices of the Dutch themselves. On one occasion the Dutch Governor Pijl referred to himself as the 'king's most faithful governor and humble servant'. Dutch sovereignty was thus more virtual than real, as the complexity of the reactions of the people subjected to colonial rule suggests. The main works of Matara literature were sponsored by members of a low-country Sinhala elite that remained aloof from any opposition to colonialism and participated as minor officials in Dutch rule. The sentiments of the more common people cannot be discerned from these sources, but the main picture evokes a certain amount of autonomy and freedom for the local elites in the maritime areas.

While the Dutch were in possession of the Low Country, King Rajasinghe of Kandy organised a resistance that combined guerrilla warfare, negotiations and attempts at alliances with France and England. After his death, as Kandyans did not cease to incite the Low Country Sinhalese to revolt against colonial rule, the VOC resorted to force. After an unsuccessful attempt to capture Kandy in 1763, the Dutch succeeded two years later, but failed to consolidate their victory. However, in 1766 colonial rule was given written sanction when the Kandyan king was obliged to sign a treaty that gave the Dutch sovereignty over the entire coastline of the island up to a depth of four Sinhalese miles. From then on the kingdom of Kandy became a landlocked entity. A Sinhalese proverb described the transfer of power from Portuguese to Dutch colonisers in these terms: 'We gave pepper and got ginger in exchange'. Indeed Dutch ambitions would prove to be just as devastating for the natives as those of the Portuguese.

The commercial decline of the Dutch occurred at the time the British East India Company, involved in Indian politics, took interest in the island for strategic reasons. The excellent port of Trincomalee was a vital base for the control of the southern coast of India. In 1782 the French and British competed for the port, which remained in the hands of the Dutch until the occupation of Holland by the French during the revolutionary wars. The Stathouder, a refugee in London, authorised Britain to annex Ceylon in 1796.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid. and Tikiri Abeyasinghe, 'Princes and Merchants: Relations between the Kings and the Dutch East India Company in Sri Lanka, 1688–1740', *Journal of the Sri Lanka National Archives*, 2, 1984, p. 40.

Changing structures and landscapes. Although there had been trade with other countries before—rice and cloth had been imported from India, while exports varied from arecanut to cinnamon, gems, pearls and elephants—it was the Portuguese who brought the inhabitants of Ceylon into direct contact with Europe. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese were intent on building a system of trading and military outposts connected by sea lanes. They came to Ceylon, or what they called Ceilão, for spices more than for Christians. Their aim was to do away with the middleman and establish direct contact with the sources of spices in the East. Unlike their Asian competitors the Portuguese were armed traders. Political control over the areas of production was necessary to secure a reliable supply of the desired goods. In Ceylon they found cinnamon, which they developed by relying on the Salagama peoples, who were relatively recent migrants from South India, to provide their counters with supplies. Portuguese rule over the southwestern plains lasted for only six decades and over Jaffna for only forty years, periods during which rebels and hostile armies threatened them on a number of occasions.

Portuguese colonialism did not lead to substantial changes in the administrative system. The existing basic structure of native administration was not altered. The archetype remained the Sinhalese system. The Sinhalese administration was hierarchical, with the king at the apex and several grades of officials under him. His kingdom was divided into four Disavas or provinces: Matara in the south, Sabaragamuwa in the south-central region, the Four Korales that lay to the northeast of Colombo, and the Seven Korales that covered the northern plain and stretched as far as the land of the Vanni. Each Disava was subdivided into Korales. While the officer administering a Disava was called the Disava, the officer administering a Korale was called the Korale Vidana or simply the Vidana. The Vidana's functions were both administrative and military. He attended the king's court, appointed the subordinate officers, allotted lands, and summoned and led the provincial Lascarin force (ordinary soldiers) in war. The Lascarins in the early seventeenth century numbered between 4,000 and 12,000 people who were generally recruited either among the Nayar from Kerala or among the Karava/Karayar.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Eric Meyer, 'Labour Circulation between Sri Lanka and South India in Historical Perspective' in Claude Markovitz, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subramanyam (eds), Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950, New Delhi, 2003, p. 64.

The Vidana also had extensive civil and criminal jurisdiction over the inhabitants of his area.

Coexisting with this system based on territory was a 'departmental system' consisting of a number of *badda*s. The term *badda* denotes a caste group organised as a unit for purposes of revenue and service to the state. The most important *badda*s in seventeenth-century Kotte were those concerned with the production of cinnamon and the capture, taming and care of elephants.

Portuguese were installed at the top layer of the administrative system—chief officials being the captain-general and superintendent of revenue. The Portuguese captain-general stepped into the vacuum created by the remoteness of the King of Portugal. People of the island appear to have adopted the same mode of address and salutation towards the captain-general that they had employed for their own rulers. Ribeiro noted that he was addressed as deiyo (God), the usual mode of addressing the king. Even the Sinhala Chronicle, the Rajavaliya, used the term Raja (king) to denote this officer.11 Although Portuguese governors were put in charge of each province and even referred to as Disavas, the customary hierarchy determined by caste and land ownership remained unchanged. The Portuguese took over not only the territorial and departmental organisation (badda) but also the native military organisation that consisted of ordinary soldiers commanded by the Disavas, the Mudaliyars and other officers.

The principal change in the administration introduced by the Portuguese was the creation of a separate branch for revenue matters. A Superintendent of Revenue, assisted by a *feitor* (factor), was put in charge of government revenue and expenditure. Revenue farmers were used to collect a number of taxes, but under Portuguese rule revenue from export of agricultural products was clearly much more important than taxes on land and its produce.

For a person living through these troubled times, the Portuguese also transformed the landscape of those parts of the island they occupied—essentially the south-western plains—by transplanting three main institutions and their constituent building types: the *feitoria*, the fort and the church gave visibility to the Portuguese presence. The *feitoria* was the residence of the Superintendent of Revenue and the *feitor*, the Portuguese royal trading representative, and also served as the royal warehouse. In Colombo the Portuguese

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Tikiri Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon 1594–1612*, Colombo, 1966, pp. 76–7.

dismantled their *feitoria* in 1507 and returned in 1517 to construct a fort, quite plainly a military establishment, using a simple plan. The fort of Colombo was very similar to a medieval castle with a single line of ramparts, a ditch and a moat. After 1517 the intentions of the Portuguese had clearly matured from alliance with the kingdom of Kotte to annexation. They were proving to be more than 'coastguards who had got out of hand'.

When the Dutch took control of the lowlands and the Jaffna peninsula they moved the administrative headquarters from Galle to Colombo, but they maintained, just as the Portuguese had done, much of the indigenous administrative system. It was a system of indirect rule with Dutch officials in the higher echelons of the administration and native chiefs below them. 14 The administrative structure was broadly divided into three groups, commercial, civil and military. The Dutch governor of Lanka, who ruled aided by a Council, was at the apex of the administrative ladder. Sri Lanka was divided into three commands: Colombo under the governor himself, and Jaffna and Galle under lieutenant-governors. In civil administration the Dutch found it useful to take on for themselves the office of Disava. The posts of Disava—there was one each for Colombo, Jaffna and Galle, and later for Batticaloa and Matara were thus filled by Dutchmen who had supervisory control over the indigenous administrative service. 15 Each Disavoni was, as before, divided into Korales, Pattus and villages with Mudaliyars, Korales and Atukorales, all natives, as their chief administrative officials. Minor chieftains who had converted to Calvinism from Roman Catholicism retained their positions. The VOC modified the headman system, creating a Mahabadda (cinnamon department) for Salagama Vidanes and headmen who owed allegiance to the Dutch captain of the Mahabadda, thus placing them outside the traditional hierarchies. 16 Native officials were payed for their services through accommedessans, the grant of revenues of productive land.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> C.R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in the early Sixteenth Century: Political Conditions' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), A History of Sri Lanka, vol. II, pp. 11–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Tikiri Abeyasinghe, in ibid., citing the *Culavamsa*, the official Sinhala Chronicle, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Sinnapah Arasaratnam, Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658–1687, Amsterdam: Djambatan NV, 1958.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Chapter 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> C.R. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1987, p. 139; K.W. Goonewardena, The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1638–1658, Amsterdam, 1958.

Dutch rule, more than Portuguese rule, created a specific colonial space in Ceylon characterised by certain easily recognisable elements such as the fort, the church, the canal and in its last phase the plantation. The landscape changed dramatically with the development of the ports of Galle, Colombo, Trincomalee and Batticaloa, and the system of canals that spread throughout the island to facilitate internal trade. The canal system extended from the Kelaniya river to the Maha Oya and descended further down to Galle and Matara. The east and north too were developed for water navigation, sometimes in a combination of flood protection and irrigation schemes.

In western towns such as Colombo, Negombo, Kalutara and Kalpitiya; in southern coastal towns such as Galle, Matara, Tangalle, Hambantota and Katuwana; and in the interior, as in the north at Mannar Jaffna and Elephant Pass and in the east at Batticaloa and Trincomalee, the Dutch erected forts with a bastion, ramparts and a ditch form of fortification to make a ring round the coast protecting the lowlands from intruders arriving from the sea. Only a few forts were constructed inland to fend off any threats from the kingdom of Kandy. These forts were not castles but were made of earth and only encased in stone. However, their strength was clear from the small total number of Dutch garrisons in Sri Lanka.

Churches built by the Dutch provided visibility to Dutch rule in, for instance, Colombo, Galle and Jaffna; simple in form and almost stern in their appearance, they were nevertheless embellished by the use of gables. They peppered the territories, but did not overshadow the Catholic churches, more numerous and more elaborate. The changes in the landscape bore witness to a systematic economic policy of the Dutch to turn Ceylon into a colony of exploita tion. The concept of plantation agriculture was an innovation of the last phase of Dutch rule. From the outset their idea had been to obtain mainly cinnamon but also pepper, cardamoms and nuts cheaply for resale overseas. In the case of cinnamon they soon realised the need to control prices through the control of production. Thus, the plantation system came as a necessity. The organisation still remained, as during Portuguese rule, with the Salagamas, but the latter were now compelled to deliver cinnamon at a fixed price. In exchange the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> S. Arasaratnam, 'The Consolidation of Dutch Power in the Maritime Regions, 1658–1687', in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *A History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II, pp. 211–32; D.A. Kotelawele, 'The VOC in Sri Lanka 1688–1766: Problems and Policies' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *A History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II, pp. 233–80.

Salagamas were given land to cultivate for their own subsistence, but when the demand for cinnamon grew the Salagamas had to neglect their paddies. This led to discontent and sometimes to revolts. The Dutch reacted by bringing labour from South India and creating the first plantations they themselves managed.

At the end of the eighteenth century the largest plantation was situated in Maradana in the vicinity of Colombo. Others of a smaller size stretched along the sea coast near Negombo, Kalutara, Point de Galle and Matara. Cinnamon trees continued to grow in a wild state in the interior, but the established idea that cinnamon thrived only in the jungles had definitely been debunked. The principle of plantation production was extended to other crops such as coffee, cotton and indigo, while the cultivation of pepper and cardamom was encouraged within Dutch territories. For a native living during these years the vision of large plantations manned by Dutchmen would have been met with some surprise and perplexity.

While the landscape of the rural areas was transformed by new modes of production such as the plantation system and new modes of travel provided by the canals, the layout of cities also changed in Dutch-held territories. The city of Colombo was built up through three different stages: first the fort, then the Pettah or town, and then the outskirts or New Bazaar. The Dutch administration did not allow migrants to settle inside the town, though natives were allowed to enter for trade and leave before dusk. The Fort and the Pettah were the areas exclusively intended for military personnel, Company officers and Free Burghers. Migrants were segregated by ethnic or caste groups and concentrated in the outskirts of the town.<sup>18</sup>

J. Haafner has given us a lively description of the city of Colombo:

The fort has a very fine appearance and is, in some places, in good repair, but some parts of it are in a very dilapidated condition. Several new bastions were constructing when we were there: my friend Raumer was the engineer, and had the direction of the works. The Governor, and the principal public official characters reside in the fort. There are very fine streets and houses in it and it also contains the magazines, arsenals and counting houses of the Dutch East India Company.

The city is very pleasantly situated on the side of a fine broad river, full of fish and crocodiles. The streets are very wide and of considerable length. There are many taverns and coffee-houses, kept in the Dutch manner, where people

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> K.D. Paranavitana, Land for Money: Dutch Land Registration in Sri Lanka, Dehiwela, 2001, pp. 124–5.

amuse themselves at billiards, bowls, chess and other games... There are many beautiful walks along the banks of the river, where multitudes amuse themselves, particularly on Sundays and the suburbs are full of liquor-shops and casinos which are always full of soldiers and the working classes of the people.<sup>19</sup>

Resistance. Accounts of rebellions and revolts are the only traces left of the way indigenous people perceived Portuguese and Dutch rule in the maritime provinces. Were these sporadic, spontaneous movements led by classes that felt their place was being usurped by Portuguese and Dutch rulers, or did they reveal a larger or even popular discontent?

We know that collaboration with Portuguese rulers was a reality, although only a few Sinhalese men rose to high ranks. Don Fernando Mudaliyar became captain-major of Colombo while others such as Peter de Abrew Mudaliyar and Belchior Butalho Mudaliyar became generals in the Portuguese army.<sup>20</sup> These individual cases do not prove that the upper classes as a whole collaborated with the Portuguese. In the same way the six major rebellions and four minor outbreaks of resistance over forty-four years in the Kotte lands can be read as aberrations, sporadic and unconnected events, just as they have sometimes been hailed as signs of native resistance to foreign rule. Some understanding of these rebellions can be gathered from the type of leaders they spawned: these leaders were not related to the royal houses, nor did they represent or head popular movements baring a few exceptions. One reason was that the Portuguese had preempted such a situation by exiling potential leaders of royal stock to far away destinations. Leadership of the resistance was instead drawn from a broad spectrum— Mudaliyars in the revolt of Edirille Rala in 1630, Lascarin captains, and, in the case of Kuruvita Rala, a fisherman's son.

Revolts have been described as spontaneous, perhaps due to the lack of data related to any organisation or plan or other modes of demand predating these revolts. What actually triggered them? Was it, as has been suggested, 'a desire to get rid of the foreigner and a hostility to Roman Catholicism'?<sup>21</sup> Had Portuguese land

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> J. Haafner, *Travels on Foot Through the Island of Ceylon* (translated from the Dutch), first published 1821, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995, pp. 82–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> C.M. Fernando, 'History of Ceylon' in Arnold Wright (ed.), Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon, Colombo, 1907, p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Tikiri Abeyasinghe, 'Portuguese Rule in Kotte 1594–1638' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *A History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II, pp. 127. For more details see

policy and the lawlessness of Portuguese officials antagonised the people or only the chiefs? The fact that the Portuguese felt that by neutralising the chiefs—deporting them or depriving them of power—they would avert the threat of rebellion suggests that the common people did present in their eyes a real threat.

The Jaffna peninsula was not exempt from similar outbreaks. Portuguese missionaries had converted many in the Jaffna kingdom, especially among the Parava community from the island of Mannar. King Sangily responded by decapitating the resident priest and 600 of his congregation. In 1560 Portuguese attempts to capture Jaffna failed and the Viceroy sailed to Mannar where he established a fort. In 1619 the kingdom of Jaffna was finally annexed by Lisbon. There were several risings against the Portuguese but they were all eventually crushed. The most widespread protest occurred in 1628 when a small force from Kandy attacked Jaffna and the people rose in revolt. However, the combined Sinhala and Tamil forces were defeated and the Portuguese gradually regained control of the kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

Only the central highland kingdom of Kandy remained independent of the Portuguese, who spent the next half century trying to annex it—in 1630 they were ambushed and massacred. However, they never succeeded, and did not acquire more than patches of territory along the coasts.

Armed opposition to Dutch rule emerged from economic rather than political grievances. Thus the rebellion of cinnamon peelers on 1757–8 was caused by their deep-seated economic grievances. The Dutch needed to preserve the jungle lands where cinnamon grew wild at a time when more and more peasants were looking for arable land to clear for paddy, *chena* or homestead. As a result the peelers were unable to deliver the quantities demanded by the Dutch. Some fled to the lands of the kingdom of Kandy from where, in 1757, they armed themselves and demanded the dismissal of the chief of the *Mahabadde*. Peelers from the south later joined them and were supported by the Maha Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate and by the Basnayake Muhandiram. The entire

T.B.H. Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon*, Colombo 1966, chapters 2–3; C.R. de Silva, *The Portuguese in Ceylon*, 1617–1638, Colombo, 1972, chapters 2–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> C.R. de Silva and S. Pathmanathan, 'The Kingdom of Jaffna up to 1620' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), A History of Sri Lanka, vol. II, pp. 105–21.

south-west of the island erupted in rebellion. Finally the Dutch had to compromise by dismissing the chief of the Mahabadde and giving a free pardon to the peelers. The rebellion came to an end in 1758 when the peelers returned to work.

The outcome of the peelers' revolt makes it difficult to read as a precursor to a nationalist consciousness, since the peelers willingly returned to work under the Dutch. In 1783–90 there was a violent outburst of peasant discontent that engulfed the Matara Disavani and spread to other Dutch territories. The grievances were economic, as peasants were disturbed by measures to boost production of coffee, pepper and cardamom among other reasons.

Thus from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century there were instances of resistance to Portuguese and Dutch rule in the lowlands that grew out of direct contact with the intruders. The resistance of the Kandyan kingdom was different since it was led by the Kandyan kings, princes and chiefs who have been eulogised in a number of war poems. These poems, which were read to large audiences of peasant soldiers, convey a distinct feeling of hatred for the Portuguese and Dutch referred to in disparaging terms such as rudu parangi (cruel) or rakusas (demons). Were these sentiments deeply internalised, did they reflect a common perception, or were the poems aimed at encouraging military prowess in battle? Michael Roberts has used war poems and other material such as folk tales from the Kandyan era to explore the political culture of that period and argued that the ideology was Sinhala rather than Kandyan. He has also suggested that throughout the middle period (thirteenth to eighteenth centuries), through oral communications in such public arenas as the market place, fairs, festive gatherings and pilgrimages non-literate people would have exchanged ideas<sup>23</sup>. It is however difficult to rule out that the allegiance to the King as Chakravarti by the peoples of the highlands who fought and died for him was a testimony to his power to mobilise rather than the expression of a sort of collective consciousness.

# Conditions of differentiation; new identities

Portuguese revenue registers and Catholic missionary organisation records suggest that there were approximately 750,000 inhabitants

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Michael Roberts, Modernist Theory: Trimming the Printed Word: The Instance of Premodern Sinhala Society, Colombo, 2002, pp. 6–12. Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815, Colombo 2003.

on the whole island under Portuguese rule. Over half would have lived on the western and south-western seaboard. The Portuguese compilation of a *tombo* or land register—completed in 1615 for Kotte and in 1645 for Jaffna, and based on the native system of land registration, the *lekammiti* (land roll)—was a first timid attempt at controlling lives through a mastery of knowledge. It contained information about the extent of arable land and jungle land in a village, the land held for various services and the amount of rent payable to the viceroy or the nominee of the government.<sup>24</sup> But the Portuguese were equally intent on controlling the souls of the people they had conquered.

The Catholic Church arrived in Sri Lanka as the ideological apparatus of the Portuguese colonialists. For those who followed the precepts of Buddha and who constituted the vast majority of the population of the island, and for those who worshipped Siva, his consort and his children—concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of the country, but also living in many centres in Kotte—this was the beginning of a dark age. It is difficult to say with certainty when the people began to think of themselves as 'Buddhists' and 'Hindus'. The period when the term Buddhism (Buddhagama), the term used to refer to Buddhism by missionaries, gained acceptance among the Buddhists themselves as a term of self-reference has been a point of contention among scholars.<sup>25</sup> However, it is known that the term Bauddha was used in the wider Indian context to designate followers of the Buddha as early as the twelfth century. Furthermore, a sense of religious community would have existed during the eighteenth century, as the use of certain terms in the Rajavaliya seems to intimate: Budunge samaya (Buddha's samaya or religion); para-samayan (other samayas) for cults other than Buddhism; Kristi samaya for the religion of Christ.<sup>26</sup> The followers of the Buddha who had preserved the sasana (institution, in the sense of an organisation promoting the precepts) since

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> G.P.S.H. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka: Archival Sources for a Study of the History of the Country' in K.M. de Silva, Sirima Kiribamune and C.R. de Silva (eds), Asian Panorama: Essays in Asian History, Past and Present, New Delhi, 1990, p. 45

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> David Scott, 'Dehistoricising History' in Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds), Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1995, pp. 106–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Kitsiri Malalgoda, 'Concepts and Confrontations: A Case Study of Agama' in Michael Roberts (ed.), Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, vol. I, Colombo, 1997, pp. 55–77.

its origin felt different from those who practiced other cults, especially from the Christians.

This feeling of a community under threat was compounded by the fact that the Portuguese discriminated against other religions with a vengeance, destroyed Buddhist and Hindu temples, and gave temple lands to Roman Catholic religious orders. When the Munneswaram temple, a Siva temple near the north-western coastal town of Chilaw, was destroyed in 1606, Jesuits set about the temple's main images with iron bars, later claiming they had taken part in the great Christian struggle against evil.<sup>27</sup> Before the arrival of the Portuguese many Buddhist temples were wealthy institutions with elaborate image houses and residences for monks. Sandesa poems mention three storey structures in the temple of Devinuvara. In the face of the violence of the Roman Catholic Church, Buddhist monks had no recourse but to flee to the Kandyan kingdom.

Violence had a long lasting impact. One of the most durable legacies of the Portuguese was the conversion of a large number of Sinhalese and Tamils to Roman Catholicism, and differences between the communities acquired further complexity with the creation of these new identities. While previously most Sinhalese were Buddhist and most Tamil speaking people were Hindu or Muslim, Portuguese rule spawned Sinhalese and Tamil Christians. The Catholic Church was especially effective in the Sinhalese and Tamil fishing communities established from Colombo to Jaffna, perhaps because these communities, originally from Kerala and Tamil Nadu, were less firmly rooted in the system of services and obligations that prevailed among the Sinhalese and Tamil people of the interior. As part of this religious drive St Francis Xavier is believed to have come from India on a mission to meet Tamils in the north of Ceylon, and visited Mannar on that occasion.

Conversion to the religion of the coloniser had its advantages. Patronage of the colonial state brought many opportunities. Converts were exempted from various taxes and generally given preferential treatment. Mission schools were opened with instruction in both Sinhalese and Tamil. Portuguese became for a while the language of the upper classes of Sri Lanka. Many adopted Portuguese names were often those of their sponsors at baptism. Names such as Silva, Perera, Fernando, Costa or Fonseka in Sinhalese and Tamil communities signified less a mixing of races

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Rohan Bastin, The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munneswaram Temples in Sri Lanka, New York and Oxford, 2002.

than cultural mimetism.<sup>28</sup> For men and women of lesser birth a change of name could also serve to hide one's caste identity. The word Don or Dona, first conferred by Portuguese on noblemen and women and high rank Sinhalese, was later given to any person appointed to an office under the government.<sup>29</sup> By the 1630s about half of the people of the coastal regions of the south-west and most of the inhabitants of Jaffna professed Christianity.<sup>30</sup> One can only speculate on the extent to which these newly acquired identities were fixed. Many baptised Roman Catholics may have continued to follow Buddhist rituals in their homes while adopting a different identity in public.

Not only did Portuguese rule give birth to the communities of Sinhala and Tamil Catholics, it also created conditions of differentiation between Kandyans and Low-Country Sinhalese—the latter bearing the mark of the foreign presence in their legislation, land structures and customs.

The imposition of colonial rule did not affect all aspects of native social structures. In Low-Country Sinhala society caste structures were maintained by the taboo on intercaste marriage. But the system was an integrative one. There had been a regular flow of migrants from South India to the Kotte and Kandy regions and to the Portuguese and Dutch territories, and these migrants gradually became Sinhalised. According to the *regimentos*—the standing orders and instructions issued to Portuguese officers sent to Ceylon—many were brought to work on paddy lands when there was a shortage of labour due to wars or epidemics. Others came as grasscutters to cut fodder for the elephants, or as carriers. Manual labour from South India was still common during Dutch rule over the maritime areas.

A significant change came during this period with the upward mobility of certain castes associated with colonial power, especially those who came to be known as Chaliyas (from the locality of Chale in northern Kerala, presumably) or Salagamas. The Salagamas, who had migrated from the Malabar coast between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century to settle in small towns along the western coast, are believed to have originally been weavers. They soon turned to other occupations and a few were detailed to peel wild

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> K.D. Paranavitana, Land for Money, pp. 108-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Eric Meyer, Ceylan Sri Lanka, Paris, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Chandra R. de Silva, 'Expulsion of the Portuguese from Sri Lanka' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), A History of Sri Lanka, vol. II, pp. 178–9.

cinnamon for the king of Kotte. Gradually members of other castes who were required to peel cinnamon were absorbed by the Salagama caste. Caste had a flexibility of its own. There were also movements of population between South India and the central highlands. Kings had brought peasant soldiers from Madurai to repopulate the intermediary belts between the lowlands and the highlands that had been depopulated by wars between Kandyan kings and the Portuguese and Dutch. These new settlers, like the Salagamas, became integrated into Sinhala society within a few generations. Sometimes the original landholders, who had been expelled to give way to the new settlers, rebelled, as in Kehelpannala in Kegalle. But in general the integration of South Indian migrants into the caste structure of the lowlands and the highlands continued quite peacefully.31 The gift of land, even though it was sometimes under precarious tenure, was a crucial feature in the integration of the immigrant workers with the surrounding peoples who were often earlier settlers. With them they shared 'religious observances such as the cult of gods and goddesses (notably Pattini) which they brought with them from India, and soon a common language—Sinhala'. The acceptance of Buddhism, first by the leaders of the settlers and then by the migrants themselves, was also crucial in cementing ties with the land and the peoples.<sup>32</sup>

Colonial rule touched the inner life of the people too. According to Sinhalese folklore and Portuguese writers, polygamous and polyandrous marriages had been quite common among the Sinhalese. This custom fell into disfavour on the south-west coast, though it persisted in the interior. Where Roman Catholic morals were followed, family relations also changed. Important changes in the material life of people occurred especially in areas such as the harbours and military centres where there was most contact between the natives and the newcomers from Europe. In the Low Country the costume of the Sinhalese women before the arrival of the Portuguese was abandoned as a result of the widespread adoption of Christianity and the free social intercourse that existed between the Portuguese and the Sinhalese of the upper classes. The great majority of women in the coastal belt took to the Portuguese long

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Eric Meyer, 'Labour Circulation between Sri Lanka and South India in Historical Perspective' in Claude Markovitz, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subramanyam (eds), Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950, New Delhi, 2003, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

sleeved jacket rounded at the back and in front with a V neckline. This style of jacket was called the *kabakuruththuwa* and was only worn by women of the Karava caste (an intermediary caste traditionally associated with fishing). There are not enough sources to estimate whether the private sphere played an important role as a site of contestation of imposed structures.

*Identity formation and the Dutch presence.* The Dutch tried to supplant Roman Catholicism with Protestantism by rewarding converts with promises of upward mobility. They banned Roman Catholic practices and harassed Catholics, constructing Protestant chapels on confiscated church property. Although the Buddhist and Hindu religions were prohibited in towns, these practices were less interfered with in rural areas. During about three-quarters of a century of Dutch rule a large number of baptisms took place. In 1718 the total in the Colombo, Galle and Matara areas was given as 93,165.33 The vast majority converted to ensure their hold over property, the legitimacy of their children and rights of inheritance under the Company's administration. People of Ceylon straddled two identities with some ease. But Church school reports of the early eighteenth century give an idea of the opposition and obstruction put forward by many Sinhalese officials and schoolmasters to the forced attendance imposed by Predikants.34

The relationship between *bhikkus* and Dutch rulers varied from hostility to cordiality. While the Placard of 1678 condemned the practice of Buddhist and non-Christian religious activities, monks from the Kandyan region were permitted to visit Matara, Galle and Kelaniya where people would congregate at particular times such as the Buddhist festival of Vesak. The Dutch policy was not to antagonise the Kandyan court. Monks were sometimes compelled to solicit the Dutch administration to recognise their ecclesiastical offices and other honours as they lived in areas where the king of Kandy had no authority to enforce these grants. There were occasions when the Dutch government made efforts to win over monks. In 1765 Governor Falk paid a visit to the leading Buddhist temple in the Dutch settlements, Mulgirigala, and Governor Van de Graff (1785–93) recommended a monthly stipend be given to one of the Buddhist monks in the southern province, Karatota Dhammarama.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> K.W. Goonewardena, The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon, p. 341.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 343–5.

<sup>35</sup> Kitsiri Malalgoda, Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900: A Study of Religious

Nevertheless, a sizeable number of natives converted to Protestantism and created a new community of Protestant Sinhalese and Tamils. Identities both new and traditional overlapped effortlessly. A group of 'washermen' caste members who joined the Dutch Reformed Church would not hesitate to use myths of origin to appeal to the Dutch government for the permission to wear coats and hats for men and stockings for women. <sup>36</sup> Attempts on the part of the Dutch to encourage settlement of their countrymen and women in the occupied lands were not very successful. However, lower-ranking military recruits responded to the incentive of free land and married local women. The Dutch Burgher community emerged from these unions.

Social differences between lowland and highland Sinhalese hardened further, forming two culturally and politically distinct groups. The lowlanders were influenced by Western customs and laws and generally enjoyed a higher standard of living and greater literacy. The Dutch contributed to the evolution of the judicial system of the island. Indigenous law and customs that did not conflict with Dutch-Roman jurisprudence were codified. This was the case with the Tamil legal code of Jaffna—the Thesavalamai—and Muslim law. In the Low Country itinerant courts applied Roman Dutch law, thus modifying the notions of property and affecting family structures. In the Dutch judicial system, for instance, evidence of non-Christians was not admissible against Christians. Dutch religious policy attempted to regulate sexual mores and family practices according to the puritan ideology of Calvinism, even among non-Christians. Unbaptised persons who had married in the Sinhalese manner were said to be living in concubinage and were at risk of being apprehended.<sup>37</sup>

Configuration of identities. Identity was becoming enmeshed with the notion of counting and representation. The concept of civil data, born in the West in the Renaissance period, entered Ceylon with the Dutch who built on the native system of land registration and

Revival and Change, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 82–3, cited in N.R. Devasiri, 'The Formation of Sinhala Nationalist Ideology', p. 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> D.A. Kotelawale, 'Some Aspects of Social Change in the South-West of Sri Lanka, c. 1700–1833', Social Science Review: Studies in the Social History of Sri Lanka, no. 4, January 1988, p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> K.W. Goonewardena, The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon, p. 330.

the Portuguese enumerations. *Tombo* registration work began in the 1740s with the assistance of members of the Landraad composed of senior Company officers and local members. People were called and requested to present information that was necessary to prepare the land and head *tombos*, the register of land and the register of families. The aims of the Company in compiling the *tombos* appears in the Memoir of Governor Schreuder:

...the tombo consists of a head and Land Register of all persons and their holdings in the country in which each province and district is shown separately, and where we can see at the first glance how considerable and extensive the Companies territories are, what number of inhabitants reside therein, what services they are under obligation to perform for the Company...<sup>38</sup>

This, together with other documents such as the parish registers or school *tombos* and registers of cinnamon lands, lands held for services, land held by Moors or by the Salagamas, prefigured the British interest in collating systematic information on the territories they ruled. In a certain way the *tombos* linked the common man and the ruler and thereby integrated their mutual bond. But the Portuguese and Dutch colonial states were incomplete in many ways. Beyond trade and conversion to Christianity there was no other strong moral and intellectual component that dignified pure force with arguments drawn from science, morality and philosophy. In contrast to the British their actions were not infused with a civilising ethos and a feeling that with colonialism they were in fact bringing nothing less than modernity and enlightenment.

#### The British colonial state

The British took over the Dutch-controlled territory of Ceylon in 1796 and eventually colonised the whole island in 1815. The English East India Company's Administration at Madras mobilised a large force which seized Jaffna and marched on Colombo. While peace negotiations were under way in Europe in 1796, the British assumed Sri Lanka would eventually be restored to the Dutch. However, by 1797 London had decided to retain the island as a British possession. The government compelled the English East India Company to share in the administration of the island and guaranteed the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> D.A. Kotelawela, 'The VOC in Sri Lanka, 1658–1796: Social and Economic Change in the Maritime Regions' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), A History of Sri Lanka, vol. II, pp. 418–19.

company a monopoly of trade, especially the moderately profitable—but no longer robust—cinnamon trade. The governor of the island was responsible for law and order, but financial and commercial matters were under the control of the director of the East India Company. This dual rule lasted until 1802 and the Treaty of Amiens when Ceylon became a Crown Colony that was ruled by British authorities in London through their agent in Colombo, the governor. After a period of annexation and intervention and a lull of a decade, in 1815 the British intervened to oust the king of Kandy. The treaty of 1815, known as the Kandyan Convention, brought the Kandyan provinces under British sovereignty. The entire island was for the first time ruled by a European power.

The 1815 Kandyan Convention pledged the British to preserve the laws, customs and institutions of the kingdom and to protect the privileges and powers of the chiefs. The fifth clause laid down that 'the religion of Buddhoo, professed by chiefs and inhabitants of these provinces is declared inviolable and its rites, ministers and places of worship are to be maintained and protected'. The kingdom of Kandy would be under the administration of a British 'resident' at Kandy, who would, in all but name, take the place of the monarch. In later times the Kandyan Convention was looked upon by the Kandyans as a solemn agreement which could not be unilaterally amended. The British refused to accept this view.

British colonial rule differed from Portuguese and Dutch colonial domination in many ways, particularly in the line of demarcation drawn between public and private spheres. Spaces of tension and ruptures emerged to contest the very principle of demarcation, but the state professed to be the space where reason would be deployed, the law applied and a democratic debate take place. New technologies and new modes of transport did away with the obstacles constituted by nature. The first road from Colombo to Kandy was completed in 1831 and the first railway in 1867. Space was not only divided and controlled, it also acquired certain distinctly European features. The plantation economy that disturbed the traditional equilibrium introduced a new ethnic element into the country—migrant Tamil workers—while the monetarisation of the economy became widespread. Other elements also transformed society: an administration that yearned for efficiency; a system of instruction that Westernised elites and cut them off from the masses; medical progress that increased the growth of the population. The Up-Country, until then quite isolated from the lowlands, looked unrecognisable in the space of a few decades. In even the

most remote village British colonialism brought a change in the life of the people and their perceptions, anchoring them firmly in modernity.<sup>39</sup>

Rationalising space. From the mid-nineteenth century modernising legislation was passed in the domains of social and economic life. The basic institutional arrangements of colonial law and administration, of the courts, the bureaucracy, the police, the army, and the various technical services of government were the main elements of the modern regime of power. Rights to land were everywhere being recorded and customs were codified; the network of administrative divisions and jurisdictions was being slowly tightened and brought closer to the people; road and railway communications were being developed. Ceylon's encounter with these modern forms of control can be first traced back to the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms.

Colebrooke-Cameron reforms. By the early 1830s the British had almost finished consolidating their position in Sri Lanka and had begun to take more of an interest in securing the island's political and economic profitability. On the 1818 rebellion of Kandyan chiefs that had been crushed a few words are necessary. The Kandyan kingdom was formally ceded to the British by its leaders, secular and religious. However, the Kandyan chiefs had called in British help in 1815 for the sole purpose of eliminating an unpopular ruler. They had not contemplated the prospect of the establishment and continuation of British rule, and when they woke up to the reality of foreign control they found it extremely irksome and unpalatable. The Convention was thus a disappointment to the Kandyan elite who yearned for the restoration of the monarchy. They alleged that the British had violated the conditions stipulated in the Convention. From 1815 to 1817 a plan was hatched to overthrow British power in the Kandyan provinces and in August 1817 the rebellion broke out in Vellassa. Keppetipola, also known as Monarawila, was Disawa of Uva, a signatory to the Kandyan Convention of 2 March 1815 and brother-in-law of Ehelepola, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> For the entire period of British colonial rule, see K.M. de Silva (ed.), University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, vol. III; K.M. de Silva (ed.), A History of Sri Lanka, London, 1981. For the first half of the nineteenth century see Sujit Sivasundaram, Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony, Chicago, 2013.

last chief minister of the Kandyan kingdom. As Disawa of Uva, Keppetipola assumed command and conducted the insurrection, which spread through the entire Kandyan country. The British, who did not have adequate troops to quell the disturbance, found themselves in a precarious position. Martial law was proclaimed throughout the Kandyan provinces and reinforcements were brought from Madras. By August 1818 the rebellion had fizzled out, a good many of the leaders having surrendered.

A new wave of thought, influenced by reformist political ideology articulated by Jeremy Bentham and James Stuart Mill, promised to change fundamentally Britain's relationship to its colonies. Known as utilitarianism, and later as philosophical radicalism, it promoted the idea of democracy and individual liberty. This philosophy sponsored the idea of the trusteeship, i.e. that new territories would be considered trusts and would receive all the benefits of British liberalism. These philosophical abstractions were put into practical use with the recommendations of a Royal Commission led by W.M.G. Colebrooke and C.H. Cameron, sent in 1829 by the British Colonial Office to assess the administration of the island. Its Report (1831–2) was an important document in the history of the island. The legal and economic proposals made by the commission in 1833 were innovative and radical. The proposed reforms opposed mercantilism, state monopolies, discriminatory administrative regulations, and in general any interference in the economy. Many of the proposals were adopted and helped set a pattern of administrative, economic, judicial and educational development that continued into the next century.

Administrative divisions. The commission sought to end administrative divisions of the country based on ethnic and cultural lines and which divided the island's inhabitants into low-country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, and Tamil areas. The commission proposed instead that the country be placed under one uniform administrative system, which was to be based on five provinces. Colebrooke believed that in the past separate administrative systems had encouraged social and cultural divisions, and that the first step toward the creation of a modern nation was the administrative unification of the country. The model was clearly European states and the result was a homogenising of the island's territory by the incorporation of all differences into a single society and space. The potential strength of the Kandyan region was weakened with the allocation of parts of the former Kandyan kingdom to all five prov-

inces created in 1833. Crucially, apart from the Central Province, much smaller than the former kingdom of Kandy, the administrative capitals of all other provinces were located within former colonised Ceylon, outside the former Kandyan kingdom.

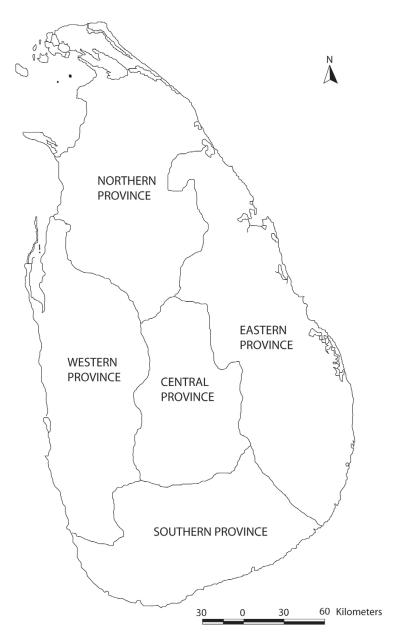
Renaming. The effacing of the identity of Kandy was taken a step further with the renaming of the provinces. The Eastern Province replaced the Kottiar Province. In all cases the territorial identity and peoplehood of the Lankans was erased when Kandy, Jaffna, Kotte or Sitavaka were replaced by provinces named according to points of the compass. The next two provinces created in 1845 and 1873 were labelled in the same way, as North-Western Province and North-Central Province. By then the threat of Kandy as a subversive force had disappeared.<sup>40</sup>

Europeanising. In the cities, much more than in the hinterland, space was Europeanised. Colombo city was recast as a colonial foreign city displaying the imprint of the imperial regime's control even over the landscape. The fort was subdivided into four quarters by two principal streets. The centre was marked by a clock tower. There were no indigenous buildings in the Fort. All these urban elements were named in British style. British names in Colombo were largely derived from their own cultural memories, for example Bristol Street and Hyde Park; associations with the royal family (York Street); historically significant men in Britain (Chatham Street); and governors and officials in Ceylon (Norris Road, Gregory's Road). The Circular Park, later renamed the Victoria Park to honour the Queen's Jubilee, was built and run by the Colombo Municipal Council to provide a public leisure area for the wealthy classes.<sup>41</sup>

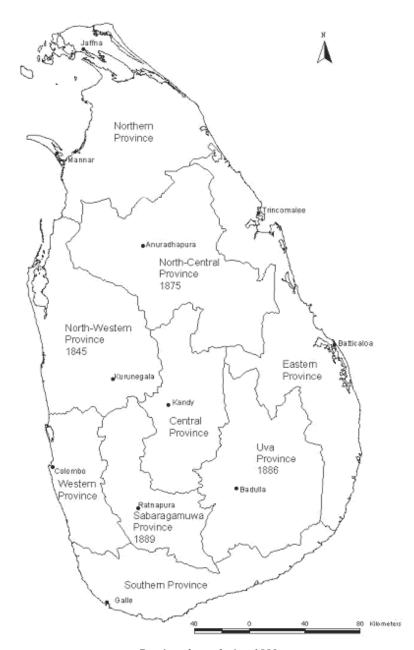
To gain control over Kandy, the metropolitan and religious centre of the Buddhists, the British had to take possession of the most sacred symbol, the tooth relic of Buddha enshrined in the Dalada Maligawa, and build a road from the coast up through the mountains of Kandy. For the Sinhalese people, the possessor of the relic was the legitimate ruler of Lanka. Kandyan symbols were coopted by the colonisers. The former Kandyan palace adjacent to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Nihal Perera, Decolonizing Ceylon: Colonialism, Nationalism and the Politics of Space in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 41–8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Michael Schaffer, 'From Victoria to Vihara Mahadevi', *Nethra*, 1, 3, April–June 1997, pp. 24–40.



Province boundaries, 1833



Province boundaries, 1889

Temple of the Tooth was adopted as the Resident's quarters. Tennis courts were constructed between the temple and the palace. The Queen's Bath House was converted into a European library and the octagonal *pattirippuwa* of the temple into a jail. The significance of old Kandy was being subverted with the construction of new buildings. In 1820 the king's pavilion was built close to the former palace. A new Anglican church towered over the Dalada Maligawa, a Protestant school and a police station were built in the sacred square. The courthouse was constructed on the most sacred grounds right behind the temple on the side of the Mahameru mountain. 42

Gradually smaller cities of Ceylon were also remodelled along the lines of Colombo and Kandy: roads with roundabouts, schools and post offices, prisons and hospitals, bungalows and clubs sprung up in the interior peppering the land with imperfect replicas of the colonial city.

New landscapes: the plantation

From coffee to tea. The Portuguese and Dutch who ruled the maritime areas of Sri Lanka initiated few changes in the traditional system of land tenure. They remained content with extracting service, revenue and products for trade through existing tenurial relations. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, amidst conditions of land tenure that were largely feudal, large-scale private ownership together with large farms owned by the Company with indentured labour made their appearance inland.

In the spirit of the Colebrooke-Cameron commission, which advocated a laissez-faire economy, government monopolies over cinnamon cultivation and trade were abolished. Traditional institutions, such as land tenure by *accommedessan* (the granting of land for cultivation, as opposed to its outright sale), were abolished, as was the *rajakariya* system. *Rajakariya* was opposed not only on moral grounds, but also because it was believed that it slowed the growth of private enterprise, impeded the creation of a land market, and interfered with the free movement of labour.

British colonial rule shared in many respects the ethos of domination over nature that marked the emergence of middle class government in Britain. Shaped by the increasing influence of capi-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> N. Perera, *Decolonizing Ceylon*, pp. 49–52.

talist modes of thinking, many British leaders saw domination of nature and its commodification as a legitimiser of the British in Sri Lanka. Governor Barnes also began experimenting with a variety of commercial crops, such as coffee. Incentives were given: for instance, investors found it easier to obtain land grants and loans, while coffee estates were exempt from land taxes. There was also no export duty on coffee. By the 1830s there were three major areas where coffee plantations were located—the Udagama hills near Galle, the Dumbara valley and the area around Gampola and Peradeniya. These experiments provided the foundation of the plantation system that was launched a decade later.

Gradually the entire economy was being transformed by the rise of coffee plantations, which overshadowed all other attempts such as those made for indigo in the 1820s, sugarcane and coconuts. New financial conditions helped promote the new crop. Agency houses were established that provided loans and financial assistance to planters. The planters also required land and more specifically land with well-defined rights of ownership. Pressure from the planters led to the promulgation of the Crown Land Encroachment Ordinance No. 12 of 1840, under which the Crown claimed all 'waste land'—that is all uncultivated and periodically cultivated land, forests, *chena* (slash and burn cultivation) and pasture—that had not been granted previously. The clearance of waste land was a means by which 'wild' nature was tamed and ordered. The extension of cultivation was synonymous with progress and the 'reclamation of waste land' was a civilising project. The expropriation of land began with this new definition of what constituted property and the requirement of documentary proof of property rights. Indeed, not only were land transactions traditionally informal in character and limited to verbal declarations; in addition the major landowners, the Kandyan nobility, had been decimated in the previous turbulent decades and many of their documents destroyed. This reliance on written documents, this sacralisation of the written word above the oral in administrative practices, was an important part of the colonial technology of rule and embodied the distinction the British made between 'civilised' and native customs.

Another key requirement for coffee cultivation was labour, the need for which was most acute in the picking season between mid-August and November. There was however a year-round demand for other types of labour such as 'weeding, pruning, fertilizing, staking, digging drains, planting grass, transporting rice and other foodstuffs, along with duties necessary for the maintenance of the

residential population'.<sup>43</sup> It is generally believed that the Kandyan peasants' refusal to take up employment in coffee estates led planters to turn to a ready reservoir of labour in South India. There is however little evidence that a sustained effort was made by planters to recruit Sinhalese labourers. It has been suggested that the unsuitability and unwillingness of the Sinhalese for work on the plantations was only later used as a convenient justification for maintaining a system based on 'alien labour'.<sup>44</sup> Thousands of Indian labourers began to make an annual journey to the coffee plantations in the central and southern regions of Sri Lanka. The harsh conditions in the plantations can be discerned from the reminiscences of Carpen, the *kangani* whose autobiography was recorded by a planter. On one occasion he and three friends had plucked some guavas off a tree in the planter's bungalow:

'Then we were cruelly thrashed. Our legs and arms were covered with cuts and warts and we could hardly get to the lines. Pitchai was covered with blood because being the largest he tried to resist and angered the Master more. For four days we were unable to go to work and all this for a small handful of fruit '45

The first coffee boom was in the years 1839 to 1847. Between 1845 and 1848 the acreage doubled, reaching 50,000 acres. The rapid development of the plantation system was temporarily checked by the world depression of 1846. To compensate for lost revenue caused by falling coffee prices the government imposed a series of new taxes that affected the Sinhalese farmers. A form of *rajakariya* was reintroduced through the Road Ordinance of 1848 and temple lands were alienated for coffee plantations. Widespread opposition emerged to these unpopular measures, led by persons of peasant background eager to reintroduce the traditional pattern of life and crown one of their own as king. The rebellion was severely crushed by British troops. After an inquiry commissioned by the House of Commons all new taxes except the Road Ordinance were repealed. 46

In 1869 a devastating leaf disease—heimleia vastratrix—spread quickly throughout the coffee plantation district, destroying the industry within fifteen years. Planters desperately searched for a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, London and New York, 2001, p. 83. 44 Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Donovan Moldrich, Bitter Berry Bondage: 19th Century Coffee Workers of Sri Lanka, Kandy, 1989, p. 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> K.M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka, London, 1981, pp. 279–80.

substitute crop. One that showed promise was chinchona (quinine). However, the market price of the crop fell and never fully recovered. Cinnamon, which had suffered a setback in the beginning of the century, was revived at this time, but only to become an important minor crop.

Among all the crops experimented with during the decline of coffee, only tea showed any real promise of success. A decline in the demand for Chinese tea in Britain opened up possibilities for Indian tea, especially the fine variety indigenous to Assam. Climatic conditions for the cultivation of tea were excellent in Sri Lanka, especially in the hill country. By the end of the century tea production on the island had risen enormously. Land legislation was passed to further regulate *chena* cultivation and curb private land sales to investors in coffee and later in tea and rubber.

While the British were converting to tea, Ceylonese planters were developing coconut plantations. The labour was mostly indigenous. For their financing they had to rely on the costly loans of Chettiar bankers. The main centre of coconut cultivation was the coconut triangle, Colombo-Kurunagala and Chilaw. In 1900 it constituted 41 per cent of the total cultivated area (tea covered 21 per cent and paddy 32 per cent).

Since tea was harvested throughout the year the estates required a permanent labour force.<sup>47</sup> Recent research has argued that the conversion from coffee to tea was less difficult than expected because since the 1850s a settled labour force had already been developed. In the late 1870s only a third of the workforce on coffee plantations was seasonal. Indeed not only did coffee cultivation require some labour all the year round, the coffee harvest season did not fit in with the slack season in paddy cultivation in South India. Consequently, the 1880s did not constitute a decisive break in labour migration from South India.<sup>48</sup> Waves of Indian Tamil immigrants settled on the estates and eventually became a large and permanent underclass that endured abominable working conditions and squalid housing. The census of 1911 reported the num-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> See D. Wesumperuma, Indian Immigrant Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka: a Historical Perspective, 1880–1910 (Colombo, 1986); I. Van den Driesen, The Long Walk: Indian Plantation Labour in Sri Lanka in the Nineteenth Century, New Delhi, 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Patrick Peebles, 'Plantation Tamil Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ceylon', paper presented to the 17th Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison (Wisconsin), 1988, cited in E. Meyer, 'Labour Circulation', p. 77. This argument is developed in Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils*, pp. 80–105.

ber of Indian labourers in Sri Lanka at about 500,000—12 per cent of the island's total population. The Tamil labourers emigrated to Sri Lanka from India not as individuals but in family units or groups of interrelated families, which enabled them to maintain cultural traits where they settled.

Although the Indian Tamils spoke the same language as the Sri Lankan Tamils, were Hindus, and traced their cultural origins to southern India, they were considered by the Sri Lankan Tamils and colonial officials to be culturally distinct from the Sri Lankan Tamils. This was more a perception than a verified fact. Migrants were clearly not from nomadic and marginal groups but hailed 'from rice-growing districts in the heartland of present day Tamilnadu'. For instance, in the years from 1905 to 1920 the proportion of the Vellalar (35–40 per cent) equated that of the Pallar and Parayar taken together. The type of integrative tendencies that had occurred in the pre-British system of labour procurement failed to operate in the British plantation system for reasons other than caste and social differences between villagers and migrants.

Although there was probably more interaction between Sinhalese and Tamil in the plantation areas, the lack of integration was probably related to the systematic creation of 'enclaves' on the plantations where the workers were kept and lived apart. Unlike in the old system that had prevailed since the Kotte kingdom, workers were not given land, and in a sense this prevented them from interacting with the neighbouring Kandyan villages, acquiring the language or following religious observances they had in common.<sup>50</sup>

The development of tea was accompanied by changes in the structure of production with the growth of tea factories where the drying, fermentation and sifting took place. The financial structure of the tea industry incorporated stockholding companies in London or Colombo financed initially by large companies such as Lipton, and agency houses in Colombo involved in the day to day operations of supervision of production and the financing of these operations. Among the best known were Carson Cumberbatch, George Stewart, the Armitage Brothers and Finlay-Muir.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, experimentation in crop diversification took on greater importance. Responding to international market trends, planters attempted to diversify the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> D. Wesumperuma, *Indian Immigrant Plantation Workers*, p. 78, cited in E. Meyer, 'Labour Circulation', p. 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> E. Meyer, 'Labour Circulation', pp. 73–4.

crops they produced to insulate their revenues from world price fluctuations. Not all their experiments were successful. The first sugar plantation was established in 1837, but sugar cultivation was not well suited to the island and has remained on a small scale. Cocoa was also tried for a time and has continued as one of the lesser exports. Rubber, which was introduced in 1837, became a major export during the slump in the tea export market in the 1900s.

Peasant agriculture in Sri Lanka had long depended on state encouragement and support. In the first half of the nineteenth century neither was forthcoming. While irrigation works survived, subsistence agriculture in the highlands suffered owing to devastation caused by British troops during the rebellion of 1817–18. A change of policy occurred under Governor Henry Ward (1855–60). However, his efforts to aid traditional agriculture, had mixed results. Assistance provided to cultivators in the Batticaloa district and Southern Province met with a measure of success, but the restoration of Kantalai tank and Yodavava failed owing to endemic malaria in the dry zone and the consequent shortage of labour. Ward's attention to traditional agriculture was not emulated by many of his successors who were more concerned with the plantation industry.

A revival of interest in the dry zone came in the 1870s. A new province, North Central, was carved out of parts of the Northern, Eastern and North-Western Provinces and many small reservoirs and canals in the area were repaired. Among them the Kantalai tank was repaired under Governor William H. Gregory and the Kalavava project was completed in the time of Governor Arthur Gordon (1883–90). In 1900 a separate Irrigation Department was set up. Nevertheless, even in the 1855–1904 period the government spent only Rs 13.5 million on irrigation works, a minute fraction of its total expenditure.

State policy was inimical to peasant agriculture in two specific areas—the levying of grain taxes and British policy in relation to *chena*. Grain taxes in the early nineteenth century varied from region to region, in some places being levied on paddy land only, in others on land sown with dry grains too. As a norm, the tax was a tenth of the yield, but the rate ranged from a half to a fourteenth. The collection of grain taxes involved great hardship for the peasant cultivators, but brought in considerable revenue to the state. The British strengthened the machinery for the collection of taxes. A scheme to commute the tax by payment of higher dues was

#### COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS

adopted in 1832, but an ordinance of 1866 empowered the government to seize lands from those who had defaulted on commutation payments. In 1878 commutation was made compulsory for peasants. In the 1880s the collapse of coffee and the failure of paddy crops led to many peasants defaulting in their payments. The result was the loss of lands for many. The grain taxes were finally abolished in 1892 following a campaign by the Sri Lankan elite.

British policy relating to *chena* was even more inimical to local cultivators. *Chena* cultivation was an important means of subsidiary income to the local cultivator. It provided him with vegetables and dry grains to supplement the produce of his paddy field and enabled him to tide over the occasional failure of the paddy crop. British officials' views regarding *chena* were fraught with moral overtones: shifting agriculture was not only condemned as a primitive and wasteful form of agriculture, it was often regarded as a social evil. Thus permits for clearing Crown jungles for cultivation were seldom given in the wet zone lowlands. Much of this land was sold and later converted to perennial cultivation under rubber and paddy. In the Kandyan highlands and the dry zone there were restrictions, although they were more limited.

As a whole British agricultural policy proved to be of little benefit to traditional agriculture. The increase in the acreage under paddy was mainly due to local enterprise. There was little change in traditional methods of cultivation. Peasant agriculture failed to achieve the dynamic growth achieved by the plantation sector during this same period. <sup>51</sup>

Ordering space: road and rail infrastructure. As Governor, Sir Edward Barnes (1824–31) was responsible for consolidating British military control over the Kandyan provinces through a programme of vigorous road construction. Roads were built to link Colombo with Kandy, Kandy with Matale and Kurunegala and Kurunegala with Ambepussa. The construction of these roads imposed considerable hardships on the people and the use of *rajakariya* for road construction was essentially accomplished by the extended use of a customary obligation in a changed context. One of its overall results was the opening of the central highlands.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> M. Roberts and L.A. Wickremaratne, 'Export Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 89–118, and M. Roberts, 'Aspects of Ceylon's Agrarian Economy in the Nineteenth century' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, vol. III, pp. 146–64; C.R. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: a History*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 158–70; Eric Meyer, *Ceylan Sri Lanka*, pp. 38–46.

The growth of the plantations was helped by the development of an infrastructure financed by the state: a vast rail and road network, especially linking tea producing areas to the port of Colombo, was set up soon after the opening of the Suez Canal. During the coffee plantation period Governor Ward had realised the importance of a good road system. Between 1855 and 1860 he spent over £1 million on the construction of roads and bridges. But even this was not sufficient to keep pace with a rapidly expanding coffee industry. A railway was clearly necessary and by the time Ward left, much of the essential groundwork for a railway had begun. His successors were instrumental in constructing the railway to Kandy and extending it to Navalapitiya. Plans were made for an extension to Kalutara and the construction of a branch route to Matale. The construction of the southern railway to Matara between 1877 and 1895, the line to Negombo (1907-8) and beyond to Chilaw and Puttalam later on, and the railway to Jaffna through Kurunagala (1894–5) owed a great deal to agitation from coconut producers.52

The creation of modern colonial subjects. Colonial rule used a number of institutions, especially the systems of justice, education and representation, to immerse their colonial subjects in modernity. The purpose was to create modern colonial subjects who would be efficient and willing servants of the Empire.

Cameron had proposed that the judiciary be unified into one system and extended to all classes of people, offering everyone equal rights in the eyes of the law. His recommendations were adopted and enforced under the Charter of Justice in 1833. In the nineteenth century a system of justice that drew its ideals and inspirations almost totally from Britain was established. During the time of Governor North a Supreme Court, a High Court of Appeal and five Provincial Courts were set up. In the early years the major advance was the introduction of trial by jury by the Charter of Justice of 1810. In the Kandyan kingdom, however, traditional institutions continued to administer Kandyan law: the only significant change was that a collective Board of Commissioners that included the Kandyan chiefs in the deliberations replaced the *Mahanaduwa* as the supreme judicial tribunal. English became the language of the courts and except in the north, where Tamil customary law as codified in the *Thesavalamai* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Indrani Munasinghe, The Colonial Economy on Track: Roads and Railways in Sri Lanka (1800–1905), Colombo, 2002.

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was applied, and in the case of the Muslims, it was assumed that Roman Dutch law was to be the basis of judgements. Other Tamil customary law, in particular *Mukhuvar* law or the law of a Christian/Muslim Tamil community in Puttalam and the East, did not receive legal recognition. Under British rule the move was towards rationalising traditions and doing away with diversity.

When Roman-Dutch law proved lacking, English law was applied. A 'colonisation' of legal values in non-Muslim Sri Lankan family law took place. The 1822–47 and 1859 statutes on registration of births and non-Muslim marriages drew a distinction between lawful marriage and 'non-legal' family relations such as cohabitation, a practice until then recognised by customary law. Furthermore, the concept of the wife's 'coverture' or her inferior legal status during marriage, the husband's marital power, the inferior legal position of the widow and the unity of personality between husband and wife were articulated in the legislation on matrimonial property rights. This was contrary to Sinhala and Tamil law that recognised a woman's independent legal status and her right to own and control her separate property.<sup>53</sup> Thus indigenous family laws were replaced or restricted by the dominant colonial legal system.

In the modern colonial state a decentralisation of executive power took place. Many of the autocratic powers vested in the governor were stripped away with the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms, his advisory council being replaced with an Executive Council, which included both official and unofficial nominees. The Executive Council appointed the members of the Legislative Council, which functioned as a forum for discussion of legislative matters. The Legislative Council placed special emphasis on Sri Lankan membership, and in 1833 three of the fifteen members were Sri Lankans. The governor nominated one of the three to represent Low-Country Sinhalese, Burghers and Tamils each. The commissioners also voted to change the exclusively British character of the administrative services and recommended that the civil service include local citizens. These proposed constitutional reforms were revolutionary—far more liberal than the legal systems of any other European colony.

Another of the chief mechanisms through which the values of the rulers were transmitted was educational structures modelled on metropolitan institutions. The impetus for the establishment of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Savitri Goonesekere, 'Colonial Legislation and Sri Lanka Family Law: the Legacy of History' in K.M. de Silva *et al.* (eds), *Asian Panorama*, pp. 193–209.

schools had come not from the colonial authorities but from the Evangelicals who arrived in the second decade of the nineteenth century and viewed education as the most crucial means of 'civilising' and reforming the natives. Missionary activity was concentrated on the maritime regions of the north, east and south-west, regions that had been under European domination since the sixteenth century.

The opening of the Ceylon Civil Service to Sri Lankans from 1844 required that a new emphasis be placed on English education. The Colebrooke-Cameron Commission had quite early emphasised the standardisation of the curriculum and advocated the substitution of English for local languages. Local English schools were thus established, while the missionary schools that had previously taught in the vernacular adopted English too. Missionaries became major partners in a dual system of educational control introduced in 1870, and with the withdrawal of the state from English education (with the exception of Royal College) thereafter, had a virtual monopoly of the education of the elite. In boarding schools such as Uduvil in Northern Ceylon native girls' bodies, minds and souls were instructed and shepherded with the purpose of keeping them morally pure and training them in the disciplines that were deemed necessary to a Christian woman. Needlework occupied a central place in their education. Native customs such as the chewing of betel and tobacco were stamped out and strict timetables were established. Many of these structures, such as daily routines and drill, rules of behaviour and regulation of attire, spread from elite boarding schools to vernacular schools, thus moulding not only the local elite members who had converted to Christianity but most children who went to school in the late nineteenth century. Educational institutions were thus purposefully used to consolidate political rule by disseminating Western civilisation and values and Christianity. Many children of the local elites grew up to become docile colonial subjects.<sup>54</sup>

The premise of the power of the colonial state was, however, the rule of colonial difference, namely the preservation of the alien-

Malathi de Alwis, 'The Production and Embodiment of Respectability: Gendered Demeanours in Colonial Ceylon' in Michael Roberts, Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, vol. I, pp. 105–43; Swarna Jayaweera, 'Colonial Educational Policy and Gender Ideology under the British Colonial Administration in Sri Lanka' in K.M. de Silva et al. (eds), Asian Panorama, pp. 210–27.

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ness of the ruling group.<sup>55</sup> As the institutions of the modern state were elaborated in the colony, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, the ruling European group found it necessary to lay down in specific areas the precise difference between the rulers and the ruled. While the civil service was open to natives the higher echelons were not. Similarly, higher education was not encouraged, except at medical and law colleges.

Modernity met little open opposition from the native population. Rather people tried to choose—within the confines of an authoritarian regime—what they felt was useful, giving British customs and ideas their own meanings. Diversity was the rule. Colonial rule was lived by different social groups and religious and ethnic communities in different manners. Age, gender and environment also played a part in colonial-native encounters. Those who did contest British rule were mainly social groups steeped in traditional values. The resistance to British rule that grew in Sri Lanka differed in nature and ideology from the movements that opposed Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule. On three occasions, in 1801, 1818 and 1848, British rule and the project of modernisation were contested. Although these rebellions have been identified as protonationalist movements, they were very different in content to the nationalist movement of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> The protagonists were largely from the Goyigama elite of the Kandyan regions, supported by the traditionally minded Siam Nikaya. Their aim was to re-establish the ancien régime rather than think in terms of building a nation-state a concept that would enter the minds of the people only in the late nineteenth century with the growth of the press.

The exceptional length—four hundred years—of the colonial impact on Ceylon, particularly in the coastal areas, radically modified social and economic structures of the island. Ceylon encountered modernity gradually and unevenly. In some respects the colonial impact extraverted the economy, overturned the traditional streams of trade, and distorted links with India, while introducing into society new elements of heterogeneity: Christianity, the languages of the successive conquerors, new communities such as the Burghers and later Indian immigrant plantation workers. It also

<sup>55</sup> Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, New Delhi, 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> K.M. de Silva, 'Nineteenth Century Origins of Nationalism in Ceylon' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, vol. III, pp. 249–61.

imposed unifying factors: modern modes of communication, a unified administrative system, a common language of domination, monetarisation of exchanges. However, the depth of the colonial imprint must not be overestimated: family structures, the caste system and Buddhism were maintained, especially in the centre of the island where foreign domination was resisted for three centuries.<sup>57</sup>

Further traditions were transformed by reshaping or adapting to features of modernity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Eric Meyer, *Ceylan Sri Lanka*, Paris, 1994, p. 27.

2

# COLONIALISM AND CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES

'I am a Ceylonese of the Burgher community and 27 years of age.'

— E.J. Livera (application for post of systematic botanist in 1924) SLNA, Lot 5/334

British colonialism brought about a new way of looking at identities through a variety of technologies of rule. The most important among these was the imperative of enumerating groups in society through the census. Identities lost their substantial quality, their many forms and shapes, and became objective features of people that could be delineated once and for all. Enumerations themselves would not have changed the shape of the varied and contextual identities of the peoples of the land, but their currency contributed to the gradual imposition of the idea—promoted by nationalists as well—that identities were like institutions: fixed and gelled. One of the conventions in the census is the 'impermissibility of fractions, or to put it the other way round, a mirage like integrity of the body'. The understanding on the part of the colonised peoples, that by claiming to belong to one or another group recognised by the colonial rulers one could obtain certain entitlements, further moored this perception of identities as embodied, inescapable features of being.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*, London, 1998, p. 36.

In that sense colonial knowledge did not imagine identities or construct them; rather, it opened up a new realm for political identities to blossom. Colonial divisions were informed by a desire to strengthen what was considered the authentic culture of the land, recognised without hesitation as the Kandyan culture. Both in the ceremonial sphere and in the realm of political representation British readings of identities displayed this feature.

# Counting and classifying: the census mode of knowledge

It was precisely when Britain's colonial subjects were beginning to create a public arena for themselves, with the growth of the press, the spread of reading habits and the emergence of a modern theatre, that the concern for collecting, collating and publishing detailed information about all aspects of the population acquired a new dimension. At first there had been, on the part of early British visitors, a feeling of confusion and marvel at the diversity of the peoples living in the island. Percival's description of the different 'castes', 'races', 'mixed races', 'half castes', 'religions', 'languages', 'classes of people', each with its own 'manners, customs and language' in the city of Colombo in 1803 revealed the difficulties he and his contemporaries faced when they attempted to make sense of human differences.<sup>2</sup>

Censuses, gazetteers, administrative reports were then carefully written from first hand observation. Only later can their concern be traced to an imperial project of control where natives were counted, objectified and divided into social groups such as castes, races or ethnic groups. British colonialism did not in any sense of the term invent or imagine identities. What colonial officials were trying to do in their writings and policies, often in a gauche way, was to 'describe something that had practical and conceptual coherence both for outsiders and observers' and for the peoples of Sri Lanka themselves. And the British were not the first to use such enumerative technology in this manner: both the Portuguese and the Dutch had expended great efforts in compiling tombos. Furthermore, they too had produced labels for the communities and social groups they encountered. Indeed the Portuguese and Dutch officials and writers had used certain categories to describe the peoples they encountered that were very similar to those used

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon*, London, first edn, 1803, reprint New Delhi, 1990, pp. 114–15.

by the British in the nineteenth century. Mission reports of Dutch priests in the eighteenth century refer to 'Tamul' and 'Chingala' people and the sect of 'Budu', 'which is the religion of all the Chingalas of Ceilao'.<sup>3</sup>

But the British differed in the systematic manner in which categories were used and in the modern stamp that was given to identities as providing the basis of entitlements and rights, such as places in the administration or representation in the Legislative Council.

The process of objectification was based on the way natives represented themselves to the British, what little knowledge the British were able to gather from native informants, and perceptions they had inherited from Dutch and Portuguese rule. Thus Anderson's claim that the nineteenth-century colonial state dialectically engendered the grammar of the nationalisms that eventually arose to combat it needs to be nuanced in the light of recent criticisms of the constructivist position on identity.<sup>4</sup>

How far the European colonisers' construction of knowledge about the peoples of Sri Lanka would have influenced the ways in which individuals and communities perceived themselves is difficult to assess. Identities were constantly in flux, taking different shapes according to the practices—religious, educational, political—that were enacted. It is quite likely that the majority of the population would have remained for long unconcerned by colonial categories of classification that were made in the law and the administration. Probably until they were involved in a process in which they had to define themselves according to these categories.

In Ceylon, among the apparatuses of knowledge destined to guide the British ruler in his dealings with the natives the census stood out as a document whose manifest rhetoric was technical but whose subtext was contestatory and disciplinary. The sole purpose of the first censuses in Ceylon was to find out the number of natives in the colonised territory. In 1789, by the order of Governor Vander Graff, the first census that covered all the inhabitants in the Dutch East India Company, i.e. the Maritime Provinces, was taken

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Report of the Mission of Ceylon by Fr Antonio Pereira in V. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*, vol. II: *1712–1746*, Dehiwela, 1983, pp. 502–4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, revised version, 1991), p. xiv. See David N. Lorenzen's excellent critique of the constructivist point of view in 'Who Invented Hinduism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41, 4, 1998, pp. 630–59.

for the purpose of taxation. No complete census was taken until 1871. Returns were based on information provided by village headmen. In a few cases a sample census was made. It appears that the population resented giving information, as Governor Torrington's experience testifies. His zealous effort to collect first-hand information seems to have been, according to Tennent's evidence before the Select Committee, one of the causes of the revolt in 1848.<sup>5</sup> The first modern census taken in 1871 produced some unusual reactions on the part of a population still unaccustomed to being counted. Sarkar reports thus:

Many people fled from their villages and spent weeks in the forests; others hastily got married and even took the unusual step of getting their marriage registered. The panic arose from a wide-spread rumor that the purpose of the counting was to transport younger males to Europe to make good the depletion in manpower caused by the Franco-Prussian war.<sup>6</sup>

That same year a census of most of the provinces and princely states of India, as well as a census in Great Britain and Ireland, was carried out. In Sri Lanka the Registrar-General was charged with the conduct of the census, but the actual work of enumeration was done by the Government Agents and their assistants. Enumerators were selected at the district level. In Sri Lanka, as in India, village records, district records and census reports were meant to provide a photograph of the actual state of the community and give an authorised version of knowledge about the society.

There was a tremendous amount of experimentation with categories. When the British officials chose to delineate groups within the native population and refer to them as castes, nationalities, races or communal groups, the term used was never innocent or fortuitous; it reflected an understanding of the differences prevalent amongst the people of Ceylon. The British needed labels that served to locate the strange in a frame of reference that they were familiar with. This entailed arranging groups in neat diagrams, or by alphabetical order, simplifying them, and finding equivalents in language.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> N.K. Sarkar, *The Demography of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1957, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Census of the Island of Ceylon 1871, General Report (Colombo, 1873), pp. ix-xi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> R.S. Smith, 'Rule by Records and Rule by Reports: Complementary Aspects of the British Imperial Rule by Law' in Veena Das (ed.), *The Word and the World*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 153–4.

Both the 1814 and the 1824 censuses gave information on castes and religions in Ceylon. Caste was the category used to differentiate groups in these censuses, just as it was in India. But in Ceylon the term 'caste' was more vague. It encompassed caste groups not only in their most recognised sense, such as the Vellala, but also regional groups such as Europeans, Portuguese and Malays, occupational groups such as washermen or potters, and large amorphous groups such as Moors and Malabars. 10

It seems that at least until 1824 Sinhalese and Tamils were perceived not as clear-cut ethnic groups, but first and foremost as members of a number of caste groups of various sizes. <sup>11</sup> Caste particulars were not obtained in censuses because, according to Denham, 'caste does not play in Ceylon the important part it does in India.' <sup>12</sup>

In 1835 a detailed statement of the total population had been prepared from headmen returns and registers of births and deaths. The population was grouped under the following headings: whites (9,121), free blacks (1,194,482), slaves (27,397) and aliens and resident strangers (10,825). The categories were no longer castes, but they expressed more clearly the feeling of exclusion-inclusion that permeated colonial situations. The British were whites. The 'others' were their antithesis—blacks, an all-encompassing term.

In the 1871 and 1881 censuses the term 'race' appeared for the first time along with the category of nationality. In 1871 there were seventy-eight nationalities and twenty-four races. There was a certain amount of incoherence in these classifications: Sinhalese and Tamils, for instance, were races as well as nationalities. It seems that the 'nationality' category was introduced to describe groups numerically

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Bryce Ryan in *Caste in Modern Ceylon*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1953, p. 19, gives the following definition of caste: 'a social organisation structure functioning through hierarchical birth status groups, they or their subunits being communalistic and usually endogamous, and possessing functional or ritual roles, including symbolic expressions of social distance and privilege in reference to and in distinction from other social groups in the great society.'

The term 'Moors' is derived from 'Mauros', used by the Portuguese to refer to the Muslims of Mauritania. All Muslims except the Malays in Ceylon came to be referred to by this term. The term 'Malabars', initially employed for the inhabitants of the Malabar coast, became part of the vocabularly of the European powers to describe all Tamils in Ceylon.

<sup>11 &#</sup>x27;Return of the Population of the Maritime Districts of the Island of Ceylon', Colombo, 1816, p. 24. CO 59/29, Census of Ceylon 1824.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> E.B. Denham, Report of the Census of 1911, Colombo, 1912, p. 177.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

too small to be called races, for instance, Abyssinians or West Indians. The 1881 census showed a process of rationalisation: there were only seven races left, namely Europeans, Sinhalese, Tamils, Moormen, Malays, Veddas and others. The number of nationalities had slightly decreased from seventy-eight to seventy-one. From then on race became the main category of classification. <sup>14</sup>

The term 'nationality', which entered official usage in the middle of the nineteenth century at the time nationalities were awakening in western Europe, was dropped in 1911 in favour of the new term 'race'. The number of races in the censuses also increased. The 1921 Census recognised ten principal races in Ceylon, three pairs being subdivisions of larger groups. These pairs were the Low Country and Kandyan Sinhalese, the Ceylon and Indian Tamils, and the Ceylon and Indian Moors. The four other specified races were the Burghers and Eurasians and the Malays and Veddas. The differentiation of the Sinhalese community into Low Country and Kandyan Sinhalese, a division that was regional in origin, was a legacy of the European impact. The Low Country Sinhalese of the southern and western coastal areas, more than two-thirds of the Sinhalese, tended, as a result of four centuries of Western influence, to diverge somewhat in social practices and attitudes from the more traditional Kandyans of the interior, who remained independent until 1815 and were subject to much later and less intense Western influences. This was the rationale for dividing the Sinhalese into two distinct groups.

In the same way the predominantly Saivite Hindu Tamils who lived in the Northern Province, in the Jaffna peninsula, along the east coast and in the city of Colombo were called Ceylon Tamils so as to distinguish them from the Tamil-speaking South Indians who had come in the nineteenth century as temporary sojourners in search of employment on the tea and rubber plantations of the interior hill country or to work as labourers in the towns. This group was referred to as Indian Tamils. Censuses also divided the island's Muslims into three separate communities. In the 'Ceylon Moors' category were Muslims living along the coast in the Eastern Province, in Colombo and in the cities of the west coast. The 'Indian Moors' category encompassed more recent Muslim migrants from India. The 'Malays' category drew into its fold Muslims who claimed descent from East Indies troops brought to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Census of the Island of Ceylon, 1871, General Report (Colombo, 1873); Census of Ceylon 1881, General Report and Statements and Tables (Colombo, 1882).

Ceylon by the Dutch. In terms of origin, both Muslims and Tamils of the Eastern Province hailed from the southern coast of India. Religion had demarcated these two groups.

Although the larger categories of race became acceptable to the people, caste remained an important feature of classification upon which colonial constructions had little effect. Castes too had evolved. Some caste categories had simply disappeared; this was the case of the Hammaru, the caste of tanners present in the writings of early nineteenth century travellers but invisible thereafter. Other castes absorbed new groups, growing into large communities such as the batgam. There were also contests over the caste hierarchy as it appeared in government documents, which most administrators accepted as a given. The main contest involved the Goyigamas and the Karava, Salagama and Durava castes of the coastal belt. The British administration's policy had in the first decades of the nineteenth century officially recognised the existence of higher castes and lower castes in the choice of juries—the distinction was between 'first class' and 'second class'—and in the selection of headmen. But after the abolition of rajakariya and petitions on the part of 'second class' men, the recognition of caste was abolished in the selection of juries in 1844. The new opportunities that emerged with the growth of a capitalist export economy led non-Goyigama castes to compete for public employment. The end of the nineteenth century witnessed a growth in caste tensions which manifested in altercations, judicial disputes and petitions to the government. The position of the colonial administration varied from encouragement of members of emerging castes such as Karavas, Salagamas and Duravas, by giving them official posts at the district level (Korale Mudaliyar), to openly favouring Goyigamas, perceived as the 'native aristocracy'.

Thus, although the colonial census played a crucial role in gelling identities which were until then flexible and contextual, and drawing discrete boundaries between communities, conflicts over these classifications and resistance to them constantly transformed a seemingly ordered picture.

Rather than gelling identities, the lasting effect of colonial rule in the nineteenth century was to propagate the idea that identities were fixed and stable and that one could not jump from one to another. In his certificate of discharge Y.G. Stephen, an engine cleaner, had to state his race after his name, in this case Tamil. Sandanam Nicholas, who was a candidate for a scholarship, specified in his application form that he was a Jaffna Tamil and a Roman

Catholic.<sup>15</sup> Divisions acquired a new importance in a few concrete instances: the representative system and the ceremonial sphere of official titles and ranks.

Constructing political identities: Kandyans and Ceylon Tamils

While in the early nineteenth century classifying colonial populations was sometimes nothing more than an academic exercise, the civilising impulses of later liberal imperialism gave it an added feature: natives would be included in the government of the colonies. This new entitlement led certain groups, very limited in numbers, from within the native people to construct political identities for themselves and voice demands from the state based on their new status. They claimed to represent the 'people' of their community. Unfortunately history has left little trace of the way people perceived their 'representatives' and of other modes of representation that non-elite groups pursued during the early twentieth century.

Political representation was bestowed on persons the British acknowledged as leaders of their community. The census was the basis for determining 'race'-based representation in the colonial state and political representation was first distributed equally to selected 'racial' groups. In 1833 a Legislative Council composed of British and natives (Ceylonese members) was established. In the selection of the natives the Governor had recourse to what he termed 'racial representation', nominating one Low-Country Sinhalese J.P. Panditaratne, one Burgher J.G. Hillebrandt and one Tamil A. Coomaraswamy. It is likely that this scheme of representation stemmed directly from an interpretation of Ceylonese society as plural and composed of fixed racial groups rather than from some Machiavellian plan to divide and thus rule more efficiently.

'At the time the present Council was established there was no doubt good grounds for the adoption of the racial system and the country was not advanced enough for representative government', said James Peiris, sharing the point of view of the colonial rulers.<sup>16</sup>

During the seventy years that followed, the only change made in the constitution of the Council was the addition of two unofficial members to represent the Kandyan Sinhalese and Muslim com-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Lot 5/344 enclosed in despatch from Governor to Secretary of State, 8 Dec. 1924; CO54/891/6, Education Department 1928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Memorandum of James Peiris to the Under Secretary of State, 12 Dec. 1908 in S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (ed.), *The Handbook of the Ceylon National Congress*, 1919–1928, Colombo, 1928.

munities. In 1889 the Council consisted of a Low Country Sinhalese, a Kandyan Sinhalese, a Tamil, a Burgher, a Moor/Muslim and three Europeans.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when colonialism experienced its first cracks, with the various ethnic groups—Sinhalese, Tamils, Indians, Muslims and Burghers, Malays and Europeans—forming associations of a political nature, the British encouraged them to jockey for power.

British policies on representation can be described as haphazard and experimental, but in at least one instance this perception must be nuanced. More than any other governor, Sir William Manning was a spontaneous initiator of policy. He was appointed on 1 May 1918 at a time when constitutional progress in India had highlighted the efficacy of organised action. His predecessor, Governor McCallum (1907-13), had translated his deep mistrust of the English-educated elite into a scheme of indirect rule through consultative assemblies of native headmen. There is ample evidence that Manning knowingly participated in drawing new boundaries between groups while helping to forge minority political identities for the Kandyan Sinhalese and the Ceylon Tamils. His policy was directed at creating enduring divisions within the elite while organising the estrangement of minorities from the Ceylon National Congress, the only elitist political association that attempted to draw its membership from all communities. The Ceylon National Congress, formed in 1919, attracted a wide support in the initial stages, but owing to the political conservatism of its leadership had a limited impact in the decade that followed. It would also become ineffective because of divisions within the elite.

Why Governor Manning felt that crippling the Congress was worth so much effort remains obscure. He perhaps felt that the CNC would represent a danger if it acquired national status, and if it succeeded in convincing the Colonial Office that it spoke for all communities even though the political game was restricted to a chosen few. However, there was no real risk of the CNC obtaining a Gandhian type of following, owing to the dominance of the conservatives in its fold. A more radical organisation called the Young Lanka League, formed in 1915, had affiliated to the CNC and assumed the role of a radical pressure group. In 1921, at its height, it could count only 124 members.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon, Colombo, 1972, p. 234.

In the case of the Kandyans, Manning was in fact motivated, apart from a desire to use Kandyan dissent as a counterpoise to the reform movement dominated by Low-Country Sinhalese men, by true sympathy with the Kandyan high caste aristocracy (Radalas), who in his view crystallised the sense of collective grievance and political deprivation experienced by the Kandyan peasants. The grievances of the Kandyan peasants were in fact quite different from those of the Radalas; they suffered from indebtedness and had lost land to speculators during the rubber boom. Acquiring new land was difficult, while those who had land had to deal with the problem of the small size and fragmentation of their holdings. The evidence of J.C. Ratnayake, late chief clerk of the Badulla Kachcheri and owner of paddy lands, before a commission studying the feasibility of setting up agricultural banks is telling: he stated that the usual interest rate at which the cultivator borrowed seed paddy was 50 per cent. Buffaloes had to be hired, and for their maintenance during cultivation, cultivators usually borrowed paddy at the same rate. 18 Between the peasants and the radalas there were ties of dependence and paternalism. Writing about her childhood in Ratnapura, Sirimavo Ratwatte expressed quite innocently her understanding of the relations that prevailed then between her family of Kandyan radalas and the common people:

We cared about the villagers just as they did about us. They were interested in our welfare as much as we were in theirs. It was the feeling we had for each other that was important. We were all 'people of the place' to put it idiomatically and it made us kin.<sup>19</sup>

This was still, in the view of the elites, a time when where one lived mattered more than what language one spoke or what religion one practiced. For the privileged Kandyans, Kandyans were clearly distinguishable from their Low Country counterparts by their manner of dress and deportment, their names, and the dialect of Sinhala they spoke.

For social groups outside this circle, being Kandyan assumed other meanings. In the 1920s there were a number of *sangamayas*, associations of Kandyans who belonged to the so called 'depressed classes' among the Kandyans. Among them were the Sri Lanka

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Sessional Paper 8, 1910, 'Report of a Committee Appointed by the Governor to Consider the Whole Question of Agricultural Banks'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Maureen Seneviratne, Sirimavo Bandaranaike: The World's First Woman Prime Minister, Colombo, 1975, p. 30.

Sinhala Jathika Sangamaya, the Udarata Jatika Sangamaya that represented the Batgam Duraya community, and the larger Madhyama Lanka Majana Sangamaya that claimed to have a membership of 6,400 and to represent over 75 per cent of the Kandyan community. The sangamayas articulated economic and social grievances based on a condemnation of the privileged Kandyans, ratemahatmayas and headmen who abused their powers to extract forced services from the people and discriminate against them in the administration of the area. Often depressed class members were excluded by headmen from posts in the administration even if equally qualified.<sup>20</sup> When appearing before the Donoughmore Commission in 1927 the Sri Lanka Sinhala Jatika Sangamaya, representing non-Goyigama Kandyans, clearly demarcated its members from the privileged Kandyans who put forward a case for a federal state, by supporting the Congress, then largely a Low Country Sinhalese organisation. Yielding to the demands of the Kandyan National Assembly was described as tantamount to 'entrusting the lamb to the wolves'.21 While they had a general distrust of headmen and radalas, they did not perceive all Low Country Sinhalese as interlopers or enemies, although conflicts often arose over the sale of land or money-lending.

The Kandyan region was regarded by provincial agents and the British in general as the epitome of tradition, and they often displayed a patriarchal and protective attitude towards the Kandyans. The Kandyan Sinhalese were registered separately from the Low Country Sinhalese for the first time in the 1901 census, forming from then on the second largest community. Inhabitants of the interior of the island—the Central, Uva, Sabaragamuwa and North-Central Provinces—were included. In 1921 the Kandyans numbered 1,089,097, thus accounting for 24.2 per cent of the total population.<sup>22</sup> Statistics show that they were less literate than the Low Country Sinhalese, and led lives based mainly on the village and ownership of land, largely untouched by the commercial developments that had followed the British exploitation of tea and rubber estates. The inroads made by British capital had, however, cre-

<sup>20</sup> L.A. Wickremaratne, 'Kandyans and Nationalism in Sri Lanka', Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, 1 & 2, June–December 1975, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> The Census of Ceylon 1921, vol. IV: General Tables, Colombo, 1922, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Special Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon 1927, Record of Oral Evidence, Public Sittings, vol. 3: Evidence of the Sri Lanka Sinhala Jatika Sangamaya Represented by Mr S. Sunderasekera and Others, p. 50.

ated the need for a subordinate entrepreneurship. Low Country Sinhalese had filled the void. In the nineteenth century the antagonism between government agents and these Low Country Sinhalese traders, labourers and arrack renters who had settled in the Kandyan province following the plantation boom was widespread.<sup>23</sup> There were many who interpreted the history of the plantation era as a conflict between high caste Kandyans and Low Country interlopers, and sustained the impression that Kandyans differed fundamentally from Low Country Sinhalese. Governor Manning's vision of Ceylonese society was consistent with these ideas.

It is a paradox that in many parts of the British Empire, the very men who conquered lands in the name of modern civilisation valued the 'native aristocracy' far more than the upwardly mobile Western-educated sections of the local population. Ranger has shown how Europeans in colonial Africa thought of customary practices with respect and valued age-old prescriptive rights. They did not fail to compare the sort of title an African chief held with the gentlemanliness they laid claim to themselves.<sup>24</sup> In Palestine a basic element in the British perception of the Arab majority was that Palestinians were degenerate Levantines of mixed race and questionable character as opposed to the 'authentic' Arab of the desert Beduin, a gentleman by birth.<sup>25</sup> The Brahmin in India was considered the 'natural' leader of the Hindus as in Richard Westmacott's 1830 statue of Warren Hastings shown accompanied by two Indians—one a tall, classically proportioned Brahmin with a shaven head and topknot, and the other a seated *munshi* or scribe, bearded and turbaned: the latter represented the Muslims and the former the Hindus.<sup>26</sup> Thus the authentic Hindu was the Brahmin just as the authentic Sinhalese was the high caste Kandyan, guardian of the admirable qualities of tradition. British respect went to what was regarded as the 'real native not the hybrid, university trained mule'.27

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> L.A. Wickremaratne, 'Kandyans and Nationalism', p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 247.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> B.S. Wallerstein, The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the ArabJewish Conflict, 1917–1929, London, 1978, p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> T.R. Metcalf, 'Ideologies of the Raj' in G. Johnson, C.A. Bayly and J.F. Richards (eds), *The New Cambridge History of India*, III, Cambridge, 1994, p. 132.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Rudyard Kipling cited in B.S. Wallerstein, *The British in Palestine*, p. 13.

But just as in India, where the English-educated people declared themselves committed to the common good and to progress, insisting that they and not the 'traditional' aristocratic notables represented the larger public, so in Sri Lanka the Westernised elite, mainly from the Low Country, tried to show they were more worthy of trust than the 'feudal' Kandyan chieftain. This trust was to be painstakingly gained by the Ceylon National Congress which spearheaded the struggle for independence from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards. When Ceylon gained independence in 1948 it was clear that the British had been forced to trust the men whom they had despised a few decades earlier.

The evolution of the colonial rulers' attitude towards the Kandyans offers a parallel to their attitude towards the nationalist movement dominated by Low-Country Sinhalese. As one lost ground the other gained. As independence became a possibility, colonial rule shifted its support to the modernising forces in society. The turning point was the sittings of the Donoughmore Commission in 1927, where the federal scheme of the Kandyans was rejected.

Thus, when Kandyan leaders began to echo the voice of the provincial agents and appropriate their arguments to press for more political power, Governor Manning lent them unconditional support. The crux of the discord between Kandyans and Low-Country Sinhalese was the discrepancy, real or perceived, in the distribution both of *de jure* power resources—that is, the power resources which accrued to each individual by virtue of his or her citizenship in the state, in particular the right and ability to petition the government and organise political action—and of *de facto* power resources such as education and wealth. The more articulate members of the Kandyan community translated this sense of deprivation into an appeal for remedial political action. Manning's task was easy. It consisted in canalising Kandyan fears and discontent, and presenting their case in a supportive manner to the Colonial Office. These were the fears and grievances of the upper rungs of Kandyan society. The peasantry had little chance to forward its claims, which were surely not for education and wealth but for land, food or labour.

Different arguments have been put forward as to whether, with the growth of the plantation system, the subsistence village ecology was affected to the point that landless villagers were compelled to seek employment on estates.<sup>28</sup> Colonial policy did in many cases

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> L.R.U. Jayawardena, 'The Supply of Sinhalese Labour to Ceylon Plantations,

result in landlessness. As early as 1869 the Assistant Agent at Kegalle spoke of 'a surplus population, a population which cannot derive subsistence from its labour'. Following the paddy tax, evictions had occurred in Badulla and Nuwara Eliya and the peasants who lost their paddy fields were nearest the subsistence level. In the Kegalle district village land was sold to estates and a landless class of labourers was in the making.<sup>29</sup>

Kandyan leaders clearly did feel threatened by the Colombo reform leaders. The 'Ceylonese' nationalism that the latter articulated was perceived as the announcement of political domination by the Low Country Sinhalese and the extinction of Kandyan culture and tradition. J.N.O. Attygalle used harsh words against the 'Ceylonese Britishers' whom he denounced *en bloc* as 'nouveaux riches', professional politicians or adventurers, upstarts who were 'averse to be called by their racial names Sinhalese and Tamils which provoked inquiries from outsiders as to the places assigned to them socially by long usage and custom'. What Attygalle suggested was that the Sinhalese who preferred to assume a Ceylonese identity, rather than a Low Country Sinhalese identity, belonged to lower castes and did so in order to dilute 'traditional' Sinhala caste hierarchies. In the Kandyan view it was inconceivable that the CNC should arrogate to itself the right to speak for the whole country.

In 1920 there was considerable agitation for a substantial increase in the number of unofficial members in the Ceylon Legislative Council. Congress pressed for territorial election and for the abolition of communal representation and sent a reform deputation to meet Viscount Milner, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.<sup>31</sup> The Kandyan ranks were divided. Dr T.B. Kobbekaduwa, a prominent Kandyan, addressed a message to his community just before his departure to England, in which he stressed the need for a relationship based on trust if there were to be ethnic harmony in Ceylon: 'Scorn the idea that a general electorate does threaten us

<sup>1830–1930:</sup> a Study of Imperial Policy in a Peasant Society', PhD, Cambridge University, 1963, cited in Eric Meyer, 'Between Village and Plantation: Sinhalese Estate Labour in British Ceylon', *Colloques Internationaux du CNRS*, 582: *Asie du Sud. Traditions et Changements*, pp. 459–68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 465-6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ceylon Observer, 27 June 1918.

<sup>31</sup> The Ceylon Reform Deputation led by Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam was composed of eminent politicians and included a number of Kandyans including A.E. Molamure and T.B. Kobbekaduwa.

with extermination or the domination of us by others'. <sup>32</sup> Immediately prompted by Manning, a segment of the Kandyan elite sent a rival deputation composed of three lawyers of Radala status, J.A. Halangoda, G.E. Madawala and T.B. Moonemalle, to London in June 1920. They pressed for the ratio of seats which the Kandyan Association—formed in 1917—had deemed necessary to ensure their distinctiveness in a reformed Legislative Council, that is, five seats out of thirteen. <sup>33</sup> Manning, on his side, urged the Colonial Office to recognise the Kandyans as a minority community that needed to be represented in the reformed Council by members elected on a franchise confined to Kandyans. <sup>34</sup>

However, convincing the Colonial Office and the House of Commons that the Kandyans formed an oppressed minority, that could only be protected by extending the communal principle to them, presented some difficulty. In the Commons the Under-Secretary of State was a solitary voice in favour of communal representation. He was strongly attacked by Col. J.C. Wedgwood of the Labour Party who believed that 'consolidation of communal representation under representative government was a method used to divide and rule'. Finally, unable to withstand Manning's unremitting pressure, Milner yielded to Kandyan demands. The Kandyans were allowed to elect their representatives through communal electorates and Manning gloated over the paucity of concessions made to the Congress delegation.

The 1920 reforms were based on the 'balance of power' theory advocated and practised by Manning. Arunachalam, who had led the Congress delegation, had nursed hopes for something comparable to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms in India: he had strong reason to be disappointed. Representation had been arranged so that, in the words of the Secretary of State, 'every community shall be represented and while there is a substantial non official majority, no single community can impose its will on other communities

<sup>32</sup> Ceylon Daily News, 21 April 1920.

<sup>33</sup> The Kandyan Association Monthly Letter, 2, November 1920, cited in Calvin H. Woodward, The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon, Providence, RI, 1967, p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> The Colonial Office was aware that the Kandyans were protected by Sir William Manning. See for instance CO54/842, H. Cowell's minute of 30 April 1920.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Debates of the House of Commons, 11 Aug. 1920, cited in D.K. Greenstreet, Ethnic and Elective Problems of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), 1796–1931, London, 1982, p. 190.

if the latter are supported by official members.'36 For the Kandyan community the reforms meant the addition of only one more representative. The victory, if largely symbolic, was of importance. From this point onwards the Kandyan political leadership had two options: siding with the Low Country Sinhalese or assuming a minority identity, since Manning had succeeded in making their stand as a minority acceptable to those in control.

The Ceylon Tamil and Kandyan cases presented some similarities. However, the main difference was that the Ceylon Tamils' political leadership had until the beginning of the 1920s always insisted that they were a majority community on the same footing as the Low Country Sinhalese and the Kandyans. This 'majority complex' had been at the heart of all their political stands. In the early twentieth century, at a time when leading Tamils were members of the CNC, the Yalpana Thamilar Cankam (Jaffna Tamil Association) based in Jaffna was the main organisation (formed in 1905) voicing the social and political aspirations of the Tamils. Its President was a teacher, James Hensman, and its membership included persons of all religions and castes, although many of its office bearers were Christian. Unlike other associations such as the Saiva Paripalana Sabhai or Hindu Maha Sabhai—formed for religious, cultural and linguistic reasons, inspired by the Indian National Congress and the South Indian Dravidian Movement the Jaffna Association was explicitly political in its aims and constantly agitated for Tamils to gain more political power. The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the growth of organisations involved in social and economic issues such as the Aikkiya Nanaya Cankam (Cooperative Finance Society) or the Batticaloa Union formed in 1920, which fuelled the more political Jaffna Association and nurtured a socially aware and active group of people in the region.<sup>37</sup>

The rift between the Sinhalese and the Tamil leadership began after the elections to the reformed Legislative Council in early 1921, which returned thirteen Sinhalese to territorial constituencies as against three Tamils. From then onwards influential Tamils began to campaign for the restoration of the Tamil-Sinhalese ratio of representation that existed prior to the reforms. In 1921 the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Cmd. 1809, Ceylon. Correspondence Relating to the Further Revision of the Constitution, Duke of Devonshire to Governor Manning, 11 Jan. 1923.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Murugar Gunasingham, *Sri Lankan Nationalism: a Study of its Origins*, Sydney, 1999, pp. 206–8.

Tamil Mahajana Sabhai had been established, with the purpose of voicing the claims of the Tamils as a minority community. Most Ceylon Tamils, including Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, withdrew from Congress, while a mere handful of Colombo and Kandy based professionals remained. This was the beginning of a phase of collaboration with the imperial power. On 1 April 1922 a memorandum setting out the views of the minorities on constitutional reform and drafting a scheme of constituencies and representation on an ethnic basis was sent to the Colonial Office. If this joint memorandum was mainly the work of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Manning endorsed his views by describing it as a model memorandum, and paid a great tribute to him for having succeeded in bringing the minorities together.<sup>38</sup> The Congress memorandum, which had been simultaneously presented to the Secretary of State, was accompanied by merciless criticisms on the part of Manning: 'The Congress,' he noted, 'is undisguisedly out for Sinhalese domination over all communities and it may now be said to be almost purely a Sinhalese organisation. It is unmistakably clear that the minority representatives do not admit that their interests are in no way different from those of the general electorate.'39

Viscount Milner and H. Cowell were perceptive enough to raise doubts about Tamil demands: 'The demands of the Tamils in this joint memorandum are somewhat excessive... It would be a doubtful measure to agree to communal representation for the Tamils who are a numerous and progressive class.'40 However, when the 1923 reforms were announced, it was apparent that Manning's views had once again prevailed. They were in many ways a bequest from the Governor to the Tamils: the Ceylon Tamils who formed no more than 11 per cent of the population were given eight seats. whereas 16 seats were allotted to the Sinhalese who formed 67 per cent of the population. The provision for special representation of Kandyans was done away with and the Kandyans were included in the general territorial electorate. The scheme was typical of the system of checks and balances advocated by the Governor as the only means of safeguarding the rights of the minorities. The corollary to the 'divide and rule' principle was balance of power between groups.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> CO 54/853, Confidential Memorandum on the Memorial of the CNC by Governor Manning, 3 April 1922

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

However, Governor Manning's role in the construction of a Tamil political community must be read in the context of the changes that were taking place in the self-perception of the Tamil leadership of the period. When Ponnambalam Arunachalam reluctantly moved away from his ideals of Gladstonian liberalism to join his brother Ramanathan's camp it was a phase of national politics that came to an end. Only little is known of the way these political choices were reflected in the minds of the common people in Jaffna. After 1922 Maha Jana Sabhais, Tamil speaking local organisations that were overwhelmingly Vellala organisations, each led by a minor civil servant, a village headman or a teacher, were started in many of the larger villages throughout the peninsula, such as Manipay, Chunnakam, Navaly, Mallakam, Uduvil, Vaddukodai and Point Pedro. There were also village committees whose jurisdiction covered essentially village affairs such as small works, schools, tanks, roads and drainage. There were forty village committees in the Northern Province in 1927. In 1924 an All Ceylon Village Committees Association had been formed, but the Northern Province had its own Association, the North Ceylon Village Committee. This organisation lobbied the colonial government about colonisation schemes, provision of irrigation and causeways, credit for tobacco and paddy farmers, and solicited aid for village workers. The Committee's demands were closely related to the needs of the common people in the Northern Province, farmers and workers. Its politics developed alongside that of the elite Tamils whose demands for more representation were purely of a constitutional nature. 41 The North Cevlon Workmen's Union that had been formed on behalf of the 50,000 persons involved in the toddy industry in the Northern Province made the point, a few years later, that the people they represented were not represented by the members of the Legislative Council.42

Those who were privileged enough to exert a political choice through the vote—as in the 1924 elections to the Legislative Council when 4–5 per cent of the population were given the right to vote—were surely doing so within the constraints of the communal boundaries agreed upon by colonial rulers. The divisions

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Jane Russel, Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931–1947, Dehiwela, 1982, pp. 94–8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Special Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon 1927, Record of Oral Evidence. Public Sittings, vol. 3: Evidence of the North Ceylon Workmen's Union Represented by Mr A.P. Thambiah and Others, pp. 185–8.

created by colonialism did not change their 'being', but rather caused them to adopt a specific political position. But people did not always follow the rules: in 1924 only three Kandyans were elected for seven Kandyan seats to the Legislative Council. Kandyans on this occasion preferred voting for Low Country Sinhalese members of the Ceylon National Congress rather than for their 'traditional leaders'.

The census must thus be conceived as an instrument more for establishing new categories for political pursuits and entitlements than for making them a social reality. While political representation was shaped through the construction of political communities, social representation was also 'designed' by colonial edicts and rules in the ceremonial sphere.

# Colonial constructs of authenticity and gender differences<sup>43</sup>

In the ceremonial sphere British constructs were precise and to a large extent informed by a certain knowledge of what constituted the appropriate dress of different social groups of different ranks. The *Gazette* notification of 1935, in which instructions regarding the number of appointments for each ethnic group to the offices of headman, president of village tribunal or interpreter to the governor, and to honorary ranks such as Mudaliyar, Muhandiram and Adigar, were laid out in great detail, reads as a lesson in colonial wizardry.

Many of the honorary ranks mentioned—generally bestowed on occasions such as the (British) King's Birthday—did not have antiquity to commend them. The Tamil Muhandiram rank, for instance, was created—in the prosaic sense of the term—in 1935. It was the institution of a strict etiquette that brought legitimacy to these offices. For attendance at every public function, details of appropriate headwear, footwear, medals and swords were prescribed: a Tamil Muhandiram had to wear a white turban with silver lace and a Muslim Muhandiram had to wear a Turkish turban with white as the predominant colour.<sup>44</sup> Uniforms were exotic exhibits of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> This section draws from Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body*, op.cit., pp. 78–92; 'From Hybridity to Authenticity: the Biography of a few Kandyan Things' in Neluka Silva (ed.), *The Hybrid Island: Culture crossings and the invention of identity in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2002, pp. 71–92; and 'La chaussure "traditionelle" dans l'ile de Sri Lanka. Héritage et invention', *Institut de Calcéologie*, no. 6, 1999, pp. 40–5.

<sup>44</sup> Ceylon Government Gazette, 17 April 1935

authentic indigenous cultures as the British perceived them. All office bearers were compelled to wear these identitarian uniforms and photographs of the period are ample proof that natives abided by the strict etiquette set out for them. These costumes emphasised the specificity of each ethnic group, Low Country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim. Did the wearer's self-perception as a member of a specific ethnic group increase by virtue of wearing an identitarian costume? For those who met and interacted with these officials, the costumes and the differences between them were surely an indication if not a message of the way society was—in the official view.

Through the definition of this ceremonial sphere the gap between the Oriental and the Western was once again emphasised, which reinforced some of the perceptions common in the theatre and in Sinhala newspapers about what constituted an oriental culture. However, there was no clear-cut rule about the introduction of non-oriental styles into the ceremonial dress of the natives. Western elements in ceremonial dress were accepted in some cases but not in others. If one were to discern a general trend, it seems, in the Kandyan dress, no foreign element was tolerated, while in the dress of the Low Country Sinhalese the assumption was they were already part of a hybrid culture and Western elements were prevalent. A description in the 1935 Gazette of the shirt of a Kandyan Sinhalese *disawa* in semi-dress exemplifies this tendency: 'Reli Kamise or shirt with frills (not to be European dress shirt)'. 45 This added qualification suggests that the invented tradition for Kandyans was resolutely non-Western. Hybridity was not tolerated in any form in the dress of the community that embodied tradition as the British perceived it.

Like the *Gazette*, other writings showed that Kandyan culture was perceived as pure, while Low Country Sinhalese culture was read as composite. Among the colonial writings that documented the 'authentic' in society as the British envisioned it, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon* stands out. The explicit purpose of this volume was clearly defined in the preface. It was 'to give a perfect microcosm of the colony or dependency treated'.<sup>46</sup> It was 'the outcome of an enterprise designed to give in an attractive form full and reliable information with reference to the outlying parts of the Empire'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> A. Wright (ed.), Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon, Preface (no page number).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibid.

What this book did in fact was to chart the 'authentic' in Ceylonese society or what was worth museumising. In this operation the objects of the inquiry, namely the leading families in Ceylonese society, became willing subjects. The book is composed of a number of essays and illustrated with black and white photographs of men and women who belong to the traditional or the new elite. It purports to reach completeness and accuracy.

The photographs give a rational and ordered version of the diverse dress of the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim people. No judgement or opinion is offered. The description is purely informative. In the same way the costumes are timeless, unanchored and dehistoricised. When one sifts through this photograph album of solemn faces in their best costumes, what is conveyed is the author's mitigated respect for his subjects, either in their authentic dress or the most fashionable Western outfit. The violence of the colonial gaze is absent, replaced with the inquiring search for the traditional and the elegant. In this four hundred page book/photograph album two pages of text are devoted to the dress of the Sinhalese, in which clear distinctions are made between, on the one hand, the dress of the Low country Sinhalese and the Kandyans and, on the other, that of the lower and upper classes.<sup>48</sup>

The writer, who in many ways exemplified the colonial mind—the Low-Country Mudaliyar who on occasions 'assumed the European coat' and wore medals given to him by the colonial state, embodied modernity, while his Kandyan counterpart remained firmly entrenched in the traditional realm. The Low-Country man's costume was described as a mixture of East and West. The Kandyan costume, which seemingly drew solely from indigenous culture, was perceived as being more 'authentic'.

Of the Kandyan or highland Sinhalese, a colonial official wrote in the same book, '...they are the living examples of a remote antiquity and they are almost as fresh and original to us as the inhabitants of the coast of the island were to the early invaders'. <sup>49</sup> Then comparing them with the Low Country Sinhalese he wrote: '...while the low-country Sinhalese materially changed with the tide of each successive European administration and adapted themselves to western modes, manners and habits, the Kandyans remained in status quo.' <sup>50</sup> It appears the Kandyans were thought of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 334–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid.

as museum pieces, as the epitome of the unchanging, slow-moving Orient.

The situation was quite different in the case of the Low Country Sinhalese. The descriptions of the ceremonial costumes of the Maha Mudaliyar, Gate Mudaliyar or Muhandiram show many elements borrowed from the West. The coat, for instance, was undoubtedly Western black or dark navy blue in colour with loops and buttons down the front and cuffs with 'Austrian knot' for the Mudaliyars. The footwear was also Western: black boots or black shoes. The implication was that in the early twentieth century Low Country Sinhalese customs were hybrid enough to incorporate any amount of western elements. Purity had been 'sullied' a long time ago.

The details pertaining to the wearing of shoes—in particular, what is referred to as the juta in the Gazette notification of 1935 gives some indication of the features of the authentic as it was conceived in the official mind. The Telugu name *juta* for the Kandyan shoe and its appearance during the reign of the Nayakkar kings seem to point towards a recent South Indian origin. But not only did the British consolidate the *juta* as the only authentic shoe, they also transformed it into the oriental shoe par excellence. Indeed it is interesting to note that in the Gazette of 1935 jutas are recommended not only for the Kandyan Sinhalese, but also for Muslim and Tamil officials if they choose to wear a sarong instead of trousers. For a Ceylon Tamil the recommended uniform gives the following details: 'With sarong: if shoes are worn, jutas without socks or shoes with socks and matching stockings.' This is followed by the important recommendation that 'Jutas must be taken off in the presence of the Governor'.

So the *juta* lost first its South Indian character and then its regional/Kandyan character and, reinvented by the colonial administration, became the oriental shoe worn by Kandyans, Muslims and Tamils. It was also coded as a sartorial symbol of subjugation: its presence on the foot of a native official in the presence of the Governor was considered an affront.

British colonial policy on official footwear clearly shows the colonial rulers' attempt to subsume the complexities of Sri Lankan cultures under the unifying idea of the Orient. It also shows that in the colonial view Kandyans could remain pure even as they wore south Indian *jutas* on their feet. Hybridity came with mixing East and West. When 'oriental' cultures mixed, they fused and merged into an acceptable whole, they did not become hybrid. Thus identi-

ties in Sri Lanka were predicated upon the notion of difference between the colonial and the native. The authenticities that were constructed were largely based on a British understanding of race and history that privileged 'purity' and age-old traditions.

Through their participation in the constructing of authenticities for various communities in the island, some British—there would have been internal differences within the colonial community—conceptualised the difference between Britain and the East in terms of gender too.

Colonial laws and administrative practices had elaborated a system of where people were or were not. They belonged somewhere with certainty, and proof of this belonging was visible. Cross-gender behaviour was therefore troubling to British men accustomed to a clear demarcation of gender roles and appearance. For this reason the *konde* (hair tied up in a bun) of southern Sinhalese men caused them much worry. Why would self-respecting men keep their hair long and worse, tie it up in a bun over which a comb was fixed?

As late as 1887, in spite of the increase in commoditisation men were killing themselves over the right of certain people to wear the comb. Men from an elite Oli family from South of Colombo planned to attend a marriage ceremony wearing combs in the Goyigama (traditionally highest caste) style. The local Goyigamas successfully prevented them from doing so and an Oli was killed in the affray. Governor Arthur Gordon opposed taking any action against them, for he believed that the Olis had provoked the riot by giving 'grievous offence'. In 1801 Cornelis de Alwis Vidane, Muhandiram of Galle, complained in a petition to Governor North that a Lieutenant Short had struck him on his head and broken his comb.

The operation of cutting off the *konde*, which became a quasiobsession for the colonial rulers, was an integral part of the silent violence of colonial rule. To be fair, impressions of the *konde* were mixed among the British; but most would have approved the 1906 ruling according to which the colonial state specified that Volunteers in Ceylon should no longer wear a *konde*. This new law would affect thirty Sinhalese men. Until then long hair had not been considered a threat. The editors of the *Ceylon National Review*, a mildly radical magazine, sarcastically commented: 'We suppose it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> John D. Rogers, Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka, London, 1987, p. 171.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Cited in U.C. Wickremeratne, The Conservative Nature of the British Rule of Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1996, p. 177.

interferes in some mysterious way with the defense of the Empire, still we can't help wondering how.' They suggested these men should retire from service rather than comply.<sup>53</sup>

In European culture cutting the hair of one's enemy signifies his total submission. Historical examples are many, from Julius Caesar who cut the long hair of the Gaulish chiefs to the scalping and eventual decimation of native Americans. For British rulers in Ceylon the sight of long haired men was a threat to their power. The Foucaultian notion of 'bio-power' and 'the body surface' offers some powerful tools for examining colonial visions of the body. In his later works, Foucault identifies a distinctive mode of modern power that produces its effects from within the sphere of the self through regulation, inhibitions and introspection—a mode that he calls bio-power. Accounts of the functioning of bio-power have all involved institutions and practices concerned with the regulation and 'inscription' of bodies—such as medicine, punishment and sexuality.

In Ceylon district courts had the power to inflict punishment of up to one year in prison, fifty lashes, a fine of £100 or any of the two above. There was no formal limit to the punishment the Supreme Court could impose, though in practice the death sentence was passed only in cases of murder. In the 1880s reforms led to a reduction of lashes to twenty-five. But this decision was overturned in the 1890s when magistrates were given the power to order corporal punishment for specific offences. 'Whippings in Sri Lanka were carried out with a cat-o-nine-tails and flayed the back of the prisoner scarring him for life'. <sup>54</sup> Doing away with the *konde* was less hurtful than corporal punishment, but it remained a central part of the strengthening of colonial bio-power.

What was often perceived as a 'distinctive mark of the Low Country Sinhalese' was, according to popular tales, introduced in the eighteenth century by a Malay prince who was deported from Java to Ceylon by the Dutch. Popular stories also claim that the custom of wearing a comb came after a Dutch governor had suggested to a native chief that a comb would keep his hair turned up in place. From then on headwear (hats) was no longer used among the Low Country Sinhalese who adopted the comb. The comb became part of 'tradition'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Ceylon National Review, No. 1, January 1906, p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> John Rogers, Crime, Justice and Society, p. 44.

The colonial rulers of Ceylon were unnerved by the comb, perhaps even more than the turban in India, because of its feminine character. By wearing combs Sinhalese men were in effect becoming women. The effeminacy of Sinhalese men was part of the British rulers' general appreciation of men from India. As early as the 1750s Robert Orme spoke of the effeminacy of the inhabitants of Hindustan. Gender in fact helped define the contrast between ruler and ruled and provided a way to order Britain's relations with its Indian and Ceylonese subjects. According to the powerful domestic ideology that developed in Britain in the early nineteenth century, it was innate and demonstrable biological distinctions that defined the fundamental difference between male and female. By their very nature women were fragile, passive and emotional, in contrast to men who were strong, active and intellectual. These differences in the structuring of the body in turn dictated differing patterns of behaviour for men and women. Men were to be active in the public world, competing against each other for power and wealth; while women from the sanctuary of the home were to nurture their husbands and children.55

The very nature of British imperial experience brought into prominence the 'masculine virtues' such as control and self-discipline, and de-emphasised the 'feminine' virtues such as tenderness and feeling which were expressive of the softer side of human nature. <sup>56</sup> Sinhalese men were considered feminine as were men belonging to particular communities in India, such as Bengalis. However, the Bengali and Sinhalese situation differed because not only were men considered feminine by colonial observers in Ceylon, Sinhalese women were attributed masculine features.

Many Europeans arriving in the colonial worlds of the nineteenth century were interested in the sensual, physical and bodily nature of indigenous cultures, and the early ethnographic texts that often framed their interest in these subjects shared this preoccupation. Nineteenth-century travel narratives about Ceylon define a very specific conceptual domain. Among the more negative features highlighted by colonial minds was, in a positive manner, about the freedom enjoyed by women: 'The men are not jealous of their wives, for the greatest ladies in the land will frequently talk and discourse with any men they please although their husbands be in

<sup>55</sup> T.R. Metcalf, 'Ideologies of the Raj', pp. 92-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 31–4.

presence.'<sup>57</sup> A British colonel in *La Féerie Cinghalaise*, a popular French novel, summed up the prevalent view about Sinhalese women in the early twentieth century: '*Curieux pays...tout y est beau, sauf les femmes. A vingt ans, elles sont fichues*' (Strange country...everything there is nice, except the women. At twenty, they are finished).<sup>58</sup>

Sinhalese women, it seems, troubled colonial minds just as Keralan women did. They did not conform to the idea which prevailed in the Raj of the oriental woman as a person mysterious, beautiful but tragic, feeble and in need of protection. By challenging the traditional understanding of the relationship between anatomy and social roles Sinhalese women created a feeling of uneasiness. Hence the colonel's cruel indictment.

The perceived effeminacy of the Sinhala men and the masculine features of the women were also linked to their attire:

The only visible distinction between the sexes consists in the women wearing rather shorter jackets than the men, enjoying generally rather coarser features, and dispensing with the masculine appendages of combs and parasols.<sup>59</sup> Captain Percival stated that women 'get old and haggard in their looks immediately after they pass twenty', while the Reverend James Cordiner declaimed: 'The women are lower in stature than the men and the greater part of them are not comely.' According to Elisabeth Harris Sri Lankan women were neither romanticised nor praised by British men. <sup>61</sup>

One of the reasons was their dress was perceived as unbecoming. Dress was sometimes seen as inadequate, sometimes as simply plain. It lacked the exuberance colonial minds expected of oriental women. On the whole the variety in the looks of the Sri Lanka women and the simplicity of their attire puzzled many British males who were looking for some idealised oriental woman. Construing an authentic Sinhalese woman was therefore of no interest to colonial writers and officials. In sharp contrast to its role in gelling male

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, Dehiwela, 1958, pp. 123–4. This book was first published in 1681.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> François de Croisset, *La Féerie Cinghalaise*, Paris, 1923, p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> E. Sullivan, The Bungalow and the Tent or A Visit to Ceylon, London, 1854, p. 19, cited in Elisabeth Harris, The Gaze of the Coloniser: British Views of Local Women in 19th Century Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1994, pp. 14–15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Robert Percival, An Account of the Island of Ceylon, p. 181; James Cordiner, Description of Ceylon Containing An Account of the Country, Inhabitants and Natural Productions, vol. 1, 1907, repr. Dehiwela Tisara Prakasakayo, p. 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Elisabeth Harris, The Gaze of the Coloniser.

identities through official costumes, colonialism had little impact on the formation of 'authentic women' of different communities.

Official Ceylon, like official India, did not concern itself with women's attire. Colonial minds found more resources and inspiration in the willing group of men, chiefs and aspiring leaders whose claims to authenticity had, in their understanding, more right to support. A word of reservation is however necessary concerning the omnibus category of the 'colonial ruler'. There is no evidence of a single colonial consciousness—mingling middle-class moralism, hyper-masculinity and guilt—that would include both the defenders of empire and the more passive middling participants. <sup>62</sup> Difference is an attribute that needs to be tested for colonisers too.

# Evading colonial divides

Colonial divides were challenged by individuals and currents that refused to accept colonial divisive perceptions. While nationalism often met colonialism halfway in its play of myths and purities, a few cases of evasion of such divides merit mention. Evasion meant sometimes looking beyond the territory of birth. In the early twentieth century some intellectuals saw India as the motherland and not as a threatening power. Under the aegis of the orientalist A.K. Coomaraswamy there was a renewal of interest in Sinhalese and Tamil art, literature and music. The Ceylon National Review, the journal he edited, emphasised the mental and spiritual kinship existing between India and Ceylon. 63 India represented the 'Motherland' and the 'anglicisation of the East' was subjected to much criticism.<sup>64</sup> Coomaraswamy believed in uniting the 'Eastern races of Ceylon'.65 However, his syncretic ideals remained confined to the literati. In the following decades fewer references were made to India as a mother culture. It was no longer India but a specific geographical portion of India, the land of the Aryans identified as the province of Bengal, which was looked upon as the motherland of the Arya Sinhalas. A.K. Coomaraswamy's father, Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy, invented the costume of a prince for himself to fulfil his aristocratic strivings, a costume that had nothing in common with what men wore in Jaffna in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ceylon National Review, II, 4, July 1907, p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., I, 2, July 1906, pp. 181–95.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., I, 1, January 1906, p. 9.

The costume—a long coat, a gold laced turban and gold chain with diamond pendant around the neck—was similar to that of a Rajput or Sikh prince and quite unlike the attire of South Indian kings. His two nephews,

Ponnambalam Arunachalam and Ramanathan, adopted this costume and even today Colombo Tamil males wear this outfit on their wedding days.<sup>66</sup> Sir Muttu, in spite of his admiration for British customs and his other enthusiastic collaborations with the colonial rulers was in fact displaying his belonging to the South Asian cultural domain.

Colonial discourse also produced figures and processes that its structure of power could not easily accommodate. This was the case with the mimic men, the anglicised Indian or Ceylonese 'brown Englishmen' who, as Macaulay said, had to be 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'. Those who wore Western dress belonged mainly to the urbanised, educated, English-speaking male elites. Governor Hugh Clifford described them in rather caustic terms:

An essentially imitative people, they have adopted from their childhood the manner of living, the speech and as many of the social usages of the English as their means can make accessible to them. They are proud of having imbibed such an exclusive British quality as the public school spirit...and they display a no less British extravagance in the keen interest they take in games, no one of which is indigenous...and in their admiration of athletic prowess. They delight in public banquets...attend them clad in orthodox evening dress... Many of them experience difficulty in addressing an audience in Sinhalese; many of them have visited Great Britain and in ordinary conversation allude to England as home.<sup>67</sup>

Although colonial rule had created this social group, most British had only contempt for its members. But this group thrived owing to the extension of the franchise and the growth of mass consumer markets that had facilitated the disappearance of ascriptive signs of personal value. Differences within the group were erased while self and the presentation of self became dependent on style and fashion rather than on fixed symbols of class and hierarchical status. Status involved style, and to a certain extent was style. <sup>68</sup> This group was not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy, 'Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy: British Shadows and Sri Lankan Dreams', Law and Society Trust Lecture Series, Colombo, 3 July 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> CO 537/692, Governor Hugh Clifford's despatch of 20 November 1926.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, London, 1984.

homogeneous. The extent of its immersion in the value system of the colonisers varied, but at the least its members shared a certain facility with the English language. The ethnic divides exemplified by the *Gazette* notification of 1935 were transcended by this small but influential group that would form the core of the leaders of the Ceylon National Congress.

Even more subversive, because they denied the power of definition to the colonial power and displaced the apparatus of value coding, were the rare moments when Sinhalese and European clothes were worn together. These have been called 'hybrid moments', when the colonised does not produce a copy of the original but misappropriates it, thereby denying its authority. In Bombay the Parsis began to wear European shoes and trousers with their own style of coat and Parsi hats called *phenta*. <sup>69</sup> In Sri Lanka European garments were not always easy to acquire; this, combined with their expense, made them good status symbols that marked out a man's superiority and progressiveness to the local community. Vijayatunga has described how members of the local elite chose to wrap a sarong over their trousers, thus acknowledging both European and Ceylonese customs.

[...] The president of the Village Tribunal...wears a white cotton suit of the so called European cut and wraps over his trousers a white cloth Sarong fashion in the native style, but leaving a good twelve inches of the trouser ends to be seen. Whether this is an additional respect for the European trouser or the covering up of a shameful lapse I have never fathomed, but all Gansabhava (village tribunals) Presidents,...in fact all the aristocrats and those who wish to pass as such...they all sport the mystic masonic all-round apron over their trousers.<sup>70</sup>

In practical terms this enabled a man to be in fashion without having to Westernise his appearance totally. But the hidden text of this dress was to chart a way of subverting the order of reason and progress instituted by colonialism. It was a way of undoing the implacable dichotomies of colonial thought—East/West, traditional/modern, primitive/civilised. The potentially explosive feature of hybrid dress was never realised in Ceylon, where it remained at the level of amusement and derision. As we shall see in the next chapter, nationalism never claimed hybridity, but instead reiterated and reinforced the colonial discourse of purity.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in ibid., p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Emma Tarlo, Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India, London, 1996, p. 48.

In colonised Sri Lanka identities were sustained and maintained by definitive structures and legal identification and representation. The evolution of laws, constitutions and political assemblies, like the segregation of communities whether spatially or in their relation to economies and political processes, were a vital point in the process of identity formation. However, although divide and rule strategies permeated the policies of certain governors, there was generally no master plan that guided their relations with the colonised peoples. The census mode of identification had a limited impact as it mainly provided a grid for the British to make sense of diversity. But it did not 'create' identities from a *tabula rasa*. Colonial rulers, when they tried to understand and order an often incomprehensible world, instituted codes that ruled what was authentic and not, what was civilised and not, who should voice an opinion and who should not.

The next chapter will examine the difficulties in evading the impositions of the politics of imagined communities and the efforts of those who, having moved away from the colonial coding of values, ceased to be the Sinhalese or the Tamil of the British imagination.

#### AUTHENTIC BODIES AND THINGS

'Ceylon [is] in possession of continuous written chronicles, rich in authentic facts.'

- Sir James Emerson Tennent

'A system that has stood the test of time in spite of neglect must have something good in it, otherwise 70 per cent of the population will not resort to it in time of illness.'

— SP XXIV, Report of the Commission on Indigenous Medicine

In the early twentieth century the Tower Hall stage was an important arena where working class audiences watching didactic and nationalist plays reflected on what constituted an authentic national consciousness. In the same vein the literate classes were able to appreciate the diverse views expressed in the fledgling press of the day on the heritage and past that needed to be rekindled. During this period it was mainly in the sphere of culture that anticolonialism found expression in moments of declamation of what constituted the authentic in the 'nation to be'.

That notions of authenticity were central to the growth of anticolonial ideas in the early twentieth century is generally agreed. However, interpretations vary about the contours and features of the 'authentic'. For instance, were the space and sign of the last kings of Kandy in the central hills considered important only until the mid-nineteenth century? Was Kandyan symbolism erased or

totally superseded by the historical landscape of the Rajarata or North Central Province in the historical imagination of the nationalists? This chapter will argue that notions of the authentic not only varied in time but coexisted. Evidently among the Sinhala Buddhist literati there was in the late nineteenth century the idea of an authentic past that was grounded in the age-old hydraulic civilisation of the Rajarata, but together with this there was the idea of an 'authentic for the present' or 'for the immediate' founded on Kandyan signs and symbols.¹ The Kandyan heritage was not superseded by the Mahavamsian dominant discourse of the nation, but remained and entrenched itself in the material culture of the people. Examples of national dress, national artefacts, restoration of ruins and indigenous medicine, among other things, will be looked at in some detail to throw light on the multiple meanings of authenticity.

Spreading notions of authenticity: schools, reading, newspapers, theatre and new religious practices

At the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth a variety of new influences and technologies entered the lives of the people and drastically changed the ways in which they looked upon themselves and upon the world around them. A renewed Buddhism fed upon the burgeoning print industry to reach out to the newly literate people and tear them away from the 'heresies' preached by Christian missionaries. The spread of literacy through the development of schools created a new reading public in the vernacular languages—avid consumers of the culturally conscious press and writings of the day, breaking the monopoly of modern knowledge until then preserved by the Anglophone elites. The theatre created new spaces of empathy where people congregated and united in common critiques of colonial rule, of Westernised behaviour and habits or, in the case of the English language the-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The differentiation of the Sinhalese community into Low Country and Kandyan Sinhalese, a division that was regional in origin, was a legacy of the European impact. It is commonly believed that, as a result of four centuries of Western influence, the Low-Country Sinhalese of the southern and western coastal areas comprise more than two-thirds of the Sinhalese. They tend to diverge somewhat in social practices and attitudes from the more 'traditional' Kandyans of the interior, who remained independent until 1815 and were subject to much later and less intense Western influence

atre, in unabashed admiration of these same values and habits. Through new practices people began to perceive themselves in different ways, both as individuals and as members of larger collectivities. In this context ideas about authenticity forged by the literati travelled fast and spread to social groups until then relatively untouched by modern readings of the past.

Schools. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gender, class, language/ethnicity and region of origin dictated the type and quality of education that a child would receive. Martin Wickremasinghe, born in 1890 in the southern village of Kogalla, related his experience of learning and schooling under colonial rule. At the age of five he was taught, both at home and in the village temple, the Sinhala alphabet by a monk, Andiris Gunananse. He also learned the Devanagari script and was able to recite by heart large sections of the Hitopadesa. Two years later he was sent to a vernacular school, where he admitted having had a very easy passage, until 1897 when he was sent to an English school in Galle called Buena Vista. During his two years there he learned to read and write not only English but also Latin. After the death of his father he went back to a vernacular school in Ahangama and there lost interest in schooling. But his ability and constant will to read in English opened up the doors of knowledge. He became the most renowned Sinhala novelist of post-independence Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup>

An important feature of the colonial education system was Christian control through the Schools Commission, headships of government schools and the missionary schools. After 1870 the state withdrew from English education (except for Royal College), giving the missionaries a virtual monopoly on the education of the elite. The dual system of education that became entrenched was founded on the Macaulayan notion of a privileged few educated in English and the masses educated in the vernacular. Vernacular schools under the government Department of Public Education provided a cheap elementary education. These schools received lower grants than 'English schools' and were limited to providing 'rudiments of knowledge in their own tongue' as recommended in the Morgan Report. The level of attendance at schools varied. In many districts schools were so far apart that small children could not walk the distances required. In the plantations a Sub-Inspector of Schools complained that the labourers showed little interest in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Martin Wickremasinghe, *Upandasita*, Dehiwela, 1961, pp. 7–38.

educating their children.<sup>3</sup> There were also Anglo-vernacular schools that attempted to straddle both cultures, but were not very successful. English schools were the sole point of entry to the ruling elite. Pupils were brought into contact with the world view conveyed in English textbooks, a world of modern knowledge and scientific advance. And in the school grounds—through cricket and rugby—and in their classrooms they were imbued with the values and mores that prevailed in Britain at the time.

Following the Colebrooke-Cameron report of 1832 the government had established five English schools, located in Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Chilaw and Jaffna. Initially only aristocratic families had access to Western education, but this preferential treatment did not last long; in the course of the nineteenth century an increasing proportion of non-Goyigama children also gained access. Indeed, new avenues of work had been provided with the establishment of a plantation economy. Contractors, middlemen, transport agents and suppliers of food and other necessities on the plantations had gradually accumulated wealth. As a result, in the mid-nineteenth century many Ceylonese began to invest in and acquire cash crop plantations: coffee in the 1830s, cinnamon in the 1850s. A few of them invested in tea but many more in rubber. Ceylonese were especially successful in graphite mining and coconut planting. Some of these entrepreneurs bought properties in Colombo and this contributed to an extension of their influence. They used their resources to send their sons and daughters to prestigious schools in Colombo.4 Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century children attending these elite schools constituted a minute proportion of the school-going population.

Vernacular schools were the main providers of elementary education in the country. In 1911 about 88 per cent of those at school were receiving a purely vernacular education, and of the literate population of the island only 8.7 per cent were recorded as being able to read and write English. Buddhist education on Western lines started in 1880 with the arrival of Colonel H.S. Olcott, President and founder of the Theosophical Society. He proposed a scheme of Buddhist education with the approval of the leading Theras. In 1907 there were about three hundred Buddhist schools,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> E.B. Denham, Report of the Census of 1911, Colombo, 1912, p. 410.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Swarna Jayaweera, 'Education' in T. Fernando and R. Kearney (eds), Modern Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1983–84, pp. 132–4; J.E. Jayasuriya, Educational Policies and Progress during British Rule in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Colombo, 1976.

of which about two hundred were under the management of the Buddhist Theosophical Society. The teaching in most of these schools was imparted in Sinhala, but in the important towns there were schools that used English as a medium of instruction, preparing students for university entrance exams in Britain, while regularly also teaching Sinhala and Buddhism. This was the case of Ananda College, Musaeus College for Girls, Mahinda College in Galle, and Dharmaraja College in Kandy. In the same decade, in Jaffna, Arumuga Navalar launched and organised a Tamil Hindu school system so that Tamil Vellala children would not have to attend Christian schools and risk being converted. Jaffna Hindu College began life as the Saivamangala Vidyasalai school in 1890.

Reading. The development of schools led to a significant increase in the literate population. In 1911 there were five times as many literate females and twice as many literate males as thirty years before. Approximately 40 per cent of males and 10 per cent of females enumerated in the Census of 1911 were able to read and write. There were disparities between communities. The Low-Country Sinhalese males came first with 47.9 per cent, closely followed by the Ceylon Tamil males with 46 per cent. Kandyan Sinhalese and Indian Tamils were less literate (36.4 per cent and 20.4 per cent respectively). The disparities were even larger in the female population where the Low-Country Sinhalese women were well above the other communities with 17.4 per cent literates as compared to 10.9 per cent for the Ceylon Tamils, 2.8 per cent for the Kandyan Sinhalese and 1.5 per cent for the Indian Tamils.<sup>5</sup> The Western and Northern Provinces were far more literate than the others. In certain regions such as Uva only 2.2 per cent and in some communities, especially the Indian Tamils, even fewer women were literate. Thus, if reading and writing contributed to forging new self-perceptions, these perceptions appear to have been limited to less than half the adult male population and one out of ten adult women on average. It may be supposed that a number of people who were not literate were read to, for example at the workplace or after the day of work was over. These people too would have been touched by the new ideas contained in the press of the time.

When for the first time literacy in the vernacular was recognised as a qualification for voting rights in 1921 the meaning of literacy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> E.B. Denham, Report of the Census of 1911, p. 400.

acquired an added value. The voting population increased from 3,013 in 1917 to 54,207 in 1921 and 189,335 in 1924.<sup>6</sup> Literacy not only led to a broadening of the electoral foundation, it created a group of people who recognised themselves as being part of a larger political community.

Publications. For the growing reading public books and newspapers soon became a need that called for immediate satisfaction. In 1737 a printed book was published for the first time in Sri Lanka when a printing machine was brought to the island by the Dutch. This single event had a series of unintended consequences. It eventually led to the growth of a vibrant and singular press in the vernacular languages from the 1860s, and the emergence of a mass readership from the 1940s onwards. Between 1888 and 1927 701 new publications were launched.<sup>7</sup>

Christian missionaries initially exercised a monopoly over the printing technology. In the early nineteenth century large circulation papers in English such as the *Government Gazette* were published. The *Gazette* was followed by three more papers, the *Observer and Commercial Advertiser* (1834), the *Ceylon Chronicle* (1837) and the *Ceylon Herald* (1838). The *Ceylon Examiner* stood out as attempting to report more than commercial and administrative news. These papers had no impact on the local population, but they paved the way for the emergence of a dynamic Sinhala press.

Printing gradually came to serve what had hitherto been a largely oral culture consisting mainly of the popular ballads on the Jataka tales. They came to be printed in cheap leaflets called *kavi kola* that were sold in markets and at pilgrimage centres and were read by the classes that had acquired literacy in the state school system. A fundraising campaign in 1861–2 for the establishment of the first Buddhist press led to the foundation of the Lankopakara press in Galle in 1862. *Lak Mini Pahana*, launched by the Sinhala scholar Pandit Koggala, was the first registered Sinhala newspaper published with the purpose of challenging Christian missionaries. Other newspapers of similar content followed, such as *Sathya Marga* (1867). Later newspapers diversified from religious issues to include commerce, agriculture, current events, science etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> K.N.O. Dharmadasa, 'Formative Stages of Sinhala Journalism' in G.H. Peris (ed.), *Studies on the Press in Sri Lanka and South Asia*, Kandy, 1995, p. 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See Michael Roberts, *Modernist Theory*, Colombo, 2002.

In the first decades of the twentieth century two outstanding publications, *Sinhalajatiya* (1903) and *Sinhalabauddhya* (1906), brought about a change in content and rhetoric. These two newspapers, spearheaded by Piyadasa Sirisena and Anagarika Dharmapala,<sup>9</sup> were explicitly patriotic and instrumental in propagating Sinhala nationalist ideas. In the weekly newspaper he founded, the *Sinhala Bauddhaya*, Dharmapala unveiled what he perceived were the main features of an ideal Sinhala Buddhist society through a critique of the existing state. In 1898 Dharmapala published a Sinhala pamphlet entitled *Gihi Vinaya*, 'The Daily Code for the Laity', in which a number of rules of proper behaviour were given. What was proscribed were the 'bad' peasant habits based on Western notions of propriety. This book had a wide readership. Hence, literacy, reading and new conceptions of the self were deeply interdependent.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1901 and 1924 on average eighteen newspapers and periodicals were launched per year, and over the next ten years this rose to fifty-five. To speak of a mass readership is however problematic. Indeed the English language papers—the *Observer, Times of Ceylon, Ceylon Morning Leader* and *Ceylon Independent*—had an aggregate circulation of no more than 10,000. It was only at the time of independence that the readership increased to 40,000 for the *Daily News* and 50,000 for the Sinhala daily *Dinamina*. Of course a single newspaper would be read by a number of people in the same household and even circulated in the workplace.<sup>11</sup>

The development of the press in Jaffna followed a similar pattern to that in the Sinhala speaking areas. The initial impulse came

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Dharmapala was the son of a furniture producer who through dedication and hard work acquired considerable wealth. He was sent to Christian schools where he presumably understood the need for restoring Buddhism to its prime glory. He changed his foreign name David to Dharmapala, meaning 'Guardian of the Dharma'. The first part of his name, Anagarika, meant 'homeless'. Like a renouncer he wore ochre, but like a layman he made his apparel a tailored one. He urged the Buddhists to give up the ritualism characteristic of rural peasant Buddhism and become productive members of society. He died in 1933 as the Venerable Devamitta Dharmapala.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The seminal work on this theme is K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka, Ann Arbor, MI, 1992.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> G.H. Peiris, 'The Press in South Asia: intra regional comparisons' in G.H. Peiris (ed.), Studies on the Press in Sri Lanka and South Asia, Kandy, 1997, p. 32.

from Christian missionaries who used the fledgling printing industry to propagate messages of the Christian faith. *Udaya Tharakai* (*Morning Star*), started in 1842, was a bilingual weekly that soon became an exclusively Tamil language weekly. *Udayadithan*, unlike the Jaffnabased *Morning Star*, was launched in Colombo by Simon Casie Chetty. The renewed religious consciousness among Hindus and Muslims provided further impetus to the formation of a Tamil language press. Hindu revivalism was pioneered by several exponents of Saivism, the most famous being Arumuga Navalar. His doctrine was popularised in a number of publications in the 1870s and '80s. The establishment of a branch of the Ramakrishna mission in Colombo was followed by the publication of a periodical, *Vivekanada*, in 1902.

Muslims entered the field at a slightly later stage than the Buddhists and Hindus. Until the early 1880s Muslim education was confined to a few madrasas and one or two irregular newssheets. A new era arrived with Ahmad Arabi Pasha, exiled in Sri Lanka for nineteen years between 1883 and 1901. He acted as a catalyst for a cultural revival amongst the Muslims in Sri Lanka. In 1882 a Tamil newspaper called the *Muslim Nasen* was launched by M.C. Siddi Lebbe, a lawyer and educationist. Other papers followed, promoting an assertion of Muslim rights and campaigning for Muslim representation in the Legislative Council.

The early twentieth century saw the emergence of secular Tamil newspapers such as *Illangai Mitran* (1902) and *Vijayabahu* (1911). In the first three decades of the twentieth century a total of fiftythree Tamil publications were registered at various times as newspapers. The content of these newspapers differed very little from their counterparts in Sinhala and English except for the wider coverage given to political events in the Dravidian south of the Indian subcontinent. Further, the Tamil reading public was able to choose from the relatively inexpensive South Indian publications. In that sense their world view would have extended beyond the boundaries of the island towards an imagined language community.<sup>12</sup>

In the last few decades of the nineteenth century there emerged a new form of Sinhala literature. This differed from classical literature, dominated by *bhikkhus*, not only by its mass readership, owing to the availability of printing technology, but also in being chiefly secular. Parallel developments were happening in the Jaffna pen-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> P. Muthulingam, 'Evolution of the Tamil Press of Sri Lanka' in G.H. Peiris (ed.), Studies on the Press, pp. 181–92.

insula. Christian missions had printed the Bible, tracts and translations from Tamil works before 1849, when Arumuga Navalar established a printing press which published a great quantity of Saivaite Hindu literature.

Another important feature was the increasing readership of contemporary western literature and novels inspired by books such as the *Arabian Nights, Gulliver's Travels* etc. These works appeared in translation before the Sinhala novel itself came of age. In 1888 one of the first Sinhala novels, *Vasanavantha saha kalakanni pavul* (The happy and unhappy families), appeared serialised in a Christian journal. The Sinhala literature that followed brought about new attitudes towards life and society. One of the most popular of the early novelists was Piyadasa Sirisena, who blended romantic story lines with didactic and anti-Western concerns.

Newspapers and polemical journals serialised novels to boost their sales. With this increased demand, booksellers and stationers thrived. There were 811 printers and compositors in 1901 and 1,166 ten years later. Circulating libraries became commonplace, while itinerant book hawkers trekked deep into the countryside, carrying with them Sinhala books such as translations of religious works—*Rajaratna Karaya, Mahahatan, Bodhivansaya*—as well as English books such as the *Arabian Nights, Aesop's Fables*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe* and plays of Shakespeare. Through the reading of these books and newspapers people who did not know each other could personally enter into and reinforce shared assumptions, world-views and religious-cultural practices. The theatre also participated in this ushering in of a common, collective consciousness.

The theatre. At its debut Sinhala drama was as didactic and edifying as the novel. At the theatre the audience identified with certain characters. The emotional responses of people to drama made the theatre a powerful vehicle for social and political comment. The Tower Hall was opened in 1911. There plays by Sinhala playwrights like John de Silva and Charles Dias were staged. They developed the young *Nurti* tradition, which was inspired by touring Parsi musicals and, like those plays, comprised elaborately costumed spectacles combined with a musical performance. The Sinhala theatre

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, 'The Formation of Sinhala Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', MPhil, University of Colombo, 2000, p. 137.

audience, that sometimes referred to these plays as 'teeter', from the English word 'theatre', was the expanding working class of Colombo. While it is difficult to estimate numbers, there is evidence of working class women forming part of the *Nurti* audiences as early as the 1870s. While the *Nurti* plays performed in Hindustani attracted the multi-ethnic peoples of Colombo, the plays in Sinhala were more restricted. In the plays there were constant references to colonial rule and the 'aping of Western manners' and to the 'Tamil and Muslim workers' who were castigated as threats to the jobs of the Sinhala people. Furthermore John de Silva's plays, including his adaptations of Shakespeare, began with a dedication to the Triple Gem and the Buddha.

The theatre provided a forum where the anxieties of a colonised people were exposed and sometimes assuaged. The identity that Tower Hall plays were promoting was one constructed in opposition to the British colonial regime: a renewed Sinhala identity encompassing Sinhalese music, dress, social etiquette and language. Clearly it was the indigenous professional and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie that made capital available for *Nurti* plays. The 358 names and addresses of those who donated funds for his plays, jotted in John de Silva's diary, point to a cross-section of the population: their professions ranged from Mudaliyars to advocates and proctors, jewellers and shopkeepers, timber and plumbago merchants, arrack renters and newspaper editors, among others. Interestingly they were not all Buddhists, Christians too supported de Silva's productions. <sup>15</sup>

The theatre opened up people's minds to other things too, especially to the world at large. Translations of Western plays not only introduced the people to Shylocks and Hamlets, they also gave them an entry into real foreign capital cities through pictorial advertisements of the plays.

The theatre scene was not uniform. In villages *kolam* performances and operatic folk dramas continued to satisfy the villagers' needs for entertainment. In the cities, apart from the Sinhala speaking audiences, a very small group of people attended perfor-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ranjini Obeysekere, Sri Lankan Theatre in a Time of Terror: Political Satire in a Permitted Space, Colombo, 1999, pp. 116–18.

Neloufer de Mel, 'Stage Echoes: Tropes of Nationalism in the Modern Sinhala Theatre', The Thatched Patio, March-April 1993, pp. 8–26; Neloufer de Mel, Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2001.

mances in English, pale imitations of Western productions. The theatre played an important role in forging a sense of belonging to a wider community. Mime, song, dance and dialogue in the theatre allowed even those who could not read and to whom print was not available access to the collective imagining. <sup>16</sup>

New religious practices and sacred space. With the newspaper, a new grammar of representation had come into being. Not only was the vocabulary standardised, but the reader or the audience—reading was often a collective act—was acquainted for the first time with a larger domain, the world at large. Journalists, novelists and dramatists instilled a popular awareness and concern for various cultural markers through their works. To what extent the practice of reading a daily or weekly newspaper and regular attendance at the theatre enabled people to reimagine themselves as part of a wider collectivity is difficult to fathom. The power of the written word was probably less significant in identity formation and consolidation than that of certain age-old practices centred around Buddhism or Hinduism. In the case of Buddhism, from very early days it had acquired a set of rituals which ensured that it survived as a lived religion. These rituals still brought believers together.

Peasants' and villagers' understanding of Buddhism came from the sermons of ordinary village monks and from literate persons of the village who would read aloud from texts such as the *Saddharmaratnavaliya*, a thirteenth-century book devoted to Buddhist stories. This book, as well as the book of *jataka* tales (*Jatakapota*), dealt with the past of the Buddha, his former births, renunciation and attainment of Nirvana. Martin Wickremasinghe relates that his aunt, a villager in the southern village of Kogalle, could recite the entire *Pujavaliya* by heart. He recounts that listening to the preaching of the monk in the village was for the villager a form of entertainment, unlike the city folk who had cinema halls, theatres, restaurants and taverns. His mother had a shrine room in her house decorated with a picture of Mara's war, but his father, although he was a *dayakaya* (lay patron) of the temple, rarely set foot there.<sup>17</sup>

The themes of these stories were enacted in the ritual dramas of village society. The peasant's landscape was one where local and foreign deities that had been incorporated into the Buddhist tradition throughout the years confronted their opposites, the demons

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Neloufer de Mel, Women and the Nation's Narrative, p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Martin Wickremasinghe, *Upandasita*, p. 43.

who lacked all the ethical qualities and values of Buddhism. Story-telling gave the abstract ethics of the doctrinal tradition an immediacy and concreteness that touched peasant society: children were told these stories by parents and these became part of their own consciousness. Martin Wickremasinghe relates that for the villager the world of folktales, of King Dutugamunu and Queen Yasodhara, constituted the real world, not a fantastic one. <sup>19</sup>

Religious revivalism. In the mid-nineteenth century a Hindu revival inspired by the Hindu religious revival in India was started in the north of the country by men such as Arumuga Navalar and C.W. Thamotharampillai and by organisations such as the Saiva Paripalana Sabhai. Recent scholarship has established that Navalar, whose works and acts focused essentially on Saivite revival and was restricted to the Vellala caste, was no social reformer, and in this sense differed from the leaders of the Buddhist movement led by the newly emergent middle class who challenged the social values of Christianity and British rule as a whole.<sup>20</sup> Navalar nevertheless spearheaded a literary revival in the Jaffna peninsula. He undertook large-scale revision and purification of Saiva Siddhanta, pioneered a Tamil prose style, and wrote commentaries on grammar for Hindu children.<sup>21</sup> He was greatly sensitive to Christian endeavours at proselytisation. But his appeal was mainly to Hindu Vellalas. Less known is the contribution of C.W. Thamotharampillai to the study of the pre-Saivite literature of the Tamils. He published the oldest of existing Tamil works, the Tolkappiam, and other Sangam works such as Kalithohai.22

In the middle and late nineteenth century, at the time Christianity was winning over new converts and European values were becom-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Dutthagamani and the Buddhist Conscience' in Douglas Allen (ed.), Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia: India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Westport, CT, 1992, pp. 150–1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Martin Wickremasinghe, *Upandasita*, p. 41.

For more details on the Sinhalese and Tamil social and cultural movements under British colonialism see Kitsiri Malalgoda, Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900: a Study of Religious Revival and Change (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976); Dagmar Hellmann-Rajayanagam, 'Arumuka Navalar, Religious Reformer or National Leader of Eelam', Indian Economic and Social History Review 26 (1989), pp. 235–57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> A.J. Wilson, *Tamil Nationalism*, London, 2000, p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> S. Ratnajeevan H. Hoole, 'C.W. Thamotharampillai, Tamil Revivalist', Nethra, October–December 1997, 2, 1, pp. 1–45.

ing entrenched in Ceylon, a powerful religious-cultural challenge appeared in the form of a Buddhist revivalist movement. This movement had many roots. The eighteenth century had seen a reformulation of the social organisation and the intellectual practices of Sri Lankan Buddhism, owing to the formation of a new Buddhist monastic order, the Siyam Nikaya, in 1753, the systematisation of monastic education, and the development of a commentarial genre called the *sutra sannaya* (a commentary written in Sinhala for the Pali *suttas*). Illiterate Buddhists were exposed to these texts and became part of a 'textual community' that predated the imagined community of the nineteenth century. The Siyam Nikaya played a central role in the standardised transmission of religious learning in the pre-print era.

The Kandyan monastic establishment of the Siyam Nikaya was opposed to laymen attempting to direct the reform movement and sought, though in vain, to retain their power and control over the religion.<sup>23</sup> The more important strand that took shape between 1860 and 1885 had a leadership consisting of educated Sinhala Buddhists and monks from the Sinhalese Low Country, the most famous being Mohottivatte Gunananda. Its protest was on three fronts: it sought primarily to refute the aggressive claims of Christianity, create a modern Buddhist system of schools and encourage abstinence. The printing and dissemination of newspapers and periodicals in the vernacular languages on the one hand, and the emergence of voluntary associations on the other, strengthened this 'religio-cultural revival'.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the need that some Buddhists felt to respond and to defend central Buddhist teachings led to a new orientation within the Sri Lankan Buddhist community. This new orientation was characterised by a return to Buddhist 'classical' texts—essentially the *Tipitika*, Buddhaghosa'a *Visuddhimagga*, and the commentaries composed for the *Tipitaka* in the fifth century—and the 'rational' aspects of Buddhism. These approaches were not only the effect of Euro-American scholars who privileged 'classical' traditions, but also arose from the changes that came about with the teachings of the Siyam Nikaya and their focus on the *sutra sannayas*.<sup>24</sup> The development of an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> George D. Bond, The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response, Columbia, SC, 1988, pp. 61–2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Anne M. Blackburn, Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture, Princeton and Oxford, 2001.

intellectual Buddhism in the late nineteenth century can be traced to the arrival in Sri Lanka of the Theosophists of New York, especially Colonel Olcott who saw religion as a rational theosophy without a saviour or a cult and consonant with modern scientific thought. The Western interpretation of Buddhism was adopted by many Sri Lankan monks and laity who found it particularly powerful in their fight against the Protestant and Catholic missions. This rational view of Buddhism implied a rejection of mythic, cultic and devotional elements that were condemned as accretions to a pristine form of the religion.<sup>25</sup>

While many folk rituals demonstrate the existence of a syncretic religion during these years—the Pattini cult, the dominant village cult in the Western, Southern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces, is a case in point—these trends were dismissed by intellectual Buddhism as superstitions. Furthermore, some of the more recent non-Goyigama monastic fraternities (*nikayas*) created after the Siyam Nikaya—the Amarapura Nikaya and Ramayana Nikaya—had originated not only to protest against the caste exclusivism of the Siyam Nikaya, but also to reform the Sangha and return it to the Vinaya, condemning the worship of deities. Martin Wickramasinghe in his autobiography recounts that in the early twentieth century, the temple his parents frequented—the Sudharshanaramaya, an Amarapura Matara Nikaya temple—did not have any pictures of Vishnu, Kataragama or other deities. <sup>27</sup>

The Buddhist revivalist movement of the early twentieth century was more than a purely religious crusade directed against Christianity. It was a method by which the newly emergent middle classes could challenge the social values of foreign Christian rulers and British rule as a whole. The social and religious reformers, Anagarika Dharmapala and Walisinha Harischandra, led a campaign to protect places of Buddhist worship. They were also leaders of the Temperance movement. This endeavour—which had two peaks, one in 1903–5 and a more important one in 1911–14—had a dual purpose: first, to reiterate Buddhist strictures against alcohol, which amounted to the renewed assertion of the validity and relevance of Buddhist values after years of acquiescence in the values of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Gananath Obeysekere, 'Dutthagamani', p. 151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Gananath Obeysekere, The Cult of the Goddess Pattini, Chicago, 1984.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Martin Wickramasinghe, *Upandasita*, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Nira Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 33–4.

foreign rulers; second, on the political plane, to attack excise duties as an important source of British revenue. The impact of this movement was not confined to the urban intelligentsia, but spread to the rural middle class and to the urban workers. Dharmapala appealed to the middle classes when he stressed the doctrinal tradition and rejected peasant religiosity, especially the worship of deities: 'No enlightened Buddhist...would ever care to invoke a god which is only a step higher in the evolutionary scale of progress than man.'<sup>29</sup> The Buddhist and Hindu revivalist movements were not simple and distinct social movements; rather, they blended several actions and personalities.<sup>30</sup>

In the early twentieth century the practice of Buddhism underwent more changes among the lay people of the middle classes with the introduction of an array of new communal rituals. A sense of community and belonging was taking shape through new collective practices such as the celebration of Vesak in a similar fashion to Christmas, with Vesak cards commemorating the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha and songs modelled on Christmas carols, attendance at Daham Pasala—Sunday Schools for Buddhist children—and individual practices such as meditation that were encouraged by lay preachers. A number of new institutions such as the Young Men's and Women's Buddhist Associations, where young people met, helped forge a sense of common purpose among middle-class Buddhists.

Sacred space. A number of public demonstrations of a renewed Buddhist identity began. Among them was the celebration of the full moon during the month of Poson, with mass processions around Mahinda images in the main cities of Sri Lanka. This was partly an act of defiance against colonial rule. As Mihintale—the hunting grounds where Mahinda had according to popular belief met King Devanampiyatissa—was still in a ruinous condition, pilgrims, taking advantage of the opening up of the Anuradhapura rail line, flocked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ananda Guruge (ed.), Anagarika Dharmapala: Return to Righteousness, Colombo, 1965, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeysekere, Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka, NJ, 1988; George Bond, The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka; Kitsiri Malalgoda, Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900, Berkeley, 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Mahinda, the son of Emperor Asoka Maurya, is believed to have visited Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE and converted the Anuradhapura king Devanampiyatissa to Buddhism.

to Anuradhapura during the full moon day of the month of Poson.<sup>32</sup> Pilgrimages played a important part in the gelling of a collective consciousness. Anuradhapura became a modern site of pilgrimage through a series of historical, archaeological and aesthetic practices that can be summarised in the term 'restoration'. There was an 'elective affinity' in the way Anuradhapura was conceived by colonialists and nationalists, which explains its phenomenal growth in people's consciousness in the early twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

As it was, at that time, various communities were being revived after decades of quiet acquiescence to the power of colonial knowledge. Through the practice of modern Buddhist rituals, attendance at Buddhist schools, participatory practices such as the theatre, and individualist practices such as reading novels and newspapers in the vernacular, a collective identity was taking shape that recognised the white man as the 'Other'. Minority communities were in the same throes of identity formation. In Jaffna, for instance, a vibrant press was initiating its readers to the world around it and especially to the close proximity of South India. A collective consciousness was emerging that looked up to India. Other people were thinking of themselves in a new way; among them, surely, were the 2,000 natives of Ceylon counted in the Census of 1911 who were unable to read and write their own language, but could read and write English.34 Identities overlapped as easily as a Sinhala newspaper could be read in the morning and an English-language one in the evening. Gradually, through the medium of Buddhist schools, vernacular language publications and collective religious rituals, the contours of an authentic national identity grounded in a verifiable past were being framed by the Sinhala literati.

## Images of an authentic past

What were the images of the island's past conveyed in the newspapers, publications, theatre and schools? Perceptions of authenticity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Jonathan S. Walters, 'Pushing Poson: The Politics of Buddhist Pilgrimage in Postcolonial Sri Lanka' in Michael Roberts (ed.), Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, vol. II, Colombo, 1998, pp. 133–62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Pradeep Jeganathan, 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: the Conquest of Anuradhapura' in P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation*, Colombo, p. 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> E.B. Denham, Report of the Census of 1911, p. 441.

differed according to which community, religion, region and class one belonged to. Many Tamils from the Jaffna peninsula, for instance, harboured a sense of heritage founded on affinity with South India, quite different from the sense of history and chronology grounded in the foundational book of the Sinhalas, the *Mahavamsa*. But among Tamils too there would have been a sense of history, just as a sense of heritage or culture existed among Sinhalas. Between these visions of the past many others existed: for instance Christians' and Muslims' sense of the authentic past was deeply embedded in the history of their own faiths, a history external to the island in which they lived.

Authentic records and remains of the past. By the early twentieth century the idea that there was a great and unbroken Sinhala past was widespread even among the non-literate classes. In 1903 in Anuradhapura, the capital of early Sinhala kingdoms, when the Public Works Department took stones from ancient sites for their own use people displayed an anger that revealed their clear identification with the past of Anuradhapura. 35 According to the Vamsa literature, Sri Lanka is the *Dharmadvipa* (the island of the faith) consecrated by the Buddha himself as the land in which his teachings would flourish.36 The Mahavamsa, a sixth-century court chronicle, states that on the very day of the Buddha's death, Vijaya—the founder of the Sinhala race—landed in Sri Lanka, as if to bear witness to the Buddha's prediction.<sup>37</sup> In the 1890s the Mahavamsa was cited in petitions related to the protection of Buddhist sacred space and rituals, as in a petition to protect Bo trees that grew on the site of the Kalutara fort station.<sup>38</sup> Bo trees were indeed considered sacred by Buddhists in recognition of the fact that Gautama Buddha had attained enlightenment under one such tree in Bodh Gaya.

The colonial perception that the Sinhala people had a glorious past had its roots in the histories written decades earlier by British writers such as James Emerson Tennent in 1859, and subsequently by Sri Lankan writers, and in a vibrant oral culture. Early writers such as John Davy and Anthony Bertolacci suggest that the content

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> John Rogers, Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka, London, 1987, p. 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> For an interesting assessment of the Buddhist Chronicles as a dominant site of symbolic production see Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles*, *Politics and Culture in Sinhala Life*, Ithaca, NY, 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> The Mahavamsa, transl. Wilhelm Geiger, Colombo, 1950.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> John Rogers, Crime, Justice and Society, p. 100.

of the *Mahavamsa* was circulated orally among the people even though they were not aware of its written version.<sup>39</sup>

Until the *Mahavamsa* was 'discovered' and translated from Pali to English by George Turnour, a British civil servant, in the 1830s British officials believed that Ceylon had no real history recorded in authentic documents. In 1838 his text, which transmuted oral conceptions of history and erased in its translation notions of nonlinear time and fantastic miracles, became the authoritative historical text of Ceylon. By 1859 James Emerson Tennent claimed that 'Ceylon [is] in possession of continuous written chronicles, rich in authentic facts' that present a 'connected history of the island.'40

Thus nationalists drew upon these existing perceptions to propagate their own vision of the authentic Sinhala past where authenticity was linked to the Vijayan foundational myth of the Sinhalas described in the *Mahavamsa*. The role of the indigenous press and the two newly emerging genres of the theatre and the novel were crucial in the popularisation of stories of kings and battles described in the *Mahavamsa*.<sup>41</sup>

The *Mahavamsa* as a written text was valued by nationalists more than folktales and oral culture and the revivalist leaders, in their search for ethnically and energising themes from the community's historical tradition, found a most satisfying solution in giving credence to Aryan origins in northern India. Prince Vijaya was believed to have come from north India, the *Aryavarta* as it was called in Sanskrit texts.

Alongside the research on and translations of the written chronicles of the island, archaeology was also breaking new ground. The discovery of remains of ancient civilisations in the jungles prompted the first investigations. These remains confirmed in the minds of colonialists and nationalists alike the 'authenticity' of the histories related in the chronicles. The theme of a glorious Sinhala past founded on Buddhism and a pure Sinhala language was taken up by early Sinhala nationalists such as Anagarika Dharmapala and his associate the Brahmachari Walinsinha Harischandra. The lat-

<sup>39</sup> Sir James Emerson Tennent, Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical, 2 vols, London, 1859; John Davy, An Account of the Interior of Ceylon, Dehiwela, 1821/1969; Anthony Bertolacci, A View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interests of Ceylon, Dehiwela, 1817/1983.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Cited in Pradeep Jeganathan, 'Authorizing History', p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Three figures epitomised these developments: C. Don Bastian (1852–1921), dramatist and journalist; Piyadasa Sirisena (1875–1946), journalist and novelist; and John de Silva (1857–1922), dramatist.

ter's writings reveal his veiled hostility to Tamil culture, 'foreign to the history of Anuradhapura', and its imprints on that city.

For nationalists such as Harischandra there were indeed important problems in seeking inspiration for an anti-colonial movement solely from the Rajarata civilisation: one was the state of decline into which the latter had fallen, another was that the enemy or the 'other' of the Sinhalas was not the 'white colonialists' but the Tamil invader from across the Palk Straits. While a glorious past was important, nationalism needed symbols befitting the present struggle that suggested strength and perseverance in the face of colonial domination. Other conceptions of the past and other understandings of authenticity coexisted with the dry zone/Mahavamsian vision.

Other conceptions of the Sinhala past. Whilst the Mahavamsian vision of the authentic past has today become the central charter of Sinhala nationalist thought, this was not the case in the early twentieth century. Authenticity was sometimes sought out in events that predated those related in the Mahavamsa. There were for instance occasional references to a pre-Aryan colonisation of Ceylon contemporaneous with the original Arvan colonisation of Southern India. The myth of Ravana was invoked to sustain this interpretation of an ancient invasion. The story goes that Ravana, king of Lanka, hearing of the beauty of Sita, the wife of Rama (then in exile), carried her off to Lanka. Rama, having allied himself with the non-Aryan races of Southern India, crossed over to Lanka, gave battle to Ravana, defeated him and recovered Sita. Lak Mini Kirula, an early Sinhala newspaper, carried in an 1881 issue the first part of a serialised history of Lanka. It was claimed that Lanka was 'a powerful kingdom even before the advent of Vijaya', and that the mythical ruler Ravana had ruled the island in about 2837 BCE with the assistance of a council of ten'. 42 The precision of the dates supports Barthes' contention that myth as 'depoliticised speech (parole) does not deny things, that its function is on the contrary to speak about things simply. It purifies them and founds them in nature and eternity, gives them a clarity which is not that of the explanation but of the statement.'43 Later publications reiterated the Ravana myth:

Prior to the landing of Vijaya, however, in the sixth century before Christ—from which date the written history of Ceylon begins—it is now conceded that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Cited in K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Language Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka, Ann Arbor, MI, 1992, p. 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris, 1957.

the island was peopled by advanced races and that its history as a civilised country dates many centuries from Vijaya's occupation.<sup>44</sup>

For some Sinhala intellectuals, Vijaya was not a hero but the 'arch enemy'. In the 1930s and '40s the Hela identity upheld by the Sinhalese scholar Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887–1944) amounted in effect to a denial of the Arya-Sinhala identity forged during the religious-cultural revival. Thus, speaking of the popular idea of Vijayan colonisation, Cumaratunga declared:

It is a slur on the Helese nation to say that the arch robber Vijaya and his fiendish followers were its progenitors. Many thousands of years before their arrival we had empires greater and mightier than the greatest and mightiest that any other nation could claim to have had.<sup>45</sup>

The Hela theory of the island's history suggests that long before the beginning of the lineage of kings recorded in the *Mahavamsa*, the Hela people had built up a great civilisation in Sri Lanka. Proponents of Hela believed that the Hela kingdom was ruled by powerful monarchs such as Taraka and Ravana who even challenged the military might of Indian empires. The treachery of 'Hela traitors' such as Vibhisana and Kuveni, who fraternised with the Indians (Vijaya and his men), led to the destruction of this great civilisation. Thereafter 'Indian influences swept over the kingdom debasing and corrupting among other things the language of the Hela people'.

The Hela myth was evocative of a compelling need in the communal consciousness to sharpen the boundaries, particularly with regard to India. The proponents of a Hela identity refused to accept the Indian origin of the people of Sri Lanka. The people of the island had no extraneous origins. Even Pali was considered a language fathered by the Hela people. Significantly the keystone of the Helese identity was the pure Sinhala (Elu or Hela) language. 46

But the Hela theory of the origins of the Sinhalese and the earlier incarnations of the Ravana myth did not succeed in capturing the imagination of a large group of people. While the Hela theory was perhaps too literary and complex to be understood by non-literate people, the Rama Sita Ravana myth which saw the king of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> C.M. Fernando, 'History of Ceylon' in Arnold Wright (ed.), Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources, London, 1907, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Cited in K.N.O. Dharmadasa, The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism, p. 262.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Dharmadasa, The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism, pp. 262–86.

Lanka ultimately defeated by Rama did not give Ravana a *persona* Sinhala people could easily identify with. It was very much a myth for Hindus. The Vijayan myth gave the island a centrality which no other myths could offer. Furthermore, it had the advantage of being inscribed in the official history of the island, and seems to have gradually and unproblematically imposed itself as the most significant foundational myth of the Sinhala. However, nationalism needed to rekindle certain material aspects of an authentic culture, and with this purpose, rather than looking back at the age-old and collapsed civilisation of the North Central Province, it turned visibly towards signs and symbols of the Kandyan kingdom. Indeed the historical landscape of the Kandyan kingdom with its many rebellions offered many possibilities for anti-colonial readings.

Authenticity in the present: dressing and caring for the authentic body 47

Anagarika Dharmapala, who spearheaded the religious-cultural stream of nationalism in the early twentieth century, urged his countrymen not to wear combs on their head 'like Batavian Malays'.<sup>48</sup>

This remark epitomised the dominant perception of authenticity as purity, and purity as superior to *mélange*, in the Sinhala nationalist discourse. This idea pervaded not only the Sinhalese literati, but also leaders of other communities. I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, the leading Sri Lankan Muslim ideologue of the period, claimed the Muslims of Sri Lanka were of Arab descent, and more precisely that the first migrants to the land were Hashimites, of the tribe of the Prophet.<sup>49</sup>

This led to a vision of society made up of a number of pure and unconnected communities, a juxtaposition of purities, as it were.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> This section reworks sections of my previous works: *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 2003; 'Some Comments on Dress in Sri Lanka', *The Thatched Patio*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1–21; 'The Return of Keppetipola's Cranium: The Construction of Authenticity in Sri Lankan Nationalism' in Gyanendra Pandey and Peter Geschiere (eds), *The Forging of Nationhood*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 129–56; and 'From Hybridity to Authenticity: the Biography of a few Kandyan Things' in Neluka Silva (ed.), *The Hybrid Island: Culture crossings and the invention of identity in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2002, pp. 71–92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Anagarika Dharmapala*, p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Qadri Ismail, 'Unmooring Identity: The Antinomies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka' in P. Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1995, pp. 68–9.

The way male and female bodies were wrapped in national dress and cared for by an authentic medicine tells us something about the content of authenticity in the nationalist discourse. While the male national dress conjured up political belonging, female dress functioned on a different plane, that of emotion and sensibility.

An authentic dress for women: the osariya. The influence of the later Nayakkar dynasty on the Kandyan throne led to a consequent modification in dress in the Kandyan provinces: the osariya style of sari was widely adopted by Kandyan upper-class women. Ironically the osariya, a form of sari with a frill at the waist, with a definite origin from across the Palk straits, became the ideal national dress for the early nationalists.

In the nationalist ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a woman's role was quite different from a man's. She was the nurturer of the future generations of righteous individuals. She had to be freed, educated, and transformed into a new woman, but within the framework of tradition. The reformed dress that was advocated for her was not invested with the same symbolic meaning as the newly invented men's national dress. Most importantly the new women's clothing had to be modest and decent, since she symbolised the pride of the nation to be. Women were discouraged from exposing their navels or ankles. Instead they were expected to shed all garments of foreign origin, from brassieres (believed by some to damage the breasts of young women) to long skirts and socks, shoes and hats.<sup>50</sup>

The sari in its Kandyan form, or *osariya*, which was considered an adequate dress for the Sinhalese woman, was promoted by lay preachers throughout the country as the true Sinhalese dress, a morally acceptable dress because it covered the entire body. Dharmapala's recommendations on 'how females should conduct themselves' were quite clear in that respect: 'A proper blouse should cover the breast, stomach and back completely. A cloth ten *riyans* long should be worn as the *osariya* or sari.'51

The main reason for the choice of the *osariya* as the national dress was its Kandyan origin. In the view of the reformists, which was a mirror image of the colonial reading of Kandyan culture, the Kandyan kingdom, through its historical insulation, had protected its purity—in contrast to the Low Country that had been subjected

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Arya Sinhala Wansaya, 11 March 1913; Sinhala Jatiya, 22 July 1913.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Dharmapala Lipi*, Colombo, 1963, p. 37.

to a spectrum of cultural influences. The *osariya* was seen not only as the 'moral dress', but also as the authentic, unspoiled and 'pure' dress of the Sinhalese, and this in spite of its appearance in Sri Lanka during the Nayakkar period. Authenticity was Kandyan.

Inventing a national dress. The idea of a national dress emerged in the early twentieth century among the Sinhala literati as a reaction to the adoption of a Western style of dress by many natives. In South Asia Western dress was not consciously imposed upon the people by the colonisers, whether Portuguese, Dutch or British. At first the European conquerors did not in many instances dream of propagating, much less imposing, European forms of life on foreign peoples in tropical countries; rather they often tended to adopt the styles of life and particularly dress of the latter, which they realised were better suited to local conditions. French Jesuit missionaries in southern India emulated Brahmin dress.<sup>52</sup> But soon European styles of dress became prestige symbols among non-Europeans, and this led to the adoption by elite groups of a dark formal dress of a type completely unsuited to the country's climatic conditions. In Ceylon Western clothes were a status symbol to the extent that Europeans began to feel that the native dress when worn in an ostentatious manner was symbolic of disobedience, or was at any rate contrary to the demand for submission to the superior colonial power and to Christian demeanour.<sup>53</sup>

The contest over clothing was in many ways symptomatic of the wider contest that was taking place between Christianity and Buddhism—transformation of the whole person, the creation of a new human being. Dress reform was part of a programme to restore pride among the Sinhalese in their culture.

We are blindly following the white man who has come here to demoralize for his own gain. He asks us to buy his whisky, and we allow him to bamboozle us. He tells us that we should drink toddy and arrack separately, that we should teach our children Latin and Greek and keep them in ignorance of our own beautiful literature and that we should think like the Yorkshire man and not like our own Dutugemunu and Parakrama Bahu and Sirisangbodhi, and that we should discard our own national dress which was good for our noble and spirited ancestors, and dress according to the dictates of the fashion of London and Paris. <sup>54</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> M. Cordell and R.A. Schwartz (eds), The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment, The Hague, 1979, p. 399.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> N.C. Chaudhuri, Culture in the Vanity Bag, Bombay, 1976, p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> A. Guruge (ed.), Anagarika Dharmapala, p. 509.

Clearly the 'national dress' was, in the mind of men such as Dharmapala, the dress of the Sinhalese man who would partake in public life. It was conceived as a Sinhalese dress reminiscent of the dress worn by the kings Dutugemunu and Parakramabahu, which contrasted favorably with the dress of other ethnic groups:

The Sinhalese dress is complete if instead of the sarong, trousers, combs etc. presently worn by the Sinhalese one wears a white or silk cloth, a long banian with a shawl over it, hair cut short, a head band made of flimsy cloth on the head and a pair of shoes for the feet. The rich can wear varieties of silk cloth, ornaments embedded with gold, pearl and gems for the head, a necklace for the neck and a pair of beautiful shoes made with gold thread.

# The Sinhalese man should abide by the following rules:

Not show the entire body like the Veddas who wear only a loin cloth. Not wear a trouser like the fair Portuguese...

Not wear a hat wrapped in cloth, comb, collar tie, banian, shirt, vestcoat, coat, trousers, cloth socks, shoes all at the same time. It is a ludicrous dress.<sup>55</sup>

Although Dharmapala attempted to distance his ideal national dress from the sarong—a dress that probably originated in Indonesia and came to the Sinhalese through the Malays—what he suggested was in fact a more elegant version of the same. The white sarong was indeed commonly worn as the formal dress. The novelist Martin Wickramasinghe has described how as a child in the late nineteenth century he wore a white sarong to go to temple. <sup>56</sup> The dress Dharmapala defined as the national dress was selected precisely with the rural constituency in mind. There would be change but not a sizeable one, in the dress of the farmer. What changed was the pride attached to the dress that was worn.

In the early 1920s there were frequent instances of the national dress being worn in official contexts such as the school or the workplace. But at this stage these experiments were severely dealt with. When a number of students of Trinity College, Kandy, went to school wearing national dress, the warden of the college, the Reverend A.J. Frazer, made them stand on benches and ridiculed them in front of the whole school.<sup>57</sup> Kularatne, principal of the Buddhist School Ananda College, successfully introduced the national costume in his school. It was reported that a number of government officials, including Sir William Manning, praised him

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Martin Wickremasinghe, *Upandasita*, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Sinhala Jatiya, 1 Aug. 1921.

for doing so, thus displaying the British tendency to admire things of the past even if this past was an imagined one. However, a lawyer's attempt to wear the national dress in court was turned down.<sup>58</sup> It appeared that the national dress was acceptable to the British provided that it remained within the confines of native social interaction.

A uniform of rebellion? The early nationalists planted the seeds that were to sprout a few decades later. Men's national dress became a political issue with the introduction of a democracy and the beginning of electoral politics. The enactment in 1931 of the Donoughmore Constitution, which abolished communal representation and instituted universal suffrage, initiated a reconquest of political power by the Sinhalese majority. This reconquest took many forms: it was both a positive operation, since it was destined to bring back self-esteem to the people after four hundred years of colonial domination and acculturation, and a negative one, for exorcising the colonial past meant bringing down specific groups that had benefited from it.

In Sri Lanka more than in India under British rule, wearing national dress was first and foremost, for the middle classes, a form of political rebellion against the indignity of having consented to be re-clothed by a conquering power. It was in a way a displacement of economic, political and cultural issues.

In India Mahatma Gandhi redefined normality in dress by wearing a loin cloth to meet and negotiate with the British Viceroy, offending Winston Churchill's sense of sartorial respectability and leading him to call Gandhi a 'half naked fakir' and refer to his dress as 'nauseating' and 'humiliating'.<sup>59</sup> In India dress reform was an integral part of a new political idiom. Since the first Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920–1 Gandhi had elaborated a political idiom distinct from that of the British that had until then set the terms of discourse of the early nationalist movement. The Indian National Congress in its incipient form had been organised on the same motif as a British political association: it followed the age-old rules of association in its acceptance of notions such as a President, an executive committee and a quorum, and until the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid., 11 Sept. 1923.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> A. Nandy, Traditions Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness New Delhi, 1987, p. 144.

1920s used mainly the petition as a form of protest. Gandhi's contributions to the nationalist movement were concerned with the creation and representation of new codes of conduct based on a radically different theory of authority. By wearing simple homespun peasant clothes instead of the native costumes decreed by the imperial rulers, by meeting at communal prayer meetings instead of political rallies and adopting the Indian pilgrimage and *paidatra* as new political rituals, Gandhi's followers were in fact creating a new political idiom of resistance.<sup>60</sup>

In Ceylon dress reform in the 1930s was disarticulated from the political milieu that spawned it. The religious-cultural movement of the early twentieth century had been overshadowed by a moderate and reformist trend spearheaded by the Ceylon National Congress that never evolved from the British idiom in which it was initially anchored. It remained an elitist association of lawyers and professionals that functioned in line with colonial rules of political organisation. In Congress deliberations members were referred to as 'gentlemen'. 61 Could gentlemen wear national dress? The CNC's encouragement of the national dress movement was not deeply rooted in fully fledged resistance to British rule. While preaching the benefits of wearing national dress CNC leaders continued to drink Scotch in their clubs, accept honours bestowed by the British, and in their political activism seldom use any other political idiom than that of British colonialism. The uniform of rebellion remained an isolated marker that contested authority, but its limited spread to the population as a whole can be explained by the absence of any general idiom contesting the same British authority. The national dress was an exception in a transfer of power which was essentially characterised by continuity with the colonial state and its emblems.

The adoption of national dress by a few politicians belonging to more radical groups such as the Sinhala Maha Sabha was not accompanied by significant changes in the political culture of the nationalist movement. From 1931 onwards C.W.W. Kannangara, Sir H.L. de Mel and W.A. de Silva were among the first to adopt the

<sup>60</sup> B.S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India' in E. Hobsbawn and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> See for instance Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the CNC of 17 Aug. 1920 in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon 1929–1950*, vol. I, p. 242, Sri Lanka National Archives, Colombo, 1972.

cloth on public occasions.<sup>62</sup> The dress etiquette in courts was also challenged. Indeed gowns and lounge coats were hardly suitable in a tropical climate. However, use of the national dress was not widespread amongst the elite. Adoption of the cloth as a uniform for school children was also suggested on occasion. In the late 1920s the Jaffna Youth Congress, a radical organisation modelled on the Indian National Congress, asked teachers to wear the *verti* and coat. In 1931 the Jaffna Town Teachers Association passed a resolution calling on 'All Teachers in the Island to give up foreign dress and adopt a dress consistent with national self-respect'.<sup>63</sup>

The national dress movement was not limited to politicians. Indeed, the clerical staff of the department of Post and Telecommunications decided to wear the national dress in the office as a means of cutting down costs. It was estimated that the cost of the dress manufactured in local fabric—white cloth, long sleeved white banian and the shawl—would amount to less than Rs. 3 per unit. At a meeting held at the main post office, or GPO, clerks of the Post and Telecommunication department—sixty Sinhalese and sixty-two Tamils—promised to attend work clad in the national costume.<sup>64</sup>

In the decades that followed economic reasons led to the adoption of national dress by the poorer classes; among the upper classes, eager to demonstrate their distance from an alien culture, it was a way of defying colonial authorities. Western dress was then an expression of 'the surrender of culture and bankruptcy in all the creative life of the people'. The solution proposed by a young radical Sinhalese was simple: 'Correction can only be applied in reorganising the social life at the top of society. In short we must change our dress.' The more conservative Ceylon National Congress demonstrated its mitigated concern for dress reform by organising a dress parade in 1941. All competitors agreed that the cloth was the most suitable national dress, but differences arose with regard to the upper garment. The winner, chosen by an impressive panel of judges—G.C.S. Corea, H.W. Amarasuriya, Dr R. Saravanamuttu, J.R. Jayewardene and M.D.A. Wijesinghe—

<sup>62</sup> Ceylon Daily News, 7 and 16 July 1931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Jane Russel, Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, Colombo, 1982, p. 120; Ceylon Daily News, 18 July 1931.

<sup>64</sup> Dinamina, 2 July 1931 and 4 July 1931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Vernon Gunasekere, 'Dress of a Nation', Young Ceylon, I, 1, May 1932, pp. 18–19.

was described in these terms: 'He wore a cloth and shirt in the form of a tunic falling just above the knees. The "tails" of the shirt were elegantly stitched up with pockets on either side. The shirt was taken in at the waist so as to give it a comfortable fit.'66

For the CNC and the classes it represented, the national dress, which in the minutes of the CNC is quite typically referred to as 'national costume', would remain at the level of an exhibit. Whereas for women Kandyanness and authenticity were synonymous in the minds of revivalists and later nationalists alike, political leaders did not try to impose an existing costume on men but rather created a national dress which resembled the dress of the common man whether Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim. Ethnic groups could show their distinctiveness by wearing additional adornment such as a turban for the Tamils or a fez for the Muslims. In effect the created national dress became an expression of majoritarian culture, i.e. of the Sinhalese, while minority leaders often preferred wearing the Western coat and trousers on formal occasions. Unlike their Indian counterparts, Sinhala nationalists were not totally successful in their attempt to create a uniform of rebellion.

Caring for the authentic body. The nationalist concern for the physical health of the people was tinted by notions of a return to, or at least of a renewal of, indigenous practices of medicine, *ayurveda*, and a critique of Western consumer products such as soaps, perfumes and powders that were flooding the country and challenging ageold customs.

Traditional medicine or *ayurveda* is based on the theory of 'three humours' (*tridathu*) that correspond to elements of the universe that make up the human body: air appears as wind, fire as bile and water as phlegm. Imbalances among the humours cause various diseases. Treatment of disease requires an infusion of hot or cold substances that are listed in ancient texts. Literate monks, skilled in *ayurveda*, were the most important sources of knowledge in former times. From the late 1920s onwards two parallel developments were taking place: a call for state protection of age-old medical practices and a respect for traditional values by practitioners of Western medicine.

In the early twentieth century the common British perception was that native doctors were mainly 'charlatans'. This perception

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> M. Roberts (ed.), Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon, 1929–1950, vol. II, Colombo, 1977, p. 1381.

evolved slowly. The first demand was met when the traditional British position, that the local population should be shielded from 'quack medicine', was abandoned in 1927, and state sponsorship was given to indigenous medicine.<sup>67</sup> Until then there was neither state recognition nor state aid for indigenous systems of medicine. In 1916 the government was prepared to consider favourably a practical scheme for assistance for the training of those seeking to practise the indigenous systems of medicine. Three years later a building site was offered by the government to the Oriental Medical Science Society for the establishment of an Ayurvedic College and Hospital. The offer was withdrawn in 1922 as sufficient funds were no longer available. In 1926 a committee chaired by K. Balasingham was formed to assess whether it was feasible for the government to assist financially or otherwise in the training of future practitioners. A scheme was prepared for consideration by the government in 1927. The committee recommended among other things the creation of a Board of Indigenous Medicine, the establishment of a college for training with a hospital and dispensary attached, a scholarship scheme for students to be sent to India, and registration of practitioners who passed the exam prescribed by the Board. A year later the Council approved the establishment of the Board and granted it 75,000 rupees to further its plans.<sup>68</sup>

In a parallel development there was a widespread critique of Western consumer products that dealt with hygiene. The fact was that these products were aggressively advertised in the press. Among the perfumes were Rigaud's White Violet and Kananga, a toilet water that was said to have the property of relieving mosquito bites. Savaresses oil was advertised as a 'pure English oil', and Hazeline Snow was said to make the skin softer, smoother, whiter and more youthful in appearance. Fairness, which probably existed as an attribute of upper-class women in Sri Lanka and as an ideal in pre-colonial times, was reinforced by European ideals. Medicated soap was also in vogue and advertised in women's magazines. Clearly the modern woman was thought to need more than citronella oil against mosquitoes, coconut oil for her hair to shine and powder for her skin to remain smooth and become fair like

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> C.G. Uragoda, A History of Medicine in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1987, p. 88.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Sessional Paper XXIV, 1947, Report of the Commission on Indigenous Medicine.
 <sup>69</sup> Ceylon Independent, 6 March 1914; Ceylon Independent, 28 Jan. 1904; Ceylon Daily News, 3 April 1918; Lakmini, 29 Oct. 1892; Sarasavi Sandaresa, 27 Oct. 1899; Lakmini, 4 Jan. 1918.

the colonising Other. This new range of products marketed as medicinal spelt the end of indigenous beauty treatment among the newly literate women.

Cultural nationalists who were advocating the *osariya* and new moral standards for women were understandably annoyed by the enthusiastic adoption of the entrapments of consumer culture. A letter to the *Sinhala Jatiya* deplored the new trend among some Sinhalese women to waste money unnecessarily to beautify themselves following the latest fashions and using strange things like perfume. However, some soaps were considered patriotic. The Chandra soap advertisement invited 'patriotic ladies and gentlemen' to buy the 'famous Chandra soap produced through much diligent hard work in Lanka by us Sinhalese'. The

The second demand was more problematic and its paradoxes came to light during the severe malaria epidemic. Since the inception of British rule there had been a concern for the health of the colonised people and a will to eradicate diseases through modern scientific methods. As early as 1802 a vaccine against smallpox was introduced and within a decade, according to Bertolacci, 221,082 people had been vaccinated.<sup>72</sup> Institutions for caring for the body were put in place. Until 1858, when a civil medical department was established, the military medical officers were responsible for both the military and civil medical sectors. In 1905 there were '65 hospitals, 424 government dispensaries and 142 estate dispensaries'. The civil medical staff consisted of one principal medical officer and 140 medical officers, 247 apothecaries, 152 nurses, 114 vaccinators, forty-six clerks and eight stewards. The hospitals included a lunatic asylum, a leper asylum, a lying in home, a women's hospital and an ophthalmic hospital.73

While the political elite urged that native medicine should be given the respect it deserved and be provided with help from the state, steeped as they were in the culture of modernity their critique of modern scientific institutions such as hospitals or practices such as inoculations and vaccines was motivated more by indifference towards the plight of the poor than real commitment to 'ori-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Sinhala Jatiya, 1 Feb. 1923.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Arya Sinhala Wansaya, 18 Feb. 1913.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Anthony Bertolacci, A View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interests of Ceylon, Dehiwela, 1817/1983, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> James Carpenter, The History of Mental Health Care in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1988.

ental' values. Social and economic issues were most often overlooked by the first State Council and the ministers never developed any comprehensive framework of policy. The indifference of political leaders to the needs of those who did not participate in their elite culture was particularly evident during a severe malaria epidemic which lasted from October 1934 to April 1935. By 1935 about one fifth of the country's 3.5 million people were affected.<sup>74</sup> Ormsby Gore denounced in vain 'the mentality of Europeans and Sinhalese who from the Governor downwards regarded medical services as an expensive provision for the treatment of the sick.'75 He went on to condemn the retarding effect of Buddhist precepts over the enactment of scientific measures. 'The anopheles mosquito,' he wrote, 'is as effectively preserved and pampered as the sacred cow in India.'76 The leader of the State Council was reported to have said that the malaria epidemic was due to the past sins of the people.<sup>77</sup> When the Minister of Health tried to introduce an Anti-Mosquito Ordinance in the State Council in 1933, it was received with much opposition in the name of the 'liberty of the subject'.78

Retrieving lost authenticities. When the Commission on constitutional reform headed by Lord Donoughmore, which remained in Ceylon from 13 November 1927 to 18 January 1928, called for representations by groups and individuals, the political landscape of the country changed. A new type of politics based on a self-conscious assertion of communal belonging came into being. Thirtyfour sittings were held for the purposes of taking evidence and 140 witnesses and delegations were examined. The arrival of the Commission had the effect of stimulating political activity in the island. Ethnicity imposed itself as a viable strategy to secure greater advantage in the new Constitution. The authenticity of their own ethnic group or race was claimed by many elite leaders who used

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> CO 54/927/17, Tel. from Governor to Secretary of State, 15 Dec. 1934; CO 54/925/8, Extracts from Minutes of 35th Meeting of the Colonial Advisory Medical Committee of February 19, 1935.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> CO 54/924/17, Ormsby Gore to Secretary of State, 18 Dec. 1934.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Cited in V.K. Jayawardena, 'The Urban Labour Movement in Ceylon with Reference to Political Factors 1893–1947', PhD, University of London, 1972.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> CO 54/924/17, Cowell's minute of 20 December 1934.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Command Papers 3131, Ceylon: Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon, July 1928, pp. 11–12.

the imagery of purity, lineage and distinctiveness to ascertain their place in society.

A delegation claiming to represent the 32,000 Burghers scattered over the leading towns appeared before the Commission. The main point they made was the distinctiveness of the Burghers as against Eurasians and other people of mixed descent. The Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon was formed in 1908, aimed at promoting a distinctively Dutch Burgher ethnic identity among the middle class Burghers of Colombo and purging the outsiders, mainly Portuguese Burghers. The latter, commonly referred to as mechanics or *tupasses*, by the very nature of their occupations—they were shoemakers, mechanics and artisans—did not earn the right to call themselves Burghers. The Burghers constructed their authenticity by defining strict laws based on lineage.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, the Malays of Ceylon, who numbered 15,000, used a racial argument to demarcate themselves from the larger Muslim community. In the mid-nineteenth century the British administration had found it convenient to bring together the small communities of Ceylon—Moors, Malays, Afghans, Bohras and Memons—under the umbrella term Muslim. The Malays, on the basis of a proclaimed Javanese identity, wanted separate political representation.<sup>81</sup>

At the Donoughmore sittings authenticity became a pliable instrument used by all small communities that feared they would lose their place in society if the law of numbers were to prevail. The etiquette of authenticity followed by the smaller groups was very similar to that displayed by the Sinhala nationalists.

Malays would distinguish themselves from Moors by not wearing the red felt fez and instead tying a cloth around the head. The fez was a significant community symbol for the Moors. In 1906 Abdul Cader, a prominent Moor, resisted the Chief Justice's order forbidding him to appear in court with both head and feet covered. A meeting of 30,000 persons in support of him was held in Maradana.<sup>82</sup>

Dress was an important component in identity display. Jaffna Tamils who wore the cloth undivided, just like the Sinhalese, wore

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> R.G. Anthonisz, *The Burghers of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1927, p. 5; 'The Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon', *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon*, 1, 1908, pp. 1–11; 'The Constitution and By-Laws of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon', ibid., pp. 52–60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Nathan MSS 602, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Evidence of the Malay Political Association, 23 Nov. 1927.

<sup>82</sup> Ceylon National Review, 1, January 1906, p. 89.

the turban as a sign of separateness from the majority community. The communities' definition of their authentic self rarely entered into conflict with the colonial constructions of the same. It was indeed within the social framework sketched by the colonial minds that communities reinvented signs of identity and difference.

In parallel with the nationalist movement's overtures to the Kandyans and its eventual absorption of Kandyan symbols into the new nation, Sinhala nationalist leaders set about defining what in their view were the emblems of the future state of Ceylon.

The return of artefacts that had been removed was one aspect of a wider process of defining the nation, and Keppetipola's cranium was one of the most celebrated of the 'national' objects returned. The cranium of Keppetipola, one of the leaders of the Great Rebellion of the Kandyan people in 1818, was returned to the Ceylon government on 9 February 1948, a few days after the country celebrated its independence from British rule. The Duke of Gloucester (a son of King George V) was instrumental in the return to the Colombo Museum of what the Cevlon Observer in 1948 referred to as a 'national relic'.83 Thus the cranium moved from one museum to another: in no uncertain terms independent Ceylon had inherited the practice and form of political museumising that began in the nineteenth century with the growth of colonial archaeology and anthropological museums. The trajectory of the cranium from 1818 to 1948 exemplifies the continuities between colonial and nationalist imaginings.

It all started in October 1818, when Keppetipola and Madugalle, the second in command, were captured in the Seven Korales, brought to Kandy, tried for levying war against the King and executed. Just before the execution Keppetipola took out the *Dhammapada*, a book of Buddhist scriptures which he always carried, and, as the story goes, he was reciting some stanzas from the text when the executioner severed his head from the body with two strokes of the sword. What happened to Keppetipola's cranium next is a somewhat curious tale. It was taken from Ceylon and presented to the Phrenological Society of the Edinburgh Museum by Henry Marshall, chief surgeon of the Kandyan Provinces between 1816 and 1821. Phrenology, first known as cranioscopy, had been founded by the German anatomist Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828). There was at the time great interest in methods of determining

<sup>83</sup> Ceylon Observer, 9 Feb. 1948.

character and temperament from external bodily configurations, especially the facial. Gall had evolved cranioscopy, combining the concepts of cerebral localisation with the analysis of bodily configurations. He argued that faculties or talents are inborn and dependent upon cerebral structures: therefore the brain is made up of as many 'organs' or areas as there are moral and intellectual qualities. Character and intellect are represented by twenty-seven organs, or psychic qualities, sharply delineated on the cranial surface. Skulls of 'heroes' or any men displaying exceptional qualities were particularly sought after as case studies.

This interest in skulls was not new. In the seventeenth century scientists were making observations on the morphology of the chimpanzee and the orang-outang. The early eighteenth century saw the beginning of anthropology with the works of Buffon, Linne, Camper, Daubenton and others. In the nineteenth century anthropology officially took its place at the university as the natural history of mankind. Craniology was among the most important subjects taught within this discipline. Parallel to this, the first anthropological museums and the first collections of skulls were created. Appropriately Gall's cranium is still preserved in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

Gall himself was much more a man of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment; he was a social reformer who deduced moral rules from his phrenology. A Crania were not only studied by the 'rational' minds of the time, they were also exhibited in museums for the consumption of the metropolitan crowds. By 1900 Britain had 250 natural history museums, and by 1910 more than 2,000 science and natural history museums had been established throughout the world.

The Colombo Museum was established by Sir William Gregory, Governor of the island. In his speech to the Legislative Council he explicitly conveyed what in his view were the aims of a museum:

'The want of a museum, in which may be represented the natural history, antiquities, and industrial products of the island, has been forcibly urged on me... For a comparatively small sum, considering the object in view, a museum may be constructed which shall not be a mere random collection of miscella-

<sup>84</sup> Encyclopédie Internationale des Sciences et Techniques, vol. IV, pp. 604–6, Paris, 1970.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> David Jenkins, 'Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 36, 2, April 1994, pp. 244–5.

neous objects, but a scientific, teaching exhibition, which while ministering to the amusement of many, may convey instruction to all who seek it. $^{86}$ 

The purpose of the Colombo museum was articulated as twofold: amusement at the sight of objects of wonder, and education. In 1877 it opened its doors to the public. By 1915 the museum had enormously improved. Visitors were able to wander through new exhibits from the mineral gallery and through the mammalian gallery to the medieval gallery. Exhibits were labelled so as to inform and educate the visitors. A recent addition in 1915 was a wooden four poster bed of massive proportions which bore the following inscription:

This bed belonged to the last king of Kandy Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. In January 1815, the king fled to Madamahanuwara. During his absence the palace was ransacked by different people. Molligoda Adigar took the Royal bed and it was in his possession until his death on 26th October [1823].<sup>87</sup>

The history or rather the story of the bed was thus encapsulated in an explanatory vignette by colonial archaeologists.

Post-colonial museumising would follow the same model of displaying selected items behind glass frames, thus elevating then to the status of reified exhibits. Just as in the colonial museum each object is then vested with one explanation, one label. The story of the bed, for instance, is almost certainly more complex than that contained in the museum label. But in the colonial as well as in the post-colonial museum, its story is limited to the part it played in the Kandyan Rebellion. Modern museums have used the same framework and joyfully classified and labelled all the items in a 'reasonable' way, thus carrying on the spirit of the Enlightenment.

The museum that grew out of a typical nineteenth-century colonial concern to collect knowledge about the Other and offer a selective representation of this knowledge to the natives, thus standing as an objective demonstration of the colonial appropriation of the world, later became the location for self-definition of the new nation state. The reversal of this powerful symbolic process, central to colonisation, took place with the return of objects such as Keppetipola's cranium. The meaning of artefacts was never more contextual. While in Edinburgh Keppetipola's cranium was part of the knowledge system of colonialism. With its return to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Cited in Bethia N. Bell and Heather M. Bell, H.C.P. Bell: Archaeologist of Ceylon and the Maldives, Denbigh, 1993, p. 237.

<sup>87</sup> Ceylon Independent, 28, 206, 2 March 1915.

Colombo museum in 1948 it became the symbol of the new and independent nation.

During the last decades of British rule demands for the restoration of Buddhist relics held in museums in Britain began to be received with some amount of sympathy. The story of the return of the throne and crown of the king of Kandy exemplifies the common perception of colonial rulers and nationalists—that the nation to be would be essentially Sinhalese and Buddhist, and privilege Kandyan culture.

Return of the throne. In 1934 the Hindu Organ reported: 'Before a large assembly gathered in the audience hall the Duke of Gloucester returned to the people of Ceylon the throne and crown of the kings of Kandy.'88 The Ceylon Independent described the ceremony as 'typically oriental and magnificent', thus unproblematically staging the debate between colonialism and nationalism as one between a unified white power and an oriental people.<sup>89</sup>

The differentiation of the Sinhalese community into Low Country and Kandyan Sinhalese, a division that was regional in origin, was a legacy of the European impact. It is commonly believed that, as a result of four centuries of Western influence, the Low-Country Sinhalese of the southern and western coastal areas comprise more than two-thirds of the Sinhalese. They tend to diverge somewhat in social practices and attitudes from the more 'traditional' Kandyans of the interior, who remained independent until 1815 and were subject to much later and less intense Western influence.<sup>90</sup>

The identity of the throne was always a site of contest. In the first State Council, councillors debated on whether the throne and crown should be placed in the Kandyan country or in the Low

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> CO 54/960/12, Letter from first and second Adigars and Diyawardane Nilame of Ceylon to Governor Caldecott, 12 September 1938.

<sup>89</sup> Ceylon Independent, 24 September 1934.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> According to the *Report of the Census of Ceylon 1921*, the Sinhalese (in the Western and Southern Provinces, the Chilaw district or the western part of the Puttalam district) who trace their descent to a Low Country district are generally consid ered Low Country. The Kandyan Sinhalese, on the other hand, trace their origin to the Central and North-Central Provinces, the provinces of Uva and Sabaragamuva, the Kurunegala district and part of the Puttalam district, and the Sinhalese divisions of the districts of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mullaitivu. See *Report of the Census of Ceylon for 1921, vol. I, pt II*, Government Printer, 1922, p. 195.

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Country, and were divided on the issue.<sup>91</sup> What was at stake, implicitly more than the whereabouts of the throne, was the contours of the identity that an independent state would assume in the future: would it privilege Kandyan symbols, Low Country Sinhalese symbols, or other cultural markers?

Some sources claim that what is commonly known as Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe's throne and footstool had actually been fashioned by the Dutch Governor Thomas van Rhee in 1692 as a present for the monarch of the time, King Vimala Dharma Suriya II (1687–1707). Joseph Pearson totally rejects any Kandyan origin for the throne. He claims 'It is probable that the chair was made either in Colombo by Sinhalese workmen under Dutch supervision or in one of the Dutch settlements in India by southern Indian craftsmen'. The throne was covered in gold sheeting and encrusted with jewels; its arms were a pair of lions of Sinhala, and a large sun, symbolising the origin of the Kandyan monarchs, surmounted its back. The throne was, in many ways, a hybrid object, modelled in the Dutch style, sculpted possibly by South Indian craftsmen for a Kandyan king.

Although it had been customary for them to rule from a cushioned seat, the Kandyan kings had used this Dutch-made throne ever since they had acquired it. After the 1818 rebellion, together with the lion-standard of the king, the throne was shipped to England in the custody of Brownrigg's son who was charged to present it to the Prince Regent. There is a further irony in the fact that this throne was used throughout the nineteenth century at Windsor Castle for the ceremony of investing knights of the Garter. It remained there for more than a hundred years.

When the return of the throne became known, a delegation of Kandyans including P.B. Nugawela, the Vice-President of the Kandyan Chiefs Union, sent a message to the Secretary of State from the Kandyan chiefs, the Kandyan people and the Buddhist hierarchy. They protested about the handing of the crown and throne to the Ceylonese people rather than to the Kandyans, who they felt were 'the legitimate owners of these historic treasures'. They also urged that the ancient Audience Hall was a more appropriate place than the State Council Chamber. The Governor of Ceylon responded to the Secretary of State by stating that the spe-

<sup>91</sup> State Council of Ceylon, Hansard, vol. I, January-July 1934, p. 200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Joseph Pearson, 'The Throne of the Kings of Kandy', Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), XXXI, 82, 1929, p. 382.

cial interests of the Kandyans had been recognised by establishing a permanent home for the throne in Kandy, and by inviting the Kandyan chiefs to be present on the dais during the presentation. During this ceremony the Chief Priest and chiefs would be specially presented to the Duke at the King's Pavilion. The Governor wrote quite clearly that he was 'not prepared to go further in recognition of the Kandyans as a separate people. This is', he concluded disparagingly, 'an attempt on the part of the Kandyan chiefs to claim rights which they have never possessed and which are incompatible with the present constitution.'93

In 1934, after its ceremonial return to Kandy, the throne was removed from the Audience Hall in Kandy and placed in the king's pavilion—which had been built by the British in Kandy in 1820 in a location very close to the former palace—for inspection by the people. It was then taken to the Colombo Museum and placed in the Bronze Room as an exhibit. Trapped in a glass cage, the throne became an object of bewilderment and amazement. The exhibition of the throne was the first occasion on which large numbers of people visited this institution. Indeed, the exhibition in Colombo was extended by two weeks to accommodate the crowds. Within a month 754,012 persons had visited the museum to view the throne.<sup>94</sup>

After this the throne was placed in the Treasury Room and taken out only for special exhibitions, as in 1936. This replaced the initial plan of the throne being returned to the Old Palace in Kandy. Through this symbolic act, it became the property and the pride of the state and the people. It was no longer merely a Kandyana cultural project.

Nationalists, it seems, were in search of identity markers that people, including the British, would look up to. But not all British officials were convinced that Kandyan culture was the kernel of Sinhalese culture, or of the Ceylonese state. Writing about the proposal that the throne of the last king of Kandy should be placed on a raised dais at the opening of the Parliament of independent Ceylon, Governor Sir H. Moore commented that the throne 'is really a museum piece', and it cannot be said that the 'last king of Kandy was king of Ceylon'. <sup>96</sup> The nationalists quite easily collapsed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> CO 54 921/3, Telegram from the Kandyan Chiefs, the Kandyan people and the Buddhist hierarchy to the Secretary of State, 15 Sept. 1934; Telegram from the Governor to the Secretary of State, 19 Sept. 1934.

<sup>94</sup> Ceylon Independent, 26-8 Sept. 1934; 22-6 Oct. 1934.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Administrative Report of the Director of Colombo Museum 1936, p. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> CO 537/2214, No. 59, inward telegram no. 117 from Sir H. Moore to

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one category into another. They were prepared to forget the 'origin' of the Kandyan throne and its composite nature and, in the same vein, acknowledge the centrality of Kandyan culture in the Sinhalese identity.

Pearson has argued the basic style of this throne is Louis XIV, but the decorative motif is Eastern. In this sense hybridisation had taken place during the construction process, in the working of the wood and the carving of the motives. But once the chair was gifted to the king of Kandy it lost this feature and was transformed into a symbol of the authentic Kandvan royalty. Its return to the island in 1934 vested it with a new identity, that of the nation-state that was to emerge after independence. The decisive interest in the Kandyan heritage is also evident in the requests for the return of a Kandyan gun from Dublin in 1939, of additional articles of the Regalia of the last king of Kandy from Windsor Castle in 1936, and of a painting—of the Dutch Governor receiving ambassadors from the king of Kandy—from the Royal Asiatic Society in 1937. As independence loomed, the literate classes in Ceylon grew more concerned that a number of Ceylon's antiquities, including the cranium of Keppetipola, the Kandyan hero, were deposited in museums and private collections abroad. An editorial in 1947 recalled the 'large haul of ancient coins discovered in Gampola which found its way to America'.97

The throne could have been read and projected in other ways: as the symbol of the reconciliation between a declining colonial power and assertive colonised people, or more likely as the symbol of the hybridity of all things and the celebration of the hybrid nature of works of art. But hybridity was quite unceremoniously dethroned in the nationalist agenda. Nationalists chose to forget about the origin of the throne, a gift from the colonisers and a product of non-Kandyan artisans. History was forgotten. Later, nation builders rewrote history in the explanatory vignette that was attached to the throne when it was exhibited in the Museum. Upon its entry into the Museum in 1934 the throne was described in the vignette as the throne of the last king of the Kandyan Kingdom, Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe.

However, today the label has been changed. The throne is no longer linked to the Nayakkar years, but to Rajasingha II, the father

Mr Creech Jones, 13 Dec. 1947 in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *British Documents on the End of Empire*, series B, vol. 2, pt II, *Towards Independence*, 1945–1948, London, 1997, p. 358.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Ceylon Observer, 5 Aug. 1947, 'Antiquities Abroad'.

of the king to whom it appears to have been donated. In this rectification of origin, the identity of the throne was made more clearly Sinhalese and could be traced back to the late seventeenth century. The throne—described by colonial rulers in their correspondence and in the local press as the throne of the last king of Kandy, or as the throne of the Kandyan kings—changed identities. Rajasingha's reign had ended in 1687. This date did not correspond with the dating by Pearson and Ananda Coomaraswamy of the creation of the throne in 1692 during the reign of Rajasingha's son Wimala Dharma Suriya II.

The proper date of the throne's creation is less important than the motives that shape this slippage. The choice of Rajasingha II rather than his son as the ancestral king of the land may be explained as follows. While Wimala Dharma Suriya was a deeply religious man, it was under Rajasingha II that Kandy had reached the peak of its power. During his reign the Portuguese had been driven away and the Kingdom became more extensive than before. 'Never again did Kandy show signs of so much strength and vitality as it did under this able and astute monarch.' Rajasingha II was the best contender to lay claim to the throne.

Thus Kandyanness was read as the authentic identity at a particular time and in a particular context. But it never became the hegemonic identity of the Sinhalas. It remained alongside other readings of authenticity such as that of the Vijayan origin of a Sinhala race and that of a glorious past in the dry zone of the country, and like the others was activated and given shape through practices. More than ever this period gave credence to the fact that any identity exists only as a substance that keeps growing and retracting. It is constituted, in varying forms, through a series of practices, notably practices of power and practices of the self, games of truth as it were.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Lorna S. Dewaraja, The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1707–1782, Colombo, 1988, p. 21.

## 4

## BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

## COMMUNITIES AND CONFLICTS

In the village of Morapitiya, a predominantly Goyigama caste village tucked in the Kotmale valley and known as the village where the Sinhala national hero King Dutugemunu lived in the 2nd century BCE, a conscientious headman left diaries that spanned his term from 1920 to 1942. His accounts of disputes and conflicts within the village that formed the basis of a study in social anthropology in the 1970s is of importance to us insofar as they belie claims made in a recent work that 'caste, which had been openly acknowledged in the public sphere as an accepted form of occupational differentiation and hierarchy, retreated to the private domain where it survived as an ideology, especially within the walls of the family'.<sup>1</sup>

Village disputes, which were only very rarely of a violent nature, arose from issues pertaining to land, women and caste status. Caste discrimination was a reality. The headman's set of entries for 1921 reflect his general bias against persons of the 'low caste compounds'. On 31 August 1921, for instance, it was reported that one such person, U.G. Punchirala, complained to the headman that a buffalo belonging to Heena Appuhami had damaged his paddy field. The headman investigated and Punchirala brought the buffalo to the field to prove by comparision of hoofprints that his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, pp. xii–xiii.

buffalo had done the damage. The headman, demonstrating his sense of justice, reported his conclusion thus: 'It was not the fault of the owner of the buffalo'.<sup>2</sup>

There is little data other than anecdotes on village disputes based on caste for the pre-independence years. An administration report of 1883 by E. Eliott refers to caste unrest in Batticaloa and Trincomalee mainly because the Navalars appropriated rights which the higher castes (Karayars and Vellalars) considered above their station.<sup>3</sup> A novel such as *Gamperaliya* is perhaps the best indication of the tensions of caste and status that disturbed village life in the South.<sup>4</sup> If disputes had become violent and led to deaths, one can assume that a colonial state bent on preserving law and order would have reported them and quelled them. But because they remained superficial and involved individuals facing discrimination rather than collectivities under violent attack, they have not been included even in the footnotes of history.

In the Jaffna peninsula caste tensions surrounding the campaign for and against removing the 'curse of untouchability' were of a more violent nature and led to intervention by the colonial state. The radical Youth Congress that supported 'equal seating' in schools—a policy whereby children irrespective of their caste would sit on chairs at the same level, unlike the common practice of lower castes sitting on the floor—was frequently under attack in the 1920s and 1930s. In the village of Thirunelvely, where the Congress had decided to hold its sessions in 1929, a campaign of opponents to 'equal seating' was orchestrated, including road blocks, picketing, removing means of drawing water from neighbouring wells, and hooting and throwing stones during the sessions. In November 1928 the Board of Education instructed that 'where in the opinion of the Director, a pupil of any school receives differential treatment on account of race, caste, nationality or creed the grant for such school may be withheld in whole or in part'.

In 1930 the government finally decided on enforcing 'equal seating'. A memorial from the leaders of the villages in Jaffna to the colonial administration claimed that 'the Jaffna Tamils are different

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Marguerite S. Robinson, *Political Structure in a Changing Sinhalese Village*, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 166–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity, Stuttgart, 1994, p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Martin Wickramasinghe, *Gamperaliya* (Changing Village), Dehiwela, 1944/1987.

from the Sinhalese in race, religion, language, customs, civilisation, diet and personal cleanliness' and that any change was uncalled for.<sup>5</sup> Within two months twelve schools were destroyed by arson by high caste persons, and by minority caste members when 'equal seating' was not enforced.<sup>6</sup> These acts spoke of the frustration people felt with the state structures as well as with their so-called representatives. In 1927, for instance, the case of the Untouchables in Jaffna, the 'depressed castes', was put forward by the Jaffna Depressed Tamils' Service League, an organisation created in 1927 on the announcement of the arrival of the Donoughmore Commission. It was led by high-caste Christians who asked for religious representation in Council, in order, so they claimed, to protect both the 'depressed castes' and themselves against discriminatory measures.<sup>7</sup>

In the four decades preceding independence conflicts between peoples and communities took many shapes; some were violent, some remained at the level of the written word, some were popular, others pitted elite groups against one another, some took place in villages and involved only a few persons, others in towns and concerned larger numbers. Clearly, though, in the last decades of colonial rule 'law and order' prevailed less than it is often claimed. The first decades of the twentieth century were peppered with sporadic acts of violence and conflict between religious, ethnic and caste communities to which mainstream historiography has paid only occasional attention.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> CO 54 903/5, Memorial from the Leaders of the Villages in Jaffna to the Secretary of State, 20 June 1930.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Handy Perinbanayagam, A Memorial Volume: The Jaffna Youth Congress and Selections from His Writing and Speeches, Chunnakam, 1980.

Nira Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 66–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Collective violence in the pre-independence period has been studied in detail by John Rogers, Michael Roberts and S.J. Tambiah. For details concerning the events mentioned see in particular John Rogers, *Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka*, London, 1987; Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation. Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History*, Chur, 1994; S.J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflict and Collective Violence in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1997. 'Riots' and 'rioters' must be located within a colonial discourse often aimed at depicting violence between communities as senseless and spontaneous. These terms were loosely but not innocently used in official discourse to describe the events of 1883, 1903 and 1915 and their participants.

Symbolic struggles: riots and clashes in pre-independence Ceylon

By the turn of the century Ceylon had undergone a decisive transformation. Its population had reached 4,106,350.9 Its economy based on plantation produce, raw materials and related commercial activities, together with social and political changes, had created conditions for the elites that had emerged in the nineteenth century to divert their wealth into extensive land purchases and luxury goods. Many plantation owners of the nineteenth century had become town dwellers.

Conflicts between communities in urban areas, where property was destroyed and people died, were better reported by the colonial state. The major issue between Buddhists and Christians, which sparked off collective violence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was the contest over sacred space: Buddhist processions claimed the right to pass through Catholic communities and close to churches, and opposed the building of Christian

<sup>9</sup> According to the census report the Sinhalese comprised 66.1 per cent of the population (24.3 per cent Kandyans and 41.8 per cent low-country Sinhalese, the Ceylon Tamils 12.9 per cent, Indian Tamils (Indian immigrants and plantation laborers) 12.9 per cent and Muslims or Moors 6.5 per cent, of whom a very small proportion were Indian Coast Moors. The remainder included the Burghers, British and Malays. These communities were not homogeneous. Both Sinhala and Tamil communities were divided on caste lines. In 1911 the population of Ceylon was 60 per cent Buddhist, 23 per cent Hindu, 10 per cent Christian and 6.5 per cent Muslim. Of the Sinhalese 91 per cent were Buddhist and 9 per cent Christian. Of the Tamils, 87.6 per cent were Hindus and 12 per cent were Christian.

There were important regional variations in the religious distribution of the communities. Christians were mainly found in the Western and North-Western Provinces, especially in the Chilaw and Mannar districts where nearly half the population was Christian, and Colombo, Jaffna, Puttalam and Kurunegala districts where Christians constituted a sizeable minority. The deep South had sometimes less than 2 per cent of Christians. Muslimsreferred to as Muhammadans in the census of 1911—were commonly divided into two distinct communities: Moors and Malays. The Moors were further divided into Ceylon Moors and the much smaller community of Indian or Coast Moors. The latter had come more recently to Sri Lanka from the Coromandel Coast or South India as traders and labourers. They professed a Wahhabi-inspired Muslim faith. The Muslim community amounted to 6.5 per cent of the population. The Eastern Province, especially the Batticaloa district, was home to 39 per cent of the Muslims. Another important concentration of Muslims was found in the Puttalam district. The remaining Muslims were dispersed throughout the island and were prominent in the large municipalities.

institutions in traditionally Buddhist areas. The violent events described as the 1915 Riots that pitted Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims against each other were more complex and have given rise to many interpretations. <sup>10</sup>

Sacred space. J. de Silva, Mudaliyar and Roman Catholic, testifying before the Legislative Council Chamber on 27 April 1883, made the following comments:

'I have observed that Buddhists of late have been much more forward than before. Since I think the time of Col. Olcott. They used to stop their Tom-Toms in front of a church but for the last few years they have ceased paying this respect...I do not think that the completion of the Kotahena temple in itself raised ill feelings among the Roman Catholics. It is the blasphemous preaching that has done it. I heard from an eyewitness that the Bible was trodden underfoot by a Buddhist priest.'11

There was in the late nineteenth century a growth of anti-Catholic feeling that was related to the resurgence of Buddhism in the predominantly Christian city of Colombo. This period had witnessed the emergence of a number of associations such as the Buddhist Theosophical Society, the Maha Bodhi Society and the Young Men's Buddhist Association, which confronted the encroachment of the colonial state or other communities on what they considered was their sacred realm. The encounter between Protestant Christians and Buddhists had commenced several years earlier through rival publications and several debates. These controversies had culminated in August 1873 when the two parties faced each other in a two-day public debate at Panadura, each seeking to convince the other party of the relative merits of its religion. Roman Catholics, though more numerous, were not prepared to take part in public debates. Furthermore, Catholic newspapers had carried on a campaign against Col. Olcott and the Theosophical Society.

During this period a number of places of worship were either constructed or renovated; among them the Dipaduttarama Viharaya met the demand for Buddhist religious services of the new business community that had migrated to Colombo from the Southern province. Until then many Buddhists frequented the

On the 1915 Riots, an excellent summary of the main interpretations is given in S.J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds*, chapter 3, 'The 1915 Sinhala Buddhist-Muslim Riots in Ceylon', pp. 36–81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> G.P.V. Somaratne, *Kotahena Riot 1883: Religious Riot in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1991, pp. 267–8.

Kelaniya temple situated five miles from Colombo. The space surrounding new places of worship acquired special importance for Buddhists.

In March 1883 in Kotahena, a ward of Colombo where more than half of the population was Catholic, a symbolic struggle over space led to violent Buddhist-Catholic clashes. During the months of February and March Buddhist activists had sponsored a series of *pinkamas* or meritorious deeds to mark the completion of the renovated image house at the Dipaduttarama Viharaya in Kotahena, the temple at which Mohottivatte Gunananda was incumbent. This temple was located near St Lucia's Cathedral. These processions overlapped with the Easter celebrations. On Easter Sunday a Buddhist procession was attacked by a group of two thousand Roman Catholics conspicuous by the white crosses painted on their foreheads. Two men died, one Buddhist and one Catholic, and thirty others including twelve police officers were wounded. 12

The Kotahena confrontation between Buddhists and Catholics in 1883 was not an isolated phenomenon. After the initial acts of violence trouble continued over several days. On Easter Monday previously planned Buddhist processions were turned back by the military. Among other attacks on Catholic property, a Catholic chapel in Dehiwela was burned down. The immediate cause of the 1883 violence was the belief among Catholics that Buddhists were infringing on their sacred space and even insulting their faith. Michael Roberts mentions other tensions in Gampola from 1907 to 1916, in Kandy in 1915 and in Gampaha in 1927. These events, as well as those in Kalutara and Anuradhapura, indicate Buddhist activists increasingly considered Catholics and other Christians too close to the colonial administration.

Space was an area of contest in many ways: at Kotahena it was a space Buddhist and Christian processions vied for, a space to pass through. At Kalutara and Anuradhapura the contest acquired a new dimension: land, trees and stones were claimed as part of the heritage of the Buddhists. It was at Kalutara that for the first time Buddhists claimed as theirs a particular space—crown land in the Dutch Fort—on the ground that ancient texts declared it to be sacred.

The land in the Dutch Fort had long been used for government offices. Oral tradition claimed that the Fort had once been the site

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Michael Roberts, Exploring Confrontation, p. 159.

of a Buddhist temple. In the late 1880s some Buddhists received permission to establish a shrine around a Bo tree within the fort. Modern Buddhists considered all Bo trees sacred and refused to cut them down, in recognition of the fact that it was under a Bo tree that the Buddha had reached Enlightenment. Land was obtained on lease and a custodian of the temple began to receive offerings there. Tension mounted between Buddhists and the colonial government when the Assistant Government Agent had two other Bo trees in the Fort felled. When instruction was given that the shrine had to be moved, fear that the Bo tree would be cut down led Buddhists to gather forces. On 26 November 1896 a crowd assembled around the Bo tree to protect it. A few skirmishes with the police followed but no serious violence occurred. The crowd dispersed the next afternoon. The Bo tree was not felled but the shrine was removed.<sup>14</sup>

The events in Anuradhapura a few years later were similar to those in Kalutara, but in 1903 violence was not averted. Tension also arose from a contest over space between the colonial administration and Anuradhapura Buddhists. Although Anuradhapura had been covered by jungle and was to all intents and purposes a city in ruins, it had remained a centre of pilgrimage. The British had excavated new shrines in the late nineteenth century and around these a modern city had grown. In 1899, when Walisinha Harischandra settled down in Anuradhapura, the Buddhist campaign to preserve the sacred city found a leader.

The immediate cause of the 1903 violence was the Public Works Department's use of stones from the ruined city for the construction of a road. The confrontation began on 9 June during the full moon pilgrimage. Among the participants were a few hundred pilgrims and Sinhalese residents from Anuradhapura. They targeted sites that had been claimed by the Maha Bodhi Society, such as the Medical Officer's quarters and buildings either associated with Christianity or hostile to Buddhist culture. Among these were the Roman Catholic Church that was burned down and the slaughterhouse that was destroyed. Interestingly, Protestant and Muslim religious buildings were untouched. The Catholic Church was perhaps singled out by the predominantly Low-Country Sinhalese crowds as it evoked the tensions they encountered in their own regions. <sup>15</sup>

John Rogers, 'The Kalutara Bo Tree Affair 1891–1897', in Michael Roberts (ed.), Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, vol. I, Colombo, 1997, pp. 323–35.
 John Rogers, Crime, Justice and Society, p. 187. For interpretations stressing

Although Tamils were the largest non-Sinhala community living in Anuradhapura, the campaign led by Buddhist leaders in the early twentieth century against the modern town that had emerged next to the ruins was not directed against them. The targets were the colonial administration, the Christians and later the Moors.

The 1915 Sinhala-Muslim 'Riots'. Most historians agree the violence that occurred in the South quadrant of the island between 28 May and 5 June 1915 was directed against the Coast Moors or Indian Moors, most of whom were recent migrants from the Malabar coast of India. The violence started in Kandy opposite a mosque and spread into other parts of the island. During these days Sinhala crowds attacked the property and the persons of the Moors, killing twenty-five, wounding 189, and raping four.<sup>16</sup>

There are different accounts of the way in which the collective violence began. The attack on the mosque by Sinhalese men appears to have been sparked off by the aggressive way the Muslims objected to *dansala*, processions and singing of songs of veneration on Vesak day. On the relative importance of religious, economic and political factors that explain the eruption of violence, there is considerable disagreement. It has been shown the causes of the 'riots' were not exclusively religious in origin. As retail traders the Indian Moors were direct competitors of the Low Country Sinhalese traders who accused their rivals of extending credit on easy terms and charging high prices. The prominent role of the Colombo working class in the rioting, in particular the skilled workers employed in the Railway department, has also been highlighted. Another study has pointed to the (depressed) caste composition of the 'rioters', and the importance of the phenomenon

the significance of Anuradhapura for Sinhala nationalism see Elizabeth Nissan, 'History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist Nation', *Social Analysis*, 1989, vol. 25, pp. 64–77; Pradeep Jeganathan, 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura' in P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1995, pp. 106–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Michael Roberts, Exploring Confrontation, pp. 183–212.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> R.N. Kearney et al., 'The 1915 Riots in Ceylon: A Symposium', Journal of Asian Studies, XXIX, 2, 1970, pp. 219–66. For an interpretation taking into account the caste dimension of the riots see A.P. Kannangara, 'The Riots of 1915 in Sri Lanka: A Study in the Roots of Communal Violence', Past and Present, 102, 1984, pp. 130–65.

of social disorganisation caused by urbanisation as a major cause of the collective violence.

Roberts has offered an interesting revisionist analysis of the causes of the violence which he refers to as 'the pogrom of 1915'. He suggests that by the early twentieth century the thinking of Sinhala ideologues had been sufficiently disseminated to play a crucial role in anti-Moor feelings. The economic factor alone is not sufficient to explain the 1915 violence: 'The economic and religiocultural threat from the Moors shaded into one another in the thinking of several militants.'18 The religious factor, coupled with a clumsily articulated feeling of nationality, was in many ways crucial. The feeling that the British were giving unfair judgements against Buddhist processions, prohibiting them from beating the 'tomtom' in the vicinity of places of worship, was a major cause. The Moors were considered alien, as is evident in records of the buildup to the violence at a village society meeting where the members were addressed in the following manner: 'The Tambies are insulting our nationality and our religion. We must harass the Tambies, and they must be driven out of Ceylon.'19 In the view of the Sinhala activists the Moor did not belong in Ceylon, he was an alien, an 'Other' who had his own country. In Ceylon he was only a migrant along with all those who did not fit into the Sinhalese community.

Although the target of the Sinhalese was initially the South Indian Moors, the distinction made between them and the Ceylon Moors began to fade. The reason for this was that under the influence of the more orthodox South Indian Moors, the Coast Moors developed a similar repugnance towards blaring music and a more confrontational attitude towards the majority religious community's practices.

Colonial state and riots/violence. Law and order were at the heart of the colonial state. British authority rested on military power and was supported by a range of symbolic practices from horsemanship to the new organisation of space and time in towns. In the main towns guns were fired at regular intervals to mark the passing of time. For the British there were specific activities for each time of the day. The day was for work and the night for repose or leisure. Healing rites such as *yaktovils* that had to be performed at night with 'tom-tom' beating did not fit in with the rigid divides of the colonial mentality.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> M. Roberts, Exploring Confrontation, p. 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

British attitudes to noise as well as British notions of governmentality led to the Police Ordinance of 1865 regulating the uses of drumming and other music within any town or its limits. This ordinance created a new space for conflict between religious communities that until then had not systematically considered drumming a 'disturbance'. Accordingly the colonial police regulated all religious processions in the city by issuing permits.<sup>20</sup> At Kotahena in 1883 the police had issued permits to the first group to request them.

Usually no serious attempts were made to disperse crowds, although efforts were made to diffuse potentially explosive situations. In Kotahena in 1883, when the police realised that serious trouble was brewing, they cancelled the permit for Buddhist processions on a full moon day that coincided with Good Friday. Clearly Christian celebrations were given priority.

When the Catholic crowd began to attack the Buddhist procession the police, about seventy in number, attempted to disperse them, but were showered with bricks and stones. Finally a message was sent to the military, but by the time the troops arrived the fighting had subsided.

In Kandy in 1915, when it appeared that trouble was brewing, the police inspector tried to divert the procession, but failed, following which the police were unable to master the crowds.

The colonial state's claim of impartiality was discredited by the way in which participants in the violence loosely described in the official discourse as the 'riots' were generally prosecuted. After the 1883 'riots' four legal actions were instituted, by the police, the widow of the dead man, a group of Catholics and a group of Buddhists; but the charges were dismissed for lack of evidence. The Queen's Advocate felt that the witnesses were biased and could not be taken into account.<sup>21</sup>

At Anuradhapura, following the anti-Christian violence, Harischandra was arrested for inciting it but was eventually released.<sup>22</sup> After the Kalutara Bo tree affair a number of those who took part in the violence were convicted and fined or sentenced to short terms of imprisonment.

The 1915 'riots' were severely suppressed. A number of excesses were committed by the British authorities who came to regard the clashes as part of a conspiracy against them by the Sinhalese. Men

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 149-81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> John Rogers, Crime, Justice and Society, p. 180.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> S.J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds*, p. 55.

associated with the Temperance movement were arbitrarily imprisoned and at least 63 people were killed by the army and police. English volunteers—tea planters and employees of commercial firms—appear to have flogged and shot people in a senseless manner. Sir John Anderson, who replaced Sir Robert Chalmers, condemned the atrocities committed. When the violence ended 412 persons, mainly belonging to the Sinhalese community, were charged. Of these thirty-four were sentenced to death.

By 1915 the pattern of political agitation had undergone a distinct change. The shift started with the death of W. Harischandra in 1913 and was consolidated by the exile of Anagarika Dharmapala to India. The constitutional reform movement adopted a secular outlook and religion became of secondary importance.

In the late 1920s and 1930s sections of the city's working classes clashed, often violently, over the granting of the vote to Malayalee workers perceived as 'migrants'. The economic depression further entrenched anti-migrant feelings in the labour arena of Colombo.

# The vote and anti-migrant moves

In the Sinhalese nationalism of the early twentieth century, which laid the foundation of the present nation-state, the peopling of the island was described by a fine weave of myths, orientalist writings, and popular perceptions as well as histories. In this imagined past, where the self was being shaped, the migrant occupied an important place. The question of who was a migrant took a new turn with the change in the political landscape that followed the granting of universal franchise in 1931. The definition of the migrant by the political elite was then tied to the question of entitlement ('what are your rights?') and what constituted the contours of a 'Ceylonese' identity. The mid-1930s, a period of economic depression in the country, witnessed popular acts of hostility towards migrants. However, the limited nature of these acts shows the importance of the state in monitoring violence. Under a regime of law and order communalism was not allowed to become that aggressive.

At different times the boundaries between migrant and indigenous people shifted. In the early twentieth century the Sinhala literati considered the province of Bengal the land of the Aryans and the motherland of the Arya Sinhalas. Thus, those who could not trace their ancestry to Bengal and did not speak Sinhala as their mother tongue were perceived as 'non-Aryans'. The definition of the migrant changed from the early twentieth century,

when all 'non-Aryans' were considered alien by proponents of Sinhala nationalism, to a more complex definition of the 'Other' founded on scientific and enumerative criteria—such as period of residence or proof of intention to settle—in consonance with the rational and legal order that was implanted in colonial Ceylon. There the identities pitted against each other by the political elites were 'Ceylonese' and alien. Both myths and the apparatus of knowledge of the West, combining to inscribe boundaries between communities and dividing them into 'migrants' and 'sons of the soil', led to a politics of exclusion and violence against the latter.

Migrants and political representation. The place of India in the articulation of nationalism in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century underwent significant changes during this period. Discontinuity was the norm. At times India was the non-West and looked upon as the mother country by Sinhalese and minorities alike, united in their moderate and secular opposition to British rule. At other times, when cultural symbols were more prominent, and nationalism was the preserve of the Sinhalese community, pride of place was given to North India. All those who came later from South India were considered aliens.

Just as important was the non-representation of the Indian Tamil community, which under this scheme was subsumed in the wider circle of the Tamil community as a whole. It was only in 1911 that a distinction was made between Ceylon Tamils and Indian Tamils. But this distinction was never reflected in the representative system. The census criterion for classification as an 'Indian Tamil' since 1911 had been the inability to trace one's ancestry to a traditionally Tamil-speaking district in Sri Lanka.<sup>23</sup> The migrant was defined negatively through a discourse stressing difference.

In the 1921 Constitution literacy in the vernacular was recognised for the first time as a qualification for civic rights. Although some property and income qualifications also had to be satisfied, and only males were entitled to the right, this recognition led to a substantial widening of the electorate. The voting population in 1924 reached 189,335.<sup>24</sup> The stage was set for the transformation from elite constitutionalism to mass politics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> P. Devaraj, 'Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka: Identity Stabilisation and Inter-Ethnic Interaction' in *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1979, p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka, Ann Arbor, MI, 1992.

B.S. Cohn has described the Indian colonial state as 'both totalizing and individualizing'. What he meant by this was a project which created the totality of the people to be governed (the Indians), but which also marked off religions, languages, ethnic groups and castes. In Ceylon, from the Donoughmore Commission onwards, departing from a century of divisive politics, colonial rule attempted to encourage the formation of an entity called Ceylonese.

During the proceedings of the Commission in 1927–8 leaders of communities competed to obtain as much as possible from the constitution makers. Arguments founded on race, lineage and myths were widely used by associations of minority communities, in order to secure the enforcement of safeguards for their own people. As the prominent Muslim leader H.M. Macan Markar stated at a hearing of the Commission: 'Each one is here to protect his own race from misunderstanding.'<sup>26</sup> All minorities asked for the system of communal representation to be maintained and pressed for an increase in the number of seats allotted to them. After the hearings the Commission concluded that the new government had to be made fully representative of the great body of the people. A radical extension of the franchise, until now limited to a tiny portion of 'educated Cevlonese', was recommended.

In fact the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission included universal adult suffrage for the Ceylonese. While literacy and property qualifications were abolished, residency became the criterion for civic rights. The right to vote was given only to those Indians who could meet the test of continuous past residence for five years, with an allowance for temporary absences not to exceed eight months, and in addition could firmly indicate a willingness to remain in Ceylon and become a permanent part of the island's population. Many urban mercantile and professional Indians who spent long periods in India would not be enfranchised under this formula. This constituted a clear breach of the Government of Ceylon's undertaking not to discriminate against people of Indian origin. Each of the Government of Ceylon's undertaking not to discriminate against people of Indian origin.

The Donoughmore Constitution, by granting universal suffrage to those it defined as Ceylonese, effectively established a fixed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Cited in Peter van der Veer, Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India, Berkeley, 1994, p. 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Nathan MSS 609, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, 2 Jan. 1928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Command Papers 3131. Ceylon. Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon, July 1928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, London, 2001, p. 155.

boundary between them and migrants. The new self-governing state construed this quasi-citizenship in the Crown Colony of Ceylon as an identity which subordinated all other identities of religion, estate, family, gender ethnicity, or region to its framework of a uniform body of law. It forged contractual relations based in principle on an equality of rights. Through the vote the legitimacy of the state was consolidated and the boundaries of the nation affirmed. The categories for determining who should be included in the voting community reveal the commissioners' understanding of nation. The nation was not a group of people who had a common lineage and history, neither did it include all the people who had a common will to live together. The recommendations of the Commission granted the vote to those who could prove residency in the island. The nation included all those who happened to have lived within the state boundaries for a period of five years.

Migrant Ceylonese and voting criteria. At the Donoughmore sittings the criteria put forward for separating migrants from Ceylonese who were eligible to vote reflected the different understandings of what constituted the nation by various groups and individuals. The question of suffrage forced nationalism to negotiate the difficult terrain of the 'other amongst us', and for this the guilt and ignorance of the 'other' from foreign lands, who lacked education and wealth and needed to be civilised, was proclaimed. The distance between 'Us' and 'Them' reflected the difference between the 'educated and well to-do' sections of the population and the 'ignorant masses'. Income was first put forward as the criterion for eligibility to obtain voting rights.

*Income.* The Ceylon National Congress deputation led by E.W. Perera stated that the franchise should be restricted to those earning at least Rs. 50 a month. Women would have to be over twentyfive years of age and qualify by a rigid literacy test or a property qualification.<sup>29</sup> An income qualification ruled out a large number of propertyless workers. The question of suffrage very soon became a divisive factor among representatives of various Sinhalese interests. A.E. Goonesinha, the Labour leader, was the only prominent figure to advocate universal suffrage without discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, caste or race.<sup>30</sup> Equally apprehen-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Nathan MSS 602, Evidence of the CNC.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Nathan MSS 606, Evidence of the Ceylon Labour Union, 8 Dec. 1927.

sive were most associations representing ethnic minority interests, who equated universal franchise with a daunting majority rule. The conjunction of universal suffrage and territorial representation spelt out for smaller minorities, such as the Burghers or Europeans, nothing less than political extinction.

To deny total franchise rights to all Tamil workers never entered the minds of the opponents to the Indian franchise. The demand was to restrict it. When the commissioners had recommended that the privilege of voting should be confined to those who had an abiding interest in the country, this had been welcomed by Sinhalese leaders, but only up to a point. There was disagreement as to whether the five-year residence qualification alone was enough for this purpose. It was felt that a reasonable intention to settle in the island should also be ascertained. Interestingly there was an identity of interest on this issue between the Low-Country Sinhalese and the Kandyans. The Kandyans feared that in their provinces the Indians would swamp the permanent population and that Ceylon would become the 'Indian Banyan tree'. The Indian demand for the vote was resented as arising from mainly opportunistic and materialistic considerations.

On 7 December 1928 a notice convening a public meeting to express protest against 'the extension of the franchise to those non-Ceylonese who had no abiding interest in the country' was sent to the Governor. A thousand signatures were attached to the notice. The signatories included prominent Kandyans such as Nugawela Dissawe, Ratwatte Dissawe, P.B. Panabokke and A. Godamune—all representatives of the Kandyan aristocracy—but also Low-Country Sinhalese renowned for their Sinhalese national identity, among them D.S. Senanayake, A. Dharmapala, C.A. Hewavitharne, and Piyadasa Sirisena, the editor of the *Sinhala Jatiya*. The Indian threat seemed to have led to a reconciliation between the representatives of the traditional and progressive sections of the Sinhalese population.

Leaders of minority communities such as T.B. Jayah spoke in favour of Indian franchise in the Legislative Council. His resolution proclaimed that in the opinion of the Council, non-Ceylonese British born subjects should be placed on an equal footing with the Ceylonese in respect of status and rights of citizenship.<sup>33</sup> He was supported by the Ceylon Indian Natesa Iyer and the Tamil

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Command Papers 3131, pp. 83–90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> CO 54/892/9, W.A. de Silva et al. to Governor, 7 Dec. 1928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Hansard, 1928, vol. III, p. 1776.

A. Mahadeva.<sup>34</sup> The reasons behind their concern for Indian franchise rights could have been those stated by the CNC leaders but also, more simply, a feeling of solidarity with another threatened minority. The two main European organisations, the European Association and the Planters Association of Ceylon, called for the period of residence for voters to be reduced from five years to one.<sup>35</sup> Indian franchise was strongly supported: 'It seems to us that nobody deserves more from Ceylon than the man whose labours have brought so much prosperity to it.'<sup>36</sup> This only confirmed the worst fears of the Kandyans about possible manipulation of the Indian vote by British commercial interests.

The Government of India did not get involved in the Indian issue, although it was aware of the problem quite early: 'It is understood', wrote the Secretary to the Government of India, G.S. Bajpal, 'that there is a group of Sinhalese leaders in Council which for reasons that are not clear are hostile to Indians and would like if possible to discriminate against Indians in the matter of the franchise in particular.'<sup>37</sup>

*Literacy*. A literacy qualification was favoured by elite minority leaders as well as many of the Sinhalese members of the CNC. The ability to read and write was the dividing line between those who had the power and those who did not. The Tamil leader P. Ramanathan was vehement in his condemnation of government by majorities: 'They count people by their heads like cattle, 50 men on this side and 40 men on that side or 60 men on one side and 40 on the other side...and the cultured man who is considered the leader of the village or the leader of men is classed together with the common cooly who cannot read or write.'<sup>38</sup>

The Ceylon Indian Association, which represented the Indian trade interests in the country, recommended the lowering of the franchise, but with a literacy test for men—which would have excluded the majority of Plantation Indian labourers—and for women the same property qualification, but with a literacy test and a higher age qualification, i.e. twenty-five years.<sup>39</sup> In fact the only

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 1623 and pp. 1894–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> CO 54/892/9, Memorandum of the European Association, 28 Sept. 1929.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> CO 54/892/12, Bajpal to Under Secretary of State, 29 Nov. 1928.

<sup>38</sup> Nathan MSS 603, Evidence of the Ceylon Tamil League, 30 Nov. 1927.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Memorandum of the Ceylon Indian Association in *The Ceylon Indian*, I, 2, 13 Nov. 1927.

decisive action in support of Indians and universal suffrage as a whole was taken by A.E. Goonesinha and his Ceylon Trade Union Congress. This mobilisation was triggered by a motion in the Legislative Council moved on 11 December 1928 by F.M. Molamure, the member for the Kegalle revenue district, and seconded by D.S. Senanayake, the member for Negombo district in the North-Western Province. After amendment, the final form of the motion was as follows:

'This Council accepts the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission as regards the extension of the franchise subject to the following amendments:

- 1. In the case of females the age qualification as a voter should be 21 and not 30.
- 2. That every voter should be able to read and write one of the following languages (English, Sinhalese, Tamil).'40

This call for a literacy test meant incidentally the exclusion not only of the bulk of the Indian labourers but of many Ceylonese as well. The majority of the Sinhalese in Council, with the three European members, the second Burgher member N.J. Martin, and the two Tamil members for the Eastern Province, E.R. Tambimuttu and T.M. Saber Rutnam, voted in favour. The minority comprised in the main the remainder of Ceylon Tamils and those belonging to smaller communities. Those who mastered the written word were considered suitable to vote. This sacralisation of the written word and written texts was partly inherited from colonialism, partly derived from the nationalist need to rely on written histories for legitimacy. It was no longer myths of origin that were invoked but precise criteria born of the scientific and rationalist systems of knowledge brought to the island by the colonisers. This was in many ways a class position taken by a group in society that was closer in cultural terms to a middle or upper class Briton than to a Sinhalese or Tamil worker. In this sense it was not surprising that the elites in Ceylon had absorbed one of the main myth-models of European culture, which believed that writing epitomised learning, civilisation and all that distinguished the West from the rest. Although literacy in Sinhalese and Tamil were also criteria for eligibility, this was a concession rather than a fundamental belief.

Less than twenty-four hours after this motion was passed in Council, a gigantic demonstration was staged in Gordon Gardens

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Hansard, 1928, vol. III, p. 1665.

opposite the Council Chamber to protest against the seventeen members who had opposed adult suffrage. As W.A. de Silva, the CNC president, A.E.G. Wijekoon, and D.S. Senanayake appeared on the balcony they were greeted with cries of 'shame, shame, shame'. A.E. Goonesinha then urged the crowd to shout three times, 'You have betrayed us'. It must be noted that the Labour leader's view on suffrage was not in total accordance with that of the commissioners. He shared the view that the residential period of five years did not necessarily mean an abiding paramount interest in the country, but felt the objection could be met by extending the period to ten years. One may wonder why ten years of residence was considered more appropriate than five years and not, for instance, seven years or fifteen years.

Prominent Indians like Natesa Iyer and K. Satiavaghisvara used their pens to defend the rights of the Indians. Writing in the Ceylon *Indian*, the latter had suggested that Gujerati, Hindi and Malayalam be made qualifying languages in addition to the languages already included, so as to include in the electorate Malayalees from Cochin, Travancore and British Malabar employed in factories and workshops. 42 But this amounted to endorsing a literacy qualification. It is doubtful that any democratisation of the suffrage would have followed the implementation of Iyer's proposal. Nihal Singh complained rightly about the division of the Ceylon Indian community on class lines and denounced the Ceylon Indians, especially the professional and business men who had chosen to remain silent on the franchise issue in order to safeguard their interests if the future were to belong to the Sinhalese. 43 The suggestion of a property qualification for representation in the legislature which Molamure put forward was certainly designed to detach the rich from the poor Indians.44

The franchise issue was the major reason for the eventual acceptance or rejection by the Legislative Council of the Donoughmore scheme. For the scheme to be accepted by a majority in Council a compromise over the Indian question seemed to impose itself as the only solution. The necessity of winning the support of the Sinhalese moderates had convinced the Secretary of State, Lord Passfield, that the franchise scheme would have to be modified.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 1623, pp. 1894–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> The Ceylon Indian, I, 4, November 1927.

<sup>43</sup> The Modern Review, 45, 6, June 1929, p. 662.

<sup>44</sup> The Times of Ceylon, 19 Nov. 1928.

Governor Stanley had suggested that apart from a certificate of permanent settlement granted on evidence of five years' residence, voters should also sign a declaration of intention to settle permanently in the island. Following Stanley's guidelines, restrictions were thus imposed on the franchise of resident Indians. These changes were incorporated in the Ceylon (State Council) Order in Council of 1931.

The modifications made domicile the standard test of franchise, subject to certain qualifications for British subjects over twenty-one. Voting rights were given to those Indians who could meet the test of continuous residence for five years and in addition could firmly indicate a willingness to settle in the country and become a permanent part of the island's population. The wealthy Indians and nearly the entire European community were, however, granted the privilege to vote under a clause which required certain property and literacy qualifications.<sup>45</sup>

To obtain civic rights an individual was now required to produce documents: to prove residency, rental receipts; to prove willingness to live in the island, a declaration of intent. This reliance on written documents, this valorisation of the written word above the oral in administrative practices, was an important part of the colonial technology of rule. The assumption was that meanings inscribed in writing were more stable. Elites in Ceylon followed the same logic when they demanded literacy qualifications and written documents proving intention to settle for all potential voters. While granting more rights to the Ceylonese the colonial rulers set about circumscribing the contours of what constituted the 'Ceylonese'. The elites who partook in this process of identity gelling became more committed to the idea of fixed, stable, unchangeable and exclusive identities.

# Politics of violence: migrants during the Depression

While the contours of a 'Ceylonese' identity were being drawn and fixed through the definition of who was eligible for rights and entitlements such as the vote and who was to be excluded, violent politics in the labour arena crystallised anti-migrant perceptions. But this violence was limited. It seems that the colonial state, in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> N. Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics*, pp. 89–93. For a detailed analysis of the registration of the Indian population see Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils*, pp. 152–74.

conformity with its law and order principles and despite the fact that its strength rested on the division of the native people into competing communities, did everything to avoid communal street violence. The colonial administration harboured the fear that street violence against migrants could suddenly shift its focus and turn against the colonial state.

During the 1930s there appeared to be a conjunction of interests on the part of the urban working class, trade union leaders and state councillors towards retrieving certain areas of employment. Marxist historians have interpreted this as the manifestation of the Sinhalese nationalist ideology which drew from the revivalist heritage and by the 1930s had penetrated all classes of society. There were certainly different levels of receptiveness to racialist ideas and different levels of mediation, owing to the cultural and economic discrepancies amongst the recipients. What scholars have not addressed is the question of the alchemy by which communal ideology becomes transformed into violence. What led Sinhalese workers to rise up against migrant workers at certain times and not at others?

The influence of Anagarika Dharmapala's ideas must not be underplayed. Dharmapala, it is known, addressed about twenty meetings on his return from India in 1921. Police records of all his movements clearly indicate the working-class composition of his public. On 16 June 1922, for instance, a gathering in Maradana consisted predominantly of workmen, a few clerks, students from the Buddhist school Ananda College and about ten Buddhist priests. Foreigners were verbally attacked and the 'lion race' encouraged to wake up.<sup>47</sup> Dharmapala's ideas and imagery were undoubtedly adopted by the leadership of the Ceylon Labour Union and its propagandists. At a meeting of the Labour Union in 1929 the Labour leader was emphatically referred to as the 'lion' by the speaker, a Buddhist priest called Dhamma Tilaka who on another occasion urged his audience 'to do things in the proper Sinhalese spirit'.<sup>48</sup> In the 1930s *Viraya*, the official organ of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> See for instance K. Jayawardena, Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1990.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ananda Guruge (ed.), Anagarika Dharmapala: Return to Righteousness, Colombo, 1965, p. lxv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> CO 54/896/1, 'Extracts from Criminal Investigation Department File on the Tramway Strike commenced on January 23, 1929 ended on February 5, 1929.'

Labour Party, used Hitler as an example and dwelt on the necessity of keeping the Sinhalese blood pure by avoiding mixed marriages: 'If this malpractice is allowed to continue unchecked will there be a pure Sinhalese nation in the future?'<sup>49</sup>

The extent to which these ideas helped mobilise people for anti-Indian and anti-foreigner acts in the 1930s is difficult to assess. As important was the daily perception by Sinhalese workmen of certain groups in society, essentially later migrants to the island, as aliens, intruders or exploiters. In the first decades of the twentieth century Colombo had grown into a bustling colonial centre with an urban labour force engaged in skilled and unskilled work in factories, public works and transport and an informal sector of vendors that serviced the working population. Wages were low. Skilled workers received around one rupee a day and unskilled male workers received 50-60 cents a day. There was no regulation of hours of work. The lack of adequate housing constituted an acute problem that was compounded by the increase in migrant labour for whom sheds and lines had been erected in the New Bazaar, Kotahena and St Paul's wards adjoining the harbour. Consumption of arrack and toddy formed one of the few outlets for these workers.<sup>50</sup>

On few occasions did workmen speak for themselves; one such instance was at the Donoughmore sittings, the other before the Jackson Commission on immigration. A group calling itself 'Ceylonese workmen' sent a memorandum to the Donoughmore Commission in which it outlined the economic basis of its members' resentment towards foreigners:

We feel very keenly the menace to Ceylonese labour occasioned by the influx of foreign and especially Malayalee labourers... Competition with such labour is scarcely possible for the workmen of this country, due chiefly to the low standard of living of such labourers.<sup>51</sup>

Other factors too intervened. Indians who seemed to have been associated with 'sexual promiscuity, prostitution, consumption and venereal diseases', were held responsible for undermining the moral standard of the labouring classes.<sup>52</sup> These contentions were consolidated by the official view of Indians. Indeed Indian immi-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Viraya, 17 March 1937 (translated from the Sinhalese)

Mumari Jayawardena, Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, pp. 88–9.

<sup>51</sup> Nathan MSS 619, Special Circulation No. 291, Memorandum from Ceylonese Workmen.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

grants had for long been seen as purveyors of dangerous diseases in Ceylon, except that in the nineteenth century the diseases in question were smallpox and cholera.<sup>53</sup> While smallpox was not a disease of warm climates, cholera was a disease that was scarcely recognised by the West in the early nineteenth century. Because it struck suddenly and unpredictably and its victims were seized by violent vomiting and uncontrollable purging, it became one of the most terrifying diseases in nineteenth-century India. Its contamination was associated with poor people who lived exposed to the weather and were 'filthy' in their habits. 54 The low living conditions of Malayalee labourers in Colombo led to easy associations between lack of sanitation and hygiene, diseases and foreigners. They were also castigated as the main consumers of opium in the island before the habit spread to the indigenous population.<sup>55</sup> It was therefore not surprising that Ceylonese workmen held in low esteem the uprooted Indian labourers whose mode of life was totally alien to their own. Indians were also associated with specific tasks. Appearing before the Jackson Commission, one witness said: 'A Sinhalese will sit on a stool and weigh a tea chest which a Tamil or a Malayalee puts on the scale, rather than lift the chest on to the scale himself the Sinhalese will walk out'; and another claimed that the Indian is 'cook, sweeper and everything himself and boils the water and makes the tea'.56 Indians were perceived not only as unfair competitors but also as inferiors, since they performed tasks a Sinhalese would consider despicable. This perception was based on a simple observation of reality. Indians did monopolise certain areas of employment generally perceived as low-status; they were often found in conservancy, scavenging and domestic jobs and in the Public Works Department.<sup>57</sup> Thus the anti-Indian feeling was not purely rooted in a conscious and mediated racial antipathy, it was also an immediate reaction to true economic differences that existed between Sinhalese and Indian immigrants in urban employment.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> CO 54/902/16, 'Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Medical Wants Ordinance no. 9810 of 1912.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> See David Arnold, Colonizing the Body: State Medecine and Epidemic Disease in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 159–99.

Dowbiggin MSS, Excise Commissioner's Memorandum no. C456 of 30 Oct. 1936 on Ganja and Opium, pp. 14 and 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Sessional Papers III, 1938, Report of a Commission on Immigration to Ceylon, pp. 59–60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> C. Kondapi, *Indian Overseas*, 1838–1949, New Delhi, 1951, pp. 361–2.

The same observation can be made concerning the general hostility manifested by the Sinhalese towards Afghans, Chettiars, Gujaratis, Memons and other Indians who concentrated on certain kinds of economic activities such as boutique-keeping, peddling, petty finance and trade and money-lending. Jackson remarked: 'The prominence of the Indians in trade more especially in Colombo is probably the most obvious of all the evidences of his presence in the island in other capacities than as an agricultural labourer on estates.'<sup>58</sup>

These men played the role of buffers between the elite and the masses, and between consumers and producers. They were resented on both sides. There was a widespread hostility towards Afghan and Chettiar pawnbrokers and money-lenders, due to the distasteful nature of their activities. Traditionally the Sinhalese did not engage in money lending, hence the void was filled by members of other communities. H.R. Cowell remarked about the Afghans: 'These people will always be unpopular as money-lenders, they suffer under the hostility which Jews experience in other countries where the local people are improvident.'<sup>59</sup> The Chettiars, who came from Chettinad in South India—an area of 1,700 square kilometers in Tamilnad—were never held in contempt like the Afghans, yet the word 'Chetti' or 'Hetti' came to be synonymous with the Sinhalese word *poli*, which means interest.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, independently of any ideological infiltration, the mind of the average Sinhalese worker was conditioned by his daily dealings with a number of ethnic minorities. At the core was the perception of the others as economic competitors, but cultural perceptions also contributed to the fund of prejudices.

The Depression and immigrant labour. Ceylon was particularly vulnerable to market fluctuations owing on the one hand to its dependence on tea, rubber and coconut by-products, and on the other to its negligible bargaining power in the world market. The slump in Ceylon started early, between 1926 and 1928, and lasted throughout the 1930s.<sup>61</sup> Until 1930 unemployment had been of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Sessional Papers III, 1938, Report of a Commission on Immigration to Ceylon, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> CO 54/916/2, H.R. Cowell's minute of 3 Feb. 1933.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> W.A. Weerasooriya, The Nattukottai Chettiar Merchant Bankers in Ceylon, Dehiwela, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> For an interpretation of the economic crisis in Ceylon as being the result

short duration and caused little real distress. The Depression hit Ceylon in 1930–2. The bulk of men thrown out of work were the more marginal categories of Indian estate labourers who were still poorly integrated into the plantation structure. Between 1930 and 1933 more than 100,000 left the country. Many Sinhalese casual workers who worked on the small plantations and on public works were also badly hit. The number of persons in government employ dropped from 69,287 in 1930 to 60,553 in 1933.<sup>62</sup> In 1934–5, the malaria epidemic and the failure of crops aggravated the distress caused by the economic depression. The economic crisis and the large-scale unemployment that followed sharpened ethnic identities and reinforced the role of the outsider.

The political leadership of the country in the Sinhalese-dominated State Council found it convenient to suggest a direct causal link between the rising unemployment and the presence of Indian immigrants in the country. The speeches made on those lines often went well beyond any pragmatic analysis of the situation, as though the words themselves were invested with the power of exorcising the evils of unemployment. The two main grievances had been emphasised as early as 1927. D.B. Jayatilaka had declared in the Legislative Council that Indian unskilled labourers were coming over to Ceylon in large numbers and ousting the 'local man'; and D.S. Senanayake had observed: '...whenever strikes break out I find it leads to more people from India coming over here taking the bread from the mouth of our countrymen.'<sup>63</sup>

In the 1930s these arguments were frequently taken up in the State Councils. A.E. Goonesinha, who had taken the side of the Indians during the debate over the franchise, now used particularly virulent words against them: 'The root cause (of unemployment) is that we have hundreds of Malayalees coming here and depriving Ceylonese labourers of work and undercutting them.'<sup>64</sup>

of over-production, an endogenous crisis leading to an exogenous crisis, see E. Meyer, 'Dépression et Malaria à Sri Lanka 1925–1939. L'impact de la crise économique des années 1930 sur une société rurale dépendante', EHESS doctorate thesis, Paris, 1980.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Sessional Papers VII, 1937, 'Unemployment in Ceylon: Report of an informal Committee appointed by the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Cited in Y.R. Amerasinghe, 'Trotskyism in Ceylon: A Study of the Development and Political Role of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party 1935– 1964', PhD, University of London, 1974, p. 129.

<sup>64</sup> Hansard, 1931, vol. III, p. 507.

The imagery he employed was one of collaboration and betrayal. In the labour arena he always associated Malayalees with blacklegs. During the 1931 strike he headed at the *Times of Ceylon*, he engaged in a dramatic *satyagraha* (protest fast) which he broke only when Malayalee employees who were working despite the strike decided to come out.<sup>65</sup> May Day processions and National Day celebrations were also occasions to denounce the '40,000 foreigners employed in various business establishments'.<sup>66</sup>

The CNC adopted a similar stand, although couching it in less aggressive terms. In their 1935 Policy and Programme the dangers of employing non-Ceylonese labour were underlined and it was suggested that measures should be taken to remedy the practice of employing cheap labour in government departments and private establishments.<sup>67</sup> The fact that the British imported Malayalee workers to work on industrial sites despite the rising unemployment in Ceylon has been established. But the reasons that pushed Sinhalese politicians to ask for restrictions in the immigration of labour likely to compete with the local labour force were not only an economic analysis of the situation but also their long-standing reluctance to consider Indians as citizens of Ceylon. Natesan Iyer stressed this point ironically in Council:

Although 50 or 60 Malayalees may live together in one house the receipt for the rent is given only in the name of one of them and that man alone will be allowed to vote. Therefore the Hon. Member for Colombo Central need not fear the Malayalees coming in.<sup>68</sup>

The Councillor in question, A.E. Goonesinha, found in an anti-Indian stand a propitious terrain on which to combat the members of the recently formed Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which was beginning to supersede his Labour Union on the Colombo trade union scene. This party of Marxist persuasion constituted by young, mostly Western-educated left-wingers offered a constant and principled critique of anti-migrant mobilisation. The LSSP, having had some success in unionising the Malayalee workers of Colombo, were, Malayalees and 'Communists', together with denounced as taking part in a plot against the Sinhalese. However,

<sup>65</sup> CO 54/907/10, Strike Bulletin Special, 11 April 1931.

 $<sup>^{66}</sup>$  Ceylon Independent, 2 May 1933 and 15 April 1931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> 'A Policy and Programme for the CNC adopted on 28 September 1935' in M. Roberts (ed.), *Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon 1929–1950*, vol. III, Colombo, 1977, p. 1757.

<sup>68</sup> Hansard, 1936, vol. I, p. 349.

verbal excesses against the Malayalees were not encouraged by the colonial government. The editor of *Viraya* was reported to have been brought before the Deputy Inspector General of Police and questioned regarding editorials he had written about a 'Malayalee menace'.<sup>69</sup> Remembering the anti-Indian moves that had taken place in the late 1920s around the question of the Indian franchise, the Ceylon government was concerned.

Limited violence. In 1936 A.E. Goonesinha organised a campaign against the Malayalees aimed at boycotting their shops, hotels and boutiques, at evicting Malayalee tenants and encouraging employers to refrain from engaging them. Boycott was not a new form of political action in Ceylon. In 1933 a boycott of Indian traders organised by a Councillor, L.A. Mendis, had achieved some success and had spread from Ambalangoda to Balapitiya. 70 Goonesinha's campaign eschewed violence more in word than deed, as suggested in a statement drafted by thirty members of the India Legislative Assembly in which anxiety was expressed concerning a violent agitation started against Indians in Ceylon: 'The denial of employment, boycotts, insults and even assaults are becoming the lot of our countrymen.'71 There had indeed been a certain amount of friction between Malayalee and Sinhalese workers, particularly at the railway workshops. In 1931 a Sinhalese workman was stabbed to death by Malayalees.<sup>72</sup> The press of the time seemed to select occasions when altercations between Malavalees and Sinhalese injured the latter, thus confirming the idea of a 'Malayalee menace'. The same year, newspapers reported that a Sinhalese servant had been assaulted by a party of Malayalees.<sup>73</sup>

Friction doubled in intensity during the 1936 elections to the State Council. On one occasion Goonesinha's car was pelted with bottles in response to his followers' slogan 'Kotchi marana' (kill the Cochins). 74 One supporter of the Labour Union was reported to have entered a Malayalee boutique, assaulted its owner, and caused damage to property. 75 The commitment to non-violence made only

<sup>69</sup> Viraya, 31 March 1936.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ceylon Independent, 2 May 1933.

<sup>71</sup> Hindu Organ, 19 Oct. 1936.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Ceylon Morning Leader, 7 Sept. 1931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Ibid., 30 Sept. 1931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ceylon Independent, 6 March 1936.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ibid., 16 April 1936.

a few weeks earlier had been momentarily forgotten by his supporters. At a meeting chaired by A.E. Goonesinha, held in April 1936 to discuss the Malayalee boycott movement, it had been decided not to resort to harassment but to base the campaign on *ahimsa*, that is, non-violence: first by supporting Goonesinha's motion in the State Council to oust Malayalees from the country, then by boycotting all establishments run by Malayalees. Members of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party who had come out openly to support the Malayalees were condemned for trying to sabotage the Malayalee boycott. Marxists were called 'foreigners' and 'traitors to their kith and kin'.<sup>76</sup>

What is interesting in these episodes is what could have happened and yet did not. Apart from a few isolated acts of violence there was no large-scale rioting against the Malayalees. The protest took the form of boycott and non-violent action. In the face of a coercive imperial state the labour leadership practiced self-restraint and to a large extent succeeded in controlling its membership. The workers functioned within the limited repertoire of social action which they knew and which the state permitted. Only on rare occasions did they overstep the boundary. That serious political violence against migrants did not occur on the streets of Colombo may have been because violence between workers from different communities still needed to be invented, its script needed to be written. Other reasons too may be adduced. Violence had already entered the domain of formal politics with the passing of antimigrant legislation by the State Council controlled by the nationalists. The working class had in this sense succeeded in creating a legitimate space for itself in the public domain. Resorting to violence was not necessary in the view of the labour leadership.

The Jackson Commission on Immigration. In May 1936 the following resolution was moved in the State Council:

In view of the serious unemployment prevalent among the working class in the country, this Council requests His Excellency to appoint a commission to consider the question of restricting immigration and further to investigate the causes that have contributed to such unemployment.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Hansard, 1936, vol. I.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Viraya, 6 April 1936. For more information on the attitude of the left towards the Malayalees see K. Jayawardena, 'The National Question and the Left Movement in Sri Lanka' in C. Abeysekera and N. Gunasinghe (eds), Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1987, pp. 226–71.

A year later a commission which aimed to bring acceptable answers to these contentious issues was set up. The colonial state played a conciliatory role between parties. A number of witnesses appeared before the commission and different schemes were proposed to limit immigration. One of them proposed placing a limit of 7,000 on the number of Indians allowed into the country in any given year.<sup>78</sup> After their initial term of work these immigrants would have to pass before the proper authority for review before a permit was either extended or terminated. Another proposal suggested the establishment of open and closed occupations, for which the employment of immigrant labour would be prohibited or allowed according to the availability of Ceylon workers for the different tasks. However, the Jackson Report came to the conclusion that no restriction on immigration for the protection of employment, nor any form of compulsory employment of proscribed percentages of Cevlonese, should be recommended.

The Jackson Report was received by Sinhalese politicians with much hostility and the campaign to curtail the flow of immigrants gathered new momentum. In an interview with the *Daily Herald*, the chairman of the Labour Party, Mr Gunawardene, claimed, undisturbed by Jackson's conclusion: 'We have 200,000 unemployed in Ceylon out of a population of 6 million yet there are over 900,000 Chinese and Indian immigrants who work for lower wages.'<sup>79</sup>

The CNC followed suit. Its policy on immigration set out in December 1939 promised to introduce legislation for the complete prohibition of immigration whenever foreign labour competed with Ceylon labour in any trade or profession. The immigration issue was not one that could be solved easily; it involved too many conflicting interests. However, in specific areas of trade and business the State Councils did succeed in passing what they felt was corrective legislation.

Anti-Indian legislation. Ceylon's external trade, with the exception of the main plantation crops, was largely in the hands of non-Sinhalese merchant groups. The country's business market was dominated by Moors from Malabar, Nattukottai Chettiars from South India and Sindhis, Borahs and Memons from West India. There

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Sessional Papers III, 1938, p. 28. This figure was minute compared to the yearly average of 94,000 Indians who entered Ceylon for employment purposes in the decade ending in 1936.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> *Daily Herald*, 24 Aug. 1938.

were clearly two groups of Indians belonging to the commercial classes, the small trading class and the big Chettiar financiers and bankers. In the popular perception they formed one group, the Indian exploiters and foreigners who were castigated as being on the side of the British imperialists. <sup>80</sup> In the 1930s a number of measures were enforced to break their monopoly in certain professions. From 1935 Chettiar and Afghan pawnbroking transactions were regulated by a new procedure by which every pawnticket would be executed in foil and counterfoil and would hold the signature of the pawner and pawnbroker. The Pawnbroker Ordinance No. 1 of 1942 instituted even more stringent provisions regarding the keeping of proper books, the fixing of interest rates and the redemption of goods pawned. <sup>81</sup>

The legislative enactments of the period which most affected Indian traders were the Agricultural Quota Ordinance, the Agricultural Produce Dealers Ordinance and the Shop Regulation Ordinance of 1938. Under the first of these, Indian importers of rice and textiles would have to purchase a certain amount of local products at a fixed price. The second was intended to restrict the number of Indian shopkeepers in the plantation areas by instituting licenses for the purchase of local produce. Gradually, restrictions and regulations by way of price control and the maintenance of reserved stocks rendered trade progressively less profitable, and this led to an exodus of Indian businessmen in 1941–2.

One of the reasons given in the 1930s for the small number of Ceylonese in trade and industry was the difficulty they were said to experience in obtaining credit facilities on reasonable terms. Since the British banks did not lend directly to the indigenous population, the Nattukottai Chettiars had become from the mid-nineteenth century onwards middlemen between the banks and the Ceylonese who needed credit. There was much resentment against the Chettiar bankers and moneylenders who, foreclosing on mortgages, had during the Depression acquired agricultural land from their debtors estimated at about 50,000 acres. Their decline started with the economic and trade Depression of the 1930s. The banks having suspended all credit to the Chettiars, all money-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> This was so for the political leadership as well; see for instance 60/11, Resolutions of the CNC of 4 March 1939.

<sup>81</sup> CO 54/930/10, Pawnbrokers Amendment Ordinance of 1935; W.S. Weerasooriya, The Nattukottai Chettiar Merchant Bankers, p. xix.

<sup>82</sup> Patrick Peebles, The Plantation Tamils, p. 185.

lending activities were delayed. This led to wide support for the creation of a state-aided bank. Following the recommendations of the Ceylon Banking Commission, the Bank of Ceylon was established in 1939, followed in 1943 by the Agricultural and Industrial Credit Corporation. The immediate effect of these financial and credit institutions was to restrict the volume of the Chettiar moneylending business.<sup>83</sup>

Thus during the 1930s the state was being transformed from an autocratic colonial state to a quasi-nation state. In the labour arena the fear of colonial state violence ensured the ultimate consolidation of order, while the nationalists in the State Council were fomenting communalism through inflammatory speeches and unfair legislation. Goonesinha's Labour movement received both messages and chose to remain within the confines of the law.

Elite rivalries: caste, class, community. The decades preceding independence witnessed rivalries between elites along lines of caste, community and historical prominence. While in the first two decades there were occurrences of caste tension within the Sinhala elite, the next two decades polarised elites along communal lines. There had been until the mid-1920s instances of close collaboration between elites of all communities in their political demands for more representation in the ethnic schemes of the colonial administration. The Donoughmore Constitution that abolished communal representation and introduced universal suffrage definitely spelt the end of a political entente. Communal electorates had been regarded as a safety net by all minorities. Their abolition and the introduction of the elective principle spawned new types of demands from minorities. However, these divisions were present mainly in the political realm. Political divides and conflicts were easily transcended in the social realm where a multicultural group of people, an elite sharing common habits and upbringing, clearly cut itself from the people it strove to represent and continued to act in concert.

Intra-Sinhala rivalries: battles for recognition. Interpretations vary on the significance of the caste controversies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that pitted elites of the Karava, Durava Navandanna and Vahumpura against the Goyigamas who formed the majority of, and the dominant group, within the Sinhalese

<sup>83</sup> N. Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics, p. 141.

people.<sup>84</sup> The first decades of the twentieth century saw the publication of vituperative caste literature essentially in Sinhala, such as *Sudrabandana Sankaliya* Fetters to bind the Govi People and the articles published in the *The Aryan* in 1909–10 to promote the interests of non-Goyigama peoples.<sup>85</sup> The members of the non-Goyigama castes who had made significant economic gains with the growth of the plantation sector claimed higher status to the Goyigama based on hierarchies present in the Indian *varna* system. Indeed, in their pamphlets and caste histories the Karavas claimed Kshatriya status and the Salagamas and Navandannas Brahmin status, thus a higher position than the Goyigamas, relegated to the lower Sudra status.<sup>86</sup>

Kumari Jayawardena, speaking of the 'illusion of caste struggles', has argued that the battles seemingly fought on caste lines were in fact intra-class jostlings for political recognition and social acceptability through a redefinition of caste hierarchy based on wealth and education. Her study quite forcefully shows that 'nobodies' of all castes were pushing their claims against the Mudaliyar group which had enjoyed colonial patronage and transformed itself into a landed aristocracy in the early nineteenth century. Many of those who challenged the position of the Mudaliyar group were also upwardly mobile Goyigamas.87 Among this new elite, however, the Karavas were over-represented. The famous book *Twentieth Century* Impressions of Ceylon, a photographic album of the rising families of the early twentieth century, shows that nearly half of the Sinhala families represented belonged to the Karava caste. The rise of the Karava elite was a reality, just as a sense of caste identity upon which claims and demands were made to the colonial government was apparent with the emergence of provincial associations that were essentially caste associations: the Moratuwa, Panadura, Kalutara and Dodanduwa associations arguably voiced Karava claims.<sup>88</sup>

Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon: the Sinhala System in Transition, New Brunswick, 1953; Michael Roberts, Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500–1931, Cambridge, 1982; Patrick Peebles, 'The Transformation of a Colonial Elite: The Mudaliyars of Nineteenth Century Ceylon', PhD, Univ. of Chicago, 1973; Kumari Jayawardena, Nobodies to Somebodies, Colombo 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Bryce Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon, p. 332.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Roberts, Caste Conflict, pp. 162-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, Nobodies to Somebodies, p. 352.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> P.V.J. Jayasekera, 'Social and Political Change in Ceylon, 1900–1919', PhD, Univ. of London, 1970, p. 46, cited in Michael Roberts, *Caste Conflict*, p. 171.

Since the late nineteenth century professionals and other wealthy members of the Karava caste had attempted to gain seats in the Legislative Council. The Mudaliyar group had a firm hold on the nominated Sinhalese seat. The Crewe-McCallum reforms of 1910 that came into operation in 1912 gave one seat, 'the educated Ceylonese seat', to the 'educated class' on a very limited suffrage. The elections to this seat saw the defeat of an eminent physician and plantation owner of the Karava caste, Dr Hilarion Marcus Fernando—supported by the Karava elite and some members of the new Goyigama elite—by Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who was supported by the Goyigama aristocracy, the Ceylon Tamil voters and a segment of the Salagama elite.<sup>89</sup>

In the 1920s demands for special status for certain castes were made, culminating at the sittings of the Donoughmore Commission in 1927. As early as 1922 Gate Mudaliyar W.F. Gunawardena of the Karava caste, in a memorandum to the Governor, suggested that 'each of the minority castes or groups have its elected member in the Legislative Council'. In 1927, fearing that territorial representation would mean Goyigama domination, a number of caste associations asked quite openly for special representation, basing their claims on noble origins, history and discrimination by Goyigamas and the colonial administration. <sup>90</sup>

Political representation. On 18 July 1928, within a year of the sittings of the Donoughmore Commission, a report was drawn up and published. Instead of the expected cabinet system, a system of executive committees modelled on those of the League of Nations and the London County Council was proposed. The Executive Council was abolished. Instead of a ministry and an opposition, the unicameral legislature, the State Council would divide into seven committees, each of which would be concerned with a particular public department. The main recommendation of the Donoughmore Commission was the abolition of communal representation and the extension of the franchise to all males over twenty-one and females over thirty domiciled in Ceylon. Eventually universal franchise was adopted with some restrictions. None of the demands of the caste associations that had come forward during the Commission sittings was met, and their worst fears were

<sup>89</sup> Michael Roberts, Caste Conflict, pp. 169-70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> For examples see Bryce Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon, p. 325 and Nira Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics, p. 66.

#### BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

realised: the years that followed universal suffrage brought about not only the dominance of the majority ethnic group but also that of the highest and most numerically important Sinhala caste. Caste conflict then receded to the background as other conflicts came to the fore. The 1930s saw a polarisation of the elites of the Sinhala and Tamil communities, who divided into majority and minority groups. The stake was power in the State Councils.

During the terms of the two State Councils elected first in 1931 and 1936 the relations between elites of different communities soured.91 In 1931, owing to the campaign of the Jaffna Youth Congress—a radical organisation based in Jaffna that demanded swaraj—elections to the first State Council were boycotted in the North, which resulted in the absence of four spokesmen for the Tamils. The overall results showed an under-representation of minority groups: for fifty seats there were two members of Indian Tamil origin and one Muslim. In accordance with the provisions of the Order in Council, the Governor nominated another eight members: four of these were European, two were Burghers, one was Indian Tamil and one was Malay. This rectified the situation for the small minorities but the Muslims, who previously had three members in the Legislative Council, now had only two members in a House of fifty-eight. The ministerial elections resulted in the election of five Sinhalese, one Indian Tamil and one Muslim.

Up to this point the Donoughmore Constitution seemed to have achieved its goal, which was to transfer power to the majority population—in the 1931 State Council there were, for instance no Karava caste members—while ensuring that the minorities had a voice in the governance of the country. During the first State Council there were moves by its members to reform the Constitution and move towards the creation of a ministry wholly responsible to the legislature and to reduce the powers of the Governor and the Secretary of State. The leadership of minority communities was apprehensive and on a number of occasions pressed for the balance of power to be maintained between minority and majority communities. The minority camp was enhanced by the entry in 1934 of four

<sup>91</sup> There is a vast literature on the relations between communities in the period covering the State Councils of 1931 and 1936. Among these the books most suitable for a general reader are: Jane Russel, Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931–1947, Colombo, 1982; Nira Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics, K.M. de Silva, Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies: A Case-Study of Sri Lanka 1880–1985, Madison, WI, 1986.

Northern members including G.G. Ponnambalam. The creation of the Sinhala Maha Sabha by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was motivated by the feeling that the Sinhala community had to stand united and forget divisions based on caste, religion and region.

The 1936 elections consolidated the recapture of power by Sinhala Buddhist politicians. The only mitigating factor for minorities was that among them were members of a Marxist party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which contested and won seats on a non-sectarian programme.92 These elections witnessed more instances of bribery, coercion and violence on the part of candidates or their canvassing agents. The candidate for the Kegalle seat for instance, whose electorate consisted of a large percentage of members of 'depressed classes', claimed that headmen who were relatives of his opponent practiced 'intimidation, coercion, abuse and assault' on his person. The same allegations were made for the neighbouring constituency of Dedigama. Violent clashes occurred in Matale, where within half an hour of the announcement of the results the successful candidate was shot in the head while being conducted in procession from the Town Hall. Although he escaped with minor injuries, seven others were killed during the shooting and fifteen injured.93

Of the fifty elected members thirty-nine were Sinhalese, eight were Ceylon Tamils, and one an Indian Tamil. After the elections, when the new State Council divided itself into seven executive committees and secretly elected a chairman for each committee who was appointed Minister by the Governor, seven Sinhalese ministers were elected, all Goyigama except for one. The election of what Governor Stanley called a 'Pan Sinhalese Board of Ministers' was immediately denounced by minority organisations. The Jaffna Association expressed great dissatisfaction and G.G. Ponnambalam pressed for the immediate creation of a commission of enquiry to look into the working of the Constitution. If three of the Jaffna members were elected to serve as deputy ministers, this did not suffice to appease minority anxieties. An organised reaction to Sinhalese dominance was gradually building up, but minority political activity failed to achieve any stability until 1937.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s minority groups allied in order to seek substantial modifications in the reform demands

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> See chapter 6 of this book.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> CO 54/934/5, W.E. Bastian to Sir Mathew Nathan, 17 March 1936; *Hindu Organ*, 27 Feb. 1936.

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which the State Council and the CNC had placed before the British authorities. This minority coalition was extremely loose and bound only by a minimal consensus of demands and claims. Its existence as an effective instrument of pressure was thus short-lived.

The scheme advanced by G.G. Ponnambalam, who in 1937 became the acting Minister of Communications and Works, was one of balanced representation between the majority and the minority communities. The principle of balanced representation was that no one community should be in a position to dominate the others, and its protagonists always advanced the precedent of the 2:1 ratio of Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils during the Manning era as a justification.

The position of the small minorities, particularly the Europeans and Burghers, was ambiguous although they agreed with Ponnambalam on one central point, opposition to the removal of the Governor's powers. The specific role of the Muslims during the period expresses the growth of two converging sentiments, gradual acceptance of a polity dominated by the Sinhalese and a reluctance to be assimilated within the larger Tamil-speaking community. The Muslim community was, indeed, not an homogeneous one. The essential clash was on two points: what role the Muslims should play in the nationalist movement, and the eternal question of 'racial' divisions in the Muslim community between Malays and Moors. In 1938 a split occurred with the formation of a Ceylon Moors Association under Sir Mohamed Macan Markar and the Ceylon Muslim League under the leadership of Abdul Cader and T.B. Javah. However, by 1939 the two factions had converged and Muslim leaders clearly began to express their distinctiveness vis-àvis the Tamil political leadership and its demands.

In spite of the distancing of most minority groups from the fifty-fifty scheme, Ponnambalam persisted in presenting himself as the spokesman for all minorities. By 1944 the minority coalition was limited to the Ceylon Tamils and Ceylon Indians. Their alliance was formalised with the creation of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress that claimed to represent all 1.5 million Tamils of the island. But the Ceylon Indian Congress continued to exist and represent all Indians, Tamils and others. They pledged support to the Tamil Congress as long as it championed the rights of the Indians and respected the separate 'Ceylon Indian' identity.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> On the reform debate and the minority coalition see Nira Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics, pp. 184–97.

Language, land, administration: minority grievances. During the two State Councils a transfer of power of a sort occurred in the administration. This has been described as a ceylonisation programme. For instance, in the civil service in 1930 there were eighty-three Europeans and fifty-five Ceylonese. Ten years later there were only fortynine Europeans to eighty-one Ceylonese. The proportion of Ceylonese in the Public Service increased from 68.1 in 1934 to 78 per cent in 1939.95 The 1930s witnessed a gradual change in the share of administrative jobs between the various communities. Two of the minorities in Ceylon, the Burghers and the Ceylon Tamils, had contributed large numbers of personnel to the administrative service from the 1870s to the 1920s, mainly because of their higher proficiency in written English. Burghers, for instance, occupied many staff positions in technical departments, particularly the Medical and Public Works Department and clerical positions in the Customs Department.

By 1946 the under-representation of the Sinhalese in the higher administrative service had been corrected and there were sixtynine Sinhalese, thirty-one Tamils and sixteen Burghers. In other areas Ceylon Tamils and Burghers were still over-represented, although the numerical superiority of the Sinhalese was evident. 96 This change was due to the increase in the English literacy rate for the whole population, and a consequent higher output of English educated people among the Sinhalese than among the Burghers and Tamils. Possibly many Sinhalese turned to employment in the public service as a result of economic trends in the 1930s. Indeed the Sinhalese sector of the elite had been more seriously affected than others because its stake in the plantations had been greater. Evidently this rectification was resented by members of the Tamil and Burgher communities. This issue was occasionally raised by A. Mahadeva in the State Council. Just as often Sinhalese members protested against cases of favouritism towards Ceylon Tamils by selection committees. Muslims too complained about the State Councils' neglect of the minorities. The 1930s witnessed a change in the relations between elite members of different communities. Allegations of favouritism, discrimination and canvassing were now

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> S.J. Tambiah, 'Ethnic Representation in Ceylon's Higher Administrative Services, 1870–1946', *University of Ceylon Review*, XIII, 2 and 3, April–July 1955; Sessional Papers XVIII, 1939, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> S.J. Tambiah, 'Ethnic Representation'.

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made openly, and this sowed the seeds of future tensions between the political elites.<sup>97</sup>

Language. The return to the vernacular in educational institutions and the administration, with the enthronement of Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages, did not compromise the domination of the English-speaking elite across communities. The 1931 State Council was intended to reorient drastically the educational system towards mass needs and national aspirations. But the efforts of the Educational Committee were hampered by the unwillingness of the Board of Education, formally in charge of all educational matters, to transfer responsibility. Finally in 1939 an Education Ordinance of considerable importance was submitted to debate in the State Council. The most radical changes that ensued were the extension of free education at all levels to denominational schools. the establishment of a system of schools rationally planned and organised under the management of the state, and the elimination of qualitative differences among schools purporting to serve the same age-groups.

The language issue in education was closely linked to the *swabhasha* movement which demanded the use of vernaculars in the administration of the country instead of English, which was seen to have been the language of social and economic opportunity for too long. Support for the *swabhasha* had started in the mid-1920s in Jaffna and in the South by C.W.W. Kannangara, who became the Minister of Education; later the LSSP asked for the gradual extension of the use of indigenous languages to all government departments, and the Ceylon National Congress recommended the adoption of Sinhala as the official language, while Tamil could be used in Tamil-speaking districts.

The education reform was received with different degrees of satisfaction by the non-Sinhalese groups. Many Tamils felt they had little to gain by securing a change in the official language from English to the vernaculars. However, some Tamil educationists linked to the Hindu Board of Education were open to the idea of Tamil-Sinhalese bilingualism. On the whole the new education

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> For a detailed account of the Ceylonisation process see Wiswa Warnapala, Civil Service Administration in Ceylon: A Study in Bureaucratic Administration, Colombo, 1974; C. Collins, Public Administration in Ceylon, London, 1951, pp. 99–100.

scheme made provision for the upliftment of the Muslim and Kandyan Sinhalese communities.

The education reform proposals were endorsed by the State Council in June 1945. Then provision was made in the Education Amendment Ordinance of 1947 that in government schools instruction in the religion of the parent would be given to every pupil as part of his or her course of studies in the school.

The problems surrounding the change from English to Sinhalese and Tamil as the languages of government were not as easily resolved. The State Council was divided into three groups on the language issue: those who were against the dethronement of English, mainly European and Burgher members but also certain Tamil members who thought like G.G. Ponnambalam that English could be a lingua franca; those who believed that national unity could only be forged on the anvil of a single language, Sinhalese, a group encompassing most Sinhalese Councillors but also a section of the Muslims; finally, those who supported the adoption of both Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages. A final amended resolution provided for a commission to be appointed to report on the steps to be taken to effect the transition from English into Sinhalese and Tamil. In a 1946 report of a select committee it was decided that after a transition period of ten years English would cease to be the language of the government.

The conflict over language was in effect delayed. One reason was that the reins of power were still held by an essentially English-speaking elite. As nationalists they supported the *swabhasha* movement, but they perceived the attacks on English not only as a justified attack on the imperial system but also as a threat to their own existence.<sup>98</sup>

The Soulbury Report of 1945, outcome of the sittings of a commission on constitutional reform headed by Lord Soulbury, contains many complaints of discrimination raised by minority community leaders. The Ceylon Tamils complained that owing to the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance of 1931, public revenue had suffered a total loss of nearly half a million rupees by 1943, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> The most comprehensive work on education during the decades preceding independence is still J.E. Jayasuriya, *Education in Ceylon before and after Independence 1939–1968*, Colombo, 1969; on higher education see Sir Ivor Jennings, 'Race, Religion and Economic Opportunity in the University of Ceylon', *University of Ceylon Review*, 2 (1 & 2), November 1944, pp. 1–13; for an overview see N. Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics*, pp. 125–33.

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that the general taxpayer was paying for the administration of the assets of one section of the population. This ordinance stipulated that all the revenue and expenditure of Buddhist temples should be supervised and examined by the Public Trustee, who was to recover the cost of their administration from the property of the temples. By 1933 only a negligible sum had been obtained by way of contributions, and that year their recovery was suspended until 1945. In the same way it was alleged that the Anuradhapura Preservation Ordinance of 1942, to preserve the historic city and facilitate the development of a new town outside the zone of its archaeological remains, was detrimental to Tamil and Muslim landowners. Dissatisfaction had also been expressed by the Tamil Congress as well as representatives of the Muslim community over state actions in trade and commerce, such as the imposition of a state monopoly on imports, and the encouragement given to the cooperative movement. Complaints were made of state favouritism towards Sinhalese areas in the distribution of public revenue, especially with regard to irrigation works and medical infrastructure. In the 1940s these complaints were brushed aside by the colonial rulers and the Sinhalese leadership as baseless, but they resurfaced a few years later with the radicalisation of Tamil politics and the creation of the Federal Party.99

Divide and rule? During the years that followed, colonial policy towards minorities can be characterised by a kind of aloofness to their demands. The reconquest of power by the majority was supported by the British, and excesses did not lead the British government to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards minority demands. This was in keeping with the Colonial Office preference for gradualism. The formation in 1936 of a pan-Sinhalese ministry, and anti-Indian moves on the part of the Councillors, were not taken as threats to the minorities.

An overview of the Soulbury Report's treatment of minority grievances issued in 1945 is revealing. On the whole it appears that the Soulbury Commission felt the minorities were exaggerating the precariousness of their situation. They agreed there had been

<sup>99</sup> Command Papers 6677. Report of the Commission on Constitutional Reform, Sept. 1945, pp. 112–18; Nira Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics, pp. 213–15.

N. Wickramasinghe, 'Divide and Rule in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) during the period of Transfer of Power', *University of Colombo Review*, Special Issue, Tikiri Abeyasinghe Commemoration Volume, 10, December 1991, pp. 75–92.

minor instances of discriminatory action by the Sinhalese. But the Sinhalese challenge to the predominant position of the Tamils and Burghers in public appointments was compared with the English efforts in the past to redress their own deficiencies in the face of a dominant Scottish minority. The conclusion of the report was that there was no substantial indication of a general policy of discrimination against minority communities on the part of the government of Ceylon.

Apart from remaining closed to the political demands of the minorities, the British played a role in the process of Sinhalese national affirmation that was not negligible. During the 1930s and the 1940s the colonial rulers participated in defining what they thought was the uniqueness of Sinhalese civilisation. The study, preservation, translation and publication of Sinhalese texts was encouraged. State sponsorship was given to indigenous systems of medicine. Buddhism was regarded with a new deference. Writing about the prime critic of Western values and culture, Anagarika Dharmapala, Governor Stubbs was unusually mild: 'He was a bad hat in his youth; then took to sedition and religion: finally the religious side triumphed and I believe he did really good work for Buddhism.' <sup>101</sup>

Thus, in the last decades of British rule, a 'divide and rule' policy designed to suppress nationalism by fostering ethnic tensions was more mythical than real. The urgency was on another plane: leftwing parties such as the LSSP were fomenting social unrest and threatening the old order. The British policy of alliances was one supporting moderates against 'extremists'. The main concern of the British was then to hand over power peacefully. The near completion of the programme of Ceylonisation of the administration was motivated by the same concern.

The decades preceding independence witnessed sporadic outbursts of violence that pitted a more forcefully gelled majority community against minority communities. In the early twentieth century the motives were contests over sacred space, while later on economic hardships pitted elements of the Colombo working class against each other. Ideas of a superior race were combined with perceptions of injustice meted out by the colonial administration. Among elites the contest soured when the elective principle was incorporated in the representation system. Those years of democratic transition saw the making of minorities and the consolida-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> CO 54/940/10, R.E. Stubbs to Creasy, 26 Oct. 1937.

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tion of a majority identity. Although elites of all communities shared a common outlook, from 1931 onwards tensions arose about safeguards and alleged discrimination in the distribution of resources and language. The quest for entitlements through representation, legislation or violence shaped the contours of identities in the years that preceded independence.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

4 February 1948: Independence 102

Independence Day in Negombo, a predominantly Catholic town on the western coast of Sri Lanka, began with services in temples, mosques and Churches. The town wore a 'festive garb, being decorated with lion flags'. At St Mary's Church, Grand Street, where a ceremonial High Mass was sung, lawyers attended in their gowns and wigs, officers in uniform and ladies in dazzling saris. All this 'added lustre to the decorated church'. Thus Independence Day was a day for dressing up the town and its elites, and the metaphor of dress appears constantly in the descriptions of festivities. <sup>103</sup>

The ceremony of transfer of power from British to Ceylonese hands was very much an imperial one on the line of those that marked the arrival and departure of governors to and from their colonies. It was only different from others in that it was the ultimate one.

Independence Day celebrations in Ceylon resembled an imperial fête with a few of the artifices of the nation state—national anthem and flag. National dress was interestingly absent. The resemblance to the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria which occurred in the late nineteenth century is striking. John Ferguson has left a fascinating account of the 1887 celebrations that started with a military review on Galle Face Green Esplanade. On that day services were held in all places of worship. A large number of the poor in towns and villages were fed, each getting a measure of rice and five cents (one penny) or a piece of calico. This act of charity was followed by great celebrations at Galle esplanade where fifteen to twenty pandals were erected. They were decorated with loops of plantain and coconut leaf, green moss and

This section is drawn from Nira Wickramasinghe, Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 30–6.
 The Times of Ceylon, 7 Feb. 1948.

fern, yellow olas. Approximately 25,000 people were present to hear the Governor read the 'Record of the chief events of the fifty years'. The Royal Standard was hoisted and a salute of fifty guns was heard. The national anthem was sung. A procession of 2,000 people followed, including twenty-seven Buddhist monks and the leader of the Egyptian insurrection exiled in Ceylon for eighteen years, Arabi Pasha.

This was the script of the celebrations which was to be followed with only minor modifications in 1948. The fact that in one case the queen of a foreign land was being celebrated for her fifty-year reign and in the other this same land was gaining independence from a colonial power did not inspire many changes; the same ingredients were there—flag hoisting, a military parade, religious ceremonies, speeches and acts of charity. <sup>104</sup> As Independence Day approached, the bunting went up in the streets, and soon guests from Commonwealth and foreign countries as well as from Britain itself began to pour in. The British government was represented officially by the Minister of State for Colonial Affairs. The Duke of Gloucester came to represent the Sovereign and inaugurate Cevlon's new status.

The chief event of the fourth of February was the swearing in of Sir Henry Monck Mason Moore as the first Governor General of the dominion of Ceylon at a solemn but brief ceremony at Queen's House in the morning. The Governor General's oaths were administered by the Chief Justice, Sir John Howard, in the presence of the cabinet ministers and the Parliamentary Under Secretary to the British Commonwealth Relations Office, Patrick Gordon Walker. The Prime Minister, D.S. Senanayake, was the first to congratulate the new Governor General after the latter's swearing in. In the evening the Governor General and Lady Moore attended Divine Service at the Wolfendhal Church, where the preacher was the assistant Bishop of Colombo. They drove to the church in the new Rolls Royce which was to be used by the Duke of Gloucester during his stay in Ceylon. <sup>105</sup>

In Colombo, at the auspicious time, a Day Perahera set off from the Punchikawatte Temple with a Lion Flag placed on the Chief Elephant in the procession. The Perahera then proceeded along Darley Road and reached the Eye Hospital Junction where 132

John Ferguson, Ceylon in the Jubilee Year, 3rd edn, London and Colombo, 1887, p. 171.

<sup>105</sup> Ceylon Daily News, 5 Feb. 1948.

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*bhikhus* from the Jayawardenapura monastery at Kotte joined the procession. The significance of this monastery was that it had been the repository of the sacred Tooth Relic before its removal to the Dalada Maligawa—hence the representation of its *bhikhus*.

The procession then proceeded along Alexandra Place to the foot of the F.R. Senanayake statue. To the accompaniment of the firing of 132 detonators and the chanting of '*Pirith*' five Lion Flags were hoisted by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs and Rural Reconstruction Sir Oliver Goonetileke, the Minister of Finance J.R. Jayewardene, and a few others. <sup>106</sup> As part of the amnesty granted for independence 1,186 prisoners were released. <sup>107</sup> The Methodist Church united with other Protestant churches in Galle in a special thanksgiving held at the Dutch Reformed Church. But the imperial fête was not the theatre of a general religious reconciliation, nor did it grow into an occasion for the unification of men and women who shared the common ideal of freedom. The nation was celebrated differently by each of its religious groups: in churches for Christians, in mosques for Muslims, in temples for Buddhists.

The harbour, Zoo and Museum were the sites of large celebrations. Colombo harbour symbolised the commercial power of Ceylon built up by colonialism. Hundreds of thousands flocked to Colombo on the night of February 4 to witness the water fête in the harbour and the illuminations in other parts of the city. Not since the return of the Regalia of the king of Kandy had such a crowd been seen in the city, the newspapers reported. The waterfront area presented a sea of heads from the breakwater to Mutwal. People had climbed up cranes and on to the roofs of waterhouses and other vantage points to get a good view. All ships, tugs and barges were lit up and the harbour presented a blaze of colour. Some had bought and wore their Independence badges which represented the Lion, the mythical ancestor of the Sinhalese. <sup>108</sup>

Admiral Sir Arthur Palliser, Commander in Chief of the East Indies Squadron, switched on the illuminated word *nidahasa* (freedom) in Sinhalese set high up on the jib of the pontoon named 'Jumbo'. Kandyan dances by Ceylon's finest exponents were described as 'the most interesting feature of the night's entertainment'. It was reported that the floating stage was too far from the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

audience and the music played by the marines of HMS *Norfolk* was not heard by many. Illuminated boats with multi-coloured lights, skimming the placid waters with lit cranes in the distance, made a picturesque scene. A coloured water jet display and fireworks added to the entertainment.<sup>109</sup>

An exhibition of objects of special historical and cultural interest was held at the Museum and opened by the Minister of Education, E.A. Nugawela, as a token of the state's understanding of the Museum as a space of learning. The idiom introduced by the Europeans when they created it was unproblematically adopted by the nationalists. Modes of representation (glass cases), modes of explanation (vignette-like labels summarising the historical relevance of an object), modes of ordering (chronological and evolutionary), modes of periodising (according to the dynasties and reigns of kings) showed a continuity between colonial and post-colonial cultural forms.

Among the historical exhibits was a collection of seals and signatures of Sinhalese kings, among them Bhuvaneka Bahu, Don Juan Dharmapala, Parakramabahu VI, Vijaya VII of Kotte, Vickramabahu and Senarat of Kandy and Mayadunne of Sitawaka. The choice of kings was revealing: each kingdom was represented, from the Christian Don Juan to the Buddhist Mayadunne. The absence of any king of Tamil descent from the kingdom of Jaffna was suggestive of the creation of an identity that was composite, but resolutely selective. If Tamil political power was left out, Tamil culture was very much present. Objects of art and culture on display included a collection of Hindu bronzes such as the famous Nataraja figure, Saiva saints, Sundaramurti and Mannikakavanayar. The Buddhist bronzes included two masterpieces of Indian art, the Badulla sedent Buddha and the Anuradhapura Trivaka Maitriya Bodhisattva.

The archaeological department lent a collection of impressions of important stone inscriptions, which were exhibited with a chart showing the gradual development of the Sinhalese scripts during the last 2,000 years. Provincial flags were displayed. A special case of important palm leaf manuscripts displayed the *sulu vaga*, the oldest known manuscript in the museum, and an illuminated copy of Vessantara Jataka and specimens of richly carved silver covers of manuscripts. These objects and many others that were exhibited at the Colombo Museum constituted for the new nation-state the national heritage which it would cherish and protect. The inclu-

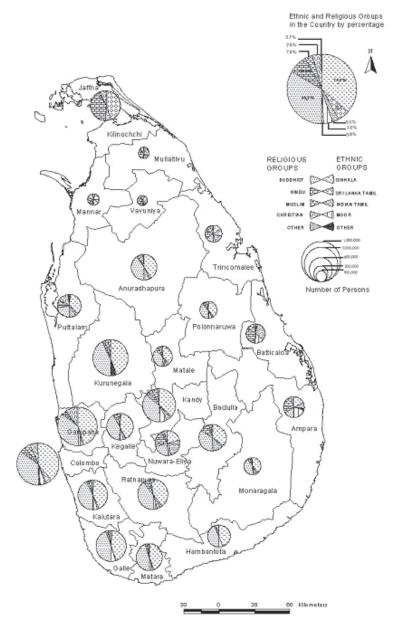
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Ceylon Observer, 5 Feb. 1948.

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sion of Veddah dances in the programme of celebrations in some districts of North Central Province such as Mannampitiya showed a desire to exhibit the curious, the bizarre, the different. The museumising of certain ethnic groups at the margins of the nation was beginning with a process equating tradition with curiosity. 110

Although the civil space was tamed by the new state through its state-sponsored celebrations there was an emptiness characterised by the conspicuous lack of ideological fervour. The illuminated letters spelling 'nidahas' were for many only senseless scribbles. The pomp and ostentatious celebration were in many ways motivated by the state's need to evoke memories of historicity that would weave the people into a composite whole.

<sup>110</sup> Ceylon Daily News, 4 Feb. 1948.



Religious and ethnic groups, 1981

Source: Dept of Census and Statistics.

## PART II

## THE POST-INDEPENDENCE YEARS

## POLITICAL CULTURES

How can we identify the creative forces and the critical moments in the making of the socio-historical world of post-independence Sri Lanka? Should we focus on what is commonly perceived as the structuring force of politics, the political parties in their relation to the state and the people, or should we look at the politics of every-day life carried in modes of address, stories and symbols? The four chapters in this section draw from an array of studies, some traditional in their focus and questions, others more innovative. Both approaches are necessary to comprehend the ways in which different communities and social groups understood their identity and their place in the world.

These four chapters focus on some of the pivotal moments that have shaped the social and political *imaginaire* of the peoples of Sri Lanka. The first feature relates to the replacement of the old regime of genealogy and its grid of kinship, descent and rank with the new regime of citizenship and rights, a clear feature of liberal modernity. The contours of citizenship were drawn and redrawn during the fifty years after independence. The social and political *imaginaire* is also animated by an image of ideal social order based on 'equality', an *imaginaire* that on two occasions the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) quite logically assumed as its own, in 1971 and in 1988–9; other non-violent groups have displayed a similar *imaginaire* that has merged with the widespread notion of the state as provider and distributor of welfare to all in an equal fashion.

Another thread that runs through these years is the traumatic assertion of rights, both of the majority ethno-religious group and of the Tamils, the largest single minority group. These conflicting notions create parallel *imaginaires* of democracy: one grounded in the link between state and Buddhism, the other in the right of self-determination for communities pushed to the periphery by an uncaring state.

The final chapter assesses this inheritance and evokes the difficulties in creating something anew for the state and for its people.

From independence Sinhala nationalists strove symbolically to appropriate the principles of democracy. They pressed for a Buddhist prototype of democracy to give it an indigenous tint, and for the moral authority of the Sangha to be recognised by the state. Their demands were answered in 1972 when the new Republican Constitution gave Buddhism, the religion of the majority of the population, a special place.

The nature of the state—sectarian or secular—has since then been a point of contention among leaders of communities. However, the main political parties dominated by the Sinhalese have never contested the special place accorded to Buddhism by all constitutions after 1972. The first fifty years that followed independence saw two main political parties alternatively and democratically capturing power: the United National Party (UNP) governed in 1947–56, 1965–70, 1977–94 and 2001–2004, and the Sri Lanka

Freedom Party (SLFP) held the government with its allies in 1956–9, 1960–5, 1970–7, 1995–2000, and since 2004.

The Senanayake-Wijewardena family nexus dominated, but only up to a point, the United National Party created in 1946, while the Bandaranaikes have been much more forceful in their resolve to mould the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, created in 1951, into a dynastic party. The ideological differences that once existed between these two parties have, however, broken down. The UNP during its first two decades was associated with liberalism, pro-Americanism and anti-Communism, in contrast with the SLFP whose raison d'être was the protection of Buddhism and Sinhala culture. Since the late 1970s—especially owing to the initiative of Ranasinghe Premadasa (Prime Minister and later President) and J.R. Jayewardene (President)—the UNP has had a more popular, multicultural and modernist image. The link with Buddhism remains. In the 1980s the political regime looked towards indigenous models such as Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore and Mahathir

Mohamed's Malaysia for inspiration. President Premadasa was instrumental in the creation of the Ministry of Buddha Sasana which provided direct financial support to Buddhist monks and temples. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party emerged as a breakaway from the UNP under bourgeois nationalist S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

He held power in 1956–9 and heralded a political and social revolution based on a programme that gave pride of place to the Sinhala language and Buddhist values and brought new classes to the fore. But it also unleashed forces that he was unable to control: he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk. His widow Sirimavo Bandaranaike was Prime Minister from 1960 to 1965 and from 1970 to 1977. Her government, which practiced a form of socialism, was rocked by the Marxist youth insurrection of the Janata Vimukti Peramuna in 1971. She conceived for Sri Lanka a Republican Constitution coming into force in 1972, which did away with its dominion status. But unpopular austerity measures, economic decline after the nationalisation of the plantations, and ethnic discontent led to the fall of the government.

J.R. Jayewardene, heading the UNP, was swept into power in 1977 and remained at the helm until 1988. During those years a separatist Tamil insurrection intensified and turned into protracted war. An Indian peace-keeping force, sent in 1987 to ensure fairer power sharing mechanisms between communities, failed to maintain peace and left in 1989 in the midst of the second IVP insurrection. A new President, Ranasinghe Premadasa, succeeded in crushing the insurrection in the south but died at a May Day rally in 1994, blown to pieces by an LTTE suicide killer. In 1994 President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, heading a People's Alliance of left and centre-left parties, renewed the SLFP's experience with power. The SLFP, the main component of the People's Alliance, had to shed its Sinhala nationalist image and seemingly converted itself to the virtues of the free economy. Losing her majority in parliament during her second term in office as president, Chandrika Kumaratunga called upon Ranil Wickramasinghe, leader of the UNP, to be her Prime Minister. This was Sri Lanka's first experience with cohabitation. In 2004 President Chandrika Kumaratunge dissolved parliament and held elections which led to a return of her party, the SLFP, together with the Marxist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) in government. The JVP fomented two insurrections in the 1970s and 1980s, but since 1994 has been a recognized political party.

The devastating tsunami of December 2004 that struck the coastal areas of Sri Lanka sharpened already existing differences

between the coalition partners. The JVP quit the coalition in June 2005 over the government's plan to put in place a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure for an equitable allocation of funds to the coastal communities affected by the tsunami in six districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Under this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) three committees—Highlevel, regional and district—comprising LTTE representatives, government officials and Muslims—can recommend, prioritise and monitor projects funded by \$ 3 billion in pledged foreign aid. The JVP condemned the balance of power in these committees that was seriously weighted towards the LTTE. The Muslims were not cosignatories of the MOU. The JVP persuaded the Supreme Court to suspend the pact, pending a review of its constitutionality.

Smaller parties had a role to play in coalitions and in extra-parliamentary politics. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress is a party that aims at defending the rights of Muslims in the Eastern province. It has wavered between the PA and the UNP and recently split into two factions. The Tamil United Liberation Front (earlier called the Tamil United Front), that emerged out of the Federal Party in 1975, attracted the more moderate Tamils into its fold but was decimated by attacks from the extremist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Today most of its members are part of a parliamentary group called the Tamil National Alliance, a proxy group of the LTTE that holds twenty-two seats in parliament. Only a few moderate Tamil politicians dare to adopt a critical stance. The Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party), a party of Buddhist monks promising to engage in clean politics and protect the unitary state, emerged as a new force in 2004, mustering 6 per cent of the vote and winning nine seats in parliament. The Cevlon Workers Congress was initially an organisation devoted to the defence of the rights of the citizenless Tamil workers on the plantations, but after most of them obtained citizenship in 1988 it was transformed into a fully fledged party. It suffered from the death of its founder, S. Thondaman.

In the past fifty years political parties have lost much of their appeal. Politicians of all parties are perceived as corrupt and less interested in the betterment of their constituencies than in their own pursuit of power and wealth. Although they remain significant actors or points of reference for people to locate themselves ideologically, civil society organisations are making significant inroads and often succeed in mobilising people along non-party lines.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Eric Meyer's lucid rendering of the recent political

## THE POST-INDEPENDENCE YEARS: POLITICAL CULTURES

The post-independence years have been described as years of decline and crisis in democratic values, institutions, power sharing mechanisms, and of a near suicidal fall from prosperity and stability to civil unrest. Indeed these fifty years witnessed serious ethnic riots in 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1983, a Tamil separatist struggle since the late 1970s, and two leftist armed insurrections in 1971 and 1988–9. With this reading, another less cataclysmic reading is necessary that relates to the establishment of participatory political and economic processes. It is one that points to the democratisation of the public sphere, to the changing landscape of a country that was in the 1950s dominated by a multicultural anglicised elite hailing from privileged backgrounds transferring political and cultural power to a counter-elite. These new actors, men and women, were the children of free education, they were essentially vernacular speaking and harboured a distinct sense of value based on Sinhala language and Buddhist culture.

These developments were seen in changes in the past thirty years in everyday social intercourse and were particularly visible in the changes in the modes of address in the Sinhala language. Sinhala possessed a multiple structure of second person pronouns based on gradation of caste and status such as tho, thopi, umbe, umbela, thamunnehe, thamuse, thamusela, thamunnanse. After 1956 language underwent a fundamental change that reflected the democratisation of society. Sinhala pronominal usages, especially the use of the term oya (you) for each and every person, showed the direction taken by society towards equality in social relations. The use of oya is, however, in certain cases non-reciprocal. The old caste and status hierarchies have been replaced by new political and bureaucratic hierarchies. Indeed, for superiors or those in positions of authority—essentially politicians and administrators—deferential forms of address are still sustained, remnants of a feudal past.<sup>2</sup> However, on the whole the old value system of the elites based on the British notion of fair play, the high culture they believed in, cosmopolitan values and multiculturalism are suspect. The new culture is popular, brash and intolerant in some instances, in others integrative and progressive.

formations in *Sri Lanka. Entre particularismes et mondialisation*, Paris: La Documentation Française, Asie Plurielle series, 2001, pp. 93–115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Regi Siriwardena, *The Protean Life of Language: Four Studies*, Colombo: ICES, 2001, pp. 74–86.

These changes indicate that formal democracy is gradually being replaced by an all encompassing social democracy that is marred with defects but that has shown signs of resilience.

# CITIZENS, COMMUNITIES, RIGHTS, CONSTITUTIONS, 1947–2000

'The Tamil people must accept the fact that the Sinhala majority will no longer permit themselves to be cheated of their rights.'—Sirimavo Bandaranaike, *Tribune*, 7 May 1967

'The general population of this country had no access to the most important document of that country, the Constitution. It had not seen it, read it, understood and accepted it. Today this draft Constitution is in the Parliament in the form of a Bill.'—Nihal Galapathi, JVP parliamentarian, 2000

Post-independence constitutions of Sri Lanka from the Soulbury Constitution of 1948 to the Republican Constitutions of 1972 and 1978 and related legislation have, through their discrete framing of citizenship and community rights, contributed to defining at different times what it meant to be a 'Ceylonese' or a 'Sri Lankan' citizen in the official sense. In a parallel development, these successive constitutions and laws marked out, from within this select citizenry, the peoples (often depicted as majorities) who managed the larger part of cultural production and consumption. If 'citizens', a term that came with modernity, and 'majorities'—a concept spawned by representative politics—unproblematically entered the vocabulary of the polity, these new concepts had the effect of imperceptibly vitiating relations between communities. Constitutions could then be likened to power maps that charted the laws governing both governors and governed while drawing circles of inclusion and exclusion in their distribution of rights to individuals and groups.

While the Soulbury Constitution eluded all matters relating to citizenship, three pieces of legislation—the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents Act No. 3 of 1948, and the Ceylon Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949—clearly demarcated the citizens from the aliens. The first law deprived the Estate/Indian Tamils, constituting 12 per cent of the population, of their citizenship, the second made it possible for those with property and education within the community to obtain citizenship, and the third deprived those without citizenship of the right to vote. Further Constitutions purported to deal with the diversity of the peoples and community demands by acknowledging both specific group rights and shared individual rights. Paradoxically, the very discussion and framing of minority rights contributed to the naturalisation and homogenisation of majorities. 'Majorities are made, not born.'1 Post-independence constitutions and Parliamentary Acts, it will be argued, made and marked majorities and minorities under specific political and social circumstances.

This chapter, which focuses on the three or nearly four constitutions of independent Sri Lanka, is not about constitutions *per se*, but about the way constitutions can 'make citizens, majorities and minorities'.<sup>2</sup> It will first look at the making of citizens in the post-colonial state and the place of women as citizens within the nation state, then focus on the creation and stultification of majorities and minorities through the discourse of rights, and finally chart the difficulties inherent in creating a framework for power-sharing and more meaningful democracy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Dru Gladney (ed.), Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey and the United States, Stanford, CA, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The most significant works on the constitutions of Sri Lanka are the following: Chanaka Amaratunga, *Ideals for Constitutional Reform*, Colombo, 1989; Appapillai Amirthalingam, *Introduction to Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka: Main Documents Aug. 1983 to Oct. 1987*, Tamil United Liberation Front III–V, Madras, 1987; Sunil Bastian (ed.), *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1994; Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Ideology and the Constitution: Essays on Constitutional Jurisprudence*, Colombo, 1996; *Devolution in Sri Lanka: S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the Debate on Power Sharing*, Kandy, 1996; H.L. De Silva, *An Appraisal of the Federal Alternative for Sri Lanka*, Dehiwela, 1991; Yash Ghai (ed.), *Autonomy and Ethnicity: Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-ethnic States*, New York, 2000; Loganathan Ketheshwaran, *Sri Lanka: Past Attempts at Resolving Ethnic Conflict*, Colombo, 1996; Dinusha Panditaratne and Pradeep Ratnam (eds), *The Draft Constitution of Sri Lanka: Critical Aspects*, Colombo: Law and Society Trust, 1998; A. Jeyeratnam Wilson, *The Gaullist System in Asia: the Constitution of Sri Lanka 1978*, London, 1980.

## CITIZENS, COMMUNITIES, RIGHTS, CONSTITUTIONS

## Unmaking citizens

The colonial institution of race-based representative governmentality, as a prelude to self-government and citizenship for 'natives', invented distinctively modern forms of political identity and conflict in the colonies. Race/ethnicity, and later nationality-based representational government, also resulted in the generation of new names and concepts (e.g. residents and aliens, indigenous and immigrant) to deal with perceived differences among communities.

From the time the term 'citizen' entered the vocabulary of politics in Sri Lanka, 'citizenship', a legal term and the main principle of political legitimacy, has been defined by exclusion. The politics of representation in the 1920s and '30s led to political and cultural constructions of 'outsider' and 'migrant' in the colonial discourse of the state. Before individuals were counted and given fixed and immutable identities upon which the political significance of their community was valued, there had been an easy acceptance of people of diverse origins and few occurrences of violent encounters.<sup>3</sup>

Although myths of origin were known and played out among people of different race, caste and religion it was only during the Donoughmore Commission sittings in 1927–8 that descent and claims of purity were put forward as reasons to obtain rights and entitlements.

The demand by the local political elites for literacy and residential qualifications as criteria for voting in 1931 not only endorsed resolutely Western principles of political rights, but also consciously undid all modes of cultural co-existence that had developed in the wake of a continuous history of migration to the island. This prefigured the construction of the 'citizen' in the modern and independent nation-state and its unfolding implications.

After independence, the institution of democratic governmentality consolidated discrete boundaries between communities perceived as monolithic and eclipsed all other possibilities of more flexible forms of being. But although the language and conven-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See chapter 4 of this book

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Senake Bandaranayake, 'The Peopling of Sri Lanka: The National Question and Some Problems of History and Ethnicity' in *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984, pp. i–ixx; Sudarshan Seneviratne, 'Peripheral Regions and Marginal Communities: Towards an Alternative Explanation of Early Iron Age Material and Social Formations in Sri Lanka' in R. Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal (eds), *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, 1996, pp. 265–312.

tions of the modern nation-state proclaimed the value of absolute standards and proprieties, it was compelled at the same time to accommodate uncertainty, change and conflict in both public and private life.

The Donoughmore Commission: origins and purity as the basis of rights

When the prominent Muslim leader H.M. Macan Markar was asked at a hearing of the Donoughmore Commission if there was a 'sort of minority attitude', he answered: 'Each one is here to protect his own race from misunderstanding'. The arrival of the Commission had led to the formation of a number of associations of peoples sharing a common identity founded on religion, caste, ethnicity or region. Most of these groups, that brought together peoples who felt they were a minority, shared the idea that safeguards and adequate representation should be determined by the degree of importance attached to each community and to the part each community had played in the history of the country. There was a feeling that convincing the commissioners their community was pure and had noble origins would help them gain the entitlements and rights their numbers could not give them.

A delegation claiming to speak in the name of the Burghers of the island put before the commissioners a middle-class and racially bounded identity—Dutch origins on the paternal side had to be proved in order for one to qualify as a Burgher. The concern among Burghers for constructing strict laws based on lineage—the Dutch Burgher Union was formed in 1908 in this context—was in many ways a reaction to the prevailing popular ideologies regarding Sinhalese, Tamil and Moor racial distinctiveness. The avowed aim of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon was to pursue social and cultural activities but the political goals of promoting a distinctively Dutch Burgher identity among the middle class Burghers of Colombo were implicit. Membership of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon was governed by a strict genealogical qualification: members had to demonstrate an uninterrupted line of patrilineal descent from one or more European employees of the United Netherlands East India Company in Ceylon, the only permitted exception being genealogical lines through the marriages of Dutch Burgher women to modern European men of any nationality. To

Nathan MSS 606 (Rhodes House Library, Oxford), Evidence of H.M. Macan Markar, 2 Jan. 1928.

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those who thought it unrealistic to hark back a hundred years, the Burghers retorted: 'Is it more so that the Sinhalese should go back 2,500 years and still glory in the arrival and the exploits of Vijaya or that the other Ceylonese races and communities should dwell on their particular origins?'6

The Malays of Ceylon, on the basis of a proclaimed Javanese identity, pressed for separate political representation.<sup>7</sup> They were hopeful that their demands would be answered as the genesis of the Muslim seat in the Legislative Council can be traced to the concern on the part of the rulers to protect Malay interests, for unlike the Ceylon Moors, the Malays were neither Tamil-speaking nor until then represented by the Tamil member in Council.8 The Malay claim for separate representation had been made in 1921, and a year later an All Ceylon Malay Association had been created with the purpose of promoting the social, educational and moral welfare of the Malays. It is the arrival of the Commission in 1927 that revived the initial political demand for special representation, on the basis of a distinct Malay heritage. Unlike the British who emphasized the linguistic unity of the Malay people, the Javanese racial and historical heritage rather than language formed the basis of the Malay demands. At a mass meeting, the president of the Malay Association reiterated that as a race or community the Malays had a very distinguished past and noble traditions to maintain. 'The Malays were the masters of the eastern seas in the eighth century and settled in some parts of Ceylon such as Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Hambantota. '9 Articulating a Javanese racial identity appeared, in the minds of Malay leaders, to be the best strategy to win them separate representation.

The small Chetty community, like the Malays, was a minority within a minority, which had been delineated as a separate race in the census statistics from 1814 to 1871. In the ensuing years they

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> 'The Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon', Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon, vol. 1, 1908, p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Nathan MSS 602, Evidence of the Malay Political Association, 23 Nov. 1927.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> During that period, the Tamil leadership made an effort to amalgamate the Muslims with the Ceylon Tamil community. P. Ramanathan in the 'Ethnology of the Moors', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Ceylon, vol. X, April 26, 1888, pp. 234–64, tried to demonstrate that the Moors of Ceylon were 'racially' Tamils. He cited leading doctors according to whom 'a skull of a Moorman cannot be distinguished from that of a Tamil'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Nathan MSS 618, Special Circulation No. 196, Memorandum of the Kandy Malay Association.

had been incorporated in the Ceylon Tamil community on the ground that Tamil was their mother tongue. When appearing before the Royal Commission Chetty representatives stressed their distinctiveness. Origins were put forward as the justification for special rights and representation: 'The Christian Chetties of Ceylon are descendants of converts to Christianity from the Vaisya caste of Hindus in India and have lived in the island from about the time of Portuguese occupation.'<sup>10</sup>

Although during the Dutch and Portuguese periods the Hindu element had been relegated to the background, not all Chetties were Christians. Christianity was not held as the only or essential attribute of their community. It was their origin, traced to a class of traders from the Madurai and Coromandel coasts of India, that was emphasised, rather than religious, educational, economic and political differences that existed between them and the rest of the Tamils.<sup>11</sup>

History also came to the rescue of spokesmen for caste associations when they wanted to prove the noble origins of their members and the validity of their claim for special representation. The Udarata Jatika Sangamaya traced the loss of status of the Batgam and Duraya castes to the fall of the Kandyan kingdom and more precisely to the fact that there was, under colonialism, no king who needed to raise a army:

'This morning Mr S.W. Fernando gave evidence and said that the Bathgama Duraya people formed a low caste. I challenge him to prove by history that it is a low caste. All English historians show that they were soldiers and husbandmen, and we have belonged to that group for the past generations and this group is now supposed to be low caste. In the Province there are now no regiments. They are thrown out of service, but if the Sinhalese had an army to themselves, it would be formed of the people of our community. Before entering into the Kandyan provinces you have to penetrate a certain Pass, and the passes are held by our community. They are historical places and they are in the possession of the Durayas.'12

A member of the Ceylon National Congress, R.H.S. de Silva, addressed the commissioners to protest against the impossibility

Nathan MSS, Special Circulation No. 146, Memorandum of the Colombo Chetty Association.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> A.C. Alles, The Ceylon Chetty Community, Colombo, 1985; A.K. Aserappa, The Ceylon Chetty Community, Colombo, 1930.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Special Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon 1927, Record of Oral Evidence. Public Sittings. vol. 3. The Udarata Jatika Sangamaya, represented by Mr N.H. Keerthiratne and others, p. 54.

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for members of certain castes to become police constables, and invoked the position of Vahumpuras as one time rulers of the country:

'It is not in accordance with history. According to history, one of these castes although now called Vahumpura was really Lambukarna and that Lambukarna clan is one which had been governing the country at one time.' 13

In the same way the Nekati community representatives related their origins in these terms:

'These people are the descendants of one of the eight sections of Brahmins sent to Ceylon with the sacred Bo Tree by the Indian Emperor Dharmasoka about 2000 years ago.'14

As in the case of the Karavas, described by one of their representatives as a 'race from India and hence Kshatriya of the bluest blood', the origins of most castes were traced to India and to the *varna* system. Myths of origin were even used by the Ceylon Tamils in order to boost their claims of parity with the Sinhalese. A. Ramanathan, Secretary of the Tamil Maha Jana Sabha, wrote:

The Tamils are the original inhabitants of the island and have been here for millenniums and the researches of Sir John Marshall, Dr Sayce and others have proved that the Tamil land was the cradle of the human race.<sup>15</sup>

The Donoughmore Commission was the last real forum where community leaders and representatives voiced the idea that descent and purity were sufficient criteria to obtain special rights from the state. The groups that appeared before the Soulbury Commission put forward similar claims for special treatment, but their reasons were couched in a narrative not of great past and noble origins but of discrimination and economic hardships.

# The Soulbury Report

Sri Lanka's statesmen were first obliged to think about citizenship in the mid-1940s when it became clear that independence was no longer a distant dream. In July 1944 Lord Soulbury was appointed head of a Commission charged with the task of examining a new constitutional draft which the Sri Lankan ministers had proposed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Nathan MSS 604, Evidence of R.H.S. de Silva, 1 Dec. 1927.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Nathan MSS 621, Memorandum of the Members of the Nekati Caste Community, 1928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Nathan MSS 606, Evidence of A. Ramanathan, 7 Dec. 1927.

but was in fact the creation of Sir Ivor Jennings, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ceylon and unofficial adviser to D.S. Senanayake. After the fall of Singapore to the Japanese, under pressure from Sri Lankan politicians, the British finally agreed to concede full participatory government after the war.

The Soulbury Report, published in September 1945, provided a bicameral parliamentary government based on the Whitehall model. Universal suffrage was retained. The executive committees and the posts of three officers of state were abolished. The executive power was to be vested in a Prime Minister and a Cabinet appointed by the governor general but responsible to the lower houses of the bicameral legislature. The governor general was given overriding powers in matters of defence, external affairs and constitutional amendments, but on all other matters could only act on the advice of his ministers. He would also appoint fifteen of the thirty members of the senate or upper chamber. The first chamber or House of Representatives would consist of 101 members; ninetyfive of those would be elected and six nominated by the governor general. The London Times described quite accurately the treatment of issues by the Soulbury Commission as 'unimaginative'. 16 Indeed, except for the addition of a second chamber, it amounted to an endorsement of the main principles of the constitutional scheme formulated by the Ministers in 1944. Citizenship was understood in a liberal spirit quite typical of British lawmakers as composed of a variety of rights rather than embodied in political participation.

Safeguards for minorities in the Soulbury Report. When the Soulbury Commission came in 1944 a number of minority groups put forward demands for special representation in the legislative bodies. Among them were caste associations such as the All Ceylon Minority Tamil Sabha which asked for representation by nomination to ensure that the grievance of depressed castes would be heard and their rights protected. The All Ceylon Scheduled Castes Federation suggested a separate electoral register for depressed caste members belonging to the plantation Tamil community. In Sinhala speaking areas, too, caste discrimination was asserted as a reason for representation by the Karava community, through the Central Fisheries Union, and by representatives of the Batgam and Vahumpura communities. While their demands varied, in general

<sup>16</sup> Hindu Organ, 18 Oct. 1945.

## CITIZENS, COMMUNITIES, RIGHTS, CONSTITUTIONS

it was felt that a new system of electoral demarcation or separate electorates would be the best remedy.<sup>17</sup>

Responses to these demands were mixed and based on the principles that the state would not identify with any ethnic or religious community and that special opportunities to underprivileged minorities would not be accommodated in the Constitution. Thus while provision was made in the Soulbury Report and in the Ceylon (Constitution) Order in Council for the protection of minority rights, the assumption was that the minority communities constituted a large and powerful enough bloc to be able to counter majoritarian initiatives. A number of mechanisms were put in place to ensure that minorities would be represented and their rights protected. The Soulbury Report ensured the governor general would exercise his discretion on any bill that evoked serious opposition by any racial or religious community and which in his opinion was likely to involve oppression or serious injustice to any such community. The Soulbury Report contained a clause that later became Section (29) 2 in the 1946 Constitution, modelled on clause 8 of the Ministers' draft constitution which prohibited legislation infringing on religious freedom or discriminating against persons of any community or religion.

The incorporation of the principle of area weightage in representation and the creation of multi-member constituencies were the principal safeguards against majority domination. Area as well as population was taken into account in the delimitation of constituencies, so that minorities scattered in various parts of the country would be represented. Provision was thus made for ethnic (Indian Tamil), religious (Roman Catholic and Muslim) and non-Goyigama representation. In a number of constituencies in Sabaragamuwa, and in two other cases outside that province, the provision of dual member constituencies helped caste representatives to be elected.<sup>18</sup> The principle of affirmative action that had in a way grown out of the colonial practice of communal representation furtively entered independent Sri Lanka.

Minority rights were also to be protected by the requirement of a two-thirds majority in the House for any change in the Constitution

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'The Inner Courtyard: Political Discourse of Caste, Justice and Equality in Sri Lanka', *Pravada*, 6, 9–10, 2000, pp. 15–16; Sir Frederick Rees, 'The Soulbury Commission, 1944–1945', *Ceylon Historical Journal*, 5, 1–4, 1955–6, pp. 31, 32, 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Janice Jiggins, Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese, 1947–1976, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 37–8.

or any piece of legislation aimed at discriminating against a racial or religious minority. The concurrence of at least 68 members in a House of 95 elected and six nominated members was thus needed. The second Chamber could check and revise legislation of a discriminatory character, but not obstruct a bill.

The institutional safeguards for minorities embodied in the Soulbury Report lagged far behind the demands put forward by the minorities at the Commission's sittings. While other minorities gradually ceased their protests and prepared to collaborate with the majority, the Ceylon Tamil and Ceylon Indian leadership stayed aloof. It was the issue of citizenship and franchise rights of the community referred to as Ceylon Indians that prevented a compromise being reached between the Tamil Congress, the organisation that purported to speak on behalf of both Ceylon Tamils and Ceylon Indians, and the leadership of the majority.

# The Soulbury Report, Indian citizenship and franchise

During a visit to London Senanayake had obtained from the Colonial Office the concession that all problems relating to citizenship were to fall within the ambit of the government elected under the new Constitution. Although the Soulbury Commission recognised that 80 per cent of the people of Indian origin were permanent residents, the Soulbury Report did not touch upon the problem of Ceylon Indians. 19 Before the publication of the White Paper at the end of October, a number of protests were articulated against the total neglect of the Indian question. The Ceylon Indian Congress demanded for the Indians what they thought was a legitimate place in the body politic. Three demands were put forward: full unrestricted adult franchise; rights of citizenship on the ascertainable test of residence; rights of representation in the House of Representatives of a number not less than the proportion of the Indian population in Ceylon warranted, on the basis of 101 seats for the whole population.

The Tamil Congress offered unreserved support to Indian demands. Tamil objections to the Soulbury recommendations were interpreted in the White Paper in terms of Tamil opposition to the march towards self-government of the Ceylonese people. Finally three-quarters of the Council accepted the White Paper and the new Constitution, embodied in the Order in Council of October

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, London, 2001, p. 224.

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1945, was approved by the King in Council on 15 May 1946. Only five of the eleven Tamil Councillors had voted for it.<sup>20</sup>

The power to legislate on the issues of immigration and citizenship was thus cautiously kept within the ambit of the future elected legislature.

## The 1948–9 Indian Citizenship Acts

In December 1947 Prime Ministers Nehru and Senanayake attempted for the last time before Ceylon became independent to reach a settlement on the issue of citizenship for persons of Indian origin. Jawaharlal Nehru suggested giving citizenship to all those who asked for it and who satisfied the criterion of residence of seven years in Ceylon preceding 1 January 1948. Senanayake proposed more stringent conditions: persons could apply for citizenship if they had been resident in Sri Lanka before 31 December 1945 for a minimum of seven years for married and ten years for unmarried adults; and applicants had to provide proof of adequate means of livelihood and that they had conformed to Ceylonese marriage laws. Quite clearly Senanayake was eager to draw up a law that would restrict as much as possible the number of eligible applicants. Nehru refused this proposal.

On gaining independence the new nation-state hurriedly passed citizenship and franchise legislation. The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948 created two types of citizenship—citizenship by descent and citizenship by registration. In both cases documentary proof was required for applicants, a procedure that disqualified the majority of Indian Tamil workers who were illiterate. Citizenship would only be given to those who satisfied the government of the intensity of their desire to adopt Sri Lanka as their home.<sup>21</sup> Citizenship by descent was restricted to persons who could prove at least two generations or more had been born on the island. Citizenship by registration was open to those residents who could prove either parent had been a citizen by descent, and the individual had been a resident of Ceylon for seven years, if married, or ten years, if un-married. The minister in charge was given discretionary power to register 25 persons a year for distinguished public service. The Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> This section draws from Nira Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 209–21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> A. Aziz, CIC President, *Hindu Organ*, 18 May 1948.

of 1949 was based on Senanayake's proposals at the December 1947 negotiations, the only change being the decision to take 1 January 1948 as the qualifying date for completion of the specified period of residence.

Anyone who laid claim to citizenship was expected to apply to the assigned government agency. The Ceylon Citizenship and Immigration Act was discussed at the Madras Legislative Assembly, where concern was expressed that 'the procedure of application be simple and inexpensive' because the majority of Indians were 'ignorant workers'. <sup>22</sup> The criteria for qualification were stringent as the practice of registering births had not been current two generations earlier. Although these laws did not include any literacy qualifications, in practical terms they favoured the literate person who was more likely to register births. Mastery of the written word was implicitly the criterion for citizenship and franchise. The Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949 made the status of citizenship mandatory for having the franchise.

The new citizenship and franchise laws altered the balance of power between the various communities and helped consolidate a majority within the polity. Through these laws Plantation Tamils were defined as an alien and marginal group. The laws in many ways also embodied a class position on the part of a group in society which was closer in cultural terms to a middle or upper class Briton than to a Sinhala or Tamil worker. In this sense it was not surprising that the elites in Ceylon had absorbed one of the main myth models of European cultures, which conveyed that writing epitomised learning, civilisation and all that distinguished the West from the rest.

The reason for the urgency of passing such stringent laws was that before independence links had been forged between the estate population and the left parties. This became a concern for the conservative elite to whom power had been transferred. Indeed the UNP had won only 42 of the 95 seats contested at the 1947 parliamentary elections, and formed a government that depended on independents and nominated members. The left had 19 seats and its growth and possible alliance with the plantation working class constituted a threat to the conservative leadership of the UNP. The laws described above had ruptured the possibility of stronger interethnic and class alliances by excluding the entire estate Tamil population from participating in the polity. They also

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Hindu Organ, 26 Oct. 1948

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pandered to fears of the Kandyan constituency that they would be swamped by the ever growing Tamil population. Senanayake's position was consolidated both within the UNP, where the threat of his rival S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike lessened, and in the state as a whole, at the expense of ten per cent of the population that was cast away as not belonging to the nation-state.<sup>23</sup>

The trade unions that represented the Estate Tamils in the late 1940s and early '50s—the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) and the Democratic Workers' Congress (DWC)—issued conflicting instructions to members. First they were asked not to apply for citizenship as a collective protest against the decrees. But others of Indian origin, from the mercantile class located in the major cities, applied. Most of those who did not have birth certificates of their fathers and grandfathers instead used sworn affidavits of bona fide citizens and even Britons. Politicians sponsored applications of Colombo's leading merchants, Bohras and Parsis and a few Tamils. White collar personnel on estates also submitted applications. Plantation workers were undecided; a few submitted applications but most did not. Tales of application forms that were requested but never arrived, owing to the connivance of postmasters, of a climate of suspicion and of a sense of fear on the part of illiterate workers, are part of the collective memory of plantation workers.<sup>24</sup> The result was that the large majority of estate workers became stateless.

The Citizenship Acts spelt the end of any sort of trust between the Plantation Tamils and the Jaffna Tamils. Indeed the leader of the Tamil Congress accepted a ministry in the United National Party government that had just disenfranchised nearly a million Tamil plantation workers. The stand taken on behalf of the Estate Tamils by the newly created Federal Party's leader, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam did not create much of an impact among the isolated Estate Tamils. Furthermore, when Chelvanayakam signed a pact with the then Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1957, the demand for citizenship and voting rights for the Estate Tamils was dropped

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> See the excellent analysis of Amita Shastri, 'Estate Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan politics', *Contemporary South Asia* (1999), 8 (1), pp. 65–86. For more conventional approaches see I.D.S. Weerawardena, 'The Minorities and the Citizenship Act', *Ceylon Historical Journal*, 1952, 1, 3, pp. 242–50; S.U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence*, Colombo, 1965.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence. Sri Lankans, Sinhalas, and Tamils, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 110–13.

in the face of other concessions deemed more important to the Jaffna Tamils, such as the recognition of Tamil as an official language, the creation of regional councils and the reversal of an aggressive settlement policy in Tamil areas. The Estate Tamils had been betrayed twice.

In 1950 the electoral lists were revised in such a way that the voting strength of Tamil voters was drastically reduced. In the Nuwara Eliya constituency the number of voters at the General Election of 1947 was 24,295. After the revision the number of voters fell to 9,279 of whom only 319 were Tamils.<sup>25</sup>

The relative isolation of the Indian Plantation Tamils from the rest of society, whether Ceylon Tamil or Sinhala, their alleged low caste status and their poverty ensured their lack of political representation and mobilisation, and their rapid marginalisation in national politics.

## Other Citizenship Acts

In 1953 the Privy Council expressed the opinion that the Citizenship Acts were not unconstitutional and did not conflict with the non-discrimination clause, Section 29 (2). The reason given was that Estate Tamils did not constitute a community and were there-fore not covered by the clause. Given the fact that the Estate Tamils had since the 1911 census been treated as a separate community or race, the decision of the Privy Council was tendentious at its best.

Applications were nevertheless filed by members of the Ceylon Indian community before the closing date, which was 5 August 1951, and in July 1962, some eleven years later, the process of investigating the applications was completed. Of the 824,430 persons of Indian origin claiming citizenship (in the 237,034 applications filed) only 134,188 were admitted, that is 16.2 per cent of the total.<sup>26</sup>

To remedy this situation India agreed to rethink its position and accept the principle that Estate Tamils could rightfully aspire to Indian citizenship. The Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahdur Shastri, and the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, concluded a pact on the citizenship question in October 1964 without consulting any of the leaders of the Estate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> S. Thondaman, Tea and Politics: An Autobiography, vol. 2: My Life and Times, Colombo, 1994, p. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> A.J. Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka*, 1947–1979, London, 1974, 2nd edn. 1979, pp. 24, 28; S.U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations*, pp. 113–14.

## CITIZENS, COMMUNITIES, RIGHTS, CONSTITUTIONS

Tamils or the sole Estate Tamil representative in Parliament, S. Thondaman. This Indo-Ceylon Agreement, often referred to as the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact, dealt with the 975,000 Indians in Sri Lanka without citizenship rights. The two governments agreed that 525,000 of the stateless persons, with their offspring, were to be repatriated to India within fifteen years. Sri Lanka would accept 300,000 persons and their natural increase. The fate of the remaining 150,000 for which neither government was willing to assume responsibility was to be settled at a later date. The end of 1974 over 630,000 persons applied to remain in Sri Lanka, a number far exceeding the 300,000 agreed upon. This, and the reluctance manifested by the Estate Tamils when applying for Indian citizenship, showed that they considered Sri Lanka their home.

In 1974 a second pact, known as the Sirimavo-Indira Pact, was agreed upon. According to this 75,000 were marked for deportation to India while 75,000 would be absorbed by Sri Lanka. During these years the Plantation Tamils suffered many hardships owing to the land reform and the nationalisation of the plantations. The fragmentation of the estate lands and the mismanagement of many estates led many Tamil labourers to flee into to cities of Colombo and Kandy in search of employment. For those who remained and worked on estates under the management of cooperatives there was no improvement in the workers' position and living conditions. <sup>28</sup>

By 1981, although the pacts had not been fully implemented, 162,000 Estate Tamils had been registered as citizens of Sri Lanka and 373,900 had been given Indian citizenship. By mid-1984 445,588 persons in all had been repatriated to India, mostly against their will. They were 'settled' in their 'home state' of Tamil Nadu.<sup>29</sup> In 1986, with the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act No. 5, and in 1988, with the Grant of Citizenship (Special Provisions) Act No. 39, the Sri Lanka government granted citizenship to all remaining Estate Tamils—231,849 stateless persons—who had not applied for Indian citizenship.

If the history of postcolonial (political) representation in Sri Lanka reveals a systematic encompassing or compression of diverse groups into increasingly restrictive categories, as well as a concomi-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> A.J. Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka*, pp. 28–9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Oddvar Hollup, 'The Impact of Land Reforms, Rural Images and Nationalist Ideology on Plantation Tamils' in Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva (eds), *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, pp. 74–88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Amita Shastri, 'Estate Tamils', pp. 79–80.

tant consolidation of a bipolar ethnic imagination, the trajectory of the plantation Tamil community has diverged from this pattern. The Plantation Tamils, who currently number 5.5 per cent, have been increasingly politicised and visible in national politics. In many ways the citizenship question and repatriation served to unite the Plantation Tamils and consolidate their identity vis-à-vis other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, most people—'permanent and lawful residents of the Republic and their descendants'—who did not qualify for citizenship under the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964 were promised citizenship rights in 1986 and 1988. The politics of representation had made the excluded once again part of the magic circle. The Plantation/Estate Tamil identity refers today to 'a category of citizens or potential citizens' of Sri Lanka.

The case of the Plantation Tamils is evidence that in the decades that followed independence, citizenship was perceived as a primary circle of belonging that measured one's attachment to the territory by criteria of descent and literacy (implicitly). Aliens and migrants who hailed from the working class were set apart and cast away. But within the political community of citizens other divisions too were created: a majority and minorities were delineated through circles of exclusion and inclusion based on gender, religion and ethnicity.

# More rights and less representation: women as citizens

Since independence, citizenship has been viewed as a system of rights constitutionally guaranteed to all members of a political community, including women. In 1981, when the last island-wide census was taken, women constituted 49 per cent of the total population. Their literacy rate of 86.9 per cent was only a little lower than that of the male population. Furthermore, female university enrolment stands today at 45.3 per cent of the total enrolment, a commendable achievement compared to other countries in South Asia. However, as citizens of the post-independence nation-state women's plight has been only second to that of the disenfranchised Plantation Tamils in the three decades that followed independence. Today the majority of Plantation Tamils enjoy citizenship rights and hold a bargaining card—that of a block vote—to obtain entitlements for members of their community. In contrast to the progress of Plantation Tamils in the liberal democratic regimes of the last five decades, women have obtained certain rights but little political representation, have been bestowed with special entitle-

ments but kept away from power. If participation in formal politics is taken as a measure of women's power, Sri Lanka's women are citizens more in name than in practice.

# Legal and constitutional protection of women

The Sri Lankan Constitution of 1978, couched in rhetorically liberal and socialist language, is laced with ambiguity in its approach to women. It incorporates the norm of non-discrimination that had been accepted in many areas of the legal system before the 1978 Constitution was in force.<sup>30</sup> But in spite of the non-discrimination clause (which includes sex) it states that: 'Nothing in this Article shall prevent special provision being made by law, subordinate legislation or executive action for the advancement of women, children and disabled persons'.<sup>31</sup>

This article embodies the tension between freedom and equality: on the one hand all individuals must be treated the same, on the other, certain groups including women warrant special treatment. This article presupposes that women—half the total number of citizens—are vulnerable and need the protection of an activist state. Women become akin not only to children and disabled persons but also to religious and ethnic minorities. Within the larger circle of citizens women, recognised as vulnerable and in need of special treatment, are effectively denied the same power as men.

The case is often made that women in Sri Lanka have all the rights necessary for equality and are to all intents and purposes equal 'citizens'. The constitutional clause on equality can be easily challenged by the strongly patriarchal value system contained in the family law, personal law governing property and inheritance, penal code and law related to citizenship. The General Law in Sri Lanka contains no explicit gender inequalities, but there are significant gaps between law and practice.

There are variations in the family law of communities. A Muslim girl under twelve can still be registered as married with the permission of the *qazi*.<sup>32</sup> The fact that the age of consensual sexual inter-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> The Sri Lanka government has also ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW) and adopted a Women's Charter in 1993.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Article 12.4 of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1978.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> See Savitri Goonesekere, The Legal System of the Female in the Sri Lankan Law on Family Relations, Colombo, 1980.

course for all other communities is sixteen years dispels all pretence of equality before the law. The equality guaranteed by the constitution is not reflected in the General Marriage Ordinance. Not only can a divorce be obtained by either party only on grounds based on the 'fault' concept inherited from English Common Law, but the concept of marriage breakdown is still not recognised.

In the area of property rights, the Sri Lankan laws recognise the egalitarian concept of equal distribution of property in intestate succession, except, however, in inheritance principles under Muslim law and in certain circumstances under Kandyan law and the Thesawalami.<sup>33</sup>

The law relating to citizenship appears to be egalitarian in its essence, embodying the spirit of the Constitution. However, the concept of father's/husband's preferential status as breadwinner, legal guardian of minor children and head of family within a marriage undermines this egalitarian approach. The war has resulted in a rise in female-headed households in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Studies have pointed to legal and administrative barriers facing women as heads of households including discriminatory legal provisions relating to pensions and social security. <sup>34</sup> Until the Citizenship Amendment Act No. 16 of 2003 was ratified, the law discriminated against married women by preventing them from transferring their nationality by descent to marital children. The amendment rectified this inequality.

The Penal Code amendments of 1995 have sought to address some of the critical issues in this area of the law.<sup>35</sup> In addition to stringent measures against rape, the criminalisation of sexual harassment, incest and trafficking, and the recognition of grave sexual abuse have been among some of the progressive measures taken in this regard. However, further changes are required in the areas of domestic violence, marital rape and abortion. In the case of prostitution the prostitute is regarded as the wrongdoer and the male client as the 'wronged'. The constitutional clause on equality is thus turned into a farce.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> See Bina Agarwal, A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 121–33 and p. 238.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> SIGI—Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD), 2012, http://gender-index.org/country/sri-lanka/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> For a detailed account of the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 1995 see Yasmine Tambiah (ed.), *Women and Governance: Reinventing the State*, Colombo, 2003.

Women's rights and representation in constitutions. For all intents and purposes women constitute a subaltern group in society in spite of constant claims by academics and male public opinion that women—understood as Buddhist women—enjoyed a degree of freedom that even women in Western societies did not have. Although women of Sri Lanka have been enjoying the vote since 1931, in practice women have been kept away from representational politics. In the 1947 Constitution a Second Chamber or Senate created more opportunities for women to enter national politics as there was no direct election by the people. Among the nominated members 'specially chosen on the ground that they either possess a record of distinguished public service or one person of eminence in professional, commercial, industrial or agricultural life' who entered parliament between 1947 and 1971, there were seven women. The women who entered—philanthropists and social workers—did not play a significant role in shaping national policy or even pushing for more representation for women.<sup>36</sup>

Women have not participated in the politics of the country in an active fashion. In national politics the figures are telling: In 1947 the percentage of female parliamentarians was 1.1 per cent; in 1960 1.3 per cent; in 1965 2.64 per cent and in 1994 5.3 per cent. Among political parties there are few variations, the larger parties being generally the least accommodating. But the representation of women in political parties remains minimal, ranging between 2 and 10 per cent and at district level between 3 and 4 per cent. The participation of women was essentially sought during election times. For many women 'political involvement was a leisure activity'. A recent study shows that in general becoming a member of the women's branch of the ruling SLFP was motivated less by a concern to enter the public domain than by a need to get away from the home and the family domain. High political participation is not synonymous with a high level of political awareness.<sup>37</sup>

A survey conducted on a cross-section of 463 women and 153 men shows that women were less knowledgeable than men about

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Chandra de Silva, 'A Historical Overview of Women in Sri Lankan Politics' in Sirima Kiribamune (ed.), Women and Politics in Sri Lanka: A Comparative Perspective, Kandy, 1999, pp. 71–100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Subhangi Herath, 'Fighting for Rights or Having Fun? A Case Study of Political Awareness and Participation of Rural Sinhala Women' in Selvy Thiruchandran (ed.), *Women, Narration and Nation: Collective Images and Multiple Identities*, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 152–68.

current politics and showed little interest in abstract political issues. For instance, when asked: 'What in your view is the strongest argument against the presidential system of government?' and 'What do you understand by the "open economy"?' Zero scores were obtained by 54 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men.<sup>38</sup>

While one can accept that Sri Lanka has one of the highest rates of gender equity in the world, that women's participation in education surpasses that of men in such professions as law and medicine, and that women and men vote in roughly equal numbers, educational indices need to be qualified and weighted against other facts. For instance, women may be well represented in law and medicine but this is not the case in science and technology where no more than 20 per cent of university students are women. More importantly, given that of a population of twenty million only about 1.5 per cent enter state universities, equal representation in limited fields of higher education does not in any way reflect the situation of the majority of women in the country. Despite equal access to free education there are more educated but unemployed women compared to men. Furthermore access to wage work has increased for women. Yet it is concentrated at the lower end of the income structure.39

Clearly, despite a much vaunted literacy level and an often claimed awareness of current political issues and debates maintained though the print and electronic media, women's understanding and perceptions of politics appear to be at a very superficial level. Although they see voting as a important civic responsibility, many women still vote for a particular party because their family 'belongs' to it. A recent survey of women from a variety of regions, communities and social classes showed that only a few women interpreted politics as a multidimensional concept underpinning individual, civil rights and economic and social rights.<sup>40</sup>

While remedies are given in the Constitution for discrimination in the area of economic, social and cultural rights—for instance the right to work—until now an equal share of political power is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Sirima Kiribamune, 'Women and Politics: A Field Survey' in Sirima Kiribamune (ed.), Women and Politics in Sri Lanka, p. 251; Yasmine Tambiah (ed.), Women and Governance, p. 489.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Sepali Kottegoda, 'Gender Dimensions of Poverty in Sri Lanka', Center for Policy Analysis, http://dilru.lib.ruh.ac.lk:8080/jspui/bitstream/1981/ 51/1/20.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Yasmine Tambiah (ed.), Women and Governance, p. 489.

anathema. Women's situation is in that sense worse than that of a minority, since minorities are sometimes given more representation than their numbers warrant, or at least proportional representation. Although the question of special quotas for women was raised in a number of fora even the last exercise in constitution drafting in 2000, which was shelved owing to opposition from all sides, made no mention of such a policy.

Critiques of citizenship. In Sri Lanka liberal feminists have fought and are still fighting for a wide range of new rights for women to make them equal citizens as stated in the Constitution, without challenging the dominant/male model of citizenship and politics. Who a 'citizen' is, what a citizen does, and the arena within which he acts have been constructed in the masculine image. Although women became citizens at the same time as men, their formal citizenship was won within a structure of patriarchal power in which women's qualities and tasks are still devalued.

Motherhood, the bringing of life, is less valued as the ultimate test of citizenship than a man's willingness to fight, kill and die for his country. In a country until recently at war this phenomenon is particularly acute and is reflected in frequent attempts on the part of the state to recruit young men as soldiers to be sent to the front. The army is described as 'the proudest career on earth' for 'those who are eager to learn, lead and serve the nation'. 41 On 4 February, the national day, the state shows off its recent military acquisitions, tanks, missiles, planes—all instruments of destruction paradoxically made in other nation-states. Schoolchildren, future citizens, are made to march in line in drill displays, in anticipation of the sacrifices the state will demand of them. The participation of women in national ceremonies is peripheral—an interlude between climaxes. How many citizens watching television cheer and feel proud of the display of masculinity of these bodies—marching, parachuting and performing stunts? 42

If the present concept of citizenship is a male one, can women's concerns be accommodated within such as framework? The public realm of modern citizenship inherited from the West has been based on the negation of women's participation. This exclusion was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Sunday Island, 10 June 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> See Pradeep Jeganathan, 'The Task of Social Theory' in R. Coomaraswamy and N. Wickramasinghe (eds), *Introduction to Social Theory*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 8–15.

seen as indispensable to postulate the generality and universality of the public sphere. Statesmen in Sri Lanka did nothing to rectify this imbalance. Just as in the lands that invented the rights of the citizen, the public/private distinction, central as it was for the assertion of individual liberty, was reproduced *in toto* in the former colonies. This led to identifying the private with the domestic and played an important role in the subordination of women.

Until recently most feminists in Sri Lanka concerned with the contribution that feminism could make to democratic politics have been focusing on specific demands that could express women's interests, neglecting other options. In that sense they have failed to offer a critique of the exercise of citizenship that consists in adopting a universal point of view, made equivalent to Reason and reserved to men. Even recent proposals put forward to change the Constitution by incorporating the demands of various women's groups implicitly refuse to disturb the status quo.

In other countries women have emphasised specific feminine values that should become the model for democratic politics. Between demanding equality and in effect accepting the patriarchal conception of citizenship or insisting that women's distinctive attributes, capacities and activities be given expression and be valued as contributing to citizenship, there are other possibilities of action.

Uncovering the false universality behind the term 'individual' seems a prerequisite of any demand for rights from the liberal/male democratic state. Emphasising 'feminine' values and mothering as a test of citizenship is contestable on grounds of essentialism and discrimination towards non-reproducing women.

There is room for new conceptions of citizenship where sexual difference 'should become effectively non-pertinent'. Citizenship would be a form of political identity consisting in the identification with the political principles of modern pluralist democracy, namely the assertion of liberty and equality for all. It would then be 'an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty'. The distinction between private and public would disappear since every situation is an encounter between the two. The condition of the possibility of the formulation of a feminist democratic project is a critique of essentialism and all its different forms.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Chantal Mouffe, 'Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics' in Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (eds), *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 324–30.

Making a majority, 1948–87

The three Constitutions of post-independence Sri Lanka helped demarcate and define a majority from within the citizens, pitting them against non-Buddhists and non-Sinhala speaking minority communities. However, unlike the openly discriminatory legislation passed in the late 1940s to determine who was a citizen and who was an alien, it was under the guise of a rights and entitlement discourse that groups became stultified as minorities in a political sense and marginalised in the nation-state. Paradoxically the rights mechanisms used by liberal states to engineer equality of opportunity for minorities were systematically utilised by successive Sri Lankan governments to shore up the dominance of a Sinhala Buddhist majority. Programmes of 'positive discrimination' in British parlance, or 'affirmative action' in North American terms, which aimed to correct the socio-economic marginalisation of immigrants and minorities were used to the advantage of the ethnic majority. It is this phenomenon that has led many commentators on politics in postcolonial Sri Lanka to remark on the minority complex of the majority—the Sinhalas. Thus the rights discourse and later multiculturalism helped consolidate the majority community and gell minorities in a sometimes dependent and subaltern situation.

Religious and language rights of the majority. In the two areas of religion and language the independent Constitutions of Sri Lanka consolidated majority identities through protective measures.

Since independence, political monks organised in pressure groups have taken positions on crucial issues, and attempted to influence people by virtue of their moral prestige. Many Buddhist monks have a vision, based on the *Mahavamsa*, of an ideal moral and social order thought to have existed in the past where the people of the country, the polity and Buddhism were bound by strong links. On the nature of the relationship between monks and the polity there is no real consensus among *bhikkus*. The variety of views relating to the ideal social and political order among Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka is often masked by the great concern for an appearance of a 'unified' front.<sup>44</sup> When the UNP came to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Chandra R. de Silva, 'The Plurality of Buddhist Fundamentalism: An Inquiry into Views among Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka' in Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, *Buddhist Fundamentalism*, p. 53.

power in 1977 and liberalised the economy, there were monks who protested against growing consumerism. The same groups protested against the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987, claiming the agreement betrayed the Sinhala people by conceding too much to the Tamils and allowing Indians to enter the island as a peacekeeping force. Today the Buddhist monks sitting in Parliament as Members representing the Jathika Hela Urumaya strive to protect the integrity of the Sri Lankan state and the Sinhala nation. The rhetoric of betrayal, and of the need to protect the land, are ever-present elements in the Sinhala nationalist discourse where Sinhalese and Buddhist identities are merged into one. The threat is identified as coming from the West, Christianity and capitalism.

The 1972 Constitution of Sri Lanka was the culmination of the ideological impetus of the 1956 movement led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. It gave Buddhism an elevated position within the polity in its section 6 and enshrined Sinhala as the official language at constitutional level. It broke away from British imperial power and made the National Assembly or Parliament the supreme body. The assertion of these majority values was both symbolic and real. The Tamil minority that had once held a disproportionate share of places in the public service saw the situation change drastically when Sinhala became the official language. The ruling party controlled a two-thirds majority in Parliament and was able to govern without any seats in the North and East. Tamil support was not necessary.

The first Constitution of Ceylon did not afford any special place to Buddhism in the form of state patronage or state protection. In fact, in section 29 it was Roman Catholics and other minority groups that were given safeguards against discrimination. Clause (c) decreed no law shall 'confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions'.<sup>46</sup>

The party that first formed a government in 1948 under this Constitution—the UNP—adopted a secular and liberal approach in which no religion was favoured. D.S. Senanayake, the first Prime

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> On the agreement see Shelton U. Kodikara, *Indo-Lanka Agreement of July 1987*, Colombo, 1989. On opposition to the agreement, see C.A. Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The JVP Insurrection*, 1987–1989, Colombo, 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> The Constitution of Ceylon, Feb. 1948, Sessional Paper III, Section 29, Ceylon Government Press, 1948, p. 22.

Minister, had emphasised that religion was essentially a personal matter and that the UNP respected the individual's rights to freedom of worship.<sup>47</sup>

Every Constitution of the country from 1972 onwards nevertheless stressed the special place given to Buddhism, the religion of more than 70 per cent of the population. Buddhism was conceived in Sri Lanka by governments and politicians as a legitimising, integrative and moral force. Although Buddhism was protected by the state and practiced by the vast majority of people, many of its proponents presented it as a religion under threat. The threat was portrayed as coming from various places at different times. In the 1950s Buddhist leaders complained of the influence of 'Catholic action' and spearheaded the SLFP campaign, taking over denominational schools, evicting Catholic nursing nuns, giving Buddhist preachers more time on national radio, and securing employment for Buddhists in the higher echelons of the administration and armed services. This was in fact a process of rectifying perceived colonial favouritism towards Catholics.

Indeed not only were Christians and especially Roman Catholics very influential inside the UNP, they and the Ceylon Tamils still held official positions not commensurate with their numbers. Consequently it was felt in many quarters, in particular those close to the Ceylon Buddhist Congress, that Buddhism suffered from this equal status under secularism and needed special attention as the religion of a backward albeit majority community. As D.S. Senanayake flippantly said, together with the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, Buddhists appeared to be striving for a fourth refuge in government.<sup>48</sup> The position of the UNP gradually evolved towards a recognition that Buddhism was to all intents and purposes the official religion of the state. Buddhist ceremonies were performed at state functions, a habit that became entrenched. It was in fact the UNP, returned to power in 1968, that made Poya day—the full moon day—a weekly holiday in lieu of Sunday. The power of the Catholic Church and clergy declined in a dramatic fashion. In the decades that followed the church ceased to focus on what marked out Catholics as a group and more on what Catholics shared with others in Sri Lanka. Eventually this led to a significant decrease in the importance of a specifically Catholic identity.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Urmila Phadnis, Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka, London, p. 119.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Cited in ibid., p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> See R.L. Stirrat, Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka, Cambridge, 1992.

In spite of clear signs of the retreat of a Catholic threat there was by 1970 a bipartisan approach to religion in which Buddhism would be given its 'rightful place' while other religions would be protected. The Republican Constitution of 1972, developed by the United Front regime of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and its socialist partners as an autochtonous constitution, accorded Buddhism 'the foremost place' and invested the state with the duty to 'protect and foster it'. Other religionists were given the right to pursue their activities unhindered, subject to requirements of law and order. Section 18 (1)(h) protected them against discrimination in appointments in the public sector. But the minority protection clause Section 29 (2) of the Soulbury Constitution—thought of by minorities as a kind of covenant for the protection of minority rights as well as the Second Chamber—was abolished. In the vision of the framers of the Constitution the state stood above all demands for special rights on the part of minority communities. Indeed, in the 1970s the state was conceived as the supreme instrument for economic development and social progress in the socialist mould. Giving minorities special rights would have amounted to weakening state instrumentalism.

Fundamental rights of the citizen. In July 1977 the UNP returned to power and obtained an overwhelming mandate to 'draft, adopt and operate a new Republican Constitution in order to achieve the goals of a democratic socialist party'. 50 The principal change directed by I.R. Javewardene was the transition from the previous Westminster-style parliamentary government to a Gaullist-style presidential system. The president elected for a six-year term by direct suffrage was head of state and head of the executive. The 1978 Republican Constitution introduced a Bill of Rights that guaranteed a system of individual-based fundamental rights. The underlying assumption of its makers was that this would be sufficient to address the question of rights of all citizens irrespective of the community they belonged to. The rights of the community were not considered. In the non-discrimination clause of the chapter on fundamental rights the principles of equality before the law and protection of the law for all citizens irrespective of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion and place of birth were clearly outlined. The Chapter on Fundamental Rights (Chapter III) was novel in its watering down of the distinction between citizens

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Cited in A.J. Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka*, 1947–1979, London, 1974, p. 235.

and the stateless. It was stated that a 'person' rather than a 'citizen' was the beneficiary of many of these rights. The stateless too had gained fundamental rights.

The Republican Constitution of Sri Lanka did not make Buddhism the state religion but preserved its foremost position enjoyed since 1972:

9. The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14 (1)(e).

However, the Constitution was overridden by practices of the state that appeared to put Buddhism forward in new ways. A number of institutions fostered Buddhism in a forceful manner; among these was the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, exclusively concerned with Sinhala and Buddhist matters. The Department of Buddhist Affairs was also given state patronage. And President Jayawardene consulted with the monkhood when his government was trying to push forward a plan of devolution of power to District Councils in the early 1980s.<sup>51</sup>

Language rights. The passage of an Act in 1956 that made Sinhala the only official language of the country—the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956—effectively ended the two-language formula that was accepted at one time by the emergent national polity. On 5 June 1956 S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, elected to power by the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, introduced a bill that asserted 'the Sinhala Language shall be one Official Language of Ceylon'. Regulations under the Official Language Act of 1956 were approved by the cabinet on 20 December 1960 with effect from 1 January 1961, replacing English as the language used for administrative purposes. These regulations laid down for instance that all public servants were required to pass three graded proficiency tests in Sinhala within the next three years.<sup>52</sup>

Following the violence and radicalisation of Tamil demands, a Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act Number 28 was passed in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Steven Kemper, 'J.R. Jayewardene, Righteousness and Realpolitik' in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict, London and New York, 1990, pp. 200–2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> H.P. Chattopadyaya, Ethnic Unrest in Modern Sri Lanka: An Account of Tamil-Sinhalese Race Relations, New Delhi, 1994, p. 20.

Parliament. This act provided for the use of Tamil in the Northern and Eastern Provinces in governmental correspondence with the public and within prescribed administrative work. However, the regulation to give effect to the principles and provisions of the act was not framed until 1966.

In May 1970, when the United Front was elected to power, a new Republican Constitution was drafted which came into force on 22 May 1972. Article 12 of the Constitution provided that all laws, written and unwritten, in force immediately before the commencement of the Constitution, including the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958 and the regulations passed under that act, remained effective. Furthermore, Article 11 (3), (4), (5) and (6) of the new Constitution provided for the use of Tamil in the courts for pleadings and applications. However, the preamble to the 1958 law and the Language of the Courts (Special Provisions) Law No. 14 of 1973 established the supreme position of the 'original' Act No. 33 of 1956 on Sinhala Only. In any event this foundational law could not be superseded.

When the UNP captured power in 1977 the new government announced that it would usher in a new constitution. The new Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka created an executive presidency. Certain provisions were made for the use of the Tamil language. Article 19 recognised Tamil as a national language. Article 18 reaffirmed Sinhala as the official language. The provisions of Tamil Language (Special provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958 were assimilated into the Constitution. Article 22 and article 24 respectively incorporated the provisions in the 1958 act regarding regulations and those of 1973 regarding the language of courts.

Following the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 29 July 1987 the Sri Lanka Constitution was amended to establish provincial councils and the powers to be devolved. Clause 2.18 established 'The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala, Tamil and English will also be official languages'. Critiques pointed out the incongruity of the wording of the clause, and questioned the practical consequences: indeed the clause did not establish definitively that all official records would be maintained in Sinhala and in Tamil and that all public servants would have proficiency in both languages.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Nadesan Satyendra, 'The Tamil National Struggle: The LTTE and the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord' in N. Seevaratnam (ed.), *The Tamil National Question and the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord*, New Delhi, pp. 164–98.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which enshrined the principles laid down in the Accord, amended Articles 18 of the 1978 Constitution by the addition of the following paragraphs immediately after paragraph 1 of that Article:

- 2. Tamil shall also be an official language;
- 3. English shall be the link language;
- 4. Parliament shall by law provide for the implementation of the provisions of this chapter.<sup>54</sup>

Concrete changes in the state infrastructure did not follow, and the bilingualism that existed on paper was not effectively implemented. The However, this period saw the entrenchment of a bipolar identitarian discourse and the drafting of legislation based on that premise. Indeed until the end of the eighties it acknowledged the significance of one large minority—the Tamils—whose claims for justice had to be accommodated within the constitutional framework. Smaller minorities, less stable identities or identities cross—cutting these bipolar divides were bypassed.

Before the Second Republican Constitution the representative system was such that a Prime Minister could be elected from an electorate that had no minority representation. In contrast, the executive presidency system introduced in 1978 led candidates to seek votes from the national grid. Minority voices counted. The multi-ethnic nature of the state was suddenly reflected in the Constitution. The system of Proportional Representation introduced in the Constitution ensured that no one party would completely dominate Parliament and that many shades of opinion would be reflected in the House. Indeed the system of Proportional Representation and its component of preferential voting enabled smaller communities such as non-Goyigama castes to rally behind their candidates at election time and ensure that some of their people were elected to Parliament or to the provincial councils. <sup>56</sup>

During the four decades that followed independence the courts failed in their role as custodians of pluralistic values and protectors of minorities. Indeed, when the courts were called to adjudicate on the constitutionality of the citizenship laws that denied citizenship

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1987). An Act to Amend the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> A. Theva Rajan, Tamil as Official Language, Retrospect and Prospect, Colombo, 1995.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'The Inner Court: Political Discourse of Caste, Justice and Equality in Sri Lanka', *Pravada*, 6, 9–10, 2000, pp. 18–19.

to estate Tamils, they did not go beyond proving that they did not contradict Section 29. In the same way the constitutional challenge to the Official Language Legislation by a Tamil civil servant in the 1950s was disposed of on purely technical grounds.<sup>57</sup>

The Sri Lanka Muslims began voicing specific demands based on minority rights only in the early 1980s with the formation of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. Until then politics had been polarised between the Sinhalas and the Tamils both in Parliament and later on the battleground of insurrectionary politics. The strategy for Muslim leaders was to waver between the two major parties, the UNP and the SLFP, without contesting the Westminster framework of politics. As a result, instead of a minority rights discourse an 'idiom of interests' existed for the cultural and educational protection of Muslims-mostly pitted against Tamils with whom the Muslims shared a language.<sup>58</sup> There was no public articulation of grievances or attempt to win rights outside the state structure. A transformation occurred with the introduction of the Proportional Representation system under the constitutional change of 1978. Indeed the PR system gave possibilities of representation to Muslims if they formed their own party, and a chance of sending representatives if they contested as candidates of Sinhala parties.

Democracy, the first ingredient for the legitimate modern nationstate, in practice perpetuated blindness to numerically insignificant groups. Brow's ethnography of a Vedda village in the Anuradhapura district shows how Veddas have been pressured into identifying themselves with the Sinhalese people.<sup>59</sup> While many of the smaller groups such as Veddas and Rodis have been 'forgotten', marginalised or assimilated with the consolidation of a bipolar ethnic imagination in postcolonial Sri Lanka, the Tamils of Indian descent and the Muslims have been politicised as distinct ethnic groups in the past decade.

Two contradictory processes are thus evident in postcolonial Sri Lankan politics. On the one hand there has been an ethnicity blindness at the level of the state, paralleled by the politicisation of ethnicity in the national imagination; while on the other there has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Ideology and the Constitution*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> J. Uyangoda, *Questions of Minority Rights*, Colombo, 2001, p. 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> James Brow, Demons and Development: The Struggle for Community in a Sri Lankan Village, Tucson, AZ, 1996; see also K.N.O. Dharmadasa, 'The Veddas' Struggle for Survival: Problems, Policies and Responses' in K.N.O Dharmadasa and S.W.R. de Samarasinghe (eds), The Vanishing Aborigines: Sri Lanka Veddas in Transition, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 141–66.

been the erasing of small/mixed minority communities, paralleled by consolidation of Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil ethnicities in the tussle for rights and entitlements. Thus it was only in 1987, when India intervened in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, that the country was for the first time officially defined as a 'multi-ethnic and multi-lingual plural society'.

*Power sharing.* The post-national state model was characterised by its absolute command over the life and wellbeing of its citizens; hence the dialectics of control it employed constituted an asymmetrical relationship between the central state and civil society. In the last fifteen years two important attempts have been made to rethink the nation-state model and power sharing between communities: the first was the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution in 1987, under trying circumstances; the second was the attempt by the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga to introduce a draft constitution that would devolve considerable power to regions in a bid to solve—at least at a constitutional level—the question of Tamil aspirations for security and autonomy. While the first experience survived, the second was shelved and never faced a vote in Parliament. As the state moved to a more open-ended 'peace process' where peace came first and structures for power sharing are part of a long drawn negotiation process, the draft constitution remains an important framework for future discussions on power sharing between territorially based communities.

Thirteenth Amendment.<sup>60</sup> On 29 July 1987 an Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed by President J.R. Jayawardene of Sri Lanka and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India. This accord declared for the first time that Sri Lanka was a 'multi-ethnic and multi-lingual plural society' and endeavoured to provide an institutional framework for the sharing of power between all communities in Sri Lanka. The distinct character of the Northern and Eastern Provinces as 'areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking people' was recognised. In that sense the first significant measure to address the issue of the rights and grievances of a plurality of communities,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> For more details see Sunil Bastian (ed.), Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1994; K.M. de Silva, 'The Making of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the Final Phase: June–July 1987' in K.M. de Silva and S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe (eds), Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict, London and New York, 1993, pp. 112–55.

rather than those of individuals or of a majority and a single minority, was the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution that was an integral part of this accord. According to the provincial council scheme still in force today, legislative and executive authority is devolved to eight provincial councils elected on the basis of proportional representation. Each province has a governor who is appointed by the president. The governor in turn appoints the member who will head the board of ministers. The subjects and functions devolved on the provincial councils include police and public order, provincial planning, local government, provincial housing and construction, agriculture and agrarian services, rural development, health, indigenous medicine, cooperatives and irrigation. The centre still has authority in areas such as defence and national security, foreign affairs, post and telecommunications, broadcasting, television, justice, foreign trade and commerce, ports and harbours, aviation, national transport, minerals and mines and elections. The powers of the centre are defined in the Reserve List. National policy on all subjects and functions shall belong to the centre. The residual powers are also vested in the centre. The provincial councils were to be financed through direct grants from the centre, a limited form of taxation, and revenue-sharing arrangements. A Finance Commission would make recommendations regarding allocation and apportionment of funds.

From the beginning, the provincial council system was in difficulty because of the opposition it met from both the LTTE, the dominant politico-military formation in the North-East which denounced the lack of real power devolved to the provinces, and the JVP, the radical youth movement in the South that saw the provincial councils as a structure imposed by an interventionist Indian government.<sup>61</sup> When elections to the provincial councils were held in April and June 1988 the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the main opposition party, did not participate. Elections to the North East Provincial Council were marred by difficulties owing to the LTTE opposition. Thus, owing to historical circumstances, the provincial councils suffered from their very inception. The absence of compromise at the centre contributed to the further downgrading of the powers of the provincial councils. Indeed the Republican Constitution still affirmed the unitary nature of the state. The assumption was that the central government, dominated by the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> See chapters 6 and 7 of this book for details on the opposition of the JVP and the LTTE.

executive presidency and the parliament, was the prime actor in this framework.

In the decade that followed there were encroachments on the scheme of devolution. In 1991 a bill giving extensive powers to the centre to frame policy regarding transport, including a commitment to private sector involvement rather than encouragement to state institutions, clearly undermined the powers vested in the provinces to legislate on the regulation of surface transport. The position of the governor by virtue of the Provincial Councils Act of 1987 was equated with that of a minister of finance of the province, in complete contradiction to the spirit of the Thirteenth Amendment. Even provisions such as the creation of a provincial police have not been implemented. In 1992 the creation of a new tier in public administration, divisional secretaries who perform functions within the limits of the province, further strengthened the hand of the centre. <sup>62</sup>

There has been some ambivalence on the part of the judiciary regarding the principle and specifics of power sharing. The constitutional scheme itself was a theatre of dissension. Four judges out of nine in the Supreme Court held the view that the scheme violated the unitary character of the state. On a number of occasions the court has had to act as arbiter between the centre and the provinces. On the whole the courts tended to uphold the centre's legislative powers, sometimes adopting an even more extreme position than the state. In 1990, when legislation was introduced to provide for the dissolution of a provincial council by the president on the mere report of a governor, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the amendment. However, since 1993 there seems to have been a change in the judicial trend. That year, at the provincial council elections in the North-Western and Southern Provinces, no party gained a majority. The subsequent appointment by the governors of two chief ministers from the UNP was challenged before the Court of Appeal which referred the case to the Supreme Court. In this instance the Supreme Court developed the principle of judicial review of the exercise of the discretion of the governor, thus assigning the judiciary a role in the interpretation of the chapter on devolution in the Constitution. In 1995 the Court of Appeal declared that the dissolutions of the North Central and Sabaragamuwa Provincial Councils were contrary to article 154 (B) (c) and made them null and void. More recently in 1998 the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Neelan Tiruchelvam, 'The Politics of Federalism and Diversity in Sri Lanka' in Yash Ghai (ed.), Autonomy and Ethnicity, pp. 197–218.

Supreme Court had to consider the constitutionality of the delay in holding elections to five provincial councils. It eventually pointed out that the Constitution required prompt elections: 'To hold otherwise would be to devalue the devolution of power'.<sup>63</sup>

The creation of provincial councils was initiated by the state with little drive from the provinces. For the past two decades they have been functioning *nolens volens* but are little more than institutions of political patronage. Partisan allocation of public resources and state intervention have paralysed the provincial councils in the South. The North-Eastern Provincial Council has been administered for the past ten years by the central government through a governor. The Council was dissolved in 1990 after three years of functioning. The uncertainties in the peace process and the *de facto* LTTE control of large expanses of land in the North and East have given the state reasons to postpone the holding of elections.

# From Draft Constitution 2000 to open-ended peace

In 1994 the United National Party lost the elections to the People's Alliance, a conglomeration of left, left-of-centre and minority parties. The new government put forward a vision that encompassed human values at least at the declaratory level. The election manifesto of the People's Alliance in the parliamentary elections of 1994 contained in its very title an understanding of the ideal society that incorporated the concerns of peoples in the South as well as in the North and East: 'For a secure prosperous society where human values reign, devoid of corruption and terror.' In this formulation it was society and not the state that had to be secure, the emphasis having shifted from the state and a dominant concern for national security to a focus on civil society. In the manifesto the three main aims of the People's Alliance underlined a 'liberal democratic' approach to rights and suggested the vital national values that must be protected: freedom to live in a humane society; a free and democratic society with law and order; and rapid and sustainable economic development. 65

<sup>63</sup> Cited in ibid., p. 210.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> For an insider's view of the North Eastern Provincial Council see Dayan Jayatilleka, *The Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka*, 1987–1990: The North-East Provincial Council and Devolution of Power, Kandy, 1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Election Manifesto of the People's Alliance, 1994, ICES Election Literature Collection.

After the People's Alliance captured power and formed a government, its leader, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, won the presidential elections. The new government showed at the outset some eagerness to introduce liberal-democratic ideas into society through constitutional means as well as through efforts to involve civil society in governance.

# Constitutional responses

One of the promises of the new government was to transform Sri Lanka's 1978 Constitution into a liberal-democratic constitution that would protect the freedom of the individual while recognising community rights. Three types of reforms were apparent in the proposals enunciated since 1995: first, provisions directed at democratising the institutions of the state; secondly, provisions to strengthen fundamental rights and the institutional safeguards of rights and justice in the judiciary; and thirdly, provisions to increase the mechanisms for power sharing between the centre and the regions and within the regions themselves. <sup>66</sup> The idea was to solve the problems in the South—corruption, poverty, lack of economic drive, inequalities—while at the same time creating a framework of power sharing with the North and East.

The proposals for constitutional reform released on 3 August 1995 redefined the nature of the state as a 'union of regions'. Sri Lanka remained a 'united and sovereign Republic'. In the 1996 legal text the Republic was described as 'an indissoluble Union of Regions' and in the draft constitution presented to Parliament on 3 August 2000 the Republic was 'one, free, sovereign and independent State consisting of the institutions of the Centre and of the Regions which shall exercise power as laid down in the draft Constitution'. Power sharing was clearly recognised in the existence of two orders of government, at the national and the regional level, and in the distribution of legislative and executive authority and the allocation of revenue resources between the national and the regional orders of government; while the checks in place, to make provisions on devolution virtually unalterable without the consent of the region concerned, show a definite concern for a different approach to minority aspirations. Deepening the process initiated with the Thirteenth Amendment, the draft constitution

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Dinusha Panditaratne and Pradeep Ratnam (eds), Draft Constitution of Sri Lanka—Critical Aspects, Colombo, 1998.

sought to give real power to specific communities by means of a devolution of power to all regions. This contrasted with the post-independence strategy of bestowing rights upon state-demarcated minorities. According to some authors the nature of the power sharing constituted a paradigm shift. But in some respects the draft constitution appears to have not gone far enough. One area criticised was the provision of an arbitral tribunal to be established in the case of a dispute between a regional administration and the central government, instead of the provision for a judicial resolution of disputes. Another criticism was the absence of a Second Chamber providing for the representation of regional views. <sup>67</sup> A marked departure from the constitutional history of Sri Lanka was the constitutional recognition of the Supreme Council of the Maha Sangha and of the practice of seeking its advice on any matter concerning the state.

The LTTE rejected the package of proposals in 1996. Anton Balasingham is reported to have stated that they were 'limited and inadequate, failing to address the political aspirations of our people'.<sup>68</sup>

While the draft constitution was a bold attempt to find new state forms to accommodate different forms of diversity, it remained set in the liberal-democratic framework where rights were more important than citizens' participation. The framers of the draft claimed that freedom was the highest good and that a rational social order dedicated to principles of justice had to strive to realise them.<sup>69</sup> That men and women can aspire to freedom only to the extent that their basic needs are met was not sufficiently taken into consideration. Although Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties were enunciated in Chapter VI they did not confer or impose legal rights or obligations and were not enforceable in any court or tribunal. Basic needs that encompassed the social goods that were essential to human subsistence—food, clothing, housing, medical care, and schooling-although mentioned, were not emphasised, as they are for instance in the directive principles of the state in the Indian Constitution. 70

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> N. Tiruchelvam in Yash Ghai (ed.), Autonomy and Ethnicity, pp. 210-14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Cited in S.L. Gunasekere, A Tragedy of Errors: About Tigers, Talks, Ceasefires and the Proposed Constitution, Kelaniya, 2001, p. 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Cambridge, MA, 1971.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Christian Bay in 'Conceptions of Security: Individual, National and Global' in Bhikku Parekh and Thomas Pantham (eds), *Political Discourse: Explorations* 

In the area of rights, however, it must be conceded the draft constitution aimed at rectifying a number of deficiencies of the present Constitution. Although the right to life, liberty and security of person was expressly stated in Chapter 6 of the 1972 Constitution, there was no comparable provision in the 1978 Constitution. The present Constitution did not treat the various fundamental rights as absolute, but made them subject to the limitations stated in Article 15. National security, racial and religious harmony, parliamentary privilege, contempt of court, defamation, public health and morality were among the recognised grounds for imposing restrictions on fundamental rights.<sup>71</sup>

In the draft constitution the right to life was an important departure from the 1978 Constitution. Although security was conspicuously absent as a fundamental right, the draft constitution, which strengthened democratic institutions and provided an enhanced protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, implicitly acknowledged the importance of security.<sup>72</sup> However, the draft was typically liberal in that it diluted central power and the responsibilities of the central power towards the citizens.<sup>73</sup>

It is difficult to fathom whether these fundamental rights enshrined in the draft constitution, applicable to all citizens and hence also to citizens belonging to minority communities, together with power sharing arrangements between the state and the centre, would ensure that minority communities—Tamils, Estate Tamils, Muslims, and smaller minorities such as Catholics, Christians and Burghers—feel secure again in the state in which they are fully fledged citizens.

in Indian and Western Political Thought, New Delhi, 1987, p. 129 has argued in an absorbing article that security is the poor person's freedom. He goes on to say: 'For people who are heavily oppressed, whether by political design or economic circumstances, or both, their measure of individual security determines the size of their limited space for freedom of choice.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> R.K.W. Goonesekere, Fundamental Rights and the Constitution: A Case Book, Colombo, 1988.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Daily News, 27 March 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> It is generally accepted that the political package for devolution of power— a plan that entails the division of the country into seven regions—was drafted as a political solution to the ethnic conflict by a team spearheaded by G.L. Peiris, former Professor of Law and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, with special input by the late Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam, member of Parliament and director of the International Center for Ethnic Studies.

Minorities within minorities. The First Schedule of the draft constitution listed the nine regions: Western, Central, Southern, North Central, North Western, Sabaragamuwa, Uva, Northern and Eastern. The Northern and Eastern regions in the draft constitution were to be administered by an interim council and after ten years a referendum would be held for or against the merger. In the event of a referendum not being held after ten years, the Northern and Eastern Provinces were automatically to remain two separate regions. Critics denounced the referendum as a 'cosmetic exercise' and highlighted the central state's abdication of its responsibilities towards the Muslim and Sinhala communities in a merged North and East where the Tamil community would constitute 70 per cent of the population.<sup>74</sup>

The difficulties that modern constitutionalism faces in accommodating multiple and distinct forms of belonging to the community, the region and the nation were reflected in the tensions released by debates on the draft constitution. One of the questions that arose was the place of minorities within these regional units. Sri Lanka Muslims redefined their strategy regarding minority rights when the secessionist war began in the North and East. The displacement of large numbers of Muslim families and their relocation in refugee camps, the forcible eviction of Muslim communities by the LTTE from the North, and the repeated massacre of Muslim villagers in conflict areas have created new tensions between Tamils and Muslims. The LTTE was responsible for four massacres of Muslims in the Batticaloa district between 1987 and 1990. The sense of insecurity among Muslims became so great they made demands that went far beyond the rights discourse of the previous decades. The right to self-protection with the creation of a Muslim unit in the Sri Lanka armed forces and the arming of Muslim youth were demands that could be read as a significant departure from the strategies of the earlier decades.

The Sri Lanka Muslims also redefined their rights with respect to the new constitutional schemes put forward after 1995. Arguing that the ethnic conflict was no longer a purely Sinhala-Tamil affair, but in many ways affected the Muslims too, leaders of the Sri Lanka Muslims questioned the political structure that Muslims should obtain as a significant regional minority (one third of the population) in the Eastern Province. Muslim leaders were opposed to the idea of a merger between the Eastern and Northern Provinces,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> S.L. Gunasekere, A Tragedy of Errors, pp. 44-66.

which would in their view reduce their strength from 33 per cent to 17 per cent, making them an 'insignificant political minority'.<sup>75</sup>

In August 2000 the set of proposals, further reconditioned after extensive deliberations by a Parliamentary Select Committee, was presented to Parliament in the form of a 'Bill to Repeal and Replace the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka' (Bill No. 372). The Bill was debated for three days amidst mounting public opposition until the debate was suspended sine die. The bill died a natural death with the dissolution of Parliament on 18 August 2000. In December, after the general election, the United National Front (consisting of the UNP, defecting People's Alliance MPs and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress) was elected to power. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe quickly initiated a new round of peace negotiations based around a reinvigorated peace process with Norwegian mediation. Unlike in the previous attempts, cessation of hostilities in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the government and the LTTE preceded discussions over constitutional arrangements. While a revised version of the draft constitution remains as one power sharing option, other possibilities are being discussed, including the Indian federalism model. However, the context changed in 2005 owing to regime change and the tsunami of 26 December 2004, the worst natural disaster that has ever befallen Sri Lanka. In 2004 the SLFP and JVP coalition was voted into power by forces hostile to the UNP's conciliatory moves towards the LTTE. A few months later when the tsunami struck the island Sri Lanka was still in a no war/no peace situation. Thirteen of the twenty-five districts of the country were hit taking the entire country by surprise. Nearly 30,000 people died and thousands were made homeless, and there was severe physical damage to roads and infrastructure. The Sri Lanka government estimated the costs of reconstruction at 3.5 billion dollars. The people of the country first, then foreign governments and multilateral aid agencies responded with pledges of large sums of money towards the reconstruction of the devastated areas. There was a brief window of opportunity when the peoples of all ethnic groups shared their grief and displayed solidarity, but it dissipated fast. The tsunami was not a transforming moment but rather intensified existing political processes. Once again the fragility of a peace process based on a bi-polar model of conflict where the LTTE and the Sri Lanka government were the only play-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> M.H.M. Ashraff, cited in J. Uyangoda, *Questions of Minority Rights*, p. 129.

ers was exposed. In June 2005 the Sri Lanka government signed a Memorandum of Under-standing for aid distribution to tsunami disaster areas, giving the LTTE wide powers in the North and East. In the East the conflict was clearly multipolar: in March 2004 the LTTE command under Colonel Karuna had broken off from Prabhakaran's hold, and there were, even more crucially, the Muslim and Sinhala communities in the East that each formed one-third of the population and whose rights needed to be protected. For the LTTE the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (PTOMs) appeared critical for it to re-establish its authority and legitimacy in the troubled Eastern province. For the government the joint mechanism had the potential to become a peace bridge. But over the disbursement of aid as well as over eventual self-rule for the Tamils the southern polity was fractured. The coalition partner in the government—the radical nationalist JVP and the Jathika Hela Urumaya, a Buddhist religious party represented in parliament, mounted a powerful campaign against what they perceived as a betrayal of the Sinhala people. They called for the disarming of the LTTE and for the opening of the political space in the North and East to non-LTTE actors. The JVP eventually left the government in protest.

In the post-independence years the state adopted the framework of entitlements for communities that had prevailed throughout in the colonial modes of representation and gave it a new garb through the discourse of rights. The focus on rights in fact privileged the two larger communities, Sinhalas and Tamils. Caste, in particular as opposed to ethnicity, was not given acceptance as a legitimate sphere of political action and mobilisation. There has been in fact a clear denial and delegitimisation of caste based discourses and practices against inequality and injustice, even in the discourse of multiculturalism. The draft constitution that was put forward and then shelved constituted a bold attempt at a more sensitive approach to group rights. However, it rested on the assumption that the multiple identities that existed in the nationstate were fixed and stable, and were therefore a possible basis for territorially determined strategies of power-sharing: a Muslim is a Muslim, a Tamil a Tamil and a Sinhala a Sinhala. On this basis, for instance, the Eastern Province was to be carved into enclaves.

If one accepts that all identities are forms of identification, and that a social agent must be conceived not as a unitary subject but as the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, the formation of ethnic enclaves is troubling. The curse of multiculturalism

is that while providing for more freedom and recognition to the group or community it is a closure in that it denies the contingency and ambiguity of every identity. Multiculturalism cannot help but essentialise the fragment. Turning towards the citizen is a possible way out of the impasse. The citizen is not only a legal subject; s/he is also the part owner of political sovereignty. He or she, with other citizens in a political collectivity, has a supreme duty which is of choosing those who will govern and represent the community. The draft constitution presented to Parliament in 2000 gave the notion of citizenship a renewed boost with its clause that rendered null and void the difference between Citizen by Descent and Registered Citizen (Chapter V). In the same way, the fourth principle enunciated at the Thimpu Talks of 1985 by the Tamil delegation called for 'The recognition of the right to citizenship and the fundamental rights of all Tamils in Ceylon'. The challenge today is to revitalise citizenship as an alternative to multiculturalism in a way that reaches further than legal rights and entitlements, within a state structure that recognises multiple identities through multiple acts of identification. This would mean acknowledging the limits of pluralism by accepting the fact that all differences cannot be accepted, and devising criteria to determine what is admissible and what is not.

THE LEFT MOVEMENT AND INSURRECTIONS

# THE SEARCH FOR EQUALITY

A combatant's itinerary

The life of a JVP leader of lower rank, Nimal Maharage, who gave evidence before the Criminal Justice Commission on 17 October 1973 not only evokes the trajectory of many young radicals from traditional Leftist politics to insurrection, it also exemplifies the perception shared by many, of traditional leftist parties as parties that betrayed the trust of the people. Maharage became, as a schoolboy, a member of the Communist Party, attending meetings held by Pieter Keuneman as well as party classes. By 1963 his commitment had grown to a point that he abandoned his studies to work for the CP on a fulltime basis. He continued to attend classes given by national leaders such as Bernard Soysa and Leslie Goonewardene. But his hopes of a social revolution were soon shattered following the entry of three LSSP members into Mrs Bandaranaike's cabinet in 1964. He realised sadly that left leaders were no different from other power seeking politicians. He was further disillusioned with the left when Philip Gunawardena's MEP joined forces with the conservative UNP and when, internationally,

the Russia–China split occurred. In 1968, still in search of a means of transformative politics, Maharage established contacts with the China-wing Communists led by Shanmugathasan and began to follow their classes. Sacked from the factory he was working in, for attempting to form a trade union, he was then drawn, like many of his China-wing comrades, towards a new force, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna.

Source Janice Jiggins, Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese, 1947–1976, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 137–8.

"...the leftist movement which was born on the 18th December 1935 was social reformist in origin... This was the beginning of a tragedy. It was the birth of a series of betrayals, flights, enmities and destruction of hope."

-Vimukthi, 19701

# The left in Sri Lanka

At independence Sri Lanka's left represented to many a vibrant and growing alternative to the conservative forces of the United National Party. The live wires were the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the oldest existing political party in Sri Lanka, and smaller Marxist parties. Two forces, both populist in nature, prevented the parliamentary left from playing a significant role in the politics of the second half of the century. First, the emergence of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), a party predominantly Sinhala and non-Marxist but with socialist leanings, not only robbed the LSSP and other Marxist parties of any hope of capturing power but spawned stagnation and decline in their strength and influence. Secondly, the left was overrun from the 1970s by the radical/populist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), which drew the youth in the South into two violent insurrections that were ruthlessly put down by the state. Criss-crossing these two movements and feeding them with grassroots support were the Dharmapalite anti-imperialist monks associated with the Vidyalankara Pirivena of the 1940s and their ideological children in the following decades. The changing position of Buddhist monks in politics, from bearers of Marxist ideals in the late 1940s to champions of Sinhala nationalism from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Vimukthi, 20 Jan. 1970.

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the mid-1950s, has been described as encapsulating both the 'flowering and the destruction of the socialist movement'.<sup>2</sup>

Today the traditional left barely exists while the once revolutionary JVP-ers have entered Parliament and hold a balance of seats between the two main parties, the UNP and SLFP. The political history of the left in twentieth-century Sri Lanka can thus be charted in terms of a gradual demise of the 'old left' and the rise of a 'New Left' with an insurrectionary, violent and uncompromising lineage.<sup>3</sup> It is not sufficient to assert that the old Left failed because of its own internal divisions. The trajectory of the left, as movement and as idea, can also be read as the gradual decline in ideological terms of a democratic and secular project unable to sustain the assault of the hegemonic forces of Sinhala Buddhist exclusivism.

# The left movement: origins

A significant feature of the left in Sri Lanka is its relatively late beginning, as compared to its counterparts in other Asian and African countries. While a well organised Communist Party emerged in India in the early 1920s it was not until twenty years later that a Communist Party was created in Sri Lanka. The creation of other left parties such as the Labour Party and the LSSP

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, Chicago, 1999, p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> There has been until now no serious study of the left movement in Sri Lanka that surveys its evolution in the last fifty years. Much information has to be gleaned from general accounts that cover the entire or parts of these fifty years, such as K.M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka, London, 1981; K.M. de Silva, Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1998; and Robert N. Kearney, The Politics of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Ithaca and London, 1973, which covers the period up to 1971. Other sources are W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation, Princeton, 1960; A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka 1947-1979, London, 1979; James Jupp, Sri Lanka, Third World Democracy, London, 1978; Jagath Senaratne, Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977-1990: Riots, Insurrections, Counterinsurgencies, Foreign Intervention, Amsterdam, 1997. There are also histories of separate parties such as Y. Ranjith Amerasinghe, Revolutionary Idealism and Parliamentary Politics: A Study of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2000, and Rohan Gunaratna, Sri Lanka, a Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the TVP, Kandy, 1990; and biographies of prominent left-wingers such as N. Sanmugathasan, Political Memoirs of an Unrepentant Communist, Colombo, 1989 and Hector Abhayavardhana, Selected Writings, Colombo, 2001.

was linked to very specific events: the 1931 State Council elections for the former and the 1936 elections for the latter.

The first progressive left organisations grew out of the need of the urban and plantation working classes for representatives who had no class links with or interests in the export economy. Indeed, in the mid-twentieth century three crops—tea, rubber and coconut—accounted for 90 per cent of the total export value and virtually dominated the economy. Tea estates were mainly in the hands of British capital and the marketing of tea was dominated by British commercial firms. The major part of the working class was consequently made up of plantation labour while the urban working class, consisting essentially of Sinhalese workers, was concentrated in the transport sector. However, in the cities there was a largely

unskilled segment of Indian workers—mainly Malayalees—engaged in sanitation, street cleaning etc.

The native elite that had entered the State Council in 1931 and was officiating over a trouble-free transfer of power had close links with the export-oriented sector of the economy, especially in the areas of coconut and rubber. Its members were therefore cautious in their attitude towards reforming the economic system and voicing the concerns of the people.<sup>4</sup> In this context other parties and organisations emerged with the promise that they would represent the interests of the working class.<sup>5</sup>

The Labour Party. The Labour Party's origin can be traced to the trade union movement that was closely linked with the revivalists and temperance workers. The Young Lanka League was the most radical outfit in the political field and the champion of a new and more radical unionism. A.E. Goonesinha emerged as its first leader of consequence. He was a product of Theosophist schools, and had worked as a railway clerk and later as a journalist on *The Searchlight*. As a young man he took to social work and helped form a Servants of Lanka Society modelled on Gokhale's society in India. Anagarika Dharmapala was a significant example to him, but it was the influence of foreign nationalist movements and radical Indians that led him to critique the leadership of the nationalist movement in Sri

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> C.R. de Silva, Sri Lanka: A History, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 220–4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The origins of the left movement have been generally well covered by a range of studies: G.J. Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*, Stanford, 1968; K. Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, Colombo, 1972, Y. Ranjith Amerasinghe, *Revolutionary Idealism*.

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Lanka. His period in jail after the 1915 riots embittered him further against colonial rule and soon he imposed himself as the most militant and active leader of the Young Lanka League.<sup>6</sup>

The growth of the workers' movement over a period of forty years has been vividly described by a worker, P. Serasinghe, who was closely involved in labour politics from its inception. Serasinghe describes A.E. Goonesinha's creation in 1922 of the Ceylon Labour Union in Colombo, which commanded the support of the majority of the working class in the city. He gives a vivid description of a May Day rally when Goonesinha had workers walk in procession wearing leaves and with painted faces to express the oppression under which the working class lived.8 The general strike Goonesinha spearheaded in 1923 was followed by a number of other successful strikes. During the 1920s working class agitation centred on winning for the Ceylonese workers the statutory benefits enjoyed by immigrant labour in the plantations. Goonesinha affiliated his party to the once reviled Ceylon National Congress in 1922, thus forming a powerful radical wing, and during the following years pressed for the adoption of Gandhian tactics by Congress. His admiration of the Indian struggle and his frequent visits to India may have alerted British officials to the danger of letting such a movement swamp the moderate leaders of Congress. The 1920s also witnessed the beginnings of the plantation labour's new assertiveness championed by K. Natesa Aiyer.9

A.E. Goonesinha's movement was in many ways a victim of democracy and the logic of representation. In the late 1920s he staged successful strikes, and in 1928 he formed a new party called the Ceylon Labour Party on the model of the British Labour Party, which indulged in scathing attacks on his one-time allies, the leaders of the Ceylon National Congress. The 'doctrinaire leaders' of the CNC were, in the last resort, much more acceptable partners for the British. Goonesinha had the support of the urban workers, but if the vote was extended further, the rural electorate would swamp the importance of this power base. It is possible that the Donoughmore Commissioners, in accord with the view prevailing at the Colonial Office, found universal suffrage an adequate device

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> K. Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement*, pp. 234–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> P. Serasinghe, A Forty Year History of Government Workers, 1940–1980 (in Sinhala), Colombo, 1987.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> K. Jayawardena, The Rise of the Labour Movement, pp. 241–53.

to reinforce, at the expense of Goonesinha, the power of the moderates of the CNC, many of whom were rural notables. <sup>10</sup> Universal suffrage dealt a deadly blow to the Labour Party; in the 1931 State Council it held three seats out of fifty.

The left movement of this period can be characterised as radical and secular, more concerned with nationalist issues than with religious uplift, and anti-colonial in nature. The short life of the Labour Party was, however, the only instance in pre-independence Sri Lanka of a left organisation adopting an openly anti-colonial stand that went beyond rhetoric. It suffered mainly from its focus on urban labour and lack of appeal to the majority of rural people. In the rural areas the conditions of villagers were becoming the concern of young and idealist monks inspired by Anagarika Dharmapala's message of economic regeneration.

Buddhist monks and rural development in the 1930s. Many young monks came from their villages to study at one of the seats of monastic learning in the city of Colombo, Vidyodaya Pirivena and Vidyalankara Pirivena. At Vidyodaya some of Anagarika Dharmapala's ideas of the monks' duty to regenerate the village and help create an ideal village community were expounded. Universal suffrage had given the rural majority a new importance and urban based politicians found in city educated monks ideal emissaries and intermediaries to implement their programmes of work in their constituencies. The Gramasamvardhana (Rural Development) Movement brought together city elites and rural monks striving for different goals ranging from electoral gain to a sincere and humanist interest in uplifting the lot of the peasantry.

Politics and ideology rarely entered the social programme of monks such as Kalukondayave Pannasekhara, allegedly the founder of the Rural Development Movement. In his 99-point manifesto of Rural Development he defined a new pastoralism for the monk. The movement was launched in 1933 in Hevagam Korale, in the Colombo district where his own native monastery was located. He then travelled throughout the country explaining his ideas for eradicating crime, alcoholism, disharmony and poverty. More than the elite urban-based politicians, whose concern for the 'people' was related to the call of universal suffrage, monks such as Kalukondayave, Hinatiyana Dhammaloka and Hendiyagala Silaratna

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nira Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1995, p. 82.

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and their followers developed a close contact with common people whose needs they understood. Through sermons in villages, and published sermons in Sinhala papers such as *Silumina* or in leaflets, they emphasised ethical conduct as an answer to day to day problems in a manner that common people could understand. The purpose was to free the peasants from the ritualism, festivity and emotionalism that formed the core of 'folk Buddhism'.<sup>11</sup>

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party. The economic depression that hit Europe and the United States in the 1930s impacted on Ceylon's colonial economy a few years later. There was a drastic fall in the prices of Ceylon's main exports. The plantation sector and related industries were badly hit. The closure of many tea and rubber plantations led to a decline in economic activity in Colombo and the retrenchment of labour by government departments and private firms. There was extreme poverty in rural areas too, especially in Kalutara, Galle and Matara where the coir industry had collapsed and where many families owned either extremely small shares of land or none at all. The dry zone and fishing villages too were subject to recurring malaria and extreme weather conditions, and people were often close to destitution. In suburban areas the depression in the towns caused depression outside the town limits.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) was formed in December 1935 by twenty founding members, most of whom were Ceylonese students who had absorbed Marxist ideas abroad, in England or in the United States. <sup>14</sup> The political careers of men such as Philip Gunawardene, S.A. Wickremasinghe, N.M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene began in 1932 when they took over the Youth League movement and radicalised the protest against the sale of poppies on Remembrance Day, promoting instead the sale of the *suriya* (hibiscus) flower. Few people remember that a woman, Selina Perera, a graduate of the University of London, became a founder member of the LSSP in December 1935 and was its treasurer. <sup>15</sup> The Suriya Mal campaign soon became less con-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, chapter 3, pp. 56–129.

K. Jayawardena, Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1990, p. 44.
 Report on the Proposals to Introduce Statutory Relief in Ceylon, 1934, p. 4, SP VII, 1947.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Philip Gunawardena had learnt his Marxism at the University of Wisconsin and in New York.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Nelufer de Mel, Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2001, p. 27.

cerned with the fate of local ex-servicemen and more with national issues. The movement was explicitly declared as collecting money to promote the cause of national independence 'by giving scholarships for poor students, translating books into Sinhalese and Tamil, and encouraging local industries'.<sup>16</sup>

The socialists who now controlled the Suriya Mal movement strove to establish links with common people. The malaria epidemic of 1934–5 provided an occasion for them to display their commitment to the welfare of the poorer sections of the people whose precarious life H.E. Newnham had described:

...the specially dangerous feature of the domestic economy of many of the people is the lack of any reserve at the back of this low standard of diet. They are brought very near to starvation point by any small disturbance of their normal equilibrium... Then the morning meal may be reduced to a small quantity of weak plain tea with a suspicion of sugar...the midday meal becomes a small quantity of boiled breadfruit, jak, papaw or some jungle fruit.<sup>17</sup>

The socialists tirelessly engaged in relief operations in the badly affected areas in the Western and Sabaragamuwa Provinces, providing basic food and medical care. Their concern contrasted with the lack of interest displayed by the colonial government towards the victims of the epidemic. Many Buddhist monks involved in rural development played a role during the epidemic. Hinatiyana for instance established temporary hospitals in the badly affected Kegalle district. Kalukondayave used radio sermons to solicit help for the sick.<sup>18</sup> In 1935, in anticipation of the 1936 State Council elections, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) was formed, with Colvin R. de Silva as President and Vernon Gunasekera as Secretary. From the outset there were close links with the Jaffna Youth Congress, with some of its members such as P. Nagalingam, K. Tharmakulasingham, V. Sittampalam and V. Satchithanandam joining the LSSP and others supporting it. The Youth Congress, although it shared with the LSSP a deeply rooted anti-imperialist sentiment, was influenced by the Gandhian movement. It did not pave the way for the emergence of a Marxist left in Jaffna.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Y. Ranjith Amarasinghe, Revolutionary Idealism, pp. 13–14.

<sup>17 &#</sup>x27;Report of the Commissioner for Relief of Distress due to Sickness and Shortage of Food 1936', p. 6 in SP VII, 1947, Report of the Commission on Social Services.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, p. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Santasilan Kadirgamar, 'The Left Tradition in Lankan Tamil Politics'

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The LSSP's manifesto was very critical of the elected members of the first State Council who were all representatives of the 'oppressing classes'. They had done little to address the pressing issues of poverty, unemployment and disease faced by the people, except for a few legislative advances such as the Trade Union ordinance of 1935, which was a step forward in protecting trade unions from actions of tort.<sup>20</sup> The Lanka Sama Samaja Party was determined to offer an alternative by taking part in the 1936 elections.

Clearly the LSSP was never a revolutionary party. Created with the purpose of contesting elections, it has been likened to the left wing of the Indian National Congress. The LSSP leaders were in the words of one of their critics 'the Nehrus and Boses of Ceylon'. <sup>21</sup> Indeed their wealth and family background—landowners or urban professionals—were very similar.

Despite this, during the campaign, the Sama Samajists were considered a threat by all sides. The Roman Catholics appealed to the government to crush them. The CNC declared itself the only party capable of combating 'the growth of Communism' in Ceylon. The Labour Party, which Colvin R. de Silva had called 'a public entertainment', saw in the LSSP a potentially serious rival to its monopoly of the urban working class support. The Labour Party press was in fact very virulent in its attack on the Sama Samajists, particularly regarding their ambiguous attitude towards religion.<sup>22</sup>

The LSSP contested four seats. It won the two seats of Avissawella and Ruwanwella and polled over 37 per cent in the two constituencies it lost. The two elected members, Philip Gunawardena and N.M. Perera, used the platform of the State Council to spread their views on social reform. The party also launched its own newspaper, the *Samasamajaya*, and a Tamil version, the *Samatharman*, two years later. The LSSP's claim to have brought political discussion to the common people in their own language is exemplified in the usage of terms such as *sama samaja*, the term used as the party's name and meaning socialism (literally 'equal society'), and the adoption of words such as *panthiya* and *pakshaya* for class and party. The

in Rajan Philips (ed.), Sri Lanka: Global Challenges and National Crises. Proceedings of the Hector Abhayavardhana Felicitation Symposium, Colombo, 2001, pp. 265–94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> L.A. Wickremaratne, 'The Emergence of Welfare Policy, 1931–1948' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *History of Ceylon*, vol. III, Peradeniya, 1973, p. 480.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> N. Sanmugathasan, *Political Memoirs*, p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> N. Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics*, pp. 112–13.

impact of the left went beyond the constituencies it strove to represent and entered the general political rhetoric of the nation.<sup>23</sup>

Their vision was modernising—Japan was often hailed as an example—and reformist. In the area of labour legislation, for instance, the LSSP campaigned for an eight-hour day and minimum wages. The need for modern manufacturing industries was also emphasised, together with the introduction of large-scale farming and the use of new techniques. Philip Gunawardena urged the Minister of Agriculture 'to think less of Parakramabahu and more of Henry Ford'. The LSSP departed from all other parties in its realisation that neither the country nor the people would gain if they clung to a dream of a nation of small peasant proprietors.

Throughout the 1930s the LSSP indefatigably denounced imperialism, using the State Council as a platform to voice their ideas. This was also a clear indication of their reformist rather than revolutionary stance. They took principled stands against the establishment of an army in Sri Lanka and against state sponsored celebrations for the coronation of the British king. The LSSP also attempted to create a rift between the conservative leaders of the nationalist movement and the colonial administration, but with little success. One such occasion arose with the colonial government's attempt in 1938 to increase the special powers of the governor. Although the moderate politicians initially suggested a boycott of Council proceedings, they eventually adopted a conciliatory position towards the colonial administration. 'The placid world' of the Ceylonese intelligentsia had however been disturbed.<sup>24</sup>

What became known as the 'Bracegirdle episode' exploded in 1938. More than any other single event it increased the confidence of the Sama Samajists and proved their organisational capability to the country at large. A young European apprentice planter, M.A.L. Bracegirdle, had become involved in the problem of plantation labour and gained the support of the LSSP. The Governor's order to expel him became the centre of a duel between the LSSP and the colonial government. At the forefront was the issue of individual freedom. The LSSP launched a massive campaign to canvass against the decision of the government. In this instance the State Councillors passed a resolution censuring the Governor for omitting to seek the advice of the acting Minister of Home Affairs. Finally the Supreme Court declared the order of expulsion invalid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Robert Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon*, p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Hector Abhayavardhana, Selected Writings, p. 185.

and Bracegirdle was released from detention. The LSSP had proved its organisational powers and its ability to muster support from radicals as well as moderates and to arouse mass enthusiasm.<sup>25</sup>

#### The war years

Regi Siriwardena's delightful account of his own experience with the LSSP during the war years gives a sense of what it meant to be a member at that time. 'It wasn't a party that you could join by filling a form, paying a membership fee or declaring your support for it. You had to be recruited into it, and this meant that the party organs had to be satisfied that you understood and accepted the party's political objectives, and that you could be relied on to participate actively in its work.'26 There was a galling cultural gulf between the English-speaking elite cadres or vanguard that ran the party and the Sinhalaand Tamil-speaking masses. The latter were limited in their readings to a translation of the Communist Manifesto, a summary of Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution and the party's paper and study classes. The Central Committee, later renamed the Regional Committee, had only a very small minority of worker members. Discussions were in English.<sup>27</sup> However, there were many worker and peasant members who reached out to the non-elite sections of the population.

In 1939 the executive committee of the LSSP passed a motion of no confidence in the Third International and expelled the Stalinist minority from the party. In November of the following year, a United Socialist Party (USP) was inaugurated by the Stalinist faction under the leadership of Dr S.A. Wickramasinghe. The USP succeeded to a certain extent in penetrating the trade union sector which was previously a stronghold of the Sama Samajists. In July 1943, following Stalin's dissolution of the Third International, a secret conference of USP leaders was held which decided to dissolve the party and form the Ceylon Communist Party. Among the founding members were the older group of LSSP members such as Dr S.A. Wickramasinghe, M.G. Mendis, the Rev. Saranankara and T. Duraisingham, reinforced by university graduates from the Ceylon University and Cambridge among whom P. Keuneman

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Y.R. Amarasinghe, *Revolutionary Idealism*, pp. 23–30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Regi Siriwardena, Working Underground: The LSSP in Wartime: A Memory of Happenings and Personalities, Colombo, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 36–7.

stood out.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1940s a rapprochement took place between the Communist Party and the Ceylon National Congress where young radicals were gradually taking control. In 1943 the CNC admitted the CP to its membership, thus demonstrating that the struggle for independence from British rule transcended class and ideological differences. D.S. Senanayake left the CNC in protest, a move viewed by some as carefully calculated. However, the CP and CNC differed fundamentally in their positions on minorities and the Indian immigration problem and the alliance would not survive after the end of the war.<sup>29</sup>

After the executive committee of the LSSP expelled the Stalinist minority from the party it adopted a revolutionary programme inspired by the Fourth International. One of the main issues was the policy to adopt towards the War. The LSSP encouraged revolutionary defeatism. In March 1940 some party members burned an effigy of the Governor on the Galle Face Green and Governor Caldecott was personally attacked in articles of the Samasamajaya, where he was called 'the rogue elephant' or 'the chief imperialist henchman'. In 1940, under the defence regulations, a number of members of the party were arrested and detained without trial. The party was forced to go underground. The reason for their arrest was probably labour unrest, especially the series of strikes that the LSSP had sponsored in the estate sector. Indeed, unlike the other unions—the Ceylon Workers Federation or the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union—the LSSP was not simply interested in advancing union rights. Although it pushed for economic rights such as a 75 cents minimum wage, it also projected a more political rhetoric that was unambiguously anti-capitalist.

The war years saw transformation from a radical mass party to a committed Trotskyist party with a cadre based organisation. Many future representatives started their political action during the period when the LSSP was banned. D.B. Wijesundere from Kiriella, who contested the 1960 elections on an LSSP ticket, had secretly distributed the *Samasamajaya* as a young man during the war years. During these years many future trade-union leaders too had established contacts with the LSSP. P. Serasinghe for instance,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> N. Sanmugathasan, *Political Memoirs*, p. 41, points out the Ceylon Communist Party established contacts with the Soviet Union only in 1956, after Stalin's death, and was more influenced by its Indian and British counterparts

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> N. Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics, pp. 176-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Samasamajaya, 8 March 1960, p. 4.

who joined the LSSP for three months before he took up employment as a government worker—assuming a leadership role in the union—acknowledges his debt to the LSSP.<sup>31</sup>

In early April 1942 the four Sama Samajist leaders detained in Bogambara jail—Colvin R. de Silva, N.M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena and Edmund Samarakoddy-managed to escape in a successfully planned and implemented operation. The jail guard absconded with them. Following the escape, a round-up of prominent members of the LSSP was ordered and the party was banned. On 14 April eleven second-line Sama Samajists, against whom warrants had been issued, were arrested, but the four escaped prisoners and the guard remained in hiding. Power was taken under defence regulations to attack the property of those evading detention. Some of the LSSP leaders fled to India where they helped form the Bolshevik Party of India. The second rung too were often compelled to leave their country. V. Karalasingham, who started his career in the labour union movement, fled to Calcutta where he immersed himself in revolutionary activities and as a result was even sentenced to three months' imprisonment. He remained the editor of the Bolshevik Party of India's weekly paper *People* until the mid-1950s.<sup>32</sup> In Ceylon, however, the role of the LSSP was temporarily diminished owing to government defence measures.<sup>33</sup>

However, during the mid-1940s there was another centre of Marxist anti-imperialism that the colonial government was less aware of: the Vidyalankara Pirivena had brought together a group of monks who, having followed Dharmapala to Calcutta, were exposed to Indian nationalism and other progressive ideas. They were in close touch with the LSSP and openly supported Marxism.<sup>34</sup>

#### Post-war social unrest—the 1946–7 strikes

In the years following the end of the War, the publication of the Soulbury Report and the subsequent framing of a Constitution, under which elections for a new Parliament were held, led to renewed political activity. The end of the artificial prosperity that had prevailed during the war years when troops were stationed in Ceylon, together with the announcement of future elections, cre-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> P. Serasinghe, A Forty Year History, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Samasamajaya, 19 Feb. 1960, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> N. Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics*, pp. 177–84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, p. 131.

ated conditions of social unrest throughout the island, instigated in the main by the three Marxist parties: the LSSP, the Communist Party of Ceylon formed in 1943 and the Bolshevik-Leninist Party formed in 1945 as another breakaway group of the LSSP.

Although the widely felt fear that the moderate leadership of the nationalist movement was being submerged by the left had no real substance, it had a double effect. First, it led the moderates of all ethnic groups to join hands and form the United National Party in April 1946; the UNP rallied all non-Marxist forces of all communities except the Tamil Congress. Second, it acted as a bargaining card for D.S. Senanayake, the leader of the State Council, to compel Whitehall to make a decisive statement regarding the status of Ceylon in order to reinforce the position of the moderates. Indeed, the British had no interest in seeing Ceylon ruled by what they considered 'extremists'.

Class politics made a shattering entry into the otherwise dormant political scene of post-war Ceylon. Unrest started in October 1946 with a bank clerks' strike led by the Ceylon Bank Clerks Union, which was close to A.E. Goonesinha. It then spread to government workers and municipal employees, paralysing the essential services. The government treated the strike as a major emergency. A strike committee, which included the leaders of all left-wing parties, was set up and was interpreted in official circles as a show of force. In addition to the strikes in Colombo there had been trouble on the estates. The hartal movement started as a general protest against the absence in the new Constitution of any assurance to the Indian population in Ceylon and against the restrictions of their economic and political freedom. The hartal was suspended but it acted as a warning to the Board of Ministers. The '1946 historical strike' was a victory for the working class who obtained a number of rights and concessions, among them a higher minimum wage, a pension scheme, 45 days' medical leave, religious and other holidays and accommodation or else accommodation allowances.35

At the beginning of 1947 agitation for an increase in wages among the government daily-paid workers reached another climax. The strike spread from motor and engineering firms to other sections of the private sector, government servants and clerical workers. The military was eventually called in and on 5 June the police opened fire on a crowd of strikers near Kolonnawa, killing one of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> P. Serasinghe, A Forty Year History, pp. 9–10.

them, a government clerk by the name of Kandasamy. After a month the strike was eventually defeated. The Marxist parties and trade unions did not at that time possess the organisation or the propaganda tools sufficient to stand up to the government forces arrayed against them.<sup>36</sup>

The 1947 elections. The general election of 1947 for Ceylon's First House of Representatives was the third election since the bestowal of universal suffrage by the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931. The main parties that contested the elections were the UNP, the LSSP, the BLP, the CP, the Labour Party, the CIC and the Tamil Congress. There were also two minor parties, Lanka Swaraj and the United Lanka Party. The 1947 elections were the first in which class conflict entered the political arena with the UNP-left duel in the Sinhalese areas of the country. The Lake House newspapers, the country's major newspapers, joined by the nationalist Sinhala Jatiya and Sinhala Bauddhaya (founded by Dharmapala), constituted the main forces opposed to Marxism. In the two decades preceding these elections numerous Buddhist societies—the Sri Sanandhara Society (Society for the Support of the Buddhist Priesthood), the Buddhagaya Defence League, and the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress were some of the main ones—had emerged as a response to the newly felt need for organising the largest religious community in the island. These developments prepared the terrain for bhikku involvement in politics.

The conservative forces were supported by the rural petite-bourgeoisie and many Vidyodaya monks who travelled around the countryside with a message of disaster should the Marxists capture power. Their campaign was strengthened by other publications such as posters and pamphlets that depicted the Marxists as antireligious and immoral.<sup>37</sup> There were for instance exaggerated accounts by some monks of Marxist 'terrorist' activities: the removal of the railway line in Jaffna, which had caused a number of deaths, was used as an example of the increase in crime for which the LSSP was responsible.<sup>38</sup> The same Reverend Maitreya urged all *bhikhus* to unite and begin a campaign against socialism

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> H.L. Seneviratne, The Work of Kings, p. 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> SLNA 51/A538, 'A Sugar Coated Pill' by Thera Ananda Maitreya of Balangoda, *Silumina*, 10 Aug. 1947.

as 'religious places will be burnt or turned into theatres, markets or beef stalls'.<sup>39</sup>

The left, with the help of Vidyalankara monks, had succeeded in winning over a significant number of radical Buddhists who believed socialism was not alien to the spirit of Buddhism as the sangha was a community in which private property was non-existent. In this context a number of texts that expressed the vision and programme of the political monks of Vidyalankara had been produced, among them the Declaration of the Vidyalankara Pirivena issued in 1946, written by Yakkaduve Pragnasara, which defined the vocation of the monk as social service. This was followed by Walpola Rahula's The Heritage of the Bhikku, which can be considered one of the most influential books for the monkhood in recent history. The newspaper Kalaya, Rahula's The History of Buddhism and Yakkaduwe Pragnarama's works were other contributions to this literature aimed at justifying the involvement of monks in social activism. The Declaration was also read as a declaration of hostility towards the conservative elite. This group responded by trying to enlist the support of the orthodox monastic groups in Kandy and to empower the Mahanayakas to derobe, fine and imprison the political monks. In response the Vidyalankara monks formed in May 1946 the Lanka Eksath Bhiksu Mandalaya (the United Bhikku Organisation of Lanka), which sought to engage every monk on the island in the politics of the country and played an important role in disseminating Marxist ideas to the rural elites. 40

There was hardly any unity among the left parties except in their common opposition to the Soulbury Constitution. The two Trotskyist parties, the LSSP and the BLP, urged the compulsory acquisition of estates covering more than 500 acres, their division among the landless, and the nationalisation of road transport, public utility companies and foreign trade. They differed over the immigration problem, but agreed with the CP on both Sinhala and Tamil being official languages.

The election results were a disappointment for the UNP which secured only 42 of 95 seats. The LSSP won ten seats, the BLP five, the CP three and Labour one. Left-wing parties, which secured 20.5 per cent of the votes, dominated the Low Country, from Colombo to the south-western coast to Matara at the southern tip. At the time the success of the left was explained as a result of the

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> H.L. Seneviratne, The Work of Kings, pp. 135-44.

post-war economic slump. There was also a caste dimension to the Marxist power base; the coastal fringe of the country contained a heavy concentration of the Karava, Salagama and Durava castes. In the constituencies of Panadura, Moratuwa and Kalutara, for example, the anti-UNP vote went ordinarily to the LSSP, which represented a force capable of disturbing the traditional social order. Karava plantation owners and men of property such as Wilmot A. Perera and Harold Peiris provided financial support to the Sama Samajist movement from the 1930s onwards. The Matara seat was won by the CP, allegedly with a strong Durava vote. In Sabaragamuwa Province the Goyigama vote went to the LSSP. The left made no headway in non-Sinhalese areas. <sup>41</sup> Interestingly the North was the only area where the LSSP scored fewer votes than its Marxist rivals.

The Independents secured twenty-one seats while the Tamil Congress and Ceylon Indian Congress had respectively seven and six. As the UNP had not secured a majority, anti-UNP forces gathered to try to form a government at what is known as the Yamuna conference. <sup>42</sup> But no agreement was reached and D.S. Senanayake lured enough Independents to form a cabinet. The left parties would never come closer to forming a government.

## The decline of the traditional left, 1950–70

The decades that immediately followed independence were a period of missed opportunities for the left parties. They entered the period as a divided group and were unable to reap the political benefit of working-class dissatisfaction with the status quo. Two inter-related events had a bearing on the future of the left. In the 1952 elections left parties lost half the seats they had gained in 1947. This led some currents of the left to adopt a more pragmatic attitude to parliamentary politics, while others sank deeper into ideological debates. The emergence of the SLFP as a populistcentrist party spelt the end of the possibility of the left forming a government on its own. Ten years after the Vidyalankara Declaration of Independence the seeds of the nationalist and socialist agenda propounded by the Vidyalankara monks had been sown far and wide. During these two decades the left parties failed to grasp the opportunity of transforming themselves into a wide reaching and popular social democratic party. Instead they splintered into fac-

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 228-43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> N. Sanmugathasan, *Political Memoirs*, p. 70.

tions and let the populist SLFP occupy the position of a left-ofcentre party.

## Disunity of the left

Disunity has been described as the 'malady of the entire Left movement'.<sup>43</sup> Indeed the two decades spanning from 1950 to 1970 witnessed only a few occasions of left unity: the 1953 *hartal* was one such occasion, the 1963 Joint United Front was another. However, these were rare instances. A few years earlier, in 1948–9, the left parties had displayed a degree of unity when they opposed the UNP government's legislation depriving the majority of Indian Tamils of citizenship and franchise rights. But throughout the 1950s the left was engaged in a process of division and combination along personal and ideological lines that weakened it internally and cast a shadow on its former popular appeal.

The main divide remained between the Trotskvist Sama Samajists and the pro-Soviet Communist Party. From 1945 there were two separate Sama Samajist political formations, the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party (BSP) led by Colvin R. de Silva and the larger LSSP led by Philip Gunawardena and N.M. Perera. These two parties had no fundamental differences except the LSSP, unlike the BSP, was concerned with broadening the organisational base of the party, while the BSP adopted a more dogmatic line. From 1948 attempts were made to reunify the two factions. Finally, after a series of talks, the two parties fused and formed a new LSSP. Philip Gunawardena, who opposed the move, walked out of the LSSP and went on to form another LSSP called the Viplavakari (VLSSP), meaning 'revolutionary'. For the next four years it had close links with the Communist Party, and in April 1951 CP and VLSSP formed a United Front, a move that was virulently denounced by the LSSP.

In spite of these wranglings and recombinations, by 1950 the new LSSP was on firmer ground. N.M. Perera, the leader of the Sama Samajist parliamentary group, was elected Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.<sup>44</sup>

The 1953 hartal. The events that occurred in 1953 were a rare occasion when the left parties united against the establishment. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Wiswa Warnapala, The Sri Lankan Political Scene, New Delhi, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Y.R. Amerasinghe, *Revolutionary Idealism*, pp. 72–90.

poor performance of the left at the polls in 1952 had tended to strengthen the forces within the left who wanted more confrontational politics. The occasion arose when export earnings began to decline and the cost of living soared. From the end of 1952 workers put forward demands for better conditions of employment. By 1953, on the advice of a visiting World Bank mission that had noted that social and welfare services were consuming 35 per cent of the budget, the government was taking unpopular measures to cut government spending and conserve foreign reserves that had been spent mainly on imported consumer items. 45 Among the measures were the withdrawal of the free midday meal for school children, and increases in the price of rice, wheat flour and sugar. The poorer sections of the population were badly hit by these measures. The parties of the left, led by the LSSP, seized the opportunity to turn the feeling of outrage into an anti-government movement. A meeting of all the major trade union leaders decided to stage a day of mass protest throughout the entire country.

On 12 August 1953 the LSSP, the CP/VLSSP United Front and the Federal Party joined forces in an anti-government protest that became known as the *hartal* of 1953. This was one of the factors that contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake. On that day widespread strikes commenced in the main population centres. The countryside was more passive. The protest was intended to be purely non-violent but in some areas led to riotous behaviour and looting. The protest did not cease after a day as planned but took on a life of its own, devoid of leadership. In Moratuwa women workers led by Assee Akka succeeded in halting trains by standing on the rails and waving red flags. Rails were then dismantled to ensure that no trains would run. When the army was sent to quell the disturbance Assee Akka was seen removing her blouse and taunting them to shoot her. The soldiers put down their rifles. All over the country transport was at a standstill.

Although their initial response was positive, workers in the estates did not participate in the *hartal.*<sup>46</sup> After several days the situation was brought under control. Thousands were arrested and several hundred were injured. Twelve people died according to some accounts. The offices of the left parties were searched and their presses sealed. A few years later LSSP candidates to the 1960

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> A.J. Wilson, 'Politics and Political Development since 1948' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), Sri Lanka: A Survey, London, 1977, p. 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> P. Serasinghe, A Forty Year History, p. 15.

elections would speak proudly of their participation or even leadership in the *hartal.*<sup>47</sup> The life story of D.L. Pathirage, candidate for Kotte and a Sinhala teacher, as it appeared in *Samasamajaya*, mentioned as a 'qualification' that he had been in prison on remand for his role in the *hartal*.

The *hartal* started as a strike but grew into something more, perhaps not a revolutionary uprising as described by Sama Samajists, but the first real post-independence moment of mass power in action. The immediate causes were the cuts on social services and the increase in the price of rationed rice from 25 cents to 70 cents per measure. The free midday meal in schools too had been removed—a measure that a leftist MP from Galle, W. Dahanayake described as tantamount to a 'massacre of the innocent' as infant deaths would increase as a result. Sir John Kotelawala, the UNP Minister of Transport and Works, displaying a typical lack of sensitivity to the hardships of the people, answered, 'It is good to die young'. <sup>48</sup> Clearly in the postcolonial state of the early 1950s people could no longer identify with their political leaders who they felt were misleading them.

The leadership of left parties, overwhelmed by the people's movement, called off the *hartal* on the twelfth night. The fact that they were not prepared or were reluctant to turn the revolt into an uprising under their leadership—a point made by elements of the radical left—has been a subject of controversy. The LSSP has consistently argued that the hartal was not an action to capture state power, not an end in itself, but a mobilisation of mass protest to secure adjustments in wages and working conditions. Furthermore, the lack of support for the hartal displayed by the SLFP, which insisted on its commitment to parliamentary politics, and by the Ceylon Indian Congress, the main organisation of the plantation workers, was a major impediment. The masses too appeared to prefer a combination of mass struggle with the choice of government through parliamentary elections. In retrospect the *hartal* has been read by a prominent member of the LSSP as 'the curtain raiser of the dramatic change that began with the general elections of 1956'.49

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Samasamajaya, 5 Feb. 1960.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Wesley S. Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe (eds), We Were Making History: The Hartal of 1953, Young Socialist Publication, Colombo, 2002, p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Hector Abhayavardhana, *Selected Writings*, p. 260, reprinted from *Socialist Nation*, 12 Aug. 1977.

After the show of force, however, left unity collapsed. From within the LSSP a splinter group emerged that called for closer links with the CP/VLSSP Front. After leaving the LSSP, the majority of the dissenters eventually joined the Communist Party. This period was one of acrimonious relations between the LSSP and the CP, in spite of the changes that were taking place worldwide after the death of Stalin. Party divisions were reflected in the labour unions too. Unions affiliated to left parties representing the same labouring interests competed with each other for party followers. In the Port of Colombo, for instance, 8,000 to 10,000 workers belonged to three principal unions. The All-Ceylon Harbour and Dock Workers Union was under Philip Gunawardena, the Communists dominated the Colombo Harbour Workers Union, and N.M. Perera controlled the United Port Workers Union.<sup>50</sup> Because of these splits the left contributed to the growing influence of the SLFP as the most viable alternative to the UNP.

The left parties came together again ten years later in 1963. Between 1961 and 1963 labour unrest, minority discontent and economic deterioration had led to a change in the LSSP's attitude towards the government. The LSSP renewed its criticism of the SLFP. In 1963 a short-lived United Left Front opposed to the SLFP was formed by the LSSP, the CP and the MEP. This was a high point of left unity. But this pact dissolved as members of the LSSP were wooed into the government by the Prime Minister to carry forward 'the fight against reactionary forces', or perhaps seduced by the attraction of political office.

In 1963, as a result of the Sino-Soviet conflict, the Communist Party also split. One group called the CP(M) took a pro-Russian stand and a commitment to a peaceful path towards socialism. The other, the CP(P), was influenced by the Chinese revolution and advocated a revolutionary approach. The pro-Peking wing of the CP was led by N. Sanmugathasan, who was also General Secretary of the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, and Premalal Kumarasiri.

Left parties underwent a process of fragmentation owing largely to personality clashes between leaders and obtuse ideological differences that voters were finding more and more difficult to understand. Their disaffection from these parties manifested itself quite clearly in the electoral losses of the left in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon, p. 133.

Electoral politics: the challenge of the SLFP

The splintering of the left into parties that were sometimes no more than factions undoubtedly made the left less acceptable as an alternative to the UNP. As early as in the 1952 elections voters realised that the left disunited could not muster enough seats to form a government. From 1956 onwards the left had to address another challenge in the form of the rising SLFP, a party that combined political pragmatism and nationalist politics and towards which traditional left supporters were beginning to shift their loyalties.

The elections of 1952 and 1956. The accidental death of Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake in 1952 precipitated parliamentary elections. The LSSP, which counted fifteen members of Parliament in a House of 101, set about campaigning for the 1952 elections with the rather ambitious objective of forming a Sama Samaja government. The Communist Party and the VLSSP had established a separate United Front to contest the elections. The division of the left partly explains the voters' disaffection from the LSSP. The elections of 1952 registered a sound victory for the UNP led by D.S. Senanayake's son, Dudley Senanayake, when its strength in Parliament grew from forty seats to fifty-four. The LSSP won only nine seats of the forty-one it contested, and was overtaken by the newly formed SLFP led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike as the second largest party. The results were disappointing for the left and the new SLFP seemed to present an ominous challenge for the future.

In 1952 the left was the victim of people's sympathy for the UNP candidate—son of D.S. Senanayake, the 'father of Independ ence'—who went to the people a few weeks after his father's tragic death. But a more significant reason for the electoral decline of the left was the lower middle classes now had in the SLFP a real alternative to the UNP. With the founding of the SLFP, the radical monks had found a party closer to their concept of politics than the Marxist parties, and from that time had tirelessly campaigned for a form of Buddhist nationalist socialism that distanced them from the secular left. Colvin R. de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene gave a number of reasons for the poor performance of the left; among them was the formidable state machinery they had to face and the absence of class consciousness among the workers. The left, they alleged, was also deprived of one of its main support bases—the Indian plantation labour, now disenfranchised.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Y.R. Amerasinghe, p. 98.

The turn to the right on the part of voters, due to favourable economic circumstances and the granting of social benefits such as relief employment and subsidised food and services, was also stressed. People were indeed living better and longer. Out of a total population of 6.6 million in 1946, 20 per cent lived in the Colombo district and nearly 5 per cent of the total in the city of Colombo alone.<sup>52</sup> There had been a rapid increase in health services. The number of hospitals increased from 80 to 256 between 1914 and 1949, while the doctor-patient ratio dropped from 1:11,713 to 1:7,992.<sup>53</sup> Maternal mortality, which in 1931 was 20.8 per 1,000, dropped to 8.3 per 1,000 in 1948, and infant mortality dropped from 158 per 1,000 to 92 per 1,000.54 The Sri Lankan citizen in the 1950s had obtained change without revolution or threats to the stability of the political system. The welfare state that was providing a better standard of living and the hope of a better life ahead was a powerful hindrance to the growth of the left.

The 1956 elections further marginalised the left parties. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake, who resigned in 1953, was replaced by Sir John Kotelawela in a context of Buddhist religious revival. The Buddhist world was preparing for the Buddha Jayanti year that marked the 2,500th anniversary of Budd h the arrival of Prince Vijaya, the mythical founder of the Sinhala hism. In Sri Lanka the Buddha Jayanti was believed to coincide wit people. For Buddhist activists this provided an excellent opportunity to consolidate their positions. Kotelawela had been petitioned by most Buddhist lay and clerical leaders to postpone the elections by a year, but he was quite insensitive to the danger of holding elections during the national and religious celebrations.

The overt pro-American and British statements of Sir John Kotelawela made it easier for the left parties to reach a tactical agreement with S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. At Bandung in 1955 Kotelawela is reported to have expressed the hope of gaining the conference's endorsement for a strongly worded resolution condemning both Communist 'colonialism' and the traditional Western variety. Furthermore, like previous UNP leaders before him, he advocated Britain as Ceylon's best friend, and firmly supported the defence agreements with Britain and the formation of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> B.L. Panditaratne and S. Selvanayagam, 'The Demography of Ceylon An Introductory Survey' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *History of Ceylon*, vol. III, p. 293.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> N.K. Sarkar, *The Demography of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1957, p. 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> C.R. de Silva, Sri Lanka, p. 162.

the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO).<sup>55</sup> The LSSP did not make much effort to contest the elections of 1956, and together with the CP entered into a no-contest pact with the SLFP. In a message to voters in the Kegalle constituency the LSSP explained its reasons for supporting the SLFP candidate and its desire to participate in the formation of a 'progressive and just government of the people'.<sup>56</sup> The LSSP had not recovered from the split of 1953 and was also concerned that the party's stand on language, religion and citizenship would not attract the Sinhalese masses. Until 1960 it resisted populist policies and persisted in its stand for parity between the Sinhala and Tamil languages, but accepted no-contest pacts with a party whose policies on language and minority rights clashed with its own.

The Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front or MEP), which the SLFP under Bandaranaike had formed with the VLSSP, appealed to the majority of Sinhala voters. The groups particularly supportive of the MEP came to be identified as the *Pancha Maha* Balavegaya (Five Great Forces): Sinhalese labourers, teachers, farmers, ayurveda physicians and Buddhist monks. Furthermore, Bandaranaike had publicly accepted the recommendations of a report later published in an abridged form in English as The Betrayal of Buddhism by a Committee of Inquiry set up by the Ceylon Buddhist Congress, as the basis upon which he would formulate policy on achieving victory. One of the recommendations was the creation of a Buddha Sasana Mandalaya for the care and enrichment of Buddhism. In this context many radical monks took an active role in campaigning for the 1956 elections and were largely responsible for forging a 'Sinhala Buddhist' identity for the SLFP. Tarzie Vittachi, writing a few years later, emphasised their role:

Here were the best election agents any politician could wish for—12,000 men whose words were holy to over 5,000,000 people, campaigning for the downfall of the Government, zealously and, what is more, gratis.<sup>57</sup>

Monks who spoke on SLFP platforms used religious concepts and terms such as *mara yuddha*—'a fight against evil'—to reach out to the rural electors.<sup>58</sup> Just as Dharmapala had seen in the monks

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> SLNA, 56/A1/74—Kegalle Seat, 'A Message to the Voters', 13 Oct. 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Tarzie Vittachie, *Emergency '58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*, London, 1958, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Sarath Amunugama, 'Buddhaputra and Bhumiputra: Dilemmas of Modern

the instrument of regeneration, the SLFP relied on them to take their message of change to the people. But while the Dharmapalite ideal monk was involved with peasants through social work, the political monks of the next decade were campaigners rather than doers. However, it seems they succeeded in attracting to the SLFP many potential left voters, even though the liberation of radical monks from ritual service (provided by the Heritage) was gradually enabling them to abandon their traditional bond with the rural community and focus on other activities. In the course of the campaign the MEP displayed much skill in designing material that interwove traditional cultural modes with their own political objectives. One such poster, using the imagery of Mara's attack upon the Buddha, depicted a parade led by Sir John Kotelawala on an elephant, the symbol of the UNP, pointing a spear at the heart of the Buddha statue. The parade included Kotelawela's entourage of ballroom dancing and champagne drinking friends. Particularly shattering to Sir John's reputation was a cart bearing the carcass of a dead calf. This was to remind the voter in a predominantly Buddhist country of Kotelawela's disrespectful act of carving a barbecued calf in public view.<sup>59</sup>

The result of the 1956 elections was a resounding victory for all anti-UNP forces: the UNP was reduced to a derisory eight seats, while the MEP won fifty-one of the sixty seats it contested. The LSSP's representation doubled from seven to fourteen. The leader of the LSSP group, N.M. Perera, was elected Leader of the Opposition. The Communist Party secured three seats and the VLSSP five. Leftist candidates received 22 per cent of the vote. The no-contest pact had yielded results, but was a prelude to further compromises for the left. While the elite that had inherited power from the British in 1947 was truly dethroned, Buddhist monks' influence was at its zenith. Not only did the new Prime Minister make changes in his cabinet to satisfy the monks, newly designated ministers started out for their oath taking from the Kelaniya Temple. 60

The elections of March and July 1960. The LSSP contested about twothirds of the constituencies—101 in number—in the March 1960 elections that followed the assassination of Prime Minister S.W.R.D.

Sinhala Buddhist Monks in Relation to Ethnic and Political Conflict', *The Thatched Patio*, March/April 1991, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon, p. 356.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 14.



Cartoon of Sir John Kotelawela reproduced in the form of a poster during the elections of 1956, entitled 'The 2,500 Year War of

Bandaranaike. The results of these elections were very disappointing for the LSSP which won only ten seats. The UNP was returned to power with a slim majority and the SLFP became the second largest party. One reason for the poor performance of the left parties was the provisions of the 1959 Delimitation Commission, which reinforced the over-representation of the Kandyan areas and disadvantaged the CP and LSSP whose support base was in the urbanised areas of the south and west coasts. 61 The voters may also have seen the potential of the SLFP rather than of the LSSP as a viable alternative to the UNP. In the Jaffna district, though, the left parties—projecting themselves as a political alternative to the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress—received a sizeable number of votes (the LSSP 25,904, the CP 14,363), exceeding the total votes polled by the Tamil Congress (38,275). However, the left failed to win a single seat, once again owing to their inability to form a united front or to grant nominations to independent candidates with leftwing sensibilities.62

The UNP government headed by Dudley Senanayake was short-lived and in July 1960 the voters went back to the polls. This time there was a clear victory for the SLFP, which won seventy-five seats, assisted by the no-contest pacts it had with the two left parties, the LSSP and the CP. Explaining a month before the elections the reasons for the no-contest pacts G.B. de Silva, an SLFP number, highlighted the weakness of the left parties: '...the LSSP and the CP had not gained a sufficient foothold in the rural areas in the country and the votes cast for them in these areas deprived (in March 1960) the SLFP of a number of seats'.<sup>63</sup>

The LSSP, which had twelve of its candidates returned, maintained for some time a policy of general support for the SLFP government headed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, lending their support for instance to the government policy of nationalisation of the oil and insurance companies and the takeover of denominational schools.

# Dilution of the left: coalition politics

The MEP, which captured power in 1956, brought together elements from diverse political groupings ranging from right-wingers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Janice Jiggins, Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese, 1947–1976, Cambridge, 1979, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Santasilan Kadirgamar, 'The Left Tradition', pp. 278–9.

<sup>63</sup> SLNA 56/A1/241—'Why a no-contest pact', Î June 1960.

to radical socialists. The left parties differed in their position vis-àvis the MEP. Pieter Keuneman, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, acknowledged that 'despite the reactionary, obscurantist and even chauvinist forces that have jumped upon the SLFP bandwagon there was also a basic anti-imperialist, democratic and progressive content in the aims which S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike called upon the people to endorse in 1956.' The LSSP read the situation differently and saw MEP rule as the replacement of one capitalist government by another.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the LSSP was supportive of MEP policies on certain issues such as nationalisation, the withdrawal of British military bases, tenancy reforms, foreign policy and labour conditions. The LSSP and the CP also supported Philip Gunawardena's Paddy Lands Act passed in February 1958, which sought to give security of tenure to sharecroppers. But they differed on language and citizenship. The LSSP advocated parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil and non-interference of the state in religious affairs. Consequently both the LSSP and the CP voted against the MEP government's Official Language Act in June 1956.

The first two years of the new government were characterised by tension between communities and increased trade union activity. During 1957 and 1958 the LSSP-controlled unions took part in massive public sector strikes. A strike in 1957 to make May Day a holiday for all workers plunged the entire country into darkness. <sup>65</sup> The party itself was engaged in a fierce criticism of what it stigmatised as the MEP's anti-working class policies, with the purpose of eventually overthrowing the government. A strike organised by the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, the Ceylon Federation of Labour and the Ceylon Mercantile Union in April 1958 resulted in violent clashes between strikers and police.

In 1958 a crisis developed in the MEP government; it reached a climax in 1959 with the resignation of the two left-wing ministers and their crossing over in parliament. The government that remained was essentially a government of Bandaranaike's own party, the SLFP.

LSSP leaders appeared to have failed to read the rise of the SLFP as that of a middle force in the politics of Sri Lanka, capable of both riding the tide of nationalism and drawing to it constituencies that were radical and anti-elite but deeply entrenched in the Sinhala culture. In many ways, by failing to retain the support of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Wiswa Warnapala, The Sri Lankan Political Scene, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> P. Serasinghe, A Forty Year History, p. 18.

the radical monks, who from 1956 were firmly behind the SLFP, the left, relying on waning support from the urban working class, lost its entry point into the rural areas.

The alliance of 1964. In 1950 the LSSP had declared its basic objectives 'cannot be realised through bourgeois parliaments'. 66 However, fourteen years later it had forged an alliance with the SLFP, a non-Marxist party, and with the Ceylon Communist Party, its former arch-rival. In March Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike prorogued parliament for four months to avoid a possible defeat in the House and to negotiate with the left parties. The formation of the United Front in 1964, binding together the SLFP, the LSSP and later the CP, represented a significant change in the political situation of Ceylon, leading toward ideological polarisation and a growing bi-polar confrontation between the UNP and the United Front. There was increasing common ground between the left parties and the SLFP. The former shared with the SLFP a hostility towards the UNP. Their increasing pragmatism made them closer to the more radical SLFP. The left parties, by gradually shedding their radical colours and merging with the SLFP, were in effect digging their own graves.

In 1964 the LSSP obtained three portfolios, Finance, Communications and Public Works. The coalition government adopted a 14-point programme closely following the proposals of the majority group of the LSSP. This led the Leftist Sama Samajists who were opposed to the coalition to leave the party and form their own LSSP (Revolutionary Section). Meanwhile the LSSP was disaffiliated from the executive of the Fourth International and the new LSSP (Revolutionary Section) was accepted. The SLFP alliance with the LSSP was interpreted in conservative circles as a drift leftward. But at that time few predicted the alliance would spell the inevitable decline of the left parties.

New alliances were being forged. At the elections of 1965 the UNP, which presented itself as the rallying point of democratic forces pitted against totalitarianism of the left, enjoyed support from the Federal Party and the Ceylon Workers Congress. Indeed the effect of coalition politics practised by the left with the SLFP meant shifting away from traditional left positions on issues such as language parity: in particular, the adoption by the LSSP of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> LSSP Programme of Action, Adopted at the Unity Conference, 4 June 1950 (Colombo, 1950), p. 4, cited in Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon*, p. 121.

Sinhala Only policy alienated Tamils from the left parties that seemed to be willingly pandering to Sinhala populist sentiments. There were many changes in the labour arena too. The expansion of the public sector in the 1950s and 1960s had led to an increase in the numbers of the working class in the state and semi-state sectors. For the government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike the main advantage of befriending the left parties was the promise of cooperation extended by the left-wing unions to the government. Coalition politics had more adverse effects for the left parties, insofar as they prevented the left from organising these new workers, who instead joined large trade unions controlled by the ruling parties—either the UNP or the SLFP. Workers easily switched from SLFP-controlled to UNP-controlled unions with changes in government, thus displaying in the following years a clear lack of ideological commitment.<sup>67</sup>

### Policies of the left: from class to sectarianism

Historians anxious to understand and explain the large-scale participation of the Sinhala working classes in communal violence in the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the 1983 anti-Tamil violence, have highlighted the 'chauvinist' shift in left parties policies in the mid-1960s as a crucial moment.<sup>68</sup>

Rather than a sudden break from the principles that the left had advocated for the past twenty-five years, there was in fact a gradual and subtle drift that occurred from the late 1950s. The left did not take 'an uncompromising stand in support of minority rights' up to the mid-1960s. <sup>69</sup> This is apparent when one examines the political programmes of the two main left parties in the 1950s and 1960s. The policies of the LSSP in 1952, embodied in a 'Fourteen Point Programme', included progressive policies such as the use of 'the national languages', the 'grant of citizenship to all who desire to be permanent residents', and the transfer of all alienable crown land to the peasantry. However, the Manifesto put forward in March 1960 contained some significant changes on the issues of language and citizenship. The notion of language parity was abandoned and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Sasanka Perera (ed.), Newton Gunasinghe: Selected Essays, Colombo, 1996, pp. 174–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, 'Ethnicity and Sinhala Consciousness', *Nethra* Special Issue 'July '83 and After', 6, 1 & 2, April–September 2003, pp. 47–86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

replaced by a provision to make Tamil an official language while maintaining the rightful place given to Sinhala. The provision on citizenship was also watered down considerably.

In the mid-1950s, and especially in the 1960s, it was the politics of alliance with the SLFP that led left parties to adopt more forceful anti-Christian, anti-Tamil and anti-Plantation Tamil positions. The LSSP and CP newspapers of those years, *Janasathiya* and *Attha*, contained attacks against Christians who held high offices in the government. The demands of the Federal Party in the mid-1960s were repeatedly presented in racist terms to the literate working classes in the left press of the period. The Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact was for instance denounced as a betrayal of the birthright of the Sinhalese. The slogan cried out by the left at the May Day rally in 1965, '*Dudleyge badai masalavadai*' (Dudley has swallowed *masalavadai*—a food generally eaten by Tamils), epitomised these racist outbursts.<sup>70</sup>

However, the evidence for saying that Sinhala working class attitudes towards other communities changed drastically with the changes in policy at the leadership level is slim, if based purely on selected articles in left-wing papers and a selection of racist slogans at political rallies. There were different and often opposing strands of thought within the left movement and inside the main parties that are not captured in the mechanistic analyses that equate the left with racism in the 1960s.

The support the two left parties commanded in the north cannot, for instance, be measured purely in electoral terms. At the local government level villages and towns such as Chunnakam, Manipay, Uduvil, Anaicottai and Puloly had leftists heading village committees or town councils. Their ideas would have had some influence on the social, economic and cultural life of the people. A variety of groups supported the left parties, among them the General Clerical Services Union (GCSU), Teachers Union, Bank and Mercantile Unions, the Transport (Bus) Workers Unions, Cigar Workers Unions and Toddy Tappers Unions. Minority Tamil organisations and landless labourers' organisations had close contacts with the left parties whose principled stand on caste oppression earned them the wrath of the upper castes in Jaffna. Their electoral failure was inevitable, though ethically justifiable.<sup>71</sup>

There is a need for ethnographic studies to look at the popular culture and ideas of the common people in the 1950s and 1960s in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 57–61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Santasilan Kadirgamar, 'The Left Tradition'.

order to ascertain in a less speculative manner the antecedents, depth and extent of anti-minority feelings in the Sinhala working class and peasantry. For instance, did the electoral support given to left parties by the urban working class increase or decrease with their shift towards racist policies?

The official organ of the LSSP, Samasamajaya, gives a vivid picture of the language and ideas that prevailed among the rank and file of the party, which was obviously more in touch with the rural people than the leadership. In an article entitled 'The ideas of the peasants' the grievances of the rural folk, as described in their own words, were traced back to the British period and to the lack of commitment of successive governments to improve their lot: 'If they cannot give us back the lands that were taken away by the white men at least they could develop our villages'. 72 More than language or citizenship, the peasants expected a government that would address the problems of landlessness, rural indebtedness, drought and floods. The Survey of Landlessness reported in 1952 that 37.7 per cent of all families were without any land. Reading the popular mood, the SLFP emphasised from 1952 onwards as their central economic policy the promotion of peasant agriculture and resolving of the Sinhalese peasants' problems.<sup>73</sup>

In 1960 the Communist Party also attempted to deal with issues that affected the common people, such as an often oppressive headmen system and the provision of electricity and water to villages, but electoral results showed the CP was clearly not the answer to the needs of the people.<sup>74</sup> The neglect of the peasantry by the left parties and the priority given to attempts to muster the support of the urban working class explain their poor electoral performance in the 1950s and 1960s.

# The rise of the Radical Left, 1965-70

The second half of the 1960s witnessed an important change in the Sri Lanka left. In keeping with developments in many other countries the youth was becoming radicalised and entering a stage of modernity where boundaries were easily transgressed. In the cultural field this was the beginning of a new sort of theatre more politically <code>engagé</code>, and in the arts, poets such as Mahagama Sekera

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Samasamajaya, 5 Feb. 1960.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> SLNA 56/A1/145-March 1960, CP Manifesto.

were experimenting with free verse. In the second half of the 1960s students who were at odds with the regime were restless and on many occasions the police had to intervene. A peak was reached in March 1971 when a bomb exploded on Marrs Hall at the University of Peradeniya. This was followed by the arrest and interrogation of about 150 undergraduates believed to be JVP activists.<sup>75</sup>

The UNP-led forces had emerged victorious in the elections of 1965, winning 39 per cent of the vote as compared to the SLFP's 30.2 per cent. The UNP government, led by Dudley Senanayake, tried to develop a mixed economy with little success. Although Western aid was restored, the economic context was unfavourable, with a steep increase in the price of rice imports and a fall in the prices of export commodities. In 1966 food riots were averted at the last moment. The halving of the subsidised weekly rice ration contributed to the people's disenchantment with the government. Changing the calendar to lunar months and granting the full moon Poya as a holiday did not suffice to win them over. In 1968 a United Front Coalition was formed between the SLFP, LSSP and CP (Moscow wing).

In the late 1960s the Radical Left parties were in the midst of further divisions. By the mid-1960s Sanmugathasan had come under criticism for moving away from the path of revolutionary struggle to take part in local government elections. His party exercised a fair amount of influence on Jaffna university students and staff and grew in strength with the important role it played in the 1968 Temple Entry crisis in Jaffna. That year several hundred members of traditionally untouchable Pallar and Navalar castes staged a non-violent protest in front of the gates of Jaffna's most orthodox Hindu shrine, the temple of Lord Kandacami (Skanda) in the village of Maviddapuram. They were led by an activist of the CP (Peking Wing) and experimented with an array of strategies to spread their message, including the theatre. The Communist Party (Peking Wing) produced a play called Kanthan Karunai, which referred to the mercy of Lord Skanda whose second wife, Valliammai, was supposed to be from the depressed castes. But the demonstration, which lasted a week, was broken by a group of self-styled 'Defenders of Saivism' who violently assaulted the demonstrators with iron rods and bottles. The intervention of leftist groups in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> G.H. Peiris, 'The Campus Community at Peradeniya' in K.M. de Silva and G.H. Peiris (eds), *The University System of Sri Lanka, Vision and Reality*, ICES Sri Lanka Studies Series, Colombo and New Delhi, 1995, p. 206.

what they considered an internal matter for the peninsula was denounced by the high caste Tamils who dominated the Tamil politics of the day.

In his memoirs Sanmugathasan could rightly denounce the indifference of other so-called progressive forces: 'Not a single other political party extended its support to us'.<sup>76</sup> The Colombobased left never regained a position of strength in the north and the remnants of the Trotskyite and pro-Beijing Communist groups became known in Jaffna as 'one man parties'.<sup>77</sup>

The factions that developed within the CP(P) led to the formation of splinter groups. It is in this context that a new left organisation, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna, was created in 1969 by someone whose name became inextricably linked to the party: Patabendi Don Nandasiri Wijeweera (alias Rohana Wijeweera).<sup>78</sup>

Rohana Wijeweera was born in 1943 in Tangalle in the deep south of the island. His father was a member of the Communist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> N. Sanmugathasan, *Political Memoirs*, p. 159.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Santasilan Kadirgamar, 'The Left Tradition', p. 279.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> The books on the JVP insurrection are of varying quality. A few deserve to be cited: the informative A.C. Alles, The J.V.P., 1969-1989, Colombo, 1990; S. Arasaratnam, Insurgency—1971: An Account of the April Insurrection in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1977; H.A.I. Goonetilleke, The April 1971 Insurrection in Ceylon: A Bibliographical Commentary, 2nd edn, revised and enlarged, Louvain, 1975. There are also the more engaging C.A. Chandraprema, Sri Lanka, the Years of Terror: the J.V.P. Insurrection, 1987-1989, Colombo, 1991 and Victor Ivan, April Riot, Colombo 1979 (in Sinhala), and Rohan Gunaratna's more sensationalist Sri Lanka: a Lost Revolution?: the Inside Story of the IVP, Kandy, 1990. Gamini Samaranayake, Sri Lanka's Revolutionary Movement: The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna, Peradeniya, 2002 (in Sinhala). The recent monograph by Jagath P. Senaratne, Political Violence in Sri Lanka 1977-1990: Riots, Insurrections, Counterinsurgencies, Foreign Intervention, Amsterdam, 1997, is a welcome survey of the literature on the second JVP uprising. There have been a few dissertations on the topic: Navaratne Rambukwelle, 'Sociopolitical Implications of the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna's Second Revolution in Sri Lanka from 1983 to 1991', MSc, Waikato University, 1998, has used interviews and personal testimonies of participants. Among journal articles one can single out G.B. Keerawella, 'The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna and the 1971 Uprising', Social Science Review, 2, 1980, pp. 1–55, and Mick Moore, 'Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries: the JVP in Sri Lanka', Modern Asian Studies, 27 (3), 1993, pp. 593–642, as attempts at understanding the ideology of the JVP. For a more detailed and exhaustive bibliography see G.H. Peiris, 'Insurrection and Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka' in Gerald Peiris and S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, History and Politics: Millenial Perspectives: Essays in Honour of Kingsley de Silva, Colombo, 1999, pp. 165–200.

Party and at seventeen he won a scholarship to study medicine in the Soviet Union at the Patrice Lumumba University. During the Sino-Soviet crisis he took a pro-Chinese position, and when he returned to Sri Lanka on holiday in 1964 his visa was not renewed. He abandoned his studies and in 1965 joined the Communist Party of N. Sanmugathasan which supported China, and was entrusted by its leader with strengthening the youth league.79 He was expelled from the party in 1966 and in 1969 formed his own organisation.<sup>80</sup> Four groups that joined Wijeweera were the workers' union of the Land Development Department, the Sarath Wijesinghe group from the University of Peradeniya, the D.A. Gunasekera group and the G.I.D. Dharmasekera group.<sup>81</sup> Among the young men who came forward to form the IVP, Wijeweera was the only one who had travelled and who had a certain knowledge of the English language. He became the natural leader, perhaps helped by his very ordinary physical appearance with which many may have identified.

The first years of the JVP were spent formulating and disseminating five lectures that explained in simple language the politics of the socialist revolution throughout the island. The 1968 version of the lectures dealt with the economic crisis of the capitalist system, Indian expansionism, Independence and the leftist movement. Participation in the fifth lecture, 'The path of the Revolution in Ceylon', was for a select group of listeners of the four preceding lectures. During the six years when the JVP operated underground a large number of young people were given political instruction; among them many were recruited from the ranks of university students, essentially from Peradeniya University. In stark contrast to the other main political parties, the JVP's membership consisted of young men from non-elite Sinhalese backgrounds.

For the youth of the country the JVP constituted the only radical alternative to the UNP, since to prepare for the 1970 general election Sirimavo Bandaranaike had formed a coalition in 1968 with the LSSP and CP. The new three-party United Front (Samagi Peramuna) announced it would work towards a 'people's govern-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> G.H. Peiris, 'Insurrection', p. 166.

<sup>80</sup> The CP (P) had splintered into a number of organisations; Rohana Wijeweera's group was one. The others were Peradiga Sulanga led by Gamini Yapa, Samajavadi Sangamaya led by Nihal Dias and the Maoist Front led by GID Dharmasekera.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, 'Rohana Wijeweera's Impact as a Political Leader', BA, University of Colombo, 1991, pp. 27–9.

ment' under the leadership of Bandaranaike and that it would follow a socalled Common Programme that promised radical structural changes, including land reform, increased rice subsidies and nationalisation of local and foreign banks.

The rise of the New Left, 1970–90: political violence

Between 1970 and 1990 the JVP tried and failed on two occasions to topple the legitimate government of Sri Lanka, first in 1971, then in the late 1980s. In its second reincarnation it resumed activities in an even more violent manner than before, using murder, torture and intimidation. The trigger for this resurgence was the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, which sanctioned the use of Indian troops in Sri Lanka to quell the LTTE in the North and East. In 1989 the IVP movement nearly succeeded in destroying state institutions, but was crushed by the Sri Lankan security forces working with death squads. The rise and fall of the JVP and its metamorphosis into a third force represented in Parliament after 2000, and the near complete disappearance of the old left, is the main feature of the left movement during these decades. The experiences of survivors of the terror unleashed during the 1987–90 years give us another picture of the JVP's insurrection and the state's counterinsurgency, a picture of pain and suffering, broken people, parentless children, bodiless funerals.

Insurrections and political violence. The origin of the JVP has generally been read within the context of class formation in Sri Lanka's rural society. Many works emphasise the importance of the class that came into being in the agrarian sector under the colonial economic system, namely the rural petite bourgeoisie. Democratic politics and universal suffrage led to a politicisation of the rural areas where this group acquired a sudden importance: swabasha school teachers, ayurveda physicians, members of village committees and shopkeepers were an important element of this class. In the 1950s these groups had supported S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and his SLFP and were firmly behind the MEP victory of 1956. The MEP coalition itself was evidence of the petite bourgeoisie's strength in the new government. Three of the parties in the coali-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> See for instance Newton Gunasinghe, 'Land Reform, Class Structure and the State in Sri Lanka, 1970–1977' in Sasanka Perera (ed.), Newton Gurasinghe, pp. 53–76.

tion—the Basha Peramuna led by W. Dahanayake, the Jathika Vimukti Peramuna led by K.M.P. Rajaratne and the Republican Party led by I.M.R.A. Iriyagolle—were typical expressions of the cultural values of the petite bourgeoisie. In the mid-1960s the social composition of the political elite underwent a change with the incorporation of this group—the Sinhala-educated and Sinhala-speaking middle and lower middle-class strata—into the party processes. The JVP leadership who belonged to this strata were in a sense the children of 1956.

It has been argued that the policies of the old left that climaxed with the United Left Front debacle of 1964 were the *raison d'être* of the emerging JVP. The JVP did indeed have an antagonistic and tension-ridden relationship with the old left. Its birth was the outcome of serious schisms within the left movement and reflected the frustrations and discontent of the educated Sinhala rural youth with the prevarications of the established left parties.<sup>83</sup>

However, there was more to it than this. The JVP leadership harboured a near obsessive project for capturing political power. The JVP had been preparing an insurrection to overthrow the UNP government, which they believed was intent on continuing its term beyond 1970 with military assistance from the United States. Contrary to their expectations, parliamentary elections were held in 1970. When the results were announced the SLFP-Marxist coalition or United Front had won 116 of 151 seats and 48.7 per cent of the vote. In the 1970 Cabinet there were many left-wingers appointed, among them N.M. Perera as Minister of Finance, Colvin R. de Silva as Minister of Plantation and Constitutional Affairs, and Leslie Goonewardena as Minister for Communications. Other left-wingers received important administrative appointments.

The JVP initially supported the government, but after ten months dissatisfaction mounted against the slow rhythm of the reforms. By the early months of 1971 the JVP had thousands of members and fellow travellers among academics, students, school-children, workers and *bhikkus*. The monks, who since the 1940s had been used by all parties as vital support groups, had turned to the JVP in large numbers, attracted by their egalitarian Sinhala Buddhist ideology.

Relations with the government had soured and veered towards a collision. By March 1971 the JVP threat was quite obvious and from

<sup>83</sup> Jagath Senaratne, Political Violence, p. 104.

raids on JVP hideouts it became apparent that the JVP was preparing for an insurrection. On 16 March Rohana Wijeweera was arrested and detained in the high security prison in Jaffna. Nine JVP leaders met at Vydyodaya University to plan the revolt on 2 April 1971. He jvp insurrection was launched. During that night police stations in certain chosen areas of the country were captured and military posts raided. Altogether ninety-three police stations were attacked and severe damage was caused to fifty-seven in raids leading to the deaths of sixty-three police and service personnel. Of the ninety-three police stations only five were actually overrun; the others had been abandoned for strategic reasons. In many rural areas normal civil administration was dislodged. But attempts to capture Karainagar naval base, release Wijeweera and attack Katunayake airport failed.

The weapons used by the insurgents were mostly home-made hand grenades. After the initial thrust the state rallied its forces and crushed the IVP. Between 5,000 and 10,000 lost their lives in the confrontations and counter-insurgency. In some cases the armed forces overstepped their role and used torture and brutality, as in the famous case of the murder of a young woman from Kataragama. The failure of the insurrection can be explained by a few factors. First, after the taking over of police stations no new administration was established. Second, four of the important missions failed: the attack on the army camp of Panagoda, the plan to kill or kidnap the Prime Minister, the plan to capture Colombo and the plan to release Wijeweera. After the revolt was quelled and its leaders imprisoned, the United Front began a programme of radical reforms. In 1972 a new Republican Constitution was adopted, and the same year plantations were nationalised. Investigations relating to the insurrection were conducted over a period of five years by a Criminal Justice Commission and resulted in the conviction and punishment of the key suspects: Wijeweera was sentenced to life imprisonment.86 In 1975 a farreaching land reform was

<sup>84</sup> According to James Jupp they were S.V.A. Piyatilleke, W.P. Vitharana ('Sanath'), U.M. Jamis ('Mahataya'), W.T. Karunaratne, Lionel Bopage, Susil Wickramaratne, W.M. Sunanda Deshapriya and B.A.R. Kurukulusuriya.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Numerous scholarly works have dealt with the sequence of events in detail: see Kearney, Jiggins, Alles, Keerawella, and for a more recent account of the sequence of events see Gerald Peiris, 'Insurrection', pp. 169–70.

<sup>86</sup> See Alles, The J.V.P., pp. 196-217 and Appendix II.



Insurrectionary activity, 1971

Source: W. Howard Wriggins and C.H.S. Jayewardena, 'Youth Protest in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)', pp. 324–5, in W.H. Wriggins and James F. Guyot (eds), Population, Politics and the Future of Southern Asia, New York/London, 1973; A.C. Alles, The JVP, 1969–1989, Colombo, 1990.

enacted. In spite of these radical reforms the tide was turning against the government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Austerity for the majority and luxury for the few, nepotism and complacency were no longer tolerated by the majority. In 1977 the UNP returned to power and the prisoners of 1971 were given an unconditional pardon and released. This was not a purely altruistic gesture on the part of J.R. Jayewardene but a decision based on the analysis that a reconstituted JVP would undermine the SLFP. Wijeweera, once released from prison, publicly eschewed violence and decided to develop his party as the principal opposition party to the UNP, stronger than the SLFP and the traditional left, a vision that he put forward in his electoral programme: social change was attainable through democratic and electoral means.

Wijeweera contested the presidential elections of 1982 and obtained a very modest score of 273,000 votes. Compared to the scores of 0.9 per cent by the old left and 0.26 per cent by the NSSP this was not insignificant, but clearly it was only a modest achievement. In spite of his attempts to woo the middle class by emphasising his medical studies, his marriage into a middle class family and his ownership of a Ford Laser car, the electorate did not perceive him as a national leader and statesman. That same year President J.R. Jayewardene decided to substitute a referendum for the parliamentary elections due in 1983, in order to preserve the hegemony of the ruling party and the greater than two-thirds majority in Parliament. An important consequence of this blatantly undemocratic act was the non-inclusion of over 1.5 million new voters in the electoral register. Another was that the JVP and other small parties were deprived of parliamentary representation.

After the communal riots in July 1983 the JVP and some other small leftist parties were proscribed under the pretext that they had instigated anti-Tamil violence. This obvious injustice convinced the JVP leaders that they had no other resort than to take the course of revolutionary politics once again. Within a few months the proscription of the NSSP and CP was lifted but the JVP remained proscribed. The proscription that acted as a catalyst, as well as the inability of the government to curtail the growth of the JVP, explains why from 1984 the JVP was once again ready to launch an armed confrontation to take power. Safe houses were constructed in the jungles and funds collected through robberies. The cadres were trained in the jungles by army deserters and from 1987 they formed a real army. From that year they began attacking army camps in the South. They captured power in the university system,

which led to the closure of the universities for three years and the death of a vice-chancellor and a student leader. In 1987 the JVP mobilised the people against the Indo-Lanka Accord signed between Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayawardena, which involved establishment of a system of provincial councils as a means of ending communal conflict. The SLFP too was against the accord, but the JVP had taken the lead. Wijeweera appeared prophetic as one of his 'Five Lectures' had warned against 'Indian expansionism'.

The two years that followed were years of terror. IVP victims were killed and tied to lamp-posts with a notice indicating the charges and the reasons for the killing. The Deshapremi Janatha Vyapara (DIV—People's Patriotic Movement), generally identified as the military avatar of the JVP, appears to have been responsible for most of the deaths. In 1987 a grenade attack on the cabinet in Parliament narrowly missed the major targets. In 1988 the JVP succeeded in completely paralysing the government by using hartals, strikes and acts of sabotage. Any person who did not comply with the curfews was under threat. Ordinary people were killed for going to work when a IVP hartal was declared. Any person supporting the Indo-Lanka Accord was in danger. More than state institutions, it was the political apparatuses that were targeted, especially the UNP party, student organisations and trade unions. Political opponents from the 'old left' were mercilessly assassinated. Vijaya Kumaratunga, the leader of a small left progressive party, suffered the same fate. The JVP issued a leaflet under the name of 'The National Movement to Punish the Enemies of the Motherland' that listed all the 'traitors' to the motherland who deserved to be killed.

In September 1988 Ranasinghe Premadasa was declared the UNP candidate for the presidential elections. The main opposition party put forward Sirimavo Bandaranaike, supported by seven other parties. The eight parties put forward a declaration condemning 'the massacres unleashed by the state', but not a word was said about the violence of the JVP. The JVP threatened death to any person who voted at the elections.

In August 1989 the JVP was very close to achieving its end, which was the capture of political power. Its strategy of weakening the political apparatus and exhausting the state by taxing its meagre resources was gaining ground. But for a number of reasons the JVP failed to strike the final blow at the legitimate state.

In December 1988 R. Premadasa was elected President. Only 53 per cent of the electorate voted. In June 1989 he made a declaration calling on the Indian Peace Keeping Force to leave the island.

This event, and the JVP threat against the families of army personnel who did not leave their posts, turned even neutrals within the army against the JVP. President Premadasa had succeeded in delegitimising the JVP in two ways: by his own subaltern credentials, which attracted to him the same constituency of poor and deprived persons that the IVP attempted to woo, and by being more patriotic than the IVP. The battle became an ideological one in which he received the complete support of the army. He did not hesitate to use the vigilante groups that had emerged during the last years of Jayawardena's term, although they committed many excesses. The anti-IVP violence was perpetrated with total impunity by a number of groups known as PRRA, Black Cats, Ukkussa, Kola Koti and others. Young men were rounded up and joined the cohorts of the 'disappeared'. After Wijeweera's eventual capture and death during a confrontation between the IVP and the army, the second insurrection of the IVP was put down. Over 40,000 people had lost their lives.

Social groups, ideology. The JVP uprisings in 1971 and in 1987–9 have been interpreted in different fashions, sometimes as symptoms of unemployment, poverty and caste oppression, sometimes as a feature of the general crisis of the state. Today, more than before, the agency of the revolutionary actors is given pride of place amongst possible causes. The JVP movement is being read increasingly as a political movement founded on an indigenised Marxist-Leninist ideology. Indeed, in the JVP's theory of revolution the revolutionary agency was not the urban proletariat as in the case of the old left, but social groups bracketed under the more inclusive term nirdhana panthiya, meaning the class of the property-less, which included all the social classes and strata that felt grievances against the dominant order.<sup>87</sup>

There were common features in the membership of the JVP: ethnicity, religion, age, education, regional and rural belonging were some. In social terms, the JVP movement of 1971 and 1988 was made up of Sinhalese Buddhists drawn from the educated unemployed youth of the extreme southern districts of Matara and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Social Conflict, Radical Resistance and Projects of State Power in Southern Sri Lanka: the Case of the JVP' in Markus Mayer, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah (eds), Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 2003, p. 41.

Hambantota. In 1989, when the state forces were regaining control of the South, the JVP shifted its operations to the Central Province. Youth and belonging to the poorer strata of the population were common features. The JVP cadres of 1971 were all less than 30 years old. Many hailed from non-Goyigama castes, especially Vahumpura and Batgam. While the 1971 JVP was mainly a rural and small town movement, the 1987–9 JVP had a certain amount of urban support, especially among clerical workers in government departments. No minority communities were represented in its leadership, and in 1971 its membership was 97 per cent Sinhala and 94.3 per cent Buddhist. Rather than charisma, the leadership has been characterised by a certain 'ordinariness' of being, an ordinariness which created cohesiveness within the movement and attracted the common man or woman. He workers in government and attracted the common man or woman.

Young monks who constituted a sizeable proportion of the university population had been recruited into the movement and formed one of the three front organisations of the JVP, together with the fronts for workers and youth. In 1987 they marched on the streets to the cry of 'Motherland First, Pirivena Second', and they were generally deployed for JVP propaganda on issues such as the privatisation of the Medical College. They were very critical of senior monks who were supporters of the UNP or Left parties. Some of these, including Thambugala Sumanasiri, Vellatota Pannadissi and Kotikawatta Saddhatissa, were killed, most probably by the DJV/JVP. Many young monks too gave up their robes and died or disappeared in the late 1980s. 91

Estimates vary as to the size of the JVP in 1971, from Gunaratna's estimate of 100,000 members to Loku Athula's (a prominent JVP-er) estimate of 50,000.<sup>92</sup> The JVP of the 1980s had lost most of its 1971 membership. Only three of the forty-one individuals who appeared before the first Criminal Justice Commission remained with the JVP after 1980.

A significant feature of the JVP, contrasting with the old left, was the centralised leadership. In 1971, as in the late 1980s, Wijeweera's

<sup>88</sup> Gamini Keerawella, 'The Janata Vimukti Peramuna and the 1971 Uprising', Social Science Review, 2, January 1980, pp. 1–55.

<sup>89</sup> Gamini Samaranayake, 'The Changing Attitude towards the Tamil Problem within the Janata Vimuktho Peramuna' in Charles Abeysekere and Newton Gunasinghe (eds), Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1987, p. 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> G.H. Peiris, 'Insurrection', p. 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Sarath Amunugama, 'Buddhaputra and Bhumiputra', pp. 20–30.

<sup>92</sup> Cited in G.H. Peiris, 'Insurrection', p. 168.

authority was unquestioned. Any individual who challenged his authority was dismissed and from the beginning party leaders were chosen by him. Although Wijeweera described his organisation as a Marxist-Leninist party, its structure did not resemble the Bolshevik organisational structure followed by other left parties—that is, there was no process of accountability from the top to the grass roots, neither was there a set of procedures for the selection of leaders, annual meetings etc.

The central committee and the politburo members were not chosen at party meetings but appointed at Wijeweera's discretion. Potential threats such as Sarath Wijesinghe and G.I.D. Dharmasekera were expelled from the party. Although there were many in the central committee who questioned Wijeweera's authority no other leaders were strong enough to challenge his position.

The centralised leadership continued even after 1977 when the JVP insurrectionists were released from jail and attempts were made to reorganise the party. By 1977 many of the old members and leaders of the JVP were either dead or had given up politics, but the conditions that attracted the rural youth to the path of revolution had not changed. Splits within the JVP continued as many left in opposition to Wijeweera's authoritarianism. In July 1980, for instance, the Ceylon Teacher's Union (Lanka Guru Sangamaya) broke away in opposition to the JVP decision not to cooperate with the July strike. By the end of 1983 Lionel Bopage, who along with Wijeweera was the only remaining leader of the 1971 insurrection, resigned from the party. The main reason for these splits was the lack of democratic centralism within the party.<sup>93</sup>

Why did the insurrections begin at the time they did and not before or after? The JVP has been described as the product of both structural and conjunctural causes. Unemployment of the educated youth of the South is often singled out as the answer. The JVP publication *Deshapremi* evoked the difficulties of young people of that generation:

Our poor parents having a thousand and one hopes spent the fruits of the sweat of their labour on education instead of spending it on food or clothing or building houses. We studied hard, keeping up in the night till our eyes ached. We sat for examinations. We passed examinations. We obtained degrees. But without trying to overthrow this corrupt neo-colonial economic system and build up a socialist system. We built great hopes on that very system

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> N.R. Devasiri, 'Rohana Wijeweera's Impact', pp. 45–9.

itself. Finally as a punishment we were forced to loiter in the streets and face the insults and the laughter of the capitalists.<sup>94</sup>

Although unemployment is the most potent structural explanation, it must be located within a wider picture. The comprehensive free education system in Sri Lanka produced large numbers of young people with university degrees or Advanced Levels who either were looking for jobs or were in jobs that did not meet their aspirations. Most university-educated rural youth had paper certificates that had little value on the job market. Indeed, owing to the lack of science teaching and laboratory facilities available in rural schools, they had little choice but to follow courses that led to General Arts Degrees. Nearly 80 per cent of the suspected insurgents of 1971 came from Maha Vidyalas and 6.4 per cent came from Madya Maha Vidyalas. Statistics are not available for the 1980s cadres, but among them students and schoolchildren played a pivotal role.

However, the unemployment of the educated young as a single structural factor to explain the uprisings is not sufficient. Rather than the term 'causes' one can refer to favourable structures that shaped the nature of the JVP's uprising. Sri Lanka was endowed with a 'modern' social, political and economic structure. Its state structure was large and ramified, with a rural economy closely meshed with the urban sector; its economy was commercialised and hence had spawned a diversified occupational structure; its population was educated at a formal level—hence the problem of educated unemployment. These features—including youth unemployment—had been a constant for some time. Why did the uprisings happen precisely in 1971 and 1987?

Certain conjunctural factors seem to have combined to create the given moment. By 1970 the terms of trade had deteriorated steadily. The trade deficit between 1966 and 1970 was Rs 426 million. Obtaining foreign loans to tide over the budget deficit became a regular feature. At the same time welfare services and subsidies had to be curtailed. The youth of the petite bourgeoisie was deeply affected.<sup>96</sup> In 1971 disappointment with the reforms promised by Mrs Bandaranaike erupted into discontent and anger.

In its second reincarnation the JVP was more complex. The decline of democratic politics during the 1980s, when all opposi-

<sup>94</sup> Deshapremi, 8 Aug. 1970, p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> G.B. Keerawella, 'The Janata Vimukti Peramuna', pp. 23–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 26–9.

tion parties were subjected to harassment, led to disaffection from democratic modes of protest. The increasing authoritarianism of the UNP regime does not however solely explain the rise of the JVP. The first targets of the JVP in 1986 were indeed individuals who belonged to leftist parties; among them the Colombo University student leader Daya Pathirana was known for being anti-UNP. The weakness of the SLFP, controlled by the bickering Bandaranaike clan, and its inability to counter UNP moves such as the extension of Parliament in 1982 opened up a space for the JVP.

Certain areas, especially in the south of the country, had been neglected by successive post-independence governments. 'No government has ever bothered about us. We never get aid, we do not even get rain in time. Even the gods seem to have forgotten us', lamented a villager in the Wellawaya area in Moneragala. <sup>97</sup> The JVP rhetoric of equity and social justice could only strike a chord in this setting. If there was not always active support there was at least a sense of sympathy for the JVP. Finally the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord and the entry of the Indian troops into Sri Lanka created an ideal moment for patriotism to blossom.

A public meeting of the JVP in 1970 displayed pictures of revolutionary leaders such as Mao, Lenin and Che Guevara as well as Anagarika Dharmapala, the Sinhala patriot, amongst a flurry of Sinhala flags. 98 This eclectic mix exemplifies the nature of the JVP ideology, at times described as a direct outcome of the Sinhala Only language policy of 1956, at other times as a genuine indigenous Marxist movement. Between 1971 and the late 1980s, the ideas and positions of the JVP changed. A common feature of the rank and file was, however, the lack of any sound theoretical grounding and a reluctance to accept the complexity of issues and thoughts. A common slogan among Sinhalese radicals is 'pavathina kramaya varadda', which literally means that the entire system of power relations is wrong—blaming the existing economic and political order for systemic failures. 99

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Sasanka Perera, 'The Context and Patterns of Political Violence in Southern Sri Lanka' in S. Perera (ed.), Stories of Survivors: Socio-Political Contexts of Female Headed Households in Post-Terror Southern Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Ceylon: The JVP Uprising of April 1971, Solidarity London Pamphlet 42. Interview with Edmund Samarakoddy, who resigned from the LSSP in 1964 to join the LSSP. He legally represented Rohana Wijeweera in the courts.

<sup>99</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Social Conflict, Radical Resistance and Projects of

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Instead the JVP fostered an ideology that has been described as a caricature of Marxism, or by less severe commentators as an indigenous variant of Marxism where the idea of Ruhuna, in southern Sri Lanka, as the historic centre of the island, was prominent. The rise of the IVP is closely linked to a patriotic issue, what has been referred to as the 'Ruhunu spirit' by scholars who draw parallels between the JVP's opposition to Indian intervention and King Dutugemunu's heroic and patriotic fight for motherland against the Tamil king Elara and his army. Many features in the JVP movement have emphasised the importance of Ruhuna. The names of the leaders symbolised the Southern connection: Rohana was a derivative of Ruhunu, the two Athulas who were part of Rohana Wijeweera's inner caucus were named after the Sinhala heroic king Gemunu's lieutenant. In the late 1980s JVP pamphlets referred to King Keerthi Vijayabahu, a prince from Ruhuna who in the eleventh century freed the northern part of Sri Lanka which was under Cola control. JVP propaganda sought to portray Wijeweera as a modern-day Vijayabahu, and in fact the name of the leader of the militant Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya was Keerthi Vijayabahu. The popular thinking at the time was that Keerthi Vijayabahu was a pseudonym for Wijeweera. 100

Patriotism was the kernel of the JVP ideology both in 1971 and in the 1980s, as the slogan 'Motherland or Death' illustrated. In 1971 the JVP sought to 'save' the country from 'eastern' (meaning Indian) imperialism and Indian expansionist designs. In 1987–9 it again sought to 'save' the country from an unholy trinity of American imperialism, Indian imperialism, and Tamil expansionism. Neither the dismissal of 70,000 striking workers in 1981, nor the referendum of 1982, which prolonged the life of parliament illegally, had moved the JVP to enter into conflict with the state.

Patriotism was essentially communalist in nature. In the 'Lecture on Indian expansionism' of 1971, the role of the Federal Party, the trade monopoly of Indian businessmen, illicit immigration from India and plantation workers were condemned en bloc—described as 'kallathony', a derogatory term for plantation workers or illegal

State Power in Southern Sri Lanka: the Case of the JVP' in Markus Mayer, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah (eds), *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 49.

<sup>100</sup> N.R. Devasiri, 'Rohana Wijeweera's Impact', pp. 92-8.

immigrants (probably referring to *thonies*, flat-bottomed boats mostly used by South Indian merchants to travel in shallow water).<sup>101</sup>

However, there was a notable shift in the attitude of the IVP towards the Tamil minority after 1972. This was partly a response to the TULF's demand for the establishment of a free, sovereign, secular and socialist state of Eelam and the mandate it obtained in 1977 from the voters. The JVP had to take a stance on the issue and adopted a progressive position: it stood for a policy of equal status for Sinhala, Tamil and English, condemned discrimination on grounds of race and caste, and criticised the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964 and the Sirimavo-Gandhi agreement of 1974 for having been made without consulting the estate workers. Tamil and Muslim candidates were included in lists put forward by the JVP for Municipal and District Development Council Elections in 1980. The following year the JVP candidate in the Municipal Elections for Colombo was a Tamil. But while the Tamils were recognised as a distinct nationality the TULF was castigated as representing the Tamil bourgeoisie and its claim for Eelam was opposed. 102 However, a year later the tide had turned. At the presidential elections of 1982 the JVP slogan was 'Vote for the JVP to eliminate the cry for Eelam'. The return to Sinhala chauvinism took its toll: in the North and East the IVP came fifth out of six parties. In the mid-1980s it remained adamant that the solution to the ethnic problem was not devolution of power but a unitary socialist state incorporating forms of selfgovernment.

Justice. The JVP insurrection was first analysed by state officials and mainstream academics as an anti-state movement that would have to be crushed by the security forces to safeguard the legitimate state. There is at the core of Sri Lanka's state ideology the notion of its responsibility to ensure a dharmista samajaya, a just society. The state and its security forces see the 'dharmista society' as one in which social justice prevails, but one that can be achieved only through political stability. The ruler and his agents undertake to govern righteously, to provide for all citizens according to their merits and virtues, and to bring about material benefits for the ruled. In return, the ruled are expected to accept the status quo and to confine their dissent within the bounds of the political order. Therefore, crushing the JVP insurrection was a security

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> Lionel Bopage cited in G. Samaranayake, 'The Changing Attitude', p. 287.

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imperative that the state and the security forces took upon themselves. The JVP's activities were described in the state media as subversive threats to the state that could be dealt with only through the use of the Public Security Act. In 1971 Mrs Bandaranaike proclaimed she was 'ready for any threat to the peace'. <sup>103</sup>

Justice was at the core of the JVP vision of a sadharanaya lokaya ('equitable world') where the poor are not discriminated against and social justice prevails. In 1988 the IVP Action Centre issued a communiqué calling on the masses to protest the J.R. Jayawardena-Rajiv Gandhi accord, which brought about provincial councils and devolution of power. The rhetoric was one of justice and equality rather than individual rights: 'We shall not keep quiet when the patriots in the South who fight for equality and justice are massacred by mercenaries. We shall not wait patiently when the reasonable struggle by the students—our future generation—for justice and equality is repressed brutally.'104 In 1987-9 a primary component of its vision of social justice was the notion of mass universal education as a basic need. In the economic field, according to that vision, foreign trade, internal wholesale trade and heavy industry would be maintained as state monopolies. Foreign banks and financial institutions would be nationalised. A radical land reform would be implemented. And the ethnic problem would be dealt with by ensuring that equality prevailed among all races in education and land distribution.

The JVP took upon itself to secure social justice for the Sinhalese by taking up arms against what it saw as an oppressive state. It argued the Sri Lankan state after independence had been committed to welfarism—that is, to safeguarding the basic needs of its citizens. However, after 1977 the economy was opened up and industrial growth based on foreign investment was encouraged. A necessary concomitant to such an export-led strategy was the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's 'structural adjustment policies', which demanded a shifting of public resources away from social welfare into investment. The JVP opposed the system of private property on the grounds that a society based on humanistic principles can never be built on a capitalist framework. The socialisation of property relations was firmly defended. The JVP claimed that Sri Lanka had a neocolonial economy completely subservient to the imperialists. In this view capitalism, which had led to neoco-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Daily News, 6-7 March 1971.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?, p. 291.

lonial domination and an erosion of traditional mores and values, was the main enemy.  $^{105}$ 

Cost of the insurrection. New terms and old words with new meanings entered the language of the Sinhala people—beeshanaya (terror), wadhakagaraya (torture chamber), issuwa (kidnapped) and athurudahanwoowo (disappeared)—reflecting the new culture of violence and terror of the late 1980s. In many instances words that directly represent violence and terror were avoided and instead cautious and ambiguous terms were preferred. Instead of using the term 'civil war' for this period people still today speak of the beeshana kalaya, which means 'the time of great fear', a polite euphemism for a period when the government was close to collapsing. Torture (vadayak) is encapsulated in a word that also stands for a child's mischief. There was and still is in the use of euphemisms a tendency to avoid the mental representation or visualisation of a taboo act. 106

Political violence became institutionalised with the capture of power by the UNP in 1977. This heralded an era of political thuggery often perpetrated by members of the JSS (Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya) union, affiliated to the UNP. Intimidation and violence were tolerated and often encouraged by some Members of Parliament.

Since the violence in the South, unleashed by the JVP and the state, consisted mainly of ambushes, assassinations, kidnappings, roundups and torture, there was relatively little serious infrastructural damage. However, the social and psychological repercussions on the people were severe and long-lasting.

An estimated 40,000 people died during the period 1987–91 and thousands simply disappeared. <sup>107</sup> Most of the victims were men who left women and children behind. Community ties rarely held after the violence was over and women were left without help from their extended families. They had to cope with the loss while trying to resume a normal life. Or else, if the man returned after experiencing torture, the family had to deal with his pain which lasted well after the physical wounds were healed. Children too were touched intimately by the violence perpetrated against a family member, father or brother. Many children developed serious conditions—emotional distress, nightmares and fear—after witnessing abductions or violent acts against their parents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp. 259–66.

Alex Argenti-Pilleu, Masking Terror: How Women Contain Violence in Southern Sri Lanka, Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 104–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> G.H. Peiris, 'Insurrection', p. 185.

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The JVP insurrection in the south led to an imbalance in the home environment. The disappearance or death of their spouses, children, friends or relatives made women extremely vulnerable to a number of stresses. However, women devised strategies to cope with their needs and those of their families. They dealt with their feelings of hopelessness by concentrating all their efforts on their children. Religion and rituals too were performed, although the costs were often prohibitive. 108

After the People's Alliance came to power in 1994 three separate commissions were set up to investigate disappearances in all parts of Sri Lanka. Their mandate was to inquire into disappearances, recommend legal measures to deal with the culprits and also make recommendations to intervene on behalf of the victims. There was a feeling that justice would be done. The reports were completed in 1997 and revealed a total of 19,079 complaints. The commissions had established the disappearances of 16,742 persons. However, the names of the culprits were absent from the published version of the reports, although they had been referred to in many of the testimonies. The state, in the name of national security, avoided prosecuting police and military personnel fighting a war in the North-East. IVP violence was not subjected to the same scrutiny as UNP state violence for reasons of political expediency. 109 Interestingly, human rights groups and leaders of civil society soon forgot about the commission's task.

Although the JVP movement was violently crushed in the late 1980s, its ideas remained popular in certain circles such as the student movement and some trade unions. Militant Sinhala groups such as the proponents of a *Jathika Chintanaya* (National Ideology) in the early 1990s, student movements such as the Janata Mithuro (Friends of the People) in the mid 1990s, and trade unions drew on the JVP rhetoric that was based on a critique of the Sri Lanka state as a component of global capitalism. The JVP is today once more the leading force in the universities and with the passing of years many young men and women express, if not allegiance to the JVP, at least an intellectual affinity with its ideas. A well-known social critic, Gunadasa Ameresekere, has put forward the concept of *jathika arthikaya*, a national or indigenous economy. His vision idealises the village and rural culture and castigates the open

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Gameela Samarasinghe, 'Strategies of Coping' in Sasanka Perera (ed.), Stories of Survivors, pp. 102–19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Sasanka Perera, Stories of Survivors, pp. 120-44.

economy without clearly advocating an alternative model of development. Others envisage an environment-friendly regime that would control the pernicious effects of modernisation—tourism, pollution, urbanisation. These approaches reflect the need for security from 'imperialist/global threats' and a turning inward to focus on indigenousculture rather than international conceptions of human rights.

During the rounds of peace talks the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) denigrated all moves made by the 'peace lobby' to reach a negotiated peace settlement between the state and the LTTE and called for a military solution to the Tamil problem. It vilified 'foreign funded NGOs' as responsible for undermining the morale of the troops and pursuing selfish aims instead of thinking of the good of the nation. With each military setback these voices gained more momentum and a new circle of power emerged that harboured diametrically opposite views to those of the NGOs.

Today these same forces have coalesced in the Patriotic National Movement (PNM), whose aim is to save the nation, its sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country. The national executive council of the PNM includes two prominent Buddhist monks, an SLFP parliamentarian, a JVP parliamentarian, a well-known writer Gunadasa Amerasekara, Arjuna Ranatunga (a former cricket captain and deputy minister) and a host of other representatives of civil society. Together with the JVP, the JHU and the National Bhikku Front—an organization of nationalist Buddhist monks—it engaged in widespread protest activities against the signing of the Post-Tsunami Operational Structure.

No government would agree to reverse the ongoing process of liberalisation in order to appease the JVP or its supporters. But under pressure from these anti-capitalist forces, the state can be and has been forced to change its policy on certain issues. In the mid-1990s the state had to compromise with the striking workers of the Ceylon Electricity Board and assure them privatisation would not take place at the expense of their interests. Today the government is once again compelled to negotiate with JVP-controlled trade unions in order to push through its plan for restructuring key areas such as electricity and education. In early 2005 the electricity reform proposal drawn up by the Ministry was withdrawn by the government after the Ceylon Electricity Board trade union threatened to launch an all-out strike with the possibility of plunging the entire country into darkness.

A feature of the JVP has been its phoenix-like capacity to rise up from its ashes. Few parties that faced near total decimation would

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have been able to muster enough support to lead another rebellion after the first one was crushed less than twenty years before. Today the IVP has once again been resurrected and has gained much strength since the late 1990s. All but one of the major university student bodies are controlled by the JVP, while local government has a number of JVP representatives in its fold. In the 1990s the IVP succeeded in entering Parliament, and at the time of writing it commands a force of 38 deputies in a house of 225. In 2003 it helped the SLFP-led coalition to regain power and form a government. Rewarded with some important portfolios, the IVP has remained an opposition within the government, where it positions itself as the representative of popular interests. It lays claim to a higher moral ground than the two larger parties, the UNP and SLFP, that have been repeatedly embroiled in and tainted by corruption scandals. The ultimate aim of the JVP is to capture power after a decade or so.

The old left is close to vanishing point, with a single nominated representative in Parliament. The dream of a large progressive left wing is dead. One tends to agree with those who claim that the old left, too close to power and privilege, was doomed from the very beginning to be a marginal force in the politics of the country, confirming Marx's opinion or warning that 'social existence determined consciousness'. As Gananath Obeysekere remarked:

...The Communist and Trotskyite leadership was not (and is not) an 'underprivileged group': they spoke for the under-privileged but were themselves privileged, and lived an unabashedly high style of living. Close relations, sibling and even parents of this group might belong to right wing parties and a social network connected them with the sources of power and privilege.<sup>110</sup>

Today, while election results show that many are still attracted by socialist ideals, and others live their left sensibilities through institutions other than parties and trade unions—such as NGOs and social movements—or through alternative lifestyles, there is no party that truly embodies the values of equality and freedom, the central tenets of the left.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Gananath Obeysekere, 'Comments on the Social Background of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 33, 3, May 1974, p. 380.

Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Sri Lanka's Left: from Class and Trade-unions to Civil Society and NGOs' in Rajan Philips (ed.), Sri Lanka: Global Challenges and National Crises, Proceedings of the Hector Abhayavardhana Felicitation Symposium, pp. 187–215.

### TAMIL SEPARATISM/NATIONALISM

In an instant
Gun shots will explode
The quiet will shatter
Flies
And street dogs, sometimes
Will take up arms
The wind, grief
laden
Will shudder
As if to say
'That is the way it is

In between times'

- Balasoorian, 'When Our Peace is Shattered'1

'We wish to state clearly and emphatically that we are not a group of amateur armed adventurists roaming in the jungles with romantic illusions, nor are we a band of terrorists or vandals who kill and destroy at random for anarchic reasons...on the contrary we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice...we are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed.'2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Chelva Kanaganayakam (ed.), Lutesong and Lament: Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka, Toronto, 2001, pp. 140–1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cited in Sumantra Bose, *State, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement*, New Delhi and London, 1994, p. 84.

— Open letter, dated 20 July 1979, from Vellupillai Prabhakaran, supreme commander and chairman, Central Committee LTTE, to Ranasinghe Premadasa, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, on enactment of the PTA

By the early 1970s Sri Lanka had begun its descent into political instability. A few years after the 1971 JVP insurrection, the unity and institutions of the postcolonial state were once again challenged by secessionist armed insurrections waged by an array of groups that claimed to represent the Tamil peoples of Sri Lanka. Thirty years later the project of Tamil separatism dominated by a single militant organisation, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), remains the establishment of a separate state of Tamil Eelam incorporating the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the Sri Lankan state. The struggle, then and now, has the character of a quest for sovereignty founded on the principle of self-determination.<sup>3</sup>

Scholarly attempts at understanding the events of the last fifty years among Tamils, and between Tamils and other communities of the island, have centred around two issues generally treated quite conventionally. The first line of analysis, which pertains to the notion of continuity and breaks, strives to identify phases in a longer continuum called Tamil nationalism seeking substance in the early years of the twentieth century. Some scholars, for instance, demarcate two clear phases in the mobilisation of the Tamils within the unifying narrative of Tamil nationalism, the first being political and the second military. The second line of questioning is related to the origins of the insurrection, either as a symptom of a crisis within Tamil society or as a reaction to an oppressive state. Only a few scholars would still evoke Tamil nationalism as the encounter between the nation and antinational atavisms.

Recent scholarship has noted that conventional works emphasise and analyse the 'defensive and reactive' nature of Tamil nationalism and focus on the victimhood of Tamils,<sup>4</sup> without taking into

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Some of the main readings on Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka in the English language are R.N. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, Durham, NC, 1967; S.J. Tambiah, Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, Chicago, 1986; A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, The Break-up of Sri Lanka: the Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict, London, 1988; idem, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947–1977, London, 1994; idem, Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, London, 2000; Neil DeVotta, Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka, Stanford, 2004.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> R. Cheran in *The Sixth Genre: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination*, Colombo, 2001, has cited as examples of this trend the work of A.J. Wil-

account the transformation of Tamil nationalism from a victim's voice to a voice of power and force where the Tamil is no longer a 'paraiyah' Tamil but a 'Puliththamil' (Tiger Tamil). 5 The argument that Tamil insurgency arose out of the twin processes of political mobilisation and institutional decay in a majoritarian state finds much currency.<sup>6</sup> A recent article epitomising this argument speaks of a 'control democracy' in Sri Lanka, in which the majority group eschews ethnic compromise with minorities and instead solely controls the levers of power in the attempt to create a Sinhalese ethnocracy.7 Institutions such as the bureaucracy, the police, the defence forces, the public education system and the judicial system were biased against the Tamils, which led to the two above mentioned phases. The first argument, focusing on Tamil roots of Tamil nationalism, has been avoided by many scholars as it bends dangerously towards whitewashing the state of any responsibility in the emergence of Tamil nationalism. Nationalism or ethnicity are not immanent forces and they have to be understood in a relational framework.

Mindful of these various arguments, this chapter attempts a reading that takes into account dissent and multiple strands within Tamil nationalism as well as contradictions from within Tamil society as compounding the state's unfair treatment of minorities.

# Being Tamil: multiple modes

Defining Tamilness in purely national/territorial terms is problematic today, as transnational factors play a crucial role. Diaspora Tamils have multiple allegiances—to their new home in the West, to the land they left and to the dream of Eelam—and in various

son, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka*; M. Gunasingam, *Sri Lanka Tamil Nationalism: A Study of its Origins*, Sydney 1999; and Tamil works such as M. Thirunavukkarasu, *The Fundamentals of Sri Lankan Ethnic Question*, Chennai, 1994 and V. Nithiyanandam, 'An Analysis of Economic Factors behind the Development of Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka' in Charles Abeysekere and Newton Gunasinghe (eds), *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1987, pp. 100–70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Cheran, The Sixth Genre, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The best example of this is A.J. Wilson's *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, which starts with the words: 'This nationalism evolved gradually, as a defensive reaction to events...' p. 1.

Neil DeVotta, 'Control Democracy, Institutional Decay, and the Quest for Eelam: Explaining Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka', Pacific Affairs, 73, 1, pp. 55–76.

ways they have forged close and organic links with one form or another of Tamil nationalism.

Even in the confines of the nation-state of Sri Lanka, the Tamil community is not one but many; between the Jaffna Tamils and the Estate/Indian Tamils there are significant divides founded on perceptions more than on history or culture. Other differences in religion and caste have created communities that stand apart. Being Tamil means something quite different for the Eastern Province farmer and the Colombo Tamil Vellala lawyer. Furthermore, unlike in India, being a Tamil-speaker cannot be equated with being a Tamil. Most Muslims speak Tamil but consider themselves as forming a distinct community, if not distinct communities—Malays, Sindhis, Borahs have nurtured a specific identity and resisted being absorbed into the Moor majority.

Unlike works that aim at comprehending a given 'ethnic identity of the indigenous Tamil people of Sri Lanka' and at construing how this identity was formed or welded, this chapter will first question the very notion of a single Tamil ethnic identity and attempt to show that even if commonalities exist between the Tamil speakers of Sri Lanka, Tamil culture and Tamil politics are laced with deep divides. A study of Tamil identity is not complete without mention of diasporic manifestations of nationalism. Migration of Tamils to other countries has led to the creation of hybrid and hyphenated identities and in many cases to the strengthening of ethnocentric identities. The imagined nation of Tamil Eelam is subject to a reconfiguration and remaking in the diaspora.

Furthermore, the evolution from community consciousness to Tamil national awareness and finally to Tamil national consciousness, a notion which underpins most works attempting to explain the rise of separatist demands, will be scrutinised. Much evidence points to an elite political consciousness until the late 1960s with very limited popular appeal until the early '70s. Any account of Tamil nationalism should try to avoid illusory lines of continuity and query the representativeness of those who speak in the name of Tamil nationalism.

Pan-Tamilness: 'a great Tamil-speaking world of goodness'

An important aspect of 'Being Tamil' has throughout the last centuries involved the process of either linking or delinking with southern Tamil-speaking India. Pan-Tamil cultural traits have featured at various times with greater or lesser vividness in the Sri Lankan Tamil

identity. The more affluent Tamils visited India frequently: Arumuga Navalar travelled and preached in India for a great part of his life. In Madras and Chidambaram a Navalar press and a Navalar school can still be found. Others too, such as C.W. Thamotharampillai (1832–1901) and V. Kanagasabhai (1855–1906), spent most of their lives in South India, holding positions in government service but returning to Jaffna off and on to found schools in their villages. British rule offered opportunities to scholars and poets to travel to India freely. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the 'Jaffna School' dominated the literary scene in Madras. Leading Tamil politicians from Jaffna, such as the Ramanathan brothers, received a greater part of their education in Madras.<sup>8</sup>

At a popular level, there had been a flow of pilgrims from India to the Hindu *kovils* of Sri Lanka, as Paul E. Pieris suggested:

Long before the arrival of Vijaya (543 BC) there were in Lanka, five recognized Iswarams of Siva, which claimed and received the adoration of all India. These were Tiruketeeswaram near Mahatitta, Munneswaram dominating Salavatta and the Pearl Fishery, Tondeswaram near Mantota, Tirukoneswaram opposite the great bay of Koddiyar and Nakuleswaram near Kankesanturai.<sup>9</sup>

Just as Indians crossed over to Sri Lanka, Hindus from Sri Lanka went over to India to temples and other pilgrimage centres. A large part of the subcontinent was connected by a cluster of pilgrimage centres. Many Sanskrit texts refer to the seven cities 'that grant release', namely Benaras, Kanti, Hardwar, Ayodhya, Dwarka, Mathura and Ujjain. Kanti is in most texts identified with Kanchipuram in South India. <sup>10</sup> Many Tamil Hindus from the North and East of Sri Lanka visited these places as well as temples in Rameshwaram, Madurai, Tirichentoor, Tanjore. Ashes were taken to Kasi by those for whom Benares was too far a distance. Often the travel was organised by members of the Chetty community. However, whether these links with South India created a sense of belonging to a larger community is difficult to assess in the absence of sufficient sources on popular rituals and habits during the colo-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, p. 128; K. Kailasapathy, 'Cultural and Linguistic Consciousness of the Tamil Community' in Social Scientists' Association (SSA), *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984, pp. 107–20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Paul E. Pieris, 'Nagadeepa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna', Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (CB), XXVI, 70, 1917, pp. 17–18.

Peter van der Veer, Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1994, pp. 121–2.

nial period. But one knows for instance 'that composers of the great Saivite hymns in Tamil Nadu included temples in Jaffna and in Sri Lanka in their praises as a matter of course', such as Sampantar, Manickavasagar, Appar and Sundaramurti.<sup>11</sup>

Some specific policies of the British might have strengthened the Tamil identity by creating an essentially monoethnic province in the North. When the British took over administration of Ceylon from the Dutch in 1796 the territories in the north and east where Tamil speakers were in a majority were constituted as two separate provinces. At first the Sinhalese jungle districts were incorporated in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, but in 1873 they were detached to form a new province and the Northern Province became more homogeneously Tamil. The Eastern Province extended from Trincomalee to Pottuvil and incorporated Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala villages. British rule acted in diverse ways on the society of the north and east. Economic changes were absorbed into the framework of existing social structures, but the units of family, santhati (descent) and caste remained strong. Christian evangelism had complex and contradictory effects. Initially a tool in the hands of the missionaries, it became a weapon seized by political leaders to control their destinies.

Tamil nationalism, it has been argued, was initially expressed through religious and cultural revivals directed against Christian hegemony, but later took the shape of a movement trying to show its distinctness from South India. The Saivite/Tamil revival started fifty years before the Buddhist revival in the South, mainly as a movement to resist Christian proselytisation and the spread of an alien culture and religion. Arumugam Navalar's (1822-79) movement to revive the Saivite/Tamil culture in the Jaffna peninsula allegedly sparked off fifty years later the articulation of a distinct Sri Lankan Tamil consciousness that was pitted against what may be called South Indian Tamil consciousness. Although this interpretation can be supported, recent scholarship has questioned the sole emphasis placed on Navalar as the pioneer of Tamil nationalism. 12 Besides Navalar some of the prominent intellectuals of the time were Kasivasi Senthinathaiar, Sankara Pandithar, and Valvai Vythilingam Pillai. 13 In all these authors' writings the distinctive

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers*, p. 128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See R. Cheran, The Sixth Genre, p. 5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> R. Cheran, 'Cultural Politics of Tamil Nationalism', *South Asia Bulletin*, XII, 1 (spring 1992), pp. 43–4.

character of Jaffna Tamil culture was stressed, even though it was never conceived, at least until the 1920s, as a break from the 'great Tamil speaking world of goodness'. This was particularly significant in the field of literature. Literature was largely imitative of South Indian literature, while certain elements of Tamil culture such as Bharata Natyam, Senthamil or classical Tamil and Karnatic music were cultivated as foundations of a high culture. The revivalist movement was clearly one of the upper middle classes paying homage to what they felt was the superior culture of India, in which they did not hesitate to identify certain cultural markers. As late as 1947 modern religious writers such as S. Nataraca, following Navalar's example, termed India the motherland and Jaffna the Childland.

The reference point shifted significantly from the mainland to the island nation in the early 1920s. The first clear break occurred at the literary level with the works of Thuraiappah Pillai (1872–1929) and Comasuntara Pulavar, who looked towards the island of Lanka rather than the peninsula as their motherland. Thereafter it was more common for Tamil works of fiction to include Sinhalese characters in an island referred to as Eelam.

A similar shift occurred in the political sphere where Tamil leaders such as Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam were at the forefront of the movement for a nationalism that encompassed Sinhalas and Tamils. The Ceylon National Congress was until the early 1920s a forum where elites of all communities could together press for limited demands from the colonial government. This unity collapsed when Sinhalese leaders refused to accommodate one Tamil representative to be elected from Colombo. The formation in 1921 of the Tamil Mahajana Sabha led by Ponnambalam Ramanathan, and later of the Tamil Congress, sealed the division of the island into conflicting communities. If In this organisation the Vellala-Saivite identity at the heart of Navalar's revivalism overrode yearnings for Pan Tamilness that existed in a latent form within the revivalist project. Thus, among elite Tamils, 'being Tamil' was never a constant.

# Being Tamil: history and past

A clue to the meaning of 'Being Tamil' may be found in early literary texts and Tamil inscriptions, or in the way the past is con-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See N. Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 44–5.

ceived. Debates in the Tamil language have been vibrant but are seldom incorporated into scholarship produced in the West on this issue. <sup>15</sup> Pathmanathan points out that ancient Tamil Chronicles articulate a perception of Tamil identity inspired by attachment to one of the four regions populated by Tamils, Jaffna, the Vanni, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. In that sense he confirms the notion that for the Tamils heritage is more important than ethno-history: 'For being Tamil no history of state was needed, but to justify existence it was'. <sup>16</sup>

Thus Sri Lankan Tamils have quite a different approach to their history as compared with the Sinhalas. Their claim to ancient origins in the island was mainly a reaction to the claim made by Sinhala nationalists to be the island's original inhabitants. 17 The debate about who came first, who was the original inhabitant, what expanse of land was under Tamil control, and hence who had more claims to part or totality of the land was a late development. Literary works seem to corroborate the fact that before Sinhala nationalism rekindled its myths of origin Tamils did not feel it was vital to justify their belonging or claim to the land they lived on. In Sri Lanka it was in the northern peninsula that Tamil histories invariably of the Jaffna Kingdom-were written. Hindus and Christians wrote different types of histories in the nineteenth century. Casie Chitty for instance wrote a history of Jaffna for the Royal Asiatic Society. More than Hindus, who had other means of identification, Christians felt the need for a secular history distinct from sacred texts like the Sthalapuranas and detached from the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. Arumuga Navalar typically never referred to Tamil or Jaffna history. It was in the late nineteenth century that Hindu Tamils such as Catacivapillai and A. Muttutampipillai recognised the need to write a history of Jaffna Tamils where linkages were made between the kingdom of Jaffna, Tamil culture and religion. They were followed by Gnanaprakasar and C. Rasanayagam,

17 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> R. Cheran, *The Sixth Genre*, cites the work of K. Sivathambi, *Re-invention of Tamil Culture*, Chennai, 1996; S. Guna, *The Redemption of Tamils: A Historical Look*, Chennai, 1994; and K. Gnanai, *Tamilian Life and History: an Introduction to Tamil National Politics*, Koimbatore, India, 1999, as important contributions in the Ta

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 'Tamils and the Meaning of History' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*, Boulder, CO, 1994, pp. 169–207.

who through their works attempted to prove that the kingdom of Jaffna was not a myth but a real fact.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, as the twentieth century unfolded, being a Tamil acquired a new meaning for the literate Jaffna Tamils, something that transcended commonalities of culture, kin and custom. Histories of the Tamils, although centred around Jaffna, did not fail to include the Eastern Province and the Vanni as territories under the same rule. Quite typically, no histories were written from the periphery of the kingdom of Jaffna that contested their reading.

In the 1930s the character of the histories that had been mainly based on mythical chronicles, such as the *Yalppana Vaipava Malai*, changed with the filtering in of new epigraphical South Indian sources. Sources were used to emphasise quite forcefully the preponderance of Dravidians and Tamils in Ceylon from ancient times. In the 1950s Tamil literati, while acknowledging cultural and linguistic links with South India, began to assert individuality in a number of writings. Professor K. Kanapathipillai, for instance, published in 1956 his historical play *Sankili*, which he prefaced with a *History of Tamils in Sri Lanka*. The claim that the Tamil language existed in its purest form in Sri Lanka was an indication of the new relationship developing between the Tamils of the North and East and South India.<sup>19</sup>

In the late twentieth century history and archaeology were increasingly politicised, so much so it was commonly said Sinhala archaeologists dig horizontally while Tamil archaeologists dig vertically. The 'Homeland' concept spawned a rather senseless debate between Sinhala scholars and Tamil or liberal minded scholars on the historicity of the alleged homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples. On both sides arguments were based on epigraphical, linguistic, literary and archival sources to prove and debunk the theory that Tamils were the first settlers in Sri Lanka and had lived in the Northern and Eastern Provinces since time immemorial.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, The Politics of the Tamil Past in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict, London and New York, 1990, pp. 110–14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ambalavanar Sivarajah, *Politics of Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 113–14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> See Chelvadurai Manogaran, *The Untold Story of Ancient Tamils in Sri Lanka*, Chennai, 2000; K.M. de Silva, *The Traditional Homelands of the Tamils*, Kandy, 1995; G.H. Peiris, 'An Appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Tamil Homeland in Sri Lanka', *Ethnic Studies Report*, IX (1), 1991, pp. 13–39.

# Regional modes of being Tamil

Tamils from Jaffna and Tamils from the Eastern Province. Historical precision is wanting if one tries to chart the process of Tamil settlement in different parts of the island. Prior to the thirteenth century, Tamil migrants—warriors, merchants, artisans, fishermen, priests—trickled in from the shores of Tamil Nadu and settled in various parts of the island. Some merged with the people among whom they lived and lost a specific Tamil identity. The Chola invasions of the eleventh century, followed by frequent Pandyan intrusions, contributed to a large-scale settlement of Tamils in the northern and eastern parts of the island. <sup>21</sup>

Historians agree that at the end of the thirteenth century a Dravidian chieftain from Pandya, a kingdom adjacent to that of the Cholas, created a kingdom that lasted until 1620. The kingdom gradually became the focal point of a distinct Tamil identity centred around Jaffna and different both from the mainland and from the Sinhala community that lived in the south of the island. Its control extended over the northern and eastern parts of the island. The establishment of the kingdom of Jaffna triggered off successive waves of immigration from Tamil Nadu well into the eighteenth century.

Tamil society in the North and East is by no means homogeneous. Jaffna Tamils (the Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula and of the Northern Province) differ from the Batticaloa Tamils (the Tamils of the eastern coastal Province). Colonialism created other divides when Tamils converted to Catholicism or other forms of Christianity, essentially in the Northern Province. Today about 7 per cent of Tamils are Christians. Caste is also a dominant identity marker among Tamils. In the Northern Province the Vellala caste were considered the dominant caste both numerically and in terms of power until the 1960s when intermediary and oppressed castes began to challenge their right to dominate society. The Vellalas include a number of subgroups such as the Mudaliyars, Talaiyars, Maniakars and Vidanais, and according to some historians absorbed a number of other castes and communities from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, including Chetties and Malayalees. The Brahmins are temple employees hired by the Vellalas, few in number and isolated from the rest of the people.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Sinappah Arasaratnam, 'Sri Lanka's Tamils: Under Colonial Rule' in Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*, Boulder, CO, 1994, p. 29.

The Koviyars, who were traditionally the Vellalas's domestics and according to some sources descendants of Sinhala Goyigamas captured in the wars, rank next to the Vellalas in the caste hierarchy and are considered equal in all rituals. In secular terms however they are considered inferior. Attention has recently focused on the Karaiyars, coastal people whose traditional occupation is fishing and whose traditional town is Valvettithurai. The status of the Karaiyars is being re-read by scholars mindful that the leadership of the main Tamil secessionist group belongs to this caste. From a low to intermediate status in earlier scholarship the Karaiyar are sometimes qualified as elite groups in recent works.<sup>22</sup>

Minority Tamils constituted mainly the Pallar, Nalayar, Parayar and Vannar agricultural labouring castes. Colonial rule had a mixed effect on the structure of caste in Jaffna. Under the Dutch the Vellalas consolidated their position and benefited from tobacco cultivation. Under Roman-Dutch law the Pallars and Nalavars became slaves and supplied the field labour for the Vellala cultivators. In 1844 the abolition of slavery by the British put an end to slavebased tobacco farming and the number of those claiming to be Vellalas swelled to 50 per cent in the 1950s. Vellallas reacted to the upward mobility of the minority castes by continuing the imposition of the sumptuary restrictions that had had the force of law under the Dutch, through extralegal restrictions. Minority caste members in the 1940s and 1950s were for instance 'forbidden to enter or live near temples, to draw water from the wells of high caste families, to enter laundries, barber shops, cages, or taxis; to keep women in seclusion and protect them by enacting domestic rituals; to wear shoes, to sit on bus seats, to register their names properly so that social benefits could be obtained; to attend school, to cover the upper part of the body, to wear gold earrings; if a male to cut one's hair, to use umbrellas, to own a bicycle or car, to cremate the dead; or to convert to Christianity or Buddhism'.23

Many Vellallas believed that Minority Tamils were non-Tamilian, aboriginal people of low status. This feeling of being apart was internalised by Pallars and Nalavars who sometimes referred to Vellalas as 'Tamils'. The Eastern Province was in the early twentieth century a no-man's land, where in 1915 arrested railway workers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> A.J. Wilson, Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, pp. 18–21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Bryan Pfaffenberger, 'The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism: the 1968 Temple Entry Crisis in Sri Lanka' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, p. 146.

were deported. As in other parts of the Empire the British built communications from the metropolis to the periphery and not between peripheral regions. As late as 1945 the Soulbury Commission stated that 'the means of communication between the Northern and Eastern Provinces leave much to desire'.<sup>24</sup> Colonial rule did not recognise the existence of a separate Eastern Province Tamil identity and subsumed all Tamils under the generic terms of 'Jaffna Tamils' or 'Ceylon Tamils'.<sup>25</sup>

The Eastern Province was inhabited by two historically interlinked Tamil-speaking communities: the Tamils and the Muslims. The social structure in that Province revolves around the dominant Tamil Hindu agricultural castes, the Mukkuvars and the Vellalas, which are supported by a range of service and specialist castes. In similar fashion to the Sinhala binna marriage, where the son-in-law joins the household of his wife, marriages in the Eastern Province are matrilocal. Unlike in Jaffna and in common with the Tamilspeaking Muslims of the Eastern Province, kinship is matrilineal, so family descent is traced from a man to his sister's son. The matrilineal clan (kuti) system can be traced to the invasion of the Polonnaruwa Kingdom of Kalinga Magha and his soldiers from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the early thirteenth century. There are many elements that make the Tamils of Batticaloa and Amparai districts, and even the southern parts of the Trincomalee districts, culturally and sociologically distinct from Jaffna. Among these are the matrilineal clan based temple leadership role, matrilocal marriage patterns, total premortem transfer of wealth (both houses and land) as dowry, a regional dialect of Tamil, and non-Brahmanical Hindu ritual traditions.<sup>26</sup>

Tamil-speaking Muslims and Veddas. In the Eastern Province Hindu and Muslim villages are commonly interspersed. Muslims, like other Tamil speaking communities, were politically subordinated to the Mukkuvars until recent times. There was probably a significant degree of intermarriage in the precolonial period between Muslims and Tamils, who shared many common characters such as the matri-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Cited in A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 'The Colombo Man, the Jaffna Man, and the Batticaloa Man: Regional Identities and the Rise of the Federal Party' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, p. 127.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Dennis B. McGilvray, 'Tamil and Muslim Identities in the East', MARGA Journal, New Series, I, 1, January–March 2003, pp. 79–116.

lineal clan system. Muslims participated in Hindu temple festivals and some Hindu castes such as the Paraiyar drummers were given a customary role in the celebration of Muslim saints' festivals. This changed in the early twentieth century, when Muslims severed these ties in a bid to challenge the domination of the Mukkuvars by refusing to partake in ceremonies that validated these hierarchies. There was also a growing sense of Islamic identity that led the mostly Tamilspeaking Muslims from the mid-fifties onwards to conspicuously resist being unequivocally identified as Tamils.<sup>27</sup>

Sri Lankan Muslims, according to their class and regional origin, drift between several languages—Arabic-Tamil, Tamil, Sinhala, and English—but their imagined community is that of Islam. They are Sunnis and members of the Shafi legal school. Formally referred to as Sri Lankan Moors, the leaders of the Muslim community gradually shed the 'racial' Moor identity and put forward an exclusively religious identity. In 1949 the government of D.S. Senanayake replaced 'Moor' with Muslim in the electoral register. Today they comprise 7 per cent of Sri Lanka's population. Two-thirds of the Muslim population of Sri Lanka live in the seven Sinhala-dominated provinces, while the rest inhabit the Eastern Province. In 1990 over 60,000 Muslims were dislodged from the Jaffna peninsula. The selfrepresentation of the elite Southern Muslims has been one of a peaceful trading community of Arab—as opposed to Tamil—origin. The Easterners, who are essentially farmers or fishermen, are excluded from this representation. Although many see Tamil as their mother tongue, they have resisted merging with Eastern Tamil people with whom they have many common features.<sup>28</sup>

In the Batticaloa district of the Eastern Province there are a few villages whose inhabitants still affirm a Vedda identity distinct from the majority Tamil identity. However, the trend is moving towards absorption of the Veddas into a larger Tamil community. The folk religious forms are being gradually overridden by forms influenced by the Brahminic tradition. For instance, the annual *saddanku* festival celebrated in Vedda temples in Mankerni and Palchenai has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid. and Dennis McGilvray, 'Mukkuvar Vannimai: Tamil Caste and Matriclan Ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka', in D.B. McGilvray (ed.), Caste Ideology and Interaction, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 34–97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Qadri Ismail, 'Unmooring Identity: The Antinomies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka' in P. Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds), Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1995, pp. 55–105.

been purged of certain ceremonies such as 'the capture of the wild buffalo'. Weekly Friday *poojas* are held instead, traditional village priests are being replaced by Brahminic priests, and in Mankerni a Murugan temple has been built by a Tamil landowner from Jaffna. The folk rituals are disappearing under the pressure of the civilising project of Tamil nationalism, a process commenced by the colonial state and consolidated after independence by the post-colonial elites' vision of development.<sup>29</sup>

Estate Tamils/the Indian Tamil community. Another deep dividing line runs through the Tamil community. On one side are those Tamils who have been variously called 'Ceylon', 'Sri Lankan' or 'Indigenous' Tamils, who are themselves divided into Jaffna Tamils and Eastern or Batticaloa Tamils, and who constitute 12.6 per cent of the population. On the other side of the line are those Tamilspeakers whose ancestors came to the island from South India in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, mostly to labour on the island's coffee and subsequently tea plantations.<sup>30</sup> The dialect they speak is different and considered less prestigious than that spoken in the Jaffna peninsula. At its peak in 1953 this group constituted 12 per cent of the population. In 1946 they exceeded the Jaffna Tamil total, but deportation and voluntary emigration have depleted their numbers. Non-Estate Tamils give the hill country Tamils the derogatory name vatakkatayan (northerners), and the hill country Tamils call all non-Estate Tamils by the deprecatory epithet *panankottai cuppis* (suckers of palmyra seeds).<sup>31</sup>

# Being Tamil: diasporic ways

Following the surge in ethnic violence over one and a half million Tamils left their homes to seek refuge in other countries. The less affluent crossed the Palk Straits and settled in India. The more adventurous migrated to Australia, the United States and European countries.

In 1995 three-quarters of the non-Indian Tamil population of Sri Lanka, locked in a cultural condition of liminality, had either been

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Yuvi Thangarajah, 'Narratives of Victimhood as Ethnic Identity among the Veddas of the East Coast' in Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds), Unmaking the Nation, pp. 191–218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils*, London and New York, 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Valentin Daniel, Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence, Princeton, 1996, p. 17.

internally displaced or sought asylum overseas. 700,000 were classified as displaced and receiving Sri Lanka government assistance; 200,000 are in Colombo and its suburbs. A further 320,000 people have sought political asylum in Europe and in North America.<sup>32</sup>

Across the globe they form a cultural and political community linked through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) by a common language, religion, and for some a dream of returning to a land called Eelam. CMC, comprising different systems such as electronic mail, bulletin board systems and real-time chat services, is both an interpersonal, one-to-one medium of communication and a one-to-many or even many-to-many form of mass communication. It is playing a central role in the formation of a transnational Tamil community.<sup>33</sup> Today over one-quarter of the Sri Lanka Tamil population lives overseas. Although 90 per cent originate from peninsular Jaffna, there are significant divisions within the exiled population. In Switzerland, for instance, Tamils who arrived between 1983 and 1989, largely comprising lower-middle class Vellalas, feel the presence of a growing non-Vellala, lower-class Tamil population and the threat that this poses to their long-term security.<sup>34</sup>

Siva, a fifty-five-year-old Tamil who had been in Switzerland since 1983, has described how 'Chankanai has come to Switzerland':

Everything has changed for us now in Switzerland. It is like this. In the early days it was like Kokkuvil in the 1940s, but today it is like Chankanai in the 1970s. In Kokkuvil we Vellala were dominant. We owned the land, we had our temples, the Pallar climbed our trees, worked on our fields and sharpened their knives for us. The washermen lived close by and took in our clothes. The fishermen brought their fish from the lagoon to our door. There was order. Everyone knew their place and was happy with it. Then came Chankanai. The depressed castes led by a few hotheads, marched on the temples, barged in line at the clean wells and sat at desks in our classrooms. Everything was changing. And then came the politics. Things had to change, but it was sudden. The elderly couldn't cope. The young thought that they could, but even to them these new found freedoms brought trouble.'35

In fashioning a Tamilness in the diaspora, history and collective memory play a crucial role. The dominant separatist group, the Liberation Tamils of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has succeeded in its

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Christopher McDowell, A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland, Providence, RI, 1996, pp. 5–6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Harinda Vidanage, work in progress on Tamil diaspora.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> McDowell, A Tamil Asylum Diaspora, p. 229.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Cited in ibid., p. 231.

objective of radicalising the Sri Lanka Tamils overseas. New rituals linked to the LTTE movement have been incorporated into the festivals of the diaspora Tamils: the Black Tigers Day, or Black July, and the birthday of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran are celebrated the world over. Toronto, which has a population of 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils, has been a privileged venue for the celebration of Great Warriors' Day which lasts a week from 21 to 27 November. 'The venue for the ceremonies is designed as a cemetery complete with artificial tombstones. These tombstones are inscribed with names and dates of birth and heroic death of Tigers whose kith and kin live in Toronto.'<sup>36</sup>

For diasporic Tamil communities across the globe these rituals link them with their imagined nation of Eelam and with the struggle until death of the fighters whom they support in more than one way. After 1997, for instance, the LTTE allegedly solicited one day's pay per working person per month. Businessmen were often approached for donations. <sup>37</sup> 'We regard all those who live outside Tamil Eelam and make their contribution as friends of the liberation of the Tamil land', said Velupillai Prabhakaran in 1997. <sup>38</sup>

Since the early twentieth century there have been multiple ways of 'Being Tamil', and the twenty-first century is witnessing even more configurations. Attempting to understand Tamil consciousness would be futile without accepting the unevenness and disjointed pattern of its evolution.

Land, language, education: the quest for Tamil rights, 1950s-60s

In the 1950s and 1960s elite sections of the Tamil people assumed leadership to demand certain rights from the state for the region they considered their own. What prompted them to assume this role, and did the people identify with their leadership? To understand the material basis of Tamil separatism it can be useful to look at the asymmetrical distribution of power, both between the centre and the periphery and between groups within the periphery.

Elite strategic nationalism. The growth of political parties has been evoked in many works that purport to chart the growth of a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> R. Cheran, The Sixth Genre, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, 'Impact of the Mobilised Tamil Diaspora on the Protracted Conflict in Sri Lanka' in Kumar Rupesinghe (ed.), Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka: Efforts, Failures and Lessons, London, 1998, pp. 301–28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Cited in Ibid., p. 301.

mainstream and homogeneous Tamil nationalism. The narrative generally starts with the creation of the Federal Party in late 1949 by three Tamil parliamentarians—S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, C. Vanniasingham and Senator E.M.V. Naganathan—who had broken away from G.G. Ponnambalam's Tamil Congress over the latter's decision to enter the government of D.S. Senanayake.<sup>39</sup> The new party's name in Tamil was Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi—literally translated as 'the Ceylon Tamil State or Government Party'. With the creation of this party, it is generally argued, a new phase in the political mobilisation of the Tamils began. In the years following independence a number of issues pitted Tamil politicians against the Sinhala state: these were the national flag, citizenship and voting rights for Estate/Indian Tamils, Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages of the state and state-aided colonisation in the North and East.

This early phase has sometimes been interpreted as one of reactive nationalism. However, a number of events point to a form of strategic nationalism rather than a simple reaction to the dominant state nationalism. As early as 26 November 1947 Chelvanayakam had asked in Parliament 'why the Tamils should not have the right to secede from the rest of the country if they desired to do so'.40 This indicated that even before the Citizenship Acts were passed the future leader of the Federal Party had the option of secession in mind. Was he mindful of the possibility of another Pan-Sinhala cabinet as in 1936? Clearly he heard the stirrings of the Sinhala nationalists. In 1953 a resolution of the Federal Party was adopted demanding the establishment of a Tamil university. Until then no Sinhala university had been created or conceived. As Wilson points out, 'Even before the Sinhala movement had advanced to the point of demanding that the Sinhala-oriented Vidyalankara and Vidyodaya pirivenas be made universities, Ceylon Tamil opinion, as represented by the Federal Party, was seeking in advance to safeguard Tamil interests by asking for a Tamil university'. 41 Thus the Tamil nationalism propounded by the Federal Party was pre-emptive and strategic, and motivated by fears that later events proved to be well founded. The violence of 1958 only served to estrange Tamil politicians further from legitimate politics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> A.J. Wilson, Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Cited in A.J. Wilson, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

Grievances: material basis. The movement for Tamil rights in the 1950s and 1960s was largely motivated by the loss of specific privileges that Tamils had enjoyed in the colonial period. For the elite leadership of the Tamil parties this was compounded by a need for recognition, on the part of the Sinhala leadership with whom they had then shared power, if not in the political sphere at least in economic, social and cultural arenas. Importantly, the assertion by theaspirant Sinhala Buddhist classes in the 1950s was not only cultural and political but very clearly of an economic nature. The Tamil leadership responded to what they perceived as a Sinhala reconquest in the two areas of land colonisation and language policy, areas for which schemes were used as instruments by which employment and development were being bestowed upon members of the majority community.

In Sri Lanka the term 'colonisation' meant the creation of agricultural settlements in the interior of the island. By the late 1960s the government had alienated more than 300,000 acres of land to 67,000 persons in major colonisation schemes. The issue of state colonisation of land in the Eastern and Northern Provinces, with the alleged purpose of Sinhalising these areas—which Tamils considered their traditional homelands—was an issue even before independence. In the language of the state, colonists were equated with the peasantry of the mythical Sinhala past while colonisation was portrayed as a policy meant to redress perceived inequalities. Understandably Tamil politicians did not partake in the enthusiasm for colonisation. The Tamil Congress had made complaints to the Soulbury Commission as early as 1944 about Sinhalese settlements in Tamil majority areas in the Eastern Province such as Gal Oya, Allai and Kantalai. Claims and counterclaims were made then and are still made, with figures and maps, to prove the growth of the Sinhala population in certain districts created by land colonisation schemes. Tamil claims to a Tamil homeland were also made on the basis of their own ethnic myths.

The iss ue of colonisation became a political issue for the Federal Party andeventually led to separatist demands. The state was aware of the problem: both the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 and the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1965 recognised the special rights of Tamils in colonisation schemes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Scholars disagree on the impact of colonisation on the ethnic distribution of the Eastern Province. A comparison of the ethnic composition of districts between 1911 and 1981 indicates a marginal

increase in the percentage of the Sinhala population in Northern districts and a marked increase of the Sinhala population in the Eastern Province. The colonisation schemes of Weli Oya and Maduru Oya not only skewed the demography of certain areas in favour of the Sinhalas, their impact was further strengthened by the creation of electorates (in 1976: Seruvila electorate, Ampara electorate) to ensure that Sinhalese obtained representation in the Eastern Province. 42 Clearly the increase in the density of certain districts of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa and Amparai resulted primarily from the settlement of Sinhalese and their natural increase. 43 Some scholars have argued that Tamil politicians had no right to criticise the settlement of Sinhala landless farmers in the Eastern Province considering Tamils were free to settle in any province of the island and have done so. Few would contest that it would be unjust if the beneficiaries of state sponsored colonisation belonged to only one ethnic group. The ideology of exclusivism of one ethnic group over a particular territory—an ideology that has never been that of the state even in its most idiosyncratic incarnations—has not been similarly questioned, since it means redefining the sacrosanct right of self-determination to include duties towards others.

Language policy was the second contentious issue. The Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 (the Sinhala Only Act as it came to be known) enshrined the principal of one national language rather than two. Implementation would be stretched out over a period of five years. Riots broke out over the bill, while agitation by Tamil political parties spread over two years from 1956 to 1958. At the Federal Party convention held in Trincomalee in August 1956 parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil as official languages was put forward as a demand linked to that of devolution of power to Tamil majority areas. The Federal Party then resorted to non-violent extra-parliamentary methods to voice its protest. In June 1956 a non-violent protest was organised on Galle Face Green. Organised Sinhala mobs attacked the participants and simultaneously attacked Tamils in Colombo and in the Gal Oya irrigation project. A pada yatra from townships to Trincomalee, where the Federal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> C. Manogaran, 'Colonization as Politics: Political Use of Space in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, pp. 93–9; for a critique of this interpretation see Patrick Peebles, 'Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49, 1 (February 1990), pp. 30–55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> P. Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils*, p. 38.



Major irrigation tanks up to the mid-1970s

Source: Survey Dept.

Party meeting was held, rallied many. Trincomalee had been declared as the capital of the future Tamil homeland as a gesture to Eastern Province Tamils, and later was selected as the preferred site for a Tamil university. At the Trincomalee convention the demand of the Federal Party was for 'one or more Tamil linguistic state or states incorporating all geographically contiguous areas in which Tamil speaking people are numerically in a majority'.<sup>44</sup>

To defuse the tense situation Bandaranaike held discussions with representatives of the Federal Party. An agreement was reached between Bandaranaike and the Federal Party in July 1957, the main feature of which was a measure of autonomy through a scheme of regional councils. The Northern Province would form one area while the Eastern Province would be divided into two or more regional areas. The Regional Councils would have power over specific subjects such as agriculture, cooperatives, lands and land development, health and education. The Tamil language was given the status of an official language for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. It also stipulated a reasonable use of the Tamil language in the Sinhala-majority provinces.

Implementation was another matter. Civil servants not only obstructed the measure but through insensitivity created potential conflict situations. For instance, on one occasion Ministry of Transport officials dispatched to Tamil areas buses of the nationalised transport system that included the Sinhala language 'Sri' lettering on their number plates. This led Federal Party Members of Parliament and their supporters to tar over the 'Sri' and replace it with the same letter in Tamil script. The opposition to the Pact organised by the Sangha, the Buddhist laity and the UNP, who read the Pact as an act of treachery against the Sinhala nation or as the first step towards the establishment of a separate state, eventually sealed its fate. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact was abrogated in April 1958.

The 1958 riots. The June 1956 riots were the first serious occurrence of violence between communities since the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915. They broke out in the wake of a protest staged on the Galle Face Green by Tamil parliamentarians and some 200 supporters against the legislation on language policy which gave Sinhala a privileged position. Mobs disrupted the protest and soon anti-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> A.J. Wilson, Sri Lanka Tamil Nationalism, p. 85.

Tamil violence spread throughout Colombo; 150 people died. Two years later worse violence occurred. The 1958 riots were an important milestone. Politically motivated Buddhist monks and rowdy elements organised anti-Tamil rioting in all parts of the island. 45

Certain conditions seem to have precipitated the outbreak. Among them was the abrogation of the B-C Pact owing to the pressure imposed by *bhikkus* and *bhikku* organisations. This led to a stepping up of the Tamil protest campaign and the threat of an islandwide *satyagraha*. Anti-minority acts that went unpunished added to the prevailing condition of lawlessness. The first spate of violent clashes was triggered by the Federal Party convention due to be held in Vavuniya between 23 and 25 May. A rumour that, in the guise of the convention, Tamils from Batticaloa and Jaffna were planning an invasion of the Sinhala 'sacred and historic' cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa triggered the chain of violence.

There were three phases in the riot. The site of violence between the 22 and 25 May was the borderline areas in the North Central Province where Tamils and Sinhala people clashed. In Tamil-speaking areas such as Eravur security personnel were attacked by mobs of Tamils. The second phase, between 25 and 29 May, saw attacks against Tamils in Sinhala majority areas, i.e. Colombo and the suburbs, along the western coast from Kalutara to Matara, and in Badulla, Kandy, Kurunegala, Nuwera Eliya and other towns in Central Province. Rumours of Tamil atrocities, compounded by an insensitive broadcast by the Prime Minister, triggered off the vioence in the Sinhala-speaking areas. After a state of emergency was declared by the Governor General Sir Oliver Goonetileke on 27 May there was a lull in violence until the Northern and Eastern

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> The 1958 events have not been a subject of academic research. Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*, London, 1958 provides a journalistic account of the riots, while S.J. Tambiah refers to the event in *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1997. Other academic works deal with the riots within the context of communalism such as the language question: R.N. Kearney, *Communalism and Language*, or in the context of religion and politics, such as U. Phadnis, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka*, London, 1976, and S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago, 1992; or in the context of class and ethnicity, like Kumari Jayawardena, *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 1990, or of political developments in the country, such as W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, 1960; or else in the context of the history of Sri Lankan leaders, such as James Manor, *The Expedient Utopian: Bandaranaike and Ceylon*, Cambridge, 1989.

Provinces also erupted. The victims were mainly Tamil speaking people, shopkeepers or farmers on colonisation schemes, Hindu priests, businessmen and traders, police officers and government and law enforcement officers seen to be protecting the Tamils. Little is known about the composition of the mob and those who instigated violence by spreading rumours. In the North Central Province the aggressors were mainly from peasant colonisation schemes, often labourers from the Public Works and Irrigation department who resented land being given to Tamil settlers. In the Northern Province the rioting crowd that attacked a Buddhist temple and Sinhala shops in Jaffna was made up of educated youngsters who had been at the forefront of the anti-'Sri' campaign. <sup>46</sup> The 1958 riots were the first major outbreak against Tamils and in many ways a point of no return.

Events from 1960 to 1970. Between 1960 and 1965 the government of Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike negated all the understandings that the SLFP had earlier given the Federal Party. The Sinhala Only Act was implemented from 1 January 1961, a bill was introduced that made Sinhala the only language of the courts even in the North and East, and legislation was passed to nationalise all secondary schools in 1960–1. In 1960–1 the Federal Party led a civil disobedience campaign for Tamil language rights and Tamil consciousness. The FP was proscribed and some of its members spent six months in custody. The suppression of the *satyagraha* movement led to an initial radicalisation of the Tamil youth within the Federal Party Youth wing among Tamil student unions.<sup>47</sup>

The Prime Ministership of Dudley Senanayake heralded a period of reconciliation for the leadership of the two communities. The Federal Party pledged support to the new government which needed the fourteen parliamentary seats representing the Northern and Eastern Provinces in order to form a government. In what is known as the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact, District Councils, vested with powers over subjects to be mutually agreed upon between the two leaders, were planned. It was agreed that the government should have power under the law to give directions to such Councils in the national interest. Furthermore, the pact

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Sanayi Marcelline, 'An Anatomy of a Riot: 1958: a Study of the Riot of May 1958 in Sri Lanka', BA dissertation, University of Colombo, 2001, pp. 12–19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Jagath Senaratne, Political Violence in Sri Lanka 1977–1990: Riots, Insurrections, Counterinsurgencies, Foreign Intervention, Amsterdam, 1997, p. 56.

ensured that the demographic composition of the Northern and Eastern Provinces would not be disturbed by state-aided colonisation schemes. The Language Act would be altered to enable Tamil to be a parallel official language and the language of judicial administration in the Tamil provinces. The rights of Tamil public servants who had not gained proficiency in the official language would be safeguarded. In 1966 Tamil became the language of the administration and courts in the North and East.

In a strange paradox, the SLFP and the left including the LSSP and the CP spearheaded the new campaign against granting concessions to the Tamils, unhesitatingly using the language of 'betrayal of the nation' and the claim of a 'birthright of the Sinhalese' to destabilise the UNP regime. Faced with these protests the Prime Minister had no option but to tear into pieces his agreement with the Federal Party.<sup>49</sup>

Counternarratives: temple entry, caste, class

Post-independence elite Tamil politics was essentially concerned with extracting demands from the state. This form of Tamil nationalism pitted against the majoritarian state was not, however, the only stream of political activity and popular mobilisation during these years. The explosive situation of the 1960s can be traced back to the 1920s when a subaltern trend in politics emerged in the form of the Youth Congress, a radical political movement that pressed for *swaraj* and evolved into an anti-caste movement. These movements are rarely mentioned in the continuum of Tamil nationalism, although they became very active in the 1940s and reached a zenith in the 1960s, probably because they offered a counternarrative that attacked Tamil elites rather than the oppressive Sinhaladominated state.

The struggle of minority or oppressed castes, sometimes referred to as *panchamars*, against the domination of the Vellalas throws new light on Tamil nationalism. It exposes the fissures and highlights the tension within the movements for Tamil rights. Too little is known about organisations such as the Minority Tamils Liberation Front—a response to the creation of the Tamil United Liberation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ambalavanar Sivarajah, *Politics of Tamil Nationalism*, pp. 204–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'The State and the Process of Devolution in Sri Lanka' in Sunil Bastian (ed.), *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 103–8.

Front (TULF)—the All Ceylon Minority Tamils Association, and the mass movement for the eradication of untouchability.

In post-independence Jaffna, in the village of Maviddapuram, site of Jaffna's most orthodox Hindu shrine, the temple of Lord Kandacami (Skanda) represented the ideal of the reformed Saivite temple as advocated by Arumugam Navalar. In 1968 a significant event occurred: several hundred 'Minority Tamils', mainly of the Pallar and Nalavar castes, staged a non-violent protest in front of the gates of the holy shrine that according to Brahamanical rituals they were not permitted to enter.<sup>50</sup> In the Jaffna district only 17 per cent of Hindu temples were open to Minority Tamils. Violence followed when they were beaten up by a group of Hindus of high caste rank grouped in an organisation called the 'Defenders of Saivism'. The Maviddapuram incident was a testimony to the conservatism and inegalitarianism that prevailed in Tamil society, and at the same time drew attention to an important feature of Tamil politics in the decades that followed independence. The leader of the 'Defenders of Saivism' claimed the Minority Tamils were supported by Sinhalese politicians. The conservative sections of the Vellala caste who were most vocal in the call for regional autonomy in the Tamil north, and even for the partition of Sri Lanka, deeply resented Colombo's interference in what they considered private matters of caste and worship.

By the 1960s Minority Tamils had gained some economic autonomy through the expansion of the cash economy and were leaving the agricultural sector for employment in service industries. The battle was for the right to Sanskritise. This right was hailed and taken up by Sinhala politicians on humanitarian grounds as well as for more sinister motives. In 1957 the Parliament passed a Prevention of Social Disabilities Act aimed at outlawing caste discrimination. The wording of the act indicated it was designed for the type of disabilities present in Jaffna rather than within Sinhala society. 'Social disability' on the grounds of caste was prohibited and defined as preventing or obstructing a person from entering educational institutions, shops, public restaurants, wells, barbers' shops, laundries, crematoria, public conveyances and temples; the Act also forbade certain discriminatory dress codes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Bryan Pfaffenberger, 'The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism: the 1968 Temple Entry Crisis in Sri Lanka' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, pp. 143–68.

However, this legislation was not enforced in Jaffna, owing to the connivance of the police with the upper castes. The Prevention of Disabilities Act was detrimental to the demands that Tamil elite nationalism was trying to make on the state. Indeed the deteriorating situation in Jaffna in relation to caste only further legitimised the unwillingness of Sinhala politicians to concede regional autonomy to Tamils who claimed discrimination by the Sinhala state. The greater discrimination, they contended, was performed by Tamils upon their own people—a quarter of the Tamil population.

### Elite politics and caste

The District Councils conceived in the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact, which aimed at devolving a very modest amount of power to the provinces, immediately became a focus of contention, and were opposed by an array of powerful groups. From within Tamil society there were divides between those who favoured and those who rejected them, while the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Sinhala Buddhist constituency of the UNP both opposed them. The All Ceylon Minority Tamils United Front requested the Prime Minister to stay the implementation of the legislation until caste discrimination was eradicated from Jaffna, for this would constitute an instrument to further reduce the rights of Minority Tamils. In spite of the assurance on the part of Federal Party leaders that it was mandatory that caste oppression should be removed, the Prime Minister dropped the bill in mid-1968 in the face of mounting opposition from the SLFP and the left parties.

The Federal Party was taken aback by the increase in caste confrontations that followed the Maviddapuram event. The Federal Party Youth League was becoming more radical and losing confidence in the leadership of its elders. The leaders, pressurised by the conservative Vellala electorate, wavered on the temple entry issue. Instead it was made policy to field a few minority Tamil candidates and secure their election.

The Maviddapuram conflict ended as a stalemate. The Minority Tamils withdrew after the Government Agent promised to intercede with the government to strengthen the clauses of the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act. After some temple managers were prosecuted, most large temples opened their doors to Untouchables. However, village temples owned by Vellalas maintained their discriminatory practices and throughout the 1970s caste conflicts continued. Only in 1977 was a so-called lower-caste

person elected from Sri Lanka Tamil society to parliament, in the fifth general elections of independent Sri Lanka.<sup>51</sup>

Insurrection: 1970s-1983

The case of the Dravidian nationalist movement in South India, which started in the 1930s and '40s as a potentially secessionist movement but became accommodationist because of the genuine nature of autonomy offered by independent India, suggests that no ethnic group is inherently prone to secession. The efficacy of the limited federal *imaginaire* that underwrote nation-building in India proved salutary and saved India from a civil war.<sup>52</sup> The Sri Lanka situation represents in many ways, albeit with significant differences, the Indian scenario derailed.

1970s: Tamil losses. During the years 1972–4, at the time when the demand for a separate state gained momentum and in 1973 eventually became policy, the nature of Tamil political mobilisation changed significantly. In explaining this momentous turn of events three events have been highlighted as seminal.

The victory of the SLFP-led United Front in 1970, securing twothirds of the parliamentary seats, was the first critical event. One consequence of the crushing victory of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's alliance of the SLFP, LSSP and Communist Party (Moscow Wing) was that the Federal Party lost its capacity to act as a lever between the two Sinhala-dominated parties. The 1970 elections were also the worst electoral performance of the FP since 1952.

The actions of the United Front as a whole following the electoral victory displayed a lack of concern for the demands and aspirations of the Tamils. The climate of mistrust was such that the Federal Party's stand for separate statehood did not come as a surprise.

Secondly, the new autochthonous Constitution of 1972—the brainchild of Dr Colvin R. de Silva, an LSSP minister in Mrs Bandaranaike's government—declared Sinhala the official language, gave Buddhism the foremost place, eradicated Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution that afforded some protection to minority communities against discrimination, and concentrated

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Sankaran Krishna, Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood, New Delhi, 2000, p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

power in the legislature and the prime-ministerial executive under the new Constitution. State policies were made in the cabinet where Tamils were not represented. Tamil parties were thus powerless to influence change. Thirdly, and most important, the newly introduced policies for university admissions brought about by the UF alienated all ranks of Tamil opinion, especially the Tamil lower middle class youth.<sup>53</sup>

Access to higher education for Tamils from the urban region was limited through a system of quotas. The qualifying mark for admission to the Medical Faculty was 250 out of 400 for Tamil students and only 229 for Sinhala students, even if they sat the exam in English. Tamils had until the early 1970s enjoyed a position of dominance in the science based faculties owing to their higher rate of literacy in English and good facilities for science education in the schools in Jaffna. The district quota system, which advantaged underdeveloped areas and backward communities, especially Kandyans and Muslims, was an obstacle to all urban candidates from Jaffna to Colombo. However, this was seen as an added discrimination against the Tamils, and led to disillusionment and despair among the youth of the North whose economic mobility was hampered. In real terms Tamils were still over-represented in the faculties of medicine and engineering, but the drop in the admission rate of Tamils to the national universities was so dramatic it was viewed as a loss of rights rather than a loss of privilege.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from these specific policy measures, the 1970s was the period when the development policies of the previous decades yielded results. Clearly the investment in irrigation and land development was bearing fruit with a sizeable increase in the production of paddy, mainly produced in the dry zone areas. However, irrigation had been unevenly distributed and the two districts of Jaffna and Batticaloa had the lowest percentage of sown land irrigated by any means. There was also very limited central investment in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and few opportunities for alterna-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Amita Shastri, 'The Material Basis for Separatism: The Tamil Eelam Movement in Sri Lanka' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, pp. 211–13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> On standardisation see C.R. de Silva, 'The Impact of Nationalism on Education: the Schools' Take-over (1961) and the University Admissions Crisis 1970–75' in R.B. Goldman and A.J. Wilson (eds), From Independence to Statehood: Managing Ethnic Conflict in Five African and Asian States, London, 1984, p. 125.

tive employment for those who were not able to enter universities. Almost all industry was located in the Western Province, while the Northern and Eastern Provinces had respectively a mere 6 per cent and 2 per cent of the island's industry. Even when central projects were established, as in the case of the Prima Flour Mills in the east, the majority of the positions were taken up by Sinhalese.<sup>55</sup>

The crystallisation of these events led to Tamil moderate groups closing ranks and fashioning a united stance with the setting up on 14 May 1972 of a Tamil United Front which incorporated members of the Up-Country-based Ceylon Workers Congress, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress and the Adanga Thamilar Munnani (Tamil Front that Cannot be Suppressed). <sup>56</sup> On 24 May 1972, at a protest meeting in Jaffna, Appapillai Amirthalingam said: 'There will be a day for the Tamils also to use arms...'. <sup>57</sup> Chelvanayakam resigned his seat representing Kankesanturai in the National State Assembly in October 1972, and in 1973 the Federal Party adopted a new and uncompromising line: separatism.

The rise of militancy: the 1970s. The years from 1973 to 1977 can be read as the twilight years in Tamil militancy. Violence and political murders became part of the struggle when the SLFP organiser in Jaffna, former MP for Jaffna and former mayor Alfred Durayappah, was assassinated by a group of Tamil youth led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. The state stepped away from legality when in 1974 an International Tamil conference was disrupted by a police attack that caused the death of nine persons in a stampede and through accidental electrocution. Although an independent commission condemned the police attack the government took no action on the matter.

Changes in the composition of the security forces led to a change in perception towards the forces in the North and East. Since independence the security forces had been the preserve of members of the Christian community. After an abortive coup by military leaders who all hailed from Christian backgrounds, the composition of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Amita Shastri, 'The Material Basis for Separatism', pp. 226–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Purnaka L. de Silva, 'The Growth of Tamil Paramilitary Nationalisms: Sinhala Chauvinism and Tamil Responses' in Sri Gamage and I.B. Watson (eds), Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Pearl of the East or the Island of Tears? New Delhi and London, 1999, p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Sessional Paper VII—1980, Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Incidents which took place between 13 Aug. and 15 Sept. 1977, p. 1.

army and the police underwent a significant transformation that consolidated the Sinhala-Buddhist identity of the forces. This led to a gradual shift in the Tamils' attitude towards the police and the army during the 1960s. By the early 1970s they were seen as hostile forces of occupation. The Jaffna peninsula was declared a troubled zone and no elections were held there until 1975 when Chelvanayakam returned to Parliament after delayed by-elections.

From 1975 insurrectionary acts escalated. In 1975 the Tamil United Front was renamed the Tamil United Liberation Front. Tamil unity was apparent, with the leader of the hill-country Tamils, S. Thondaman, openly siding with Chelvanayakam and G.G. Ponnambalam, although keeping his options open with regard to the demand for a separate state. Stronger ties were forged with political leaders in Tamil Nadu such as M.G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi. On 14 May 1976 the Vaddukoddai Resolution was adopted at the first National Convention of the TULF under Chelvanayakam's leadership. The words were prophetic and spoke of a 'sacred fight for freedom' for 'the goal of a sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam'. The resolution was in many ways a 'manifestation of the ascendancy of radical Tamil secessionism within mainstream Tamil politics'. 59

From then on parliamentarism and civilian politicians were abandoned by the disenchanted youth of Jaffna. They rebelled against traditional norms of Tamil society and became known as 'the boys', a term that was first used in a patronising fashion by Tamil parliamentarians. Soon an element of respect and awe seeped in. The insurrection that started with a few revolvers and shotguns would outlive all of them. The leaders of the insurrectionary Tamil youth groups were much younger than the parliamentarians of the TULF or FP, they had no experience or knowledge of democratic politics, they belonged to a social stratum that resented the domination of the upper classes and upper castes, and they were predominantly Tamil-speaking as opposed to their Englishspeaking Westernised counterparts. In the following thirty years the Tamil insurrection underwent many changes, not least in the number of militant youth groups—approximately thirty—that emerged. Some of these had fleeting existences while others survive today.

The origins of militancy among Tamil youth are generally traced to the founding in 1970 of the Tamil Students' Federation (TSF) a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> A.J. Wilson, Sri Lanka Tamil Nationalism, pp. 107–10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Jagath Senaratne, *Political Violence*, p. 60.



Tamil separatism

member of which was a young public servant, Sivakumaran, who killed himself by swallowing a cyanide capsule to avoid capture by the police. The TSF adopted the name Tamil New Tigers in 1972 and finally in 1975 became the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The LTTE declared themselves the heirs to Chelvanayakam—referred to as 'Thantai Selva', Father Selva—who by 1976 had abandoned federalism and was arguing for the creation of an independent Tamil Eelam. Unlike Chelvanayakam, the LTTE did not hesitate to resort to murder and terrorism in the pursuit of their goal, a practice they began with the murder of the mayor of Jaffna in 1975.

The name 'Tiger' was adopted because the creature had been the emblem of the Chola kings. Under the Cholas the kingdom of Jaffna had flourished and this ancient glory furnished the LTTE with a powerful nationalist ideology. But there was little Marxism in the LTTE ideology, even when reference was made to a society where caste and other traditional hierarchies would be eradicated. Their leader Velupillai Prabakaran, born of Karayar caste in the coastal town of Valvettiturai—a well known smuggling centre—in a 1986 interview listed as his models men such as Subhas Chandra Bose; Tiruppur Kumaran, a Tamil revolutionary; Mahabharata heroes such as Karna and Bhima; and Napoleon. Slogans of the LTTE bear witness to their understanding of the Tamils as a nation that has a right to self-determination. 'The thirst of the Tigers is the Tamil Eelam Motherland' is a slogan usually used as the footer in LTTE publications.

The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) was a breakaway group from the LTTE headed by a surveyor called Uma Maheswaran. It has been described as a Vellala-oriented organisation although it advocated a social revolution for workers and peasants based on certain Marxist-Leninist principles. The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) was founded in 1967–9 by Thangaturai, who was one of the main organisers of a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, "The Groups" and the Rise of Militant Secessionism' in C. Manogaran and B. Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, pp. 170–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity, Stuttgart, 1994, pp. 56–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Cheran points out that the interpretation of PLOTE as a Vellala-centric organisation is not obvious when one looks at the recruitment base (private communication with author).

Rs 7.5 million bank heist in Neerveli. After his death in a prison massacre in 1983 he was succeeded by Sri Sabaratnam. PLOTE was distinctly Vellala and believed to be an important recipient of expatriate funding, while TELO members were to a great extent Christians from Mannar.

The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), founded in 1981–4 after splitting from EROS—the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students—was led by K.S. Padmanabhan. Unlike the other groups it had its support base in Batticaloa. It also had a Marxist ideology, and its main objective was to fight a people's war. EROS was launched in London in 1975 under the leadership of Eliathamby Ratnasabapathy. Its supporters hailed mainly from Batticaloa and Amparai districts and its ideology was explicitly Marxist. Apart from the TELO and LTTE, most groups articulated their demands in Marxist terms, a feature that has often been highlighted as a reason for their limited appeal to the Tamil people. In the 1970s and early 1980s all these groups accepted the principle of an independent Tamil state. But very soon rivalries and personality clashes led to internecine violence.

The 1977 general elections, followed by anti-Tamil riots that left 128 dead, served to radicalise and further inflame the Jaffna peninsula. In 1977 the TULF campaigned for a separate state and on this platform won the second largest number of seats in Parliament after the UNP. The Leader of the Opposition was Mr A. Amirthalingam who began negotiating with the UNP. Within the UNP, Sinhala Buddhist exclusivists were hostile to any form of compromise with a party that advocated secession. The TULF was only rhetorically radical and increasingly indisposed by the pressures of the Tamil militants of EROS, LTTE and TELO. Anti-Tamil riots broke out in Colombo, Kandy and Jaffna in August 1977, a month after the UNP assumed power, causing the death of an estimated 100 Tamil people, displacing thousands and leading to considerable loss of property. A public inquiry (the Sansoni Commission) did not conclusively elucidate what sparked the riots, although it suggested that they started with news of incidents in Jaffna, in which Sinhalese living in the peninsula, Buddhist priests and Buddhist sacred places were treated disrespectfully, reaching inhabitants of other districts.<sup>63</sup> The context was one of post-election violence between the UNP and SLFP. Furthermore the TULF campaign, aggravated by the appointment of its leader as Leader of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Sessional Paper No. VII—1980 (see note 57).

Opposition, had unleashed anti-Tamil sentiments among Sinhala 'patriots'. Some accounts point to the role of the police and armed forces in Jaffna as having precipitated the initial outbreaks, while members of the UNP and SLFP accused each other of instigating the violence. Rioting was brought under control within a week, but this constituted yet another grievance for the disenchanted Tamil youth and yet another proof that secession was the only solution left for the Tamils.

Events from 1978 to 1983. The newly elected UNP government set about introducing a new Constitution which retained most of the Sinhala Buddhist features of the First Republican Constitution of 1972 while incorporating some important changes. The main changes were that the 1978 Constitution introduced proportional representation, allowing for the possibility of increased Tamil representation in Parliament and reducing the chances of landslide victories by the two major parties. The president was given considerable powers and was elected by direct suffrage, thus becoming the president of all citizens. However, the Second Republican Constitution was in no way an answer to the demands of self-determination on the part of Tamil parties and groups. Tamil insurrectionary activity intensified. In May 1978 the LTTE and 'any similar organizations' were proscribed by act of Parliament. In 1979 a state of emergency was declared in Jaffna and massive army counter-insurgency operations were started, alienating even further the people of Jaffna. Tamil guerrilla groups withdrew to Tamil Nadu in a tactical move which the government interpreted as a sign of defeat.

After a lull in secessionist activity the years 1981–3 saw a gradual escalation of the Tamil insurrection. Tamil policemen, informers and supporters of the government were targeted. The establishment Wijeweera contested th of District Development Councils (DDCs), which incorporated the principle of autonomy without any financial or administrative teeth, was rejected by Tamil secessionist groups. Prior to the elections in Jaffna a Tamil UNP candidate and several policemen were killed. This led to a shameless rampage in the city of Jaffna during which the Public Library of Jaffna—containing some 90,000 volumes and many rare manuscripts—was burned. The perpetrators were not taken to task and this served to fuel the anger of the militants.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> There has been speculation about government involvement in the burning, due to the presence of two important government ministers in Jaffna at the time.

1981 saw another episode of anti-Tamil rioting by Sinhala gangs encouraged by the diatribes of a UNP minister Cyril Mathew. Buildings were torched and seven people died. The police and armed forces were rapidly despatched, which limited the spread of rioting.

The army was again deployed to Jaffna where the insurrection was becoming a small-scale war. Within the Sinhala community and the ruling party extremist elements were advocating more drastic action against the Tamils. The important role of economic rivalry between the business communities of the Sinhalas and Tamils has been stressed by some scholars. The open market reforms allowed a large number of Tamils to utilise their ethnic and business connections with Indians and become upwardly mobile. Thus if the pre1977 era saw Sinhalese heavy and small industrialists, shopkeepers and traders utilise their ethnic identity to procure quotas, licenses and general access to scarce resources, the open market reforms allowed the Tamils to become successful traders and industrialists in their own right.<sup>65</sup> The polarisation of the two communities increased each time a new incident of anti-state terrorism was performed. During June and early July 1983 several incidents occurred, pitting communities against each other in Trincomalee, where Tamil shops were burned, and near Jaffna, where the Colombo-Jaffna train was burned. 66

War of attrition: from the 1983 riots to 2001

The Tamil insurrection entered a heightened phase in 1983, signal-ling 'history's theoretical/theatrical intrusion'. The outbreak of violence against Tamils in July 1983 was an immediate reaction to an ambush by the LTTE in which thirteen Sinhalese soldiers died. Riots broke out on the night following the killings. During ten days of widespread violence, the lives and property of innocent Tamil civilians were systematically destroyed. The late intervention of President J.R. Jayewardene to appeal for cessation of the violence, and other telling evidence, suggest pre-planning and organisation

<sup>65</sup> Newton Gunasinghe, 'The Open Economy and its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka' in Sasanka Perera (ed.), Newton Gunasinghe: Selected Essays, Colombo, 1996, pp. 183–203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Jagath Senaratne, *Political Violence*, pp. 64–8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Val Daniel, Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence: Sri Lankan, Sinhalese and Tamils, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 70–1.

in the July events.<sup>68</sup> The government failed to take precautionary measures, declared a curfew only after the worst violence had occurred, and failed to appeal to the people for restraint. President Jayawardena made a speech on 28 July that contained no message to the victims and no apologies.<sup>69</sup> The violence was construed as a defensive response to the threat of Tamil militants and as just punishment. When rumours of Tiger invasions of Colombo swept the capital Tamil neighbours, friends and colleagues became embodiments of the generic Tamil. The killings of innocent Tamil men and women that followed were informed by a moral framework.

Government sources estimated the number of deaths at between 300 and 400, while unofficial sources give figures of 3,000. Refugees numbered up to 200,000. The intensity of the fear, pain and suffering inflicted on countless Tamil families who lost everything, including their sense of trust in their nation-state, during the riots is difficult to express in mere numbers. As Valli Kanapathipillai puts it, 'The violence did not just "erupt" and then disappear. Perhaps the difference between the threats from natural disasters, and violence coming from human agencies, is that the latter is experienced as continuous violence. It is not contained in time; like waves created by throwing a stone in the river, it has repercussions which far exceed the moment of its occurrence.'70 The riots of 1983 left a lasting imprint on the collective consciousness of the Tamil people. For many it led to exile and refuge in foreign lands, for others to a heightened sense of alienation from the state that spawned radicalism; for others again it contributed to an erasure

<sup>68</sup> There are many accounts of the riots. See H.A.I. Goonetileke, 'July 1983 and the National Question in Sri Lanka: a Bibliographical Guide', *Race and Class*, XXVI, 1, summer 1984; *Sri Lanka: Racism and the Authoritarian State*, pp. 159–93; and Pradeep Jeganathan, 'Violence as an Analytical Problem: Sri Lankanist Anthropology after July 1983', *Nethra* Special Issue, 'July '83 and After', 6, 1 and 2, April–Sept. 2003, pp. 4–44, as a starting point. Recent analyses—I cannot be exhaustive here—include Stanley J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds: Collective Violence and Ethnonationalist Conflict in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1997; J. Spencer (ed.), *History and the Roots of Conflict*, London, 1990; Partha Chaterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (eds), *Subaltern Studies IX: Community, Gender and Violence*, New Delhi, 2000; Valli Kanapathipillai, 'July 1983: The Survivor's Experience' in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 321–44; Valentin Daniel, *Charred Lullabies*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Sessional Paper No. III, 2003, Report of the Presidential Truth Commission on Ethnic Violence (1981–84), pp. 35–8.

<sup>70</sup> Valli Kanapathipillai, 'July 1983', p. 343.

of identity, a refusal to be incorporated in a given identity. Many Tamils clung on to the illusion of a single collective agent—the Sinhala people—as being responsible for what had happened.

Studies of the predicament of the southern Tamils in the aftermath of July 1983 reveal them to be victims not simply of Sinhala nationalism but also of Tamil nationalism—no longer a defensive, emancipatory or ethical project. Their narratives are not just those of 'victims' of ethnic violence but of individuals who strive to exercise their agency by refusing to be brought under the hegemony of Tamil nationalism and whose response to the riot was to migrate from Sri Lanka or to erase their markers of Tamil identity (not wearing *pottu* etc.).<sup>71</sup>

When the need of the hour was to appease the Tamil people, Parliament enacted the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, requiring all parliamentarians to disavow separatism, after a single day's debate. Sixteen TULF Members of Parliament vacated their seats. Their departure from politics created the vacuum that was filled by Velupillai Prabhakaran and his Tamil Liberation Tigers. The events of 1983 made 'terrorists'. For the insurrectionist groups they were a bonanza in that their ranks suddenly multiplied. New organisations emerged, but their members were soon absorbed into the five main guerrilla groups. Media coverage of the riots created a wave of sympathy towards the cause of Tamil self-determination among Tamil expatriates and foreign governments. The riots of 1983 had a homogenising influence. With social dislocation the normal boundaries governing interaction between the rich and the poor changed.<sup>72</sup> Being Tamil acquired a virtually emblematic significance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Qadri Ismail, 'Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism: the Southern Tamil Women and Separatist Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka' in Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (eds), Subaltern Studies IX: Community, Gender and Violence, New Delhi, 2000, rereads the narratives of victims in Valli Kanpathipillai's study of the victims of 1983: 'July 1983'. Ismail sees in these narratives the condition of dysphoria in which southern Tamils who refuse to identify with the politics of separatist Tamil nationalism are placed. He describes how their critique of Tamil separatism after 1983 effectively allows 'the (safe) performance of Tamilness—Tamil nationalism's raison d'être—only within its geographic boundaries, the borders of its anticipated new country, and leaves all other (census category) Tamils to be victims of genocide' (p. 274).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Pradeep Jeganathan, 'All the Lord's Men? Ethnicity and Inequality in the Space of a Riot' in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities Revisited*, vol. II, Colombo, 1998, pp. 221–45.

After the riots the intensity of the violence between the insurrectionists and the state reached new heights. The attempts made to negotiate a settlement between the Tamil secessionist groups and the Sri Lanka government proved fruitless. In 1984 an All Party Conference failed to reach agreement on any significant issue. A year later the Indian government brought together all the major Tamil guerrilla groups and the Sri Lanka government for direct talks in Thimpu, Bhutan that were inconclusive. At these talks a joint group of militants created for the conference, comprising the LTTE, TELO, EPRLF and EROS, put forward a four-point programme. This comprised: the acknowledgement of the right of self-determination of the Tamils; the integrity of traditional Tamil territory; citizenship for all Indian Tamils; and the rights of autonomy for the Tamils.<sup>73</sup>

After 1983 the attacks on policemen, police stations and armed forces personnel in the North and East reached renewed heights. Resources for the insurrection were coming in from expatriates and new recruits were trained in South India. While the Jaffna peninsula was effectively under guerrilla control, except for the military camps sprinkled here and there, the Eastern Province which had more population diversity was still under government control. Tamil insurgents operated from bases in the jungle. Hetween 1984 and 1990 the Muslims of the North and East were subjected to repeated attacks by the LTTE, which culminated in October 1990 with the expulsion en masse of the entire population of Muslims in the Northern Province.

Intra-Tamil violence. Owing to socio-economic diversities, different political aspirations and competition among Tamil guerrilla groups, violence and killings were performed by Tamils against their own from 1972. The Tamil 'rebellion' was never a homogeneous challenge to Sinhala Buddhist hegemony, as intra-Tamil power struggles clearly demonstrate. The assassination of Tamil politicians linked to the central state, and later of moderate Tamil leaders, was one significant trend in this intra-Tamil violence.<sup>75</sup> The label of 'traitor' was an easy device to stifle all dissent. The LTTE,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> D. Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers*, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> J. Senaratne, *Political Violence*, pp. 68–74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> For details on the Tamil paramilitary groups see Purnaka L. de Silva, 'The Growth of Tamil Paramilitary Nationalisms: Sinhala Chauvinism and Tamil Responses' in Sri Gamage and I.B. Watson (eds), Conflict and Community.

which emerged as the strongest group, was the main agent of violence. After 1983 it sought to consolidate its position in the Eastern Province, Vanni, Colombo and Jaffna, and for this purpose resorted to both coercion and persuasion. Those who defied the leadership were often dealt with violently.

After 1983 there were more than thirty guerrilla groups in the Jaffna peninsula, although the five major groups remained in control. Between the LTTE and the rest—namely the PLOTE, TELO, EROS and EPRLF—tension increased. There were divergences over political issues such as the position vis-à-vis India and the Sri Lanka government, the path to liberation and the tactics to be adopted. There was also competition for resources to be extracted from the Tamil people. The attempt to create an alliance between these groups, in the form of the Eelam National Liberation Front that had brought together the LTTE, TELO, EPRLF and EROS at the Thimpu talks, was short-lived.<sup>76</sup>

By 1987 the LTTE had succeeded in establishing its hegemony. 1986 was the year when internecine warfare began. In April hundreds of TELO cadres, including the leader Sri Sabaratnam, were attacked and killed. The EPRLF was dealt with in a similar fashion.

During the years following the 1983 riots insurgent groups gained control over civil society in Jaffna through propaganda work, collection of 'taxes' or extortion. The message was conveyed to the people in papers such as *Viravankai* (Brave Tiger), journals, magazines such as *Tamil Ilam*, pamphlets, books, songs, poems, plays and even video tapes depicting the progress of the struggle. They took over the responsibility of imparting justice, punishing criminal elements and 'anti-social elements'. 'Lamppost killings'—in which bodies of criminals were tied to lampposts—were often carried out.<sup>77</sup>

Indian intervention, July 1987–March 1990. On 26 May 1987 Operation Liberation was launched. This was the long awaited government offensive against Jaffna. Pressure on the government had built up after two provocative attacks by the LTTE against civilians in Trincomalee and in the heart of Colombo city with a vehicle bomb; 110 civilians had died from the latter. As soon as Operation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> For details concerning negotiated attempts at ending war in the North-East see K. Loganathan, Sri Lanka: Lost Opportunities—Past Attempts at Resolving Ethnic Conflict, Colombo, 1996.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Senaratne, *Political Violence*, pp. 74–87.

Liberation commenced pressure was exerted by the Indian government and Tamil expatriates to halt it. On 4 June 1987 Sri Lankan air space was violated by the Indian air force with the alleged purpose of dropping food supplies to civilians in Jaffna. Operation Liberation was terminated that month.

Diplomatic activity followed and eventually an accord was reached between the Sri Lanka and Indian governments. The 'Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement to establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka' was signed on 29 July 1987. Indian troops were brought in by air and sea. A cease-fire was promulgated and the Sri Lanka army returned to the positions it had occupied before the beginning of the Operation.

The Indo-Lanka Accord, as it became known, was binding on the Tamil secessionist groups, the Sri Lanka government and the Indian government.<sup>78</sup> They ceased all armed activity while an Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) occupied the North and East. The terms of the Accord have been discussed at length. Among the most important were the surrender of arms by the guerrilla groups within seventy-two hours of the signing; the temporary merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces; the introduction of a system of provincial councils for devolution of power; and India's military assistance to Sri Lanka for the implementation of the Accord. The Accord was accepted by militant groups, albeit reluctantly by the LTTE whose leader was then under house arrest in Madras. The surrendering of weapons commenced in Jaffna. The arrival of the IPKF was greeted with much joy by the people of Jaffna who welcomed the Indians with flowers, garlands and food. The IPKF, allegedly, even flew the Tiger flag in the first weeks.<sup>79</sup> The main Northern and Eastern cities of Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai were controlled by the Indian forces while the LTTE withdrew into the jungles.

By the beginning of October 1987 the LTTE had reignited the secessionist insurrection. Although the LTTE had seemingly accepted the terms of the Accord, it had begun to instigate anti-IPKF demonstrations. It claimed that both India and Sri Lanka were violating the accord or preventing its implementation. Colonisation was still tolerated and the President had such wide ranging powers over the Provincial Councils that autonomy was not possible. Giving up arms was not part of LTTE strategy especially

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Shelton U. Kodikara (ed.), *Indo-Lanka Agreement of July 1987*, Colombo, 1989.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> D. Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers*, p. 15.

after Indian Intelligence began to arm the EPRLF, TELO, PLOTE and ENDLF as a countervailing force. The suicide of thirteen LTTE cadres who were to be moved to Colombo for questioning was the trigger for renewed LTTE violence. A few days later in October, 200 Sinhala civilians were massacred. The IPKF responded with Operation Pawan ('Wind') aimed at recapturing Jaffna and subduing the LTTE. The LTTE retreated to the Vanni and Eastern Province and operated in a guerrilla mode from that moment. The Indians had failed to compel them to accept the Accord.

After that, Indian Intelligence and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) worked closely with the other Tamil militant groups that had accepted the Accord. Provincial Councils came into existence following the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and the EPRLF, TELO and ENDLF secured power in the North-East Provincial Council (NEPC). However, they were unable to generate much public support, a situation that the LTTE took advantage of. The counter-insurgency methods practiced by the IPKF, which included harsh interrogation, torture and executions, contributed to alienating Tamil civilians from the IPKF as well as its Tamil allies. By mid-1988 the IPKF campaign had reached a stalemate, while the Sri Lanka government had to face the brunt of another insurrection in the South. The attitude of the LTTE was expressed in the words of its leader Prabhakaran:

'We protested very strongly against the Accord because it was an agreement between India and Sri Lanka. India was anxious to see that no foreign powers inimical to her vital interests entrenched themselves in Sri Lanka. Our protests were useless. What could we do against a regional power?'80

President Premadasa called upon the LTTE and the JVP to negotiate with the government unconditionally. While the JVP ignored the offer the LTTE agreed to a ceasefire. Two months later President Premadasa requested the IPKF to leave by the end of July 1989. After initial reluctance the Indian government agreed to pull its troops out by the end of March 1990. The withdrawal of Indian troops was a tactical victory for Premadasa against the JVP, while for the LTTE it constituted a bonanza. Before leaving the IPKF attempted to consolidate the position of the Northeast Provincial Council by training and arming two militias—popularly known as the Tamil National Army—with forcibly abducted youth. They were no match for the LTTE who had received military equipment,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Cited in Rohan Gunaratna, War and Peace in Sri Lanka, Kandy, 1987, p. 46.

ammunition and money from President Premadasa, who wished to undermine the North-East PC. The NEPC collapsed while the militias were decimated by an LTTE onslaught.

The Indian intervention had been a complete failure. The Indo-Lanka Accord had failed to resolve the conflict and the IPKF had failed to subdue the LTTE militarily.<sup>81</sup> On the contrary, the LTTE emerged strengthened as its claim to be the sole representative of the Tamil people gained credence.

After 1990. After the withdrawal of Indian troops in March 1990 the LTTE had a free hand. Errors and misunderstandings on the part of hardliners and softliners in the government gave Prabhakaran an opportunity to escape the 'peace trap'. §2 The ceasefire came to an end and in July 1990 fighting was renewed in the Jaffna peninsula, the jungles of the interior and the Eastern Province. This violence compelled many thousands to seek refuge in camps or in foreign lands. During these years suicide killings of politicians perceived as enemies of Eelam multiplied. Among them was the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, in Tamil Nadu in May 1991; Sri Lanka's then Foreign Minister and Deputy Minister of Defence, Ranjan Wijeratne; Admiral Clancy Fernando, who headed the Sri Lanka navy; and in 1993 President Premadasa in Colombo. The LTTE was also the prime suspect in the assassination of Minister Lalith Athulathmudali.

In August 1994 the People's Alliance (PA) government led by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was voted into power on a platform of peace. The LTTE agreed to talk with the government, but at the same time was instrumental in sinking a navy vessel off Mannar in September, and was suspected of killing the UNP presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake in October. In January 1995 the newly elected government of Chandrika Kumaratunga and the LTTE agreed on a ceasefire and began discussions. But in April 1995 the LTTE resumed hostilities by sinking two naval vessels in Trincomalee on 19 April. 'Observers in Jaffna opine that the renewal of the war was timed to coincide with the LTTE's acquisition of surface-to-air missiles'. It was feared that with attacks on military flights, the government's military base in Palaly, the naval

<sup>81</sup> For more details see Kumar Rupesinghe (ed.), Negotiating Peace.

<sup>82</sup> For an insightful analysis of this period see Dayan Jayatilleka, 'The Year 1989/90: the PremadasaLTTE talks. Why They Failed—And What Really Happened' in Kumar Rupasinghe (ed.), Negotiating Peace, pp. 173–85.

base in Karainagar and the Elephant Pass camp would be cut off by land, air and sea. The government was left with the option of taking the Jaffna peninsula or pulling out.<sup>83</sup>

That same year India made a formal request for the extradition of Vellupillai Prabhakaran to India as the LTTE was believed to be implicated in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, while the Sri Lanka government launched a major military offensive in October, codenamed Riviresa (sunshine), to capture Jaffna. However, in doing so the security forces weakened their presence in the east, thereby giving the LTTE an opportunity to gain control of the entire eastern region except Batticaloa, Amparai and a part of Trincomalee town. On 20 October the LTTE set ablaze two oil installations in Colombo. It also began a process of ethnic cleansing in Sinhalese villages on the borders of the North-East Province. Nevertheless the LTTE failed to halt the march of the security forces on Jaffna.84 In April 1996 Jaffna was brought under government control. The LTTE in the meantime used a mixture of persuasion, force and intimidation to drive a considerable segment of Jaffna's population into the Vanni mainland. In the following months the government repeatedly tried to take the Vanni, and the war was dominated by ups and downs in the region.85 In July 1996 the army launched operation Seda Pahara to clear LTTE-dominated areas in the Eastern Province. Needing a respite to regroup, the LTTE attacked the Central Bank in Colombo. 86

The LTTE's withdrawal into the Vanni jungles was a carefully planned one. It had taken along looted valuables, its materials and a good fraction of the civilian population. In July it attacked the isolated Mullaitivu camp on the east coast. Most of the officers and soldiers, numbering around 1,200, were killed.<sup>87</sup> The army responded by launching Operation Edibala, which successfully reopened the Vavuniya-Mannar road, and then operation Jaya Sikurui ('victory assured'), which entailed pushing south from the Jaffna peninsula through Elephant Pass.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Rajan Hoole, Sri Lanka: the Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder, Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) (Jaffna), 2001, p. 378.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Chris Smith, 'South Asia's Enduring War' in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation, Washington, DC, 1999, p. 27.

 $<sup>^{85}</sup>$  Hoole, The Arrogance of Power, pp. 378–9.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, 'South Asia's Enduring War', p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Hoole, The Arrogance of Power, p. 391.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, 'South Asia's Enduring War', p. 27.

The situation towards the end of 1997 suggested that the creation of secure supply routes was still a long way off; there remained a gap of 110 kilometres which needed to be closed before control could be established. Although the military reclaimed two-thirds of the required distance to secure the supply route, twenty government soldiers had been killed for every kilometre taken. Operations were stepped up the following year, but the supply route could not be secured by 4 February 1998, Sri Lanka's fiftieth anniversary of independence.<sup>89</sup>

With the government's failure to obtain the UNP's support for devolution proposals, the tempo of the war increased by 1998. In February the LTTE attacked the army front lines in Kilinochchi. By mid-February the army had set its sights on the strategic town of Mankulam. But even by late April, while LTTE passes along the way were captured, Mankulam continued to elude the security forces. The failure to secure Mankulam revealed the degree to which the security forces had become overstretched. As troops were taken away from the Jaffna peninsula to assist with the securing of the road, so commanders in the north were denied the opportunity to mount a large-scale offensive. In December 1998 the government decided to end operation Jaya Sikurui. 90

The LTTE continued pressuring government forces in the years that followed. In November 1999 an attack in the Vanni resulted in the government losing a large amount of territory north of Vavuniya, and in December 1999 the LTTE started an attack on Jaffna. While the army held its own the LTTE was able to take some strategic approaches to Elephant Pass and Jaffna Town. In April 2000 the LTTE launched a massive attack on Elephant Pass and a withdrawal from the Pass was ordered by the Army Commander in late April. A week later Palai was attacked, and the army was forced to pull back to a new defence line. The government badly lacked the ships and aircraft to pull the 34,000 or so troops out of Jaffna, and President Chandrika Kumaratunga appealed to India, Pakistan and other countries for help. Relations with Israel were quickly restored. 91 By mid-May 2000 civilian sources from Jaffna reported that army morale had improved and the troops were fighting back.92 Jaffna did not fall.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 29.
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Hoole, The Arrogance of Power, pp. 392–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

The LTTE, with considerable resources, showed no signs of weakness in the late 1990s and continued using suicide killers in the South. A van with explosives detonated in October 1997 in the business centre of Colombo led to a decline in foreign investment. The celebration of Sri Lanka's fifty years of independence was derailed by an attack against the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, symbol of power and a sacred centre for Buddhists. In 1999 the LTTE was outlawed following a suicide bomb outrage during the campaign for presidential elections, which caused the death of 38 persons and the wounding of 129 including the President herself.

Only recently did the Sri Lanka state come to understand the transformation of a diaspora-supported insurgent group into an organisation with transnational networks, investments, lawyers, ships and armies, and begun to lobby Western powers to help destroy LTTE interests in their own countries. On the diplomatic front efforts to isolate the LTTE have finally borne fruit: the LTTE was included in the US State Department's list of 30 terrorist organisations in 1997, and outlawed in India after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi for which the LTTE was the principal accused.

The government of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who since 1994 had projected herself as seeking peace, announced its willingness to negotiate with the LTTE without any preconditions. Along with the military initiative in dealing with the ethnic conflict, the government's strategy included another element, the 'peace package' which promised to institute a highly decentralised system of government that would create seven regions endowed with more autonomy than in the provincial council system. Avoiding the negative image that the term 'federalism' had acquired in the Sri Lankan political debate, the government's proposals called for Sri Lanka to become a 'union of regions'. The presidential-parliamentary structure of government was to be replaced by a parliamentary one. The Northern and Eastern Provinces were to be merged into one region (after some boundary changes) and in each of the country's regions (as the provinces would be called) the popularly elected regional government, consisting of chief ministers, board of ministers and assemblies, would be granted clear powers over a wide range of policies including taxation, law and order, police, land, agriculture, industry, development and planning, education,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, 'Internationalisation of the Tamil Conflict (and its Implications)' in Sri Gamage and I.B. Watson (eds), *Conflict and Community*, pp. 109–37.

culture and communications. Both Sinhala and Tamil would be official national languages. The proposed governmental system was more decentralised than India's quasi-federal system. However, the peace initiative stalled.<sup>94</sup>

To become part of the Constitution the government's proposals had to be passed by a two-thirds majority in parliament and then be approved by a majority of the people voting at a referendum. The government coalition fell short of the two-thirds majority by nine or ten members in the 225-seat parliament and thus needed the support of the major opposition party, the UNP. However, the UNP proclaimed itself against the abolition of the unitary state. The plan was received with suspicion and hostility in Sinhala nationalist circles and was rejected by the LTTE, who announced that they would not cease to fight for a separate state.

After an intensification of hostilities in the new millennium, a spectacular attack on the Katunavake civil and military airport by the LTTE dealt a severe blow to tourism and international confidence in the country's stability in 2001. In 2002, after the parliamentary majority changed and the leader of the UNP, Ranil Wickremasinghe, assumed the premiership, peace moves were initiated, facilitated by the Norwegians, and a Memorandum of Understanding signed. Sceptics still argue that the LTTE will not forego its demand for Eelam and will only be prepared to negotiate on what the borders of the state of Eelam ought to be. In his 1999 birthday message Velupillai Prabhakaran still wished for 'an independent state of Tamil Eelam' as the 'only and final solution to our national conflict'. In July 2005 the chief of the LTTE political wing, S.P. Thamilselvam, disputed any claim that his organisation had accepted Sri Lanka's sovereignty by signing the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure agreement.

Understanding the nature of the LTTE in 2005 when peace talks were deadlocked, meant examining not only its frontal assaults against the state, and its feints during peace negotiations, but also its place within Tamil society, as a force for liberation, progress or control and domination. In March 2004 a challenge to Prabhakaran emerged in the form of Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, alias Colo nel Karuna, the LTTE commander of the Batticaloa and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Amita Shastri, 'Government Policy and Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka' in Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds), Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and the Pacific, Cambridge, MA, 1997, p. 159.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Amparai districts since 1987. Karuna was immediately expelled from the LTTE for raising the regional cry and playing on the feeling of discrimination of Eastern Tamils in relation to Northern Tamils. The LTTE leadership claimed that Karuna decided to recede in order to avoid disciplinary action for offences alleged to have been committed by him. Karuna is indeed responsible for a great number of human rights violations both before and after the ceasefire, but whether he was guilty of fraudulent financial transactions and arbitrary assassinations remains unclear.

A low-intensity battle began between the Batticaloa cadres supporting one or the other leader. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, as well as most peace activists, implicitly sided with the LTTE whose victory they saw as the only possible route towards peace. There was a moment when the entire political scene in Sri Lanka was waiting expectantly for the Tigers to strike.

On Good Friday the counterstrike came in a surgical manner that led to the complete collapse of the opposition. A month after the declaration of secession the eastern rebellion had ended, its leader having, as is widely believed, struck a deal with Prabhakaran to end the fighting and leave the island. Since then the Eastern province has been in a state of unrest. While the LTTE is still the strongest political movement in the North and East, in the eyes of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka and of the world it is not unchallenged. The Karuna rebellion has opened up a space for dissent which is being cultivated by various actors in the political game. Karuna's supporters are visibly though covertly supported and protected by the Sri Lankan armed forces. The role of India too in aiding Karuna's split is open to conjectures.

In the year following the rebellion there were a number of violent acts committed by opponents and supporters of Karuna. The East, birthplace of Prabhakaran, peopled by Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims is even less firmly in his orbit. The Tamils of Sri Lanka can read the rebellion and its fizzling out in at least two ways: as a sign of Prabhakaran's omnipotence or as a call for future claims for justice and representation within the Tamil community. Today the grievances articulated by Karuna and the ghosts of regionalism remain unanswered. The violent response and the ongoing intra-Tamil killings do not augur well for a democratic space within the Tamil movement. What then is the true nature of the LTTE? In 2003 a challenge to Prabhakran emerged in the form of Colonel

 $<sup>^{96}</sup>$  D.B.S. Jeyaraj, *The Sunday Leader*, 7, 14 and 28 March, 18 April 2005.

Karuna, LTTE leader in the Eatern Province. The violent response of Prabhakaran and the ongoing intra-Tamil killings do not naugur well for a democratic space within the Tamil movement. What then is the true nature of the LTTE?

# The spirit of Tamilness

Scholars and activists who are totally opposed to any form of negotiation have characterised the LTTE as a small guerrilla army of a totalitarian and fascistic nature. Other, less politically motivated readings have challenged the Tigers' self-image as selfless liberators. Although the ethos of egalitarianism pervades the LTTE, its organisation has many facets.

The civil war brought about many changes in women's lives in Tamil areas, especially the change from the private into the public sphere. While traditionally the role of the woman was considered to be within the home (the private domain) the war pushed women into public roles as combatants and heads of households. Women were increasingly forced to become breadwinners for their families, deal with state organisations etc. The rapid militarisation of Tamil society led to new forms of dress, posture and movement emerging among Tamil women. While this has in a way empowered women, new forms of power relationships have also been constructed. There is for instance an attempt to control non-combatant women by restricting their mobility—preventing them from travelling outside the province; women who do so are portrayed as 'loose' and accused of consorting with the enemy.<sup>97</sup>

While the LTTE claims to have emancipated women from their traditional roles, drawing women away from the home and kitchen and giving them an equal position as combatants with their male counterparts, Coomaraswamy shows that women's emancipation in the LTTE's agenda is only designed to serve the aims of Tamil militancy. 'There is no sense of independent woman, empowered by her own agency, who makes decisions for her own self-realisation. Her liberation is accepted only so far as it fits the contours of the nationalist project.'98 Thus the LTTE portrays women as militant mothers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Sitralega Maunaguru, 'Gendering Tamil Nationalism: the Construction of "Women" in Projects of Protest and Control' in Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation: the Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1995, pp. 158–75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy, 'Tiger Women and the Question of Women's Emancipation', *Pravada*, 4, 9, 1996, pp. 8–10.

who raise their sons to fight for their nation and virgin combatants, women who have dedicated their whole lives to the liberation of the nation. Patriarchal aspects of LTTE ideology are apparent even where it supports a form of equality for women, in that it is not the women themselves who are given the credit for being agents of change but their leader Prabhakaran, whose farsightedness and understanding has created a space for women to be treated as equals. In 2005 civilian Tamil women in areas under LTTE control were ordered to wear a new 'moral' dress, i.e. the shalwar kameez, rather than any other sort of clothing. The ideology of the LTTE contains a glorification of death and members who die for the cause are valorised. Its women do not symbolise the role of mother, nurturer and care-giver, but that of purveyor of death. Nelufer de Mel quotes from the war poetry of the LTTE, especially that of Captain Vanathi, a member of the LTTE's women's wing who died in the battle of Elephant Pass at the age of twenty-seven.<sup>99</sup>

These extracts from the poem entitled 'She, The Woman of Tamililam' reflect the break with tradition that came with joining a militant group combined with the cult of martyrdom.

Her forehead shall be adorned not with kunkumam [but] with red blood.

All that is seen in her eyes is not the sweetness of youth [but] firm declarations of those who have fallen down.

On her neck will lay no tali, [but] a Cyanide flask!

From men, too, Prabhakaran demands total loyalty. On occasions traitors have been condemned without mercy: a headmaster of St John's College who organised a cricket match between his pupils and the armed forces was shot dead. 100 And a few months before the time of going to press, two school principals who were openly resisting child recruitment by the LTTE were summarily executed. Loyalty is nurtured through propaganda of various sorts, from the repeated screening of the blockbuster film *The Lion of the Desert* to instill nationalist feelings among the youth to the recounting of tales of violence and discrimination perpetuated by the gov-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Neloufer de Mel, 'Agent or Victim? The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum' in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities Revisited*, vol. II, pp. 199–200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> D. Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers*, p. 67.

ernment in the South against Tamil people. <sup>101</sup> Insubordination is not tolerated. The ultimate sacrifice to Prabhakaran's will is martyrdom. All fighters carry a cyanide capsule in case of capture, which reminds them of their surrender of their lives to the cause. The landscape of the Jaffna peninsula in the years of LTTE control was marked with memorials to martyrs: lanes, pictures, even children's playgrounds were reminders. Violence had created a community of common substance based upon an idiom of sacrifice. Traitors were erased from the landscape of Jaffna.

Locked as they are in 'combat mode' within a present of permanent violence, will the combatants ever consent to return to a life without arms? Can they build a new society based on justice and equal rights on the ruins of the old one without the memories of three decades of ruthless violence corroding its very foundation? The tactics of the LTTE mirror those of the state it abhors: secret informers, mass arrests, random searches, assassinations, massacres, disappearances, torture and terror have been the norm. The logic of militarism has placed the LTTE in good stead: it outlived the Indian Peace Keeping Force, outlasted the JVP, and has been fighting the Sri Lanka army to virtual stalemate. Each time the government offered concessions, each time the possibility of real power was looming, the LTTE turned away from peace dramatically by escalating violence.

However, attempts to discover historically enduring mindsets, static characteristics, ancient dispositions (for example towards militarism and suicide) common to the quintessential Tamil, both in India and Sri Lanka, are questionable. Discerning enduring martial traditions or some centuries-old inherent penchant for self-immolation and suicide among Tamils leads to a denial of any sense of politics as an open-ended process. This picture must contend with that of the LTTE as a quintessentially modern formation that evolves in a disenchanted secular frame where age-old traditions of Hindu society are razed to the ground and replaced by new ethics and values.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> S.I. Keethaponcalan, 'Underage Soldiers and Intervention: The Global Challenge of Violence Reduction and Conflict Resolution', PhD, Nova Southeastern University, 2001, p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> This type of interpretation is present in recent essays by D.P. Sivaram, 'Tamil Militarism: The Code of Suicide', *Lanka Guardian*, May–August 1992, and Michael Roberts, 'Filial Devotion in Tamil Culture and the Tiger Cult of Martyrdom', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 30, 1996, pp. 245–72.

There are, however, voices that fearlessly express their yearning for a different life. Two women poets who challenged the LTTE's authoritarianism and its cult of violence were Thiyagarajah Selvanity (Selvy), an internationally acclaimed poet, and Sivaramani, a young woman who was born and grew up in Jaffna. Selvy was taken into LTTE custody in 1991 and is believed to have been killed. Sivaramani, at the age of twenty-four, burnt all her poems one night and committed suicide by setting her room on fire. In her poem 'In Search of the Sun' Selvy cried out,

My soul, full of despair yearns for life
Wherever I turn
I see
primitive humans
yellow toothed, ugly mouthed
thirsting blood, slit flesh
saliva adribble
cruel nails and horrifying eyes
Bragging and jubilating
over victories are not new
legs lost from long walks for
miles and miles
in search of a throne
days wasted waiting for full moon
only oredom lingers...

(Jaffna, 1988)

But is Selvy a lone voice, one searched for and found by liberal scholars who abhor the notion that the Tamil people accept Prabhakaran's leadership? In February 2002 a festival celebrating Tamilness in the heart of the Vanni traced the spirit of Tamilness to one man—Veluppillai Prabhakaran. A banner slung across the Murunkan junction welcomed the crowds with these words: *Thamil engal uyir; ayuvir Pirapakaran* (Tamil is our spirit; that spirit is Prabhakaran). <sup>103</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Sunday Leader, 17 Feb. 2002.

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#### THE WELFARE STATE AND BEYOND

Colonial rule in many ways entrenched the principle that different communities were entitled to different degrees of rights, dues and representation according to criteria that varied in time. Later, with universal suffrage and the newly independent state's commitment to welfarism, it was the citizen who was bestowed with certain privileges such as a free education and free health services, privileges he/she still partly enjoys. Marxist insurrections that fought the state's unfair treatment of some citizens succeeded in slowing down the redrawing of state-citizen relations by the neoliberal regimes of the late 1970s and '80s. Thus the nature of state and society remained deeply influenced by the ideology of welfarism, even though the welfare state had been considerably dismantled in the late 1970s. Even today public support for the welfare state has not faded. Many people believe in a benevolent, all-embracing and all-providing state. To challenge this perception in the 1980s there emerged civil society and other identitarian discourses founded neither on community nor on class, but on issues and on values.

With the war in the North and East—partly caused by a perception among Tamils of discrimination in the distribution of welfare benefits such as places in universities—and with the recent ceasefire, the very nature of welfarism changed. In a strange rewriting of history, humanitarianism in war zones has taken the place of the decaying universalistic welfarism of old. The assault of market forces on the welfare state has touched the South in a more subtle

fashion. Violence is everywhere and taken for granted as the means to resolve conflicts and obtain dues in the absence of a caring state. The Sri Lankan state is in many ways overburdened by its inheritance. While state policies point towards a clear and definite departure from the welfare state model, society at large still expresses faith in the state as the provider of services and is developing similar expectations of transnational donors.

## Lineages of the past: peasant welfare and welfare measures

The independent state's regime of entitlement grew out of the colonial state's policy of bestowing rights and privileges on communities. The welfare state did not ostensibly target one community, but focused on occupational groups such as the peasantry or social groups such as the poor or underprivileged. Nevertheless the section of the peasantry that received most from the benevolent state was the Sinhala peasantry, and welfare measures in the educational sector became the means to correct imbalances that existed between regions and communities, giving the Sinhalese underprivileged more redress than, for instance, the Plantation Tamils.

The welfare of the peasants, who constituted the largest occupational group in Sri Lanka, was recognised and given pride of place only in late colonialism. Indeed the colonial economy was founded on the export of tropical products and the import of foodstuffs such as rice. Cinnamon, coffee, tea, coconut and finally rubber were successively introduced, while paddy cultivation was relegated to the background. At independence, the plantation structure based on the exploitation of an Indian labour force, overseen by a British managerial class and with well established commercial networks, remained. However, from the 1950s the plantation sector was less successful as larger companies left the island, owing largely to the increasingly aggressive demands of an organised labour force. The early 1970s witnessed the nationalisation of land and the larger tea, rubber and coconut plantations. The impact on agrarian relations was not felt as much as expected, as three-quarters of the expropriated land was placed under state control with only a quarter actually redistributed. Twenty years later the management of most of these plantations was handed over to private (mainly Indian) companies. Tea, rubber and coconut remained significant

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See for instance K.M. de Silva (ed.), *History of Sri Lanka*, chapter 38, London, 1981, pp. 540–56.

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features in the economy of the country, but underwent many mutations in keeping with the demands of the world market.

During the colonial period, peasant agriculture was neglected as the British encouraged the import of Indian and Burmese rice. During the Donoughmore years, however, the Sinhala political class began to favour giving the peasant greater state assistance. The colonisation of new land in the dry zone from the 1930s onwards was very much aimed at ushering in a new era in peasant welfare, together with the avowed aim of increasing the production of paddy. The efforts that were made in the late colonial period and in the decade after independence yielded some results: between 1952 and 1985 the production of paddy quadrupled, while a near 90 per cent rate of self-sufficiency was reached as a result of the distribution of subsidised grain and fertilisers to producers. The extent of paddy land doubled as a result of investments in hydraulic works—an interest that had originated in the British period—which involved restoring ancient irrigation tanks in the North Central areas, constructing new dams in the South East (Gal Oya and Walawe Ganga), and finally the large-scale project of harnessing the Mahaweli river and its affluents.

The balance sheet of the large projects was mixed, as more agricultural employment seemed to be generated by more modest projects and the new villages created around the larger schemes were often plagued by corrupt practices and injustices. The communal tensions that arose from the 1950s around development programmes such as the Gal Oya scheme lend credence to the image of a partisan state. Later the takeover of land from farmers of non-Sinhala communities in the Amparai and Trincomalee districts for sugar cane cultivation led to open hostility between settlers and other communities. Women too appear to have been overlooked in the planning process and were not seen as direct agents or beneficiaries of development.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Yuvi Thangarajah, 'Ethnicization of the Devolution Debate and the Militarization of Civil Society in North-Eastern Sri Lanka' in Markus Mayer, Darini RajasinghamSenanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah (eds), Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 24–8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Nedra Weerakon Goonewardene, 'Policies and Programmes of the Mahaweli Settlement Scheme and its Impact on the Role and Status of Women' in V. Kanesalingam (ed.), *Women in Development in South Asia*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 237–56.

Among the larger projects, the Mahaweli project stood out. It started in 1968, aimed at irrigating 365,000 hectares of land in the dry zone and adding 500 megawatts of hydropower to the national grid. Thirty years later the newly irrigated areas provide 19 per cent of the production of rice and 40 per cent of chillies and onions. However, the hydraulic resources were not exploited to their maximum to cover the cost of the project. The purpose of the project was not purely economic. The developmental discourse was enmeshed with nationalist underpinnings in which the Sinhala peasant occupied the central place. In the state ideology development through irrigated agriculture stood forth as a reincarnation of the ancient, indigenous and Buddhist culture of Sri Lanka's golden age. The economic hardships and needs of the Sinhala peasant were clearly exploited to sustain this project. In 1983 the Minister of Mahaweli Development, Gamini Dissanayake, declared quite candidly: 'The soul of the new Mahaweli society will be the cherished values of the ancient society, which was inspired and nourished by the Tank, the Temple and the Paddy Field.'4 In the same way, the scheme put forward by the JVP in 2004 to restore '10,000 village tanks' in the rural areas aimed at re-engaging the urban middle classes with the authentic essence of the nation, rekindling their link to the land and those who worked it.

There was thus the perception that the Sinhala peasant, more than the urban worker, represented the authentic son/daughter of the land. Unlike the urban worker he/she had no political party to represent his/her interests or fight for his/her rights. Unlike the Muslim or Tamil peasant he/she had no party or union that would take up his/her specific problems. It was thus the state that should shoulder the responsibility of the peasant's welfare.<sup>5</sup>

Welfare measures. In the late 1940s and early '50s the principle of collective provision for common human and social needs through

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Cited in S.N. Tennekoon, 'Rituals of Development: the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program of Sri Lanka', *American Ethnologist*, 15, 2, 1988, pp. 294–310.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> In general, the development of the agricultural sector slowed down after the 1980s. Today this sector represents only one-fifth of GNP, while only 38 per cent of the active population lives off agriculture. There is in fact a dearth of labour in this field which has been partly remedied by mechanisation. Since the 1980s there has been a change in the structure of the economy, marked by a shift from agriculture to employment in industry and in the service sector.

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state intervention was firmly established through the implementation of the Education Act of 1943, the establishment of the Department of Social Services in 1948, and the Health Act of 1953. The Sri Lankan welfare state as it emerged in its 1950s–'60s incarnation is most often traced to these fundamental acts that were made dynamic by a number of other factors: the grant of universal suffrage in 1931 and the mobilisation of groups in a competitive electoral system; the economic conditions that created a surplus from the plantation sector; the prevailing ideology of statism and distributive justice in the national elite dominant in the centre-left parties that gained power successively.

A decade later, the system had been more than partly dismantled. The crisis of the welfare state has been identified as coinciding with the decline of the social democratic state after 1977 and the coming into power of a conservative government with a neoliberal agenda. In fact, cuts in welfare expenditure and the scaling down of food subsidies were started as early as in 1972. There was also a crisis of legitimacy during the United Front government: indeed, the welfare state began to show cracks as it became increasingly apparent to a growing group of people that the principles upon which it was constructed were breeding regimes of mediocrity and privilege.

As early as the end of the nineteenth century some initiatives relating to labour welfare had been forthcoming, motivated essentially by the need of the state to safeguard the highly profitable plantation sector by giving special treatment to indentured Indian labour. In 1927, for instance, minimum wage legislation was enacted for Indian estate labour. The origins of welfarism can be more clearly traced to the Donoughmore years when social legislation relating to a wide number of issues such as child and family welfare, poverty alleviation, education and health and social security was promulgated. The commitment to improving living standards through education and health policies surfaced in these transition years of semi-self-government as a concomitant of universal franchise. However, the 1930s were especially hard on the poorer sections of the population, as those years were further

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, Welfarism and Politics in Sri Lanka: Experience of a Third World Welfare State, Perth, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See Janice Jiggins, 'Dismantling Welfarism in Sri Lanka', *Overseas Development Review*, 2, 1976, pp. 84–104; M. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka: the End of Welfare Politics', *South Asian Review*, 6, 2, Jan. 1973, pp. 91–109.

plagued by a severe drought and a devastating malaria epidemic. Thus it was necessity too that set off a number of measures—among them the Wedderburn Report of 1934 that led, for instance, to the introduction of a Poor Law in 1939—which attempted to deal with poverty by recommending state assistance, a measure that was not, however, continued in the years that followed. During the Second World War social welfare, except for a food subsidy for the entire population, was accorded little priority.

The Kannangara Report of 1943 recommended a system of universal and compulsory free education from kindergarten to university that led to a national system of education founded on the principle of equal opportunity. In practice, however, there were many discrepancies in the quality of education, and the resources invested therein, between Colombo schools and the rural schools. The failure of the state to guarantee social mobility through education and the unequal distribution of educational entitlements were central issues in the Southern insurrections and the Tamil insurrection in the North and East. One of the most effective youth slogans in the late 1980s proclaimed: '1948 freedom for Royal College, 1956 freedom for Ananda College, 1989 we free Weeraketiya Maha Vidyalaya'.<sup>8</sup>

The Jennings Report on Social Services had less progressive outcomes. It eventually led to a limited form of social security based employer and employee contributions, targeted only at the wagee-arning public sector. The health services were covered by the Cumpston Report (1950) which led to the Health Services Act. The principle of the right to health care was set out, while private practice for doctors in the state sector was abolished. Another distinctive feature of the welfare state was involvement in public utilities such as transport.<sup>9</sup>

The 1970s saw efforts to carry out fundamental reforms in the socio-economic structures of the country. A spate of social legislation followed the 1971 insurrection with the purpose of introducing structural change in the economy and reducing social tensions. This included wide-ranging land reforms, the introduction of a ceiling on ownership of housing property, private consumption controls

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Sessional Paper no. 1, 1990 Report on the Presidential Commission on Youth, pp. 71–2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> L. Jayasuriya, *Welfarism and Politics*, pp. 8–12; for a background on the political economy of the 1931–47 period see K.M. de Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, chapter 33, pp. 462–78.

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through compulsory saving schemes and stringent taxation, state ownership of basic industries and the banking system. But Sri Lanka faced some intractable economic problems in the 1970s—high unemployment, increasing inflation and a stagnant economy. In order to reduce fiscal deficits the government was compelled to curtail social expenditure. A number of measures such as means testing for the food subsidy or taking away the free rice ration fromincome tax payers and dependants were introduced. <sup>10</sup>

The actual dismantling of the welfare state occurred after 1977 when the United National Party government introduced a new economic policy based on economic liberalisation and an export led economy. However, only part of the welfare state package was dismantled. Although the health and education sectors were not seriously affected, a dramatic shift took place in the nature and emphasis of welfare policies, the most important change being that welfare was now targeted and selective rather than a right enjoyed by every citizen.

Furthermore, while welfare expenditure was 10 per cent of GNP in the 1970–7 period it fell to 4 per cent in 1981. This drop was mainly due to the complete withdrawal of the food subsidy and to the reduction of consumer subsidies on certain products such as sugar and flour. The underlying idea which underpinned the overall strategy of international aid agencies was that food subsidies and welfare schemes were for the needy.

For the people of Sri Lanka the new policy meant privatisation of public utilities such as transport and health care services. At the same time there was an attempt to modernise the rural sector through social programmes such as rural housing and electrification. For the poorest, the Janasaviya programme (from 1989 to 1995), which followed the food stamp scheme, provided a family allowance of Rs 2,500, combined with a self-help element. The emphasis of welfare had shifted. The purpose was no longer to provide social mobility or at least equal opportunities, but to give people an access to the market. The Samurdhi scheme that replaced the Janasaviya programme differed little from its predecessor and tended to display similar political patronage. Unlike in the colonial period, when entitlements were directed to easily differentiated communities, welfare schemes created other divides

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Patricia J. Alailima, 'Social Policy in Sri Lanka' in W.D. Lakshman (ed.), Dilemmas of Development: Fifty Years of Economic Change in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1997, pp. 127–70.

and spawned new identities based on economic differences that crisscrossed ethnic or religious identities. Concepts such as the 'poorest of the poor' or 'Samurdhi recipients' entered the political discourse as new forms of identification.

The measure of welfare. Development indicators often conceal increasing economic inequalities and a willing blindness to mitigating factors. The first UNDP Human Development Report for Sri Lanka, for instance, was produced excluding the underperforming North and East. Without a clear understanding of the trends in one third of the country is it possible to chart a general picture? Notwithstanding this issue, population growth is taken to prove the success of Sri Lanka's social sector development. The population had indeed grown slowly over the past five decades, in keeping with the recommendations of the United Nations on population growth. The population growth declined from 1.8 per cent in 1978 to 1.2 per cent in 1997, reaching a rate well below the growth rate of population in most developing countries.<sup>11</sup>

According to national data and international indexes, the combined effects of increased longevity due to improvements in health and nutrition and declining fertility led to a maturing of the age structure with a high concentration of the population in the middle and older groups. The ageing population in Sri Lanka (over sixty) accounts today for 8 per cent of men and women. The state is yet to devise strategies to meet the multi-dimensional needs of older persons—health, mental and physical, legal protection, social welfare. Until now reliance on family networks and traditional ties has been the mainstay of state policy.

As a result of welfare policies, the education of women and their subsequent employment delayed marriage and thereby reduced family size and population growth. Government reports claim that women became accustomed to postpone marriage in order to find time to achieve their educational and economic goals, and that free education created an enabling environment for women's aspirations to be fulfilled. However, this picture fails to highlight the often insurmountable obstacles women face in the form of traditions and social obligations. <sup>12</sup> That Sri Lanka made great strides in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka 2000, Colombo, 2000, pp. 11–12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Janaki Jayawardena, 'Cultural Constructions of the "Sinhala Woman" and Women's Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka', PhD, University of York,

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improving maternal and child health by reducing fertility is less contestable. Easy accessibility to family planning services and the high standard of education among girls contributed positively towards setting an average of 2.3 births per woman.<sup>13</sup> Thus indicators in the field of population continue to point towards a successful involvement of the state as a caring and social engineering mechanism, although fewer initiatives have been taken to cope with new population problems such as 'ageing'. Although the welfare state has not retreated from a role it has played for decades in education and health, it is less present when asked to respond to new needs.

The welfare state is generally given credit for the high level of literacy reached in Sri Lanka: the estimated number of literate adults expressed as a percentage of the total adult population (fifteen years and above) is cited as over 90 per cent. However, figures are sometimes reductive or even misleading as literacy rates are probably lower than the literacy censuses claim. As in the population indexes, national statistics appear impervious to the law of averages and exclude the North and East and the internally displaced persons from their calculations. There are thousands of young people whose homes have been refugee camps for over ten years and whose education has been disrupted by forced relocation and traumatic experiences.

In the South too the figures may be skewed by the very practice of data collection. Indeed, to reach literacy figures the practice has been to follow the UNESCO recommendations concerning international statistics adopted by the General Conference at its Tenth session in Paris in 1958—to accept the respondent's declaration of his or her ability to read and write. In Sri Lanka, where literacy and education are considered desirable achievements the lack of which would be reluctantly admitted, it is doubtful that all respondents' declarations would always be accurate. This is reflected in the rather puzzling increase in the literacy of particular age-groups.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>2003. 13 &#</sup>x27;Changing Role of Women in Sri Lanka', Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1997, p. 191. In India the average for the period 1990–5 was 3.7 births per woman, and in Pakistan 6.2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, Oxford and New Delhi, 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> For instance the cohort of women aged 45–9 in 1971 had a literacy rate of 54.4 per cent. Ten years later in 1981 this same cohort, now aged 55–9, had

Furthermore, the figure of 90 per cent hides significant differences in literacy rates according to region. While Gampaha has the highest literacy rate (95 per cent) and Nuwara Eliya the lowest (79 per cent), on the whole the entire country seems to have reaped the benefits of a state education policy that since the 1940s delivered access to free primary and secondary education to all children of school-going age. These figures hide yet another picture, which is one of school drop-outs and failure in the GCE (Ordinary Level), a state examination. Only approximately one out of four students who sit for the O Levels actually passes, a dismal figure that proves the poor quality of education in most underprivileged and rural areas. The 1990 Presidential Commission that examined the causes of youth discontent, disquiet and unrest highlighted the disparities between Colombo and the outstations through the life of a young teacher in the Anuradhapura district:

Awaiting entrance into university he had accepted a teaching post in a school three miles from Anuradhapura town. The school has no well and therefore there is no drinking water for children or for the staff. There are no sanitary facilities... The school has only one lock for the room of the principal, but it can only be operated from inside. Every morning a child climbs in through the corridor and unlocks the door for the principal to come in. School attendance has improved since the midday meal primarily because parents send their children to collect Rs 3 every day for use by the family. School books rarely arrive on time, sometimes months after school begins, dumped by the lorries in a central location awaiting distribution. There are not enough desks and benches so children are forced to share or sit on the floor.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly literacy alone is not an adequate social indicator of human development. Another issue is that those assessing and tabulating literacy seem to believe literacy is a simple matter, a clear concept unchangeable and immutable. Added to the minimal requirement of being able to read and write, to be literate is also

a literacy rate of 66.2 per cent. As it is unlikely that adult education would have succeeded to such an extent, one can surmise that a large part of the increase is due to a larger proportion of illiterates reporting themselves literate in 1981.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This type of analysis has been attempted in Sasanka Perera, 'Teaching and Learning Hatred: The Role of Education and Socialization in Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict', PhD, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1991; Reggie Siriwardena, Sunil Bastian, S.K. Indrapala and Sepali Kottegoda, School Textbooks and Communal Relations in Sri Lanka—Part I, Colombo, 1980.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Sessional Paper no. 1, 1990, 'Report on the Presidential Commission on Youth', p. 71.

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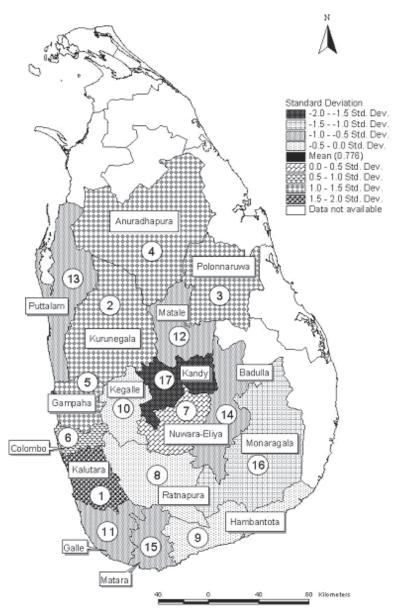
the ability to understand complexity in the Bachelardian sense. Many so-called literates are in fact suffering from a sort of illiteracy that takes a number of more subtle shapes. There is for instance, among many, an ignorance and inability to understand and use information such as medical knowledge, financial knowledge or technological knowledge. There is similarly a lack of understanding of the complexity of certain modern concepts. Many literate people believe for instance that 'autonomy' and 'independence' have the same meaning, as popular Sinhala language uses the term *swadinathvaya* interchangeably, thus blurring 'complexity'. The knowledge that Sri Lanka's *Human Development Index* rank is 91 out of 175 countries must thus be complemented by a more qualitative reading that points to the faultlines.<sup>18</sup>

The standard of living of the people can, in this perspective, be reflected only to a limited extent in the per capita income of the country as a whole and of the different regions. While the country's per capita GGDP has exceeded US \$1000 since 2004, the districtwise disparities of the late 1990s are still discernible. The reason for not including the North and East in the national picture given by the Central Bank or by international organisations was the low population density in these regions that did not affect per capita calculations. Thus the nation-state functioned even at times of intensive war as though growth with war was possible.

The level of human poverty in Sri Lanka has been the subject of debate. According to the UNDP it is moderately high with approximately 18 per cent of the population experiencing deprivation. A high proportion of households do not have electricity (56 per cent), lack access to safe drinking water (28 per cent), and do not possess adequate sanitation facilities (24 per cent). However, Sri Lanka is said to be moving towards the target of full access to safe drinking water and improved access to safe sanitation, as supported

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> UNDP, National Human Development Report: Regional Dimensions, Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1998.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> The Gampaha district in the Western Province has the highest GDP per capita, Colombo ranks second, Nuwara Eliya and Kalutara come third and fourth respectively. These four districts are substantially wealthier than other areas of the country, the poorest district in the country being Moneragala, with a GDP per capita less than half the per capita income of Kalutara. When the GDP per capita is read against the HDI figures Nuwara Eliya is the district that has the lowest HDI index, owing to the poor living conditions of the plantation workers. UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1998 (see note 18), pp. 8–11.



Achievements in Human Development by Region

Source: UNDP, National Human Development Report: Regional Dimensions of Human Development, Colombo, 1998.

by the increase in separate toilets from 53.8 per cent of households in 1953 to 88.3 per cent in 1996/7. At the district level human poverty is most apparent in Nuwara Eliya where 31 per cent of the population suffer poverty related deprivation. This is followed by Moneragala, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Ratnapura and Kegalle. Interestingly two of the districts that have the lowest per capita incomes, Kandy and Matara, perform well in terms of human poverty. This can be explained by a relatively extensive electricity network and wider social provisioning to deliver access to clean water and safe sanitation.<sup>20</sup>

Living standards can also be contrasted when looking at the availability of certain items in households. There is a significant gap between the wealthy—the 0.3 per cent who own an air-conditioner, the 0.4 per cent who use a personal computer, and the 3.4 per cent who own a motor car or van—and the rest of the people. While a very affluent class is acquiring more visibility and Colombo and other large cities are changing to accommodate their leisure needs, 26.4 per cent of households still do not own a radio. <sup>21</sup>

As with literacy, poverty may also be measured differently. The UNDP assessment is contested by other frameworks of analysis. The government poverty reduction framework, as well as a recent World Bank study, revealed that almost a third of the population is poor, applying the official poverty line, but about 50 per cent of the population receive cash payments under the Samurdhi poverty alleviation programme. The poorest two quintiles do not receive any benefit at all under the Samurdhi programme. Furthermore a substantial proportion of the poor in the conflict-ridden North and East Provinces are not covered by the Samurdhi programme. <sup>22</sup>

The interconnections between conflict, social discrimination and poverty are particularly tenuous in the former conflict zones. The impact of the conflict on these local communities is not addressed in the facts and figures of UN or national reports. Air bombing raids, artillery shelling and close fighting of ground troops with small arms caused severe damage over the years. National figures tend to hide glaring differences. In the North and the East, for instance, the bicycle is still the most common mode of transport.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 30–40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Central Bank of Sri Lanka (see note 11), p. 119.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Muttukrishna Sarvananthan, 'The International Monetary Fund in Sri Lanka: a Critical Dialogue', *Contemporary South Asia*, 11, 1, March 2002, pp. 85–7.

What then has been the balance-sheet of welfarism and the strategies that reformed the welfare state? Who actually benefited? Some economists argue that a growth-led strategy would have been more effective. Indeed, recent findings that look at income distribution by sectors and income groups suggest that the main beneficiaries of welfare measures were not the poorest in the population but middle income segments comprising the urban middle class—made up of professionals and public sector employees, the trading class and rich peasants. However, there was a recognisable measure of distributive equality during the 1953–73 period that was reversed after 1977. Other figures remain to be scrutinised and studied: for instance, the sudden increase from 1970 to 1975 in the infant mortality rate in the estates from 97 to 144 per 1,000, while for the rest of the country it decreased from 48 to 45. Was welfare evenly distributed? Popular memories often paint a different picture of the

1970s: a picture of mothers standing in line to collect their rations of milk, of children dressed in a uniform fashion because of the lack of material, of times when potatoes were only dreamt of by a yam eating nation.... But were these the memories of the middle classes suffering from an austerity with which they were unaccustomed? How did the rest of the people remember the decade? A trade unionist recounts fondly the slogans of a May Day Rally:

Without sugar we drink our tea
Without chillies we eat our broth
If our Mathini tells us to
We will eat even straw....<sup>24</sup>

Other studies have shown that the post-1977 policies, which committed the country to full-scale development with foreign aid and private capital without any social welfare objectives, further aggravated an unequal system. <sup>25</sup> Indeed, the adverse impact on the poor strata of society was not adequately offset by the production effects

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Central Bank of Sri Lanka (see note 11), p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> P. Serasinghe, A Forty Year History of Government Workers 1940–1980, Colombo, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, Welfarism and Politics, pp. 23–5. John M. Richardson Jr argues quite forcefully in 'Violent Conflict and the First Half Decade of Open Economy Policies in Sri Lanka: A Revisionist View' in Deborah Winslow and Michael D. Woost (eds), Economy, Culture and Civil War in Sri Lanka, Bloomington, IN, 2004, pp. 41–71, that the open economy reforms produced adverse human impacts that contributed significantly to the escalation of violent political conflict in Sri Lanka.

of market liberalisation and private enterprise promotion.<sup>26</sup> The erosion in the value of food stamps that replaced the food ration, combined with spiraling costs of living in the 1980s, reduced the calorie intake of the poor and increased malnutrition.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the drawbacks of the welfare system are less measurable but remain in the constant tension between meritocratic and egalitarian values at all levels of government and administration. In the 1970s egalitarianism was often synonymous with mediocrity and loss of standards: this was the case culturally when in 1972 the government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike restricted the import of books. Libraries were starved of journals and academic books while the reading public was forced to content itself with the dismal choice of local publishers. The effect such a policy had on the intellectual development of a generation cannot be measured.

Since the 1970s it is perhaps the loss of state protection that has led people to seek patronage and create other networks based on favours from politicians, and corruption of administrative officers at all levels. Welfarism left a heavy toll. Concepts such as duty and responsibility to or respect for state institutions have failed to become entrenched, even years after the welfare state was downsized, and today this state of affairs remains an obstacle to good governance. At the same time, among the disillusioned youth of the last three decades there is more faith in the state—although a reformist and socialist type of state—than in political parties, civil society or the private sector. A young man from Jaffna voiced his anger thus: 'Our local village societies, trade unions, and clubs are worthless groups. They just hang the nameboards and advertise their names only. They don't do a single proper work.'<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, a young woman from Weligama summarised the perception of the state as a caring body:

'The state sector jobs are good. There is stability for the employees. Salary is not less. But it is better than the private sector, which throws out the employees in 6 months without paying the due taxes.'<sup>29</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> W.D. Lakshman (ed.), Dilemmas of Development: Fifty Years of Economic Change in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Swarna Jayaweera, 'Fifty Years since Political Independence: an Overview' in Swarna Jayaweera (ed.), Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 2002, p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Markus Mayer, 'Violent Youth Conflicts in Sri Lanka: Comparative Results from Jaffna and Hambantota' in S.T. Hettige and Markus Mayer (eds), Sri Lankan Youth: Challenges and Responses, Colombo, 2002, p. 239.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Qualitative Case Studies Report 2000, National Youth Survey, Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2000, p. 64.

Thus, even as the welfare state is facing its most powerful challenge, the effects of welfarism continue to be felt.

## From welfare state to humanitarianism

Sri Lanka's 'exemplary' social welfare policies and high social indicators have sometimes been explained by the lack of militarisation in the early postcolonial period. Indeed, until the 1970s Sri Lanka had a largely ceremonial army that could not boast of any combat experience except in internal security matters, and minuscule defence spending.

In the 1980s Sri Lanka underwent a near transmutation from a model democracy with social and welfare indices that were the envy of the developing world to a dysfunctional democracy. Until the early 1970s the defence budget was below 0.5 per cent of GDP, and reached only just above 1 per cent in the early 1980s. The conflict brought about a sharp escalation of defence expenditure and concomitant expansion of the armed forces. In 1985 the defence budget rose steeply to 3.5 per cent and in 1996 to 6 per cent. In the space of ten years the strength of the armed forces rose from 58,660 to 235,000.

Furthermore, the armed conflict developed its own political economy in the war zones and provided an opportunity for certain groups in society to acquire profit, political power and protection. Villages in the war zones were torn between different and competing authority structures in the form of paramilitary security regimes. Seventeen years of armed conflict saw the militarisation of society and the emergence of a war economy. Economic growth, however, was not as unfavourably affected by the war as expected, owing mainly to the regional nature of the conflict. In 1998 growth was still estimated at 4.8 per cent. Sri Lanka's economy continued to show an average rate of real growth of over 5 per cent in the six years 1995–2000 even after the Asian economic crisis had hit the international currency and trading markets in 1997–8. In 2000 armed services spending amounted to 40 per cent of total government expenditure and growth. In 2001 the growth was–0.5 per

<sup>31</sup> Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, 'Sri Lanka: Transformation of Legitimate Violence and Civil-Military Relations' in Muttiah Alagappa (ed.), *Coercion* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Amita Shastri, 'An Open Economy in a Time of Intense Civil War: Sri Lanka 1994–2000' in Deborah Winslow and Michael D. Woost (eds), op. cit., pp. 75–92.

cent. Negative growth was seen for the first time in the postcolonial history of Sri Lanka.

The civil war in the North and East had repercussions well beyond the immediate theatre of combat. It set back economic progress by decades, according to some scholars. While the destruction of production factors can be assessed, the human costs of death, disability, dispossession and psychological trauma associated with terror and violence are not quantifiable. However, they provide a more balanced picture of the achievements of the Sri Lankan state than the over-optimistic and selective accounts of the Central Bank or international institutions.

Economic costs of war. Direct costs include costs borne by the government and the LTTE and costs of damage to physical and social infrastructure. This includes military expenditure, costs of providing for refugees and costs of damage to capital assets and land. If one calculates the indirect costs by comparing the counterfactual with the actual, among the important factors are: the income lost due to foregone foreign and local investment; the income lost from reduced tourism; the income lost due to a reduction, because of death and injury, in human capital; the output foregone because of displacement of persons; and the output foregone in the Northern Province. A recent study concludes that on even the most conservative assumptions, the country has incurred a war cost amounting to about two years of annual GDP.<sup>33</sup>

It has been estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 people were killed up to 1998, of whom half were civilians. The proportion of the population suffering some type of physical deformity has increased with time and is currently estimated to be around 2 per cent.<sup>34</sup> The

and Governance. The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia, Stanford, 2001, pp. 294–313.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Studies of the cost of war are J.M. Richardson and S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe and R. Coughlan (eds), *Economic Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict*, New York, 1991; M.L. Grobar and S. Gnanaselvam, 'The Economic Effects of the Sri Lankan War', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 1993, pp. 395–405; National Peace Council of Sri Lanka and Marga Institute, *Cost of the War: Economic, Social and Human Cost of the War*, Colombo, 2001. 33 Nisha Arunatilake, Sisira Jayasuriya and Saman Kelegama, *The Economic Cost of War in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> The population in the North and East and in border areas, as well as the population in refugee camps will be a serious gap in any study that aims at a comprehensive picture.

Association of Disabled Ex-Service Personnel puts the number of disabled soldiers at 10–15,000.

Female headed households emerged in Sri Lanka as a significant social phenomenon after the JVP insurrections of the 1970s and late 1980s and the war in the North and East from the early 1980s. Violence was the main explanatory factor. In 1994 18.6 per cent of households were female headed. The districts of Galle and Matara had the highest figures, the combined effect of the recruitment drive for the North East war and a general propensity of southerners for internal migration. In Moneragala, where many young men disappeared during the JVP insurrection in the late 1980s, females comprised 59 per cent of the population in 1996. The percentage of widowed women showed a steady rise over the past three decades, clearly the outcome of the ethnic war. Widows, although in receipt of some form of compensation, were in many instances subject to insidious forms of social exclusion.

About 800,000 people from all communities, Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese, have been displaced by the conflict. Of them 200,000 are under fourteen years of age. Many of the displaced live in camps in the Vanni or in Vavuniya. For those who have remained in their homes in the North and East the social and economic deprivation—with shortages of essential goods such as fuel, pharmaceuticals, fertiliser and pesticides—is such that people have spoken of premodern times to describe the situation in these areas. Women bear a large share of the burden of displacement. In the 130,000 households that had family members fighting in the war there was a constant sense of insecurity. For the rest of the people, violence and terror was less predictable but fear was ever present.

Thus the war contributed to a decline in the welfare of the peoples of Sri Lanka as a whole, in spite of attempts to provide the victims of war and their bereaved families with material and social benefits.

Political and human costs of the war. An important effect of the war has been the weakening of transparency and accountability in society. The island has been under a state of emergency nearly continuously since 1984. Governments used their increased powers to stifle criticism and public demonstrations. The political system survived

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Sepali Kottegoda, 'Female Headed Households in Situations of Armed Conflict', Nivedini, 4, 2, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Selvy Thiruchandran, The Other Victims of War. Emergence of Female Headed Households in Eastern Sri Lanka, vol. II, New Delhi, 1999.

in the South, while in the North-East people were generally deprived of their democratic rights. Arrests and detentions under Emergency laws were common, with adverse effects on the country's human rights record. Corruption was rampant in government as the war provided opportunities for large procurement transactions. The culture of violence has seeped into everyday events as life has become cheap.<sup>37</sup> In the late 1990s artists painted barrels at checkpoints to evoke the ways in which war had entered everyday life.

In the North and East the civilian population was for long terrorised into providing food and shelter to militants. The army found it difficult to distinguish between civilians and combatants and instead of open warfare resorted to other instruments for disciplining the people: torture, rape and detention became less repellent in the panic of battle. People devised coping mechanisms to deal with their own pain or the pain that came with the loss of loved ones, in the absence of institutions of civil society. Churches and hospitals were often destroyed or inaccessible. Survivors suffered from intrusive memories of death scenes and violence. A diagnostic category called post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was invented in response to the need to capture the effects of extreme situations.

Violence, torture and extra-judicial killings were widespread during the armed conflict, especially after 1979 when an operation to cleanse the North of terrorism was begun by the armed forces. After 1992 the human rights situation in the North and East was subject to scrutiny by international organisations, and this led to a change in the government approach: the government agreed to provide receipts for arrests as a safeguard against disappearances; a Human Rights Task Force was established as a monitoring body. A new emphasis on human rights was apparent with the government that came into power in 1994. The Convention Against Torture and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights were adopted. But from 1996 onwards disappearances were again heard of in Jaffna. The soldiers responsible for the rape and murder of schoolgirl Krishanty Kumaraswamy and the murder of those who went in search of her in Jaffna were sen tenced to death in a model trial. The army's top brass, however, were not held accountable.38

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> National Peace Council of Sri Lanka and Marga Institute (see note 31).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> University Teachers For Human Rights (Jaffna), Gaps in the Krishanty Kumarasamy Case, Colombo, 1999.

Violence is everywhere and no longer the preserve of combatants. Violence against women has been on the rise in Sri Lanka. Women have been shown to be victims of armed conflicts in different ways: first as direct victims of the violence, then as refugees or internally displaced, finally as victims of loss of male relatives. As participants or even perpetrators of violence they can be considered victims of a society dominated by a set of values they are compelled to respect.<sup>39</sup>

Violence did not start with the civil war. In 1971, during the IVP insurrection, a beauty queen was forced by the military to parade naked through her village for allegedly supporting the rebels. Society indirectly affected by the North and East conflict has also been brutalised. The press is replete with accounts of violence in the home, at school and in the workplace. According to a Sri Lankan women's group that monitors media coverage of violence, 291 incidents were recorded over a period of three months in 1999. In 1995 the Penal Code was reformed in a manner more advantageous to victims of rape, but it remains wracked by procedural difficulties. Obstacles to the implementation of these laws remain. 40 Sri Lankan institutions as a whole, and those that address issues concerning women in particular, have a strong rights orientation that is juxtaposed with weak participation and implementation in meeting the needs that have surfaced in the political and legal framework of the last few decades.41

## Neo-welfarism: the humanitarian thrust

The war between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE not only swelled the ranks of refugees and displaced people, it also spawned new structures and networks in response to the needs encapsulated in the humanitarian thrust. After Operation Riviresa and after the government forces took control of Jaffna city in early December 1995, there were, according to the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, over one million displaced people in Sri Lanka. The majority of them were concentrated among the extended border zone. Most were Tamil although large numbers of Sinhalese and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy, 'Violence, Armed Conflict and the Community', in Swarna Jayaweera (ed.), Women in Post-independence Sri Lanka, p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Shyamala Gomez and Mario Gomez, Gender Violence in Sri Lanka. From Rights and Shame to Remedies and Change, Colombo, 1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Swarna Jayaweera (ed.), Women in Post-independence Sri Lanka.

Muslims were also displaced. The new border zones, the result of twenty years of war between successive Sri Lankan governments and the LTTE, constitute a swathe of land between territory controlled by each. These zones are overseen and administered by a number of actors: the Sri Lankan government, the Sri Lankan army, paramilitary groups and international aid agencies from the UNHCR and the ICRC to Oxfam, the Norwegian NGO FORUT, Seva Lanka and other non-governmental relief/development organisations, all invited by the Sri Lanka government.

In the 1990s these relief organisations frequently specialised in one of the five activities that are commonly understood to compose the relief discipline: the provision and/or distribution of food, shelter, water, sanitation, and medical care. In a sense humanitarianism inherited the mantle of the deficient welfare state. In the Vanni a significant portion of the resources provided by the UNHCR is going to the development arm of the LTTE. In other border zones beneficiaries of NGO-sponsored projects are commonly taxed by LTTE cadres. The government, however, is not ready to operate in these areas, but is content to let UN agencies and international NGOs bear the costs of maintaining schools and providing training and infrastructure in government controlled areas. The state has abandoned its responsibility to the non-governmental sector or else performs it in an inadequate way—welfare centres in Vavuniya South provide an example of faltering government involvement in relief—so that NGOs have stepped in. In recent years the emphasis shifted from grants in kind or money to 'capacity building' which reflects the new thinking of aid as selfhelp rather than as a simple hand-out.

The term 'capacity building'—which a recent report commissioned by Oxfam defined as 'a means of engaging and strengthening existing knowledge and skills to render people's livelihoods more secure'42—encapsulates the new thinking in humanitarian circles. In a way the shift is similar to that in government welfare from the traditional measures of the 1950s and 1960s to the Janasaviya scheme, two decades before 'capacity building' became a buzzword. The ideology is in keeping with the onset of liberalism as the operating system in the world today.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Malathi de Alwis and Jennifer Hyndman, Capacity Building in Conflict Zones: A Feminist Analysis of Humanitarian Assistance in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2002, p. 8.

Global civil society has emerged in Sri Lanka both as a response to the state's reluctance and difficulties in sustaining a welfare policy and as a spin-off from the growth of sub-nationalism and supranational interests embodied in international financial and trade institutions. Welfarism is now practiced in the war-torn areas by humanitarian organisations. The assumption on the part of staterun institutions, international organisations and NGOs, that the internally displaced will one day return to their home, precludes them from providing assistance to build sustainable livelihoods.<sup>43</sup> While they have taken it upon themselves to further the needs of those whom the state has ceased to look after, the drawback is a measure of dependence at many levels. The relationship between Northern aid agencies and Southern partners is often one of power. Power relations are also present in the ties of dependence forged between the hapless refugee and the aid worker, researcher or academic in search of material. On the whole the people in the grassroots are mainly perceived and targeted as passive recipients of relief rather than as active participants.

# Alternatives: the rise of civil society

Alternative spaces of debate, people-centred rather than institution-based, have emerged in the last decade and are reshaping the colonial heritage of state-centrism and welfarism. These new forces can be encompassed in the concept of civil society, which is an attempt to articulate the problematic relationship between the private and the public, the individual and the social, public ethics and individual interests, individual passions and public concerns. Civil society is best understood in Sri Lanka when it includes formal organisations of a representative kind such as parties, churches, trade unions and professional bodies, formal organisations of a functional kind such as schools, universities and mass media, and more informal social and political networks, ranging from local voluntary groups and ad hoc activist coalitions to nationally or internationally coordinated groups. <sup>44</sup> Civil society is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, 'Beyond Institution and Constitution Building: Linking Post/Conflict Reconstruction and Deep Democracy' in Markus Mayer, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah (eds), Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka, New Delhi, 2003, p. 121.

<sup>44</sup> Most work on civil society in Sri Lanka has been done for the purpose of advo-

itself a site of tension and struggle between differently disposed organisations.

In the last two decades, a new Buddhism—more militant and interventionist—an NGO sector voicing human rights and developmental concerns, and an array of associations of citizens such as the National Movement against Terrorism, the Free Media Movement and more recently the Citizens Movement for Good Governance (CIMOGG), are questioning the traditional role of parties and trade unions as the prime representatives of the will of the people. Is there, however, a real decline in the appeal of 'old social movements', and to what extent is civil society a funder's dream, a shibboleth?

'New' Buddhism. Following the rationalisation of Buddhism in the early twentieth century, which called for monks to take on a more activist role in the community, monks gradually became more involved in political and economic spheres. A recent work has thrown new light on the role of the monk and the new conceptions regarding that role and the activities that have arisen from those conceptions. 45 Since the 1940s and 1950s, when many socialist monks from the Vidyalankara Pirivena, a leading temple, appeared on left party platforms, there has been a turn towards violent and xenophobic positions. State intervention in religious affairs is largely responsible for this shift from radical to nationalist Buddhism. Every constitution of the country since 1972 has stressed the special place given to Buddhism, the religion of more than 70 per cent of the population. Buddhism has become in Sri Lanka a legitimising, integrative and moral force that governments and politicians have to take into account. But although Buddhism is protected by the state and practiced by the vast majority of people, many of its proponents present it as a religion under threat. The threat has been portrayed as coming from various places at different times. In the 1950s Buddhist leaders complained of the influence of 'Catholic Action' and spearheaded the SLFP campaign, taking over denominational schools, evicting Catholic nursing nuns, giving Buddhist preachers more time over national radio, and securing employment for Buddhists in the higher echelons of the administration and armed services.

cacy or in order to engage in polemical debates. See Nira Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka: New Circles of Power*, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> See H.L. Seneviratne, The Work of Kings: New Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Chicago, 1999.

Since independence political monks organised in pressure groups have taken positions on crucial issues, and influenced people by virtue of their moral prestige. When the UNP came to power and liberalised the economy, monks protested against growing consumerism. Groups of *bhikkus* protested against the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord in 1987, claiming that the agreement betrayed the Sinhala people by conceding too much to the Tamils and allowing Indians to enter the island as a peacekeeping force.

The phenomenon of religious influence was particularly apparent a few years ago when a book by Stanley Tambiah, Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka (1992), became the centre of controversy. It was alleged in the Sinhala nationalist press that with its publication an international conspiracy had been launched: the co-conspirators included the World Institute for Development Economic Research (WIDER), its former director, and the United Nations organisations; the chief beneficiary of the plot was the LTTE. This controversy, and the response of the reading public in Sri Lanka, showed that quite a few people believe that American imperialism is behind most of the evils of the world and that a number of traitors in Sri Lanka—especially intellectuals with local and foreign NGO links—have sold out to the West. A few months later the government, bowing to the pressure of the Sangha, imposed a ban on the import and sale of the book. This was a major setback for the non-governmental sector which had issued a statement calling for the respect of freedom of expression notwithstanding content.

The Buddhist Sangha plays an important role in fostering such ideas, because many Buddhists look to leaders among the sects of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka as moral guides even on temporal matters. The condemnation by many influential monks of the devolution package—a proposal offered to the Tamil people by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's government—as a threat to the unitary character of the state dampened the initial enthusiasm of its promoters. On 5 March 1996 a vast gathering of the Buddhist order, numbering more than 2,000 members, assembled to denounce the government's proposals to defuse the ethnic problem. A prominent scholar-monk, the Venerable Dr Walpola Rahula, made the following statement: 'These devolution proposals could only cause chaos and doom to the country and hence the package should be rejected in toto.' 46 On many occasions, when the Sangha

<sup>46</sup> The Island, 6 March 1996.

believed the state was failing to protect the majority culture, language and religion of the land or was endangering the sovereignty of the country, it voiced its opinion in the media. The state was then obliged to take the Sangha's view into account even if it did not always reflect the view of the majority.

The fact that monks have taken up the political mantle of Anagarika Dharmapala rather than devoting their lives to social work has been lamented by scholars and lay people alike. <sup>47</sup> However, the politics of the Sangha have not always been divisive. Recently monks working in concert with other community leaders succeeded in fostering movements concerned with the preservation of the environment: for example, the chief monk at the Dambulla Vihara organised protests and demonstrations against the building of the Kandalama Hotel.

More recently the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka has led to protests by Buddhist monks, often working in concert with JVP activists: a large rally took place on 22 April 2002 at Lipton Circus where the very principle of negotiating with the LTTE was called into question. In 2005 monks were at the forefront of the opposition to the government's plan to push through a mechanism to disburse aid to the areas affected by the tsunami in the North and East, which in their view gave an undue power and recognition to the LTTE. After a five-day fast by a Buddhist monk and a statement against the Joint Mechanism issued by the Mahanayakas of three of the four Buddhist chapters, the President was forced to promise that she would consult the leadership of the main Buddhist chapters before signing any accord. The involvement of NGOs in the peace initiative and the support they bring to third party mediation has led the Sangha and NGOs into antithetical positions.

The non-governmental sector. Sri Lanka was not very different from other developing countries where from the 1970s onwards human rights advocates, gender activists, developmentalists and groups of indigenous peoples became more vocal and operational in many settings that were once thought to be the preserve of governments. It is generally believed that the growth of these 'new social movements' strengthened civil society in specific countries and established international networks of associations. As the role of the state was reappraised and alternatives were sought with which to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> H.L. Seneviratne, The Work of Kings.

solve problems, these organisations emerged as critical actors, private in form but public in purpose. Sri Lanka's NGO sector mush-roomed in the 1980s owing to the stifling intellectual atmosphere of the  $1970s.^{48}$ 

If one were to describe in a few words the main features of the NGO sector in Sri Lanka, three main categories need to be highlighted: an international NGO sector serving the humanitarian needs of the country stemming from the ethnic conflict; a few large and well distributed national NGOs involved in poverty alleviation projects in conjunction with the state or complementary to the state; and a myriad small NGOs sometimes called CBOs (community based organisations), involved in grassroots rural development.

Most NGOs combine elements of service delivery with elements of community mobilisation. The growth of NGO activity in Sri Lanka can be linked to two consonant processes. On the one hand Northern public interest in development created conditions for enhanced fundraising. On the other credible Southern counterparts that were competent to request funds, execute projects and provide financial reports began to emerge from within the communities. The protracted civil war in the 1980s and the consequent refugee crisis also witnessed a new phenomenon as the numbers of international NGOs operating in Sri Lanka increased sharply. Many took unprecedented steps to establish field offices. Most international NGOs in Sri Lanka were assigned a critical role by donors in the implementation of relief operations. Not only were their budgets and the scale of their operations increased, their influence in shaping opinion about the ethnic conflict was consolidated.

The actual number of NGOs cannot be determined with certainty because of the lack of available documentation and the difficulty in assessing small grassroots organisations. A recent article suggested the figure of 20,000, while a 1993 government report estimated that about 25–30,000 grassroots organisations were operating in Sri Lanka. USAID's even higher estimate of 50,000 NGOs and CBOs in Sri Lanka seems a little exaggerated. What is certain is that a statistical mechanism has yet to be devised to classify the different types of NGOs and estimate their number in an accurate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> An NGO is any association or organisation that is non-profit and non-governmental and engaged in relief and rehabilitation, social justice, social welfare, environmental protection, gender equality, development and human rights.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Nira Wickramasinghe, Civil Society in Sri Lanka, pp. 82–3.

manner. Today only approximately 4,000 NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Social Services. However, these figures need to be revised. In the wake of the tsunami of December 2004 there was a considerable inflation in the number of NGOs and INGOs in the country. Suddenly many development NGOs had to undertake relief. Some that were already present undertook new programmes and grew, while others came in and set up new offices, forging partnerships with local actors. It is too early to assess the impact of relief on local societies. There seems to have been an early impact on wages in, especially, construction and related sectors; rents increased in affected areas and staff salaries rocketed. The visibility of NGO personnel and the lack of understanding of the local customs that they sometimes display has led to a certain apprehension and sometimes hostility among local people.

The perceptions of NGOs held by people from Jaffna to Hambantota is often shaped by their experience on the ground. A youth from Hambantota summarised his feelings thus:

'More than 100 NGOs have come to our village; they come and do something useless and leave. Most of them donate spectacles or provide some facilities for fishery. They all say that commonly work is being done. Only their big shots gain commonly.'50

The elite nature of NGOs in Sri Lanka and the lack of empathy with the common people displayed by NGO workers, are resented by many, as a recent Youth Survey suggested: 'Organisations that are functioning today are elitist and they are unable to identify the needs of the people. The gap that exists between the educated upper class elite and the people of the lower classes is maintained through these clubs,'51 claimed a university educated youth from Jaffna.

Civil society is thus not seen everywhere as having beneficial functions for democracy, such as acting as a counterweight to an otherwise all-powerful state and being a 'school in democracy' by helping numerous organisations in civil society to educate citizens to become good democrats. But NGOs in Sri Lanka have engaged in interrogating the state and holding it accountable for actions harmful to society. The human rights community in Sri Lanka was largely responsible for the state's signature, in 1996, of the optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In the same way active participation and monitoring of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Cited in Markus Mayer, 'Violent Youth Conflicts in Sri Lanka', p. 239.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

1999 Wayamba Provincial Council Elections by civil society associations led to fewer incidents of violence in the Southern polls a few months later. Nearly four hundred NGOs signed a letter to the Minister of Social Services protesting against the new legislation to control social service organisations (Amendment 14 of the Voluntary Social Service Organizations Act no 31 of 1980), which was believed to pave the way for state interference in the freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Human rights and research NGOs have, however, remained silent about the possible ill-effects of globalisation on the economy and society of Sri Lanka. What is lacking is a multidimensional conception of human rights that incorporates political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. Civil society is arguably playing an important role as a watchdog of the state and strives to create a society in which the institutions do not humiliate people—a 'decent society', in Avishai Margalit's phrase.<sup>52</sup> The framework of human rights has not, however, been widened to emphasise second generation rights of the individual (education, health and well-being). Until now human rights in Sri Lanka have rarely dealt with issues of social injustice, equity and cultural relativism, which are the core of any critique of globalisation, leaving this responsibility to trade unions and political groups and movements. There is in a sense a divide between civil society, understood as the sphere that deals with 'rights', and political society that refers to the mobilisation and mediation between the state and the population in forms such as political parties, trade unions and community based movements.

Social movements. A recent development has been the emergence of single-issue social movements that draw on people's participation to exert pressure upon the state. Although these movements do not come near a mass movement—they could be qualified as examples of middle-class radicalism—they have been in the public eye and have an influence which their membership does not reflect. The visibility of the Free Media Movement, for instance, comes precisely from its linkages to the press and broadcasting industry. The absence in Sri Lanka of a Peace movement of greater significance, in spite of the non-violent premises of Buddhist culture, is in many ways surprising. However, recent developments seem to show that peace and non-violence can emerge from many quarters: Sri Lanka First, an initiative by the private sector, has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, Cambridge, MA, 1998.

mobilised the urban middle class to call for peace by taking to the streets or by displaying solidarity in various ways, from holding hands on the streets to wearing white clothes on a given day. A parallel initiative spearheaded by Sarvodaya—the largest development NGO—has had a mass influence owing to its carefully modulated reliance on popular religious symbols and customs, such as a peace pilgrimage to Anuradhapura.

Other social movements antagonistic to peace have emerged. In the mid-1990s a new wave of extreme Sinhalese nationalism emerged as a direct response to the PA government's constitutional reform attempt. The initial ideologues of the resistance to constitutional reform, power sharing and peace negotiations were Nalin de Silva and Gunadasa Amarasekera, former leaders of the defunct Jathika Chintanaya movement. Sinhalese national resistance to reform and peace became more organised when reform proposals were made public in 1995. This spawned a number of organisations that regrouped concerned activists. The National Joint Committee was formed in 1995 to spearhead Sinhalese resistance to the People's Alliance government's proposed devolution package. In 1996 the Committee sponsored the so-called Sinhala commission of inquiry into the negative consequences of the devolution package for Sinhalese Buddhists. The parallel was the 1952–3 Buddhist Commission of Inquiry that was the catalyst for the awakening of Sinhala Buddhism in the 1950s. Their hope was to create a third force, and during the hearings new sections of the intelligentsia and professionals were mobilised. The Sinhala Veera Vidana (SVV) mobilised Sinhalese traders virtually all over the country on an open plank of anti-minorityism that reflected the economic competition they feared from Muslim and Tamil traders.

The National Movement Against Terrorism, closely linked to the SVV, functioned more as a cadre-based political movement and a proto-militant party. It organised protest demonstrations, rallies and interventions on various issues through public statements on constitutional reform, devolution, peace talks and the Norwegian initiative. The NJC-SVV-NMAT combine successfully obstructed the passing of a legislative bill for equal opportunity in 1999 and the constitutional reform bill in 2000. They did not hesitate to use the threat of monks ready for self-immolation as a form of pressure upon the state.<sup>53</sup> Their language of protest offered striking similarities to that of the very group they abhorred.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Pravada, 6, 9–10, 2000, pp. 3–5.

Postcolonial dilemmas: between globalisation and traditions

Today even the way space is organised reveals the merging of once separate worlds. There is no clear line that separates rural and urban, especially in smaller towns. Although statistics enumerate a meagre 22 per cent of the population as urban this fails to take into account the peri-urban fringe of social space. Village society is not immobile. Although land and caste ties continue to be a measure of social standing, some inroads have been made by returnees from the Gulf, traditionally lower in the social scale but now in possession of new wealth often ostentatiously displayed in the form of solid houses, three-wheelers or minibuses. The rural space is often the setting of violence and crime as land and power are contested by new groups. In this predominantly rural country, water is still perceived as the most precious possession and power over water and irrigation is one that all local leaders try to obtain. Water is crucial for paddy land especially in the Northern and North Central areas and in the east of the country, where rainfall is scarce and where agriculture depends on the reservoirs being full. Land is what the peasant lacks and what people yearn for from Jaffna to Point Pedro. Large holdings are rare and generally belong to the Temple, while the majority are smallholders of half a hectare of paddy land and a few acres of garden. Intermediaries or brokers in agricultural equipment often control large amounts of land in a village.

Urbanisation is increasing faster than statistics reveal. Apart from Colombo, urban centres around the country are benefiting from their geographic position or from new trends. Dambulla, first a tourist attraction, has mutated into the largest wholesale market in the country. Anuradhapura has grown into a garrison town with all the industries that ensue, from trade to prostitution. In this evolving context, Sri Lankans appear to be more and more—to borrow Partha Chatterjee's expression—'willing consumers of modernity'. With the increase in global interactions through trade and consumption, the cultures of Sri Lanka are affected in many different ways. Urban culture, more cosmopolitan and flexible, has spread everywhere. There is on the one hand a transformation of everyday subjectivities through electronic mediation especially, but not only, in urban areas. People often live in a rural setting and work in the city two hours' travel away. They straddle cultures with remarkable ease as a new imaginaire, a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, is being created. Foreign satellite TV stations now beam images to Sri Lanka, effectively breaking the state's monopoly over

television. Television is a non-luxury item today. In 2003, 68.2 per cent of households owned a television set. Mobile phones are common (907,422 in 2002) and have opened communication networks to areas previously isolated.<sup>54</sup> The number of email and internet subscribers is still comparatively low, but use is increasing with the spread of cyber cafés (150,000 internet users in 2001).

Rather than feel threatened by these 'intrusions' into Sri Lankan cultures, many have followed indigenous paths that combine yearnings and fears. If a global cultural system is emerging it is one made up of paradoxes and resistances. Changes in dress in Sri Lanka offer a good example of the complexities of cultural flows. The most important sartorial change of the last decades has come with the liberalisation of the economy and the growth of an exportoriented garment industry. This has made available in the market place an entire range of Western-type brand name clothes—jeans, T-shirts, skirts sold at a very reasonable price. The less affluent classes have enthusiastically shed their cloth and jacket, saris and sarongs for more globalised outfits. But in the face of the levelling influence of trousers the privileged classes have invented new 'gilded costumes' to distinguish themselves whatever the cost. Handlooms and raw cotton sarongs have been given a new lease of life with the elite's return to roots. Paradoxically the majority of rural people yearn for the modern and classless dress of the elites.

For Sri Lankans Indianisation may be more worrisome than Americanisation. A few years ago, the popular Indian teledrama *Shanti* was screened daily and watched avidly in its dubbed version. The new global cultural economy cannot be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models. India is the world's largest film producer, with production figures of 700 films a year. In this sense there is an alternative globalising arena in the cultural field. Modernity is rewritten as vernacular globalization and less as concession to large scale national and international policies. Cricket is more popular than American soap operas and has acted as a unifier that transcends class and ethnicity.

Sri Lanka's cultures have been touched in an uneven fashion by the development of electronic space and the compression of time. In the parched South and the devastated North, globalisation may

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Eric Meyer, Sri Lanka. Entre particularismes et mondialisation, Paris: La Documentation Française, 2001, p. 57; UNDP Regional Human Development Report: Promoting ICT for Human Development in Asia 2004: Realising the Millennium Goals, June 2004, http://www.apdip.net/rhdr/press/idx\_techppr.pdf.

have little meaning. But the culture that is emerging is not uniform or a replica of the West, but something more complex which anthropologists began to grapple with a few decades ago.

Obeysekere, for instance, has shown how Buddhism is constantly being transformed and traditions recreated or invented. Marriage rituals of the Sinhalese, for example, are undergoing an increasing sacramentalising process that has transformed a once secular ceremony into a religious one, owing to the need of the middle-classes for ceremonial. Temples are also modernising with the intrusion of public address systems in their premises, the holding of vocational training courses and the frequent appearance of prominent monks on TV. For many young people the temple has become the terrain for social intercourse, and today it is mainly the elderly and women who frequent the temple for purely religious reasons. The Buddhist ecclesiastical order as an overall institution has been very slow in innovating in tune with the changing socio-political situation in the country.

A recent development has been the attraction in both urban and rural areas towards new evangelical groups and new religious movements such as that of Sai Baba. <sup>56</sup> Traditional churches appear not to fill the need for compassion and community of many people, especially those who have had to face political violence or other sufferings. Evangelical groups have been active among socially backward sections of society who often convert out of necessity. Sai Baba, a more urban middle-class phenomenon, attracts Hindus, Buddhists and Christians alike in search of smaller communities and face to face relations with a guru.

The Sri Lankan case gives some reason to believe that modernity erodes the traditional caste orders in society and that caste will gradually become irrelevant and wither away. Indeed, by comparison with India where caste has entered the political discourse in an unambiguous fashion, in Sri Lanka it is not a part of common discourse except perhaps in the choice of a spouse. However, recent studies point towards a renewal of caste identities, a rewriting of caste traditions and histories and a consolidation of caste communities through associations and the use of the media and even the world wide web. A few rural and semi-urban pockets still witness

<sup>55</sup> Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeysekere, Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka, Princeton, 1988.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Sasanka Perera, New Evangelical Movements and Conflict in South Asia: Sri Lanka and Nepal in Perspective, RCSS Policy Studies 5, 1998.

the continuing marginalisation of socially backward caste communities. The Copenhagen Programme of action for the creation of 'an enabling environment for social development' is yet to be realised when caste oppression and marginalisation is considered. Recent research confirms that there has been a growing tendency in rural society for tension between subordinate and dominant caste groups.<sup>57</sup> It appears that the rights to free education and to equal and non-discriminatory treatment still remain elusive for certain segments of Sri Lanka's population.

Certain critical moments have punctuated the last half century and have, in no uncertain terms, moulded the shape of the postcolony and the mental framework of its people. The inheritance rooted both in a plantation export economy and in welfarism was later reshaped by a brusque turn to liberalism and further disembodied by war. Sri Lanka in the twenty-first century has thus to bear the stigma of a mixed inheritance of Fabianism and Friedmanism that accompanied these fifty years of uneven development performed by democratically elected governments. While in the 1960s and the 1970-7 period the state emulated a statist model that attempted to reach self-sufficiency, the next decades saw experimentation with the East Asian dragon model founded on liberalisation and diversification of resources. The shift in economic policy signified a shift in morality, values, expectations and lifestyles. The nature of the relationship between the Sri Lanka state and its peoples, at times close, at others distended, has clearly underscored the way in which they have lived, the comforts they have enjoyed and the needs they have tried to fulfill at different times.

The Sri Lankan postcolony seems to have failed, in many spheres, to address its past without reproducing it. This predicament has hindered the adoption of any course that steers too far from its colonial and early postcolonial inheritance and has shaped the contours of post-independence development. The crux of the crisis appears to be in two main areas.

First, one can discern tense relations between the institutions of a liberal state, no longer able to satisfy all needs for the welfare of all its citizens, and social forces—the poor, youth, minorities, unemployed and under-employed—that expect this form of protection. In other words, the discrepancy between the official acceptance of a dilution of central power and responsibility and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda (ed.), Matters of Violence: Reflections on Social and Political Violence in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1997.

popular belief in statism creates one conundrum. The discrepancy between the state's responsibility to provide security to all its citizens and its present inability to deliver its promises to peoples in the North and East, who have been in a state of war since the early 1980s, creates another.

Secondly, there still seems to be a problem of self-vision and national identity. While the leadership speaks of transforming Sri Lanka into a Singapore or Hong Kong, most people still see themselves as a nation of proud and self-sufficient farmers, a vision that has stemmed from the Sri Lankan political and administrative elite's 'tutelary, custodial and paternalistic' attitude towards the peasantry. The peasant was at the centre of the nationalist myth, while at the same time nationalists felt that this group's manners and customs needed to be reformed. Today it is doubtful that peasants/farmers really exist as a social group or form the core of the nation. If they did exist in a mythic past, from the time representative politics was introduced, Sri Lankan small holders were never mobilised politically as a group to pursue their occupational interests. In this sense the peasantry is today, as Moore has argued, less a class with specific interests than an illusion voluntarily cultivated by politicians and state institutions that limits other identity options.<sup>58</sup>

A Year Two textbook provided by the state educational department relates the adventures of Nayana and Kumari, two children growing up in an idyllic Sri Lankan village. The setting is timeless. The children collect fruits, and play at selling them in a makebelieve shop while their mothers cook and their fathers work in the field.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Mick Moore, The State and the Peasantry, Cambridge, 1986. See James Brow, Demons and Development: The Struggle for Community in a Sri Lankan Village, Tucson, AZ, 1996, for an engaging ethnography of the effects of the Village Awakening Program launched by the UNP in the village of Kukulewa.

# 'ONLY A GREAT LAND WOUNDED'

## THE END OF THE WAR1

'We have all gone away There is no one to tell our story Now there is left only a great land wounded'

R. Cheran, A Second Sunrise

On 19 May 2009, President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, dressed in his traditional white sarong and shirt, solemnly addressed Parliament: 'The writ of the state now runs across every inch of our territory ... we have completely defeated terrorism.'<sup>2</sup> On the same day, photographs of the corpse of ruthless rebel leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran adorned all of the local newspapers. His death, and the bodies of the many guerrilla leaders who lay dead around the Nandikadal lagoon, signalled that the secessionist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This chapter draws from the following articles by Nira Wickramasinghe: 'After the War: A New Patriotism in Sri Lanka?' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Nov., 2009), pp. 1045–1054; 'Sri Lanka in 2007: Military Successes, but at Humanitarian and Economic Costs', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Jan/Feb 2008), pp. 191–197; 'Sri Lanka in 2008: Waging War for Peace', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January/February 2009), pp. 59–65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 'No mention of Prabhakaran in Rajapaksa's victory speech', *The Times of India*, 19 May 2009, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-05-19/south-asia/28203310\_1\_rajapaksa-tamil-tigers-tamil-eelam (accessed 26 March 2013).

war was over—a war that had pitted the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam against the security forces of the government of Sri Lanka since 1983.

President Rajapaksa then addressed his citizens in the Tamil language, promising reconciliation and embracing the Tamil-speaking people in his programme of recovery for the ravaged North—a 'Northern Spring' would soon come. On the streets of Colombo, there was a feeling of trepidation, while celebrations, some spontaneous and others orchestrated by sycophantic politicians, peppered the capital. The day had been given as a special holiday for the war-weary people to celebrate by eating *kiribath* (milk rice) and launching 'rockets', as fireworks are commonly called. People waved the Lion Flag and compared the president to the famous second century BCE Sinhalese hero Dutugemunu, another son of the Ruhuna (southern Sri Lanka), who succeeded in conquering Anuradhapura from the Tamil king Elara by famously slaying him with a dart. King Dutugemunu has long been a folk hero in Sri Lanka for uniting the country under unitary rule.

In the Colombo suburb of Wellawatte, however, where many Tamils are resident, shops were kept closed and the mood was decidedly more reflective. If they felt that Prabhakaran's death was a form of liberation, shopkeepers and passersby could not yet say it openly. The shadow of the violent outfit that had spread fear and practiced covert extortion still loomed over them despite its collapse a few days earlier. Perhaps they doubted the integrity of Rajapaksa's promised 'Northern Spring', or perhaps they had read a recent article in the government newspaper, *Daily News*, announcing that the president wanted a stupa built in each of the nine provinces of the country to symbolise its reunification under a single flag. As an afterthought, the report added that alongside this programme, a place of worship for Hindu, Muslim and Christian devotees would also be built in each of the nine provinces to promote unity and fraternity among all communities.<sup>3</sup>

For many, there was a sense of déjà vu. More than thirty years earlier, in his first address to Parliament, the leader of the United National Party (UNP), J.R. Jayawardena, proclaimed the idea of a new social order, a 'Dharmista Samajaya', which his regime would bring about together with neoliberal economic reforms. Not only did Jayawardena redraw the presidential flag to include the dhamma cakka (wheel of righteousness), he also initiated a ceremony in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Daily News, 14 May 2009.

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which 84,000 oil lamps were lit in honour of the Buddha, emulating Emperor Asoka's building of 84,000 Buddhist *viharas* (monasteries) in India.<sup>4</sup> Jayawardena's government, which ruled from 1977 to 1989, would prove to be the most notorious for its suppression of labour and minority rights, culminating in the riots of July 1983 during which more than 3000 Tamils lost their lives.

The three years that preceded the end of the conflict were by many accounts the most unbearable for the peoples of the North and East. No dispassionate account of the years 2007-2009 is possible as any attempt to describe this period remains fraught with contention, uncertainties, anger and inevitable gaps in the story. The present constantly intrudes into the past. Asoka Bandarage's recent analysis of the separatist conflict,<sup>5</sup> covering up to the end of 2008, offers a welcome critique of studies and perceptions that misconstrue the separatist war as a simple bipolar conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils. She argues cogently that political and economic forces combined with local, regional and international interests, all of which fed into Sri Lanka's ethnic polarisation. Her argument falters, however, when she addresses the Tamil cause purely as a form of 'terrorism' based on 'land claims', arguing against any federal solution while optimistically advocating the possibility of resolving the Tamil issue within a secular, democratic and pluralistic nation. What her approach eludes is that all homelands are intrinsically imaginary and so often borne out of situations of fear, loss and oppression. While a federal solution may not seem rational given the dispersion of Tamils in the South and the multicultural population in the East, it remains for many Tamils who have suffered thirty years of war the only possible solace, especially after the annihilation of the Tamil Tigers in 2009 which has enshrined an unambiguous majoritarian state. Other accounts of the last phase of the war include UN spokesman Gordon Weiss's emotionally charged The Cage and Frances Harrison's chilling Still Counting the Dead, both of which have been strongly criticised in Sri Lankan government circles for their alleged partiality.<sup>6</sup> The story

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Steven Kemper, 'J.R. Jayawardena: Righteousness and Realpolitik' in *History and the Roots of Conflict*, Jonathan Spencer (ed.), London: Routledge, 1990; and Nalani Hennayake, *Culture, Development and Politics in Postcolonial Sri Lanka*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Asoka Bandarage, The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy, Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Gordon Weiss, The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil

they tell, one that is refuted by state officials, is one of how countless Tamil civilian lives were so easily sacrificed in pursuit of a final and decisive victory over the LTTE. While exact numbers are difficult to assess, evidence of unnecessary killing mounts with reports, inter alia, by the Secretary-General's Panel of experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka, International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the anonymous release of photographs and short films showing instances of execution and torture of Tamil civilians and combatants in custody. The most trying visual testimonies were the three *Killing Fields* documentaries released by Channel 4 (UK) since 2011 featuring amateur video footage of atrocities committed by Sri Lankan military forces. No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka, the last of the three films, was publicly screened during the United Nations Human Rights Council gathering in Geneva on 1 March 2013.<sup>7</sup> The Sri Lankan government has denied the authenticity of these recordings. The end of the war in Sri Lanka has become less an event in itself than one subordinated to 'the fact of its mass mediability'.8

This chapter traces the main events that led to the victory of government forces in May 2009 and touches upon the afterlife of these events four years later as allegations of war crimes, torture and disappearances continue to surface. These allegations now haunt the belligerents and create ripples across the Palk Straits where the Indian coalition government is compelled to humour its regional partner in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnethra Kazagam (DMK), which demands a tougher stand on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue.

# Mahinda Rajapaksa's ascendance to power

If one is to read the three years preceding the 2009 victory in terms of government military strategy, what was explicitly stated and reiter-

Tigers, London: Bodley Head 2011; Frances Harrison, Still Counting the Dead: Survivors of Sri Lanka's Hidden war, London: Portobello Books, 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri\_Lanka/POE\_Report\_Full. pdf; http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/131025.pdf; http://sangam.org/2010/01/Peoples\_Tribunal\_Report.pdf; and for an analysis of the various forms of evidence and their relation to war crimes and crimes against humanity see, Frances Harrison, pp. 240–245.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Patricia Spyer, 'Media and Violence in an Age of Transparency: Journalistic Writing in war torn Maluku', in *Religion Media and the Public Sphere*, B. Meyer and Moors (eds), Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 159.

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ated was a rejection of peace initiatives to resolve an insurgency redefined as a 'terrorist' issue and a commitment to wage a campaign that would push ad infinito the limits of what is tolerable in counterinsurgency warfare. What self-appointed 'terrorism experts' later described as the 'Sri Lankan option' for crushing insurgencies involved not only militarily defeating the opponent by engaging in the overall destruction of the conquered areas but also more insidious strategies aimed at distorting the boundary between civilian and combatant and sealing conflict areas from media coverage. The architect of this strategy was Mahinda Rajapaksa, then the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) nominee for President against the ineffective leader of the United National Party (UNP), Ranil Wickremasinghe, who served as Prime Minister from 2001 to 2004. Having secured political deals with two smaller parties, the leftist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (IVP) and the nationalist Jathika Hela Urimaya (JHU), Rajapaksa won the presidential election on 7 November 2005 securing 50.3 per cent of the vote against 48.4 per cent for Wickremasinghe. 10 During the election campaign, a clear choice was put to voters: the victor, Rajapaksa, was rooted in Sinhalese rural culture, advocated an economically interventionist state, a stronger hand in dealings with the LTTE, and showed himself to be generally suspicious of the international community. His opponent, Wickremasinghe, came across to rural voters as part of the urban elite, committed to a cosmopolitan lifestyle, openly endorsing neoliberal economics, and soft-pedalling the LTTE. Opinions differ on whether Rajapaksa was pushed into spearheading a shift in public opinion towards war by his two more extreme allies, the IVP and IHU, or whether he used these two parties to shield himself from accusations of being a warmonger by the international community. With Rajapaksa's electoral victory, the power of the Senanayake-Jayawardene-Bandaranaike families and the social groups gravitating around them, which had shaped the political life of the country since independence, gave way to a new segment of the dominant class. Rajapaksa hails from a political family in the southern district of Hambantota. His father, D.A. Rajapaksa, was a Member of Parliament under the Sri Lanka Freedom Party but remained at the mar-

On a critique of the use of the concept of terrorism see Nira Wickramasinghe, 'Danger of False Clarities: Scrutiny of "Terrorism" in Sri Lanka.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2006, pp. 2285–2286.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> C.R de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in 2005: Continuing Political Turmoil', Asian Survey, Vol 46, No 1 (Jan/Feb 2006), pp. 114–119.

gins of a party dominated by the Bandaranaikes. He belongs to a bilingual, rural middle class of the dominant Goyigama caste, with whom less westernised social groups could more easily identify. He is seen by rural Sinhalese people as *ape kena* (one of us).<sup>11</sup>

The year that followed Rajapaksa's electoral victory was marked by a deteriorating security situation. The commander of the Sri Lankan armed forces, General Sarath Fonseka, narrowly survived an attempt by a pregnant female suicide bomber to assassinate him at the Sri Lanka army headquarters in April 2006. Later that year, armed clashes resumed between the LTTE and the security forces. After two rounds of talks in Geneva, differences remained unresolved owing to a lack of genuine commitment to finding common ground. The main area of contention concerned the re-opening of the A-9 highway connecting the central highlands city of Kandy with Jaffna, which had been closed due to the renewal of fighting. 12 An important crisis leading to the first large-scale fighting since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 2002 occurred when the LTTE closed the sluice gates of the Mavil Aru (Mavil Oya) reservoir on 21 July 2006 and cut the water supply to 15,000 villages in government controlled areas in the East. After heavy fighting the government finally gained control of the reservoir in August of that year. At this stage peace talks seemed futile.

# Military campaigns in the Eastern Province

Despite the ceasefire agreement remaining nominally in force, 2007 began with weeks of heavy fighting culminating in the capture of the Vakarai region—a stronghold of the LTTE in the Eastern Province—by Sri Lankan security forces. The LTTE's control of much of the East began to falter after its commander in the region, Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan (known as Colonel Karuna), revolted against the organisation's leadership in 2004. An undeclared collaboration between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Karuna faction of the LTTE was probably the crucial factor in explaining the military's successes in the East in 2007. As a former

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Shyamika Jayasundara-Smits, 'In Pursuit of Hegemony: Politics and State Building in Sri Lanka', Ph.D thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam 2013, p. 189.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See Chandra R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in 2006: Unresolved Political and Ethnic Conflicts amid Economic Growth', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No 1 (Jan/Feb 2007), pp. 99–104.

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insider, Karuna was an important source of information for the Sri Lankan army on strategy and operatives used by the LTTE. This military campaign prompted tens of thousands of civilians to flee the area and LTTE fighters to retreat deeper into the jungle. In March, a delegation of diplomats touring the eastern areas of the country was shelled by the rebels and the Italian and American ambassadors were injured. The LTTE claimed that it was not aware of the presence of diplomats in the helicopters that were hit. This single incident demonstrated that the LTTE, although overrun in the region, was still a formidable guerrilla force and retained significant military capability.

In early March 2007, the Sri Lankan army began an offensive in Mannar District in the LTTE-controlled Northern Province. The LTTE retaliated in a highly visible way. In the early hours of 26 March, two rudimentary LTTE aircraft bombed a key air force base next to Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport. The next day, LTTE cadres launched a suicide attack on an army base in the Eastern Province with a tractor laden with explosives, an attack in which six people were killed. The air raid had an immediate effect on Sinhalese confidence in the government and its ability to protect the country's infrastructure from LTTE attacks. The Sri Lankan army retaliated by unleashing air raids in the Eastern province. On 28 March the army captured Kokkadicholai, the LTTE's main base in the Batticaloa District. A further LTTE air raid followed in April that struck an air force base and two oil facilities near Colombo causing a blackout in the capital city where most people, including the armed forces, were fervently watching Sri Lanka play in the World Cup cricket finals. Although the raids caused little physical damage, they had a considerable impact on the economy and business confidence. Some airlines suspended inbound flights and others switched from flying at night to operating only daytime flights into and out of the country's only international airport. Tourism suffered as a result of the negative publicity given to these events by international media.

The next few months saw a continued push by the army in and around the Batticaloa area to remove the LTTE from its last remaining hideouts in the Eastern Province. In July, the government declared that it had driven rebels from Thoppigala, their last jungle stronghold in the East. The 'liberation' of the Eastern Province was celebrated with great pomp and joy in Colombo but less so in the refugee camps where thousands of civilians displaced by the fighting had sought refuge. In Colombo, people were asked to

express 'patriotic joy' when President Rajapaksa received a proclamation of victory from service commanders at an Independence Square ceremony to celebrate the recapture of Thoppigala and the East. It became apparent that a 'monarchical paradigm' was being appropriated by the modern nation state. The LTTE dismissed the capture of this territory as an insignificant victory for the state. After all, the armed forces had previously controlled the entire Eastern Province (in 1992), and the government had even held local elections there, only for it to become vulnerable again soon after and be recaptured by the LTTE when the Chandrika Kumaratunga government withdrew troops from the area to send reinforcements for military operations in the North from 1995 onwards. Interestingly, Mahinda Rajapaksa had been in Kumaratunga's government as minister of Labour and then minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

After July  $200\hat{7}$ , the armed forces consolidated their presence in the East, strengthening High Security Zones and attempting to resettle those driven away by the fighting. Special Economic Zones, launched under the theme Neganahira Udayana (Re-awakening of the East), were created in order to portray a sense of normalcy to donor agencies and lure them into funding the development of the area. At the end of 2007, the East was still under military control and the Thamil Makkal Vidhutalal Pullikal (TMVP, Tamil Peoples' Liberation Tigers)—the political wing of Karuna's outfit—faced a bitter split. Members of Karuna's faction were hounded by a dissident group led by his deputy, Chandakathan (known as Commander Pillavan). Several members of the two factions were killed in internecine warfare that broke out in September. Karuna eventually left the country amid allegations of financial irregularities in his movement. He was arrested in November in the United Kingdom for travelling on a forged passport.

By early autumn the military's attention had shifted to the North. On 22 October, the LTTE launched a simultaneous ground and air assault on the air force base at Anuradhapura. Although the government successfully fought off the assault, human losses on both sides were high and at least eight aircraft were destroyed. In early November, the leader of the LTTE's political wing, S.P. Thamilselvan, was killed in an air force bombing near Kilinochchi in the Northern Province. The government saw his death as a significant victory in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> See N. Serena Tennekoon, 'Rituals of development: the accelerated Mahavali development program of Sri Lanka', *American Ethnologist*, 1989, p. 302.

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its war against terrorism, but the long-term impact of his death was a further narrowing of any remaining space for future negotiation between the government and the LTTE.

The 'Peace with War' strategy in the Northern Province in 2008

Following a bomb attack on an army bus in Colombo on 2 January, 2008, the government of Sri Lanka pulled out of the ceasefire agreement brokered with the LTTE in 2002 through Norwegian arbiters and overseen by a group of international co-chairs (the US, EU and Japan). <sup>14</sup> The government could now explicitly argue that only a decisive campaign against the LTTE could lead to peace in the country. The ceasefire was replaced with a 'Peace with War' strategy.

The government accused the LTTE of violating the truce more than one thousand times by carrying out assassinations and terror attacks against civilians and by continuing to forcibly recruit children into its ranks. The truce, the government further argued, had been used by the LTTE to rearm and recruit, and had not moved the country toward a peaceful resolution of the lingering conflict. The LTTE, in turn, alleged that the government had carried out air raids and artillery attacks, killing and displacing thousands of Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The fact that the government, and not the LTTE, decided to formally abrogate the agreement sent signals to the international community that the government was preparing for a renewed military assault on Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, the two remaining districts still under rebel control in the Northern Province. The government's strategy for trying to control the insurgency included forging political deals and power sharing arrangements with non-LTTE Tamil militant groups while continuing to regard the LTTE as a 'terrorist' group that must be annihilated with military force.

After declaring an end to the ceasefire, the government authorized General Sarath Fonseka to lead nearly 160,000 well equipped soldiers to crush the estimated 10,000 LTTE fighters in a conventional ground offensive. On 23 April, the army launched an attack on LTTE defences in the Northern Province resulting in the deaths

<sup>14 &#</sup>x27;Peace in Sri Lanka', an official website of the Sri Lankan government's Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process, http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org/peace2005/Insidepage/AtaGlance/CeaseFire Feb-April2007.asp (accessed 10 October 2008).

of around 185 troops. <sup>15</sup> Although the human cost of this offensive was high, the army made clear inroads into LTTE territory and severely weakened the organisation. The security forces also pushed through rebel lines to seize the strategic Mannar Peninsular in June, and one month later, four additional LTTE bases—including the key naval base of Viddattaltivu—were overrun by government forces. On 2 September, the government reported it had captured the LTTE stronghold at Mallavi, killing dozens of rebels and bringing the army one step closer to Kilinochchi—the LTTE's administrative center and the base of its reclusive leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

These military victories came at a significant human cost. An estimated 250,000 Tamils were displaced as a result of the security forces' continuing offensive in the North, many of them apparently heading toward the rebel-held town of Mullaitivu. The United Nations (UN) pulled out of rebel-held territory on 15 September following the government's warning that it could not guarantee the safety of UN personnel stationed in the area. By late 2008, the army claimed that its advance units were within artillery range of Kilinochchi. The Sri Lankan air force reportedly bombarded a number of locations said to be frequented by the leader of the LTTE. The pro-rebel website *TamilNet* alleged that bombs indiscriminately struck densely populated settlements of internally displaced refugees and that the government appeared to be trying to 'obliterate' the LTTE with little regard for the well-being of non-combatants.<sup>16</sup>

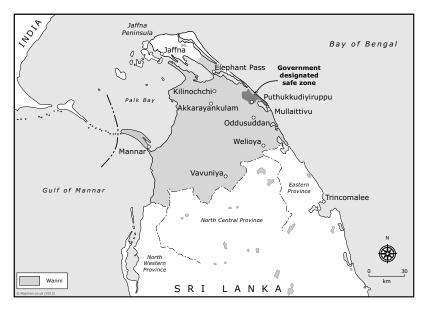
# Insecurity and insurgent violence in 2008

2008 was punctuated by a spate of bombings and political killings across the country. The LTTE systematically targeted civilians in southern areas of Sri Lanka in an attempt to force the government to redeploy troops away from the front lines in the North and to destabilize SLFP rule by undermining the already-faltering economy. The year began with the assassination of Minister of Nation Building D.M. Dassanayake, killed by a roadside bomb in the town of Jaela, 19 kilometers north of Colombo. On 16 January, 2008, the day the 2002 ceasefire expired, suspected LTTE rebels bombed a civilian bus in the central district of Moneragala, killing twenty-four

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> There are a total of twenty-five official districts in Sri Lanka, contained within the country's nine provinces. Districts in Sri Lanka are further subdivided into administrative 'divisions'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This website can be accessed at www.tamilnet.com.

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Map of Sri Lanka. The War Zone.

people and wounding dozens more. On 2 February, 2008, twenty Buddhist pilgrims were killed in the town of Dambulla, allegedly by LTTE militants, though this is not proven. In April, Highways Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle was killed in a blast also blamed on the LTTE. In the months that followed, a number of explosions took place in Colombo and its suburbs resulting in the deaths of several civilians. In addition, a suicide bomber killed retired army General Janaka Perera in Anuradhapura on 6 October, along with his wife and twenty-five others.

## The final battle, 2009

By May 2009 the LTTE had been crushed by the Sri Lankan army. To those who had watched the rebel force for the past twenty-five years, this defeat, unimaginable only a few years before, seemed inevitable after the LTTE was routed from its stronghold in the Eastern province in an operation the government termed the 'clearing of the East', 17 leaving them fighting a defensive war in the North.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See Rebecca Walker, 'Violence, the everyday and the question of the ordinary', *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 18, No 1, March 2010, pp. 9–24.

The last phase of the war was only witnessed by the military, the LTTE and civilians caught in the crossfire. Journalists, NGO personnel and UN agencies were barred from the war zone and many of those already inside chose not to remain on the basis of security. Apart from satellite images of the war zone, rejected by the government as inauthentic, historians are left with only survivors' stories that have to be read as testimonies either warped by trauma or intentionally inflected due to political bias. Frances Harrison's book captures the desperation of those who had tacitly travelled with the LTTE and suddenly saw a world without anchors. Their motivation, she wrote, 'was not revenge, or even scoring a propaganda victory. It was about making the dead count for something.' 19

In January 2009 the Sri Lanka army captured the strategic A-9 highway. Some time after, the Government announced the first of three 'no fire zones' or safe zones for civilians located on the front line. A few days later Mullaitivu was captured from the rebels. In the two months that followed Vishwamadu, Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) and Puttumatalan were also taken by security forces. On 16 April, when Kilinochchi—the de facto administrative capital of the Tigers—was eventually overrun by the army, President Rajapaksa paid a surprise visit to the town to encourage the troops and reinforce the writ of the state upon the North.

Pushed by an advancing Sri Lankan army, remaining LTTE forces retreated to a small coastal area of the Jaffna peninsula in the northeast and used the civilian Tamil population as a buffer, shooting with impunity those who tried to escape. Even in this last stage young people were forcefully recruited into the rebel army. This strategy can be best explained as follows: 'to try to prevent the sustained bombing and shelling by the Sri Lankan military on LTTE targets by hiding among the civilian population and to create a massive humanitarian crisis to build international pressure for a government ceasefire.' The strategy did not succeed in the face of a military that was ready to win at any human cost and combined guerrilla warfare with multi-pronged artillery assaults backed by air

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> 'New Satellite Images Show Bombardment of Sri Lankan "Safety Zone", Amnesty International, http://blog.amnestyusa.org/asia/new-satellite-images-show-bombardment-of-sri-lankan-safety-zone/ (accessed 20 April 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Frances Harrison, Still Counting the Dead: Survivors of Sri Lanka's Hidden War, p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Sri Lanka in 2009: From Civil War to Political Uncertainties', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 50, No 1, (Jan/Feb 2010), pp. 1104–1011.

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raids. There are contradictory accounts of the bombing of the no fire zones designated by the government. While some reports assert there was a deliberate targeting of civilians and hospitals, government sources deny any form of deliberate targeting.<sup>21</sup> However, the evidence that 'safe zones' were as unsafe as the battlefield and that civilian hospitals were systematically attacked is compelling. During the last stage of the war, doctors who worked until the bitter end in hospitals in the 'safe zones' spoke out about government forces bombarding buildings bearing the Red Cross symbol. One of them lamented: 'I can't describe the situation because it was an entirely different world, a place of inhumanity.'22 After the end of the war these dangerous witnesses, held in detention for collaborating with the LTTE, were forced to retract what they had said and appeared in a press conference to declare they had lied about civilian casualties. 23 Neither party to the conflict was ready to accept a surrender. While requests for a pause in the fighting were made on humanitarian grounds by the UN and countries such as the USA and India. the government was open only to unconditional surrender by the LTTE. It refused to negotiate safe passage out of the 'no fire zone' for civilians and the shelling continued with tens of thousands caught in the middle.

By the end of May 2009 all LTTE military and elite cadres were reported to have died in battle. The insurrection was over. The circumstances surrounding the deaths of Prabhakaran and his close retinue are shrouded in controversy. Government sources allege that surrendering Tiger leaders holding a white flag were shot in the back by their own while advancing towards the Sri Lanka army. Other testimonies suggest they were killed by the army rather than taken prisoner, as per the Geneva protocols.

The actual number of civilian and combatant deaths on both sides, as well as people 'disappeared', is disputed and will likely never be resolved. What is certain is that the number of civilians that perished during the fighting is far greater than the government claims, even while the magnitude of the destruction of lives

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See Neil DeVotta, 'The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka', *Asian Survey*, Vol 49, No 6 (Nov/Dec 2009) pp. 1043–1044.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Dr Niron (pseudonym) in Harrison, Still Counting the Dead, p. 75.

<sup>23 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka: Statements by detained doctors underline need for independent inquiry', Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news\_details.asp? NewsID=18314.

remains contested. The government claimed to have rescued a captive population in what was dubbed a 'humanitarian operation' and that no more than a few thousand civilians perished in the crossfire owing to the LTTE's callousness. Rohan Gunaratne, for instance, gives an impressively precise figure of 1,400 civilian deaths. Host estimates are much higher—from the UN's initial figure of 40,000 to a more recent estimate by the UN Internal Review Panel of 70,000. Local estimates vary from the University Teacher's for Human Rights (Jaffna) estimate of 20–40,000 to the much lower figure of approximately 12,000 deaths reported by M. Sarvananthan. Beyond the overall death toll, however, should the question not be whether there was an alternative less destructive to human life—one that would have allowed the surrender of the Tiger leadership avoiding unnecessary casualties?

In the months that followed, the military continued operations in the North to arrest any remaining LTTE cadres. Nearly 300,000 civilians were ushered into the largest refugee camp in the world, Manik Farm in Vavuniya district, where they remained behind barbed wire fences under the watchful eye of security forces who feared the possible infiltration of combatants. The UNHCR and other organisations provided basic facilities for the displaced but conditions in the camps remained very difficult. Incidents of violence and rape by army personnel were reported but not taken seriously by the government. Resettlement began at a slow pace and the camp was only officially closed in September 2012.

# Human rights, NGOs and the shift in international norms

The culmination of Sri Lanka's twenty-five year civil war shows the weakness of the mechanisms at the disposal of the international community to guarantee the rights of people under a sovereign state and the failure of Sri Lanka's traditional donors to tackle human rights abuses through aid conditionality and sanctions. Never did the Hobbesian adage that covenants without swords are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Michael Roberts, 'The Tamil death toll in early 2009: a misleading count by Rohan Gunaratna', *Transcurrents*, http://transcurrents.com/news-views/ archives/6285.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Michael Roberts, 'A Missing Person in Sri Lanka: Heartfelt Issues & Ground Realities', Groundviews, http://groundviews.org/2013/03/28/a-missing-person-in-sri-lanka-heartfelt-issues-ground-realities/?doing\_wp\_cron=136 4438547.7250208854675292968750; Roberts, http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/6285.

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but words ring so true. The three years of war that preceded the final annihilation of the LTTE dealt a bitter blow to people's faith in the UN. Disappointment was shared across the board. Sinhalese public opinion increasingly saw the UN, NGOs, the Tamil diaspora and Western powers as part of a world conspiracy to divide their small island while Tamil civilians in the North and East felt let down by a generally impotent UN that listened to and followed government directives. The feeling that Western states were selective and partial in their criticism of the belligerents was in many ways justified. As a recent study of the arms trade with Sri Lanka points out, there were many inconsistencies between the rhetoric of Western countries and their arms trading: 'In 2007 the United Kingdom's annual sum of debt relief to Sri Lanka was cut in half because of concerns over human rights abuse, while arms exports to the country continued.'26 The local press was muzzled or practiced self-censorship, fearing repercussions, and most journalists toed the government line.

In conjunction with the military campaign against the LTTE, the government embraced a counterterrorism and counterinsurgency discourse that blunted the potential effect of recriminations from the international community.

Rajapaksa deftly shifted public support from peace-building to counterinsurgency by developing 'a powerful discourse of legitimation' that was based on three factors: stressing the flawed design of the peace process; using both the influence of China and new global norms on sovereignty and internal conflict; and appropriating the Western rhetoric of the 'war on terror' to justify the ruthless campaign against the LTTE. <sup>27</sup> Conflict resolution mechanisms were rejected leaving war as the only solution to what was now defined as a 'terrorist problem'. There was now a stigma attached to the word 'peace' and 'peacebuilding' became understood as a metaphor for support of secessionism and anti-national activities. <sup>28</sup> Public opinion in the South gave full support to the armed forces.

From January 2007 onwards, violence displaced thousands in the east of the island. According to the office of the UN High

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> J. Lindberg, C. Orjuela, Siemon Wezeman and Linda Akerstrom, Arms Trade with Sri Lanka: Global Business, Local Costs, Stockholm: Pax Forlag, 2011, p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> David Lewis, 'The Failure of a liberal peace: Sri Lanka's counterinsurgency in global perspective', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 10 (5), 2010, p. 648.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Simon Harris, Humanitarianism in Sri Lanka: Lessons Learned?, Feinstein International Center Briefing Paper, 2010.

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2007 the number of internally displaced people in the Eastern Province alone was 50,136.<sup>29</sup> Many of these refugees were living in rudimentary camps, schools and temples in the hope they would later return to their homes. During this period the international community consistently voiced concerns about the human cost of the war and reported human rights violations by the Sri Lankan military and Karuna's TMVP, which, like the LTTE, recruited child soldiers into its ranks. But the government dismissed most criticism of its human rights record as propaganda disseminated for partisan purposes by local and international human rights activists.

Amnesty International's 'Play by the Rules' campaign, which coincided with the cricket World Cup in which Sri Lanka reached the finals, was particularly poorly received by the Sri Lankan government. Its impact was felt only at the international level, ephemerally drawing the attention of concerned people towards the situation in Sri Lanka. Another report by UN Special Envoy Allan Rock revealed the large-scale recruitment of child soldiers not only by the LTTE but also by Karuna's faction—the latter with the connivance of the Sri Lankan army, which gave Karuna's men protection while using them against the LTTE in the East. These findings were refuted by the government. Meanwhile independent sources reported suspicious deaths caused by security forces, especially in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, on a daily basis.

The government was also unwilling to comply with international requests for an impartial inquiry into the killing of seventeen local staff members of the French NGO Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger) in August 2006, giving credence to suspicions that the military had a hand in the killings. The inquiry into the deaths of five youths on a beach in Trincomalee, allegedly shot by members of the military's Special Task Force in January 2006, is still pending.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> See http://www.unhcr.lk/statistics/docs/SummaryofDisplacement-7Apr-01 Oct07 (accessed 25 October 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> This report is available at http://web.amnesty.org/pages/lka-020407-petition-eng (accessed 25 November 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UN General Assembly, 13 August 2007, A/62/228, in http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/reports89.html (accessed 25 November 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> D.B.S. Jeyaraj, 'The Terrible Truth of the Trincomalee Tragedy', *The Sundayt Leader*, http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/03/11/the-terrible-truth-of-the-trincomalee-tragedy/ (accessed 5 April 2013).

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Eastern University Vice-Chancellor Professor Sivasubramaniam Raveendranath, who was abducted in a High Security Zone in Colombo in December 2006, was never found.<sup>33</sup>

On the defensive, the government publicly reacted in an aggressive manner, likening its struggle to the 'War on Terror' and highlighting the double standards of Western governments. The Sri Lankan government regularly castigated independent news media as 'traitors' if they criticised the armed forces. On a number of occasions editors and journalists were threatened. On 7 June, 2007, the police forced hundreds of Tamils out of the capital citing security concerns. However, in an act of defiance against executive power, the Supreme Court ordered an end to these evictions. Criticism from international agencies and foreign diplomats continued to dog the regime. In October of the same year, Louise Arbour, the UN human rights commissioner, visited Sri Lanka on a fact-finding mission and suggested creating a permanent office of the UNHCR to monitor abuses in Sri Lanka.

The following year, foreign diplomats and human rights activists continued to allege that the government was tolerating unlawful kidnapping and allowing its security forces and military proxies such as the TMVP in the Eastern Province to work outside the law. The government's response to these allegations was that these missing people were probably among the displaced refugees taking shelter in either northern or eastern enclaves of the country or perhaps in India.

In March 2008, an international panel, the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP), which had been invited by the government to investigate alleged human rights abuses, announced it was leaving the country. Sir Nigel Rodley, one of the panel members, explained that the authorities were hindering the panel's work—a criticism vehemently refuted by the government. The government became more vocal in labelling criticism of its human rights record as tantamount to treason and a challenge to Sri Lanka's sovereignty. Journalists were also increasingly targeted in physical attacks for criticising the government's conduct of the war. Keith Nohayr—a senior Sri Lankan journalist and editor of the well-known Sunday paper, *The Nation*—was picked up in a white van, beaten, and subsequently released only after

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Shabnam Farook, 'Missing and Forgotten: The disappearance of an academic', http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/2012-01-30-09-31-17/human-rights/240-the-disappearance-of-an-academic (accessed 5 July 2013).

pressure at the highest levels of government. Another senior journalist, J.S. Tissainayagam was sentenced in 2008 by the Colombo High Court to twenty years of rigorous imprisonment for allegedly supporting the rebel cause in a web journal. He was pardoned by the Sri Lankan president on World Freedom Day in 2010.

Sri Lanka's dismal human rights record antagonised international human rights bodies. In May 2008, the country lost its seat on the UN Human Rights Council. Both the US Department of State and the UN cited reports of government involvement in extrajudicial killings and complicity in the recruitment of child soldiers by its proxies in the Eastern Province as examples of continuing human rights violations. Nevertheless the culture of impunity continued.

The shift in war strategy on the part of the regime was closely intertwined with a geopolitical realignment towards Asia. Victory against the LTTE would not have been feasible without the 'quiet dominance of China and the "hands off" approach of India.'34 In a bid to attract foreign capital to the country, President Rajapaksa made overtures for greater Indian investment including tenders for offshore oil exploration. While Sri Lanka had long embraced capitalist development through strong ties with the West, in 2007 a major shift towards greater interaction with other Asian countries, particularly India, China and Japan, became discernable. This shift had important implications for international engagement in state reform, human rights, security and economic development in Sri Lanka. Economic growth, which, boosted by deficit financing and tsunami aid, grew rapidly to 7.4 per cent in 2006, dipped to 6.2 per cent in the first half of 2007. In spite of a high growth rate, the budget deficit was 8.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and public debt reached 93 per cent of GDP.

In 2008 Sri Lanka's already fragile economy faced rising defence costs and foreign aid receipts from its traditional donors such as the USA, Canada and the European Union became increasingly conditional on improving its human rights record. These changes took place against the backdrop of a rapidly deteriorating global economy accompanied by a worldwide surge in the cost of fuels and foodstuffs. As a result, Sri Lanka turned even more resolutely to the East, to China and India, to expand its network of potential donors in response to conditions imposed by some of its traditional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 'The Chinese factor in postwar Sri Lanka', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol II, No 3, 2010, p 434.

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sources of economic assistance. China became Sri Lanka's single largest source of bilateral aid in 2007 with money to be used as a part of the government's drive to build roads, ports, and power stations. Along with intensified aid relations, Colombo also resorted to raising foreign capital through sovereign bonds, generating 200 million USD in the first half of 2008.

The government continued to allocate an extraordinarily large portion of its revenues for defence and security to service the national public debt, and on its bureaucracy. Sri Lanka was by then one of the most militarized states in South Asia, spending 166 billion rupees (1.5 billion USD) on the army, or 3.5 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>35</sup>

The government's lack of concern with criticism of its human rights record by the international community came to a head in early 2009. On 8 January Lasantha Wickrematunge, the outspoken editor of the English-language newspaper *The Sunday Leader*, was assassinated in a suburban Colombo street. He had predicted his own killing in an editorial published a week after his death. It accused the government of his murder and of casting a 'shadow of death' over the country. His assassins have still not been found.

Such disregard for human rights in Sri Lanka came to the attention of the EU which gave the country preferential treatment under the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP +).<sup>37</sup> The booming Sri Lankan garment industry had benefited immensely from this scheme but Sri Lanka's inclusion in the GSP + was partially dependent on the maintenance of a strong human rights record. The scheme came up for renewal in 2008 and was extended for an additional year to allow the EU to complete its probe into the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, in an effort to convince the EU not to take away its tariff privileges, the government launched an extensive 'garment without guilt' campaign advertising Sri Lanka as an ethical and environmentally-friendly manufacturing hub free from child and bonded labour. Despite

<sup>35</sup> Central Bank of Sri Lanka, http://www.cbsl.gov.lk.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Lasantha Wickrematunge, 'And then they came for me', *The Sunday Leader*, 11 January 2009, 'http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20090111/editorial-.htm (accessed 4 April 2013)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> The GSP+ scheme that came into operation in Sri Lanka in 2005 provides preferential treatment for Sri Lankan imports to European Union countries. To qualify recipient countries must demonstrate that they have ratified and implemented twenty-seven international conventions on core human rights, labour rights, environment and good governance.

this, in July 2010 Sri Lanka became the third country (after Burma and Belarus) to be removed from the GSP + programme.

Battles over conflict-related norms continued in UN institutions, notably the Human Right Council. On 27 May 2009 Sri Lanka won a moral victory when a resolution supported by Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa welcomed its 'continued commitment ... to the promotion and protection of all human rights'. Se China and Russia ensured that the crisis in Sri Lanka was not put on the Security Council Agenda but moves to investigate alleged war crimes in the last phases of the war bypassed the Security Council and were initiated directly by the Secretary General's office.

## Electoral gains and the consolidation of the regime

In January 2007 the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) government under Mahinda Rajapaksa secured a long-elusive parliamentary majority when nineteen opposition MPs defected to its ranks. Many of them joined the government in exchange for perks and cabinet positions. These deals resulted in the creation of one of the world's largest cabinets with 54 members, all enjoying the privileges that come with the position, and a total of 113 members holding portfolios in the government. The SLFP government became more stable as it no longer depended on the support of the leftist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front) and the Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya (Buddhist National Heritage Party). 2007 also witnessed the growing political influence of President Rajapaksa's family. While the nepotistic practices of the Bandaranaikes were openly criticised by Mahinda Rajapaksa before he became president, family politics were openly enshrined in the years that followed as part of local custom: three of his brothers one a minister in the government, the other a secretary of the Defence Ministry, and the youngest a recently sworn-in MP and his heir apparent—became increasingly active in the highest echelons of government.

In February, two prominent members of the SLFP—Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Ports and Aviation, and Sripathi Soori-yarachchi, a non-cabinet minister—defected from the government

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Report of the Human Rights Council 10<sup>th</sup> Session (2–27 March 2009), 11<sup>th</sup> Sessiom (2–18 June 2009), 9<sup>th</sup> Session (9–12 January 2009), 10<sup>th</sup> Special Session (20 & 23 February 2009), 11<sup>th</sup> Session (26–27 May 2009), UN Publication, 2009, p162.

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to form a breakaway SLFP, the SLFP (M) (Mahajana), or People's Wing. They denounced the corruption and nepotism prevalent in Rajapaksa's government and the lack of concern with the spiraling cost of living. The SLFP (M) formed an alliance with the main opposition party, the UNP, in a bid to establish a broad political front to challenge the government. In October, the UNP redefined its position on the 'national question' by giving up on 'federalism' as the solution and embracing the idea of maximum 'devolution' within a unitary state in its place. This strategic repositioning was probably designed to woo the Sinhalese electorate and find common ground with the leftist IVP, which had thirty-eight seats in Parliament and was vehemently opposed to the 'federal' option. The common position reached by all Sinhalese political parties on the need for 'devolution' within a unitary state opened up the possibility of reaching an arrangement at least acceptable to the entire Sinhalese community, although less so to minorities.

A minor coalition partner in the SLFP-led government, the Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC)—which represents the interests of the Indian Tamil minority and acts as a trade union for tea plantation workers—first left the government in August after a minor dispute with a member of the president's entourage, only to rejoin in October. The deal struck for the CWC's return to the coalition included ministerial positions for several party MPs and a wage hike for plantation workers. The All Party Representative Committee continued working towards a political solution to address the long-standing 'national question' by, in part, devising constitutional reforms that might be acceptable to both the Sinhalese majority and minority populations in the country, including the Tamils.<sup>39</sup> But in reality the committee's purpose was more to blunt opposition to the return to war and deflect international criticism than to establish a basis for peace.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> The All Party Representative Committee chaired by the minister of Science and Technology, Professor Tissa Vitharana, was convened by President Rajapaksa in 2006. It was purportedly created to try to fashion creative options that would satisfy the minimum expectations of Sri Lanka's people, as well as provide a comprehensive approach to the resolution of the 'national question'. In reality, the committee's purpose was more to blunt public opposition to the return to war and deflect international criticism than to necessarily establish a basis for peace.

#### Elections in the Eastern Province

Relatively peaceful local council elections were held in the Batticaloa district of the Eastern Province on 10 March 2008, won by a candidate of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP, Tamil People's Liberation Tigers)—a party created by former insurgents of the LTTE in the East who had defected. The United National Party (UNP), the main national opposition party, and the Tamil National Alliance boycotted the election on the grounds that the TMVP's retention of arms posed a security threat to rival candidates. The SLFP, under President Mahinda Rajapaksa, interpreted its 'one horse race' electoral victory in Batticaloa as a sign that provincial council elections could also be successfully held and won in the Eastern Province. As a result, provincial council elections for the Eastern Province were subsequently scheduled for May.

The SLFP won the Eastern Province's first provincial council elections as a single political unit in alliance with the TMVP, securing twenty of the thirty-seven seats. In contrast, the opposition—a coalition between the UNP and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC)—won only fifteen seats. Violence during these elections was relatively low but independent observers did report some cases of voter intimidation and ballot stuffing by armed militants. The SLFP campaigned relentlessly during these elections using the machinery of the state to its electoral advantage. The timely visit of Iranian President Mahmound Ahmedinejad helped to win some Muslim votes in the East for the SLFP-TMVP alliance. President Rajapaksa—who was under political pressure because of soaring commodity prices, heavy casualties in the North, and increasing allegations of nepotism and corruption—sorely needed an elec-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> In 2004, the Eastern Province commander of the LTTE, Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan (also known as 'Colonel Karuna') had revolted against the organisation's leadership and had helped the Sri Lankan armed forces successfully 'liberate' the province in 2007. By the end of 2007, Colonel Karuna's outfit had itself split, and a dissident group led by Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan (also known as 'Pillayan') had offered support to the government and was subsequently supported by it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> The Tamil National Alliance is a Tamil-based political party closely aligned to the LTTE. It won 22 out of 225 seats in the 2004 legislative elections.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> The provincial council system in Sri Lanka was set up in 1988 under the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, which temporarily merged the Northern and Eastern Provinces. In 2006 the Sri Lankan Supreme Court declared the merger to be invalid and bifurcated the province into the Northern and Eastern Provinces once again.

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toral victory in these provincial elections. The result of the elections also dealt a serious blow to the LTTE's claim to represent all Tamil-speaking people in their 'homelands' of the North and East. Pillayan, the TMVP leader, was made chief minister of the Eastern Province amid protests from many Muslims who preferred M.L.A. Hisbulla—an SLMC defector—for this post.

In April 2008 the government benefited from a split in the radical Sinhalese nationalist JVP. Wimal Weerawamsa, the party's former propaganda secretary, currently leads a breakaway group of ten out of thirty-nine JVP MPs. Weerawamsa and his colleagues, supported by the influential Sinhalese-Buddhist Patriotic National Movement (PNM), advocated a close partnership with the Rajapaksa regime. Colonel Karuna, the former LTTE commander in the East, became an MP when he was nominated by the ruling party in October. His induction into the 'political mainstream' vindicated the government's strategy of supporting anti-LTTE Tamil politicians.

As the military campaign in the North gained momentum in 2009, any talk of reform—mentioned by the government to deflect the questions of international actors that were concerned about the fate of the Tamils in postwar Sri Lanka—receded into the background. The Tissa Vitharana committee, which had searched for a consensus solution in consultation with different parties a year earlier, was now defunct. Its proposal for constitutional reform was swept under the carpet by the full scale military option chosen by the Rajapaksa administration.<sup>43</sup> On 23 May 2009, following the defeat of the LTTE, President Rajapaksa made a speech on the premises of the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth in Kandy) pledging to never 'allow the bifurcation of the Motherland which was united after defeating divisive separatists'.<sup>44</sup>

The LTTE, which had dominated Tamil politics for three decades, was eliminated from the theater of power in Sri Lanka. Not only were its leaders killed by the military, but it also succeeded in attracting the opprobrium of many displaced Tamils through its callous actions in the last phase of the war. While the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) continued to voice a watered-down version of Tamil claims for autonomy within a unified state needed to ensure their dignity and security, the government successfully used

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Sri Lanka in 2009: From Civil War to Political Uncertainties', *Asian Survey*, Vol 50, Number 1, (Jan/Feb 2010), p. 108–109.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Nira Wickramasinghe, 'After the war: a New Patriotism in Sri Lanka', p. 1053.

Tamil politicians it had coopted to its side to argue that special provisions for the Tamil population were unnecessary in a country of equal citizenry.

The immediate reaction of Tamils in the diaspora to the defeat of the LTTE was a 'mix of anger, depression and denial'. 45 The diaspora's sense of loss of an anchor in the homeland was illmatched with the feelings of the bereft peoples languishing in camps where political aspirations were supplanted by the much more prosaic need to simply survive the shattering experience they had lived through over the past few months. The million-strong diaspora remains, in its majority, supportive of a separatist and pro-LTTE ideology. This commitment continues in spite of the LTTE's loss of credibility among Sri Lanka's Tamil community as it clung to the possibility of victory, using its own people as human shields. Tamil diaspora organisations in the UK and Canada that call for international scrutiny of the actions of the Sri Lankan government in the last phase of the war continue to wave the Tiger flag at rallies. This has not endeared them to Western governments and has fed the Rajapaksa administration's argument that Tamils still constitute a threat to state security. In a devious manner typical of his style of rule, Rajapaksa also attempted to engage with the Tamil diaspora by inviting them to invest in the country in the postwar period.

## Afterlives

Four years after the defeat of the LTTE, diaspora organisations are divided into three dissident LTTE factions: the Tamil Eelam Peoples Assembly in Norway, the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) led by Father S.J. Emmanuel in London, and the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam led by V. Rudrakumaran in New York. These organisations have lobbied the UNHCR to issue a strongly worded resolution on Sri Lanka's actions during the last phase of the war. However, UN Resolutions calling the government to account or taking economic measures against the Sri Lankan state have had little impact on the financial stability of the government which seems more concerned with the failing monsoon and the price of oil. The impact of the EU's suspension of the GSP + concessionary tariff agreement in August 2010 was minimal for the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> 'The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora after the LTTE', International Crisis Group, Asia Report no. 186, 23 February 2010.

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Sri Lankan government, though it forced some garment factories to close down.

In May 2010 President Rajapaksa appointed the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) with the limited mandate of investigating and reporting on the period between 21 February and 19 May, 2009 with regard to specific issues. These included: 'The facts and circumstances which led to the failure of the Ceasefire Agreement operationalized on 21st February 2002'; Whether any person, group or institution directly or indirectly bear responsibility in this regard'; 'The lessons to learn from those events and their attendant concerns, in order to ensure that there will be no recurrence'; 'The methodology whereby restitution to pay persons affected by those events or their dependants or their heirs, can be effected'; 'The institutional, administrative and legislative measures which need to be taken in order to prevent any recurrence of such concerns in the future, and to promote further national unity and reconciliation among communities'; and 'to make any such other recommendations with reference to any of the matters that have been inquired into under the terms of the Warrant'. 46 The commission, which submitted its report in 2011, met with much criticism on issues of procedure, independence, accountability, and the lack of any mechanism for witness protection in its proceedings. Its conclusions exonerated the Sri Lankan security forces of any responsibility in the death of civilians and left many questions unanswered. It also generated the unintended consequence of bringing to light inconsistencies in the various accounts of the parties concerned. For instance, while establishing that hospitals had indeed been shelled, the report failed to make clear who had done the shelling.<sup>47</sup>

The vapidity and failure of human rights mechanisms to effect change in the government of Sri Lanka's approach to power sharing and freedom of speech leaves a sense of disquiet. The state can simply ignore these interventions and hide behind principles of sovereignty, non-interference and southern solidarity to curb such criticisms. The 2013 UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka is a case in point. On 21 March 2013, twenty-five countries—including

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> LLRC Report, http://slembassyusa.org/downloads/LLRC-REPORT.pdf, LLRC report, pp. 5–6 (accessed on 25 April 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Kishali Pinto-Jayawardena, (8 January 2012) "On those Inconvenient 'Truths' in the LLRC Report" *Sunday Times* available at http://www.sunday-times.lk/120108/Columns/focus.html

India—voted in favour of a US-sponsored resolution pressing the Sri Lankan government for an independent and credible probe into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law during the final stages of the war in 2009. Thirteen member countries voted against the resolution, eight abstained from voting and one member was absent. While India supported the resolution it did not move any amendments to give the resolution more teeth saying only that it would encourage Sri Lanka to expedite the process of broad-based, inclusive and meaningful reconciliation. The Indian representative at the UNHRC added, 'We note Sri Lanka's invitation to UN Human Rights Commissioner; we urge her to undertake it as early as possible.'48 The resolution did not cede to the demands of human rights bodies for an independent international investigation, as was called for by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in its report. Welcoming the Sri Lankan government's announcement of elections for the Provincial Council in the Northern Province in September 2013, the resolution called upon Colombo to fufill its public commitments, including the devolution of political authority to Tamil majority areas. The resolution encouraged (rather than urged, as in the previous version) the Sri Lankan government to implement the recommendations made in the report of the Office of the High Commissioner, adding that it 'calls upon' the government to 'conduct an independent and credible investigation' into allegations of the violation of international human rights and international humanitarian law. It also reiterated its call for Sri Lanka to 'implement effectively the constructive recommendations' made in the report of the LLRC, to take all necessary additional steps to fulfill its relevant legal obligations, and a commitment to initiate credible and independent action to ensure justice, equality, accountability, and reconciliation for all Sri Lankans. 49

The Presidential Special Envoy on Human Rights, Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe, said the resolution was 'intrusive, bears misinterpretations and focuses disproportionately on negative and eliminates or is dismissive of the positive.' The general stance of

<sup>48</sup> http://world.time.com/2013/03/20/peerfvdg frty-pressure-will-another-unresolution-change-sri-lanka/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> 'UNHCR Resolution on Sri Lanka passes', http://www.upi.com/Top\_News/ World-News/2013/03/22/UNHRC-resolution-on-Sri-Lanka-passes/UPI-38071363925469/ (accessed 24 March 2013).

<sup>50 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka rejects the American resolution', http://www.news.lk/news/sri-

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the government was to denounce the moral travesties of an America that imparted blame on small states but failed to censure its own violent acts in Pakistan or those of its allies in the Middle East. The impact of diplomatic pressure has until now only served to strengthen the resolve of the government and its position that Sri Lanka is a small country subject to bullying by former imperial powers. Furthermore states such as Canada and Australia have become less vocal about the human rights record of Sri Lanka in order to avoid an increase in the number of Tamil refugees seeking asylum in these countries.

Three decades of war was felt across Sri Lankan society—in zones directly exposed to the conflict and in more sheltered areas. Military campaigns in the North and East were accompanied by a more general militarisation of society. Militarisation is evident in popular culture in various forms but largely as something 'manipulative and stupefying' rather than as a 'space of political resistance' through parody and evasion.<sup>51</sup> It was present in institutions on and off the battlefield, in policy choices, and as part of everyday life. The size of the security forces increased from a total of 30,000 in 1982 to 250,000 in 2002.52 At a time when market reform could have generated greater inequality and social tension, the army offered an avenue of employment to underprivileged young men: 'High levels of military expenditure associated with a prolonged civil war had an important positive impact on sociopolitical stability in Sri Lanka.'53 While the most visible form of militarisation was the soaring defence budget that easily supplanted investment in education, health and other social welfare measures, it also existed in more insidious ways in everyday life where rampant violence, whether gender-based or domestic, became increasingly normalised and accepted.

#### Conclusion

The total victory of the Sri Lankan government over the LTTE had a number of direct consequences. Firstly, in the eyes of many, it

lanka/4634-sri-lanka-rejects-the-american-resolution (accessed 23 March 2013).

Neloufer de Mel, Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007, p. 14.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Rajesh Venugopal, 'The politics of market reform at a time of civil war: military fiscalism in Sri Lanka', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46 (49) pp. 67–75.
 <sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

validated the right of governments to use terror in order to preserve territorial sovereignty and to prosecute a 'war without witnesses'. 54 Secondly it strengthened the Sri Lankan government's decision to get closer to China in the US-Chinese geopolitical rivalry in the Indian Ocean, exemplifying the existence of a 'Beijing consensus' that competed with Western ideals and values. Sri Lanka received loans and military hardware from China without the human rights conditionalities that frequently accompany similar support emanating from the West. Thirdly the successful prosecution of the war also permitted the tightening of the Rajapaksa family's domination over the apparatus of state. It was now clear that the victor's peace would benefit less the rural Sinhalese population that had supported the regime by providing the man power needed to win the war than a small coterie of people, a 'venal and predatory elite'55 surrounding the inner ruling family. Finally the triumph of total war on both the battlefield and at the discursive level in the public sphere continues to define the moral-ethical contours of postwar Sri Lankan society. Indifference to suffering, acceptance of crass inequalities, and the crowning of mediocrity seem to have become the norm. Today the limits of what is acceptable in the name of state consolidation and national sovereignty have been stretched to the point of nullifying other values that people held to heart before the descent into civil war. However, among many people there is a need to know and to act as witness. The flawed exercise of the LLRC received 5000 written submissions, perhaps a sign that the silence needs to be lifted.<sup>56</sup> The legacy of the war and conflicting accounts of what happened in its final months will cast a constant shadow over any attempts to forge a more just and empathic postwar society.

<sup>54</sup> Stuart Bell, 10 May 2009, The Sunday Leader cited in Shyamika Jayasundera-Smits p. 192

<sup>55</sup> Neil DeVotta, 'Terrorism and Democratic regression in Sri Lanka', Economic and Political Weekly, 5 April 2008, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> See Neloufer de Mel, The Promise of the LLRC: Women's Testimony and Justice in Post-War Sri Lanka, ICES Research papers, Colombo, 2013.

#### 10

# THE POST-WAR STATE

#### THE MAKING OF OPPRESSIVE STABILITY

'My father washed his hands from the waters flowing from the sluices of the paddy fields before signing his nomination papers'

— Mahinda Chintanaya Manifesto 2005

After President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government won a ruthless victory in the country's three-decade civil war against a fierce insurgency waged by the rebel Tamil Tigers, the stage seemed to be set for the wartime president to assume a new persona: that of the father of the peacetime nation. Yet one of his earliest moves after the end of the civil war upset the country's already precarious democratic balance following the passage of a constitutional amendment clearing the way for him to stay in power 'as long as the people desire it'. The regime became increasingly nepotistic, patriotic, sycophantic, corrupt, militaristic and amoral. Supported by a depoliticised middle class and a blinded rural constituency, the country has now reached a stage of oppressive stability.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Scholars in the political science tradition have traced the evolution of the Sri Lankan state in the past forty years from 'commendable democracy' to 'illiberal democracy', and finally, in the last five years, to something closer to a form of 'soft authoritarianism'. The author finds it less useful to use the term 'authoritarianism' as a frame of reference than to describe the workings of the state and the new power dynamics that have emerged within the state in the last eight years. See in particular Neil DeVotta, 'Sri Lanka: From

## Consolidation of power

The power of the Rajapaksas has been consolidated over the last three years through constitutional amendment, the strengthening of patronage networks, and a canny form of spatial politics involving, inter alia, the occupation of the North and East by the security forces and the gentrification of Colombo that has earned the regime the silent consent of the privileged urbanised classes. The trappings of a democracy described as 'the rule of law, free and fair elections, limited government, and freedoms of assembly, speech and religion' remain.<sup>2</sup> But the semblance of stability hides rigged statistics and everyday violence seldom reported in a pliant self-censoring media.

## Destroying the opposition

On 27 January 2010, incumbent candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa was declared the winner of Sri Lanka's sixth presidential election. He triumphed over his main challenger, former army commander Sarath Fonseka, with a comfortable 58 per cent of the vote against Fonseka's 40 per cent. Many seemed to believe that if given sufficient time and power he would fulfill his promise to rebuild the country, supported by a business community eager to prosper. Opposition parties immediately launched demonstrations to protest alleged election fraud. According to a report by an independent monitoring group, the Commonwealth Expert Team, the presidential election did not fully meet the benchmarks for democratic elections. Yet most observers acknowledge that the outcome was affected not by vote rigging so much as by mass pro-Rajapaksa propaganda in the media in the weeks preceding the ballot. State television, for example, repeatedly screened images of Uganda's notorious Idi Amin to instill fear of military dictatorship among Sinhalese voters and thus warn them against voting for former army commander Fonseka. A crackdown on the losers followed the release of the election results. Members of an elite army commando unit and army deserters who had supported Fonseka were arrested. Fonseka's office in Colombo was raided. On 8 February

Turmoil To Dynasty', Journal of Democracy, Vol. 22, Number 2, April 2011, pp. 130–144.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

2010 the former general himself was dragged out of his office and arrested under suspicion of conspiring to topple the government and assassinate Rajapaksa, and for divulging state secrets. He was later court-martialled, convicted of irregularities in military procurements and made to serve a prison sentence of thirty months. Another court-martial dishonourably discharged him for being involved in politics while being in active military service. Finally he was found guilty of making false allegations against the Defense Secretary and sentenced to a further three years in prison.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to this the traditional opposition had fallen into disarray. Since 2007 Mahinda Rajapaksa had deftly moved to weaken his two legitimate political challengers. The right-wing UNP led by Ranil Wickremasinghe, in tatters having lost many of its parliamentarians to the government, was pushed by popular political pressure into supporting the ruling party in the 'war to eliminate terrorism'. The left-wing JVP party split into two factions, one supporting the government and the other in opposition. Its last electoral performance was dismal. Rajapaksa hastened this collapse of the opposition with interventions of his own—most notably, the court-martial of Fonseka in August 2010 for 'involvement in politics' while still an officer and dabbling in weapons contracts, charges that conveniently surfaced around the time of the election. Minority parties were similarly silenced. Many Muslim and up-country Tamil politicians were won over by a generous offering of ministries by the president.

In the years that followed the brutal resolution of the civil war, Mahinda Rajapaksa's administration was busy weakening the institutions that would allow a better-organised opposition to one day become a political force. Constitutional measures against political freedoms and countering any form of devolution of power to the provinces accompanied coercion and threats directed at potential challengers. These measures were cleverly embedded within a deeply entrenched form of cultural politics where, through the spread of the idea of national heritage and pride in an unproblematic national past, citizens became convinced of the legitimacy of the post-war patriotic state.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Jonathan Goodhand, 'Sri Lanka in 2011: Consolidation and Militarization of the postwar Regime', *Asian Survey*, Vol 52, No 1 (Jan-Feb 2012), pp. 130–137.

#### 18th Amendment

In passing the 18th amendment to the constitution in September 2010, the SLFP-dominated parliament removed the two-term limit that had capped presidents at a maximum of twelve years in office.<sup>4</sup> The President's coalition captured 144 out of 225 seats at the parliamentary elections in April 2010 and effortlessly organised defections from other parties to muster the two thirds majority required. They also abolished the 17th amendment that had been enacted in 2001 which created a Constitutional Council and independent commissions that the president had to consult when appointing people to high-level government posts. That amendment had been a key check on Sri Lanka's otherwise very powerful executive. It should be noted that Mahinda Rajapaksa did not singlehandedly bring about Sri Lanka's overly centralised executive power. The constitution introduced in 1978 by President J.R. Jayawardene concentrated significant power in the hands of the president. Mahinda Rajapaksa's SLFP had claimed, at least when it took power in 1994, that it wanted to abolish the executive presidency and replace it with a form of government where power was less centralised. But in 2010 Mahinda Rajapaksa embraced a much stronger executive. With the constitutional term limit abolished, Rajapaksa now has a fair chance of staying in power after 2016 when his second term ends. Just as in other presidential systems such as France or the United States, incumbent presidents in Sri Lanka are very likely to win second-term elections. Limits on terms of office are set precisely for this reason. The reaction to this constitutional coup was muted. Many Sri Lankans seemed to think that it was not such a terrible thing or failed to comprehend the importance of the amendment for the future of the country.

The fact that academics, lawyers, students and pressure groups took to the streets to protest against the 18th Amendment indicated, however, that there was still room for the opposition to maneuver in the interstices of power. The question remains whether, as defenders of the 18th Amendment argue, voters will be given a true choice in 2016. This ultimately depends less on Mr. Rajapaksa than on the will of opposition political parties to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> http://www.priu.gov.lk/Cons/1978Constitution/18th%20Amendment%20 Act(E).pdf (accessed 10 June 2013); 'The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution: Process and Substance', *Groundviews*, http://groundviews.org/2010/09/02/the-18th-amendment-to-the-constitution-process-and-substance/(accessed 10 June 2013)

forge an alternative democratic vision and give leadership to those who believe in it.<sup>5</sup>

It is revealing in this regard that passage of the amendment was achieved with little public debate or scrutiny given the significance of this change. It was pushed through parliament as an 'urgent parliamentary bill' and was discussed for one day only. Unsurprisingly, the Supreme Court had earlier ruled that a referendum would not be required. In the end Mr. Rajapaksa secured the requisite two-thirds majority thanks to support from his own party and a smattering of parliamentary votes from defecting members of the UNP and other much smaller groups including the main party representing the Muslims.

## Creating a patronage state

Patronage and clientelism have existed in all spheres of public life in modern Sri Lanka and its genealogy has been traced to precolonial times. In the pre-independence period networks and alliances forged between elites and the people were based on the *mudaliyar* system and sustained by a democratic politics that began in 1931. The Donoughmore Commission on constitutional reform, inspired by Fabian ideas, brought about an unprecedented form of selfgovernment to the crown colony of Ceylon in the 1930s. Headed by Lord Donoughmore, the commission was sent to Ceylon by the British government in 1927 to examine the existing constitution and to make recommendations for its revision. Among their recommendations was universal suffrage to the crown colony, making it the first country in Asia to enjoy this right. From this time onwards, people of the island began to look at the state in a new light. The state—which was until then an institution to which they paid taxes and that they occasionally petitioned—became entrenched in their imagination as a space of utopian possibility, a source of justice, redress and resources that could be distributed at will, thus touching and transforming the core of their lives. Jayadeva Uyangoda has lucidly articulated how the pedagogical mission of the state and the peoples' expectations are still bound in a tight social contract:

The centrality of the state in regulating our social existence became particularly prominent with the postcolonial welfare state. Consequently, ours has become an intensely paternalistic and interventionist state where for educa-

Nira Wickramasinghe, 'Rajapaksa makes a move', Wall Street Journal Asia, 17 September 2010, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703 743504575494863452823020.html

tion, employment, food and clothing, health, transport and even for taking revenge on an adversary the state is expected to step in as the supreme regulatory agency.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed with universal suffrage it became necessary for local elites who were vying for political power and competing for the vote of a largely rural citizenry to consolidate ties of dependence between them and the common man. They presented themselves as power brokers, the translators of the enigma that constituted the modern state and its often-illegible institutions. From the late 1940s onwards a state welfare system dispensing a variety of entitlements such as free healthcare, education, subsidised transport and rural development was established through the consolidation of patronage networks involving political elites at the national and local levels. It was through this system that power remained in the hands of a small group of people who belonged either to age-old dominant groups or new moneyed sections of society that had flourished within the colonial economy.

## Patronage politics: changes since 1977

When the United National Party headed by J.R. Jayawardena swept into power in 1977 winning a two-thirds majority in parliament the state-sponsored patronage system, extended over the previous decades, underwent some changes. Funding sources became more diverse. Sustaining the open economy strategies of the regime, foreign investment and aid poured in, nourishing existing patronage networks. Corruption followed new money. Benefits in the form of land, licences for various businesses, employment and perks were distributed to political loyalists. This system spread to wider society through the 'chit system' which was practiced at all levels: a local parliamentarian could issue a 'chit' (hand written note) ordering a state institution to recruit a person or a school to admit a child.<sup>8</sup> The regimes that followed consolidated existing political structures, each adding new features, but never attempt-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Political Dimensions of Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka', 35–48 in *Unrest or Revolt: SomeAspects of Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka*. S.T. Hettige (ed.), 35–48. Colombo: Goethe Institut and American Studies Association, 1992.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Shyamika Jayasundara-Smits, 'In Pursuit of Hegemony: Politics and State Building in Sri Lanka', PhD thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2013, pp. 64–72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Jayasundara-Smits, p. 92.

ing to practice other forms of politics. Under president Ranasinghe Premadasa (1989–1993) who came from an underprivileged caste and class background, UNP patronage networks widened to include poorer segments of society in distant villages. The next incumbent leader, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who secured a landslide victory in 1994 and ruled for two terms, used the privatisation of state enterprises as a means to benefit supporters of the regime and close friends of the president. The beneficiaries of her patronage network shrunk to a small coterie of allies. Thus the new president Mahinda Rajapaksa only had to build on existing structures and practices of corruption and clientelism put in place by his predecessors to create and finance his own party-based patronage system.

The transformation of the state from one based on welfare and redistribution to a neoliberal war state accelerated under the administration of Mahinda Rajapaksa. This ideological shift had started in the 1980s under the administration of J.R. Jayawardena who had called in the 'robber barons' while following the dictates of the lending agencies, reducing social expenditure from 10 per cent of GDP in 1970-77 to 4 per cent in 1981. While free healthcare and education were maintained, their decline in quality coincided with the increasing role of private institutions. 10 His government had invested in strengthening the military through the acquisition of sophisticated hardware for the army, navy and air force. The defense establishment became a privileged partner of government and the soldier/peasant the symbol of a good citizen. Public sector employment in Sri Lanka, still the most coveted source of employment among the youth of the country, had been increasing since the 1960s despite a decline in the size of government. Total public expenditure as a percentage of GDP declined substantially from 1976 to 2011 as a result of continued government endorsement of the Washington Consensus directives on decreasing non-productive state positions. However, there has been a significant shift in policy regarding the public sector under the Rajapaksa administration, which came into being in 2005. Since then, the numbers in the public service have more than doubled reaching 1.23 million in 2011.11 The state sector includes the secu-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 95–98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, Taking Social Development Seriously: The Experience of Sri Lanka, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Key Social Indicators, http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics\_n\_docs/10\_pub/\_docs/efr/annual\_report/AR2011/English/4\_KSI.pdf

rity forces (army, navy, air force, police and civil defence), education and health services, and semi-government institutions such as the Transport Board, Samurdhi Authority, Electricity Board, and Ports Authority. Unsurprisingly the armed forces are today the largest public sector employer. They are involved in an array of activities from repairing roads and bridges to growing agricultural products and selling them. An interesting development has been the army's launch of a brand of hotels, Laya, and the navy's own resort called Sober Island. The navy is even running boat services for whale watching on its passenger craft 'Princess of Lanka' while the air force offers helicopter tours to local and foreign tourists.

## Rajapaksa and family politics

Due to the decline in value-based politics that allowed easy crossovers, the fluidity of party politics and the possibility of the old guard in the SLFP remaining loyal to the Bandaranaikes, Mahinda Rajapaksa had to turn to a much smaller group of loyalists than his predecessors. The centre of power is constituted by his siblings who occupy key positions in the government. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa is Defence Secretary, Basil Rajapaksa is in charge of the ministry of Economic Development, while Chamal Rajapaksa is Speaker of Parliament. Approximately 70 per cent of the national budget is under the control of the ruling family.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the President's eldest son, Namal, aged twentye-five, has been elected to parliament and is being groomed for future national responsibilities. Hundreds of other family members, from clerks to high officials were brought in to occupy positions in government offices thus creating a sea of loyal and dependable people in the seat of government. To critiques of this blatant nepotism Rajapaksa has responded by pointing to examples abroad—the Kennedy and the Bush political families, and at home, the Senanayake and Bandaranaike families—and claimed that people were not concerned as long as his family served them and the country well.

The system would not have survived without the acquiescence of the majority of SLFP parliamentarians. While the important positions are kept for members of the ruling family, loyalties are nurtured or fostered through the distribution of perks and rents that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Sri Lanka Navy Whale Watching, http://whalewatching.navy.lk, (accessed 26 May 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> DeVotta, 2011, p. 137.

accompany a ministerial position. Apart from SLFP parliamentarians, ministers include UNP turncoats such as G.L. Peiris and Mahinda Samarasinghe as well as minority party members such as paramilitary leader Douglas Devananda, who heads the anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party. Mahinda Rajapaksa's cabinet is composed of the President, the Prime Minister, ten Senior Ministers and fifty-four Ministers. There are also non-cabinet beneficiaries including two Project Ministers and twenty-nine Deputy Ministers. Being a favourite of the regime implies guaranteed impunity.

## Militarisation and gentrification: space as politics

The army's grip is spreading rather than shrinking after the end of hostilities. Although the war ended in 2009 the military, overwhelmingly Sinhalese, is still present in the North and East not only in military camps but also in the civil administration, development activities and commercial ventures. According to Suresh Premachandran, parliamentarian of the Tamil National Alliance, over 150,000 soldiers are deployed in the North. To Other sources give smaller figures. *The Hindu* alleges that 16 out of 19 divisions of the Sri Lanka Army are deployed in the North and the East, chiefly in Tamil-majority areas: three divisions in Jaffna, three each in Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu, and two in the East. Based on an estimate of 6–7,000 soldiers per division, a conservative figure would place the number of army personnel in the North and East at 85–86,000. The

The increased role of the Sri Lankan armed forces following the end of the war has been described as 'securitised development', a euphemism for military occupation and insertion of the armed forces into all aspects of the economy of the northern and eastern territory. The strategy of the UPFA government is to grant economic rather than political benefits to the people of the northeast but within parameters decided upon by the rulers.

Land is increasingly becoming a contentious issue in the north and east as well as in the south. Land has been legally acquired under the Land Acquisition Act and occupied by the Sri Lankan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> 'Please withdraw army personnel from North and take them to Hambantota, Galle or Kolonnawa'—Suresh Premachandran, MP, dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/ archives/20893 (accessed 12 June 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The Hindu, 19 September 2012, http://www.thehindu.com/news/srilankan-army-still-has-vast-presence-in-north-east/article3915391.ece (accessed 12 June 2013).

army, especially in the districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Such land has been used for a variety purposes ranging from setting up camps and constructing army hospitals to establishing commercial ventures including a holiday resort. Claimants to any of the land acquired have 'not been traced'.<sup>17</sup> According to parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran the Land Acquisition Act is a ruse to expropriate 64,000 acres of land in Jaffna needed to build a military cantonment.<sup>18</sup> Apart from taking over land the military is also engaged in processes that the government describes as a part of its reconciliation strategy: establishing cadet corps in schools where head teachers get forty-five days of training and then adorn full military titles; leadership training programmes; and tours for school children organised by the army. The Civil Defense Force is also welcoming the area's youth while the Civil Security Department is reportedly managing preschools in the Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu area.<sup>19</sup>

#### Gentrification

Since the end of the civil war Colombo has undergone a very visible facelift—an economic, class and visual alteration. The process of 'urban regeneration' has been identified by President Rajapaksa as one 'vital for the sustainability of the economy'. <sup>20</sup> In that sense the purely economic understanding of regeneration in the context of neo-liberal concerns regarding efficiency is not a hidden agenda of the state. <sup>21</sup> The beautification of the city, as it is often described, consists in 'clearing out the waterways for flood prevention, clean-

<sup>18</sup> Tisaranee Goonesekere, 'Reengineering the Nation', Colombo Telegraph, 26 May 2013 http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/reengineering-the-nation/ (accessed 12 June 2013).

- <sup>19</sup> Ambika Satkunanathan, 'Militarisation as panacea: development and reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka', openDemocracy, 19 March 2013, http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/ambika-satkunanathan/militarisation-as-panacea-development-and-reconciliation-in-post-w (accessed 12 June 2013).
- <sup>20</sup> Cheranka Mendis, 'Colombo's Facelift', *DailyFT*, http://www.ft.lk/2013/02/22/colombos-facelift/print/(accessed 12 June 2013).
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Herzfeld, 'Engagement, Gentrification and the Neo-liberal Hijacking of History', *Current Anthropology*, Vol 51, Supplement 2, October 2010, pp. S259–S267.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> 'Land acquisition by the Sri Lankan Army in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts', *Groundviews*, http://groundviews.org/2013/05/23/land-acquisition-by-the-sri-lankan-army-in-kilinochchi-and-mullaitivu-districts/ (accessed 12 June 2013).

ing and repairing the streets, taking the walls around the public institutions down and reclaiming land for private development by corporations and investment.'22 Urban improvement is often, as Neil Smith reminds us, a euphemism for the disruptive force of gentrification, which he defines as 'the process by which working class residential neighborhoods are rehabilitated by middle-class homebuyers, landlords and professional developers. <sup>'23</sup> The work is overseen by the Ministry of Defense and Urban Development under the President but all decisions are in fact made by his brother Gotabhaya Rajapaksa who serves as Defense Secretary. The Urban Development Authority (UDA) that was recently incorporated under this ministry oversees changes in the city landscape, often conflicting with the Colombo Municipal Council that is presently under a UNP mayor, A.J.M. Muzzammil. Prime recreational land in the plush centre of the city such as the fifty acre sprawling Vihara Mahadevi Park and the racecourse were taken over by the Urban Development Authority in 2012. The refurbished old Race Course Building, now an up-market shopping complex, was declared open by Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa on 20 October 2012.<sup>24</sup> Much of the infrastructure work is undertaken with the help of the army, now fully engaged in urban battles against street hawkers and squatters or simply in clearing sites for new projects to begin. While city dwellers and visitors cannot but praise the improvement in the city's roads, greatly reduced flooding in the capital, and the beautification of the city following the breaking down of walls around government buildings, there is also a less palatable aspect of the Singaporean dream that informs policy makers. Most of the heritage urban regeneration projects, from the Dutch Hospital Shopping Precinct in Fort to the Racecourse Shopping Complex facing Royal College (the prime boys school where Colombo's elite send their sons, adjoining Colombo University where the country's most underprivileged students learn the meaning of lost promises in dilapidated sur-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Evelien van Winsen, 'Post War Optimism: Third World Democracy in Sri Lanka', Report, University of Delft, 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Neil Smith, 'Gentrification and uneven Development', *Economic Geography*, Vol 58, No 2, April 1982, p. 139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> 'Latest "shopping complex" in Colombo—Race Course Building at Reid Avenue', *The Times of Sri Lanka*, 22 October 2012, http://www.timeslanka.com/2012/10/22/race-course-bldg-colombos-newest-shopping-complex/ (accessed 26 October 2013).

roundings), are designed for the rich inhabitants of the city. The change is an elitist one epitomised in the regime's choice of the architectural style of tropical modernism. Contracts are awarded to favourites in the field of architecture, design, and furniture, and commercial space in refurbished areas is awarded to brand names such as Barefoot and Odel as a means of wooing the cosmopolitan upper classes of Colombo. One dreams of some dissonance, some steel and metal in an oppressive mainstreaming of Geoffrey Bawa lookalikes. The issue is unfortunately not only about imposing a nostalgia-infused aesthetic but also ridding the city of a certain class of citizens that do not fit in with its new image. The Slave Island redevelopment project, covering a seven acre plot of land in Colombo, as well as other development schemes will lead to the eviction of 60,000 families living on state land and their resettlement outside the city in Homagama, Gampaha and Kalutara. They will receive 100,000 rupees in compensation (one year's rent) before resettlement.<sup>25</sup> The city is peppered with high-rise apartment blocks each holding an evocative name such as Capitol Residencies, Iceland, St James, Monarch, King's Court, Emperor, or Trillium, and aspiring to offer Singapore style living experiences with a swimming pool, gym, supermarket and other amenities within the compound. Prices vary from \$200,000 to \$800,000 USD for a three bedroom apartment in the city.<sup>26</sup> In the outer rings of the city such as Dehiwela, often occupied by Tamil residents, more modest apartment blocks have sprung up to answer the real estate demands of an affluent Tamil diaspora eager to establish connections with their land of origin. Often elderly relatives of Tamil expatriates moved from the war zones to live in these concrete blocks with little to remind them of their lives in Jaffna.

# Decentering

If Colombo is undergoing a facelift, Hambantota, a backwater city in the Hambantota district 241km south of Colombo, is being transformed into a major hub for no particular reason other than it happens to be the birthplace of the president. The Urban Devel-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Chris Kamalendran, '60,000 families face eviction to make way for city development projects', *The Sunday Times*, http://www.sundaytimes.lk/101121/News/nws\_51.html (accessed 12 June 2013)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See http://www.lankapropertyweb.com/forsale-Colombo+All\_0-all.html (accessed 12 June 2013)

opment Authority is spearheading a megalomaniac project of transformation that includes building upon recently completed development projects such as a new port, an international airport and a cricket stadium. The most significant investment is the fashioning of the port of Hambantota as a service and industrial port and privileged berthing site for cargo ships from all over the world. Critiques have pointed to the logic behind the choice of Hambantota for the project as Trincomalee in the Eastern Province, a historic and natural harbour, Galle, the existing southern harbour, and Colombo harbour, which handles 4000 vessels annually, could have been developed into more efficient ports at a lesser cost to the taxpayer. The port at Hambantota was funded by a loan of USD \$1,300,000,000 taken by the Sri Lanka government from the Exim Bank of China that has to be repaid over eleven years in bi-annual installments.<sup>27</sup> At present, the Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port (the term Magampura was coined to provide the illusion of antiquity for a totally new creation) is receiving little traffic as the cost of transporting goods between the port and the capital city of Colombo stands as a disincentive for cargo ships, in spite of the lower cost of berthing.

The Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, situated about 15km north of Hambantota and recently opened with much fanfare by the ruling family, has been similarly unsuccessful in attracting airlines beyond the national airline, Sri Lankan Airlines, and the local charter, Mihin Lanka. The international charter, Air Arabia, that was flying to Mattala airport recently suspended its flights on the route. FlyDubai, Dubai's low-cost airline, is still operating regular flights to Mattala in spite of a recent incident in which peacocks hit one of its aircraft damaging the engine. 28 A number of controversies surround the choice of the site, in particular the threat posed to migratory birds by air travel, a warning by the Environmental Conservation Trust that was not heeded by the Aviation Authority. Another possible threat to the functioning of the airport—to be combated with the installation of an electric fence—will be the influx of wildlife into the airport area. Public institutions such as the Central Environmental Authority and the Department of Wildlife Conservation remained silent on these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Chrishanti Christopher, 'Hambantota Harbour named after President Rajapaksa languishes without sufficient ships calling', dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/ archives/19360 (accessed 12 June 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> 'Peacocks damage plane in Mattala', Colombo Gazette, http://colombogazette.com/2014/01/11/peacocks-damage-plane-in-mattala.

issues and granted approval to the building of the airport in response to presidential directives.<sup>29</sup>

Also located in the Hambantota district, the Mahinda Rajapaksa International Stadium was built for the 2011 Cricket World Cup at the cost of more than one billion rupees. A total of two matches were held there in 2011, and in 2012 it hosted the ICC World Cup Twenty20 matches. The seven hour road trip from Colombo has earned the stadium the moniker 'the ground at the end of the universe'. <sup>30</sup>

## Producing the present: patriotism and cultural heritage

Why such acquiescence to a visibly selfish project where the spoils are shared only among a small coterie? President Rajapaksa's regime has built its appeal by producing a fictional present where difference between equal citizens is denied, instead replaced with the concept of a civic nation. In this new post-conflict patriotic state that he described in his victory speech, President Rajapaksa promised there would no longer be minorities in spite of the fact that the idea of a multicultural society was embodied and endorsed in the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of 1987. Citizens/ patriots would be ethnically undifferentiated, although he seemed to hold out the promise that all religions and ethnic identities would be respected.<sup>31</sup> The idea of a civic nation is commendable but utopian as any attempt to construct 'one people' involves the marginalisation of some. 32 Furthermore, all examples of civic nations—the USA or France are cases in point—have anchored their liberal principles to a particularistic legacy. Most liberal democratic political cultures reflect the norms, history, habits and prejudices of majority groups, but they do usually attempt to foster a political identity whose political content makes it compatible with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Nirmala Kannangara, 'Mattala International Airport in Mid-air Battle', *The Sunday Leader*, http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2013/03/31/mattala-international-airport-in-mid-air-battle/(accessed 12 June 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Anand Vasu, 'The ground at the end of the universe', *Wisden India*, http://www.wisdenindia.com/cricket-article/the-ground-at-the-end-of-the-universe/25508 (accessed 12 June 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> 'President's speech to Parliament on the defeat of the LTTE', http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/president\_speech\_parliament\_defeatofLTTE.htm (accessed 12 June 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.

a variety of practices and beliefs. The new patriotism enunciated in President Rajapaksa's speech also had little in common with postnational or constitutional patriotism which has been theorised as an alternative form of loyalty compatible with universal values but distinct from and superior to nationalism. It had little in common even with a civic patriotism that recognises that the public sphere cannot be neutral.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, the President's vision merged nation and state and promoted a love of country based on a particular reading of the history and foundational myth of the Sinhala people, where all other groups—those formally known as minorities—are present merely as shadows and not as constitutive elements of a common political culture.

The new patriotism that thrived after the end of the war uses heritage as an instrument of cultural power. It is as much about the production of the present as it is about the reproduction of a past. This discourse has evolved in the post-conflict environment and has validated a set of practices and performances that inhabit popular, expert and state constructions of heritage.

Educational structures helped produce social agents worthy and capable of receiving the heritage of the group and capable of transmitting it in turn to a larger group.<sup>34</sup> A principle manner in which ideas about heritage are conveyed to a larger public is through teaching in schools, universities, Daham Pasala (Buddhist Sunday schools), and through textbooks. History is now a compulsory subject up to the Ordinary-Level examination, and a cursory look at the texts produced by the National Institute of Education confirms the emphasis on monumental histories associated with royal lineages. History as a subject that interprets the past rather than glorifies it, is unrecognisable in these textbooks, which offer children a narrative of the glorious days before invaders from India and colonial powers shattered the equilibrium of society ushering in modernity. Alongside grade-school history books, the syllabi and texts used for teaching Buddhism in Daham Pasala should be looked at as one of the main sites of transmission of ideas about heritage to a younger and often more impressionable generation. The textbooks for grades 1–11 for Buddhist Sunday School are printed by the Department for Buddhist Affairs. Until 1961, it was the Young

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Margaret Canovan, 'Patriotism is not Enough', British Journal of Political Science, Vol 30, No 3, 2000, pp. 413–32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'Strategies de reproduction et modes de domination' Actes de la Recherche en Science Sociale, No. 105, 1994, pp. 3–12.

Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), which had established a national network of Buddhist Sunday Schools that provided printed texts and other educational resources. Later, successive government ministries took over this responsibility. Even a quick scrutiny of the present *Daham Pasala* texts that contain sections on Sri Lankan history are revealing of certain trends. Just as in school histories, important and 'great individuals' (shresta minissu) are mentioned for their roles in promoting Buddhism. The history of Buddhism appears as one peppered with glorious deeds and exceptional individuals. It is a history full of omissions and chosen emphases: one which resembles the heritage/mythic mode of recounting the past rather than modern historiography. The exceptional individuals include various Buddhist priests and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, King Asoka, and King Dhatusena in grade eight; Sumangala Himi, Walisinghe Harischandra and Anula Devi in grade nine; and Lakdiva Babalavu Kanthavo (women who made the lakdiva/island shine), Mary Museus Higgins, King Dutugemunu and King Parakramabahu in grade ten. 35 A further more recent example of the way in which a certain discourse of heritage is entering the educational sector comes from the government's compulsory training programme for new university students led by the military. There is a module entitled 'History and National Heritage'. The topics of this module are, in order, the arrival of the Aryans, foreign invasions (who the foreigners are is not clear), and the development of Sinhalese kingdoms. 'National heritage' focuses exclusively on prominent cultural symbols of the

<sup>35</sup> Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) was a former American military officer and co-founder of the Theosophist Society which helped bring about a renaissance of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. King Asoka was a king of the Maurya dynasty (third century BC) who converted to Buddhism and sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka with the message of Buddhism. King Dhatusena ruled over the country in the fifth century after defeating South Indian rulers who had held power until then. Wariyapola Sri Sumangala was a Buddhist monk of the early nineteenth century who helped the leaders of an anti-British rebellion in 1818 and was later convicted. Walisinghe Harischandra (1876-1913) was a social reformer and revivalist of Sri Lankan Buddhism. Queen Anula Devi was Sri Lanka's first ordained Buddhist nun in the third century BC. Mary Museus Higgins (1855-1926) was a theosophist and Principal of a reputed girls' Buddhist school subsequently named after her. King Dutugemunu is famous for having defeated the Tamil Chola King Elara who reigned from Anuradhapura. King Parakramabahu of Polonnaruwa was the last king in the twelfth century to reign over a unified kingdom.

majority Sinhala community, such as Sigiriya, the Temple of the Tooth, and the Aukana Buddha statue, and privileges monumental records of the past, as well as records from pre-colonial periods.<sup>36</sup>

Vying for popular appeal: merging of history and heritage in popular culture

The realm of popular culture has always been inhabited by accounts of history that have drawn from the chronicles, myths, and Jataka tales, and portrayed heroes and gods as the motors of history rather than in terms of social forces or class conflict. In post-colonial Sri Lanka, the gap between academic histories written in English and histories in the vernacular is not new, but was accentuated with the opening up of the economy and the emergence of a cosmopolitan class consuming Western modernity with a vengeance after a decade of austerity under Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The vernacular domain of culture had various layers, but a large group of people soon became adepts of an entertainment industry that pandered to their need for reassurance at a moment when the nation was threatened by secessionist anti-systemic groups. The trend became more pronounced in 2008 when the state began a full-scale patriotic war to re-conquer the East and the North from the Tamil rebels. In August 2008, the movie Aba was released in thirty-eight cinemas across Sri Lanka. The total of those who saw the movie leads to the impressive figure of 2.1 million, about 10 per cent of the total population of the island. Aba was produced by EAP Edirisinghe, a group of companies that owned a popular TV channel called Swarnavahini. The film was directed by a popular film actor and TV personality named Jackson Anthony, and depicted the life of King Pandukabhaya some 2,400 years ago. Pandukabhaya was the first king of Anuradhapura and, according to the Chronicles, ruled for seventy years. The success of Aba led to other epic movies, among them, Mahindagamanaya, which was released by the National Film Corporation on 18 May 2011, and has been seen, as of November 2011, by 1.6 million viewers. Mahindagamanaya relates one of the founding events/myths of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Course for developing the leadership abilities and positive thinking through theoretical and practical training, A program jointly organised by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Defense, 2011 (See www.scribd.com/doc/57788381/Training-Manual-English-Version).

nation: that a son of Emperor Asoka was sent as an emissary to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism, and that he was responsible for the conversion of King Devanampiyatissa and his followers to Buddhism. The popularity of the film epitomises the popular attachment among Sinhala people to the mythic story of the arrival of Buddhism embodied in an individual persona, Mahinda, about which, it must be noted, Indian sources have no trace.<sup>37</sup>

Different genres of television programs have also helped to consolidate the domination of the Rajapaksa regime. Many teledramas that show feuds and fights between people contain a moral at the end that blood is thicker than water (*le ghanai waturata wada*). Family ties are placed above all other ethical values. In 2008 television programmes with a historical slant also began to be aired at peak times. Among these, the *Maha Sinhale Vansa Kathava* (the great Sinhala chronicle) with Jackson Anthony as the anchorman, was the most popular. The programme brought together a panel of 'experts' who discussed an event of Sri Lanka's past, generally in a narrative and emphatic style. Among the members of the panel was often an academic historian, but his or her interpretation was drowned out by the dominant narrative of praise for the great feats of the kings and people of the past.<sup>38</sup>

In all these creative works the tropes are the hydraulic civilisation and the aesthetic of the *gargantuesque*. What is portrayed is not the past but Sri Lanka's fame, which is related to its past ability, for instance, to build stupas that are deemed exceptional mainly for being the largest brick structures known to the pre-modern world. Buddha statues too are admired less for their aesthetic value than for the fact that they compare in size with the Maligawila seventh century statue, eleven metres in height and considered to be the 'largest free standing Buddha figure'. <sup>39</sup> Monumentality is a central value in the production of heritage by the state, business, journalists and consultants. The connection with the present is implicit.

<sup>37</sup> G.C. Mendis, *The Early History of Ceylon and its Relations with India and Other Foreign Countries*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (1932), pp. 2–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> In the popular press it is no longer professional historians who discuss matters relating to the past but amateur historians who fail to abide by the protocols of the profession. Among these are Bandu de Silva, a former diplomat who frequently contributes to English-language newspapers *The Island* and *Daily News*, and Nuwera Eliya Hemapala and Ellawala Medananda who write for the Sinhala dailies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Tourism Sri Lanka in 'Pilgrimage in Sri Lanka', available at http://www.tourism-srilanka.com/religious-places/index.html.

Today's patriotic state needs the 'signatures of the visible'<sup>40</sup> to construct a national imagination. Creative works, monuments and archaeology, as such 'signatures of the visible', create heritage products that consolidate national identity and the profile of certain political figures.

Fictionalised versions of the past for adults and children alike are also vehicles of a heritage discourse that draws on and naturalises certain narratives and cultural and social experience, often linked to ideas of nation and nationhood. Historical novels are in great vogue. Jayantha Chandrasiri's novel, *The Great Dutugemunu (Maha Dutugemunu)*, which relates the glories of a third century BCE Sinhala hero who slayed the Tamil King Elara and recaptured the kingdom of Anuradhapura, is soon going to be made into a film.

Today, it is clear that the public idea of what constitutes the past is fashioned in a vibrant commercial environment where publishers, authors, film and teledrama makers, using print media as well as visual technologies and the internet (for example *Lanka C News*, Wimal Weerawansa's website), and harbouring Sinhalese nationalist ideas, reproduce the monumental, most often exclusive, personality-oriented vision of the past as heritage that the state apparatus is conveying through educational institutions. This vision is, however, contested on occasions by dissenting views among the hegemonic discourse, as well as by members of communities that are excluded from this dominant vision.

# Contest over place/sites and practices

The patriotic state encourages the promotion of a consensus version of history through state-sanctioned cultural institutions and elites which regulate cultural and social tensions in the present. There have been moments, however, when the same discourse has been subverted and has become a resource used by subaltern groups to challenge the stasis and received values. As such, heritage offers the possibility of negotiating new ways of being and expression of identity.<sup>41</sup>

It is sites and landscapes that provide the most fertile terrain for conflicting claims to meet. The post-war patriotic state is keenly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'The Globalization of Archeology and Heritage: A Discussion with Arjun Appadurai' in G. Faiclough, R. Harrison Jnr, J. Jameson and J. Scholfield (eds) *The Heritage Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 2019–218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Laurajane Smith, The Uses of Heritage, London: Routledge 2006, p. 4

aware that memory requires a display, an articulation in objects or representation to give it meaning. Where nostalgia for a particular past becomes embodied, it transforms places. One then sees a concretisation of ideologies, as they are embedded in landscapes. The peculiar power of landscapes is inherent in the fact that they are visual, material forms. Materiality makes them appear neutral as mere traces of history. For this reason, in Sri Lanka the origin of historical landscapes is rarely questioned; they become naturalised. For example, who would contest the notion of a sacred city and Anuradhapura's claim to such status? The politically-laden and socially-conditioned processes that actually produced these landscapes are obscured. The post-conflict state has taken a determined stance in the consolidation of a notion of glorious national heritage through various performances. In June 2010, *Daily News* reported thus,

The Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi Development Fund will conduct Hele Bodu Urumaya Exhibition, an exposition of sacred Buddha Relics and ashes of King Dutugemunu at the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi premises in Anuradhapura, from June, 24 to 27. The organizers expect over 1,000,000 viewers at the relics exhibition. Ashes of King Dutugemunu were excavated from Dakkina Stupa in 1946 by the Archaeological Department and proven genuine scientifically.

Dakkina Stupa had been honoured for centuries by local people, not as the tomb of Dutugemunu but as that of King Elara, the Tamil who was slayed by Dutugemunu. But in 1946, ashes were discovered which Archaeological Commissioner Senarat Paranavitarna testified were those of Dutugemunu. The stupa was renamed and became known as Dutugemunu's stupa, while the ashes were collected and regularly displayed at times when people needed to be reminded of their past glories. The name change occurred, interestingly, in the Sinhalese nationalist discourse of the 1980s, at the same time the Dutugemunu ashes were paraded by Minister Cyril Matthew. This event shows the conflict over the ownership of a site and how a heritage claim by common people was displaced by a state-led narrative supported by expert knowledge. It begs the question: is veracity of facts important in a situation where both claims appear equally questionable?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> For a more detailed account of the controversy about the ashes see Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Dutthagamani and the Buddhist Conscience' in Douglas Allen (ed) *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia: India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992, pp. 135–160.

Another recent example is Kandarodai, a place in the Jaffna Peninsula where a collection of circular structures was discovered in the early-twentieth century on a megalithic site possibly dating from the early part of the second millennium. After the end of the civil war, pilgrims began to visit the place again and its name was subsequently Sinhalised as Kandurugoda, while the structures were also refashioned as stupas. Through this reconnection with the Buddhist past of the North, what was being contested was the entire Tamil nationalist historical narrative. Today, this could fuel tension between communities as they battle over the cultural meaning of this place. Unlike the case of the Ramayana Trail, the stupas appear to offer concrete evidence of a Buddhist past, further strengthened by an inscription naming the place Kandurugoda. This serves Sinhalese claims that Buddhism encompassed the entire island, the stupas being dated to the ninth century AD, a period similar to Borobudur in Indonesia. 43 Tamil scholars have acknowledged the Buddhist remains in Jaffna, described as 'burial monuments of monks, a Buddhicised version of megalithicism', as proof of the existence of Tamil Buddhists in ancient times.<sup>44</sup> The presence of urn burial sites in the Jaffna area, with very similar features to those in Tamil Nadu from Pudukottai to the Chittoore area of Andhra Pradesh, falls in direct conflict with the Vijayan story of Aryan settlements and shows human settlements in the Jaffna area that began with a South Indian culture. 45 Sinhalese nationalist Ven. Ellawalla Medhananda is championing the renovation of all Buddhist sites in areas 'desecrated' by decades of civil war: his book describes sites in Anuradhapura, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu districts. 46 In the post-conflict period that began in 2009, Tamils felt the patriotic state was investing in renovating traces of Buddhist heritage in the North and East as well as building new temples, while the Hindu heritage they subscribed to was being neglected:

Buddha statues have been found in places like Kandarodai, and this shows that Tamils have followed Buddhism and that Tamil Buddhism was practiced

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> D.G.B. de Silva, 'Kantaroadai Buddhist remains: A Sri Lankan Borubudur lost forever?', *The Island*, http://www.island.lk/2002/08/14/ (MidweekReview), (accessed 14 August 2002).

<sup>44</sup> N. Parameswara, Early Tamils of Lanka Ilankai, Malaysia, 1999, pp. 123–24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> K. Indrapala, The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils in Sri Lanka c.300 BCE to c.1200 CE, Colombo: MV Publications, 2005, pp. 69–71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ven. Ellawalla Medhananda, Sinhala Bauddha Urumaya (Sinhala Buddhist Heritage), 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Colombo: Dayawansa Jayakodi & Company, 2008.

in Eelam, in a lesser extent, but the Sinhalese show these as Buddhist antiques and claim parts of the Tamil motherland as Sinhala areas. $^{47}$ 

Tamils often counter with similarly grandiose claims of a 'Great Stone Age' in Kandarodai, using new media to disseminate their ideas. 48

## Heritage and violence

In many cases the post war patriotic state has either given sanction to or tolerated attacks against religious sites and members of religious communities. A recent report mentions 'mob attacks on places of worship, robberies and vandalism of religious places, the killing of clergy, protests against religious communities and hate speech on the internet and in the media'.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most serious conflicts occurred in Dambulla in 2012 over allegedly illegal Muslim and Hindu constructions within the boundaries of the sacred city. The chief incumbent of the Dambulla Rajamahavihara had given permission for a mosque to be built in 1964 in the central town of Dambulla and since then Muslims had worshipped in these premises. On 20 April 2012 a mob of about 2,000 people led by Buddhist priests stormed the Dambulla Masjidul Kairiya mosque and chased away the Muslim worshippers attending Friday prayers at the time, claiming it was an illegal construction. Two days later Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne, also Minister of Religious Affairs, ordered the removal of the mosque from an area deemed sacred to Buddhists and its relocation to another part of the town. Residents of the area were also issued with letters from the Urban Development Authority asking them to vacate their homes as they lived within the premises of what was designated as a 'sacred area'. These conflicts often become means to change the demographic composition of an area either by forcibly evicting people or by creating tense situations that encourage them to leave of their own accord.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Global Tamil News, 29 September 2011, available at http://www.globalta-milnews.net/MobileArticle/tabid/81/language/en-US/Default.aspx?pn=articles&aid=53410 (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Global Tamil News, 24 June 2011, 'People of the Great Stone Age Civilization had Lived in Kandarodai" available at http://www.globaltamilnews.net/GTMNEditorial/tabid/71/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/63096/language/en-US/People-of-the-Great-Stone-Age-Civilization-had-Lived-in-Kandarodai.aspx (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Center for Policy Alternatives, Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Postwar Sri Lanka, CPA, March 2013.

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More recently tension grew around a Jailani Sufi shrine, 22 kilometres southwest of Balangoda, a predominantly Sinhalese area also known for being the hometown of the Ratwatte family, one of the leading political dynasties of Sri Lanka. The area is the site of a devotional cult of Shaykh Muhiyadeen Adul Qadir (AD 1166), who is believed to have visited and meditated in the popular cave, which now houses a mosque at Kuragala, while on a pilgrimage to Adam's Peak. The site was rediscovered in 1875 and a festival began to be celebrated by the Muslim merchant community in Balangoda from 1890. The site is made of three large stone formations, one being the Kappal Malai, which resembles the prow of a ship, and at the base of which an open-air mosque was erected in 1922.

An organisation called the Bodu Bala Sena<sup>50</sup> that recently took center stage in Sri Lankan public space as protecting the interests of Buddhists against encroachments by minority religions, especially Islam and Christianity, made vociferous calls to restore Buddhist heritage by removing the mosque from the Kuragala rock cave, believed to be a Buddhist monastery. These allegations were not new, but their tenure was different in the context of a recent BBS victory in which they had secured the endorsement of the government on its banning of halal certification for meat products.

From the 1970s, there had emerged claims by Sinhalese nationalists, based on the presence of second century Brahmi inscriptions, that Jailani was actually an ancient Buddhist archaeological site and that this heritage needed to be preserved. The state gave sanction to these claims by allowing the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to construct a small dagoba, just above the spot where the Sufi saint is said to have meditated. In spite of the Jailani trustees' success in obtaining cabinet orders to limit the height of the construction, the Archaeological Department erected a sign claiming that Kuragala was the site of a Buddhist monastery.<sup>51</sup> According to a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> The Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) was created by Ven. Galago-daatte Gnanaseara and Ven. Kirama Vimalajothi in 2012 and has considerably expanded its agenda and scope from issues such as halal certification of food products and dress code of Muslims to purely political matters through a recent campaign against the 13th Amendment. See the official website of the Bodu Bala Sena, <a href="http://bodubalasena.org/english/">http://bodubalasena.org/english/</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Dennis B. McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective' in *Contributions to India Sociology*, 32 (2), 1998, pp. 433–83; Dennis B. McGilvray, 'Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka' in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, Delhi: Social Science Press, pp. 273–89.

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recent report, 'the Department of Archaeology vested authority of the site to the Buddhist Asgiriya Chapter for ten years, with specific conditions that the activities of the mosque are not to be disrupted.'52 The Kuragala mosque issue remains unresolved. In May 2013, Alavi Mowlana, the Governor of the Western Province expressed his concerns that the Director General of Archaeology was demolishing buildings at the Kuragala mosque site. Furthermore he mentioned threats by the Bodu Bala Sena to bring thousands of Buddhists in a vehicle parade to destroy the site in a scene reminiscent of the Ayuddhya mosque destruction. There is clearly a tacit acceptance by the government of the role of the BBS as well as of another similar outfit called the Sinhala Ravaya as guardians of the Sinhala Buddhists, in spite of their often very questionable statements. These extremist forces have been understood as appendages of the state created as diversions for the people from issues such as corruption, nepotism, and cost of living that plague the regime and could threaten it in the future. Their appeal also reflects the power and penetration of a long and sustained stateelite investment in manufacturing consent around the idea of the nation as one and the nation in peril.

# Through the interstices: social solidarities and the possibility of protest

Reactions to the downward spiral of the country towards an authoritarian form of rule have been few. There is no real tradition among the Sri Lankan people of mass street protests on issues that do not concern them directly as persons. Decades of war, the banality of violence and the spread of practices of patronage and clientelism at all levels have eroded peoples' faith in the possibility of a fair society. Indifference is the norm. The ideologies of late capitalism combined with a war situation have created a 'one dimensional man'. <sup>53</sup> This one dimensional consciousness, instrumental reason and lack of critical thinking have played an important role in forestalling protest. Consumerism, racism and patriotism, strengthened by a controlled mass media, have until now functioned as demobilising factors of protest. The culture of fear prevails as websites are periodically banned and even social media has been recently tar-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Center for Policy Alternatives, Attacks on Places of religious Worship in Postwar Sri Lanka, March 2013, Colombo, CPA, p. 76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, Boston: Beacon 1964.

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geted by a state eager to avoid an 'Arab Spring' in Sri Lanka. Speaking at the Kotelawala Defense University, the secretary of defence warned against future mobilisations: 'The final threat to Sri Lanka's national security... is the emergence of technology driven new media including social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and other websites on the Internet.'54

No political party can offer any uplifting vision for the future, neither can any politician show a clean slate that people can look up to. The only signs of value-based politics have come from the courageous stand taken by university teachers since 2012 and by lawyers and their supporters who openly protested the impeachment of the Chief Justice in 2013.

In the arena of formal politics, either from the left or the right, there is no real alternative to the UPFA government. The only party that appears to cause some concern to the present regime is the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). In 2011, the TNA—which continually critiques the government's strategy of development without devolution of power to Tamil majority areas—won 20 of 25 seats on local councils in the north, and now controls 32 local councils (pradeshiya sabhas). This has helped the TNA position itself as the only remaining representative of the Tamil people. The TNA is in fact a loose formation created in 2001 of five separate organisations, namely the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).55 Following a wave of international criticism on its handling of war crimes allegations, the UPFA government announced elections to the Northern Provincial Council for September 2013, and a number of Western governments boycotted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Sri Lanka in November of the same year. The announcement of the provincial council elections was met with protests from the JVP which saw the move as an undue concession to the international community and a paving stone to separatism if the TNA were to emerge as the winner of the elections. Sinhalese nationalist formations such as

<sup>54 &#</sup>x27;Gotabaya Rajapaksa and National Security: The Kotelawala Defence University Lecture', Groundviews, http://groundviews.org/2013/06/14/gotabayarajapaksa-and-national-security-the-kotelawala-defence-university-lecture/(accessed 22 June 2013).

<sup>55 &#</sup>x27;Tamil National Alliance may break up soon due to intensifying internal conflict', http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/21411.

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the JHU similarly criticised this move as they have been against the provincial council system on principle.<sup>56</sup>

These were the first provincial council elections in the Northern province in twenty-five years. The TNA won 30 seats including 2 bonus seats in a 38-member council, while the UPFA secured 7 and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress won 1 seat. 78.5 per cent of the 425,000 who voted chose the TNA. This was a clear vote of confidence for C.V. Wigneswaran, a politically moderate retired Supreme Court judge who had been selected by the TNA as chief ministerial candidate. Wigneswaran's manifesto reaffirmed the need to find a solution to satisfy Tamil aspirations but within a federal structure. This election signaled the total rejection by people in the Northern Province of President Rajapaksa's strategy of using development needs as an alternative to devolution as well as their anger towards the Sri Lankan army's omnipresence in the province four years after the end of the war.

Whether these elections will mark the start of a long-due reconciliation process will depend on whether the UPFA government will devolve police and land powers to the province and disburse funds earmarked for development.

In 2012 the legal profession mounted a serious protest against further government movement against the already limited independence of the judiciary. The controversy arose around the impeachment of the Chief Justice of the country. Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake, a former dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, was the first woman to be made Chief Justice by the then president, Chandrika Kumaratunge, in 1998. In November 2012 when a government spokesperson announced that the process of impeachment against the Chief Justice had begun, hundreds of lawyers and citizens demonstrated on the streets calling on the government to halt the process.<sup>57</sup> There were mixed feelings among lawyers and the public about the person of the Chief Justice.

<sup>56 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka: First take on Northern Provincial Council elections—Update No. 236', South Asia Analysis Group, 24 September 2013, http://www.southa-siaanalysis.org/node/1364 (accessed 26 October 2013); 'Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council elections 2013—Preliminary Findings', The Commonwealth, http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/sri-lanka's-northern-provincial-council-elections-2013-preliminary-findings (accessed 26 October 2013).

<sup>57 &#</sup>x27;Sri Lanka lawyers protest impeachment of Chief Justice', Jurist, http://jurist.org/paperchase/2012/11/sri-lanka-lawyers-protest-impeachment-of-chief-justice.php.

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Bandaranayake was never perceived as a threat to the regime but as a careful and precise jurist that had benefited from her political closeness to the regime. But for all political loyalists there is an expectation of total compliance. When she declared unconstitutional a bill (the Divineguma bill) introduced by the president's brother that would have vested wide-ranging powers in the central government at the expense of local bodies in the predominantly Tamil Northern Province, the government felt betrayed and decided to remove her. A bill was then introduced in Parliament to impeach her on fourteen charges of alleged misconduct. The constitutional procedure was that she would have to be tried by Parliament after a fair trial and, if found guilty, the President would be asked to remove her. Bandaranayake was not given a fair trial. Among the eleven member parliamentary select committee, seven were government ministers. They sat in secret, giving her no time or information to prepare her defence or call upon witnesses. She was furthermore abused and humiliated by government members of the committee. The basic principles of due process were not followed. In January, during parliamentary deliberations, lawyers went on a countrywide strike for two days that culminated in a massive protest in front of the Supreme Court complex. Progovernment groups attacked the march while army and police attempted to restore peace.<sup>58</sup>

Bandaranayake was found guilty on three charges and the pro-Rajapaksa majority in Parliament gleefully asked the President to remove her. Two days after, on 13 January, president Rajapaksa ratified the decision. The government's legal advisor, Mohan Peiris, was appointed in her place. Both the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal refused to acknowledge the guilty verdict and declared the parliamentary process unconstitutional, but this had little effect. Their rulings were disregarded. Judges and magistrates protested, lawyers held processions and other civil society activists joined together to lament the systematic erosion of the rule of law. They boycotted the official swearing in ceremony of the new Chief Justice. But owing partly to the general public's lack of empathy for the legal system in the country and the movement's inability to stir the imaginary of the people, the lawyers' protest did not amount to the formidable movement that once brought down a regime in Pakistan.

<sup>58 &#</sup>x27;Lawyers attacked during impeachment protests in Sri Lanka', Xinhua News, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-01/10/c\_132094211. htm.

## SRI LANKA IN THE MODERN AGE

The three-month-long strike of university teachers that began in July 2012 had in many ways the potential of transforming into a movement for democracy. Beginning as a protest against the government's refusal to follow through on its promise to increase the salaries of the teaching staff and increase the autonomy of universities, from the outset the movement set for itself much wider goals that included a call for state investment of 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for the education sector at large. The strike gained mass support as there was a wide public consensus around the crisis in the education sector and the state's dismal 1.9 per cent investment of GDP in education. The 100-day strike was called to an end by the Federation of Teachers' Association (FUTA) on the basis of a vague agreement for backlog payments and salary increases from the next budget, mainly due to a sense of responsibility towards students whose academic calendar was being disrupted. While FUTA did not extract from the government any concessions on their demand for an investment of 6 per cent of GDP in education, the strike nevertheless constitutes a watershed in many respects. First, it energised a demoralised and passive intellectual community into taking leadership of a vibrant solidarity movement. The vernacular and English press was full of well argued essays written by academics who until then had remained silent. The controversial selection by President Rajapaksa of the least-qualified candidate for the post of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Colombo, who also happened to be the husband of the former vice-chancellor, now Chairperson, of the University Grant Commission, has once again stirred FUTA into action. Thus the strike has given academics the courage to speak out. Secondly, the FUTA movement constantly reached out to other associations and unions, moving beyond corporatism and forging lasting connections with trade unions, radical political parties and citizens' associations. These solidarities came to the fore in 2013 when domestic electricity price increases rose from 50 per cent to 127 per cent. Under the new pricing scheme those using the smallest number of units, the poorer segments of the population, saw the biggest rises. The loss-making state-run Cevlon Electricity Board (CEB) was immediately attacked for making low- and medium-level users bear the brunt of their own inefficiency and lack of foresight. On May Day in 2013 President Rajapaksa, who felt the tide of discontent, made some concessions to low electricity users. But on 21 May the Coordinating Committee of the Trade Union Alliance (CCTUA), consisting of over 600 trade unions, called for a token

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strike over soaring electricity prices in the public and private sector that did not lead to total work stoppage in all institutions but denoted that the governments' 'power base is increasingly eroding underneath'. 59 The success of the strike was denied in the government controlled media while opposition members criticised the use of intimidation and coercion to force workers to report to work on the day of the strike. 60 What is clear, however, in spite of the inability at this stage to completely cripple sectors such as health, education and transport, where pro-government trade unions still prevail, is the new solidarity that has emerged between groups that want to voice their discontent over the fundamental deficiencies of the regime. This may come to mark a shift from identity or single-issue social movements, as in the decades that followed the destruction of trade unionism by J.R. Jayawardena in the early 1980s, and a return to class-based struggles bringing under a single umbrella all those who feel they have a right and a duty to protest against the injustice of cultural, economic and political capital being kept in the hands of a ruling clique.

#### Conclusion

Will the increasing media exposure of the executive/military nexus, the culture of impunity displayed by political and economic elites and their ostentatious lifestyle compounded by a complete disregard for basic needs of ordinary Sri Lankans lead to a change in the popular perception of Mahinda Rajapaksa as the saviour of the nation? For now, in spite of a few stirrings in the cities, there still seems to be wide popular acceptance, certainly in the rural areas, of the shape of post war Sri Lanka: patrimonial, nepotistic, nationalistic and militarised with clear continuities between the 'war for peace' and post-war periods. War crimes allegations and the boycott of the Commonwealth summit by certain states are only minor irritants for a regime that has mastered the art of creating consent for a regime of oppressive stability. The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee is brandished when deemed necessary to prove the regimes's alleged commitment to investigating past abuses.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Laksiri Fernando, 'Electricity Price Hike, Token Strike and Mass Protests', The Sri Lanka Guardian, 24 May 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> On trade unions in Sri Lanka see S.Janaka Biyanwila, *The Labour Movement in the Global South: Trade Unions in Sri Lanka*, Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series 36, London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

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The political arena offers little opportunity for change. Between a self-defeating neo-liberal UNP and a shallow inward-looking JVP, change could only come from democratic pluralistic forces recapturing the SLFP from dynastic rulers of the past and present and voicing a message of political reconciliation coupled with constitutional reform.

Some will remember a fleeting moment when even people with foresight and democratic credentials believed Mahinda Rajapksa himself was the alternative. With a strong electoral mandate and a large parliamentary majority behind him, he had then a free hand to rebuild a country bruised by thirty years of violence into a social democratic state. As he instead focused on consolidating his power, this hope soon faded away, leaving people today with a difficult choice: total compliance or desperate revolt. But in the interstices one senses disrespect and discontent. Internet tabloids, *kele pathara* (pamphlets), cartoons, jokes, puns and gossip are widely circulated as they constitute safe and soft ways of deriding the regime. These may only be 'ruses', <sup>61</sup> yet they show fissures spreading in an oppressively stable edifice.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984, p. 96.

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