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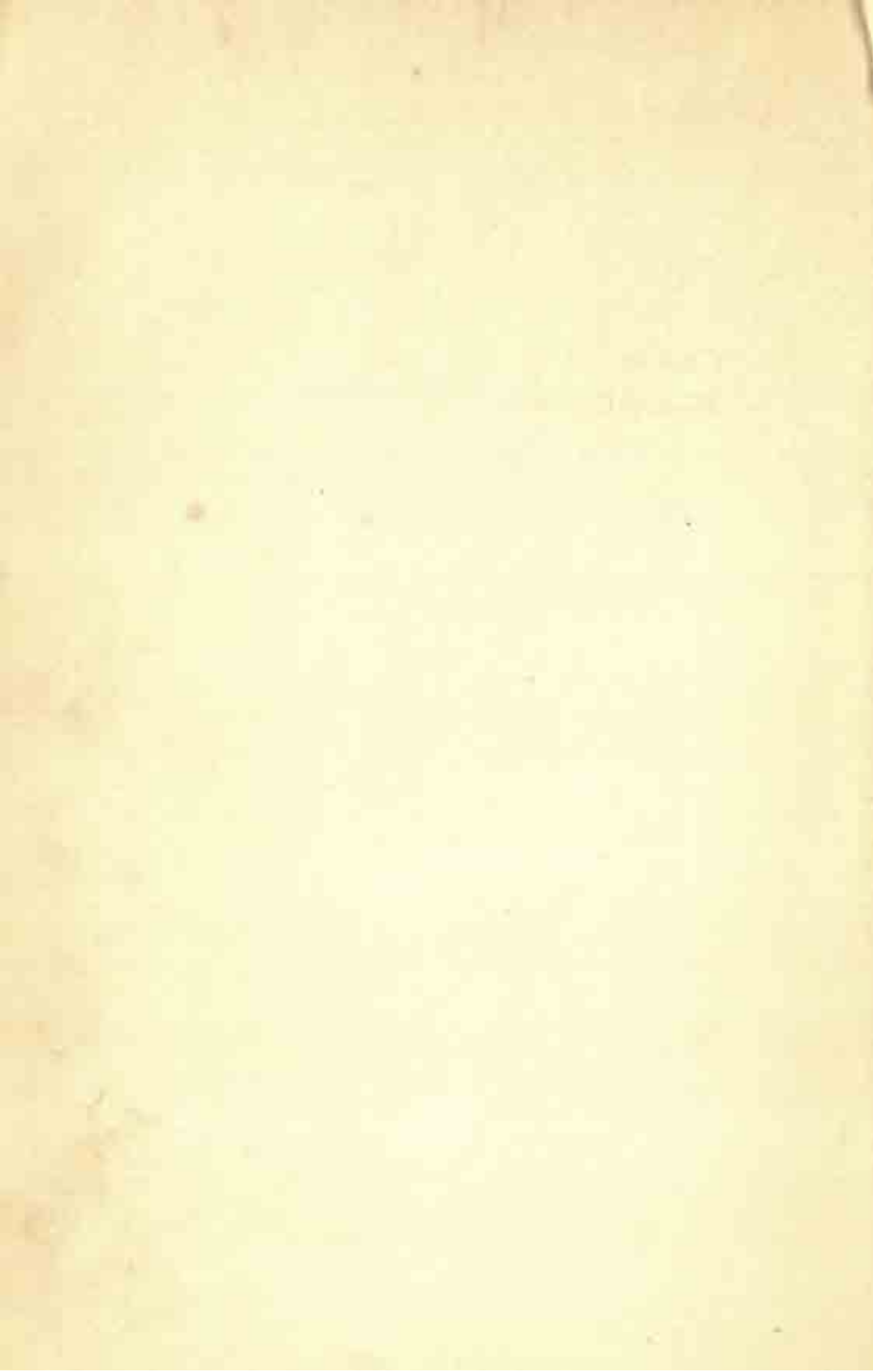
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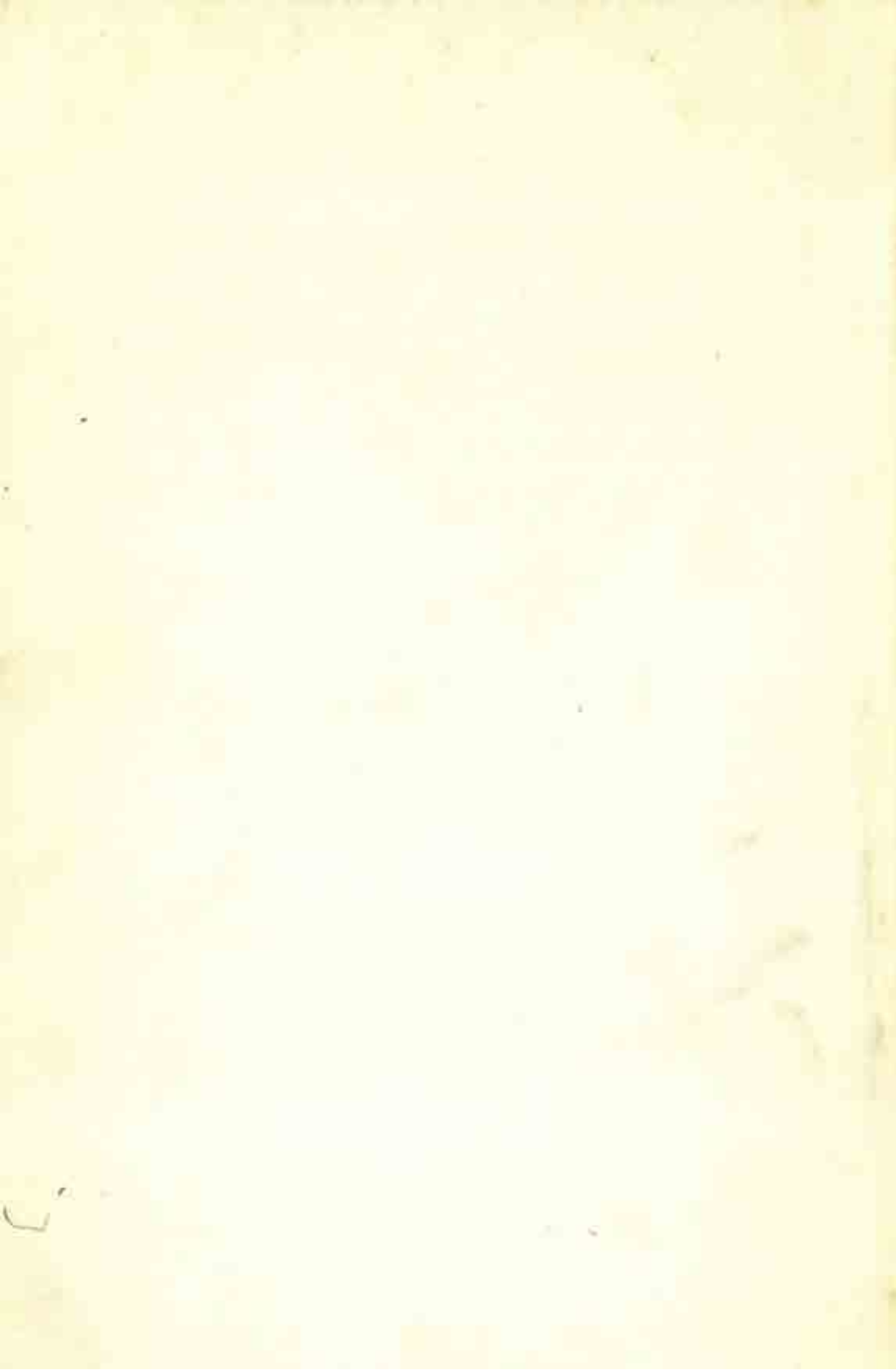
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*Caste in  
Modern Ceylon*





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# CASTE in Modern Ceylon



THE SINHALESE SYSTEM  
IN TRANSITION

A. N. 332.

Bryce Ryan ❖❖❖❖

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1953

Rutgers University Press

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## *Note on Sinhalese Terminology*

Sinhalese words, many of which are necessarily used throughout the text, have been rendered into English in general accordance with modern principles of transliteration. Although usages are fundamentally consistent throughout, some liberties have been taken with Sinhalese grammatical forms. In reference to a specific caste, the Sinhalese stem usually has been taken. Applying the term to an individual of a particular caste, the Sinhalese singular frequently has been used. Ordinarily, plurals have been formed either by the addition of the English "s" to the singular form or by use of the stem itself. The Sinhalese plural has been used sparingly, and the singular form itself avoided in many cases, since only in reference to certain castes is it commonly used by the Sinhalese themselves. (The singular has the implication of emphasizing the fact that a person is of a particular caste.) Properly, the stem should be followed by some such word as "people," and in polite address the singular should be avoided in preference to the stem plus a term for "person."

Usually the singular is formed by the addition of (y)ā to stem words ending in "i" or "ī" and the addition of (v)ā to stems ending in "a" or "ā." The Sinhalese plural is formed by adding (y)ō to stems ending in "i" and (v)ō to stems ending in "a." Thus:

STEM NAME OF CASTE	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Roḍi-	Roḍiyā	Roḍiyō
Hinnā-	Hinnāvā	Hinnāvō

However, in practice the plural of each has usually been expressed as *Rodiyās* and *Hinnāvās* respectively. For certain castes, only the stem has been used, usually in respect for Ceylonese usages. Also, stems ending in "u," e.g., Padu, and those ending in consonants, e.g., Vahal, have been expressed here only in the stem form. Throughout the text, italics have been used sparingly except as



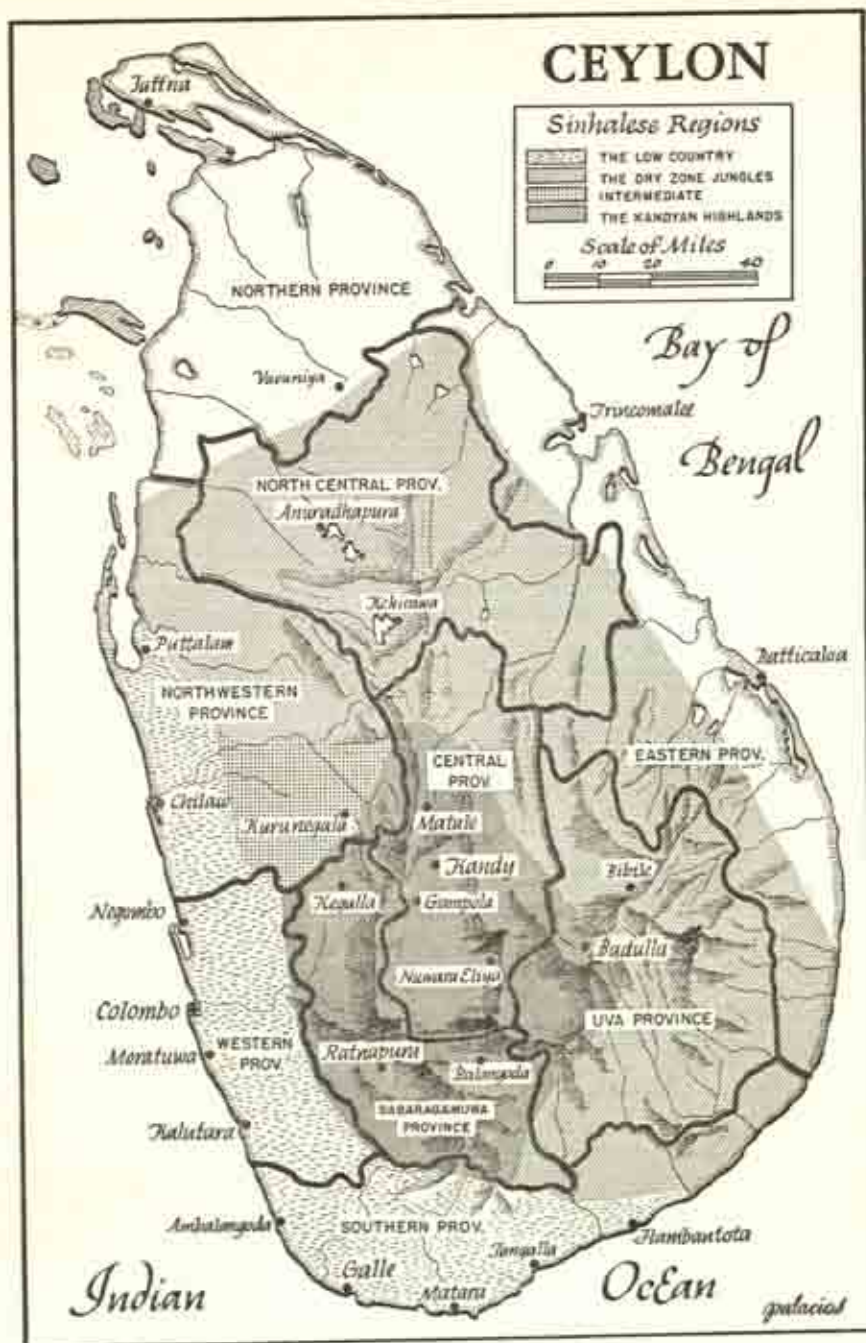
unfamiliar words other than caste designations are introduced. It might be noted that the sound "w" does not occur in Sinhalese, although many words are popularly rendered with an English "w." The more accurate "v" rendering has been followed except in reference to certain place names and in direct quotation from English sources which have followed the older usage.

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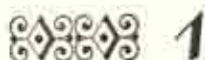






MAP OF CEYLON  
Showing Regional and Provincial Boundaries, Principal Cities and Towns.





## INTRODUCTION

### *The Nature of Sinhalese Caste*

*Among this People there are divers and sundry Casts or degrees of Quality, which is not according to their Riches or Places of Honour the King promotes them to, but according to their Descent and Blood. And whatsoever this Honour is, be it higher or lower, it remains Hereditary from Generation to Generation. They abhor to eat or drink, or intermarry with any of Inferior Quality to themselves. The signs of higher or meaner Ranks, are wearing of Doublets, or going bare-backed without them: the length of their Cloth below their knees; their sitting on Stools, or on Blocks or Mats spread on the Ground: and in their caps.*

*Robert Knox: An Historical Relation of Ceylon, 1681*

In caste, as in race and culture, the Sinhalese are the children of India. From early antiquity they have ordered their society with regard to caste principles. Separated from the Indian subcontinent by only a few miles of water, Ceylon is in the cultural and historical sense part of the vast Indian social composite as truly as if its northern straits were a peninsula. From the point of view of caste, Ceylon manifests this fundamental unity while displaying, like the subcontinent itself, regional patterns on the ancient fabric. The Sinhalese trace their origins to pre-Buddhist invaders from Northeast India and their most ancient chronicles depict the transplantation of Indian social organiza-

tion.<sup>1</sup> Little is known of the aboriginal Veddoïd people, but it can be safely assumed that this simple hunting folk had not acquired the complex Indian social system. In legend, and quite possibly in fact, the movement of Indians into Ceylon began during the sixth century B.C. From these invasions came the early civilization in what is today the sparsely settled northern jungles. The passage of centuries saw the sources of Indian influence and the migrants to Ceylon shift from North India to the Dekkan. After the tenth century A.D., South Indian princes were indeed established as rulers in the northern parts of the island, while to the east and south the Sinhalese maintained their kingdoms, the last of which, the Kandyan, capitulated to the British in 1815.

The Sinhalese produced their unique way of life as a variant not only upon their original Indian heritage, but also under virtually continuous stimulation of Indian contacts. Early periods were no doubt dominated by the influences of the Aryan-speaking north, while in later times there were both peaceful and militant invasions by the Dravidian-speaking peoples of the south. Until the island, or more accurately, its coastal regions, fell to the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Sinhalese were dominated culturally, and at times politically, by India. Throughout these centuries, nonetheless, there was built a distinct and autonomous society, establishing unique variations of Indian institutions, both from the fact of autonomy and partial isolation and also by the diversity of the Indian influence brought upon the island. In the sphere of social organization this partial cultural autonomy is evidenced today in the contrast of the Sinhalese and the Ceylon Tamils who for several hundred years have been settled in the northerly Jaffna peninsula. Although the castes of the latter roughly parallel those of the Sinhalese, the content of caste relations is that of Southern India and forms a system fundamentally distinct from the Sinhalese. Ceylon possesses two caste structures, the Tamil, no more than a regional variant within the South Indian pattern, and the Sinhalese, a self-contained emergent aris-

<sup>1</sup> *The Mahāvamsa* (51) attests the early introduction of caste principles. See especially p. 14 (Geiger's translation); also *The Cūlavamsa* (11). Parenthetical numbers following literature cited throughout the text refer to full references given in the bibliography.



ing from diffuse Indian influences and historically unique situations.

The search for origins of caste has been one of the more empty pursuits of nineteenth- and even twentieth-century scholarship, and there is no intent here to add to the numerous theories of ultimate origins. Caste, in any case, did not originate in Ceylon; it was transplanted in concept and grew both by infusion and maturation. The documentation of that transplantation and growth, in so far as it exists, lies in the semilegendary chronicles, unanalyzed ola leaf manuscripts, stone inscriptions and other sources which someday may be accessible to linguistically skilled antiquarians. There is available today a number of accounts of specific Sinhalese castes tracing them to Indian sources. These are, with few exceptions, professions of caste pride more than historical documents. An exception lies in the work of Hugh Neville (1885 to 1888), whose dispassionate view is unquestioned but whose philological interpretations, devoid of historic documentation, are more ingenious than reasonable.<sup>2</sup>

The *Janavamsa*, to be dated not earlier than the fifteenth century, and probably later, is apparently the compilation of a Buddhist *Bhikkhu* (Priest). It is valuable mainly for its listing of the castes and for certain insights that it offers regarding Buddhist attitude toward the caste system. Quite a dissimilar account is the *Nīti-Nighaṇṭuva*, which reflects traditional legends regarding the origins of the caste system among the Sinhalese from the standpoint of the high caste Kandyan.<sup>3</sup> The *Nīti-Nighaṇṭuva* relates a

<sup>2</sup> Neville was the editor and main contributor to the journal, *The Taprobanian* (97), published 1885 to 1888. The issue of April, 1886, contains Neville's notes on the *Janavamsa* (42), a Buddhist tract relating to caste which Neville translated for *The Taprobanian*. The strong philological bias in these notes makes them only slightly more creditable than the *Janavamsa* itself, as the author leads us as far as ancient Egypt, tracing migration by means of philological similarities in caste names, without archeological or other sources of support for his speculations.

<sup>3</sup> *Nīti-Nighaṇṭuva* or *The Vocabulary of Law as it existed in the Last Days of The Kandyan Kingdom*, translated by C. J. R. Le Mesurier and T. B. Panabokke (58) is of debated origin, but probably can be attributed to John Armour, an early British Civil Servant, who based it both upon close personal acquaintance with the law as it existed in his time and the interpretative and legendary knowledge of a group of Kandyan chiefs. See further, F. A. Hayley, *A Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Sinhalese* (36), pp. 12-30; Viscount George Valentia, in Appendix IV, Vol. I of his *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, The Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt in the Years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (103), 1809, also presented

cosmology and an origin of the state which is essentially a social contract theory. With the selection of a king and the concomitant tribute which was his due, there came both division of power and division of labor. Herein were created the four great castes, "Wise-men," "Kings," "Merchants," and "Cultivators," as well as their attendants, the artisans and other service groups. Vijaya, the progenitor of the Sinhalese, and his warriors subsequently peopled Ceylon with representatives of the four castes, and later, others as well were brought by capture. The higher castes ultimately merged with the "Cultivators."

Characteristic of all Sinhalese explanations of caste is this obvious reconciliation to the ancient Indian organization, or what is presumed to have been that organization. The *Ruvanmal Nighaṇṭuwa*, a fifteenth century Sinhalese lexicon, orders the hierarchy as Brahmins, Kings, Merchants and Cultivators, and "Men of the Fourth Tribe" or Sudra.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the *Nīti-Nighaṇṭuwa* and the *Ruvanmal Nighaṇṭuwa*, however, the order of the four strata in popular Ceylon usage gives precedence to kings over wise-men, i.e., Kṣatriya over Brahmin. Thus Davy,<sup>5</sup> about 1816, was given to understand that the order of precedence of the four great castes by the Sinhalese placed the "Ekshastria wanse" (Kṣatriya people) above the "Brachmina." In the third position of priority came the "Wiessia wanse" (Vaiśya), among whom were included both merchants and cultivators, the lowest "Kshoodra" caste comprising the artisans and others. Popular opinion in the villages to this day supports the Kṣatriya in his claims to highest status.

A singular difference between the *Nīti-Nighaṇṭuwa* and the other sources is its possible implication that "cultivators" are of Sudra origin. Davy and others have been assured that the cultivating caste is Vaiśya. These discrepancies in regard to the cultivators' position and the relative superiority of Brahmin and Kṣatriya have some significance in contemporary status pretensions, and point as

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an account of caste origins based upon Sinhalese legendary accounts. There are, of course, Sinhalese references to caste other than those cited. No exhaustive coverage of that literature is attempted here. It is, however, surprisingly small. See also pp. 332-333, this volume.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ruvanmal Nighaṇṭuwa or Narmaratna Malawa: A Poetical Lexicon of the Sinhalese Language*, by His Majesty Sri Parākrama Bahu VI, revised and translated by D. P. De Alwis Wijayasekara (108), 1914, pp. 37-80.

<sup>5</sup> John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon* (12), 1821, pp. 111-112.



well to a possible influence of early Indian controversies upon Sinhalese thought. The basic agreement in these folk accounts upon the introduction of the four *varṇa* is partially supported by direct texts in the *Mahāvamsa*. The most significant fact is that the conventional and classic theories of Indian caste structure implicit in these accounts are wholly without substance in the Sinhalese hierarchy today or in that hierarchy as it existed in the time of the earliest European observers.

If one were to accept the *Niti-Nighaṇṭuva* premises, or even the assumption that the classical Brahminical hierarchy actually existed in India of the pre-Buddhist era, one might then assume that the Sinhalese order represents a deterioration of the classic structure. The Sinhalese in modern times have recognized no Brahmin peoples, nor Kṣatriya, and have been scarcely conversant with such concepts as Vaiśya and Sudra. The conventional fourfold hierarchy would appear to be but a memory of the ancient past. There is, however, some basis for believing that Sinhalese caste, rather than being a pale expression of a classical, rigidly defined hierarchy of ancient times, is instead the modern expression of a primitive Indian system. Sinhalese social organization developed upon a base which in Northern India was redefined and crystallized under Brahminical domination. In Buddhist Ceylon the Brahmin played no corresponding role.

Western scholars frequently have clung to the view that India prior to the Christian era was organized in accordance with the Laws of Manu, *i.e.*, the classical hierarchy. There is, however, reason for suggesting that the caste system of the Sinhalese may reflect the social organization in early India more clearly than does India proper today.<sup>6</sup> Fick's work on the social system of Northeast India in the time of the Buddha throws grave doubt upon the existence in ancient times of the classic "four castes," and describes an actual structure which conforms more closely with the evidence on Sinhalese caste than with the Brahminical theory expressed in the Laws of Manu.<sup>7</sup> The ancient guild-like and endogamous units de-

<sup>6</sup> This view was expressed by Hocart and was a premise upon which his analysis of caste origin rested. See Hocart, *Les Castes* (38), 1938, p. 5. Neither Hocart's observations nor his conclusions are, however, supported by the present research.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Fick, *The Social Organization in North-East India in Buddha's Time* (23), translated by Shishirkumar Maitra, University of Calcutta, 1920, also N. S. Subba



scribed by Fick seem to have been present also in Ceylon and give little evidence here of having been highly schematized. The accoutrements of caste developed, but without the sacred systematization as in India, and hence with the retention of the essentially secular hierarchy of early times. In the *Mahāvamsa* as in the *Jātakas*, one must be impressed by the paucity of evidence that social structure was in fact in accord with the Brahminic ideal, and the considerable body of evidence that social organization rested upon less schematic, although hierarchically graded divisions. Fick does not deny that castes existed in ancient India but rather that the formalized caste principles permeated the social order. The period in which the historical groundwork of the Sinhalese civilization was laid was one in which caste, as a crescent institution, was in its incipient, and one might almost say, doctrinal stages. The caste system of Ceylon which struck the first European observers was hence no degenerated form but an autonomous growth, under Indian influence it is true, which probably never knew the structuralizing power of the Brahmin. When the village Sinhalese of today contends that the Rajahs or the Kṣatriyas hold the highest rank, he is harking to tradition based on ancient authenticity. The most significant factor for an understanding of Sinhalese caste structure is not, as is commonly supposed, that the Sinhalese preserved Buddhism, but that the Sinhalese did not preserve the Brahmin. Brahmins as priests and royal advisers there unquestionably were in Ceylon, despite its nominal Buddhism, but Brahmins as a cohesive caste, wielding secular organizing power upon sacred grounds, there were not.<sup>8</sup>

The introduction of Indian social organization to Ceylon during the period reflected by the *Jātakas* is of deep significance for,

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Rao, *Economic and Political Conditions in Ancient India as described in the Jātakas* (72), 1911; and E. Senart, *Castes in India—The Facts and The System*, translated by Sir E. Denison Ross (88), 1930, and others had, of course, also indicated the historic unreality in Brahminic mythology.

<sup>8</sup> Fernão De Queyroz, writing in 1687, explicitly separates "Brahmanes" from "Chingalas" in his discussion. See *The Conquest (Temporal and Spiritual) of Ceylon*, translated by Father S. G. Perera (14), 1930. Chapter 12, Book I. He also notes the "four different classes of people . . . the first being that of the nobility, the second of the ministers of Pagodas and of their Religious, the third of Husbandmen and workmen, and the fourth Macuaz, Bedas and other low castes already mentioned . . ." p. 44, Book I.

unlike the Ceylon Tamils who arrived many centuries later, Sinhalese social organization was not crystallized in the Brahminic pattern.<sup>9</sup> The conversion of the Sinhalese to Buddhism by the first century B.C. is likewise a fact of profound significance. To many scholars the presence of caste in any form in a Buddhist society is a study in paradox. While it will subsequently be argued that Buddhism is not, and has not been, in opposition to a caste structure, it unquestionably weakened the supernatural and sacred sanctions of caste and replaced, in part, the Hindu priestly caste by a clergy less subject to exploitative incentives. The early conversion of the Sinhalese, whatever was the precise form of their previous religion, did not uproot or prevent the Hindu pantheon from acceptance by them. The predominance of Buddhism did, however, partially remove the Sinhalese from the power of Hinduism as a basis of secular organization.

The influences upon the establishment of caste in Ceylon thus far treated are negative rather than positive determinants. The founding of the Sinhalese nation in a period of much simpler social organization and the conversion of them to Buddhism are not elements explaining the growth of caste but rather an historic reconciliation of a caste system existing outside Brahminism and Hinduism. It is unlikely indeed if Buddhism offered the design upon which Sinhalese caste was built, and even more unlikely that the system was merely a logical unfolding of an early tribal, guild and village communalism.<sup>10</sup>

Two distinct historic processes, coming upon the transplanted, incipient caste concept, established the system of society as it was seen by the vanguard of western invaders. These processes were the growth of a political-economic structure encompassing "Sinhalese"

<sup>9</sup> No one should suppose that the Brahminical theory of caste, which is still frequently reproduced in texts as the actuality of caste, ever comprehended India. However, with the rise of Brahminical power and the subordination of the contending Royalty, the theoretical structure did in fact become an ideal pattern to which Indian organization tended to conform in varying degrees for different regional and tribal areas. Similar to continental South India, the Ceylon Tamils have few Brahmins, other than priests, few, if any, Ksatriyas and Vaiśyas, and these very concepts are scarcely used.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the social organization of the early Sinhalese and the peopling of the island, extremely little is known beyond what can be gleaned from the epics. See Sir James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical, and Topographical*, 2 volumes (98), 1859, Vol. I, Pt. III.



Ceylon in a *relatively* unified and culturally homogeneous society, and the intermittent addition of Indian rulers and tribal groups, which were absorbed and assimilated into the Sinhalese body politic. These processes not only produced castes but served to reinfuse caste concepts into the island people, generally in the pattern of South, rather than North, India.

The social history of Ceylon indicates an early and surprisingly persistent unity. That political unity was, over considerable periods, lost in the isolation of the courts and the regional lords, is to be expected. The over-all historical view, however, indicates recurrent periods of national oneness and persisting cultural integration between the Sinhalese provinces. This unity rested fundamentally in the theoretical acceptance of a common monarch and the organization of village society upon a feudal framework in which the ultimate ownership of land and the ultimate authority were vested in the king. Regional schisms between contesting royalties and lords, as well as the effects of militant Tamil invasions, marred the perfection of this pattern, but at no time resulted in the full growth of culturally and politically autonomous principalities. The most notable exceptions arose in the northern jungles, where in medieval times there developed an autonomous tribal state between Tamil and Sinhalese, and in the more recently settled southwest where the feudal structure was never fully developed and a considerable political autonomy obtained. Generally speaking, the integrated feudal order blossomed in what are today known as the Kandyan Provinces in contrast to the Low Country, *i.e.*, the interior rather than the southwestern and southern coastal fringes. Not only did this pervasive feudal system bring a relatively cohesive cultural and social system, it was a major institutional framework in which the caste hierarchy functioned. The feudal structuring of Sinhalese society was not exclusively secular. Buddhism and a persisting Hinduism followed, at the local level at least, a similar organization of its human and land resources, somewhat reminiscent of the medieval European parallels of monastic and secular tenures and vassalage. Through the feudalistic forces both of religious organization and the state, the peasant Sinhalese were brought into a service system in which birth status was the genesis of role and function.

There is today in Ceylon a popular myth that the Sinhalese, one and all, are the direct descendants of the Aryan-speaking peoples who founded their ancient civilization. This view is more nationalistic than historic, for the evidences regarding Sinhalese origins are very sparse. Almost certainly the Sinhalese are a composite people, not only of pre-Christian era invaders, but of migrating tribal groups, remnants of Tamil invasions, and others. Even among the Kandyans, occupying the interior of the island, it is reasonable to believe that intermittent tribal infusions were not lacking.<sup>11</sup> In the Low Country, evidence from many different angles points toward large and late settlements from South Indian sources. The differences existing today between caste manifestations of the interior and the coast are only in part the result of greater European influence upon the latter. That the coastal country was never as closely bound in the feudal monarchical system is significant, and equally so is the direct assimilation of tribal groups as castes in the Sinhalese society, taking place there even within the last several centuries.

The South Indian migrants did more than add to the number of Sinhalese castes. Unlike the early Sinhalese who reached the island in periods of incipient caste organization in North India, the South Indians came during eras of the institution's higher development on the subcontinent. Not only did tribal or caste groups settle in Ceylon, the rulers of the Sinhalese were at times imported from appropriate families in South India. With them came Hindu influences, and the caste concepts of South India reinforced and perhaps crystallized those principles of social organization given such scant mention in the early Sinhalese epic.

Throughout Ceylon the origins of caste differentiation tend to be interpreted popularly in terms of feudal services and occupations. It is highly probable, however, that many Sinhalese castes represent immigrant groups quite possibly having had predeter-

<sup>11</sup> Evidence for this view is given below in various contexts. For the Kandyan area, E. B. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census of 1911* (16), makes some relevant observations, and the Sinhalese epics indicate the introduction of Indian mercenaries and captives. Regarding the late movement of South Indians and others into the Low Country, there is cultural evidence of South Indian connections among several Low Country Sinhalese castes. Mr. Edmund Reimers has found documentary corroboration of large scale movements of mercenaries into Ceylon from the Coromandel and Malabar coasts in the mid-fifteenth century and later.



mined statuses, while others arose through division of labor and other schismatic processes within Sinhalese society. Thus specific coastal castes undoubtedly have unitary tribal or caste origins in India and were Sinhalese as bodies rather than as individuals, possibly with some retention of previous statuses and occupational roles. The evidence for this, presented in a subsequent chapter, is clearer in the coastal area than for strictly interior castes where origins have usually been lost in mists of time. Upon what basis the interior, or Kandyan, castes were originally differentiated no one can say, although the most common designation of a caste is one differentiating it by traditional, feudal role. In the sense that most castes, including those probably of late South Indian origin, claim a service role or occupation as their primary distinguishing feature, we might, in terms of Risley's early classificatory attempts, say that most Sinhalese castes are of "functional" type.<sup>12</sup> We know only that, among other differences, many Sinhalese bodies came in fact to be distinguished by unique ceremonial and/or functional services and occupations, but not by these solely. There is, however, no historical basis whatever for attributing status to the nature of the role, any more than there is for attributing the role to the status.

Various Sinhalese legends seek to explain the status of particular castes in terms of virtue and sinfulness. Thus one version of the *Janavamsa* (42) attributes a low position to the fishing people on the grounds that they sinned "in the taking of life without mercy." Such reasoning smacks of the rationalizations of a high caste Buddhist, applied as it is to what was probably a relatively late tribal movement of a South Indian people into Ceylon. A major burden of the *Janavamsa* is the promulgation of the Buddhist injunction against killing (*ahimsa*) and the, in fact, rather high caste fishermen, along with certain others, are made to fit the author's object lesson. On the other hand, it is sometimes claimed that the highest status came to the cultivators because they were least tempted to take life. (It seems clear that by this reasoning beggars and potters and washermen should stand even higher.) There is no evidence that religious impurity has been a factor in status determination among the Sinhalese nor that the castes differ sig-

<sup>12</sup> Sir Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (78), 1915, Chapter II.

nificantly in religious practices or institutions, except in so far as certain castes have more widely embraced Christianity. That religious ritual performance and ceremonial roles are functions of caste there is no doubt; these as well as secular service obligations are apparent in caste and subcaste titles, in traditions and in the contemporary society. They imply, however, no deeper cultural difference than those existing between, say, the sexton and the parson. It seems probable that the component groups of the Sinhalese people accepted generally the Indian role and status definitions, adapting and modifying them to fit new balances of power, and new religious, political and economic systems. Thus the Beravā or tom-tom beating caste, whatever its specific origin, retains something of the degraded status of the Hindu Paraiyan, with whom the caste name is shared in derivation, but becomes a functionary of the Buddhist temple. Whoever filled this role no one may say; that it was filled is obvious, and that it drew its status correlates from India is probable. Within the dominant caste, subcaste gradations occur in respect to the level of vassalage and type of agricultural service. The basis for such differentiation is a matter of conjecture; it is possibly less reasonable, however, that distinct castes have become a single articulated caste than that a single group became differentiated by differences in economic and political power. In the case of one Kandyan subcaste, the Gattara, the effect of royal decree separating specific high caste villages from their fellows quite possibly has valid historical foundation.

Few Sinhalese castes or subcastes appear to have been produced through migration or isolation from their main bodies. In several instances the nomenclature of a caste changes regionally, but a surprising number of castes bearing identical names and traditions are to be found throughout the island. In one or two instances, distant castes have been found maintaining similar origin stories and status positions but bearing dissimilar names and living in isolation from each other. The possibility here of fission is considerable, but such cases are rare. Since Sinhalese Ceylon is notably short of intracaste endogamous divisions and has in total no more than twenty to twenty-five groups claiming caste status, it is evident that no great proliferation could have occurred from any source. More reasonable is the hypothesis that within the Sinhalese



milieu there was more consolidation of tribal, caste, or perhaps subcaste, divisions than there was fission. It is certain that several of the earliest European observers noted subcastes, and even certain castes, which today appear to be nonexistent. It is a striking fact, in contrast with India, that in respect to only one caste, the depressed Rodī, does popular tradition associate its origin with the breach of endogamic practice. Brahminic theory regarding the fissiparous origins of a multiplicity of caste divisions has no significance in Ceylon in legend or probably in fact.

Whatever else may be clear, caste here did not arise out of either slavery or conquest. The incoming Sinhalese met a primitive people whom they exploited but did not subordinate as a caste group.<sup>13</sup> In part the aborigines were amalgamated with the Sinhalese and in part they withdrew to the remote jungles, maintaining their primitive life and culture apart from the civilizing invaders. In most Sinhalese traditions the putative descendants of the aborigines, the Vāddās, are viewed as a subgroup of the highest caste. Of slavery in ancient Ceylon, and through most of the colonial period, there is ample evidence, but this was not a product of conquest, except in so far as Indian slaves were introduced, and it was an institution coincidental to caste. The caste rights of slaves were kept, under Kandyan law, and although there developed a Kandyan subcaste nominally of slaves, their status in island society was quite high.<sup>14</sup>

In view of the unique Sinhalese background, it is not surprising that neither the structure nor the system of caste developed in replica of the Indian subcontinent or even of any of its regions. Sinhalese caste was conditioned by Buddhism and by a feudalism which was undoubtedly assimilative of diverse tribal elements.

In contrast to India, Sinhalese castes can seldom be confused with tribes. The only points at which such conceptual overlapping occurs are some areas in which Tamil peoples were not completely assimilated into the Sinhalese nation; even today these peoples can be classified as Tamils with as much exactitude as they may be viewed as Sinhalese.<sup>15</sup> The historic bases of the castes may fre-

<sup>13</sup> See Tennent (98). See also the *Mahāvamsa* regarding the aborigines (51), Vol. I, Chap. III. See also C. J. Seligman, and B. Z. Seligman, *The Veddas* (87), 1911.

<sup>14</sup> See Hayley (56), Chap. II, and pp. 101-102 below.

<sup>15</sup> See Chap. 6.

quently have been tribal, but unlike India there is today no great borderland between tribe and caste. While regions differ somewhat in the structure of their caste order, any day of tribal separateness is long gone, and indeed the existence of such organization, even in the Low Country where it probably occurred latest, is given bare implication in the accounts of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observers, when it is recalled that "race," "tribe" and "caste" were less precisely differentiated than in contemporary social science.

In India it is a subcaste which is the effective unit of communal life and the limit of endogamy for the exogamous sib, or other small unit. In Ceylon there is no development or retention of the subcaste, or caste within caste, in any sense comparable with that found in India, although intracaste family position is an important fact. The major expression of formal subcaste divisions apparently arose among the high caste Kandyan; the role distinctions between them were primarily on the basis of service to king or temple and lacked any locality basis of grouping as is commonly found in India.

Intracaste gradations of status are usually determined by the "goodness" of family name and achievement rather than by membership in a formally designated segment of the caste. While there is some historic and contemporary evidence of intracaste gradations approximating castes within castes, except for certain Kandyan areas, Ceylon is significantly lacking in the complex and variable formalized intracaste divisions so characteristic of the Indian continent. Having no highly developed subcaste, tribal or even sib units, it is understandable that caste organization in any formal sense comes to have little importance. There is no evidence of the existence of the caste, or more accurately, the locality caste *panchayat* outside isolated areas which came strongly under direct Tamil influence. While some castes had their local headman until modern times, even this has almost disappeared and may indeed, in some instances, have been a product of European organizers. Local members of an amorphous caste kindred form a strong control group, but there is no evidence today of anything approximating a corporate body or a tribal or caste gov-



ernment, outside the North-Central jungles where there is retained an approximation to the panchyat. In modern times, except where instigated or perpetuated by European exploiters, there probably has been no caste voice as such, nor machinery of caste business for the vast majority. Under the Sinhalese kings service castes were organized economically under high caste vassals, a strictly bureaucratic and "estate" phenomenon rather than caste. In addition, headmen of the caste were also appointed, but our knowledge of this is vague.<sup>16</sup> The caste is seldom a unit of formal organization but it is usually a boundary line of communal life.

As is to be inferred from the assimilative powers of the Sinhalese, cultural differences between the castes are today relatively insignificant. Nor do the early European observers indicate many striking contrasts. Caste-linked skills and prerogatives and symbolic expressions of status were manifest as were some other traits, but the fundamental diversity exemplified in any Indian region finds no counterpart in recent Ceylon. Today there is only one very small caste, the lowest, which is significantly differentiated culturally and, also unlike others, possesses remnants of a system of internal organization on a familial basis. Even the intercaste organization bonds which are known in South India as the "left" and "right hand" castes are completely lacking. Although certain low castes use kinship terms in reference to others of approximately equal status, there is no indication of intercaste affiliations for ceremonial, conflict, or other purposes. Any tendency for lower castes to view themselves in opposition to the highest caste is undoubtedly a very modern feature and part of the contemporary transition, entirely without parallel to the status-crossing South Indian division.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most notable feature of Sinhalese stratification, in contrast with the Indian, is the absence of "untouchables" in the

<sup>16</sup> Sir John D'Oyly, *A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom* (18), 1929, pp. 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> There is, however, an obscure passage in Francois Valentyn, *Keurlyke Beschryving van Choromandel, Pegu, Arrakan, Bengale, Mocha . . . Ceylon*, in a section entitled "Naamen Der Inlandsche Bedienden Inde Dorpen op Ceylon," (104), 1726, which might be interpreted as evidence of intercaste status-crossing alliance. Valentyn specifies for one Low Country caste those who would and would not eat at their festivals. All of those specified were of distinctly inferior status to the caste under discussion. See also Chap. 3, footnote 4.

Hindu sense. In Buddhism no man is "unclean" in the sacred meaning of the concept. While there is an "outcaste untouchable" group, its untouchability rests more in the secular tabu than in religious proscription. The absence of the Hindu concept has rendered the Sinhalese caste system mild and humanitarian when judged by Indian standards.

That Sinhalese caste has little in common structurally with the theoretical Brahminic order is already clear, but for that matter the resemblance of Indian caste to that construct is nowhere close, and in South India particularly, very slight indeed.<sup>18</sup> Structurally, the Sinhalese is close to the South Indian and, in fact, reproduces some South Indian castes with some rough approximation of their status in India, without, it is true, the "exterior" castes, the tribes, and dual organization of castes. In South India as in Ceylon, castes which are nominally Sudra are both numerous and of high status. Recognition of the South Indian structure makes less surprising the fact that among Sinhalese the highest caste is also the largest. These structural similarities or, more accurately, borrowings and transplantations from South India, are not reflected in a comparable rigidity in caste strictures and tabus. The very mildness of the Sinhalese tabus leads many contemporary Ceylonese to view the system as crumbling and of little practical significance today. There is, however, some doubt as to whether the Sinhalese have ever known the plethora of cultural differences, injunctions, tabus, and discriminations which have been the most sensational parts of the Hindu social organization.

If the Sinhalese caste system is in fact a unique variant upon the Indian theme, what then are its chief features in concept, structure and functioning? Is it "caste" at all, or is this concept to be applied in that loose, analogical manner which appeals to some students of American race relations? The answers to these questions depend simply upon what conception one has of "caste" and what the essential system is that is found in Ceylon. These

<sup>18</sup> This is evident from any of the inductive studies of Indian caste structures and has been recognized in many general treatises on the Indian scene. See particularly Rev. M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, 3 Vols. (89), 1881; Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 Vols. (101), 1909; Abbe J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, 3rd edition (19), 1906.



issues are especially pertinent in view of the tendency of some able scholars to doubt if caste, in the sense of the Indian concept, is to be found apart from Hinduism and the Brahmin.<sup>19</sup>

Application of the caste concept to the social organization of Ceylon does not rest on any of those strained definitions which encompass the phenomena of interracial segregation, "closed classes" and other manifestations of privilege on the basis of birth status, supported by endogamy. Cox<sup>20</sup> has performed a useful service in distinguishing certain of these systems of social relationship from that organization of society which seemingly arose nowhere but in the Indian East. The Sinhalese system offers a particularly interesting variation within the Indian pattern because of its simplicity, its over-all consistency, and its growth apart from integrally important supporting institutions on the continent itself.

That there is no satisfactory definition of caste, or of a caste, is due to the actual variety of social organization systems found within the Hindu-Indian milieu. Any precise definition will inevitably fail to conform to some manifestations of the Indian structure and again will imply characteristics which in specific instances are not present. There is further the understandable but abortive tendency to perceive the actual from the arbitrary vantage point of Brahminical doctrine. The difficulties of definition have been best overcome by scholars like Ghurye who have treated caste as a web of organizational traits and complexes, tabus and injunctions, describing the range of their definitions and the generality of their application.<sup>21</sup> The narrower range of organizational variation in Ceylon, and the fundamental cultural unity of the people, renders this kind of descriptive definition of the Sinhalese system comparatively easy. It must, however, be recognized that such a core précis fails completely to indicate the disorganizing effects of urban and western influences, and similarly fails to place caste in its

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Max Weber's magnificent essay on the role of the Brahmin (106).

<sup>20</sup> Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (10), 1948. Even more relevant for the present study is Sorokin's analytical discrimination between estates and castes. See his *Society, Culture and Personality, Their Structure and Dynamics* (92), 1947, Part IV.

<sup>21</sup> G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (30), 1932.

proper perspective among alternate and complementary status systems operating throughout the society. Caste is only one form of social organization in a society, and more precisely, it is only one form of social stratification. This is as true in India as in Ceylon.

If definition we must have, the caste system may be conceived as a social organization structure functioning through hierarchical birth status groups, they, or their subunits, being communalistic<sup>22</sup> 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. Both the structure and the functional or role content are subject to almost infinite variation within the range of Indian influence.

Sinhalese caste structure is composed of communal groups standing in some hierarchical position in reference to at least some others. These groups, the castes and less frequently subcastes, define the boundaries of the individual's friendly, egalitarian, and approaching behavior. Hierarchical position of a caste tends, in Ceylon, to be in inverse relationship to the numerical size, the highest caste including perhaps one-half of the population. There is virtually no formal organization either of the caste, the subcaste, or the system of caste, although to some extent they were formerly partially organized under a feudal bureaucracy. Neither hypogamy nor hypergamy are approved between castes or subcastes, and there is a preference for cross-cousin marriage. Even among the urban sophisticates caste endogamy is almost rigidly retained. Certain of the castes show strong tendencies toward regional concentration, but many are distributed throughout all regions. Apart from caste-linked roles, cultural differences are slight to nonexistent. The structural origins of the castes are mixed but many are probably

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps nowhere outside Indian Asia is the term "community" so distinct from the locality connotation of western lay and professional parlance. In Ceylon "community" is a synonym for ethnic group and quasi-racial and nationalistic minorities. It is also a euphemism for caste and in this use has accurate connotations of solidarity and common life. It includes common interests, common life, and common blood. "Communalism" is the spirit, and the more common form, of the word, signifying that in-group attitudes are strong and that the interests of the body politic are made subservient to the loyalties of "community."



outgrowths of Indian caste, tribal and guild status groups re-orientated in the Sinhalese milieu.

Functionally the Sinhalese castes have been in the past, and to some extent are in the present, differentiated by occupational or ceremonial responsibilities, or both, frequently amounting to monopolies. Caste responsibilities or prerogatives or obligations tend to be performed by members of a lower caste toward a higher or to the temple and, in earlier times, the king. Their performance entails reciprocal action on the part of the higher caste where a contractual economy is lacking. Former service to the king, the feudal lord, or the temple, whether occupational or ceremonial, is usually viewed as the chief functional characteristic of a caste, and in many instances is preserved today in tradition and in the caste name, and in some actual behavior. The manifestations of social distance in overt conduct vary in a rough relationship to the disparity in status between the persons. Although physical segregation in village residence is common, tabus of caste avoidance seldom apply to the whole gamut of human relationships, and are most pronounced in situations involving home, family, and food. Legal disabilities formerly associated with caste are abolished, but extralegal disabilities persist, overtly as in certain temple functions, covertly as in prejudiced appointments to office. Symbols of social distance vary widely by region, but range from differential expressions in salutation to proscription of articles of clothing and ornament, and insistence upon worshipful behavior toward the high caste.

From this terse summary description, it may be incomprehensible that visitors to Ceylon can remain for months in total ignorance of caste among the Sinhalese. In the single metropolis of Colombo, it would be indeed easy to assume that caste had no meaning, for here nearly all overt discriminations and symbols of status are gone. But in the countryside as well caste is not always obvious; untouchability, the rigmaroles of avoidance, the food tabus, and other visible aspects of caste in India are less highly developed and less apparent. To use W. I. Thomas' concept, "the perseverative pattern" was notably retarded in the Sinhalese milieu and in addition to this the culture of the Sinhalese is throughout

less rigidly and more loosely structured than for the Hindu.<sup>23</sup> And, of course, most interaction is between caste equals. Caste in Ceylon today has seldom the obvious inhumanities and degradations commonly associated with such a system of human relations. Many functional and even some structural features of caste have disintegrated in the urban environment, but not as yet the demands for caste endogamy and hence certain significant complexes of associated attitudes. The unobtrusiveness of caste is still further enhanced by growing disparities between birth status and economic position, a condition which in some respects tends to disintegrate and replace the old order, but which in part overlays the caste hierarchy with a second and simply different status system.

The generally quiescent character of caste in Ceylon is exaggerated by urbanites in general, and by government policy in particular. The common tendency of the westernized sophisticate to talk as if caste did not exist, or as if it were a dusty skeleton in the national cupboard, can be misleading. Standards of good taste render caste topics tabu in the mixed classes of urban society, however minutely the genealogies will be scrutinized at the time of approaching marriage, or even occasionally pending an intimate social occasion. Caste does matter, but its mattering is not something one displays publicly. Government policy reflects somewhat similar standards by supporting strongly the position that caste is to be treated as if it were nonexistent. The ultimate effect of these personal and official attitudes is a conspiracy of silence implying caste disintegration in a period which may more accurately be described as one of caste transition.

<sup>23</sup> See W. I. Thomas, *Primitive Behavior: An Introduction to the Social Sciences* (1909), 1937.

In regard to the "loose structuring" of Sinhalese society and culture, most of what Embree says of Thailand would apply here as well. See John F. Embree, "Thailand: A Loosely Structured Social System," *American Anthropologist* (20), April-June, 1950.



# *Part One:*

INSTITUTIONAL AND HISTORICAL  
BACKGROUNDS





## ❖❖❖❖ 2

### THE INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND:

#### *Familism, Buddhism and Feudalism*

##### FAMILISM

Caste as a form of social organization is irrevocably bound and entwined with the broader behavior systems of family, religion, economy. So integrated in these institutions is caste that students have at one time or another sought to find its origins in each of them. Abstractly, caste can be viewed as a distinct institution, concretely, it is firmly integrated in the institutional milieu, in Ceylon no less than in India.

Sinhalese concepts of the family and marriage today provide the most substantial bulwarks for the preservation of caste structure. The solidarity of the kin as a unit of action and of loyalty, the concepts of family honor and good name, the injunctions and customs of marriage all lead to the maintenance of caste integrity, caste communalism, and to some extent caste hierarchy. This is not to say, as did Senart, that the historical roots of caste are in an ancient "Aryan" family system, but it is to support him in so far as he found the strong family order integrally related to, and stimulative to, the caste system.<sup>1</sup> Sinhalese caste could not survive in an atmosphere of family individuation and emphasis upon the marital companionate over familial institutions. Strong family systems are found independent of caste, but caste in Ceylon could not survive without familism.

Like all other social aspects of Sinhalese history, the ancient

<sup>1</sup> Senart (88), Pt. III.

family and kinship systems are matters of speculation or of inferences drawn from relatively recent sources. Fortunately it is the impact of traditional concepts upon modern life which concerns us more than the purely historical, and this is clearly evident in modern times.

The largest quasi-kinship unit among the Sinhalese is the *Gē*, or patrilineal House.<sup>2</sup> It is a quasi-kinship unit in that persons bearing the distinctive *Gē* name do not always recognize, or profess, actual kinship. As Hayley observed earlier in this century, "... the gens tends to diminish in size for practical purposes, until the remoter gentile kinship of each family have little more than the name in common. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Although the *Gē* is not *per se* a social group, it is a body which may have distinctive status within the caste. Among the dominant caste, *Gē* names frequently include symbols of ancient family honors as well as place of origin and, apparently, totemic references. Many of them are well known as aristocratic lineages throughout the island. More, however, are undistinguished either positively or negatively in respect to status connotations. In some localities they fall into two or three status categories, only in Kandyan areas achieving formal subcaste character. For the lower castes the name usually includes some indication of caste position or role, unless it has been modified to an honorific title or even arbitrarily modified to render caste position uninterpretable. Lineal status gradations within the caste are less pronounced among the lower castes than for the highest. At the present time there is a strong tendency for *Gē* status to be counteracted and influenced by economic position. Nonetheless a family of high blood line would hesitate to make an alliance with one of equal caste but of lower name. A *Locugē* (Great House) father would be most reluctant to marry his son into some undistinctive *Gē*, but the power of dowry can, and not infrequently does, mix reluctance with enthusiasm. In no sense are the *Gē* generally to be viewed as subcastes. They are lines, some of which possess or claim distinctive status.

<sup>2</sup> Sinhalese descent is normally patrilineal and residence patrilocal, but the converse systems are recognized although less frequently practiced. See further Hayley (36), Pt. IV.

<sup>3</sup> (36) p. 162.

These gradations are often no sharper than those existing between "Cabots" or "Lodges" and "Maloneys" or "Doakes." However, this appears in Kandyan areas associated with clear-cut subcaste membership. The *Gē* is, in effect, the status bearing body within the caste. Typically its name is indicative of caste, and within the caste it is associated, sometimes vaguely, sometimes sharply, with blood prestige level. Actually the *Gē* has more symbolic significance for intracaste status differences than for caste integrity as such. Usually it is the status level within the caste which is "endogamous" rather than the caste itself. This phenomenon, if more formalized with clearly defined levels, might indeed be considered the caste within caste, but in practice the boundaries of the levels are indistinct and the community attitude of one marrying outside the level is entirely different from that toward one marrying outside the caste. The former generates gossip, the latter sanctions. Where marriage is contemplated the test of *Gē* status suitability is invariably applied, even though it may be subordinated to other considerations. Sawers described this test of suitability as being first of all whether or not the families had previously intermarried.<sup>4</sup> In lieu of known interfamily alliances in the past a most scrupulous investigation is made of the genealogical position of the proposed party. There is a strong tendency for marriage partners to come from closely adjacent villages, or from the same village, and hence lineages are usually well known. Considerable skepticism is shown by villagers over marriage proposals coming from distant localities, partly because of preferential obligations to previously related families nearby, but also because of the greater possibility of acquiring an in-law of unknown rank; or perhaps, caste. Although these gradations and their preservation do not constitute true subcaste differentiation, the preservation of a lineal status concept is part of woof woven upon the warp of caste. Both of these related phenomena bespeak the value of blood status apart from achievement, and the value of the *Gē* is largely that of protecting the concept of birth status upon which it, as well as caste, depends.

The diminution of the *Gē* as a social group has been associated more with the enhanced significance of a local kindred than with the emancipation of the conjugal unit from the community of kin.

<sup>4</sup> In Hayley (36), p. 186.



The Gē forms no boundary of social life, but the multi-Gē local kindred is an effective social unit. Wholly unorganized, it is a social world surrounding the household and entering into its life. The lines of closest social intercourse in the form of daily association and bonds of loyalty include those close kindred on either side of the house who are physically adjacent. In practice this tends more frequently to conform with the husband's kin group than the wife's, since residence is usually patrilocal. However, since marriages are normally between either local village persons or those of contiguous villages, the household family is close, physically and socially, to the parental homes on each side and with the uncles and cousins as well. The great week of family celebration, Sinhalese New Year, is marked by the joint attendance of the household family at the homes of the kindred. There is no split between husband and wife in social affiliations. Lines have truly been united in marriage and the unification is seen in the integration of the marriage unit with the kindred, *i.e.*, both sides of the house. Usually the kindred are also neighbors and frequently the entire village is a single kindred differentiated only by the nearer degrees of relationship between some households than between others. Within the local area there is a persistent tendency for the caste group to conform with the kindred, the outer boundaries of each tending to become identical. In practice the more fundamental loyalties and closest associations are within households in the first or second degree of relationship on either or both sides.

In a sense inadvertently, the strong family system here supports the integrity of the caste and its solidarity as a communal group. Social differentiation in group life conforms first of all to the lines of kindreds. In so far as the family, conjugal and consanguinal, covers the life of the individual, it covers him with a blanket which is absolutely caste exclusive. Kinship as a group-making factor keeps the individual within his caste not by negative injunction but by positive provision. And leaving the kindred, most of those of common caste in the village are either potential relatives or actual ones. The high value and the solidarity attached to kinship means that the household family has minimum opportunity or reason for stepping across caste lines in its intimate daily affairs. Special interests which might cut through caste lines in group

formation are few in the villages and, except for the elites, even in the city. The world of the individual is very largely within the three associated areas of kin, neighborhood and caste. The boundaries of each do not correspond, but neighborhood always includes kin, and caste includes both. There is nothing in this to support caste hierarchy, but kinship solidarity effectively inhibits intercaste joint participation.

One of the most fundamental characteristics, and an indispensable one, of caste is its restrictions upon marriage. Here the marital kinship structure merges so with caste that the institutions are actually inseparable. Although we may speak of the endogamy of castes, endogamy is a concept of families and it is the family which enforces this stricture and is protected by it. Among the many requirements and conventions of marriage, caste appropriateness is only one, but it is no isolated trait. The marriage system of the Sinhalese systematically prevents marriage outside the caste and, together with concepts of family honor, is part of the very substance of caste. The subordination of marriage to the family institution is vital for the maintenance of caste integrity, for family integrity is inevitably defined in caste and birth status terms. In many peasant societies, marriage is a sacrament of families rather than of individuals and God. In Ceylon, the moral rightness of this traditional concept is questioned only by an urban Bohemian elite and by the utterly disorganized slum dweller. The rights of the kin in the determination of marriage, its time, place, and personnel, is one of the most inviolable of mores. Sawers, in the nineteenth century, described the requirements of a "regular marriage" as being: the consent of the respective heads of the families, the sanction of relatives to the third or fourth degree, and that the parties be of identical caste and of equal rank within caste.<sup>5</sup> These are essentially valid today except that more remote kin have little direct voice and equality of rank within caste is less rigidly maintained.

Personal congeniality, romantic attachment or other individualistic elements valued in the companionate marriage of the West are simply outside the concept of what is marriage. If personal preferences are expressed, the kin may take them into ac-

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Hayley (96), p. 186; also in D'Oyly (18).



count, although more often than not the parties concerned, like their elders, do not visualize the marriage union in terms of personal preferences. In any case the sentiments of the individual, where apparent, are wholly subordinated to the familial institutional requirements of status appropriateness. In this union of families through marriage the possibility of indiscriminate youthful passion is rendered harmless. Passionate feelings between youth of opposite sex may readily be found and, as might be expected, sex attraction does not invariably conform neatly to boundaries of caste. Sex relations, however, are one thing and marriage quite another. In marriage the individual is removed from any temptation to marry by personalized criteria which could be irrelevant to family honor. Family honor is assured in marriage, for it is the family which makes the marriage, and on grounds consistent with family integrity, one very important element in which is caste.

There is no doubt a tendency for marriage to be hypergamic. Rarely does a family marry a daughter beneath her rank, but more commonly the daughter is used as a device of status gleaning. In modern times financial position translated through the dowry can bridge the gap between inferior *Gē* and superior ones. It might be thought that with this deterioration of status criteria there would be a comparable tendency to use the dowry as an instrument of intercaste hypergamic union. No such trend or tendency is evident. In the infrequent instances of intercaste marriage there is no dowry: for where there is no family there is no dowry, and in intercaste union the family does not function. Sinhalese fathers of high caste are no doubt as mercenary as any peasants who practice dowry, but the suggestion to even the most mercenary that caste be traded for wealth is shocking. Rank, occupational prestige, or "good name" may be crudely bartered, but caste never. The vigor of this conviction throughout rural Ceylon is so strong that it might be compared to the abhorrence of incest. It is truly as much a part of the family system as is the incest tabu.

As if further to support caste integrity, preferential marriage is also practiced. Although the traditional preferential right of the cross cousin is universally recognized, it is today frequently disregarded or overcome. Where the custom remains strong it removes

even from the parents the responsibility of deciding upon a partner; caste and lineage are automatically safeguarded.<sup>6</sup>

Any practice which supports the arranged marriage pattern is also in support of caste, for the breakdown of caste integrity will inevitably come, if it comes, through individuation in marriage concepts. The arranged marriage is firmly entrenched and integrated with the customs and values of the village. Preferential marriage is supported by a high regard for kindred solidarity. The father of an eligible young man does not unthinkingly spurn his kin by wanton disregard of their appropriate daughters. The rights of the parents and family elders to dictate the terms of marriage are supported in the esteem and power of the parent. In the Kandyan Provinces this esteem is still ritualized in leave-taking and other ceremonies. In the conventions of adolescence the segregation of persons eligible to marry is strictly enforced—needless to say, covert glances are passed. Although the Sinhalese lack the Muslim practice of purdah, or the seclusion current among Tamils, young men and women are zealously prevented from participating in personalized situations with those of opposite sex. Even in urban localities and among the elite, the "date" is virtually unknown. Only in the highly urbanized atmosphere of the University of Ceylon is close heterosexual contact possible except as clandestine meetings. The adolescent is given scant opportunity to form attachments which might be in opposition to parental desires. The system is internally consistent and self-supporting.

In practically every aspect of family life, caste integrity is supported and it is in reference to the home and family that caste strictures and symbols are most clearly evident. Avoidance and symbols of social distance between the castes are at their maximum in affairs affecting the home. The peasant may chat on terms of seeming equality with another in the village lane, but matter of factly offer him the symbolic stool at his home. At ceremonial functions pertaining to the kin, caste restrictions are invariably evident.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that in some localities it is believed that cross-cousin preference has sacred sanctioning. Several villagers have pointed out to the writer that the custom was established by the Buddha and hence is sacred to them. It might be noted here that the Gē is not strictly exogamous and no feeling is attached to marriage between those having the same Gē name. Marriage between parallel cousins is usually tabu.



The introduction of a guest unknown to any of the kin at a wedding brings forth immediate questions as to his caste: questions which in nonfamilial situations would be considered gratuitous. Men of many castes may eat together in the fields, but never in the households. The hard core of caste organization is found in the concepts of honor and exclusiveness as defined and enforced by the household and the kin. The family is indeed so intertwined with caste there is small wonder that the brilliant Senart sought the origins of one in the other. The fact of their integration among the Sinhalese will be evident in nearly every part of the subsequent discussions.

### BUDDHISM

For India there can be no understanding of caste apart from the Hindu law and metaphysics in which it is meshed and supported. For Ceylon caste must be understood in its integration with two distinct institutional systems, Hīnayāna Buddhism and feudalism. Recognizing the original and continuing impact of Hindu thought upon Ceylon, the juxtaposition of caste with an even nominal acceptance of Buddhism appears, at first glance, to pose a total paradox. In all the world, the Sinhalese are the only Buddhists to have nurtured such a system of social organization.<sup>7</sup> Significantly enough, one would have great difficulty in finding a Sinhalese today willing to defend the caste structure on the basis of religious precept or sacred philosophy. Is it possible that Sinhalese society has survived through two thousand years of gross disparity between an ethico-philosophic-religious system and the concrete blueprints of its actual social organization?

In modern times the popular Sinhalese interpretation of the Buddha's position in respect to caste is illustrated by a folk tale of unknown antiquity.<sup>8</sup> The king, in this tale, suffered from a growth

<sup>7</sup> J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India, Its Nature, Function, and Origins* (40), 1946, Chap. IX, describes some semblances of caste in Burma, but similarly analogous are elements in the Theodosian Code, Fiji, and elsewhere and, as Hutton recognizes, do not constitute caste systems. Hutton's mention of caste in Ceylon, p. 120, based entirely upon Hocart (38), is misleading and fragmentary, as is Hocart's original treatment.

<sup>8</sup> *Orientalist*, Vol. IV, pp. 30-31 (61). Quoted in E. B. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census of 1921* (16), pp. 218-219.

of three hairs on his tongue. This extremely annoying condition, he learned, could be dispelled only if he would eat rice with an outcaste. Forthwith the king went out to seek the abhorred Roḍiyās. Finding a Roḍi colony he ate with them, but to no avail. The hairs remained as before. Homeward bound, the king by accident fell in with a high caste family of evil character. When he remonstrated with them over their cruel behavior, one of them, not knowing his identity, rudely thrust a handful of boiled rice into his mouth. The hairs immediately vanished from his tongue. Only then did the king remember the words of the Buddha, "No man is by birth an outcaste and by deeds is one a Brahmin." As significant as the moral of this tale is the fact that "only then" did the king remember.

Indeed the Buddha seems to have made quite clear his judgment of caste, time and again in various texts of great antiquity. The *Sutta-Nipāta*, one of the old anthologies of Buddhism, offers a clear source for the king's tardy recollections.<sup>9</sup>

"And the Master spake thus:

"The evil angry man  
Man of ill-will and cant  
Deceitful base in view  
Know him as outcast vile!

and later:

"Yet there are brahmans born,  
In Ved-mantras versed,  
Who oft-times may be seen  
Amid their evil deeds:  
Theirs is disgrace here now,  
Gone hence the Ill-bourn theirs;  
By birth they're not debarred  
From Ill-bourn or disgrace!  
No outcast is by birth,  
No brahman is by birth:  
By deeds an outcast he,  
By deeds a brahman he!" "

<sup>9</sup> From *Woven Cadences of Early Buddhists*, translated by E. H. Hare (111), 1944. Selections from "The Outcast Man," pp. 19-23.



That sentiments like these are not torn from context is demonstrated by the frequent and recurring theme in many texts. Brahminic pretensions and hypocrisy were indeed favorite targets for the Buddha in his denunciation of sinful or unmeritorious behavior. There is further the seeming incongruity between the humanitarian ethics preached by the Buddha and the actuality of harshness in social organization. No one can deny the depth of tolerance in Buddhist teaching; its essential kindliness and, as we have seen, the repudiation of caste or social status as a factor in attainment of the Way. The ultimate *Nibbāna* is no prerogative of secular class or caste; it is the fulfillment of lives in accord with the noble truths and precepts. If seemingly final evidence for the castelessness of Buddhism is required, we have the clear textual demonstration that the priesthood (*Sangha*) was intended as no monopoly of the high caste, and low and perhaps even "untouchables" were admissible.<sup>10</sup>

Informed Buddhists of the laity and clergy alike repudiate sacred foundations for the caste hierarchy. Nor will an ignorant villager, even under the most stringent questioning, admit religious or preceptual basis for the organization of the society into castes. The intelligentsia today will relate caste purely to secular foundations, usually noting that such a system is contrary to the Buddha's teaching, and in this context deplore this departure from both the spirit and teachings of the religion. The less sophisticated may not deplore caste organization, but find it religiously irrelevant. Thus an intelligent villager responds, "Caste is not of the Buddha, it is of the kings." Unlike his educated fellow he is not confronted with the necessity of conventionalizing religious views and secular practices. At no intellectual level do Sinhalese believe that Buddhism supports caste, and in general western observers have considered the caste system as existing in opposition to religious principles.<sup>11</sup> The conclusion is one of a social system too deeply rooted to be broken by Buddhism and its teachers.

Although reference to textual precepts and examples are evidential regarding Buddhism's relation to the secular order, they

<sup>10</sup> See Fick (23), p. 321; and Bimala Churn Law, *India as Described in Early Texts of Buddhism and Jainism* (46), 1941.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Tennent (98), Vol. II, p. 157.

scarcely provide demonstrable proof. Ancient texts read in the light of current value systems offer conclusions which may be more satisfying than analytically helpful. Buddhism's relationship to caste depends ultimately on the consistency between its central principles and caste organization, and on the mode in which these principles have been interpreted, not only in modern times but in earlier periods. Is the ideology of Buddhism anticaste and has the institutional structure of Buddhism been inconsistent with it?

It is a singular fact that only in the context of caste has the Buddha's position been interpreted as that of a revolutionary. That the Buddha was a reformer of men's lives there is no doubt, but that the Buddha, or the Buddhist texts, sought such reformation through any system of society is utterly without foundation either in principle or precept. The apparent revolutionary implications of the *Sutta-Nipāta* are capable of quite different interpretation. Fick (23) has extensively developed the view that such passages illustrate the early Buddhist conviction that caste has nothing to do with spiritual attainment, nor indeed with "success" in life.<sup>12</sup> Wrongdoing and its spiritual effects are as immutable for the high as for the low caste. As Fick points out, the Buddhist writers cared not in the least to contradict caste theory as such; they simply tried to demonstrate that caste has no value for the attainment of Nibbāna. The fundamental acceptance of a cast structure by the early Buddhists has ample evidence in words attributed to the Buddha himself, and indeed in his preference for Kṣatriya birth, which at this period was probably in the dominant stratum. Ghurye, as well as Law and Fick, views the movements of Jainism and Buddhism as vehicles for asserting the superiority of the Kṣatriyas over the Brahmins.<sup>13</sup> The careful researches of both Fick and Law in the early texts<sup>14</sup> confirm the probability that Buddhism had little adverse effect upon Indian caste structure which in the period of Buddhist dominance was in formative stages. There is considerable evidence that the social thought of Buddhism held no conflict with caste and that its widespread acceptance had

<sup>12</sup> Ghurye (30), pp. 64-67, has followed Fick in his analysis of the influence of the Buddhist period in India upon the Indian caste system.

<sup>13</sup> Ghurye (30), pp. 64-67. See also Law (46), Chapters III and IV.

<sup>14</sup> Law (46), Chapter III.



no retarding influence upon caste development. The Buddhist "revolt" was against corrupt Brahminism, not caste.

The acceptance of a social system by a religious movement is not of course the same in its effects as an ideological integration with it. Buddhism not only accepted; through its most central principle, *kamma*, it accepted ideological roots for the established order of social hierarchy.

Take the case of anyone—man or woman—who being hard and arrogant, refuses salutations to one who ought to be saluted, does not rise for one who should be so received, does not give up his seat or the road to one more worthy, shows no respect, deference, honour or worship to those who should be shown it. Such deeds, if persisted in of deliberate choice, either bring that person at death to misery and woe in purgatory; or, if his rebirth is again among mankind, then, whatever station he is reborn into, he is of low and unimportant family. Such arrogant courses tend to lowliness here. But if a person is void of arrogance and shows all due regard to those who deserve it, his destiny is either bliss in heaven or high family among men. Such deference tends to importance of family here. . . .<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to believe that in a period of birth hierarchy such emphasis upon the status of family is without direct caste connotation. Man's earthly life is a necessary consequence of his *kamma*, his former deeds. Earthly position and birth status are products of an immutable law standing at the very core of Buddhist metaphysics. The new thought provided in some respects a rationalization of the system and in others a positive force working toward its preservation and development.

Not only was rising Buddhism quite possibly part of the struggle for power between Kṣatriyas and the Brahmins, but the reformist movement fought the Brahmins on grounds of their caste impurity as well as on their moral and spiritual corruption. Law observes that the Jains and Buddhists contended for the Kṣatriyas precedence over the Brahmins on precisely the latter's own ground, *i.e.*, purity of birth through seven generations.<sup>16</sup> Buddhists fully accepted the association of blood purity and familial prestige, and

<sup>15</sup> *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated from the Pali of the Majjhima Nikaya by Lord Chalmers (25). Vol. II, 1927. Selection from Cula-Kamma-Vibhanga-Sutta, pp. 268-272.

<sup>16</sup> Law (16), p. 148.

praised Brahmins who married from their own stratum.<sup>17</sup> Also, in Law's judgment, the Buddha's strong voice against cow-killing and beef-eating contributed to social orthodoxy.

As truly as for him who through previous sins spends a lifetime as a lower beast, one born low in caste must fulfill his kamma through a lifetime of that status. The only deviation from this law appears in that human prerogative, the choice of an ascetic, priestly life which in theory is casteless. Herein man is no longer man in the social and mundane sense, for as an ascetic he conquers human passion and the desire of earthly goods and pleasures. In the law of kamma an escape from caste is by renunciation of society and hence by a release from kamma in the attainment of Nibbāna. From the modern conservative villager one may indeed hear that "caste is of the kings, not of the Buddha," but in response to the query, "Why were you born in this caste?" there is but one answer, and that is kamma, the Buddhist law of causation.

Buddhism's emancipation from Hindu restrictions upon who may tread the path of Nibbāna rendered caste largely irrelevant from the point of view of spiritual attainment. Correspondingly it relieved society of the sacredly founded tabus of pollution so prominent in India. Nor has there been in Buddhist thought any religiously self-conscious proliferation of expressions of obsequiousness as techniques for the achievement of merit. Standards of respectfulness to superiors, except in reference to the Sangha (priesthood), have been matters of secular definition. While Buddhist ideology could and did support the caste concept, Buddhism in fact became no driving force building and elaborating the structure as a sacred institution. It rationalized rather than promoted caste in its concept of kamma.<sup>18</sup> By opening the Way to any caste, particularly through a casteless priesthood, Buddhism lost the dynamics of Brahminism.

Notwithstanding actual deflections, the Buddhist priesthood was founded as a casteless body of ascetics and the ascetic ideal has

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211. Law, despite his contrary evidence, clings to the conventional view that Buddhism was fundamentally anticast.

<sup>18</sup> Actually, as Hutton (40), p. 110, observes, while *kamma* even in Hindu definition supports caste, it was not essential for its origins and was probably grafted onto the system. The more important fact is that in Hinduism caste observances are moral law, a condition not developed by the Buddhists.



been preserved. Unremitting pursuit of the Way required that the aspiring Bhikkhu give up, as did the Buddha before him, the secular distractions of property, family, and comforts. Theoretically, if not in practice, the vows of the priest wiped clean all disability of caste and the measurement of the Bhikkhu rested wholly upon spiritual piety and attainment. The most critical factor in the secularization of Sinhalese caste was in the separation of priestliness and caste.

The Bhikkhu holds in society a pre-eminence surpassed in the functionaries of no great world religion other than Hinduism. The reverence, homage, and worshipful salutations accorded him all are essentially similar to those accorded a highest caste by the lowest. While he is no arbiter between man and the supernatural in theory, folk practice has accorded him roles which savor strongly of this. His position is one of supreme respect and tremendous potential power. The Sangha, pledged to repudiate all things of sensuous pleasure, incapable by vows of acquiring either property or descendants, could not become a priestly caste nor could it gain materially through the exploitation of a power position. Violators of the vows of celibacy and of propertylessness could be, and in flagrant cases have been, disrobed. The very term "priesthood" is inappropriate; the Bhikkhu is more friar than priest, particularly in theory. Without a means to hereditary power, a priestly caste could not develop. Too, the Bhikkhu is by the tenets of Buddhism a man with whom to reason, not a spiritual authoritarian, and least of all a secular one.

The Buddhist society had no Brahminical helmsman and the Bhikkhu was not his counterpart. In secular relations, the Bhikkhu could at most insist upon the unfortunate kammatic consequences of behavior ill-suited to one's caste position. Except through malfeasance he was emancipated from personal or family gain in the retention of the system. That organized Buddhism accepted and utilized the caste structure is quite another issue; the essential mildness of Sinhalese caste is a product of the Brahmin's absence in Buddhism rather than the fact of Buddhism as an ideological, metaphysical, and ethical system. The keenest incentives for caste exploitation were denied the holy men of the Sinhalese.

Although, for obvious reasons, the Sangha did not become a

caste, it should not be supposed that Buddhism's support for a caste system remained on the level of subtle metaphysical principles and endogamic regard. The Sangha did in fact become an organization embodying and practicing caste principles, not merely in reflection of the secular order, but as an active agency in support of the established hierarchy. The forms taken by this support were two, the sectarian movement within the Sangha on caste lines, and the functional organization of temple services and lands upon the principles of caste. Principles of caste were exemplified in the priesthood, and the structure of caste was the mechanism of organizational perpetuation and power.

Whatever may have been the selectivity of priests during those centuries from the coming of Mahinda to Ceylon, and the advent of modern times, the eighteenth century knew the Sangha as a caste monopoly. During the reign of Kirti Sri Raja Singha there was a formal edict establishing the *Siyam Nikāya* (Siamese Sect) as a monopoly of the highest caste, *i.e.*, "cultivators."<sup>19</sup> In more modern times, it is interesting to note that this exclusiveness has been rationalized on the basis of the unlikelihood of cultivators being subject to the temptation to take life.<sup>20</sup> This period of colonial influences upon Ceylon was one of caste disquietude in the Low Country, and the priestly prerogatives of the cultivators were successfully challenged by a caste of rising power, the "cinnamon peelers." This challenge, the nominal object of which was to return the Sangha to its pristine caste-free state, resulted in about 1800 in the establishment of the rival *Amarapura Nikāya*. Somewhat later the *Ramanya* sect was created over doctrinal disputes among the Bhikkhus of the dominant caste, *Siyam Nikāya*. Although entirely of Hīnayāna persuasion, the house of Buddhism in Ceylon was divided; the division broke the monopoly of caste by substituting a sectarianism based less upon doctrinal interpretations than upon caste exclusiveness. Schisms chiefly on caste lines were not slow to develop within the *Amarapura* branch, and are latent in the *Ramanya*.

In contemporary Ceylon the *Siyam Nikāya* is by far the largest

<sup>19</sup> See Reginald S. Copleston, *Buddhism—Primitive and Present in Magadha and in Ceylon* (8), 1892, Chaps. XXX and XXXI.

<sup>20</sup> See Denham (16), pp. 256-257, for an example.



and most powerful of the clerical groups. Entrance to it is possible only for members of the "cultivating caste," not because of any Buddhist claims of holiness, but upon the grounds of "communalistic superiority" and secular caste feeling. The Amarapura Nikāya, next in numerical importance, is strongly entrenched in the Low Country where minority castes have been most aggressive and challenging. Originally organized by a single caste, nominally at least for the purpose of returning the Sangha to the Buddha's casteless principles, subsects upon both caste and doctrinal lines were soon apparent. While these sub-nikāyas are not avowedly drawn upon caste lines, they are in fact little less exclusive than the Siyam Nikāya. The original Amarapura sect, in which members of the "cinnamon peeling" caste gained ordination, is today divided in two sectarian groups. This division follows closely the secular dual division of this caste into higher and lower status groups. Another Amarapura sect was established by members of the "fishing" caste, today to be seen in the form of two sections in which the vast majority of Bhikkhus are from this caste, although it is believed that another caste (Vahumpura) has considerable representation in one section. A third major schism was the outgrowth of ordination of Bhikkhus of another Low Country caste (Durāva) and has remained a virtual monopoly of that caste, except for an offshoot intercaste reform movement of no numerical significance. Also in the Amarapura ordination is another segmented subsect, the one branch being composed of members from the highest "cultivating" caste, the other representing a quite low Kandyan caste (Batgam). This sect, found in the Kandyan Highlands, is said to be dominated by the high caste subdivision.<sup>21</sup> While additional schisms occur even within the Nikāya claiming Amarapura ordination, it is probable that most of the remaining ones are upon doctrinal lines. It is true that some of the subsects are not wholly caste exclusive, but the vast majority of Bhikkhus in each subsect are of homogeneous caste origin.

The newer Ramanya Nikāya, like the Amarapura, was founded as a casteless order, and like the Amarapura, contains today Bhik-

<sup>21</sup> No textual reference to sectarianism in the Sangha is wholly reliable. These observations are the products chiefly of interviews with Bhikkhus in various orders. Each of the subsects has a distinctive name which gives no hint of the caste cleavages involved.

khus from many castes ranging in status from the highest to the moderately low. At this point there is no formally designated subject involving caste distinction. However, for reasons which will be apparent, it seems unlikely that this situation can long be maintained, for the very structure of organized Buddhism is conducive to caste differentiation in the Sangha. Although there is no caste monopoly in the priesthood today, the Sangha is organized in fact upon caste lines and, whatever the will of the individual Bhikkhu, tends in some degree to support the community caste organization.

Caste sectarianism is almost inescapable in the highly localized character of Buddhist organization. The priestly incumbent of a temple is named by a local council of lay Buddhists, composed usually of the financially powerful members of a single caste. Where this situation obtains, and it is rather widely the case, it is obvious that caste considerations are just as significant in the selection of an incumbent as they are generally significant in the thinking of the lay council. It is thus unlikely that in a temple dominated by lay members of a particular caste an incumbent will be named who is of another caste, and it is especially unlikely that he will be of a lower caste. In matters of succession to incumbency, the chief priest of the temple usually selects the ablest or most favored of his own pupils. It is extremely improbable that there are many instances in which this pupillary succession crosses caste lines, or even where the pupils of a priest are from different castes. Certain important exceptions are known, but they are not typical. From these circumstances it is apparent that caste is significant both for the establishment of incumbents and for succession. Any Nikāya which maintains or attempts to maintain a casteless order is thus confronted with the fact of caste clusterings of neophytes around its leading priests. Formal schisms on caste lines are but one step removed; organizationally the caste pattern is inherent; sectarianism crystallizes it.<sup>22</sup>

These circumstances do not arise entirely out of the demands of the lay Buddhist cliques. We should not assume that the Bhikkhus by and large offer much resistance to lay demands for such discrimination. To the contrary, it is frequently alleged by liberal

<sup>22</sup> Hayley (36), p. 534 ff., notes that the Chief Priest of a temple belonging to the Siamese order was dismissed for having joined the Amarapura order.



and critical Buddhists that the priests are more "caste-minded" than the laity. This of course is not true of priests with broad educational background, but it is probably no exaggeration in reference to the rank and file of Bhikkhus in the predominantly village temples of Ceylon. It is quite generally true that the Bhikkhu's attitude toward caste and his behavior in reference to it simply reflect his own secular background and the community sentiments wherein he operates. No Bhikkhu would preach caste hate, but the majority would support the traditional discriminations of the community, and articulate references to the kammatic value of caste are not unknown. Perhaps more naive than most was a Low Country Siyam Nikāya Bhikkhu who, deploring the violence arising locally out of caste restrictions on dress, suggested to the writer that dress equality might be granted, and caste badges won instead, to assure caste endogamy and communal life.

Sectarianism in Buddhism within Ceylon is only in minute measure a product of doctrinal and interpretational differences. In the proper sense it is not sectarianism; there are few theological or metaphysical differences, and the schisms of the Sangha have no counterpart in the laity. It should under no circumstances be concluded that the Buddhist temple and its services are caste exclusive nor even that there is formal segregation in service. The Buddhist *vihāre* and the preaching hall are free to all; "there is no caste in Buddhism." There is, it is true, a reluctance among the lowest castes to enter the temple when respectable worshippers are there, but the members of these castes are so few that the issue is usually not relevant. Where restrictions upon dress and ornamentation are enforced by the community upon certain castes, the temple worshippers conform to the normal dictates of the locality. Caste distinctions are not forgotten in the sacred precincts, the conventions of the temple only require equal access.<sup>23</sup>

While it is generally true both in theory and in practice that the castes participate commonly in Buddhist services, certain qualifications must be made. The tendency toward locality concentrations

<sup>23</sup> Copleston (8), p. 440, reports an incident arising during the preaching of *bana* because a low caste woman wore a jacket in the presence of high caste persons. This incident refers to the late nineteenth century. Under some conditions similar incidents could conceivably arise today, although the point at issue would be not a woman's jacket but more likely a man's "undershirt."

of fellow caste members tends to reduce the actual caste mixing at services, particularly when this is associated with local caste sectarianism in the Sangha. Thus the Low Country Karāva ("fishing caste") will tend to associate himself with an Amarapura temple, while the "cultivator" chooses a temple in which Siyam Nikāya priests officiate. This is probably more pronounced in the Low Country than in the interior, where the vast majority of temples are under the Siyam Nikāya but are free to virtually all castes, for worship and almsgiving. There is an unlikelihood, however, that alms are often sought from persons of low caste by a Bhikkhu of the Siyam Nikāya order. This tendency toward caste discretion in temple attendance, even where pronounced because of the concentration of a single caste or strong caste feeling, is almost never complete and in no sense to be viewed as a restriction upon worship. However, in some places the actual caste homogeneity in attendance forms an additional bond to caste solidarity.

The second qualification upon equal access to the objects and ceremonies of worship relates to religious practices which in the strict theoretical sense are non-Buddhist. Ceylon Buddhism is reared upon the foundations of indigenous deities and Hinduism, theoretically, historically, and in contemporary daily practice. Although Hinayāna Buddhists, the Sinhalese have a rich supernatural world of demons and gods, some local and some not, many of whom have been associated with the Hindu pantheon. In their rituals Hindu practices are evident, and the Buddha himself has been integrated with Hindu mysteries and deities. Side by side with the Buddhist vihāre was raised the quasi-Hindu *dēvāle*; and throughout the island there are shrines dedicated to deities and powers which lie quite outside the sphere of pure Buddhism. In actual religious practice and in actual religious belief they are not distinct systems, although they partially employ separate organizations and temples of worship. The Hindu pantheon has been melted into indigenous supernaturalism and in turn into practical Buddhism.<sup>24</sup> The *dēvāle*, frequently found associated with the

<sup>24</sup> This fabulous merger of high supernaturalism with the agnosticism and rationalism of Hinayāna Buddhism has never been properly studied, although it has been commented upon by writers from the time of Robert Knox (*An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, Ryan ed. [45], 1911), in the seventeenth century, to the present. Organizationally it seems to have been due to the works of Hindu



Buddhist *vihāre*, reproduces in its ceremonies and in its restrictions upon participation the caste tabus of Hinduism. In regard to this religious system the highest caste of the Sinhalese holds some prerogatives reminiscent of a priestly caste. With few recent exceptions the controlling functionaries are of the highest caste, and some, through their hereditary offices, have supernatural and priestly qualities. Traditional caste ritual functions are rigidly preserved in temple and in public ceremonials, as exemplified by the famous Perahera of Kandy usually associated popularly with the Buddhist Temple of the Tooth, rather than with its affiliated *dēvāle*, to which the celebration really belongs. Degree of admissibility to the *dēvāle* follows traditional lines of caste precedence similar to those enforced in the purely Hindu *kōvil* of Jaffna and, until recently, India. The directorship of *dēvāles*, in earlier times, lay with secular chiefs, and in modern times it resides in influential families, frequently descendants of the earlier directors. The chief official of the *dēvāle* (*kapurāla*) is still an hereditary officer, usually not of secular influence, but the embodiment of priestly powers in a Hindu sense. The prerogatives of caste show clearly in the lay directorship and the priestly functionary, but the results have not been to transform this caste into a status similar to that of the Brahmin. Nor is there evidence that these roles were assigned as the prerogatives of a caste having sacred status. The break from Brahminism as a caste phenomenon is complete; only certain priestly parallels are present. Definitions of conduct and of religious and ethical ideologies affecting secular human relationships are functions of the Sangha which, however caste-ridden it may be, is not a caste. Although religious monopolies unquestionably added to the power of the high caste both economically and politically, they did not reflect or produce any effective claim to supernaturally endowed superiority. There is no priestly caste among the Sinhalese, although priestliness has been, as in the *dēvāle*, a monopoly of a caste. Ideologically this monopoly has no more support in the *dēvāle* than in the *vihāre*.

It should be evident that the view that Sinhalese caste lacks

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(Tamil) Kings, who ruled the Sinhalese, and was possibly associated with Mahāyāna influences. See Hayley (36), pp. 245-247. There was probably never a time, however, when the Sinhalese did not have the Hindu-like pantheon.

support in Buddhist thought or in Buddhist organization is without empirical foundation. We have seen that kamma is consistent with caste, that regard for family status and purity is positively caste promoting, and that the Sangha was organized in reference to caste, thus supporting it by example and by perpetuating caste cleavages in the community. Nor is there indication that Buddhism has motivated serious attacks upon the secular social system, which could be construed as contrary evidence. The reverse is actually the case, for Buddhist organization, following the secular feudal pattern, utilized the caste hierarchy and the concept of caste services for its strength.

Copying the feudal structure of secular social organization, both vihāre and dēvāle derived their functionaries and economic strength from the performance of services allocated on the basis of caste. The religious organizations can be understood most clearly as part of the general feudal milieu. The significance of caste feudalism must be recognized to understand contemporary social organizations. The elimination of Brahmins and the more passive support of Buddhism did not leave Sinhalese caste in an institutional vacuum. The status hierarchy was orientated toward service to the king, the feudal lord, and the temple. If in regions of India caste approximates endogamic tribes, in Ceylon it became more like endogamic estates.

#### FEUDALISM

The application of the term "feudal" to Ceylon is not to use a European concept for an Asian development only superficially similar. The linkage of obligation to land in reference to both secular and religious authorities was present in Ceylon as much as it was in medieval Europe. Gradations and classes of tenure show a surprising conformity with those of Norman England, as do provisions for commutation of service, payment of death duties, etc. Ceylon had feudalism in every connotation of the term; unlike Europe, Ceylon also had caste. From Robert Knox we have a succinct description of Sinhalese feudalism in its secular aspects, hinting as well at guild elements embodied in it.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Knox (45), pp. 68-69.



The Countrey being wholly His, the King Farms out his Land, not for Money, but Service. And the People enjoy Portions of Land from the King, and instead of Rent, they have their several appointments, some are to serve the King in his Wars, some in their Trades, some serve him for Labourers, and others are as Farmers to furnish his House with the Fruits of the Ground; and so all things are done without Cost and every man paid for his pains: that is, they have Lands for it; yet all have not watered Land enough for their needs, that is, such Land as good Rice requires to grow in; so that such are fain to sow on dry Land and Till other mens Fields for a subsistence. These Persons are free from payment of Taxes; only sometimes upon extraordinary occasions, they must give an Hen or Mat or such like, to the King's use: for as much as they use the Wood and Water that is in his Countrey. But if any find the Duty to be heavy, or too much for them, they may, leaving their House and Land, be free from the King's Service, as there is a Multitude do. And in my judgment they live far more at ease, after they have relinquished the King's Land, than when they had it.

Many towns are in the King's hand, the Inhabitants whereof are to Till and Manure a quantity of the Land according to their Ability, and lay up the Corn for the King's use. These Towns the King often bestows upon some of his Nobles for their Encouragement and Maintenance, with all the fruits and benefits that before came to the King from them. In each of these Towns there is a Smith to make and mend the Tools of them to whom the King hath granted them, and a Potter to fit them with Earthen Ware, and a Washer to wash their Cloaths, and other men to supply what there is need of. And each one of these hath a piece of Land for this their Service, whether it be to the King or the Lord; but what they do for the other People they are paid for. Thus all that have any Place or Employment under the King, are paid without any Charge to the King.

Although Knox' account is confined to the Kandyan area, Codrington<sup>20</sup> and others have made it abundantly clear that similar tenures were normal in the coastal area prior to and during the European conquest. As in medieval Europe the manorial village flourished throughout the land, not as an exclusive form of

<sup>20</sup> H. W. Codrington, *Ancient Land Tenure and Revenue in Ceylon* (6), 1938; Joao Ribeiro, *History of Ceilão*, translated from the Portuguese by P. E. Pieris (77); D'Oyly (18); Johan Gideon Loten, *Memoirs, Selections from the Dutch Records of the Ceylon Government*, translated by E. Reimers (50), 1935. For an intelligent summary of Sinhalese feudalism see Hayley (36), Part V.

organization, but as a very prevalent one. Hayley's description of the manor exposes its principal features, and is in conformity with the later and more technical analysis of Codrington.<sup>27</sup>

As a political functionary the overlord, called the *gamladdā* or *gametirālā*, was formerly responsible for the collection of taxes and the due performance of *rājakāriya* [feudal service] where such was due. It was his duty furthermore to keep order in the village, and for this purpose he had both civil and criminal jurisdiction over the tenants. . . . As an estate, the *gama* [village] if of any appreciable size, contains the *walawwa*, or manor house, the *mutteṭṭuwa* or domain of the lord, the *nilapangu* or holdings of the tenants, and a certain amount of waste, forest, or *chena*, either belonging to the lord or cultivated by the tenants as appurtenant to their *kumbura* [paddy fields]. The *mutteṭṭuwa* comprises both those lands which by custom are properly the lord's domain, and are cultivated for him as a feudal service by the *nilakārayās* (tenants of the *nilapangu*), and other lands acquired by escheat, gift, or purchase, in respect of which he is not entitled to exact free services. The former are known as the *nindamutteṭṭu*. The latter, called *andamutteṭṭu*, were in former times usually let out for cultivation in *anda* [crop share] to the tenants of the *nilapanguwas* or, in some cases, to strangers . . . . A large *nindagama* usually contained both free landholders and tenants of various castes and occupations, who rendered services and provided the food, furniture, and utensils necessary for the ease and comfort of the *gametirālā*. According to Sawers there were four chief classes of tenants, namely: <sup>28</sup>

- (a) Freeholders who were liable to no other service than rendering homage. They were often kinsmen of the proprietor.
- (b) Persons of high caste who performed various honourable services, such as accompanying the lord on his journey, carrying his *talipot* [large palm frond], watching his fields, or keeping watch at his house.
- (c) *Nilakārayās*, who held *panguwas* [service lands] on condition of cultivating the *mutteṭṭu*, or performing services attached by custom to their particular holdings.
- (d) *Uliyakārayās*, persons of low caste, who held land subject to menial or degrading services such as carrying the lord's palanquin, and who formerly were practically serfs.

<sup>27</sup> Hayley (36), pp. 237-241. Italics mine.

<sup>28</sup> Reference is to Simon Sawers' *Memoranda and Notes on the Kandyan Law of Inheritance, Marriage, Slavery, etc.*, written in 1826 and reproduced in Hayley's work as an Appendix. (84)



The merger of the caste hierarchy into the feudal service system is shown here in fragmentary fashion. Actually, complex and highly differentiated statuses were recognized, and the service functions allocated in minute detail and in a manner congruent with caste dignity and traditional caste vocations. Artisans and those engaged in personal service, *e.g.*, the washer and the barber, fitted into this service structure both as *nilakārayās* (service tenants) and as local caste defined guilds. The entire political-economic structure was reared upon the principle of usufructory rights in return for service. Invariably these services, whether ceremonial or utilitarian, honorable or mundane, were linked to caste. That the castes were also estates, and even in some instances guilds, makes them no less castes.

Similar to the secular institutionalization of caste was that of religious organizations. The feudal system of the state was closely paralleled in the feudal caste service organization of the *vihāre* and the *dēvāle*. In the great temple holdings, tenants whose service was dedicated to a shrine were exempt from royal service and taxation, although they remained subject to call in time of war or for extraordinary public works.<sup>29</sup> The extensivity of temple holdings was considerable, for not only did they increase as kings and others sought enhanced merit, but nominal transfers to temples were common as devices for escaping royal taxation.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, as in feudal England, such transfers were subjected to royal control, but vast tracts of land came under temple auspices where, indeed, they remain today.

The specific tenures of the temple lands (*vihāragam* and *dēvālagam*) were similar to those of the *nindagam* (secular manorial village). They ranged from those in which fee simple rights were vested in the temple to others in which the cultivator held permanent and inheritable rights in the land, subject only to required service. This range is consistent with that of secular holdings, as is to be seen particularly in the contrast of villages retained by the king and those held in vassalage.<sup>31</sup> Dedicated lands were of two types, the first wherein the whole, or a large portion, of the land

<sup>29</sup> Codrington (6), p. 20 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Knox (45), pp. 116-117.

<sup>31</sup> See Hayley (56), pp. 241-246, and the *Report of the Temple Land Commissioners*, (76), Colombo, 1857-58, pp. 14 ff.

of a village was given outright to the temple, the second where qualifications were imposed in the grant upon the rights and services of the tenants. Under the former type, the tenants were bound to cultivate the temple fields without payment and without share (*i.e.*, as on a *demesne*); in the latter the previous owner resigned his vassal rights in the land and the obligated tenants continued their old services but now under the temple. *Dēvāle* and *viḥāre* lands, although quite similar from the standpoint of feudal tenures, were quite different administratively. The latter, except where united with a *dēvāle*, were administered by the priests alone. This was a local administration, the lands being adjacent to the *viḥāre* proper. *Dēvālagams*, however, were widely scattered and under the administration of lay chieftans with a resident *kapurāḷa*, hereditary priest, himself holding lands as a functionary. As pointed out by the Temple Land Commission of 1857, the consequences of absentee control in the *dēvālagams* were gross inequities in service demands and general maladministration.

Manorial organization was ubiquitous but not universal; many villages were free from service, others, directly belonging to the king, under officers rather than the *mesne* lords. The quasi-manorial structure of the temple villages is obvious. Hayley has classified the villages of the land into the following four categories:

1. Royal villages, belonging directly to the Crown, called *gabaḍāgam*.
2. *Nindogam* (a modified form of which are termed *gallatgam*), villages under the dominion of a *mesne* lord, himself the tenant of the Crown.
3. *Viḥāragam* and *dēvālagam*, villages belonging to the *viḥāres* and *dēvālēs*.
4. Villages and separate holdings, generally controlled by officers who enforced the customary services of the various castes or communities which inhabited them, or collected the taxes, but otherwise free from service to any overlord.<sup>82</sup>

The backbone of religious organization, like the state, lay in the feudalistic land-service system. It is not known whether these practices were anterior to the rigid formalization of caste lines. D'Oyly believed that the feudal and manorial system evident in

<sup>82</sup> Hayley (36), p. 228.



the early nineteenth century was a structure of great antiquity, but it is from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources that the present picture is drawn.<sup>23</sup> Whatever may have been the processes of blending caste and estate concepts, it is certain that feudalism crystallized the caste hierarchy. Not entirely figurative is the suggestion that feudalism became the defining agency of caste in Ceylon even as Brahminical Hinduism has held that role in India. Caste was rooted in secular sanctions which in turn were supported by religious ideologies, rather than the reverse. What Ceylon caste structure lost in emancipation from Hinduism, it gained through political and economic ideology and unified organization. The role of Buddhism probably had more significance organizationally than it had ideologically, *i.e.*, in resting its organizational structure on caste cleavages and functions. Feudalism in temple and state was the skeleton upon which caste was the flesh and blood. The significance of feudalism is not wholly an historical one, although the structure described here has been drastically modified during centuries of European domination. Feudalism, with its caste implications, was solidly supported and utilized first by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch. Only in the comparatively recent British period of occupation has the feudal structure of the state disappeared, and with this there has been no complete disruption either of feudal attitudes or of feudal-type relationships, particularly in temple organization.

During the sixteenth century the Portuguese were dominant in Ceylon, followed by the Dutch and, in the closing years of the eighteenth century, the British. A rigorously exploitative conquest of the Low Country took place under the Portuguese, who pursued both profit and, with fanatically evangelistic zeal, the establishment of Christianity. Their immediate effect upon the feudal and caste system was to solidify rather than to disrupt. They and the Dutch after them were not slow in appreciating the value of the ready-made machinery for exploitation. A Christianity which could condone massacres could, and did, condone serfdom and caste, particularly when such institutions were ideally adapted to their material needs. The Sinhalese, on their part, were willing to recognize Phillip II as their legitimate sovereign for so long as

<sup>23</sup> D'Oyly (18).

His Majesty and ministers respected the rights and usages of the nation. This condition proved no hardship to the Portuguese, who in full respect for customary usage set about the compilation of Tombas, the land registers of the country. The transition of the established order from the recognized sovereignty of a native monarch to that of a foreign one involved no change whatever in the fabric and pattern of society. The new masters appropriated royal villages for the benefit of the King's treasury, and distributed temple and other villages among their officials and soldiers and others in their service.<sup>34</sup> The Church demanded and received her share as well. The new holders derived from the villages the dues of the lordship according to custom. Village economy was untouched.

Acceptance of the established social structure was *de facto* an acceptance of caste and caste obligations within the feudal hierarchy. Christianity then, and for that matter today, had no more serious concern with caste repudiation than had Buddhism before it. Ribeiro, arriving in Ceylon in 1640, described very explicitly how the various castes had their traditional *rājakāriya* (service to the king) translated into service for the new ruler.<sup>35</sup> Thus His Majesty came into possession of four hundred villages, and the Captain General had "twenty of the best villages allowed him for his expenses" and "a large number of the religious orders, . . . had each two villages. . . ." Ribeiro shows quite clearly that no alterations were made in the caste services performed.

Not only did the Portuguese accept and use the feudal-caste order, they built upon it, strengthening and formalizing the organization of certain caste groups which could serve their purposes. The great cinnamon peeling industry was developed as a caste monopoly in a most successful elaboration upon the earlier Sinhalese pattern.<sup>36</sup> Although the Portuguese spread through Ceylon, particularly in the Low Country, a western language and, nomi-

<sup>34</sup> See E. Reimers, *Feudalism in Ceylon*. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon) (73), Vol. XXXI, No. 81, 1928.

<sup>35</sup> Ribeiro (77), Chaps. 10 and 11. See also P. E. Pieris' English summary of the Third Book of the Portuguese Tombo in his *The Ceylon Littoral*, 1393 (68), 1949.

<sup>36</sup> Actually this caste monopoly may have been a Sinhalese creation, but it was developed at the behest of the Portuguese and subsequently most effectively organized by the Dutch. See Tennent (98), Vol. II, p. 51, for a discussion of the Portuguese role.



nally, a western religion, their immediate effect upon the social organization was to further the feudal and caste systems.

The Dutch invasion of Ceylon was a movement of world cartel organizers and as such they carried on the economic establishments of the Portuguese with vigor and system. Like their predecessors they seized upon the already established institutions for exploitation, offering no serious deviations from feudal organization until late in their rule. The memoirs of Johan Gideon Loten, Governor of Ceylon (1752-1757), indicate a most careful traditionalism in the distribution of company services among the various castes.<sup>37</sup> Loten lists the specific castes, noting the duties ascribed to them under the Company. Thus the high "Bellales" (Vellāla or Goyīgama) he divides into various groups, the highest of which held offices of local and district government in accord with tradition. "Raddawe or washermen," he notes, "are under obligation to wash the Company's calicoes, and on the departure of qualified officers to the country, to deck the rest houses with linens, and further to do whatever occurs during such commission in respect of their service." Here the washers' traditional occupation is maintained as also is his ritual service of decorating on festive occasions. Similarly the "toddy (palm liquor) tappers," "potters," and other castes are described in terms of their proper services to the Company. Land grants, such as were made under the Sinhalese kings, were provided for those serving. For high service, manorial grants were given including rights to the services of lower castes attached to the particular lands.<sup>38</sup> It was through this device that many Salāgama, devoted to the cinnamon industry, moved into the status of landed aristocracy.

Cinnamon work had been a caste occupation long before the Dutch, but under their tutelage the caste became highly organized and self-conscious. A tribute to Dutch opportunism and organizing skill lies in the fact that in Ceylon today, the caste traditionally associated with the "Great Industry" is critically divided into sub-castes possessing in-group solidarities unsurpassed by those of any other Sinhalese caste.

<sup>37</sup> Loten (50), pp. 27-31.

<sup>38</sup> Examples of honorary positions and feudal grants may be found in Sampson Rajapakse, Mudaliyar, *A Memoir with a Sketch of the Salāgama Sinhalese, their Chiefs and Clans* (84), 1912.

The British conquest of the Ceylon maritime provinces in 1795 found a caste feudal system entirely undiminished by the works of their predecessors and, to the contrary, probably more firmly seated.<sup>39</sup> Indirectly, however, seeds of disorganization had been sown during the Dutch period. While recognizing the integrity of customary practices, the Dutch established for themselves and certain of the Sinhalese villages in their service a modified code of Dutch law.<sup>40</sup> This code probably applied as well to all Christians in the native population. The limited application and the fact that it was deemed expedient that civil matters be determined according to Sinhalese practices meant that its direct impact was more nominal than real. It did, however, establish a pattern which was to become the recognized code for both civil and criminal law in the Low Country.

Even the limited urbanization of Dutch times introduced the coastal populace to new occupations outside the existing status system, and upset some vocational caste monopolies. New varieties of occupations were evaluated in terms other than caste, and some caste vocations were also redefined. Thus the Dutch demand for wood workers and carpenters gave new stimulus to this trade, and the caste monopoly of the artisans was broken as others moved into the field. A different variety of disruptive economic influence was to be seen in the cinnamon industry. Here the Dutch preserved a rigid caste monopoly, but in an industry so highly valued by them this caste received rewards incommensurate with their previous status in Sinhalese society. Particularly after Dutch times, the foundations of fortunes by families of lower castes tended to modify the caste status hierarchy, without necessarily disorganizing the caste system. No doubt the establishment of common schools served as something of a levelling influence in the pursuit of occupations disentangled from caste concepts. There is no evidence that the propagation of Christianity, in any period, served to upset the caste hierarchy or system, except in so far as Chris-

<sup>39</sup> In the latter part of the Dutch period, there was one counteracting influence exhibited in the tendency to dispossess the manorial lord intermediate between the overlord and the villager. See Reimers (73), pp. 31-32. It seems clear that this movement had no significant growth or consequences during Dutch administration.

<sup>40</sup> See Hayley (36), pp. 20-37.



tianity was a password for special privilege and hence could be used to widen disparities between caste status and economic power. In brief, it may be concluded that the substantial efforts of Portuguese and Dutch were not fundamentally disorganizing to the feudal order in which caste was rooted, nor was the system challenged or directly weakened except by a limited occupational mobility. The principal impact upon caste was in the foundations laid for disparities in the status roles acquired through birth and the economic or political power acquired through the conqueror. These disparities, of no great significance in earlier times, are today matters of immense importance.

When the British arrived in Ceylon at the end of the eighteenth century, they found an island which was still largely under the control of the Sinhalese and practically in full retention of ancient patterns of life. This was only slightly less true in the maritime district than in the jungle and the highlands. The early decades of British rule were chaotic in their effect upon the social structure. Attempting to institute taxation systems similar to those imposed upon India, they succeeded only in disrupting political and economic order. It cannot be said that such changes came through intent to upset either feudal or caste structures, although the experimentations probably contributed to further weakening of feudalism in the Low Country. Not too late, the English fell back upon more traditional forms of organization and adapted their rule more closely to ancient village and feudal patterns.

No doubt seems to have been entertained by the British that the native inhabitants of both the maritime and inland provinces should be governed by their normal usages and customs.<sup>41</sup> However the early denial of the overlordship of the king for the Low Country, together with the abolition of slavery, prohibition of polygamy and other reforms, led to a general disregard for the ancient law throughout the maritime belt. Eventually a dual legal system appeared in which the more westernized coastal Sinhalese came under Roman Dutch Law in its entirety while the civil law of the Kandyan Provinces rested in traditional usage. The moderate cultural differences between the Low Country and the interior were accentuated. In 1832 compulsory service to the Crown

<sup>41</sup> Hayley (36), p. 27.

(*rājakāriya*) was formally abandoned, but the Kandyan manorial structure was only slightly affected and temple lands were wholly excluded from the Act. No active policy was pursued toward the dissolution either of feudal or caste relationships on the local level, and offenses relative to feudal tenures were treated in accordance with ancient principles of obligation and status rights. Land ownership which had devolved upon the British Crown was in Kandyan areas frequently regained by manorial lords where their ancient claims were upheld. Similarly, the feudal claims of rights in the soil by the tenant were explicitly maintained in the courts.<sup>42</sup> Thus the *ninda* lord might transfer his property to another, but tenant services adhered to the land. In 1870 provision was made for the registration and valuation of all service tenures with a correlative right of commutation of service in money. The Service Tenures Ordinance of 1870 is today part of the law of the land with its legal recognition of feudal serfdom, and the commutation rates established at that time are effective today, except where specifically modified. If services have not been rendered nor commuted payment made for a period of ten years, the tenant is entitled to full ownership, free from any service or payment. Statutory recognition is given the tenant's permanent interest in his holdings.

Today the secular *nindagam* is often no more than a shadow of the strict feudal manor. While there are localities in which the tenants are still responsible for the cultivation of *mutattu* (*demesne*) land and for the performance of legitimate services, the system is less formalized than a consideration of the law might lead one to believe. The majority of Kandyan villages are not feudal in the proper sense of the word; they are villages in which status relationships predominate over contractual ones. Where the feudal lord survives, as he does in the Central Province and Sabaragamuwa, relationships vary from extralegal benevolent paternalism to strict adherence to the service ordinance. It is probable that the majority of lands in the Kandyan Provinces are owned and rented on terms which from a legal standpoint are contractual. While land ownership is concentrated in most localities, renting is nominally on a share basis. *Muttettu* lands and services are not unknown, and

<sup>42</sup> Hayley (36), p. 252.



commuted tenure fees are somewhat more common, but the vast majority of peasants are exempt from them.

Although fee simple ownership is probably more the rule than the exception, it is notable that there is a high concentration of land ownership in lordly families in many parts of the Kandyan interior. Where the manorial lord or his descendants still maintain their *valuavva* (manor house), village relationships hew to a feudal design even under nominally contractual rental arrangements. The household of the *valuavva* is set apart by economic position, economic and political power, and caste. Dignity and prerogatives of high birth are preserved, both as a due to those of lordly heritage and as an effective demand exerted upon land hungry peasants. Under such circumstances, and they are not unusual, the legal wording of land titles is powerless to prevent the service and the ritual aspects of feudalism. In the *valuavva* dominated villages the niceties of caste stricture persist unchallenged.

While some of the grosser aspects of secular feudalism have fallen into disuse, the same cannot be said for temple lands, especially *dēvāle* land holdings. Scattered throughout the highlands are vast tracts, as well as diffuse small holdings, subject to temple service or in temple ownership. Although commutation is practiced widely, particularly when entailed land has fallen into the hands of persons inappropriate to the service, there are thousands of villagers today holding service entailed land. Frequently the legal difficulties of commutation are so great that it is impossible to achieve even if a peasant has cash. Sometimes, too, the temple requires unique caste service from the ancient land holding and places obstacles in the path of commutation. *Dēvāles* particularly have clung to their services partially because of the irreplaceable hereditary skills required in the shrine. Frequently one finds peasants holding titles to land subject to varieties of service consistent with the status of the original cultivator, but which are now partly commuted and partly carried out by the current owner.

The fusion of caste with contemporary temple feudalism is exemplified in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy and associated *dēvāles*. Here the blendings of feudalism and caste are manifest in the administrative organization of the temple and in its ceremonial activities. The temple is headed by a lay official who formerly



was appointed by the king, but now by the high priests with the secular hereditary chieftans (Radaja subcaste of the Goyigama) and the lay administrators of other temples, also Goyigamas.<sup>43</sup> The "watcher" for the kitchen, doing menial work, is always of the "jaggory making" caste. The sweepers and letter carriers are similarly members of this caste. The drummers are of the "tom-tom beating" caste. "Indeed," Hocart notes, "all these officials hold land for their services. Thus the store keeper has lands assigned to him in Aladeniya. The singers each have two pala, about half an acre of paddy land." In public ceremonies such as the Perahera, the great annual parade in which the Buddha's tooth relic is carried from the Temple, service tenures provide functionaries. The attendants, the mahouts, the dancers, the drummers, in short the entire gigantic display of mixed Buddhist and Hindu import, is made possible by the status obligations of various groups performing traditional caste services. The peraheras of modern times conform in all essential respects to the descriptions of Robert Knox nearly three centuries ago. Its leaders under temple auspices are the secular chieftain families of Kandy, the perpetuators of a caste tradition; its functionaries are serfs performing caste-determined roles.

<sup>43</sup> See Hocart (37), for a description of the Temple of the Tooth, Chap. III, from which the subsequent quotation is taken.



## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS:

### *Caste in the Colonial Period*

Examination of early and late European observations on Sinhalese social life indicate that no great structural changes occurred in the caste system between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. There is a surprising uniformity and agreement between the descriptions of the various writers. Even in intercaste relationships the similarity between the observations of Robert Knox in 1681 and those of Cordiner, Davy, Tennent and others in the nineteenth century is astonishing.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is a close conformity between them all and the contemporary scene, if one leaves the urban centers. European influence had its effects upon caste even in the villages, but the over-all system is structurally and in part functionally preserved as it was in the time of Knox or Cordiner or Davy. The status hierarchy described by these various early writers provides a relevant introduction to the modern castes.

Robert Knox' account of his twenty-year captivity by the Kandians is an amazing source of knowledge on all phases of Sinhalese social structure prior to any serious European contact. Unlike Ribeiro, who was nearly Knox' contemporary, the Englishman distinguished carefully between the caste order and the feudal statuses associated with it. Knox' account, not freely available today, is at once the most complete and concise, and so immediately pertinent to the contemporary system that his comments on caste

<sup>1</sup> Rev. James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon* (9), 2 Volumes, 1807; Vol. 1, Chap. IV; Davy (12); Tennent (98).

are reproduced in full, except for his detailed observations on "Beggars."<sup>2</sup>

Among this People there are divers and sundry Casts or degrees of Quality, which is not according to their Riches or Places of Honour the King promotes them to, but according to their Descent and Blood. And whatsoever this Honour is, be it higher or lower, it remains Hereditary from Generation to Generation. They abhor to eat or drink, or intermarry with any of Inferior Quality to themselves. The signs of higher or meaner Ranks, are wearing of Doublets, or going bare-backed without them: the length of their Cloth below their knees; their sitting on Stools, or on Blocks or Mats spread on the Ground: and in their Caps.

They are especially careful in their Marriages, not to match with any inferior Cast, but always each within their own rank: Riches cannot prevail with them in the least to marry with those by whom they must eclipse and stain the Honour of their Family: on which they set an higher price than on their lives. And if any of the Females should be so deluded, as to commit folly with one beneath her self, if ever she should appear to the sight of her Friends, they would certainly kill her, there being no other way to wipe off the dishonour she hath done the Family but by her own Blood.

Yet for the Men it is something different; it is not accounted any shame or fault for a Man of the highest sort to lay with a Woman far inferior to himself, nay of the very lowest degree; provided he neither eats nor drinks with her, nor takes her home to his House, as a Wife. But if he should, which I never knew done, he is punished by the Magistrate, either by Fine or Imprisonment, or both, and also he is utterly excluded from his Family, and accounted thenceforward of the same rank and quality, that the Woman is of, whom he hath taken. If the Woman be married already, with whom the Man of better rank lies, and the Husband come and catch them together; how low soever the one be and high the other, he may kill him, and her too, if he please.

And thus by Marrying constantly each rank within itself, the Descent and Dignity thereof is preserved forever; and whether the

<sup>2</sup> Knox (45), from the Ryan edition, Part III, Chap. II, "Concerning their different Honours, Ranks and Qualities." Knox' original edition, under the title "An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon in the East Indies," was published with the approval of the Royal Society in 1681. Daniel Defoe quoted Knox extensively in *Captain Singleton* (see Ryan's preface) and it is probable that *Robinson Crusoe* owed something to Knox. The edition quoted here follows the original manuscript exactly, except that various letters and contractions were modified to modern usage.



Family be high or low it never alters. But to proceed to the particular ranks and degrees of Men among them.

The highest, are their Noblemen, called Hondrews. Which I suppose comes from the word Homdrewnē, a Title given to the King, signifying Majesty: these being honourable People. 'Tis out of this sort alone, that the King chooseth his great Officers and whom he employs in his Court, and appoints for Governors over his Countrey. Riches are not here valued, nor make any the more honourable. For many of the lower sorts do far exceed these Hondrews in Estates. But it is the Birth and Parentage that inobleth.

These are distinguished from others by their names, and the wearing of their cloth, which the Men wear down half their Legs, and the Women to their Heels: one end of which Cloth the Women fling over their Shoulders, and with the very end carelessly cover their Breasts; whereas the other sort of Women must go naked from the waist upwards, and their Cloaths not hang down much below their Knees: except it be for cold; for then either Women or Men may throw their Cloth over their Backs. But then they do excuse it to the Hondrews, when they meet them, saying, Excuse me, it is for warmth.

They are distinguished also by their own Countrey Caps, which are of the fashion of Mitres: there are two flaps tied up over the top of the Crown. If they be Hondrews, their Caps are all of one Colour, either White or Blew: if of inferior quality, than the Cap and the flaps on each side be of different Colours, whereof the Flaps are always Red.

Of these Hondrews there be two sorts, the one somewhat Inferior to the other as touching Marriage; but not in other things. The greatest part of the Inhabitants of the Land are of the degree of Hondrews.

All Christians either White or Black are accounted equal with the Hondrews. The Whites are generally Honourable, only it is an abatement of their Honour that they eat Beef, and wash not after they have been at Stool: which things are reckoned with this People an Abomination.

Among the Noblemen may be mentioned an Honour, that the King confers, like unto Knighthood; it ceaseth in the Person's death, and is not Hereditary. The King confers it by putting about their Heads a piece of Silk or Ribbond embroidered with Gold and Silver, and bestowing a Title upon them. They are stiled Mundianna. There are not above two or three of them now in the Realm living.

Next after the degree of Hondrews may be placed Goldsmiths,

Blacksmiths, Carpenters and Painters. Who are all of one degree and quality. But the Hondrews will not eat with them: however in Apparel there is no difference; and they are also privileged to sit on Stools, which none of the Inferior ranks of People hereafter mentioned, may do. Heretofore they were accounted almost equal to the Inferior sort of Hondrewes, and they would eat in these Artificers Houses, but afterwards they were degraded upon this occasion. It chanced some Hondrews came to a Smith's Shop to have their Tools mended, when it came to be Dinner time, the Smith leaves work, and goes in to his House to dine, leaving the Hondrewes in his Shop: who had waited there a great while to have their work done. Now whether the Smith fearing lest their hunger might move them to be so impudent or desperate as to partake with him of his Dinner, clapt to his Door after him: Which was taken so hainously by those hungry People in his Shop, that immediately they all went and declared abroad what an affront the Smith had put upon them. Whereupon it was decreed and confirmed, that for ever after all the People of that rank should be deposed, and deprived of the Honour of having the Hondrewes to eat in their Houses. Which Decree hath stood in force ever since.

Nevertheless these Smiths take much upon them, especially those who are the King's Smiths; that is, such who live in the King's Towns, and do his work. These have this Privilege, that each has a parcel of Towns belonging to them, whom none but they are to work for. The ordinary work they do for them is mending their Tools, for which every Man pays to his Smith a certain Rate of Corn in Harvest time according to ancient Custom. But if any hath work extraordinary, as making new Tools or the like, besides the aforesaid Rate of Corn, he must pay him for it. In order to this, they come in an humble manner to the Smith with a Present, being Rice, Hens, and other sorts of Provision, or a Bottle of Rack, desiring him to appoint his time, when they shall come to have their work done.

Which when he hath appointed them, they come at the set time, and bring both Coals and Iron with them. The Smith sits very gravely upon his Stool, his Anvil before him, with his left hand towards the Forge, and a little Hammer in his Right. They themselves who come with their work must blow the Bellows, and when the Iron is to be beaten with the great Maul, he holds it, still sitting upon his Stool, and they must hammer it themselves, he only with his little Hammer knocking it sometimes into fashion. And if it be any thing to be filed, he makes them go themselves and grind it upon a Stone, that his labour of fileing may be the less; and when they have done it as well as they can, he goes over it again with his file and finisheth it. That which makes these Smiths thus stately is,



because the Towns People are compelled to go to their own Smith, and none else. And if they should, that Smith is liable to pay Damgages that should do work for any in another Smith's Jurisdiction.

All that are of any Craft or Profession are accounted of an inferior degree, as Elephant-Catchers, and Keepers, who are reckoned equal with the Smiths, &c. abovesaid, tho they neither eat nor marry together; and these may wear Apparel as do the Hondrews, and sit on Stools, but the Hondrews eat not with them.

No Artificers ever change their Trade from Generation to Generation; but the Son is the same as was his Father, and the Daughter marries only to those of the same Craft: and her Portion is such Tools as are of use, and do belong unto the Trade: tho the Father may give over and above what he pleaseth.

Next are Barbaras; both the Women and Men may wear Doublets, but not sit on Stools, neither will any eat with them.

Potters yet more Inferior, may not wear any Doublets, nor their Cloth much below the Knee, nor sit on Stools, neither will any eat with them. But they have this Privilege, because they make the Pots, that when they are athirst being at a Hondrews House, they may take his Pot, which hath a Pipe to it, and pour the Water into their mouths themselves; which none other of these inferior degrees may be admitted to do: but they must hold their hands to their mouths and gape, and the Hondrews themselves will pour the Water in. The Potters were at first denied this Honour, upon which they joyntly agreed to make Pots with Pipes only for themselves, and would sell none to the Hondrews that wanted; whereat being constrained, they condescended to grant them the Honour above other inferior People, that they should have the favour to drink out of these Pots with spouts at their Houses.

The next are the Ruddaughis, Washers: Of these there are great Numbers. They wash Cloths for all People to the degree of a Potter; but for none below that degree. Their usual Posture is to carry a Cloth on their Shoulder, both Men and Women: They use Lye in their washing, setting a Pot over the Fire holding seven or eight Gallons of Water, and lay the foul Cloths on the top; and the steam of the water goes into the Cloths and scalds them. Then they take them and carry them to a River side, and instead of rubbing them with their hands, slap them against the Rock, and they become very clean; nor doth this tear the Cloths at all, as they order it.

Another rank after these are the Hungrams, or Jaggory-Makers. Tho none will eat with them, yet it is lawful to buy and eat the Jaggory they make, (which is a kind of Sugar) but nothing else.

Another sort among them is the Poddah. These are of no Trade



or Craft, but are Husbandmen and Soldiers, yet are inferior to all that have been named hitherto. For what reason neither I, nor, I think, themselves can tell: only thus it falls to them by Succession from their Predecessors, and so will ever remain.

After these are the Weavers. Who beside their Trade, which is Weaving Cloth, are Astrologers, and tell the People good Days and good Seasons: and at the Birth of a Child write for them an account of the day, time and Planet, it was born in and under. These accounts they keep with great Care all their Life-time: by which they know their Age, and what success or evil shall befall them.

These People also beat Drums, and play on Pipes, and dance in the Temples of their Gods, and at their Sacrifices; they eat and carry away all such Victuals as are offered to their Idols. Both which to do and take, is accounted to belong to People of a very low degree and quality. These also will eat dead Cows.

Next to the Weavers are the Kiddeas or Basket-Makers. Who make Fans to fan Corn, and Baskets of Canes, and Lace Bedstedes and Stools.

Then follow the Kinnerahs. Whose Trade is to make fine Matts. These Men may not wear any thing on their Heads. The Women of none of these sorts ever do. Of these two last there are but few.

All below the Couratto or Elephant-Men, may not sit on Stools, nor wear Doublets, except the Barbar, nor wear the Cloth low down their Legs. Neither may any of these ranks of People, either Man or Woman, except the Potter and the Washer, wear the end of their Cloth to cover their Bodies, unless they be sick or cold. Neither may they presume to be called by the Names that the Hondrews are called by; nor may they, where they are not known, change themselves by pretending or seeming to be higher than Nature hath made them: and I think they never do, but own themselves in the rank and quality wherein they were born, and demean themselves accordingly.

All Outlandish People are esteemed above the inferior ranks. The Names of the Hondrews always end in oppow, of others below the degree of the Elephant People in adgah.

The Slaves may make another rank. For whose maintenance, their Masters allow them Land and Cattle. Which many of them do so improve; that except in Dignity they are not far behind their Masters, only they are not permitted to have Slaves. Their Masters will not diminish or take away ought, that by their Diligence and Industry they have procured, but approve of it, as being Persons capable to repose trust in. And when they do buy or otherways get a new Slave, they presently provide him with a Wife, and so put him forward to keep House, and settle, that he may not think of

running away. Slaves that are born of Hondrew Parents, retain the Honour of their degree.

There is one sort of People more, and they are the Beggars; who for their Transgression, as hereafter shall be shewn, have by former Kings been made so low and base, that they can be no lower or baser. And they must and do give such titles and respects to all other People as are due from other People to Kings and Princes.

Knox' account of the castes is worth lengthy quotation for it provides a summary background of a period against which modern developments can be viewed. There are few castes noted by him which are not in existence today. A number of castes, however, are present today which were not specified by Knox, although Ribeiro, writing in about the same period, mentions most of these. Knox' knowledge and concern was for the Kandyan areas while Ribeiro was best acquainted with the Low Country. It is further a possibility that certain castes omitted by Knox arrived in Ceylon subsequent to his time; more likely he knew little about them.

The vocational and service function aspects of the castes are stressed by every observer. Thus Ribeiro writes:

These which follow are the lowest castes; the tom-tom beaters go in war to beat their drums and they come back with their own company. The wood cutters live in separate villages which also belong to the King; they cut the trees which they are commanded to, and they have to convey the stores and baggage of the army; and of this work they are so proud that in defeat they would lose their lives before their stores. There are the workers in clay and the washers, the latter of whom wash the clothes, and the former supply pottery to all in the village free of charge. The *Jagreiros* make a kind of sugar from the liquor which they draw from some trees, and of this they give a fixed quantity to the Lords of the village. The shoemakers, *Pachas*, and barbers are all very low in caste, and they also have similar duties each according to his grade. The *Cornacas* are those who tame and look after the elephants; they live in separate villages the same as the *Pachas*, the villages of both of whom belong to the King; and it is the same with the villages in which live the *Chalias*, the people who collect cinnamon; each of these has to render the number of *bahars* at which his *paravenia* is assessed, for all of them are not subject to the same amount of duty, some paying more and some less. They carry at their waists a small knife with which they strip the bark of the trees, as they enjoy the privilege of not being subject to any other kind of duty; they will not perform any service except what they



are subject to, even they are to be condemned to the fire, for they say that this would establish a precedent. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Except for the great detail given, particularly of subcastes, by some of the writers, there is remarkably little variation either in the castes noted or in their status position from the time of Knox to the end of the nineteenth century. The failure of the lists to conform perfectly in respect to relative status positions of particular groups is not surprising, for the hierarchical position of a caste

THE CASTES AS NOTED BY EUROPEAN OBSERVERS PRIOR TO  
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN ORDER OF THE STATUS ASSIGNED  
THEM §

Valentyn,<sup>4</sup> 1726

Karawo

Karawo (*principals, chiefs, etc., may not fish with rod or line*)  
Barudel-Karawo (*may not use casting nets*)  
Dandu-Karawo (*only sea fishing with rod*)  
Moru-Karawo (*net skate or squids only*)  
Kespe-Karawo (*net tortoises*)  
Cadul-Karawo (*distinctive sails*)  
Tock-Keulo (*shore net fishing*)  
Godo-Keulo (*peculiar equipment, fresh water only*)  
Indimal-Keulo (*manufacture equipment, river fishing*)  
(*The last three form the lowest castes*)

§ The descriptive remarks were explicit in the original source, except where otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> Ribeiro (77), pp. 89-91.

<sup>4</sup> Valentyn (103), 1726. This listing is derived from the section of Valentyn's work entitled "Naamen Der Inlandsche Bedienden Inde Dorpen op Ceylon." The translation that is used here is that of Philaethes in Chap. LVI of his *History of Ceylon* (67), 1817. Philaethes' rendering of Valentyn is accurate in most respects, although certain of the latter's comments are omitted. The writer is indebted to Mr. Edmund Reimers for a translation of those passages in Valentyn which Philaethes overlooked. Most of these were of obscure meaning. From this section of Valentyn's work certain groupings have been omitted here where it seemed clear that they were not considered by him to be castes or subcastes, e.g., political officers. The order in which Valentyn treats the castes is difficult to understand. Immediately prior to the Karawo he places the King, and proceeds in what is apparently the hierarchical status listing which is followed here. It is obvious, however, that the placement of the "Walinde" (Vaiśya) and the "Gowi" at the conclusion of the list has no significance in terms of the status of these groups.

The source of Valentyn's list is unknown, and he is the only authority cited here who did not himself visit Ceylon. His knowledge is undoubtedly based upon the reports of Dutch officers or governors.



## Chiandos or Duravos

- Magul Duravo† (*elephant workers, lascaryns, etc.*)  
 Nattanbovo† (*inferior to above*)  
 Niello† (*draw toddy*)  
 Usanno† (*draw toddy and coolie work*)  
 Weedy† (*inferior to above*)  
 Cottu† (*inferior to above*)  
 Cutang Wolle-Etto (*dancers for pagodas especially*)  
 Arambeo (*exclusively pagoda dancers*)  
 Ackerammo (*rope makers, assist smiths*)  
 Agunmady (*play globular drum*)

## Navandannajo or artificers

- Achieary (*smiths*)  
 Baddallo (*silversmiths*)  
 Wadduwo (*carpenters*)  
 Liane Wadduwo (*turners*)  
 Ridiceto ancarao (*gold inlayers*)  
 Adatke-teancarao (*workers in ivory and cabinet makers*)  
 Iwaduwo (*arrow-makers*)  
 Sittereo (*painters*)  
 Lucuruwo (*smelters*)  
 (*All of these eat together and intermarry*)

- Hannalio (*tailors*)  
 Hommaru ‡ (*shoemakers*)  
 Ambetteo (*shavers or barbers*)  
 Cubello (*potters*)  
 Weenawo (*elephant-catchers*)  
 Haly or Chialias (*cinnamon peelers*)  
 Hangarema (*palm sugar makers*)  
 Hunno or chinambero (*lime burners*)  
 Decon carao (*maintain lime furnaces*)  
 Hunu kattanno (*procure fuel for lime furnaces*)  
 Hunugambadu (*peasants, coolies procuring fodder*)  
 Rodawo (*washermen for superior castes*)  
 Berreways, tablinjenos (*tom-tom beaters*)  
 Heeri (*pioneers, tree fellers, ammunition carriers*)  
 Olias (*dancers and elephant tenders*)

† Valentyn says these are no longer found in Ceylon.

‡ None to be found in "Candy" says Valentyn.

- Pally \*\* (*washers for low castes*)  
 Hinnivo \*\* (*washers for chialias and procure elephant food*)  
 Gangavo \*\* (*wash for heeri and olia*)  
 Paduvo \*\* (*coolies, lascaryns, palanquin bearers*)  
 Palleru \*\* (*banditti or freebooters living in forests*)  
 Hiene Jaty or Kinneas \*\*\* (*weave fine mats*)  
 Rodias \*\*\* (*eat dead animals, make elephant nooses, etc.*)  
 Walinde or Chittys (*traders or merchants*) \*\*\*\*

Chittys (*trade in drugs, linen, domestic utensils*)  
 Caver chittys (*deal in gold and silver*)  
 Comety chittys (*deal in fruits and other eatables*)  
 Waligi chittys (*deal in corals and other ornaments*)

#### Gowi or Vellalas

Bandares or adassing (*royalty*)  
 Mantrionu (*King's counsellors*)  
 Maindellyperu (*officials and military officers*)  
 Gowiperu (*military persons and cultivators*)

#### Other sorts of Vellalas

Wanneweddas (*hunters or woodsmen*)  
 Diegaranno (*collect precious stones*)  
 Mallaccarao (*supply court with flowers*)  
 Dalae murecarao (*furnish betel, etc.*)  
 Hunkiricarao (*supply milk to court*)  
 Dadeweddas (*hunters*)  
 Goddegarranno (*mine precious stones*)  
 Batamwella Etto (*sow seeds in royal domains*)  
 Gombaducarao (*peasants, attend cows*)

*Robert Knox, 5 1681*

#### Hondrews or Noblemen (*two grades*)

Goldsmiths	{	<i>(one degree and quality)</i>
Blacksmiths		
Carpenters		
Painters		

Elephant catchers and keepers (*Couratto—reckoned equal with smiths*)

- \*\* Despised and degraded castes  
 \*\*\* Despised more than all others  
 \*\*\*\* Valentyn says these were not originally natives of Ceylon  
 5 Knox (45).

Barbars

Potters

Ruddaughs or Washers

Hungrams or Jaggory-Makers

Poddah (*without trade or craft*)

Weavers (*also astrologers, drummers and dancers*)

Kiddeas or Basket-Makers

Kinnerahs (*make fine mats*)

Slaves (*a rank composed of various castes*)

Beggars or Roudeahs (*detestable to the People*)

*Cordiner,\* 1807*

Handerooas or Vellalas (*agriculturists*)

Gopelooas (*cattle keepers*)

Carawas (*fishers*)

Doorawas or Chandoos (*toddy drawers*)

Cambooas or mechanics (*carpenters, goldsmiths, etc.*)

Somerooas (*tanners*)

Coombelooas (*potters*)

Radewas (*washers*)

Chalias (*cinnamon peelers*)

Jagherers (*coolies or porters*)

Hirawas (*sieve-makers*)

Pannikias (*barbers*)

Hoonas (*lime burners*)

Berewayas (*tom-tom beaters*)

Olias (*makers of charcoal*)

Padooas (*palanquin-bearers*)

Kinerceas (*mat weavers*)

Gahalegan bededas (*executioners*)

Rodias, shenders (*persons who touch and eat dead animals*)

*Davy,† 1821*

Wiessia wanse

Goewanse (*cultivators*)

Nillemakareya or Pattea (*shepherds*)

\* Cordiner (9).

† Davy (12).



## Kshoodra wanse

- Carawe (*fishermen*)
- Chandos (*toddy drawers*)
- Achari (*smiths, etc.*)
- Hannawli (*"taylor's"*)
- Badda hel badda (*pottery*)
- Ambattea People (*barbers*)
- Radabadda (*washermen*)
- Halee (*chalias*)
- Hakooroo (*jaggery makers*)
- Hunu badde (*chunam or lime burners*)
- Pannayo (*grass cutters*)
- Villedurai
- Dodda weddahs (*hunters*)
- Paduas
  - Padua (*low services*)
  - Yamanoo (*iron smelters*)
  - Gahalagambodyo (*vile services, beef eaters*)
- Barrawabadde or Mahabadde (*tom-tom beaters, weavers*)
- Handee (*furnish baskets and winnows*)
- Olee (*carry effigies in procession*)
- Radayo
- Palee (*inferior washers*)
- Kinnera badde (*provide ropes and mats*)

## Outcastes

- Gattaroo (*outcaste by royal edict*)
- Rhodees (*degraded, shunned, etc.*)

*Census of Ceylon, 1824 (Maritime Provinces only)*<sup>8</sup>

Vellala	Chalias	Olias
Fisher	Tom-tom Beaters	Kinnereyas
Chandos	Jaggerairoos	Pallereyas
Smiths	Chunam Burners	Demellagattereas
Potters	Pannease	Taylor's or Hunnalias
Barbers	Patchies	Vanias
Washers	Hinnawas	

<sup>8</sup> *Census of Ceylon, 1824 (Maritime Provinces only)* (31). No English-Sinhalese equivalents or descriptions are given in the original. Tamil castes are listed but omitted here. This census included only the Low Country districts, and no indication is given of order of status. However except for the final two castes the order approximates other hierarchical listings. Vanias were possibly considered outside the Sinhalese system. A caste referred to as "Tondagattera" was also listed but it may be presumed that these people, no longer found, were affiliated with the Demala-gattara ("Demellagattereas").

*John Armour*,<sup>9</sup> 1842

## Goi wangsa or Goigama, Ratte or Handuruwo

Bandaara waliya (*princely descent*)  
 Weddo (*Vedda*)  
 Mudeli peroowa (*titled class*)  
 Pattiwalayo  
 Nilemakkareyo  
 Weeramesseroo or Gooroowo  
 Kammalhandoorooowo or Wagayo  
 Gattaroo  
 Timbillo

Nawandanno (*Artificers*)

Tarahallo or Badaalo (*Gold and Silver-smiths*)  
 Wadooowo (*carpenters*)  
 Galwadooowo (*stone masons*)  
 Hittaroo (*painters*)  
 Kamburo or Achari (*blacksmiths*)  
 Lokoorooowo (*brass founders*)

## Karaawo

Goda Karaawo or Dada Karaawo (*huntsmen*)  
 Gong Karreyo (*bullock drivers*)  
 Karaawo (*fishers*)

## Duraawo or Chandos

Radauw (*washers to higher classes*)  
 Hannaali (*tailors*)  
 Badahalayo (*potters*)  
 Embetteyo (*barbers*)  
 Wiyanno or Wiyana Haali (*weavers*)  
 Hangarammo or Jaggreros  
 Hoonno (*chunam burners*)  
 Panneyo (*grass cutters*)  
 Berawaayo (*tom-tom beaters*)  
 Padoowo  
 Gahalayo (*scavengers*)  
 Oliyo  
 Paliyo or Apullanna (*inferior washers*)

<sup>9</sup> Armour, quoted in Hayley (36), pp. 103-104.

Kinnereyo  
Rhodiyo ††

GLOSSARY OF TERMS, VARIATIONS, AND EQUIVALENTS FOR THE PRINCIPAL CASTES USED BY THE VARIOUS WRITERS, WITH COMMON ENGLISH DESIGNATIONS. MOST ITALICIZED TERMS ARE CURRENTLY USED STEM FORMS.

*Baḍahāla*, Baḍahālayo, Badda hel badda, Coombelooas, Kumballu, Badda hela Badda: *potters*.

*Batgam*, Padua, Padu, Padooas, Padoowo, Paduvo, Bathgampaduvo: *non-specific, perhaps palanquin bearers*.

*Beravā*, Berawayo, Barraua badde, Berreways, Nekati: *tom-tom beaters*.

*Durāva*, Doorawas, Duraawa, Durawo, Chandos, Chiandos: *toddy tappers of the coconut palm*.

*Gahala-Beravā*, Gahaleganbedeas, Gahalayo: *executioners, scavengers*.

*Goyigama*, Goiwanse, Goyi gamayo, Govi wanse, Hondrews, Handerooas, Vellala, Wellala: *cultivators of soil*.

*Hannāli*, Hannawli, Hannaali, Hannalio: *tailors*.

*Hēna*, Radā, Henaya, Radava, Radewa, Radawoo, Ruddaugh, Rada Badda, Radauw, Rodawo (common usage is "dhoby"): *washers*.

*Hinnā*, Hinnawo, Hinnivo: *washers to Salāgama*.

*Hunu*, Hoonas, Hanubadde, Hunadurayi, Hunu badde, Hoonoo, Hunno, Chinambero: *chunam or lime burners*.

*Karāva*, Karawo, Carawas, Karaawo: *fishermen*.

*Kinnara*, Kinnera badde, Kinnerah, Kinnaru, Hiene Jaty: *mat weavers*.

*Navandanna*, Nawandanna aya, Cambooas, Achari: *skilled artisans*.

*Oli*, Oliyo, Olee, Olia: *dancers*.

*Pali*, Palee, Paliyo, Pally, Apullana: *washers to the low castes*.

*Panikki*,\* Pannikias, Ambattea, Embattayo, Embetteyo: *barbers*.

†† Armour lists several additional, but not lower groups, Yamana (iron smelters), Hommaroo (presumably tanners), Hendayo (presumably basket makers), and Raadayo (presumably comb makers), and "others." These are probably subdivisions of the castes on grounds of specialty but not truly subcastes.

\* Panikki is a term applied in the Kandyan highlands to leaders of the tom-tom beaters. Embatteyo and its equivalents is usually applied to Tamil barbers.



*Panna-durayi*, Pannayo, Panneyo: *grass cutters*.

*Roḍī*, Roḍiyā, Rhodēe, Rodeah, Rodiyoo, Rodias, Antere Jaty, Huliwalia, Gasmundo: *beggars*.

*Salāgama*, *Halāgama*, Hali, Halee, Haly, Wiyana Haali, Chalia, Chialia: weavers in tradition only; *cinnamon peelers in the Low Country*.

*Vahumpura*, Hungrams, Hangarammu, Hangarammo, Hangarema, Jaggrero, Jagherer, Hakooro, Hakero, Kandya: *jaggory makers*.

*Velli-durayi*, Villedurai, Vellidurayi: *keepers of sacred Bo-tree*.

is approximate not exact. (See pages 92-94.) Taken as representative accounts primarily because of their concise listings, generally in the approximate order of status, are the observations of Valentyn, 1726, Knox, 1681, Cordiner, 1807, Davy, 1821, the Census of Ceylon for 1824, and Armour in 1842. Leaving aside for the moment deviations in subcastes, Valentyn's report in 1726 included almost every caste noted by Cordiner, Davy and Armour. Valentyn notes several groups, most of which are also attested by early writers, i.e., Ribeiro and de Queyro, not found in later accounts, and indeed not found in contemporary Ceylon. The outstanding ones are the "merchants," "shoemakers," "elephant men," "pioneers" and their washers, and the bandits, although "elephant men" may indeed be a subcaste of the "cultivators." The merchant Chetty is present today, but is usually viewed as being external to the Sinhalese caste system. (See Chap. 6.) There are also several castes listed by Valentyn in reference to the lime burning industry, whereas all other observers have noted but one group, as is the case today. Of the castes listed by Knox, relating only to the interior, just two, Couratto and Kiddeas, are not found in most other listings, and are not found in modern times, or at least not in terms recognizable as the same peoples.<sup>10</sup> The odd castes of the Census of 1824 are Patchies, Demala-Gattara and Vanniyās. The Patchies, apparently not given by the writers referred to here, are mentioned by Ribeiro and by de Queyro and are identified by the editors of

<sup>10</sup> It is possible that "elephant men" are a subcaste under Goylegama in contemporary classification. (See p. 101 below.) "Kidaya" means literally "dancing girl." See Wilhelm Geiger, *An Etymological Glossary of the Sinhalese Language*, (29), Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, 1941.

both works as the modern Padu (Batgam) and hence the Poddah of Knox. The term "Vanniyā" obviously refers to a people of the north who in earlier times approximated tribal status, while the Demala-Gattara (signifying Tamil outcaste) were probably included as Tamils in other sources.<sup>11</sup> Cordiner describes the "Hirawas" and "Somerooas," groups seldom noted by other writers, although Armour indicates that *Hommaroo* are presumably tanners and not, in his eyes, strictly speaking a caste. "Hirawas" may well be the basket-making people noted in the present study as *Hinnavās*. The over-all structure appears to have changed very little with the passing of centuries under colonial influence. Only the odd cases mentioned by Valentyn have disappeared in later accounts, and indeed, the same can be said of the contemporary period.

Regarding subcastes the problem is more complex. Knox has mentioned two major divisions of the highest stratum while Valentyn subdivided these minutely. Valentyn also subclassifies *Karāva* and *Durāva*, and for the former is supported in the mid-nineteenth century by Tennent.<sup>12</sup> Many of these subcastes, however, Valentyn indicates are actually nonexistent at his time, and others appear not to be endogamous units. Subcastes among the lower castes were unheard of if we may judge by most typical accounts, and it may be doubted if most of the "subcastes" of *Durāva* and *Karāva* were such in the proper sense.

It is difficult to draw from these accounts any conclusions regarding modifications in the composition of the caste hierarchy during the periods of colonial enterprise. It is obvious that certain of the castes were limited to the coastal areas, a fact further attested by the evidence of late migration of some of these groups from India to the west coast, and present day cultural differences as well. Several of the groups noted by Valentyn had disappeared by the nineteenth century. There is thus somewhat greater evidence for the consolidation of castes during this period than for their proliferation. We must recognize that this conclusion does not

<sup>11</sup> See Tennent (98), Vol. II, p. 509, and pp. 135-137 below.

<sup>12</sup> Tennent (98), Vol. II, pp. 129-130. It is probable that Tennent was misinformed in this matter, or relied upon very early sources. The distinctions made make little sense in the actual practice of fishing, and that such occupational limitations existed on a subcaste basis seems unlikely.



necessarily imply intercaste marriage, since it is possible that small caste groups can through mobility change their identity. From practically all accounts, the existence of subcastes among the Govi-varṇa (Vellāla) is evident, although diverse terms are used. Armour's indication of subcastes among the Navandanna (smiths) is dubious in view of assertions by many writers that the skilled workers were without caste-like divisions, although different occupational and possibly guild-like organizations separated them. In contemporary times subcaste distinctions are practically limited, in any formal sense, to the Salāgama (Chalia) and the Govi-varṇa, now usually called "Goyigama," and it is far from certain that the reports of Valentyn and Armour do not include theoretical distinctions not then found. Outside the "cultivator" caste, subdivisions were either not highly developed by the Sinhalese, or they faded away prior to European influence.

The Sinhalese names for the castes frequently have unclear origins and significance. It is therefore more informative for an understanding of caste function to note the English designations of the caste. Such designations may not reflect what actually distinguishes, but they indicate the basis of differentiation according to Sinhalese thinking of the time much better than the literal translation of the caste names. Even casual study of the listings shows the infrequency with which the castes have been primarily identified by their cultural differences, and how consistently they are identified in terms of social and economic function. These roles are, in some instances, in respect to the King, in others to the temple, and still others in reference to castes higher in status. Even for the "Poddah" of Knox, or the Padu of others, when social function fails to discriminate, he is at a loss to explain the basis of their separateness. This, of course, attests the high degree of feudalization shown earlier, as well as a complete homogeneity in the interior at least. De Queyroz, whose contact was mostly with the Low Country, is one of the few who call attention to any fundamental cultural differences between castes.<sup>13</sup> Similarly he implies that Hindu food tabus associated with caste position were strong. No doubt in his day the assimilation of the coastally settled late immigrants was far from complete. (Even today one finds in some

<sup>13</sup> De Queyroz (14), pp. 19, 87.



areas a local dialect of mixed Tamil and Sinhalese used among fishermen who are nominally Aryan Sinhalese.) The fact that tribal groups maintained some distinctive cultural character is far less surprising than the evidence that interregional cultural variations were far greater than intraregional caste variations. While there has doubtless been some caste variation in food tabus, a fact understandably exaggerated by the *Janavamsa*, most variations do not involve such fundamentals as family organization, religious conviction, worship of specific deities, and other factors of great importance in many parts of India.<sup>14</sup> The chief distinctions of caste were apparently those induced by their status and functional position, symbols of rank and the requirements of service.<sup>15</sup> The only serious exception to this which is demonstrable during the colonial era is in reference to the depressed *Roḍiyā*, shunned and isolated by organized society. The cultural unity of the Sinhalese is far from complete as seen by nineteenth century writers, but the divisions were in geographical rather than in caste terms.

Apart from the service obligations which so obtruded themselves upon the colonial eye, the strictures of intercaste relationships were simply noted by the eighteenth century writers, and by the nineteenth piously deplored. In all we may get some small measure of caste significance in interaction.

The *Niti-Nighaṇḍuwa* stated that the fundamental law of caste entailed restriction upon marriage and upon household eating arrangements, although strictures and prohibitions, injunctions and symbols far beyond these basic principles were described by the wide-eyed Europeans.<sup>16</sup> The assumption of endogamy is obvious in each of the treatments cited here. Legal marriage was possible only within the caste and sexual relations with one outside the caste were deplored but rigorously punished only if the female were of higher caste.<sup>17</sup> The stringency of these rules is exemplified in an

<sup>14</sup> *Janavamsa* (42), Chap. II.

<sup>15</sup> Neville reports some caste distinctive practices associated with nursing infants. See *The Taprobanian* (97), April 1887, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> *Niti-Nighaṇḍuwa* (58), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Niti-Nighaṇḍuwa* (58), p. 3; Knox (45), p. 146; Hayley (36), pp. 174-178, asserts that in one district intercaste marriage was common. His source was a second-hand verbal report. While it is not uncommon for men to have mistresses of a lower caste, no evidence, historical or contemporary, can be found to support belief in this exceptional case.

incident reported by Ievers which occurred in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> When asked by an English Civil Servant what he would do if a woman of his caste married a man of different but high caste, an elderly chief responded, "In the Kandyan times we would have killed her at once, but now—humph! well, I don't know what else we could do with her now either." Hayley observes that there is no record of a woman being permitted to marry a man even slightly lower in caste than herself, but he doubts if the prohibition were so stringent in the case of a man. "Sawers states that Mīgas-tenñē, junior, Second Adigar [high official] was reprimanded by the King for keeping a concubine of the Berawāya caste, and the woman was flogged and sent across the river and thus banished from Kandy."<sup>19</sup> Knox is very explicit that a man lying with a low caste woman is guilty of no shame provided he neither eats nor drinks with her, nor takes her home as his wife. And of such action he had never heard. Endogamy was strict in both theory and practice, qualified only in reference to extralegal relationships.

Prohibition of intercaste eating is emphasized in most early accounts. Knox says that intercaste sexual relations could be thought of, but eating and drinking with a low caste paramour never. De Queyroz states that, "It is an important ceremony for the greater and smaller to eat separately."<sup>20</sup> He also implies that the high caste Sinhalese conformed to Hindu practice in respect to the protection of food from pollution through its preparation and handling by fellow caste members. There is no indication, however, that the complex food handling tabus of the Indian system were maintained, although certain of the lower castes were considered "clean" in that they were acceptable as household servants. Considerably more pronounced than the concept of food pollution is the protection of the caste as an exclusive social world in matters relating to household and family, an insistence that was supported in numerous symbols of caste, rituals of intercaste interaction, and in separated caste villages.

The symbols of caste related both to occupational or service

<sup>18</sup> R. W. Ievers, *Manual of the North Central Province* (41), 1899, pp. 68-69. Also see Henry Charles Sirtt, *Ceylon and the Cingalese*, 2 Vols. (90), 1850, pp. 158-159. De Queyroz (14) makes common caste an essential of legal marriage, p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Hayley (36), p. 176.

<sup>20</sup> De Queyroz (14), p. 147. See also Knox (45), pp. 105-106.



obligations and to the status of the caste in the hierarchy, although the latter were more common than service symbols. There is no clear evidence that precise caste marks were demanded except upon special occasions or as the normal accoutrement of the day's work. Thus Valentyn had described the bell at the waist of the Durāva to warn the passer-by below of his presence in the tree above, and of the tapping tools at his belt.<sup>21</sup> De Queyroz tells of a minute and unmistakable symbolism of caste when functioning as courts of law, each man carrying or wearing implements of his caste service.<sup>22</sup> In addition, for ceremonial and group occasions, caste flags were used at least by certain of the Low Country castes.<sup>23</sup> Knox has summarized the chief symbolic manifestations of inferior and superior position, noting that restrictions applied to groups of castes rather than to specific ones. The covering of the body, the length of the cloth and the wearing of head covering were not guides to caste but they were guides to the individual's approximate level in the social hierarchy. Similarly in behavior between castes, the elevation of the seat offered a man was in approximate accord with status; only the lowest castes were excluded from the physical presence of their superiors. Status gradients were evident in address, and De Queyroz comments upon the several grades of salutation used between different status levels.<sup>24</sup> Prostrations or worship of the high caste, and his blandishment with the offering of betel, a special cloth upon which he is to sit, are attested by Knox and others. That these latter were always not exclusively the prerogatives of the Govi-vaṃsa is demonstrated by Valentyn, who said that certain of the Karāva share in such honors.<sup>25</sup> Ostentatious display was likewise a prerogative of higher castes, in ornamentation and in housing. Lord Valentia described intercaste conflicts arising out of the breach of such customs in the early British period.<sup>26</sup>

The abilities and disabilities of caste were apparent also in the

<sup>21</sup> Valentyn in Philalethes (67), p. 327.

<sup>22</sup> De Queyroz (14), p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> Valentyn in Philalethes (67), p. 327; Lionel De Fonseka, "The Karāva Flag," *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register* (13), Vol. VII, Part I, July 1921.

<sup>24</sup> De Queyroz (14), pp. 81-82, 146.

<sup>25</sup> Valentyn in Philalethes (67), p. 327.

<sup>26</sup> Valentia (109), Vol. I, pp. 302-303.



nature of penalties imposed for crime. The customary law in this respect gave the English no small trouble in attempts to operate both with respect for customary usage and a sense of "British justice." Thus corporal chastisement which might be inflicted upon a Kandyan of low caste constituted no serious punishment, but for one of high caste it was grievous and degrading. Fine and imprisonment could not be conceived of as punishment at all for one of low status.<sup>27</sup>

The degree to which the castes were internally organized is difficult to assess from the sources. By the fact that a number of writers fail even to give the Govi-vam̐sa a caste name, referring to them only by the titles of respect they commanded, one might doubt if the "cultivators" were formalized as a caste. Thus Ribeiro implies a contrast between "citizens" and the lower castes, and several writers refer to them as "Hondrews" or by other honorifics in contrast to their tendency to give proper caste names to all others.<sup>28</sup> There is the possibility that this is a situation similar to that found in India where some higher castes in the past and even at present have been without caste organization and possibly have not looked upon themselves as a caste.<sup>29</sup> Although the failure of several of the observers to treat the highborn as a caste is singular, there is no mistaking either Valentyn or De Queyroz in their early recognition of the Govi-vam̐sa as a caste, and if no mention is made of organization, distinctive officerships were cited by De Queyroz and implied by Ribeiro. It is fully evident that certain, possibly all, the castes had some organization, although it is by no means certain that such organization comprehended an entire caste, nor that it was always formalized in councils and other bodies. Feudal organ-

<sup>27</sup> See Hayley (36), Chap. VII. In 1818 a British agent of government wrote his superior that a sentence imposed on two Roḍiyās which included 300 lashes and imprisonment was "regarded in the light of an honour done them, whereby they had been put on a footing with the Wellales and our own soldiers. . . ." Quoted by Paul Pieris, *Sinhale and the Patriots, 1815-1818* (69), 1950, p. 627. Note also Abbe Dubois' comments on the meaninglessness of imprisonment among Hindus high or low (19), p. 665.

<sup>28</sup> Ribeiro (77), pp. 89-90. The term *Hānuduruwāne* is undoubtedly the source of Knox' "Hondrew" and is in use today. Its significance is that of "your worship." By those who depreciate the Govi, to whom it was undoubtedly applied, "Hondrew" is said to be derived from *Hondura* which they allege signifies "good Sudra."

<sup>29</sup> Fick (23), p. 82 and *passim*.

ization presupposed the organization of castes for royal service. *The* caste as a governing and judicial body may not have existed in many cases, particularly in the interior, although the homogeneous caste village unquestionably had internal organization. De Queyroz implies that the Sinhalese (probably Low Country) had caste representation in local and district criminal and civil cases.<sup>30</sup> Lord Valentia observed in 1803 that the pampered cinnamon caste had had a chief with powers to judge "their causes."<sup>31</sup> It is significant, however, for the Kandyan area, that Knox gives no indication that the castes had anything approximating the caste panchyat. Hayley is of the opinion, undoubtedly correct, that leading families (*i.e.*, of high caste) appointed officers, certain of whom had jurisdiction over low caste villages in matters relating to caste and caste offenses.<sup>32</sup> Although there was a guild-like organization locally for some caste groups which exerted controls upon the practice of a trade, it is reasonable to believe that had caste councils and courts been significant bodies, the literature of the time would have indicated their importance. There is little more recognition of formal organization on the caste level than the fact that certain of the low castes as well as the high, had distinctive local headmen with distinctive titles dependent upon caste. Where strong colonial influence existed, there is reason to believe that true caste organization developed as part of the administrative machinery of economic exploitation and political control. Neither Portuguese nor Dutch had scruples against strengthening it as a means to their economic policies. This has been definitely shown in their underwriting of the *Salāgama* for the administration of the cinnamon industry and was probably true as well for the fishermen.<sup>33</sup> By the general preservation of local customs and law, the edicts of caste were supported, where they were not developed, and their simple usurpation of *rājakāria* rights prevented much deviation from the established functional roles of the castes. The British attitude toward caste and caste functions was less consistent.

The first English governor of Ceylon, Frederick North (1798-1805), seemed not averse to accepting the caste system as a

<sup>30</sup> De Queyroz (14) pp. 97, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Valentia (109), Vol. I, p. 303.

<sup>32</sup> Hayley (36), p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> The latter is treated by Valentyn in *Philaethes* (67), p. 325.



mechanism of political and economic organization. District caste headmen were maintained by the British at least for the castes of "fishermen," "washermen," "silversmiths" and "cinnamon peelers." Lord Valentia noted that North had himself made ex-officio head of the Vellālas (Govī-vaṃsa) and his Chief Secretary head of the Karāvas, the two dominant castes. Similarly, North took over for himself a chieftainship involving judicial powers among the turbulent and economically important Salāgama.<sup>34</sup> The opportunistic and intriguing Governor North did not fully represent the British point of view on caste, if point of view it can be called. Davy, only two decades after North, naively voices the Englishman's moral dilemma:<sup>35</sup>

As before observed, the Singalese experience less of the effects of castes than their neighbours the Hindoos; a very large proportion of the whole Singalese population being on an equality, and at liberty to pursue any liberal occupation. Respecting the effects of castes in general on society it is extremely difficult to form a correct estimate, and to determine whether the evil or the advantages that result from them, in a hot climate, preponderate. As they check progressive improvement, and eternally degrade a large portion of the people, their operation is most injurious on society; but, as they preserve the arts, and tend to prevent further deterioration—as they repress the passions and ambitious desires, and promote order and tranquillity, their influence is beneficial, and almost moral. . . . [yet] The system of castes is so wretched and humiliating in all its details, that only sheer necessity should induce one to support it: Englishmen have too much good feeling and generosity, and too correct notions of justice and liberty ever to err in improperly maintaining it; they are more likely to err in attempting prematurely its overthrow, before the people are ripe for the change, and prepared to benefit by its destruction.

Still later, in 1859, Tennent could fulminate on the horrors of caste, but conclude that "the inference from past experiments of the government, suggests the propriety of abstaining from direct interference, and leaving the abatement of the evil to the operation of time and the gradual growth of intelligence."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Valentia (103), Vol. I, p. 303.

<sup>35</sup> Davy (12), p. 133.

<sup>36</sup> Tennent (98), Vol. II, p. 158. He was probably thinking, among other things, of the Uva rebellion in 1817 which was due in no small part to the English disregard for traditional status leadership.



The abolition of *rājakāria* and the initiation of commutation by the English served, as we have seen, to have some upsetting effects upon the structure of service relationships. Further disruptive influences were the result of chaotic conditions incidental to conquest, administrative bungling, and halfhearted and readily reversed actions. No solution was ever found for the dilemma of the English conscience in which regard for local custom and tranquility was counterposed against regard for the conflicting concepts of social order and justice. The resolution of this dilemma was not an ideological one, but rather the pursuit of policies calculated to preserve order and hence principally to support the ancient hierarchy. The fact that their greatest economic enterprises, in coffee and later in tea plantations, depended upon individual enterprise and an imported labor force, removed the incentive to build an economic bureaucracy upon the caste hierarchy. The indirect effects of British occupation were, however, considerable for they have set the scene for the contemporary transitions in the island's status system.

The direct impact of colonial rule upon the caste system was, if not negligible, at least not seriously disorganizing. Hayley's summary conclusions relative to the legal status of the system are incontestable.<sup>37</sup>

On the death of Dharmapala, in A.D. 1597, the Portuguese, in return for the expressed allegiance of the Sinhalese to the King of Portugal, assured them of the preservation of "their laws, rights, and customs without any change or diminution whatever." They and their Dutch successors, while to some extent modifying and adapting it to their own requirements, on the whole maintained and utilized the existing system of class and caste organization with its accompanying service to government. Ribeiro states that, in the courts of the Maralleros, women were tried by the ordeals of hot oil and hot iron for degradation of caste, and if convicted, were put to death by their relations in the presence of witnesses. The English, therefore, on their arrival in the Island, found in existence a social and official organization which, while it differed considerably in detail and nomenclature from the older Sinhalese model, was based upon the original customs. This they, in the main, continued. . . . Bone, the Agent of Government in Sabaragamuwa, in 1829, cites instances in which two women were ex-

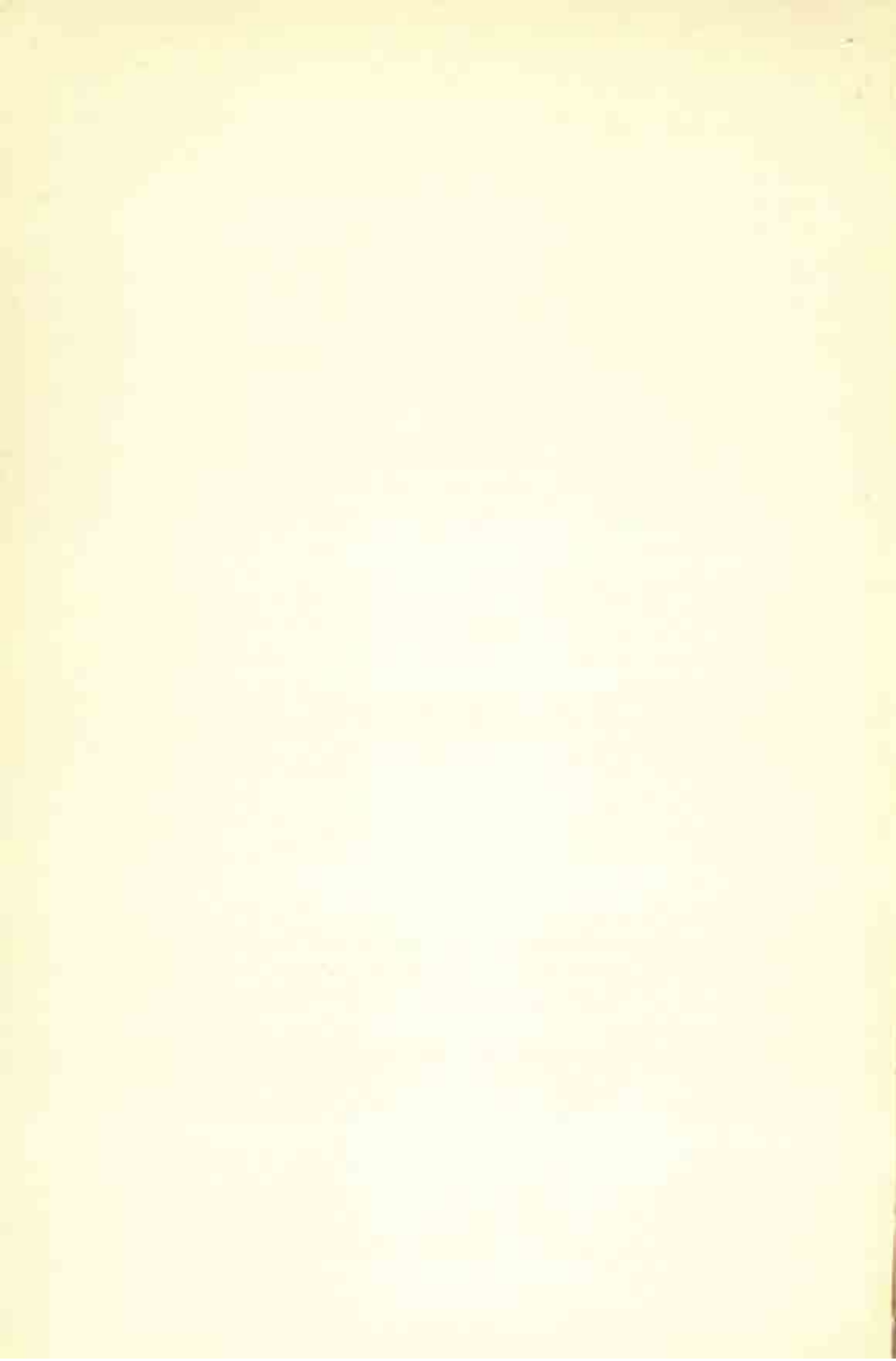
<sup>37</sup> Hayley (36), pp. 150-152.

pelled from the province for having intercourse with low caste men. Other Agents of Government gave similar answers. . . . It is evident from records such as these that, while preventing the exercise of such customs as the murder of persons accused of caste degradation, the effect of caste restrictions on the law of inheritance, adoption, marriage, and similar subjects, was fully recognized and enforced. The policy of the government for the last half century has been to discourage caste distinctions. The absence of any reference to the subject in the Kandyan Marriage Ordinances, the reluctance of the modern courts to recognize caste disabilities, and the spread of western education and commercialism, have tended to confine the effect of the divisions to matters of social intercourse; but inasmuch as the Kandyan Law is still administered, where its provisions clearly demand the recognition of the caste rules, even the courts of the present day have found themselves compelled to enforce them.

# *Part Two:*

CASTE STRUCTURE





## ❖❖❖❖ 4

### *The Modern Structure*

Nowhere in the Indian East can one boldly assert the existence of a specific number of castes and subcastes occupying any large area. Central patterns may exist, as they do in Ceylon, but locality variations forbid dogmatism. No matter how intensive an investigation, the fine border lines between caste and noncastes can never be fully comprehended, much less articulated. Nor is it assured that careful study will reveal in its true light the products of diverse historical and undocumented crosscurrents; one may err in indicating the existence of two groups where in historic perspective there is but one. Is an isolated community bearing a distinctive name, but possibly historically connected with a geographically distant caste, in fact a caste, or simply a village of a more general caste? Historical and definitional problems combine to force classificatory decisions that at times are more arbitrary than not. Such matters are further blurred by time, fading memory, and the pretensions of castes to statuses and lineages not theirs in the eyes of others or by tradition. The latter issue is particularly relevant in the case of subcastes which are in process of losing their specific status in merging with others to form simply a great caste without formal subdivisions. While this is an important part of the transformation of the system, it forbids too literal an interpretation of simple caste listings.

There is a common fallacy that castes must stand in a specific hierarchy with each one in a recognized superior or inferior relationship to the other.<sup>1</sup> Such specificity in status is not present either

<sup>1</sup> The unreality of this assumption has been documented by a number of students of the Indian system: see Hutton (40); Ghurye (30); L. S. S. O'Malley,

in India proper or in Ceylon. Castes always have different statuses but not necessarily fixed superior and inferior positions relative to every other one, in spite of the fact that the system as a whole involves gradation in rank, esteem and privilege. The villager may have no ready answer when asked for the comparative prestige of certain castes in his village. As one remarked, "P—— caste is no better than H——, we just look at them in a different way." The general superior-inferior position of each caste is of course quite well known within any local area, and always the highest and the lowest are easily named. Regional variations in the prestige of particular castes also require strict qualifications upon any attempt to arrange them upon a general hierarchical pattern for the country as a whole. The order of castes presented here is no more than a rough approximation based upon the apparent ordering in the eyes of villagers high and low. Any attempt toward a refined hierarchical arrangement would necessarily proceed on a village to village basis and then would fall short of any perfectly accurate representation. We must deal here with approximations.

The intensely local character of caste is not vitiated in Ceylon simply because many of the groups are scattered throughout the country. Residents of the interior are usually ignorant of important castes in the coastal area, and vice versa. The villager is simply unconcerned with castes outside the field of his experience. In the Kandyan highlands the Low Country man is frequently considered an outlander first and of a Sinhalese caste second. Some years ago, according to a village gossip, a few families of the Low Country *Durāva*, of relatively high status, were marrying their supposed caste brothers in the Kandyan area, *Duriyas*. The practice stopped abruptly when the Low Country men discovered that the phonetically similar *Duriyas* held a low status in the Kandyan hierarchy and were unrelated to them by any discernible historical or traditional lineage. The story may be apocryphal, and since the shame would be a closely guarded secret, it could in no case be

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*Indian Caste Customs* (60), 1932; Sherring (89), Vol. III, p. 260, says that, "Many of the Sudra castes retain traditions of their descent from Brahmins, Kashatriyas, and Vaisyas; and some of their separate clans or sub-castes still bear the designation of those branches of the higher castes, from which they profess to have sprung." Similar claims are prevalent among many Sinhalese castes based upon presumable Indian caste origins.



substantiated, but legendary or factual, the tale illustrates both the regard for and the local nature of caste knowledge.

In an immobile society with closely limited social worlds it is not surprising that members of the same caste have different status positions in different localities. Nor have caste status positions remained constant in any given area, if we may rely on the accounts of early observers in contrast with the present position. Still further the hierarchical order is qualified by the very general belief among lower and even relatively high groups that they have been mulcted out of their rightful position in society as descendants of Brahmin or Kṣatriya peoples. Few Sinhalese, except perhaps those of highest caste, would agree wholeheartedly to the hierarchical list used here, even though it conforms to the actual allocation of prestige in the society more closely than any conceivable alternate one. Any single hierarchical arrangement of Sinhalese castes cannot conform wholly to reality, much less to sentiments, because there are distinct regional differences in distribution and function of some castes. Fundamentally, these regions coincide with the general cultural patterns of the island.<sup>2</sup>

In its caste composition and in the system of caste relationships the Kandyan Highlands, especially the Central Province and Sabaragamuwa are somewhat different from the Low Country, *i.e.*, the coastal region from Chilaw to Tangalla. Several important castes found in the coastal region, traditionally associated with occupations concentrated in that area, are sparsely settled in the Highlands. Thus the Karāva, Durāva and Salāgama are distinctively Low Country castes. On the other hand, the Batgam and the less important Kinnara and Palī, and others are distinctively Kandyan. The formal divisions of the "cultivators" caste into subgroups is strictly a Kandyan phenomenon. Functionally the Kandyan system is closely related to manorial feudalism, and status services abound. The Low Country is remote from the feudal aspects of caste; while caste services are not unknown, they are today on a contractual basis. Concepts of democratic individualism are more nearly understood in the Low Country. There is as well a greater disparity between traditional caste status and contem-

<sup>2</sup> Bryce Ryan, "Socio-Cultural Regions of Ceylon," *Rural Sociology* (81), Vol. 15, No. 1, March, 1950.

porary economic power. Fewer Kandyans, high and low, would repudiate caste as a system of social organization.

The jungles of the north and east are more similar to the highlands than to the Low Country, for here isolation has been even more pronounced. Status relationships in occupational and economic matters are preserved in fact and in symbol. The most patent regional variation is to be found in the *Vanni*, the great north-central jungles. Here, in what was at various historic periods a no man's land between Tamil and Sinhalese, there appeared a caste organization functionally the same as the Kandyan, but involving a different nomenclature and slightly different rationalizations of the prestige positions. This difference is almost completely confined to the subgroupings of the highest caste. In the more remote borderlands between Tamil and Sinhalese settlement there are even today some tribal groups having no clear position within either Tamil or Sinhalese systems.

Since the caste system of Ceylon is in process of transition, it is particularly important that the criteria and methodology of caste identification be made clear. Fundamentally the criteria of a caste are explicit in an earlier definitional reference to a caste system. (See page 19.) It should be evident however that in a changing social structure certain caste-like groups will at a given time only approximate any ideal construct. As will be indicated, some "castes" are in process of disappearing, some have disappeared, and certain subgroups at least are losing their differentiation within the larger caste. In general, all of the castes listed are endogamous, multifamily groups having a particular birth status in the society; all hold prestige positions based upon that status and all exhibit some degree of social distance from others and communalism among themselves. In addition, many are distinguished by the practice or the memory of practice of services amounting to caste monopolies, group symbols, rituals of avoidance in reference to certain other groups, and a conscious recognition among individuals of the fact of their birth into such a social segment. If from the standpoint of fine analytical abstractions such groups are not "castes," we must conclude that sociological theory has become too refined for application to this reality. The reality will in any event be studied and the concept applied with full realization that in



some spheres the castes are losing certain elements of caste-likeness. Caste will have been a significant fact in Ceylon long after the last of its specific characteristics are lost, for its conditioning effect upon alternative forms of social organization cannot be escaped.

In the prosaic matter of "finding" the Sinhalese castes, the theoretical concept has not been forgotten, but in general practice preliminary attention has been given what is *called* a caste, as well as what *is* a caste. At no time has any grouping been evident which met the theoretical requirements but which was not recognized as a caste in the area. On the other hand, certain groups have come to light which in the past have been described as castes, but which today fail to meet even the most elementary requirements. To be sure, such groups are not called castes in the areas where they appear. In general there is a close conformity between what the Sinhalese call a *kulaya* or a caste and what the sociologist sees in the concept. At its barest minimum, local usage and sociological conceptions are almost at one in recognizing the criteria of endogamy, communalism, and social distance, and usually distinctive roles, or their memory, in the society. The first practical step in covering the Sinhalese hierarchy was that of deriving all possible caste names and descriptive materials from available sources.<sup>3</sup>

Armed with this partially outmoded, conflicting, inaccurate descriptive glossary, informed Sinhalese were consulted in an attempt to consolidate single castes which in this naive process had been listed separately under euphemistic titles, to sort out caste from noncaste, and to determine the probability of contemporary survival of those noted. With full notes from this process, several Sinhalese persons of different castes known to have close connections with village life were invited to compile lists of castes known to them in present day Ceylon and then to aid in integrating these

<sup>3</sup> These sources included a great many colonial observers, some of whom are cited in Chap. 3; some Sinhalese works such as the *Janavamsa* and *Niti-Nighantava* which, whatever their authenticity, have comprehensive listings of groups which may be deemed castes; and other travelers' accounts not cited in Chap. 3 because of the incompleteness or partiality of their evidence, i.e., Sirt (90); Lewis (48 and 49); Tennent (98); Neville (57); *The Taprobanian* (97); Lawrie (47); Parker (62). The only modern listing and treatment is that of Gilbert (31), 1945, whose naïvetés are so serious as to have qualified its usefulness; and Hocart (38), whose data were limited to those supporting his thesis of kingship. Few modern Sinhalese works deal much with caste structure, although some have been cited in other contexts.



registers with those derived from literary sources. These processes yielded a list more inclusive and extensive than most historical ones, together with some indications where surviving members of the smaller castes might be found. This basic register provided the framework upon which field work was begun, which, from the structural point of view, involved not only searches for contemporary representatives of castes long unheard of by informants, but also systematic coverage of the island for purposes which could almost be described as those of a caste census. These travels of course were not limited to ascertaining the presence or absence of caste groups. In the course of these studies, carried on at intervals through 1949, 1950 and 1951, various castes, and particularly subcastes, were found which were either not in the original register or which were generally believed to have disappeared in modern times. The general survey techniques were subsequently supported by more intensive studies carried on in a score of villages throughout Ceylon. Certain of these lasted as short a time as one week, most lasted several months, and four were continued through intermittent operations for as long as two and a half years; one was under continuous operation for more than a year. In all instances, sociology students and graduates of the University of Ceylon provided the necessary linguistic skills, rapport and, in some cases, field reporting upon which this study rests.

The census aspect of this work, which was time consuming far beyond its significance, thus is based both upon historical references and direct field observation. No caste or subcaste has been included here which was not found by the process of direct interview, except where explicitly noted. In determining the presence of castes and subcastes in contemporary society, three preliminary questions were always explored in each locality. These were in regard to the presence of groups having caste, or subcaste, designations, the boundaries of acceptable marriage, and the boundaries of acceptable interfamily intercourse, as in eating. The caste name, endogamy, and social distance do not make castes, but these are three necessary conditions in situations involving caste or subcaste behavior. A single village in which all residents bear the same caste name, intermarry without stigma, and participate freely in inter-household visiting is not, for our purposes, one divided by caste

lines. These characteristics were utilized throughout as symptoms and as the practical bases upon which a further understanding of the local hierarchy could be developed. If these demarcations are lacking we may conclude that caste distinctions are lacking, even though they may in fact be infinitely varied and complex. Almost always where one or the other of these symptoms were present the other two were also, partial exceptions arising in reference to the subcastes in process of losing their identity and group reality.

Regarding caste names and descriptive designations, like the hierarchical order itself, no literal meaning should be necessarily attached to them. It is no part of the present task to seek the origins of caste, and least of all should the origins of specific castes be sought in their names or traditional designations, usually of a service-occupational nature. The literal meaning of the Sinhalese caste names is more suitable for philological debate than for descriptive or socially analytical purposes.<sup>4</sup> The descriptive English phrases are actually more meaningful for they are renderings of the chief identifying feature, where one exists in the eyes of the Sinhalese. Frequently, in fact, caste names are dispensed with and the caste is referred to by some particular feature, usually its functional monopoly. Thus the Beravā are more often called simply "tom-tom beaters," and invariably the Hēnayā or Radavā is termed "dhoby" following the conventional term for washers in India. Few urban Sinhalese actually know the proper Sinhalese caste name. The descriptive designations are traditional. No one should think that the tom-tom beaters are exclusively engaged in drumming. Similarly it should be apparent that there is no actual "slave" caste in modern Ceylon, even though there is a distinctive subcaste which is recognized in terms of this presumed ancient role.

Several of the lower Kandyan castes have similar endings in their names, *i.e.*, "durayi." "Durayi" is the title of a low caste headman, *i.e.*, one coming from any of these castes, and in consequence the honorific is generally applied to those concerned regardless of personal honors. To infer that these castes are in reality subdivisions of a great "durayi" caste is not justified either in tradition or in their functional relationships today. While it is possibly significant that certain of the lower castes use relationship terms in

<sup>4</sup> Thus see Neville (57).



reference to each other, the limits of such practice are not the same as the boundaries of the *durayi* suffix. In common village practice among the Goyigama the various *durayi* castes are called simply by this term, but it is a euphemism generic to several service castes, each of which is clearly distinguished from the other by endogamy, status contentions, and frequently by differences in traditional and even actual contemporary roles and prerogatives. The "*durayi*" suffix has been used here in general accord with popular usage today.

Ceylon as a predominately agricultural country might understandably have as its dominant and most numerically important caste that of the Govi-vamsa, or, as more commonly known, the Goyigama, literally "cultivating people." Even this, however, is misleading, for the backbone of Ceylon is a cultivating peasantry regardless of caste. There is no indication that in any period were many specialized castes engaged purely in matters of the specialty; most held cultivable land, frequently in return for their specialized service. In modern Ceylon the caste occupation or service survives in some degree, but agriculture is, except for Karava and perhaps a few others, the major means of existence. The practice of agriculture is not a status determinant for the non-Govi (non-Goyigama). In regard to other vocational designations, some today may be regarded as caste monopolies, others have lost the concept. Concepts of honor and degradation associated with the services of the castes may have influenced modern attitudes toward employment, and hence affected the aspirations of youth and occupational mobility. These, however, would not be structural aspects of the system so much as processual and transitional.

The caste hierarchy (pp. 93-94) indicates the presence of unique castes in the interior and on the coast, as well as a number of castes found in both areas. The Goyigama are ubiquitous and everywhere hold a dominant status despite challenges from other castes in the Low Country. Obviously the relatively high status of the Karāva, Salāgama, and Durāva, is not credited by Kandyan, while many low Kandyan castes are practically unknown to Low Country Sinhalese and hence of no significance there. The proliferation of subcastes among the Goyigama is strictly a Kandyan phenomenon, although the Low Country recognizes varying statuses for differ-



ent family (House) lines, with some tendencies toward subcastes short of formal definition. Of the castes noted here, all except the Hannāli were interviewed by the author. The Hannāli verge upon extinction and the few remaining families believed to be located were not interviewed out of regard for local propriety. The subcaste differentiation of the Kandyan Goyigama is in process of flux and hence no more than an approximation of existing reality.

The order of precedence given the major castes is not in complete accordance with tradition but represents the author's evaluation of caste position from the observation of status symbols and restrictions. At the lower range of the scale, among chiefly Kandyan castes, this hierarchy conforms closely to that of tradition. In the upper and middle ranges the older arrangements, as given in various sources, were themselves conflicting, indicating no doubt that precise status position was variable. The arrangement devised here has, in comparison with most of these reports, upgraded, for example, the Hēna, Salāgama and Durāva. The Hēna provide a curious instance of a caste whose nominal and theoretical position is somewhat lower than the discriminatory treatment meted out to them would indicate, while the Salāgama and Durāva as castes, have, both theoretically and actually, moved up in status during the past two centuries. In general, the order of precedence given here is fairly accurate, *i.e.*, in accord with general village opinion and behavior, at the higher and at the lower levels. (Obviously the arrangement is not based on actual or claimed genealogical connections with parent bodies in India.) No precise reliance can be placed on the arrangement of mid-groups. Village opinion does not grade each caste in reference to each other one, and the gradings vary between localities. A closer approximation to actual status position is reached by the separation of the distinctively Kandyan and Low Country castes.

THE CONTEMPORARY CASTES AND SUBCASTES IN APPROXIMATE  
ORDER OF RANK WITH MOST COMMON ENGLISH DESIGNATIONS

- |                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Govi-vamsa (Goyigama) | Cultivators of the soil |
| Subcastes: *             |                         |
| Radala                   | King's office holders   |
| Mudali                   | Leaders of the people   |

Pāṭṭi	King's cowherds
Kaṭupulle	King's clerical servants
Nilamakkāra	Temple servants
Porovakāra	Wood cutters, axemen to the King
Vahal	"Slaves," household workers to Radaḷa
Gattara	Goyigama "outcastes"
Guruvō ‡	Conch blowers
2. Karāva †	Fishermen
Subcaste:	
Karāva Porovakāra	Unknown
3. Salāgama †	Cinnamon peelers
Subcastes:	
Hēvāpanne	Soldiers
Kurundukāra	Cinnamon peelers
4. Durāva †	Toddy tappers
5. Navandanna (Ācāri)	Artisans, including smiths of all types
6. Hannāli *	Tailors
7. Hunu	Chunam (Lime) burners
8. Hēna or Radā (Dhoby)	Washers to higher castes
9. Vahumpura (Hakuru)	Jaggory makers
10. Hinnā †	Washers to Salāgama
11. Baḍahāla	Potters
12. Panikki †	Barbers
13. Velli-durayi *	Guardians of Sacred Bo-tree
14. Panna-durayi *	Possibly grass cutters
15. Beravā	Tom-tom beaters
16. Batgam Beravā *	Tom-tom beaters
17. Kontadurayi *	Unknown
18. Batgam (Padu) *	Possibly King's palanquin bearers
19. Oli	Dancers
20. Pālī *	Washers to low castes
21. Kinnara *	Mat weavers
22. Gahala-beravā *	Funeral drummers and execu- tioners
23. Roḍi *	"Outcastes," beggars
<i>Hierarchically unclassified</i>	
24. Kavikāra *	Dēvāle (temple) dancers and chanters
25. Demala-Gattara †	Tamil "outcastes"

\* Typically found only in Kandyan areas.

† Typically found only in Low Country areas.

‡ Practically confined to the North Central Province. For other caste-like groups peculiar to this Province see Chap. 6 and Chap. 10.



## *The Castes*

### GOYIGAMA

The term Goyigama means literally "cultivator of the soil" and it is the cultivating, the farmer, caste which is at the peak of the Sinhalese hierarchy. While cultivation is not actually a caste monopoly, and many members are not in fact cultivators, presumably they have been distinguished from others because no low services or cultural practices were ascribed to them, as was the case for other castes who farm. Their numerical importance is singular. One would scarcely expect to find the peak of a social pyramid larger than its base, but it is probable that the Goyigama constitute at least one-half of Sinhalese society. The sensationalism of this observation is reduced by the number of subcastes, particularly in Kandyan areas. Today, however, the term Goyigama is frequently applied to all subcastes, although intermarriage and social intercourse between traditional subcaste lines is limited. While the lower frequently refer to themselves simply as Goyigama, their neighbors are usually less charitable.

In the Low Country there is no doubt that the term Goyigama is applicable to more individuals than is any other caste term; subordinate status in the caste seldom carries precise subcaste nomenclature. The House name (Gē) derived from the father is a brand of intracaste status, and achieves significance in reference to intermarriage and to some extent in social intercourse. In parts of the Kandyan region, subcastes and corresponding status gradients are formally differentiated, and are frequently recognizable in the Gē name.



Estimates of caste size and distribution are at best educated guesses, for there is no means of statistical validation. The Goyigama as an inclusive group are, however, the most numerous caste throughout the interior, both Low Country and Kandyan. The proportion has probably increased slightly in recent years through a tendency for individuals or families to achieve anonymity and thus move into the ranks of the most esteemed. In most major civil divisions of the island direct observation indicates that the Goyigama are the major group numerically. Important exceptions arise in coastal zones which are heavily populated by Karāva and/or Salāgama, and others, and in some interior areas, *e.g.*, in portions of Sabaragamuwa Province, where lower castes, particularly Vahumpura, appear to predominate. Seldom can one list as many as twenty or thirty contiguous villages in any part of the island where Goyigama would not be the largest single caste, and frequently the majority. The Goyigama are ubiquitous, except for the narrow fringe of villages along the ocean.

This caste has almost exclusive claim to a past lordly status in Ceylon, although this is primarily a subcaste prerogative of the topmost subdivision. Royalty is presumed by them to have intermarried and become part of the Goyigama, although pretensions to royal status are seldom met with. Davy, in the early nineteenth century, wrote that the "Goiwanse are a privileged people, and monopolize all the honours of church and state, and possess all the hereditary rank in the country."<sup>1</sup> Where subcaste designations were precise, these monopolies were without doubt those of their higher divisions, as frequently they are today. In recent times, of course, there has been relaxation of caste monopoly in honors of state, but very slightly in the allocations of religious honors, except in so far as they can be bestowed through the relatively weak non-Siyam Nikāya sects.

It should not be implied that the high birth position of the Goyigama is reflected throughout the population in secular or in religious power or in a universally higher level of living, although important posts are more accessible to them, other factors being equal, and in the villages probably more have inherited high economic class, as well as caste, position. Generally the Ceylonese are

<sup>1</sup> Davy (12), p. 113.

peasants, and the bulk of the Goyigama peasants live much as do their low caste peasant neighbors. The amenities of their villages are similar and no visible signs, or even average differences, are manifest between them and most moderately low castes. Although the most dominant and the wealthiest persons in peasant village areas are usually Goyigama, the majority live, in a material sense, little or no better than their low caste neighbors. It is often true, however, that among the abjectly poor the Goyigama are notably underrepresented, and among the peasant village wealthy they are notably overrepresented.

The varying numbers of Goyigama subcastes cited by different writers have been remarked upon earlier. In some instances the discrepancies arise from the fact that different regions have been observed, but this is no complete explanation. Perhaps Knox and certain others merely saw no point in giving great detail to intra-caste distinctions. However, whatever may have been the situation in earlier centuries, the caste is today divided into a number of endogamous subgroups having distinctive status positions and, in some instances, precise subcaste names and traditions of distinctive service to king or temple. The discreetness of these subdivisions ranges from that of a mere feeling that certain family lines are better or worse than others to the formal subgradations of the Kandyan Provinces.

In the Low Country, subcaste differentiation has a minimum of rigidity. Everywhere, however, some lines are "good," others are less good. It is apparent that many of the most respected Gē have immediate ancestors of high governmental distinction or wealth and, often, Gē names implying positions of prestige in ancient times. While there is no marked tendency to marry among those with the same Gē name, most marriage arrangements take into account this unrationalized and frequently inexact heritage of position. In normal daily interaction such prestige differences are usually irrelevant. Particularly in the Southern Province, however, the prestige hierarchy of Gē lines is more formalized, and amounts virtually to formal subcaste organization in some localities. Thus several houses are distinguished by a title of respect (*Hāmu*) which has become both a suffix to proper names and a generic term for persons of the appropriate Houses. Rarely is dif-



ferentiation between remaining Goyigama Houses so formalized, although some villages visualize a clear-cut classification of all other Goyigama into at least two further prestige ranks. Interaction between the levels, especially the Hāmu, requires symbolic recognition of status differences, *i.e.*, in language, seating, and separation in eating. In most Low Country areas prestige subdivisions are neither so encompassing nor so precisely defined.

Subcaste proliferation in the Kandyan interior is a phenomenon of some antiquity, and rests on feudal bases; the highest are distinguished as lordly vassals, others by service functions to secular rulers or to temple authorities. Local variations in the presence of these divisions as social groupings make generalizations regarding the structure difficult. In some areas certain of the subcastes stand practically as caste groups in themselves; elsewhere it is impossible to ascertain the precise degree to which they are endogamous, communalistic units and the degree to which their reality as groupings lies only in the memory of tradition. In many portions even of the Central Province, where their presence is most frequent, only the undifferentiated caste is to be found today, with Gē status differences it is true, but not as part of the existing subcaste structure found elsewhere.

The recognized subgroups occur mainly in areas surrounding the city of Kandy, long the seat of the interior monarchs, who ruled even into the British period with their feudal-caste system of organization. Within a fifteen- or twenty-mile radius of Kandy the subcastes are prevalent today, particularly toward the north and east. They are found elsewhere, as in parts of Sabaragamuwa and Uva, and in the north-central jungles, but they are more the exception than the rule. There is a full range in the existence of Kandyan subcaste organization from high differentiation to nonexistence. Almost everywhere subcastes are found there is today a reluctance, except by the Radaḷa, to admit a subcaste title even though it may be evident in the name of the village itself or in the Gē names of the people. In many instances, however, the subcaste boundaries of social intercourse and marriage are fairly clear, and local persons of low caste know full well who is and who is not properly entitled to more and to less respectful behavior.

The Radaḷa, as the descendants of the manorial lords, hold



firmly to that status, and to many of its attendant roles. They are not incensed if referred to as Goyigama, but nonetheless they are Radaḷa, and the villagers and all surrounding treat them as such. Even where feudal tenures are entirely abandoned, the Radaḷa is usually a seat of power and his home, the Valuvva (manor house), with its occupants, is looked upon in a way that in some communities probably has not changed essentially in the past two hundred years. Where the Radaḷa exists, caste differentiation generally is at its maximum, for around him adhere the various service castes and with him, too, traditional modes of conduct persist. The family names found here are the most respected in the land today and are well known as such in effete urban circles as well as in the remote jungles. These are the Kandyan chieftains.<sup>2</sup>

Where the Radaḷa is, the status of other Goyigama groups remains relatively low, compared to undifferentiated localities. The Mudali, likely to be termed simply Goyigama even by the Radaḷa, is here a subordinate, of good blood it is true, but like low castes, called upon for deference and perhaps service. This is related to the fact that the Radaḷa is usually the large land holder and hence the local patron and wielder of power over all others of the village regardless of caste. It would probably be correct to consider the Mudali the nindagam brother of the undifferentiated Goyigama in other areas. They are both undistinguished but of good caste, and it would appear that intermarriage between them is acceptable. Intermarriage of either with the Radaḷa would be considered intra-caste, but would be strongly frowned upon by the latter and likely to occur only in exceptional circumstances of strong dowry bargaining power on the part of the former.

<sup>2</sup> It is not to be inferred that the Radaḷa ever had a Ksatriya status or that they claimed to have. While a few Kandyans can be found who claim royal blood, and it is popularly believed that the Kings had Goyigama wives whose descendants are no doubt Kandyan Goyigama, there is no evidence that any Goyigama had royal status. That some pretensions in this direction may once have been made is suggested by an ancient inscription regarding their inappropriateness for the kingship. (*Epigraphia Zeylanica* [21], Vol. II, pp. 157-164.) Undoubtedly from a royal source, the specificity of the Goyigama's inappropriateness leaves nothing to be questioned: "People of the Govi caste should never aspire to the dignity of kingship, [for this would be] like the crow aping the swan [or] the donkey the Saidhava steed [or] the worm the cobra-king [or], the firefly the sunshine [or], the snipe the elephant [or], the jackal the lion. However powerful the people of the Govi caste may be, they should not be elected to rule the kingdom. . . ."

The remaining subdivisions, where recognized, are clearly subordinate to those who can claim to be "good" Goyigama. The Paṭṭi are found in the Kandyan area, especially in the Central Province, and are apparently the most numerous subcaste recognized as such.<sup>3</sup> In the majority of localities they repudiate the term Paṭṭi and insist upon being called Goyigama, but for those of "good," i.e., undifferentiated, Goyigama status this is an amusing pretension and one which usually does not succeed in bringing the pretender into social intercourse with the superior group. There is of course no way of telling how many Paṭṭi, or other villages for that matter, have already made the transition and are now a part of the simple Goyigama community, but village memories of important facts are centuries long. The more extensively one travels and studies the Central Province, the more one is impressed by the frequency of Paṭṭi villages, so recognized by their neighbors of all castes. There is some basis for believing that most are truly endogamous groups, mainly through the resistance of "good" Goyigama to their pretensions of equality, and their refusal to marry below their Goyigama rank.

The Kaṭupulle and Nilamakkāra are subcastes in only a vague sense in modern Ceylon. No person was found who would admit membership in an endogamous subunit of the Goyigama called Kaṭupulle, despite the presence of the term in the family names in one locality at least, in the Matale-Dambulla area. While there is surely intermixture with simple Goyigama and particularly with inferior subcastes, other residents of the vicinity recognize the Kaṭupulles as an independent and endogamous subcaste.<sup>4</sup> Persons of Nilamakkāra status are readily, if infrequently, found both in the Central Province and Sabaragamuwa and in accord with tradition are usually farming lands with some temple services in their titles. There is considerable doubt, however, if families who are

<sup>3</sup> There is some evidence that the Timbīli subcaste which is to be found in some older references is identical with Paṭṭi. The application of this term to people also called Paṭṭi was noted in two places in the Central Province. Both words are said to come from roots which pertain to the care of cattle.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, "Kandyan Notes" in the *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register* (48 and 49), April, 1921, pp. 181-190. Lewis also noted in 1921 the existence of the "Kaṭupullī class" at Nugatenna where they were recognized as "fiscal's peons," i.e., messengers, process servers. He also found descendants of the "slaves" in upper Dumbura, Timbillo in lower Dumbura, and Poravakarayo in lower Dumbura.



Nilamakkārayās are, or are looked upon as, a true caste subdivision. They are simply Goyigama people who have preserved the traditional roles. Since marriage and social intercourse is local, this tends to operate toward the appearance of subcaste endogamy and communalism. Status claims of the Nilamakkārayās would make them superior to Paṭṭi but imply inferiority to many Goyigama families.<sup>5</sup>

The Porovakāra is a small but commonly recognized and widely distributed subcaste, which in some areas approximates a distinct caste of lower status than any claimant to Goyigama rank. Generally, however, they are viewed as a subordinate division of Goyigama whose ancient service was woodcutting, especially as fodder for the king's elephants. In many places the Porovakāra refuse to accept that name, terming themselves simply Goyigama, to the annoyance of "good" Goyigama of the area who reject egalitarian and matrimonial relations with them. Thus the Goyigama peasants residing in the village of Porovakagama manifest no knowledge of the significance of their village name despite the fact that the surrounding villages are perfectly informed on the matter and appear loath to marry with them. It is believed by some Kandians that this "caste" traditionally connected with the care of elephants corresponds to Knox' "elephant men," who were of approximately the same status but not classed by him as belonging to the highest caste.

The Vahal subcaste is exceedingly small and only under conditions of isolation has their group identity been maintained. Although slavery was not traditionally a caste status, where Vahalla are known today it is commonly recognized that they are the descendants of slaves in ancient times. The division is inferior in grade, but it has a peculiarly affectionate status in the eyes of the aristocrats. It is the caste from which the Valavva household servants were procured. Undoubtedly this is still the case in some Valavvas. In such instances the Radaḷa may apply euphemisms for the sake of the caste feelings of his household retainers. Very

<sup>5</sup> Davy (12), identifies them with the Paṭṭi and describes them as shepherds, a usage which has no support in other texts. Lawrie (47), notes several villages of this caste, and Kandians well versed in traditional lore described them as helpers of priests and one source indicates that they have freely intermarried with Paṭṭi.



generally the group is indistinguishable both because of hidden identity and because of intermixture with other subcastes. Vahal people, known as such by their neighboring villages, exist in the Matale area. However, only in the isolated heart of the Uva jungle in the Wellasa Division has an openly and self-admitted Vahal village been discovered. Village endogamy is the strict rule, and social intercourse with surrounding Goyigama is subject to certain qualifications. It is reported that similar villages exist elsewhere in the Uva jungle.

The status of the Gattara is even more paradoxical than that of the high caste "slaves." Gattara is not properly a caste stratum; it is a designation for high caste villages placed beyond the pale of organized society by the Sinhalese kings. All can properly lay claim to being Goyigama; they are simply set apart from other Goyigama. The large number of villages consigned to Gattara have become an endogamous collection largely without intercourse with other Goyigama villages. Possibly a dozen of these villages, some quite large, are to be found in the area north and east of Kandy. Although the word Gattara is repudiated, the villages are clearly demarcated in the eyes of their local contemporaries.

The concept of Goyigama has a dual application. It is at once an undifferentiated caste name indicating the highest status, and a "genus" within which there are various "species." Throughout the Kandyan provinces there is a tendency, promulgated by the lower "species," to bring the term into a completely unified significance. In the Low Country the designation Goyigama is sufficient to place one in the highest caste group for purposes of marriage, although the Gē status might well be examined. It should not be thought that the subcastes of the Kandyans are strictly and perfectly endogamous and socially exclusive. Inter-marriage and hence social intercourse obtains in many localities between subordinate divisions. Where local villagers are confused over the subcaste hierarchy, believing that Vahal is synonymous with Gattara, or again that Patti are the same people as the Porovakārayō, it is possible that the cause of their confusion lies in the actual fusions going on locally.

In the north-central jungles which long remained outside the normal framework of Sinhalese society, subcaste terminology

differs from the other Kandyan provinces, but the functional structure is essentially the same. (See Chap. 10.) The Guruvō, however, are a Goyigama subcaste of this area which cannot be identified in counterpart elsewhere. Also known as Hak-gediya people, they are traditionally associated with conch (*hakgedi*) blowing at devāle ceremonies and are, of course, an agricultural, peasant folk. Today the identification of a village of this subcaste is virtually impossible for an outsider since the term, and all of its equivalents, are deemed epithets and usually are not used even by other Goyigama. Guruvōs are today Goyigama in the eyes of all but those adjacent to them. There is no doubt, however, of some maintenance of endogamic practice enforced through the persistent memory of the jungle that certain villages are reputed to be of low family heritage. The village name, *i.e.*, people of "X," is frequently substituted for the generic subcaste title, a practice also found in reference to other inferior subcastes as well.

The Vāddās, Ceylon's aboriginal race, have often been noted as a subcaste of the Goyigama with their legendary origin in the union between the Sinhalese's progenitor Vijaya and a native princess. Actually the contemporary caste position of the Vāddā is an academic rather than a village question. Approaching extinction, where they are identifiable they live more as an isolated tribal people than as participants in the Sinhalese social structure. They have also slowly been amalgamated into the Sinhalese, where the two are in contact, probably in accordance with their high caste position, hence into Goyigama. The Vāddā of the Eastern jungle claims a Goyigama status today, but in actual terms his caste position is irrelevant. His social world is Vāddā and to the nearby Sinhalese he is a scorned outsider.

#### KARĀVA

The "fishing caste" of the Sinhalese probably represents a rather late invasion from South India.<sup>6</sup> While there are isolated villages to be found in the highlands, this is exceptional. They are heavily concentrated in the coastal area from Chilaw to Hambantota.

<sup>6</sup> See Thurston (101), Vol. III, p. 250, "Karaiyān." Karāva writers repudiate this, however. See Chap. 12 below.



Evidence of their late Tamil origins is certainly present in the mixed usage of Tamil and Sinhalese languages among Sinhalese fishermen in the Chilaw and Negombo areas and in their unique marriage customs probably of Indian origin. Socially and culturally the vast majority today, outside this limited area, show no greater Tamil influence than the Sinhalese generally. Like some other Sinhalese, their current caste name appears to be of Tamil derivation and probably indicates an Indian coastal origin, an interpretation which is strongly debated by spokesmen of the caste, who attribute its origin to "Karu" of Karu land in India, and of Kṣatriya affiliation rather than fishing.

Along the densely settled southwest and southern coast, there are many localities in which Karāva are the predominant caste numerically. If one took only a coastal strip, say fifty yards wide from the sea, north of Negombo to Tangalla, there would, with a few exceptions, be an almost exclusively Karāva population in village after village. In addition to these villages, the neighboring towns and cities have many who are several generations removed from the sea and are engaged in trade and business. For the Low Country as a whole the Karāva are far outnumbered by Goyigama. The 1824 Census listed them second in size in each district of the Low Country, although very much smaller than the Goyigama.

Subcastes among the Karāva were described by Valentyn, de Saram and Tennent.<sup>7</sup> The primary basis of differentiation appears to have been upon the type of fishing undertaken, although authors indicate that intermarriage was permissible between most of the groups. If such status subdivisions existed, there is little evidence of them today. The Karāva are highly differentiated economically but these are in no sense caste divisions. The closest approximation to true subcastes is found between the Karāva north of Colombo and those to the south. This is a type of geographic difference seldom noted in other Low Country castes and arises over issues of Sinhalese purity, rather than in family name distinctions as is the case of the Goyigama. Some southerly Karāva look somewhat distastefully on their northerly caste comrades because of the

<sup>7</sup> Valentyn in *Philalethes* (67), Chap. II. De Saram is cited by Hayley (36); (de Saram's account has not been located in any Ceylon library, having, in the Colombo Museum, apparently been cut from its binding by interested persons), Tennent (98), Vol. II, pp. 129-130.



unmistakable evidence of Tamil influence. On occasion the disparaging name of "Demala Karāva" (Tamil Karāva) is applied to the northerners, but this of course is a spite word rather than a descriptive or accurate designation. The Karāva of the Chilaw coast have nothing in common with the Ceylon Tamil Karayar who are to be found still further north. The Karayars are fully part of the Jaffna caste structure with a relatively lower status in it than the Karāva in the Sinhalese system. Whatever may have been true in the past, divisions of the Karāva have little significance today, for the distinction noted here is hazy at best. If the two areas are largely endogamous, this is dictated by localism in marriage rather than strong feelings of division.

More literally a subcaste division, but of little importance, are the Karāva Porovakāra, a few small villages living inland some twenty miles from Kalutara. Wholly dissociated with fishing, they are simply village cultivators claiming Karāva status but looked down upon as an inferior lot by other members of that caste and treated with the etiquette and social distance accorded those of low caste. They claim Karāva status and the use of the caste symbols. Their origins are purely conjectural and it seems clear that before many generations they will be recognized simply as Karāva since other members of that caste are few in the locality and Goyigama neighbors are disinterested in such peccadillos so long as caste separateness is itself maintained.

More than any others the Karāva have embraced Christianity, principally Roman Catholicism. Undoubtedly this is a product of their coastal position and is perhaps related to their less firm enmeshment in the Sinhalese feudal order and hence greater susceptibility to foreign influences. Secondarily it may be significant that as takers of life their position in reference to Buddhist doctrine is insecure, although this has been exaggerated by early observers.<sup>8</sup> Buddhist fishermen have no difficulty in rationalizing their vocation. In some localities, notably near Negombo, fishermen are almost exclusively Roman Catholic, and the Church has become a highly significant factor in their social organization. If conversion to Christianity has had any direct effect upon caste, it has been to enhance communal exclusiveness. There is no indica-

<sup>8</sup> Sir James Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon* (99), 1850, Chap. I, p. 20.

tion of caste schism on the basis of religious difference; the traditional symbols are common property to both and neighborly relations across religious lines are maintained. While there is little intermarriage between Buddhists and Christians, this rests on reasons similar to the sectarian preference in marriage common to Catholic and Protestant Christians in other lands. The adoption of Christianity and willingness to accept new vocations has, however, led to wide variations in economic class within the caste. Nominal acceptance of the new faith was often a prerequisite for favor under colonial administration, and those who entered into urban and commercial occupations in some instances laid the groundwork for family fortune. A considerable proportion of the island's wealth, particularly through business enterprise, is in the hands of the Karāva. As is to be expected, the urban, wealthy members live in a different social world from the village fishermen or the urban carpenter. However, the aristocrat of wealth would not reject the claim of equal respectability in blood on the part of the fisher. A "good name" among the Karāva is one made eminent by acquired position rather than by the "immutable" law of blood and lineage.

Excluding the urban middle class, the majority of this caste live in homogeneous hamlets along the water front, physically often only a few yards from an agricultural village, or perhaps as a cadjan hut cluster on the outskirts of a town. Social intercourse with agriculturists comes mainly through the market place. Frequently the huts of fishermen merge with the better dwellings of those a generation or two away from the sea and in the urban middle class. Between the two levels there exist social class barriers, but nothing approximating caste division. By the lower castes, the Karāva are treated with much the same respect as that accorded the Goyigama, although the village Goyigama may or may not, depending upon local situations, greet his fishing neighbor on terms of equality. Except under urban influences interfamily relationships would be rare, and the Karāva villager often accepts the view that his blood status is slightly inferior to that of his Goyigama neighbor. Shunning agriculture, the typical Karāva villager lives more exclusively in his own caste world than do most of his neighbors. Confronting a common danger and working in an atmosphere that is both caste exclusive and cooperative, and frequently united by the Church,



the villages possess a strong sense of common life, even on the outskirts of the city, or physically adjacent to an agricultural village of any or all castes.

Although it is generally agreed that the Karāva status by birth is somewhat inferior to the Goyigama, this is viewed by many of the intelligentsia as a violation of their claims to an origin higher than that of any other Sinhalese caste. Several studious attempts have been made to demonstrate their warrior (Kṣatriya) origin through philological, historical and even mythological means.<sup>9</sup> While many non-Goyigama make similar claims, the Karāva have been more active than others in voicing them. The verbal battles of the castes are of social significance mainly as they reflect the strength of communalism and pride of blood among the Sinhalese. Their *actual* validity or invalidity is immaterial for the functioning or transitions of the system. Whatever the Karāva may claim, they are not in fact recognized throughout the society as being the "best" caste. Suffice it to say that the Karāva, whether villager or urbanite, never covers up his caste; to the contrary, he is usually proud of it. It is the only caste, except possibly the Salāgama, today using ancient caste symbols in public ceremonies. The white umbrella and the flag of the Karāva are seen in village funerals, both Christian and Buddhist. As if to testify to the effect of Christianity on the caste system, some versions of the caste flag contain the Christian cross.

#### SALĀGAMA OR HALĀGAMA

The Salāgama, frequently referred to as Chalias by earlier writers, are almost entirely a Buddhist coastal people, having moved from South India in relatively recent times. Paul Pieris has reproduced a manuscript of 1682 indicating the connection of both the "Chalia" and the "Chandos" with India and rivalry between the two over the use of ancient symbols.<sup>10</sup> In some early accounts they are in fact called "weavers" in the Kandyan areas, the traditional occupation of the South Indian Chalia, but cinnamon peelers in the Low Country.<sup>11</sup> In Ceylon the derived term Salā-

<sup>9</sup> See for example de Fonseka (13), and pp. 332-334 below.

<sup>10</sup> Pieris (69), p. 545.

<sup>11</sup> Davy (12), pp. 124 ff.; Thurston (101), Vol. II, pp. 11 ff.



gama, or Halāgama, has belonged in modern times to the "cinnamon peelers." The Kandyan Chalia or Salāgama is almost unknown today, as indeed was the case in the time of Davy. Whether or not the very few villages actually existing in the interior antedate the coast settlement is unknown. Their status is relatively high, as it is on the coast.

Apart from urbanites and the few isolated interior villages, the Salāgama are concentrated in the Balapitiya area south of Colombo, and in smaller numbers along the coast to Negombo. They are the most important caste numerically throughout the Balapitiya district. Their distribution corresponds closely with the cinnamon producing areas, and outside these limited but densely settled places very few representatives of the caste are to be found. Occupationally many of them are today associated with the cinnamon industry as owners of the cinnamon land and as laborers engaged in peeling. Neither position is a monopoly today, and the Salāgama also follow a wide variety of occupations varying from peasant cultivation to the professions.

In the conventional caste hierarchy early observers placed the Salāgama relatively low, and there is reason to believe that the present high position is the result of a transition which took place during colonial times. Members of the caste frequently came into positions of economic importance and political influence fundamentally because of their extreme economic importance for the colonial powers. The Salāgama became a favored caste economically, and by its geographical concentration and aggressiveness achieved unity and political power beyond that which might be expected from its moderate size. The astute Jan Schreuder, Governor of Ceylon in the mid-eighteenth century, wrote in his memoirs:

The ancestors of those who are called Chalias were mostly weavers who came from the Coromandel Coast and were reckoned among the respectable classes. In the year 1250 it happened that seven of them were brought here by Moor merchants, and that having come to the Court they earned their livelihood by their handicraft, and had (soon) increased to a considerable number.

That some time later they fell into disfavor with the King on which account he doomed them as a low caste and ordered them to depart from the hill to the low country, and that having arrived

there in the year 1380 they obtained from the King of Kotte the villages they still possess and were taxed with Dekkum or the so called Poll Tax.

This state of things did not however last for very long, for in the year 1406 they made themselves so hated by the King of Kotte both through their ingratitude and other causes that he imposed on them by way of punishment the work of peeling of cinnamon, which before that time was performed by other indigenous castes of this country.\*

It was for that reason and at that time that the cinnamon service was first assigned to them and they have continued to perform it ever since except that some of the least blameworthy were employed as coolies by the King, and others who were found less guilty were placed over them as Durayas or petty headmen.

When the Portuguese arrived in this Island and found that these people were subject to this servitude, they not only continued them in that work but even increased their engebaddé or statutory peeling tax, but in order at the same time to encourage them in their work, each cinnamon-peeler during the time that he was in the forests (cutting cinnamon) was allowed two parras of rice and 12 pounds of carwaat (dried fish), or money in their place, as well as 24 or 30 cubits of linen as a gift.

When we in our turn conquered this country, we in like manner assigned the same service to these people, but in respect of their recompense and services such arrangements were successfully made as the best interests of the Company demanded and which may well continue for the future, as these people do not gladly suffer any change from their old customs, manners, and privileges.<sup>12</sup>

The low status of the caste was shown by Davy, who wrote, "The men of this caste were not allowed to wear caps, or cloths reaching much below the knee, and the dress of the women was similar to that of the potters." But he added significantly that, "The Chalias of the maritime provinces, having been employed as cinnamon peelers, have received great encouragement, in consequence of which their number have so increased, that they have acquired the name of Mahabadde and many of them have become wealthy and

\* Whatever may be the historicity of this tradition, it is highly probable that Chalias were also directly imported from India as cinnamon workers by the Portuguese.

<sup>12</sup> *Selections from the Dutch Records of the Ceylon Government*, No. 5, *Memoir of Jan Schreuder, 1757-1762* (86). Translated by E. Reimers, M.B.E., Government Archivist (Retired), 1946, p. 74.



aspiring."<sup>13</sup> The aspirations have been sufficiently fulfilled since the time of Davy to render the Salāgama one of the high castes of the Low Country, not only in wealth and power but in prestige and esteem assigned them *as a caste*. Like the Karāva, the Salāgama does not hide his position, and, also like the Karāva, he claims an original high (Brahmin) status, although it is not by such claims that the statuses of castes are in reality modified.

Internally the Salāgama is one of the few castes having formal differentiation of a subcaste character. There is no doubt but that this formalization grew out of Portuguese and Dutch influence, although it probably developed with some regard for existing family status. The historic divisions were:<sup>14</sup>

1. Panividakara, official class of chiefs
2. Hewapanne, class of messengers and militia
3. Kurundukara, the cinnamon peelers
4. Uliyakkara, palanquin bearers and talipot (palm) fan bearers

In contemporary times there is no evidence of the existence of either the Panividakāra or the Uliyakkāra as such, presumably due to absorption into the two large groups of intermediate status.<sup>15</sup> Today the caste is divided between families of Hēvāpanne and Kurundukāra grades and a high degree of endogamy and communalism is maintained. There is a tendency for the Hēvāpanne to include large land holders, *i.e.*, descendants of chieftains, a fact which supports this stratum in maintaining their higher status.

#### DURĀVA

The Durāva, usually called "Chandos" by early writers, are the Low Country "toddy tappers" by tradition, *i.e.*, extracting the juice from the coconut palm flower for use as a beverage in both the fermented and unfermented state. They are fairly numerous throughout the Low Country, especially in the Southern Province, and, like the Salāgama, probably represent a rather late South Indian immigration, although this conclusion is inferential. In

<sup>13</sup> Davy (12), pp. 124 ff. The term *Mahabadda* actually was applied to the cinnamon industry *per se* with the meaning of "great industry."

<sup>14</sup> As recorded in *Sampson Rajapakse, Mudaliyar* (84), 1912.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible that the lowest segment is today identifiable as the *Demala-Gattara*. (See pp. 136-137 below.)



the interior of the island, and north of Colombo, the caste is practically unknown. In general throughout the Low Country they, with the previous castes discussed, constitute the "high caste people," together amounting to probably three-quarters of the Sinhalese Low Country population. The Durāva, widely scattered through the region and probably with fewer wealthy constituents than is true for either Karāva or Salāgama, are less assertive of caste pride but, like these others, have had some spokesmen who asserted, and attempted to demonstrate, their noble birth. (See below, Chap. 12.)

Like other Low Country higher castes, the Durāva have no significance in ritual or ceremonial behavior and usually are not discriminated against by the Goyigama or others in any sense other than that of caste exclusiveness. Many toddy tappers at the present time are drawn from this caste, but there is no retention of the traditional occupation comparable to that among fishermen. There are many urban members ranging, like the Karāva and Salāgama, from rich to very poor, but the majority are peasant cultivators and laborers.

No evidence is to be found today of subcastes among the Durāva remotely approximating those described by Valentyn. As far as can be observed, the Durāva are one, having of course a range of family statuses within the caste. Similar to the Salāgama, their status as a group has been rising, but it is significant that whereas a Salāgama would be unlikely to hide his caste, some Durāva, under urban conditions, attempt to be anonymous or assume Goyigama position. In terms of any social action, other than interfamilial, caste membership should cause few if any tangible disabilities. However, there is a definite and accepted feeling that Durāva is the lowest of the higher castes. The ascending history of the Durāva has been weakened in effect by lower bargaining power politically and economically as compared with the Karāva and Salāgama.

#### NAVANDANNA

The Navandanna, frequently referred to as Ācāri, are, like the Goyigama, widely scattered throughout the country, both interior and coastal. In tradition and in contemporary fact, they are the

metal workers: silversmiths, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, and in the Kandyan provinces, carpenters, woodworkers, and lacquer workers as well. In the Low Country much of the woodworking has been taken up by miscellaneous castes, especially the Karāva, although the Navandanna is usually the only blacksmith.<sup>16</sup> In modern times their relative status has declined through the persistent rise of the Salāgama, Durāva and other castes which were once no doubt of lower position. "The Achari," wrote Davy in 1821, "which I have placed third, occupies, according to some the first rank amongst the low castes. It is composed of silversmiths, blacksmiths, brass founders, carpenters, turners, lapidaries, sculptors &c. . . ." <sup>17</sup> Similarly Knox testified to the high status of the Navandanna. Omitting as he did the Low Country Salāgama, Karāva and Durāva, he placed them next to the topmost caste.

Most of the historical accounts list subcastes among the artisans but comment on the fact of intermarriage between them. It seems likely that the divisions were more like guilds than castes. Knox, usually aware of such subtle distinctions, gave no subdivisions on caste lines. Today there is no evidence of division. Recurrent rumors of subcastes of carpenters and of lacquer workers, as strictly local groups, have been heard, but upon investigation no distinction other than that of occupation could be found. It may be reasonably concluded that if any subdivisions occur they are exceptional cases, limited to a few endogamous villages. In the Kandyan highlands it is not uncommon for several of the crafts, *i.e.*, brass, silver, and lacquer work, to be practiced within a single village and even within a single family. No endogamous or status distinction is associated with the precise skill or trade, although there may indeed have been clearer gradations in the past.

The Navandanna are a fairly numerous people. Scattered throughout the interior, both highlands and jungles, are agricultural villages exclusively of them. Many also practice the traditional arts often in conjunction with farming. In no area, however,

<sup>16</sup> Ārāri is generally translated as "blacksmith" but it is undoubtedly derived from the South Indian Āsāri which Thurston describes as a name applied to various artisan castes in the Madras Presidency and Malabar. It is significant that the favored position of the smith as described by Knox is also true for Āsāri in India. Thurston (101), Vol. I, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> Davy (12), p. 124.



are their villages in a majority. In most large Goyigama villages there will be at least one or two Navandanna blacksmiths, both on the coast and in the interior. The majority for the country as a whole are no doubt engaged primarily in agriculture. Such occupational distinctions have no significance at all for caste status. Where the smith is in a predominately Goyigama village, he works on a cash, or at least a contractual, basis. In some more remote areas symbols of the ancient service relationship are kept in the annual presentation of craft products to the leading Goyigama families, although actual work is done only for specified amounts of paddy or money.

Whatever the village and whatever the area of the island, the Navandanna man is not high but he is of respectable caste. Such distinctions are subtle and almost impossible to articulate. He may be welcomed to the home of a Goyigama as an individual; once there he will not be treated as an equal. In the smithy, the blacksmith and the Goyigama may chat almost on terms of equality; in the home their differences become obvious. Toward the smith there are usually no demands of a ritual nature and no translation of social distance into terms of physical space, and ordinarily no expectation nor offer of incipient prostration or "worship" common to most low castes economically beholden to the Goyigama.

The village Navandannayā is seldom reluctant to disclose his caste. He has not the pretensions of the low Goyigama subcaste, nor yet is he subject to consequential inequities in everyday life. There is frequently pride of craft and in some instances pride of lineage, for sophisticated Navandanna people claim Brahminical origins for their caste.<sup>18</sup> Among village folk this conviction of a "truly higher status" is seldom a cankerous sore, as might be inferred from the writings of caste literati.

#### HANNĀLI

Sinhalese tailors were apparently at no time a numerous caste. Knox does not mention them although most observers recognized

<sup>18</sup> A. E. Roberts (Ratnajinendra Rabel Ratnawira), *Visvakarma and His Descendants* (80), 1909, has documented the Navandanna claim to Brahmin status, a claim not unknown among the South Indian artisans. See further Sherring (89), Vol. III, pp. 119-120.



them. Davy said that they "are few in number," and that it "was their duty formerly to make the splendid and barbarous dresses of the king and his court, for which they held lands."<sup>19</sup> Pieris states that they "can be identified as the *alfiates* who figure occasionally in the Portuguese Tombo."<sup>20</sup> In modern Ceylon they have become virtually extinct and in so far as they exist they do not practice the tailor's craft. Close questioning throughout the island indicates that they are recognized as one of the traditional castes. Only in one village, however, were Hannāli residents found. Here, a few miles south of Kandy, there are three households said by fellow villagers to be Hannāli. While their distinctive caste has not escaped village memory and fellow villagers (Goyigama) do not marry with them, the caste name has fallen into disuse and the families are both proud and respected, although not on equal terms with the Goyigama neighbors. As cultivators these people have no connection with tailoring, a craft now practiced mainly by Tamils, even in the present-day construction of the traditional Kandyan costumes. Practically the Hannāli do not exist today, nor apparently did they more than a century ago or quite probably in the time of Knox.

#### HUNU

The Hunu are by tradition the chunam (lime) burners of the Sinhalese and, although few in number, are to be found almost exclusively along the southern and western coast, in towns or urbanized villages. In the Low Country where the majority live, relatively few are engaged in the traditional vocation, many having entered urban occupations. In some instances the large scale lime kilns of the southwest coast are owned and operated by Hunu, but there has been a general movement of outside capital and labor into such operations, irrespective of tradition. In a few Kandyan localities Hunu villages are to be found engaged in lime production on a small scale. Here too, larger enterprises have been established by caste-free capital and with a labor force free from traditional caste principles.

<sup>19</sup> Davy (12), pp. 124 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Pieris (69), p. 47.

Lime burning has a special significance in Ceylon. Not only is the product used in construction, it is also a primary ingredient for betel.

The better sort of Women, as Gentlewomen or Ladies, have no other Passtime but to sit and chew Betel, swallowing the spittle, and spitting out the rest. And when Friends come to see and visit one the other, they have as good Society thus to sit and chew Betel, as we have to drink Wine together. . . . But to describe the particular manner of their eating these Leaves. They carry about with them a small Box filled with wet Lime: and as often as they are minded to eat Betel, they take some of this Lime, as much as they judge convenient, and spread it thin upon their leaf; then they take some slices of the Betel-nut, and wrap them up in the leaf, and so eat it, rubbing their Teeth therewith ever and anon to make them black. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Yesterday and today the ritual of betel is the same and the lime burner is an important producer. The Hunu, however, apparently never had any ritual role connected with their highly ritualized produce. The low skill demanded has made it an easy trade to enter, and one large production center is dominated by Salāgama capital and labor. In one Kandyan village visited, the Hunu craftsmen were buying partially processed lime from an absentee owned kiln, turning it into lime suitable for chewing, and personally peddling it in nearby towns. In the Low Country many persons of the caste are to be found in high status and urban employments. Most are no doubt dissociated from the ancient art.

#### HĒNA OR RADĀ

The principal washer caste of Ceylon is usually called "dhoby," following the Indian terminology for the similar castes of the subcontinent. The Hēna people are scattered throughout all Sinhalese regions and have been recognized by all writers on caste. Seldom does one find a high caste village without a few of these families. In addition there are many exclusively Hēna villages, particularly in the Kandyan provinces. Although often engaged in agriculture, the washing of the high castes' clothes, and hence most clothes, since the higher castes predominate, remains a Hēna

<sup>21</sup> Knox (45), p. 160.



monopoly. Many have become urbanized and are found in professional and clerical occupations; the majority are, however, in villages where, if they themselves do not wash, at least some of their caste neighbors do. Even in cities, where laundering is frequently undertaken on a small capitalistic scale, the industry is almost entirely theirs, in both roles of entrepreneurs and hired labor. The task of washing is everywhere carried out in the manner described by Knox nearly three centuries ago, but few people would today agree with him that the clothes come to no harm in the process. Although ubiquitous, the caste is not a very large one, certainly smaller than the Vahumpura but probably more numerous than the Navandanna.

The dhoby's role in village life is extremely important, less so for his economic function than for his ceremonial. Washers are invariably the persons responsible for the generally maintained customs of cloth draping at marriages and other important ceremonies. In puberty rites, marriages and postnuptial observances he also has special functions, usually specifically connected with the provision and washing of white cloths.<sup>22</sup> The ceremonial as well as the functional roles of the Hēnayā are reproduced by other washer castes in reference to those whom they properly serve. Whom the Hēnayā serves varies widely by locality, but always the Karāva and Goyigama are included. In some Kandyan areas washing is done strictly for the Goyigama, elsewhere for Vahumpura and other moderately low castes as described by Knox. (In urbanized areas no questions of caste arise in such matters.) In some village localities the Hēnayā, for some obscure reason, refuses to serve the Navandanna.

The Hēnayā's status is unique. His caste position is low, but no high caste villager will equate him with other castes deemed low, for he is looked upon in an endearing and affectionate way. He is a subordinate member of the family customarily called "Hēnayā Mama" (Hēnayā Uncle) by the high caste villagers, particularly the young. Although the nominal hierarchy of castes would place him

<sup>22</sup> See further Chap. 8 following. Hutton (40), p. 113, suggests that the low position of the washer may arise from his contact with menstrually polluted clothes. Menstruation is indeed subject to tabu among the Sinhalese, but the immediate question arises as to why "mat weavers" and "grass cutters" are still lower.



somewhat lower than the position awarded him here, in actual treatment and regard he appears the superior to most other low castes.

#### VAHUMPURA

The Vahumpura, referred to by some writers as Kandeyo (hill people), Hakuru (jaggory people) and other terms, are one of the most numerous castes of the Kandyan areas and are found also in some numbers in Low Country districts. It has been claimed by some of them that the caste includes over a million persons.<sup>23</sup> While this is unquestionably a gross exaggeration, the caste is indeed large. Traditionally they are distinguished as the tappers of the kitul palm and makers of the sugar (jaggory) produced from its juices. In some Kandyan areas members of the caste are considered suitable by Radaḷas as kitchen servants, and there is generally a traditional service obligation to the Goyigama at time of weddings. Thus in many Kandyan localities the Vahumpura man was, and to some extent is, expected to carry the "pingo" (shoulder yoke) with the baggage of the wedding party. Such customs are usually kept only in areas where the Vahumpura are economically dependent upon neighboring Goyigama. It is significant as Hocart notes that the kitchen servants at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy are Vahumpura.<sup>24</sup> Although the minute regulations of food preparation found in India are unknown to the Sinhalese, here the concept of caste cleanliness is clear. It is probable too that abstemious gentlemen of high caste status seek mistresses from among the Vahumpura more frequently than would be dictated by chance.

Although in modern times many Kandyan villages have diverse castes, the majority of Vahumpura are cultivators living in homogeneous villages. In some areas they are today engaged in kitul tapping and in jaggory making, although the industry is by no means a caste monopoly. While there are a number of wealthy and urbanized families, the vast majority have remained in the Kandyan and Low Country interior villages, living no differently from

<sup>23</sup> *Memorandum of The Sri Lanka Swajathika Sangamaya* submitted to the Royal Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon (94), 1945.

<sup>24</sup> Hocart (38 and 37), also maintains that cooking was their traditional function.

nearby Goyigama peasants except that their economic status tends to be lower.<sup>25</sup>

In common with other lower castes, the Vahumpura claim a high status in ancient periods, and articulate members have expressed deep resentment of discriminatory treatment in recent times. M. E. Munasinghe, speaking on behalf of the caste at the time of the Ceylon Constitutional reform in 1928, offered evidence that it was of Kṣatriya origin.<sup>26</sup>

### HINNĀ

The Hinnā, strictly a Low Country caste, have seldom been noted by earlier observers. Of the various sources consulted, only Valentyn and de Saram described them as "washers to the Chalias."<sup>27</sup> The caste exists today in relatively small numbers in the cinnamon areas, where it is designated by its traditional role which also implies ceremonial functions similar to those of the Hēna people. It is significant that Valentyn listed this group as one of the despised and degraded castes, a status which they do not hold today, although their precise position in the status hierarchy defies comparative evaluation. Few today are engaged in washing, and their members tend to repudiate the traditional designation and refer to themselves as the people of a particular village, *i.e.*, usually the population center of the caste, south of Colombo. (This village, with a population of under 700 families, is mainly engaged in agriculture.) Probably much washing and associated service for the Salāgama is carried out by the Hēnayās.

The Hinnāvō claim common origin, in ancient time, with the Goyigama, having been distinguished as a group by their honorable service to the King.<sup>28</sup> Their historic origins are conjectural,

<sup>25</sup> Neville (57), April, 1837, p. 47, noted that among the "Hakura, Paduwa and other low castes" a practice was made of tying a band of bark over the breasts for seven months or so prior to the birth of a first child. This is notable in that it is one of the few evidences of status free cultural differences along caste lines. No evidence of this practice could be found among Vahumpura today, although it may be practiced in some remote villages.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Edward Munasinghe, *Supplementary Memorandum on the Vahumpura Caste* (55), 1928.

<sup>27</sup> Valentyn in Philalethes (67); de Saram, quoted by Hayley (36).

<sup>28</sup> The legend of the Hinnā people is given by one of their number, S. H. Premachandra Pothupitiya, in a pamphlet published in 1908, in Sinhalese, *Kauminimewla*.



but the late introduction of a new caste or tribal group should be considered. Van Rhee appears to have identified the caste as "grass cutters," affiliated with, or part of, the Panna-durayi, who were pressed into cinnamon work by the Portuguese and thus affiliated to the Chalias.<sup>29</sup> There is today some bitterness among them toward the Salāgama for "imposing" upon them the name Hinnāvō, which has low status significance. Living as they do in an area in which caste statuses have changed considerably and intercaste relationships tend to be egalitarian outside the home, there is no precise measure of status for the Hinnāvō. They are a relatively endogamous group of intermediate but gradually rising position, eager to shed the recollection of former degradation, and hence reluctant to discuss their past or even their present.

In the Southern Province, Hinnā people are also found, traditionally associated with basket weaving, which in fact is practiced by certain family lines today. Although a few profess blood affiliation with west coast Hinnā, it is evident that marriage is generally local and that here there is no recognition of the traditional service role to the Salāgama. It is not improbable that they were described by Armour as Hundayo or basket weavers, and possibly they may be the same as those described by Cordiner as Hirawas or sieve-makers.<sup>30</sup> Whether or not this small caste, scattered in numerous homogeneous villages in the interior of the Southern Province, is a distinct one cannot be perfectly ascertained. Although some villages know and claim mixture with the coast Hinnā, the people are separated and their traditions dissimilar. The fact that the west coast Hinnā profess ignorance of any connections with the "basket weavers" would indicate a functional separation amounting to that of separation by caste.

It is difficult to equate the social status of the interior and the west coast Hinnā. Each group considers itself superior to the other, probably on general principles. Some of the Southern Province segment identify themselves as socially allied with the neighboring Vahumpura, and also the Demala-Gattara, claiming some intermarriage with each. Such admissions would be con-

<sup>29</sup> "Memoirs of Thomas Van Rhee" in *Memoirs and Instructions of Dutch Governors, Commanders etc.* (105), 1697. Translated by Sophia Anthoniesz, 1915, pp. 40-48. Van Rhee's observations are consistent with the *Niti Nighanduwa* (58), which identifies Panna-durayi and Hinnāvō.

<sup>30</sup> Armour in Hayley (36); Cordiner (9).



sidered lowering to the status-hungry but more urbanized west coast Hinnā. Within the Southern group there are status gradations by House name amounting to intracaste status subdivisions. Whether as cause or effect, the lower grades tend to be landless and to persist in the traditional basket weaving. The results of this craft are marketed in the southern coastal towns.<sup>31</sup>

### BADAHĀLA

The Sinhalese potters are scattered over the island, but are usually found in homogeneous villages or in subvillages close by towns or the cultivator villages. Not a large caste, they are in most cases pursuing their traditional craft, although frequently engaged also in agriculture. Clay deposits possibly influence their distribution, but clay is widely available, and in some instances potter villages transport it from places which, in a bullock-cart economy, are quite distant.<sup>32</sup> Davy found the potters a "pretty numerous caste" bound to furnish the king and chiefs with earthenware, and paying for their lands by small tax money.<sup>33</sup> As he also points out, and as is true today, the Sinhalese consume much pottery because metal vessels are almost unknown in most villages beyond an occasional brass water jug in some more prosperous homes.<sup>34</sup> There are no ritual or ceremonial roles for the potter, and most of his relationships with other castes take place in the marketing of his wares. In some remote areas potters maintain symbolic vestiges of their service roles to the leading Goyigama

<sup>31</sup> The *Niti-Nighanduwa*, like Van Rhee, refers to the Hinnāśv as being "Panneyo," or Panna, the former giving the terms as alternatives for the same people. Any connection, however, between the Low Country Hinnā groups and the Kandyan Panna-durayī, if it existed, is purely historical and of no functional significance today. It might be noted, however, that a caste segment of the Kandyan Panna-durayī is sometimes referred to with a derogatory implication, as "Hinnō-panna," the meaning being simply a "low" Panna. These issues are all conjectural. There is no substantial evidence that the two Hinnā groups described here are in fact a single caste in origin. Functionally they could be treated as distinct bodies today.

<sup>32</sup> Attempts to locate Sinhalese castes in terms of the traditional occupation and its economic or geographic reasonableness are at best dubious. For such an attempt see Gilbert (31).

<sup>33</sup> Davy (12), p. 124.

<sup>34</sup> Davy (12) also refers to the demand-creating ceremony of breaking vessels upon certain occasions and replacing them by new ones. New pots are yet purchased for use on New Year's Day.

families, but the craft has become one of production for the impersonal market. While hand potting is still an important caste monopoly, small industrial enterprises have entered the ceramics field, particularly in tile and brick production. These businesses and their occupations have no caste significance, and are dissociated from the Baḍahāla caste and traditions.

#### PANIKKI

Nearly all early writers refer to a barber caste among the Sinhalese, frequently termed the Embatteo, a Tamil word, and less often Panikki, the Sinhalese equivalent signifying "barber."<sup>35</sup> Knox told of them, although every attempt to find a Kandyan barber caste today has resulted in failure. Davy, who did not confine himself to the Kandyan region, described them as a very small group but little engaged in actual barbering. Extensive questioning throughout all Kandyan regions yielded no evidence of the caste today, other than immigrants of unknown status and Tamils. In the Low Country a Sinhalese "barber caste" was identified, however. These people, found in several Low Country villages in the Western, North-Western, and Southern Provinces, have tended to cling to their traditional occupation, not infrequently following it in cities but maintaining their village residence and ties. Men interviewed in one village locality, where they admitted to belonging to this caste, were practically all migrant barbers or men employed as barbers in the coastal towns. Some individuals have broken ties with the villages and have moved into new pursuits, usually with anonymous caste status. In the villages the Panikki are often the lowest caste of their immediate area and, while resentful and sensitive of their position, conform submissively to the village dictates of etiquette. They have clearly a "low caste" status in contrast with their Goyigama, Karāva and Salāgama neighbors, who, although communally divided, are essentially equal.

<sup>35</sup> "Panikki" means simply to cut, and has been used in reference to other castes as well. It is an honorific term among "tom-tom beaters" and "dancers," and has been used in reference to grass cutters, *i.e.*, Panadurayi. See Van Rhee (105). The common term for one who cuts hair is "Embatteo" or often simply the English "barber."

## VELLI-DURAYI

The Velli-durayi are a very small caste found principally in the North Central Province north of Kalaveva. According to their tradition they entered Ceylon as guardians of the sacred Bo-tree brought from India to Anuradhapura in 289 B.C. The Bo-tree stands today in the temple grounds of that holy city in the north central jungles of Ceylon, and the Velli-durayi are today its caretakers.

Unlike most other castes in Ceylon, the majority of Velli-durayi are both localized and organized. Seven villages adjacent to each other live and work on temple land provided them for their temple service. The organization and allocation of their duties is under the direction of one of them elected democratically with life tenure. Nearby these villages are others of the caste who, as residents of nontemple land, have no services, but who contribute freely to the work of temple upkeep.

Elsewhere in the Kandyan area are members of the caste, usually without actual temple obligations. In such localities it is virtually impossible to distinguish Velli-durayi from other and lower status groups using the "durayi" designation.<sup>30</sup> There has, presumably, been a tendency for others to associate their own history with their higher status Bo-tree guardians. In the Anuradhapura area there is no doubt of the distinct status of this group as a wholly endogamous, ritually distinct caste practicing approved forms of respect toward higher castes, regardless of their association with one of the most sacred symbols of the Buddhist world. Here, too, is a caste with evidence of antiquity but with no sign of mergence into secular feudalism.

## PANNA

The Panna are a fairly numerous Kandyan caste of the "Durayi" group, often called Durayi or Panna-durayi, and are perhaps the same as the Batgam-durayi. Unlike many of the Kandyan castes,

<sup>30</sup> Durayi is honorific applied to several low castes, of which the Velli-durayi is probably the most respected on account of their connection with the sacred tree. The term is that properly given a headman of low caste.



they are not clearly associated with any particular traditional service role, but have been described by some as "grass cutters to the Kings." Thus Davy, writing of them, notes that, "The Pannayo or grass cutters are numerous. The services they had to perform for their lands were to take care of the King's cattle, horses and elephants; furnish the royal stores with vegetables once a fortnight, and provide mats when required."<sup>37</sup> Such a service tradition is not professed by most village Pannayās today, although some attempt to identify themselves with the sacred Bo-tree and its care. Similar to most low castes, claim also is made to warrior status under the ancient kings.

The people referred to as Panna are widely scattered but almost entirely limited to the Central Province and Sabaragamuwa. They seem to be common in areas held by ninda lords, and in spite of their low status are acceptable as household servants by the highest caste in some localities. The Panna appear to hold service roles similar to the Vahumpura in areas where the latter are lacking. While it is apparent that the Vahumpura have frequently emancipated themselves from service relationships to the dominant caste, the Panna seem more generally to be landless and under the domination of a local landowner, often the Raḍala.

In the Kegalle and Matale North districts and in the North-Central Province, it is probable that persons of Batgam-durayi designation are of Panna caste, endogamous only by localism in marriage rather than historic difference. The opprobrious term "Hina-panna" is also applied to them, which would imply that they are an inferior group of the caste. Ievers listed eighteen Batgam-durayi villages in 1899 in the North-Central Province, and field investigations have indicated many more below the southwestern borders of this area.<sup>38</sup> Although they claim a vague traditional status as warriors, there is also a contention that in ancient times they had the right of executing offenders to the king, although this is properly associated with another and lower caste. It seems possible that we are dealing with two castes, or at least two distinct branches of some original group, or even, per-

<sup>37</sup> Davy (12), p. 127.

<sup>38</sup> Ievers (41). It is likely, however, that Ievers did not distinguish between Batgam or Padu and the Bathgam-durayi. Quite possibly, too, the issue is confused by members of the "Padu" also calling themselves "Bathgam Durai."

haps, an attempt by certain Batgam (Padu) to elevate their status. Accurate appraisal of the situation would require detailed study and even then might be beyond reasonable conclusion. The fact that neither Knox nor scrupulously detailed Valentyn mentioned them might indicate that this apparent division developed recently.

### BERAVĀ

The tom-tom beater of the Sinhalese occupies a low position, but one relatively higher than his Hindu counterpart. They are all over Ceylon, their ubiquity probably leading to an exaggeration of their numbers. They are, however, one of the more numerous of the low castes, and few Sinhalese villages are without their services. Not only do they live in small numbers in villages mainly composed of other castes, often in "hamlets" adjoining the main village, but frequently one finds an entire and distinct Beravā village. While the majority do not actually drum, the use of the *bera* and certain other drums is virtually a caste monopoly, and each village has several engaged in the art. Drumming is an important ceremony in Sinhalese life, an essential for temple services, some types of exorcising, and often for funerals, weddings, and other important events.<sup>39</sup> Except for the Navandanna, the Beravā is the only numerically important caste preserving an artistic heritage in modern Ceylon.

In addition to tom-tom beating, they are by tradition weavers and astrologers, and probably "devil dancers." It is probable that the majority of Sinhalese devil dancers are Beravā but, like astrology and weaving, it is not a strict caste vocation.<sup>40</sup> It is interesting

<sup>39</sup> Funeral drumming is not always a Beravā function. A different and lower caste is traditionally associated with it.

<sup>40</sup> Devil dancing is to be distinguished from Kandyan dancing, which is simply a folk art divorced from functional significance and participated in by all castes. Devil dancing is a curative magic art in which the performers, particularly in the Low Country, use elaborately carved masks. This carving and painting of masks is usually also done by Beravā. In some areas Beravā are exclusively associated with dancing to planetary gods rather than "demons," and other, frequently high, castes provide "devil dancers." For further details on devil dancing see Dandris de Silva Gonnewardena: "On Demonology and Witchcraft in Ceylon," *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (33), 1865-66; also O. Petzold: "The Ceremonial Dances of the Sinhalese," *Journal of the Czechoslovak Oriental Institute, Prague*, Vol. II (65), 1939.



that Knox referred to the drummers as also being astrologers and weavers. According to Davy the tom-tom beaters "are weavers by trade, and had to pay a tax in money for their lands, supply the royal stores monthly with vegetables, provide wooden gutters of the Ketoolga (kitul palm), and in some districts furnish a certain quantity of cloth of their own making. Particular families have lands for beating the tom-tom, dancing, piping &c. at the great festivals; and others have portions of church-lands for performing at temples."<sup>41</sup> Pieris has found the caste listed in nine out of seventeen villages of one civil Division in the Portuguese Tomba, under the name of *Parea tecelao*, the latter word meaning weaver, with the obligation of supplying cloth woven by themselves.<sup>42</sup> In modern times the weaving trade has been forgotten, and quite possibly it was more in tradition than actuality during the colonial period. It is relevant that important subdivisions of the South Indian Paraiyan peoples are also weavers.<sup>43</sup>

At present in Ceylon the Beravā exemplify one of the clearest instances of the retention of caste services. This relates, however, only to drumming. Many members are today cultivating temple land received through their sacred service. In more urbanized areas, particularly in the Low Country where feudal service to the temple does not exist, drumming is continued on a contractual and money basis.

#### BATGAM BERAVĀ

This small caste appears to be localized in the Matale and Kurunegala districts, and it was possibly originally a branch of the Gahala-beravā (funeral drummers) found elsewhere. The Niti-Nighantuva is the only source referring to them, and there they are associated as equal with the Gahala-beravāyō. This is strongly repudiated by all members of the caste interviewed, although their neighbors "thought" they had been funeral drummers. Hayley has interpreted their origins as drummers for royal villages, an assumption no doubt based upon the term "Batgam,"

<sup>41</sup> Davy (12), pp. 128-129.

<sup>42</sup> Pieris (69), p. 281.

<sup>43</sup> See Thurston (101), Vol. VI, pp. 77-139.



which could signify such a locality but which would thus imply affiliation with the Batgam (Padu) people.<sup>44</sup> The term, however, has also been a euphemism applied to other low castes attempting to escape the degrading significance of an older name. Members of the caste like to call themselves simply Beravā, but the castes are distinct communally and in marriage. Some members drum much as do the Beravā, and for the same type of functions. It is claimed, however, that the incantations associated with the drumming vary from those of the Beravā. Mainly these people are simply cultivators living in villages, in so far as can be determined, which are dominated by other castes.

#### KONTADURAYI

The Kontadurayi are recognized locally in the eastern part of Sabaragamuwa Province. No evidence of their existence outside this region was found, nor are they referred to by any other writer. They, like the Panna and others, are frequently called simply Durayi. It is possible that the Kontadurayi are the same caste as the Velli-durayi, or more accurately, that the two are branches from the same root. They are not in contact with the latter, but they insist upon their ancient identity with them. In as much as the prefix of each might be of similar original significance (each could be construed as referring to armed guardians) and their origin legends are the same (associated with the Bo-tree), it is possible that the Kontadurayi are an isolated branch of the Velli-durayi, which came into the secular feudal system. Unlike the Velli-durayi, spokesmen of this group claim that they had secular caste duties in the time of the kings, *i.e.*, as palanquin bearers etc., along with the other durayi castes.<sup>45</sup> Those visited, near the town of Balangoda, looked upon themselves as the descendants of service tenants in a royal village once on the spot, and shared their village residence with Batgam people, with whom there was a general feeling of equality.

<sup>44</sup> Hayley (36), Appendix VI, p. 103 fn.

<sup>45</sup> It seems likely that this group, if recognized, was classed by early writers as Velli-durayi. Neville, in *The Taprobanian* (97), 1887, pp. 137-138, offers some interesting lore in reference to offshoots of the Velli-durayi in southeastern Ceylon.

## BATGAM

The Batgam is a fairly numerous Kandyan caste usually called Padu by earlier writers and Poddah by Knox. The term Padu is common today. However, it is considered a low and degrading epithet, no doubt due more to connotations than to literal meaning, which is debatable. The Batgam are found throughout the Kandyan provinces including the north-central jungle. High castes consider them fit only for menial outdoor labor, and traditionally unsuited for household work. Their own tradition is that of royal service, particularly as palanquin bearers for officials.<sup>46</sup> It is this ascription that usually has been attached to them. That such a role was unimportant or buried very deeply in the past is indicated by the fact that Knox could find no service attached to the caste nor even an explanation for its low position, and the *Janavamsa* indicates that they were hired workers.<sup>47</sup> Under the general classification of Padu it is evident that several caste-like groups or presumably caste-like groups have been included by a number of observers. The *Niti-Nighanṭuva* distinguishes two Padu castes; Davy said that there were three groups, *i.e.*, Paduas proper, iron smelters or Yamano, and executioners. With such limited descriptive material as is provided in the older sources and in view of terminological transitions it is impossible to unravel today the true relationships between people calling themselves "Batgam," as all members of the Padu caste now do. There is clearly a fairly large caste, especially in the Central and Sabaragamuva Provinces, who are the Padu, now Batgam. Most of these people are economically depressed, lacking in land, and are often wage laborers. In the Ratnapura area they are said to be funeral drummers, although this may or may not have traditional association. The subgroup of Yamano, noted by several early authors, such as Armour and Davy, is rare but not extinct. It is not, in fact, a caste subdivision but rather an occupational name for persons who are otherwise the same as the Batgam or Padu. Yamano have been found in the Central Province and east of Balangoda in Sabaragamuva Province. Those who accept the name are simply elderly

<sup>46</sup> See further Denham (16), p. 192; Cordiner (9), p. 93.

<sup>47</sup> Knox (45), p. 110; *Janavamsa* (42).



members of a Batgam village, and who retain some knowledge of an ancient art of iron smelting practiced in former days. In no sense was a hereditary status position within the caste associated with the art, all marrying freely and having no communalistic or social distance concepts in reference to other Batgam. One village having the Yamano designation within the locality name has used its significance of "iron" to support their claim to Navandanna (blacksmith) status.

### OLĪ

The Olī (Oliya, Olee) have been described by almost all investigators other than Knox. Usually they have been vaguely associated with ceremonials and festivals, *i.e.*, as dancers or the carriers of effigies. Davy says of them that they were very few in number, and had no particular service to perform but to carry in procession one of the great demons.<sup>48</sup> While indeed a small caste, they are somewhat more numerous than Davy implied, and are to be found in both the Kandyan area and the Low Country. Seldom are they in caste homogeneous villages, and usually only a few are found in a single locality. The largest concentrations were found in the Southern Province, but no clear connection with the interior group of the same name could be established, nor in the Low Country could identical ceremonial function be established as fact, although both are supernaturally gifted.

In the Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces the Olī generally remember their traditional role as dancers, a legend which probably has some groundwork in fact, since not only do some village Olī dance today, but, more significantly, those holding *dēvāle* service lands have ceremonial roles. The Kandyan Olī claims prerogative in the ceremonial cleansing after ritually dangerous ceremonies, and particularly in reference to the god Gara Yakka.<sup>49</sup> Only in the *dēvāle*, however, is there evidence that the roles of Olī and Beravā are precisely separated.

In some Kandyan villages Olī are entirely divorced from cere-

<sup>48</sup> Davy (12), p. 129.

<sup>49</sup> See also Neville (57), 1888, pp. 51-52. Gara Yakka masks are worn by Beravā in the Low Country.



monial matters and are generally poor and often landless peasants. In the Low Country they are in some instances agricultural laborers and peasants, although one large village is almost exclusively engaged in selling fish caught by neighboring Karāva. Elsewhere in the Low Country they are termed "Nekati," and hold a virtual monopoly in astrological practices. Usually they profess no ritual responsibilities, but are aware of the Kandyan Olī. It is doubtful if marriages take place between those of the Low Country and the interior, although caste oneness is claimed.

### PALĪ

The Palī (Paliyā, Palie or Palee) have been described by most early writers as the washers for the low castes. Although not mentioned by Knox, their presence is testified by Valentyn at about this same period. There is also a vague traditional association with the function of conch blowing at *dēvāle* ceremonies, even though this service is today done by other castes. The Palī appears to be strictly Kandyan, and even in the Central Province there are very few indeed. Generally their traditional role of washer to the low castes is recognized and sometimes it is actually fulfilled. In most villages suitable for Palī service, *e.g.*, Beravā, Panna, Batgam, the light task of washing is done by the separate families for themselves. Frequently these villages are too poor to pay for such services, and frequently, too, there are no Palī locally available. In the Matale area, however, evidence was found in various localities of Palī washing for Beravā, Panna and Batgam. Most are landless and frequently dependent upon casual coolie labor. In one locality where the Hēnayā is paid in cash, the Paliyā receives only the harvest time gifts of paddy from the families he serves.

As is true for other washing castes, the Hēna and Hinnā, the Palī has traditional responsibility for hanging cloths at the weddings and other ceremonies of the villagers for whom he washes. In actual fact, such ceremonies among low castes are usually performed by a relative of the bride in Kandyan areas. In the Low Country, where commercialized relationships are prevalent, it is not unusual for the Hēnayā to wash for the low castes and serve them ceremonially if required.

## KINNARA

The very low caste Kinnara are a relatively small group practically confined to the Kandyan provinces and particularly to the districts of Kandy and Kurunegala. A few are to be found in the Southern Province. Recognized by all European writers, the "kinnera badde" are described by Davy as a very small caste that "had to provide the royal stores with ropes and mats."<sup>50</sup> Pieris notes that: "In the Portuguese Foral the *Quinirias* were described as *estereiros*, mat-makers, who had to provide a number of mats as their decum," and that, in addition to Kandyans, there was a collection of the caste at Matara, on the south coast, as is the case today.<sup>51</sup> In 1909 Parker, imputing to them distinct racial status, described them as the lowest caste of the Sinhalese system, all gaining their living weaving mats in frames, and by cultivating millet and rice.<sup>52</sup>

The insignificance of the Kinnara in a meager literature of Sinhalese caste is striking, since their status is so low as to have attracted more attention. As Parker indicated, they are rigidly set apart from the other castes and, in Kandyan areas, follow their ancient trade. Village lands held by them are quite limited, and their major sources of income are through weaving a particularly attractive mat, and through casual labor. The few who survive in the Southern Province are as degraded economically and socially as their interior relatives, but are wholly dependent upon coolie labor, and know nothing of their caste's traditions.

In legend, the hated rival of the Kinnarayā is the Roḍiyā, whom the Kinnarayā alone is alleged to treat with respect. This tradition is of more theoretical than practical importance today, since the two communities have little or no contact.<sup>53</sup> The usual evidence cited by Roḍiyās of the Kinnara people's more ignoble position

<sup>50</sup> Davy (12), pp. 129-131.

<sup>51</sup> Pieris (60), pp. 447-448.

<sup>52</sup> Parker (62), 1909, pp. 44-45. His theory of racial distinctiveness rested upon preconception and superficial evidence, and his insistence that they were the lowest caste is a quibble. In terms of general prestige and social distance from other castes, the Roḍiyā, nominally an outcaste, is at the bottom of the heap. Roḍiyās, however, claim superiority to the Kinnara, and there is a tradition of enmity between them.

<sup>53</sup> Denham (16), p. 215, has a discussion of the legend.



is the formerly enforced custom among the Kinnara men of wearing the hair cut short instead of in the typical Sinhalese *konde* or bun. This mark of caste presumably indicates a degree of degradation never meted out to the Roḍiyā. Today the custom is flouted, but in any case there is no evidence that in any historic period the Sinhalese generally held the Kinnara in as low repute as the Roḍiyā.

#### GAHALA-BERAVĀ

"There is besides," wrote Davy, "a degraded portion of the Paduas, named Gahalaberawayo, who are prohibited from eating and marrying with the rest, and who had the lowest and vilest services to perform; thus they had to furnish executioners, and scavengers to keep the streets clean; and remove dead bodies. Even of this degraded race one set is considered lower than the other, and is held in contempt for eating beef."<sup>54</sup> In connection with his travels from Kandy to Matale, Tennent wrote, "The village on the opposite side of the river is inhabited by the Gahalayas, a race less degraded in blood, but more infamous in character than the Roḍiyās. They acted as public executioners during the reign of the Kandyan kings, and being thus excluded from the social pale and withdrawn from the healthy influences of public opinion, they became in later times, thieves and marauders. . . ."<sup>55</sup>

Neither the Gahalas' connection with Padus nor the differentiation of the beef eaters is to be confirmed today, but the existence of a Gahala people is a contemporary fact, and to them is ascribed the ancient roles indicated by Davy. Today other villagers frequently speak of them as Gahala-beravāyō, for some have associated the art of drumming with funeral services. The actuality of their role as executioners in earlier times is evidenced by Pieris, who finds the Gahala mentioned in the account of a Kandyan Chief's execution.<sup>56</sup> Regarding their status, Tennent reports that when the professional executioner (probably of this caste) performed his duty upon the person of high caste he exercised great

<sup>54</sup> Davy (12), p. 128.

<sup>55</sup> Tennent (98), Vol. II, p. 571.

<sup>56</sup> Pieris (69), p. 419.



care that he should not touch the victim with his own hands. In contemporary Ceylon the most menial work of scavenging, garbage collection, and drain cleaning of the cities is done by Indian Tamil (probably scheduled caste) labor. There are no Sinhalese castes concerned with this, and actually few, if any, Sinhalese except, rarely, the Roḍi. Executions have long since passed away from the realms of caste obligation.

The Gahala of today are well known throughout the Kandyan areas, usually under the name of their principal village, referred to by Tennent. However, in extensive investigations, not one man was found who would assert that he is a member of the caste; neighbors are less reticent. The village "on the opposite side of the river," near Kandy, is still well known even many miles distant as the home of the Gahala. The very mention of the village name brings a smile to the face of far distant villagers. It is notorious today not because it is the home of a depressed and degraded people, but because it is the prosperous "self-respecting" peasant community notorious for its prostitution. Caste-wise these village men claim a status equal to the Beravā, and assert that they are a special branch of Beravā, a connotation repudiated by all others. As has been indicated, there is some possibility of connection between the Gahala and the Batgam Beravā, but, whether or not, the latter are today separate. It is unlikely that many Gahalas live outside the immediate vicinity of Kandy. If they do, it is in anonymity.

### Roḍi

The Roḍiyās are the most publicized caste of Ceylon. Their depressed condition has captured popular attention, and while most Ceylonese are unaware of the existence of many of the other castes, the Roḍiyā is a familiar figure and his status and legendary history are well known.

Roḍi villages are found throughout the hill country and the southern fringe of the north central jungle. Numerically they appear to be important, but this is because of itinerant beggary and ease of identification. In actual fact their number is usually estimated at under 1,500, and in a virtual census of their villages by the author, it seems unlikely that more than 3,000 are to be found

in the island. The *Rodiyā* is the Sinhalese's closest approximation to untouchability.

Knox' description of this caste, incorporating one current legend of their origin, is applicable to the present day: <sup>57</sup>

There is one sort of People more, and they are the Beggars: who for their Transgression, as hereafter shall be shewn, have by former Kings been made so low and base, that they can be no lower or baser. And they must and do give such titles and respects to all other People, as are due from other People to Kings and Princes.

The Predecessors of these People, from whom they sprang, were *Dodda Vaddahs*, which signifies Hunters: to whom it did belong to catch and bring Venison for the King's Table. But instead of Venison they brought Man's flesh, unknown; which the King liking so well, commanded to bring him more of the same sort of Venison. The King's Barbar chanced to know what flesh it was, and discovered it to him. At which the King was so enraged that he accounted death too good for them; and to punish only those Persons that had so offended, not a sufficient recompence for so great an Affront and Injury as he had sustained by them. Forthwith therefore he established a Decree, that all both great and small, that were of that Rank or Tribe, should be expelled from dwelling among the Inhabitants of the Land, and not be admitted to use or enjoy the benefit of any means, or ways, or callings whatsoever, to provide themselves sustenance; but that they should beg from Generation to Generation, from Door to Door thro the Kingdom; and to be looked upon and esteemed by all People to be so base and odious, as not possibly to be more.

And they are to this day so detestable to the People that they are not permitted to fetch water out their Wells; but do take their water out of Holes or Rivers. Neither will any touch them, lest they should be defiled.

And thus they go abegging in whole Troops, both Men, Women, and Children, carrying both Pots and Pans, Hens and Chickens, and whatever they have, in baskets hanging on a Pole, at each end one, upon their Shoulders. The Women never carry anything, but when they come to any House to beg they Dance and shew Tricks, while the Men beat Drums. They will turn Brass Basons on one of their fingers, twirling it around very swift, and wonderfully strange. And they will toss up Balls into the Air one after another to the number of Nine, and catch them as they fall, and as fast as they do catch them, still they toss them up again; so that there are always Seven up in the Air. Also they will take Beads of several Colours and of one size, and put them in their mouths, and then take them one by one out of their mouths again each Colours by themselves.

<sup>57</sup> Knox (45), pp. 111-114.



And with this Behaviour, and the high and honourable titles which they give, as to Men, Your Honour, and Your Majesty; and to Women, Queens, Countesses; and to white Men, White of the Royal Blood, &c. They do beg for their living; and that with so much importunity, as if they had a Patent for it from the King, and will not be denied; pretending that it was so ordered and decreed, that by this very means they should be maintained, and unless they mean to perish with hunger they cannot accept of a denial. The People on the other hand cannot without horrible shame, lift up their hand against them to strike or thrust them away; so rather than to be troubled with their importunity, they will relieve them. . . .

Many times when the King cuts off Great and Noble Men, against whom he is highly incensed, he will deliver their Daughters and Wives unto this sort of People, reckoning it, as they also account it, to be far worse Punishment than any kind of Death. This kind of Punishment being accounted such horrible Cruelty, the King doth usually of his Clemency shew them some kind of Mercy, and pitying their Distress, Commands to carry them to a Riverside, and there to deliver them into the hands of those who are far worse than the Executioners of Death: from whom, if these Ladies please to free themselves, they are permitted to leap into the River and be drowned; the which some sometimes will choose to do, rather than to consort with them.

As might be expected, their isolation is associated with patterns of social organization and cultural characteristics dissimilar to those of any other caste. There is at the present time a strong public sentiment that the condition of these people should be improved, and the government has shown a positive attitude toward such programs. In some localities the Roḍi are engaged in agriculture; elsewhere they hold jobs as scavengers; in other places they are associated with prostitution; mainly, however, they are, as in historic times, beggars. Their beggary seldom goes unheeded.

#### KAVIKĀRA OR MALAVARAS OR KAIKĀRA

This small caste is unique in that it has escaped the view of earlier observers.<sup>58</sup> Literally, the caste names signify that they are

<sup>58</sup> A work presumably based upon ancient sources, *Namavaliya or A Poetical Vocabulary of Sinhalese Synonyms*, by Nalluratum (2), editor and translator C. Alwis, 1858, indicates the existence of a caste of "garland makers" called "Malvara."



"dancers" (women) and "poets" or chanters (men). The probable reason for the omission of this group in other accounts is that they did not fall into the secular feudal arrangement, and are limited in their distribution. Today they are found exclusively on the *dēvālagams* of Sabaragamuva Province, the women serving as dancers inside the temple and the men as chanting "poets." Elsewhere the term *Kavikāra* is used in reference to temple functionaries, but without any implication or reality of caste affiliation. No persons of the *Kavikāra* caste have been found outside *dēvālagams*. The Sabaragamuva *Kavikāras* are an endogamous body with distinctive traditional roles and their own communal life on the *dēvālagam*.

The hierarchical position of the caste is moot. Their own spokesmen and members insist that they are simply an occupational group among the *Goyigama*, and historically a very high *Goyigama* people at that.<sup>59</sup> Their neighbors are undecided. By some their claims are given credence and by others they are not. Consequently the *Kavikāra* are treated by most *Goyigama* with the formalities reserved for the very low castes, while by some they are accorded terms of equality. No doubt there has been some admixture with *Goyigama* of low rank, a probability accepted by proud neighbors with great misgivings. Their functions, essentially similar to those of *Kaikolian* peoples in South India, *i.e.*, *dēvi-dāsīs*, suggest that they may have been a late South Indian importation, but of this no direct evidence has been found.<sup>60</sup>

#### DEMALA-GATTARA

This caste, composed of several thousand households, is found exclusively in the western Low Country, and chiefly in contiguous agricultural villages near Alutgama. Literally the name *Demala-Gattara* signifies that they are "Tamil Outcastes," although the caste is wholly Sinhalese in culture and in appearance. In some of their southernmost villages, they are alternatively described as the *Kulupothu Demala*, indicative of a traditional vocation in winnow

<sup>59</sup> A pamphlet published in 1948 by a group spokesman, *Malawara Alankarayo* (52) (Sinhalese), sets forth their claims to status in some detail. Mainly these contentions rest on legend, and genealogies of questionable authenticity.

<sup>60</sup> See Thurston (101), Vol. III, pp. 51-44.

making and other forms of basketry. Whether or not basketry was in fact a traditional monopoly of the caste as a whole is unknown. The more northerly villages profess no knowledge of the art. The vast majority of the people are today not engaged in any craft but are typical village peasants and laborers.

The hierarchical position of the Demala-Gattara is difficult to assess, partly because their membership in the Sinhalese body politic is repudiated by some of their neighbors, and also because of a variable status position between localities. It has been observed that where their villages are adjacent to those of Salāgama they are accorded moderately high status, but where they adjoin the Goyigama they are deemed a very low caste. They are not "depressed" in the same sense as are the Roḍi. Neighboring villages have none of the feeling toward them that can be expressed in such words as "degraded," "low," and "unclean." In the area of their most concentrated settlement, they should be considered an "out-group" more than a "depressed" group, for they are set apart in the eyes of their neighbors by their "thievery," "filthy language" and "belligerency." Here, certain of their villages are almost literally at war with the Goyigama, incidents of violence occurring frequently, and, quite atypically, caste hate is an evident and dominating emotion. With the physical power of concentrated numbers in adjacent villages and the psychological effect of a legend of royal descent, these "Tamil Outcastes" frequently lack the obsequious attitudes of the very low castes, and are instead aggressive, and are, in a sense correctly, viewed by their neighbors as "trouble makers."

The popular origin story of the caste finds them descendants of Ceylon's Tamil King Elara's warriors, who presumably married among the Sinhalese. Their contemporary designation as "Tamil" possibly attests the truth of the legend, but at least as likely is their descent from an immigrant Tamil labor force, possibly introduced in the Portuguese period. References to them are found in Dutch records where they are shown to have been associated with the cinnamon industry. Thus Van Rhee (105) refers to the "Demmetegattere Hinawas" in this area, and intimates that they were of Panneya (Panna-durayi) origin. No empirical substantiation of the latter view can be found. Van Rhee's observations are, however,



particularly interesting, for they indicate an association of the Demala-Gattara with the Hinnā, which might amount to an identification of the two groups, *i.e.*, as deriving from a single caste. Both were associated with the Salāgama, presumably in the roles of inferior laborers in cinnamon, and perhaps one or the other, or both, are to be identified with the Ulyakarayo division of the Salāgama, now presumed to be extinct. Extensive efforts have been made to seek out possible contemporary linkage between the west coast Hinnā, the Southern Province Hinnā, and the Demala-Gattara. It may be safely concluded that the Demala-Gattara are distinct in every respect from their neighboring west coast Hinnā. There is, however, some relationship between the more southerly Demala-Gattara and the Southern Province Hinnā. Not only are both reputed to be basket makers by tradition, and to some extent both groups practice the craft today, but actual instances of intermarriage have been found. Nonetheless, the Demala-Gattara repudiate caste identity with the Hinnā, either to the east or west, claiming themselves to be a superior caste and professing shame at the instances of intermarriage. It appears probable, in view of these connections and Van Rhee's observations, that there has been some historic or traditional linkage between these Hinnā and the Demala-Gattara, although the relationship is of no practical significance today. It is certain that both were affiliated in some similar way with the Salāgama during Dutch times, as, indeed, were other groups, such as certain Vahumpura villagers and the "Tondegattera." The latter were perhaps a locality division of the Demala-Gattara. The historical reconstruction of relationships between these various peoples associated with the cinnamon industry would require minute and painstaking archival research. In contemporary Ceylon there is little likelihood of the Demala-Gattara losing its distinctive caste status. They are a militantly united people, sharing a heritage which to them is a proud one.



## ❖❖❖❖ 6

### *The Quasi-Castes and the Non-Castes*

All Sinhalese persons are born into a caste, and none would be unaware either of his caste or of its status position in Sinhalese society. But Ceylon is not populated solely by the Sinhalese, and the different minority groups stand in varying relationships to the Sinhalese caste structure. Some, like the Vaggai, are sufficiently identified interactionally and culturally so that today they may be reasonably considered a Sinhalese caste. Others, like the Ceylon Tamils, are culturally and socially a distinct ethnic group with their own Hindu caste organization. Still others, like the Moors living among the Sinhalese, are an ethnic communal group but scarcely a caste. The Europeans have many superficial attributes of a caste but are outlanders apart from local social organization.

Nor can these groups be placed on a single continuum ranging from caste to "class" or from caste to "tribe" or simply from caste to "ethnic minority." For the different peoples, each of these and other concepts are represented. The Tamils of Ceylon, actually two groups, are the largest minority, and have social structures distinct from the Sinhalese. In the Jaffna Peninsula are the Ceylon Tamils with their rigorous Hindu, essentially South Indian caste organization. On the plantations within the Sinhalese country are the more recently immigrated Tamil estate laborers. The latter have a social organization distinct from the Ceylon Tamils and are a separate minority although culturally similar to the people of Jaffna. Within the estate community Hindu caste plays an important role; since there is little interaction with the Sinhalese, caste status between one and the other is immaterial, although it

is commonly recognized by the Sinhalese that estate laborers are usually of extremely low caste in their own order. Between the middle class Ceylon Tamil and the Sinhalese, interaction is usually limited to the urban population where, except for personalized relationships, caste does not matter. To a surprising extent the migrant Ceylon Tamil maintains his own communal groups within the cities dominated numerically by the Sinhalese. Where personalized relationships are involved, the Sinhalese would choose to remain ignorant of the other's caste, probably assuming it to be Vellāla unless the contrary were known. Much the same attitude is expressed in reference to Indian merchants living in predominately Sinhalese communities. Among the non-Sinhalese lower economic classes, however, some discrimination on a caste basis arises. Thus, even in Colombo, low caste Tamil laborers (whether Ceylon or Indian) have complained at being given separate and inferior containers for their tea in the small shops catering to the poor. The Sinhalese recognize difference of caste in reference to outsiders who themselves maintain caste distinctions, but as a result of the urban locale and a high degree of ethnic communalism, the recognition is both inexact and largely insignificant.<sup>1</sup> The strength of ethnic communalism is indicated by the fact that in 1949 there were in all Ceylon 167 marriages between Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils, and 27 between Sinhalese and Indian Tamils.

#### TRIBAL AND ENCLAVED PEOPLES

Particularly in the jungles of the North-Central Province, and along the northwest coast, there are South Indian peoples not strictly part of the Jaffna caste structure yet not wholly identified with the Sinhalese. Numerically unimportant, these represent mainly tribal invasions. Because of physical isolation and/or cultural uniqueness they were never wholly assimilated into either of the island's major social systems. These peoples range from the

<sup>1</sup> Thus in a household employing servants, a Sinhalese servant of high caste may refuse to work alongside one of low caste but be unconcerned and ignorant of the fact that a fellow servant is a Tamil Pariah. Where the occupation of the Tamil has a caste significance, e.g., a bathroom coolie, he would however be set apart and denied personalized relationships and egalitarian treatment by the Sinhalese staff.



Vaggai, who are today more Sinhalese than Tamil, to the Tamil speaking, Muslim fishing community of Mukkuvās, who in no sense—ethnically, organizationally or legally—are Sinhalese. Each of these groups is endogamous and each has a varying mixture of Sinhalese and Tamil cultural practices. They likewise exhibit degrees of interaction with the Sinhalese although in all cases most personalized relationships are group, or subgroup, centered.

Since most of these peoples are at best peripheral to the Sinhalese castes, a brief description of a few type instances may suffice. The Census of Ceylon for 1824 indicated the presence of the following groups in this general category: "Wagay," Ahampadias, and Camalers, to which should be added the Oddes, commonly called "Wudders," Canarese, Ahikuṇṭakayas (Kuravans), Mukkuvars (or Mukwas), and Wanniyas, and perhaps the "Chetties" and others.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the Vaggai and the Ahampadias are the same people, since Ievers notes that the latter is a prefix of "Vellāla," a description then given Vaggai meaning lower grade of Vellāla. The various Censuses of Ceylon found that each of these ethnic groups except the Vaggai and Mukkuvās was extremely small, e.g., the Census of 1824 showed 81 Camalers in their main district of Chilaw-Puttalam. While undoubtedly there are some individuals extant who identify themselves with some of the smaller groups, those who are commonly known today are the Vaggai, Mukkuvās, Ahikuṇṭikayās and Vanniyās.

The Vaggai might as reasonably be considered one of the Sinhalese castes; of those upon the borderline of Sinhalese society they have most nearly completed a merger with it. Although the Census of 1911 indicates that they are a "race" found in several different parts of the North-Central and Northwestern Provinces, field investigations have indicated their presence today only in a limited area east of Anuradhapura. Here ten or more villages acknowledge the term Vaggai and are so accepted by their Sinhalese neighbors.

<sup>2</sup> E. B. Denham (16), p. 223 ff.; Simon Casie Chitty (5), p. 185; H. Parker, *Ancient Ceylon* (62), especially p. 46, and also Parker in *The Taprobanian* (63), Feb. 1887, pp. 15-21; Ievers (41). The Chetties represent several "communities," some of which are nonindigenous to Ceylon. In Sinhalese areas they are urban trading people distinct from the Sinhalese and of high status. There are of course many other minorities in the cities, such as Borahs and Afghan (properly Baluchi) moneylenders, etc. "Colombo Chetties" are a quasi-Sinhalese high status group now marrying with high caste Sinhalese.



That the group is of comparatively late South Indian origin is probable. Culturally they demonstrate a complex mixture of Tamil and Sinhalese traits, although they are generally accepted today as being Sinhalese. As prosperous villagers in a largely self-contained area they have been able to command respect on a par with the Goyigama, and in their structural position might indeed be viewed as a Goyigama subcaste in an area within which that caste is normally not subdivided into formal divisions. They have become wholly integrated into the Sinhalese caste system, receiving the services of the lower status castes in the same manner as the Goyigama and requiring similar symbols of social distance and respect.

The Mukkavās are mainly a Catholic and Muslim, Tamil-speaking tribal group found in the Puttalam area and also on the east coast of the island. There are also some interior villages in the North-Central Province which are Roman Catholic. They are undoubtedly the descendants of the Malabar coast fishermen described by Thurston as Mukkuvan.<sup>3</sup> Along the Puttalam coast there are perhaps several thousand Mukkuvā fishermen. The Census of 1911 showed over two thousand in the Puttalam district, the majority of whom were Muslims. There are also many on the east coast, but there they have no connection with Sinhalese society. In one wholly Roman Catholic interior village visited, the church is a strong uniting agency supporting the Mukkuvā communal separateness from surrounding Buddhist Sinhalese. The Mukkuvās look upon themselves as distinct people, treating their Sinhalese neighbors in accordance with caste customs, and acting in the role of the highest caste. The peasant Mukkuvās are quite prosperous, and this has been unquestionably a factor supporting their claim to high status. Caste services, *i.e.*, washing, are performed for them by the appropriate Sinhalese castes and conventional rules of etiquette maintained. As Roman Catholics they profess no caste, but they act in the role of high caste and their Goyigama neighbors in turn rate them as just under themselves in status. In spite of their nominal castelessness, it is evident that among the Christian Mukkuvās there are endogamous subgroups

<sup>3</sup> See Thurston (101), Vol. V, pp. 106-117; see also Denham (16), p. 225.

having different status positions.<sup>4</sup> (As will be observed among Muslims, similar distinctions in other localities amount in fact to caste lines within the Muslim community.) Although the interior villages marry with those of the same religion on the coast, there is little legitimate intermixture with the Sinhalese. Relationships with the Sinhalese are friendly, and with the Goyigama egalitarian, but their contacts are most frequently economic. Due to the complicating effects of Roman Catholicism a most painstaking study would have to be made before any serious estimate of their acculturation by the Sinhalese might be made. It would appear that they still have more in common with the Tamils culturally, and in social identification they are considerably closer to them than to the Sinhalese.

Ahikuṇṭikayās (Korava, Kuravans) are the gypsies of Ceylon and are perhaps part of the widespread tribe of Koravas, renowned as gypsies, snake charmers and criminals in India.<sup>5</sup> The Ceylon Census of 1921 listed 13 Ahikuṇṭika bands having a total population of 276. Most of them cited snake charming or begging as their principal occupation. It is unlikely that the number of Ahikuṇṭikayās in Ceylon has changed materially since that time, and they are still engaged in wandering beggary, fortune telling and snake charming. Seldom are they found outside the jungle regions. Speaking a Telegu dialect, they also understand Tamil and Sinhalese and consider South India their homeland. Most of them claim to have spent all of their lives in Ceylon, although the Census of 1911 insists that the largest gangs return to India occasionally. John Still was perhaps the only outsider who ever gained the confidence of these people, and his sympathetic descriptions of them written twenty years ago could not be improved upon today.<sup>6</sup>

There were half a dozen bivouacs built of branches and talipot palm leaves, so light that a donkey could carry enough to house a family. Their entrances that all faced away from the prevailing

<sup>4</sup> Casie Chitty, in his *Gazetteer of 1834* (5), noted that they were divided into graded tribes, all having a culture similar to the Tamils except for the avunculate. No attempt has been made in the present study to go into any ethnographic detail.

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive treatment of the Indian Koravas see Thurston (101), Vol. III, pp. 438-504.

<sup>6</sup> John Still, *Jungle Tide* (95), 1930, pp. 47-48. See also Denham (16), p. 229, and Turner (102), Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 228.



wind, looked like the arched mouths of caves, less high than the heads of their owners or my shoulders, and sloping away to nothing at the back. They seemed rather the dens of hunting animals than houses as we think of them; but I suppose every Kuravan there had been born in one like these, and all their forefathers as far back as we like to imagine, for the Kuravan has no history. . . . They had no possessions at all it seemed except the clothes they wore, a few zigzag silver bangles on the women's arms, plenty of silent watchful dogs of the kind we call pariahs, really a very ancient breed . . . a few cooking pots, several donkeys, a couple of fawns, and their flat snake baskets. . . .

The Ahikuṇṭika, as they are called by the Sinhalese, claim no identity with the people among whom they move, and have none culturally or organizationally, although sometimes they attempt to pass themselves as a Vāddā people. Not accepted as such, they are in effect an outcaste tribe; some Sinhalese villagers in areas where they roam do not know a distinction between them and the Roḍi. Except as casual entertainers and beggars, they have no intercourse with Sinhalese nor are they in any sense part of the Ceylon Tamil caste structure.

The Vanniyās are a small tribal people identifying themselves with the Sinhalese and occupying a virtually inaccessible stretch of territory in the North-Central Province northwest of Trincomalee.<sup>7</sup> It is said by surrounding villagers that the Vanniyās, who in Parker's time numbered no more than five hundred persons, are of Vāddā origin. It is not unreasonable that there is some truth in this and that they were settled in semipermanent agriculture long before the "rock Vāddās" of the Bintenne and Welassa areas.<sup>8</sup> Lacking regular water reservoirs they are closely dependent upon chena (fire agriculture) cultivation and hunting. Although having supernatural and other practices not typical of the Sinhalese, they are linguistically Sinhalese and profess Buddhism.

<sup>7</sup> This group was first described by Parker under this designation in *The Taprobanian* (63), 1887, pp. 15-21. The material presented here rests heavily upon Parker and accounts given by Sinhalese living southwest of the Vanniyā villages. Of all the extant castes and tribes discussed in this volume, this is the only one whose villages have not been visited. The term Vanniyā is also applied to other groups living in the Vanni area, i.e., the north-central jungles. Previously it was the term given the historic peoples who populated this area between the Sinhalese and the invading Tamils.

<sup>8</sup> See Seligman and Seligman (87), pp. 10 and 396-97.



Eighteen miles from the nearest road and isolated as well from all but a few equally remote Sinhalese villages, their caste relationships are largely an academic rather than a practical issue. They are, however, given Goyigama status and undoubtedly are a remnant people of which most have long since lost all differentiation from the Sinhalese.

The Vāddās, as has been observed earlier, while theoretically a part of the Goyigama caste, are essentially a remnant of a former racially and culturally distinct people. The Census of 1946 found fewer than 2,500 persons identifying themselves as Vāddās, a considerable drop since the previous census. The latter is a product both of intermarriage with east coast Tamils, and jungle dwelling Sinhalese, as well as the volitional passing of persons once calling themselves Vāddā into one or the other of these ethnic groups. In Uva Province jungles where Sinhalese predominate, it is apparent that the Vāddā villages are diminishing and their residents scattering in the direction of established Sinhalese settlements. The preservation of a distinctive Vāddā culture is more pronounced among those living near to civilization where occasional coins can be secured if the Vāddā acts the way a Vāddā is supposed to act. In more remote areas the Vāddās are today little different from their equally poor Sinhalese neighbors.<sup>9</sup> The fact that there is no caste discrimination against the Vāddā by the numerically dominant Goyigama of the jungle is no doubt hastening their amalgamation with the Sinhalese. A high proportion of the Sinhalese, particularly in the Vāddā country, have Vāddā connections in their ancestry. In some instances where such mixtures are known they are admitted, not being viewed as violation of caste endogamy.

While not properly tribal or ethnic groups, there are also a few enclaved villages claiming separateness from the Sinhalese, other than those of the Muslims who are widely scattered in predominantly Sinhalese areas. Thus one frequently finds Tamil villages, composed of endogamous caste groups sometimes still engaged in their traditional occupations, *e.g.*, potters. Elsewhere Indian labor from estates has settled into village life. In all such instances which have been observed the Tamil preserves not only his communal

<sup>9</sup> This observation is based upon tendencies described by Seligman and Seligman (87), as well as by direct study in the Vāddā country.

life but also his endogamous practices, his language and his religion. No doubt some exceptions could be found, but the Tamil village in Sinhalese areas is isolated in almost every social sense from Sinhalese neighbors. In so far as they have a status position, it is a very low one, although usually not so low as that ascribed to the Roḍi, Kinnara and Pali.

Tribal groups and enclaved guest villages have no numerical significance today in Ceylon, although it may be reasonably presumed that the Sinhalese have in former times grown through the accretion of such peoples into Sinhalese society. In the case of the Vaggai and probably the Vanniyā this process is to be seen in the present day. It is curious that such tribal minorities are entering the Sinhalese caste structure at the top, *i.e.*, as Goyigama. Highly endogamous at present, there is no doubt that the Vaggai people are in process of becoming a subcaste, in the literal meaning of that concept, of the Goyigama. This is facilitated by their lack of a history involving any traditional service status, their separation from all recognized Tamil castes, and their relatively powerful economic position. They have been able to command the services of low Sinhalese castes through the power of large land holdings, a condition which *de facto* has placed them in the status if not the role of the Goyigama. Where villages unlike the Vaggai have retained a distinctive Tamil culture and identified themselves as "Indian" they are today simply enclaved guest peoples, "pariah" peoples, in the figurative meaning of the word sometimes accepted by sociologists.<sup>10</sup>

More related to Sinhalese society are the few Christian villages

<sup>10</sup> Note in this connection the terminological controversy in "Max Weber versus Oliver C. Cox" by Hans Gerth, *American Sociological Review* (28), Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 557-558. Beneath the conflict in terms exemplified in the Gerth communication, there are interesting theoretical issues. Gerth, following Weber, sees the Jews as a "pariah" people in surroundings free of caste which presumably is in concept equal to a "guest" people. No doubt both Gerth and Cox would agree that the use of the "pariah" concept would be misleading, in spite of Weber's precedent, in the Ceylonese context. The Pariah caste stands in a totally different relationship to the social structure than does the enclaved guest people, whether they are welcome or unwelcome guests. The enclaved villages are not exterior caste, they are *noncaste* in so far as the Sinhalese society is concerned. The fact that they may also hold a caste position does not mitigate the fact that they are guest peoples and not Pariah peoples. In this, as in other attempts to transfer the concepts of caste to noncaste situations, the results offer conceptual confusion and distort observations of reality.



in the Kandyan provinces. The Roman Catholic Mukkuvās illustrate a group predominately Tamil in their cultural identification and hence more isolated than would be the case otherwise. Another village in Matale North is an example of a Roman Catholic village more thoroughly identified with Sinhalese culture and with Sinhalese society. Unlike Roman Catholics along the coast, the villagers profess castelessness as part of the Christian creed and refer to themselves as Portuguese Dons rather than as Sinhalese of any caste.<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult, however, to discover that a "Don" is equal to a Goyigama and the superior of other Sinhalese castes, a number of which are represented in the village. While entirely endogamous in marriage, it is evident that marriage with any Roman Catholic Sinhalese would be countenanced—provided he were Goyigama. Services are performed in the village by the appropriate lower Sinhalese castes, and they are treated in accord with the code of etiquette practiced in nearby Goyigama villages.

#### ETHNIC MINORITIES

Most numerically significant peoples physically within, but not identified with, Sinhalese society are neither tribal type groups nor village enclaves. The Ceylon Moors (Muslims) number nearly 375,000; Burghers and Eurasians of mixed ancestry, nearly 42,000; and other socially important minorities, including Europeans, are of smaller but consequential numbers. None of these is considered part of the Sinhalese people and none is conceived to be a caste. All, except for the East Coast Muslims, tend to be concentrated in areas which are predominately Sinhalese and hence are in direct contact with the various Sinhalese castes.<sup>12</sup>

The Moors have been residents of Ceylon for centuries, nomi-

<sup>11</sup> The village probably dates from the Portuguese period and might represent a settlement of captured Low Country soldiers. Superficial observation would indicate somewhat greater admixture of Sinhalese than of Portuguese in the present population, in spite of a high degree of village endogamy. The original racial composition is not known. See also Davy (12), p. 121, and Castle Chitty (5), p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> This is not true for many Europeans who are engaged in tea planting and have limited contact with the Sinhalese. No effort is made here to treat all of the various "immigrant" minorities. See *Census of Ceylon* (71), 1946, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Chap. VII.



nally as descendants of middle eastern traders, but actually with strong infusions from Muslim Indian groups. Especially during the Dutch period of occupation the Moors were rooted out of their trading role and many of them dispersed throughout the island. They are in homogeneous peasant villages in the interior highlands, the northern jungles, along the eastern coast, and in fishing communities on the southern and western coasts. Many are also engaged in commercial activities. The majority are diffused throughout Sinhalese territory but have continued to live in communal groups, in the rural areas as homogeneous Muslim villages, and in the towns as cohesive subcommunities mainly devoted to trade with the Sinhalese.

Although the concept of caste is ideologically repugnant to the Muslim, he has adapted himself to it and in some instances copied it in intragroup relations. Knox noted that certain privileges were given the Moors, but he did not view them as a caste. Davy described them as of no caste but "attached" to the Karāva.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary Kandyan traditionalists hold that while not a caste they should be treated with the etiquette suitable for the Karāva. Certainly no Muslim will accept the designation of caste. The cultural and ethnic minorities of Ceylon are "communities" in popular usage, and the Muslim is a "community" comparable to the Ceylon Tamil and the Sinhalese "communities."<sup>14</sup> They are not a caste, for they are socially a distinct people, outside the system within which caste relationships are operative. Obviously superficial resemblances to caste can be found, for the Moors are endogamous, communal and hence socially separate from nearby Sinhalese. Further, they have been partially drawn within the orbit of Sinhalese society, *i.e.*, politically and economically. To the present day some hold lands on service tenure, and in trading relationships they have been drawn into direct contact with their neighbors, and hence into a position requiring a status relationship. In some localities they own lands cultivated by Sinhalese tenants, an additional situation necessitating the formation of patterns in social intercourse. Inevitably the Moors have acquired the patterns of intercaste

<sup>13</sup> Knox (45), p. 136; Davy (12), p. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Community is also a euphemism for caste, expressed in Sinhalese as *minissu* (people).

etiquette conventional to their surroundings. In the cities this issue is not important, for intercaste etiquette there is not so strict. In the villages it is also usually nominal, for the Muslims make slight use of the caste services available in the neighboring Sinhalese villages. Seldom do they utilize the washer nor have they any need for him in marriage or other ceremonies. They seldom require the tom-tom beaters. A wandering *Roḍiyā* they would, however, shun in the manner of the Sinhalese and on those rare instances of a home visit by a Sinhalese of low caste to a wealthy Muslim landlord, the symbols of inferiority would be expressed by the Sinhalese. This is more a matter of the transference of caste behavior to social class situations than a product of communal inferiority and superiority. If he is a wealthy and respected landowner, he is treated much the same as a high caste Sinhalese of comparable position. The Moor is not fixed ritually; if powerful he receives the formalities given those of high caste; otherwise he is usually given the status of stranger with the normal courtesies bestowed by Sinhalese upon all noncastes or those of unknown caste. To conceive of the Moor as a caste group is to place him within a social system to which he is an outsider. He has some regard for the birth status of the various castes, but he himself is not treated in accord with a particular birth status rank. He has adjusted and adapted to the caste structure but has not become part of it. Much closer to caste are the divisions to be found among Muslims, but these are so rudimental that they cannot be said to form a system.<sup>15</sup>

Neither the Burgher nor the European is properly a caste, but each approximates more nearly a caste status than does the Moor. The Burghers are descendants of European-Sinhalese mixture, and are almost always culturally Europeanized, speaking English as their home language, wearing European clothing, and following generally western practices in marriage, religion, etc.<sup>16</sup> In this

<sup>15</sup> An example of such caste-like distinction was found in an interior Muslim village. Here the majority form a community without tendencies toward endogamous divisions or birth ascribed roles. However, there is a small group within the village living in physical and social segregation. They are distinct in marital, social and economic life, and, in relationships with the rest of the village, assume the behavior common to low castes among the Sinhalese.

<sup>16</sup> In Ceylon there are very few Eurasians, a term tending to connote illegitimacy. The Burghers are the product of legitimate unions between pre-British European conquerors and the Sinhalese.



minority there are two fairly distinct segments, those claiming Dutch ancestry and those descending from the Portuguese. Status differences between the two are considerable, the Dutch Burghers being a proud association of persons usually of professional and white collar occupational status, and tending to maintain a considerable degree of endogamy with reference to Portuguese and otherwise mixed Burghers. Both are highly endogamous in respect to Sinhalese and Tamil. Long associated with the high status clerical and professional occupations of the city, the Burgher frequently likens himself psychologically more with the European than with the Sinhalese. On occasion he, like the European stranger, can refer to the Sinhalese as the "natives," reflecting the self-conception of a "European transplanted," which culturally he indeed is. In behavior his relationships with the Sinhalese are no more caste-like than is the case for the Moors. The Burgher is strictly an urban resident, and his relationships with the villager are those of a "trouserred gentleman" rather than any peculiar caste-like pattern common only to the Burgher.

The European in Ceylon is the trousered gentleman *par excellence*; trousers, white skin and other symbols of power bring him the courtesies accorded the highest caste. Almost wholly endogamous, and mixing largely within the circle of his own racial types, he accepts, and usually receives confirmation of his acceptance of, the propriety of differential—and deferential—treatment. Nor has the rise of nationalism and political independence brought the "white man" into disrepute or disregard. He is generally deferred to as a "white man." Were the "European" not a transient, he might indeed in the passage of time have become a caste. But he is no Sinhalese, for that is an ethnic and quasi-racial title, and more importantly he is no Ceylonese, for few Europeans have truly colonized in Ceylon. The "colonials" of Ceylon are temporary residents with roots still in the land of their nativity. Even when Ceylon is the land of birth, *Home* is far away. As a respected stranger, the European may expect the etiquette which Sinhalese have associated with high caste. In earlier days this was not merely accepted, it was enforced. The original covenants of peace with the Sinhalese demanded for the conqueror symbols of rank customarily reserved for the highest caste. But the transient is exterior to the



social order of caste; violation of caste rituals or stricture among village Sinhalese would more likely amuse than anger or please him. Seldom does he know or care about the caste with whom he deals. In so far as a European ever approximated a caste position, it has been a superior clique in contrast to "natives," *not* to "native castes." Most Europeans deal with Sinhalese as Sinhalese, not as members of a caste.

# *Part Three:*

CASTE IN THE VILLAGES







### *Stricture, Symbol and Sentiment*

Of all the aspects of caste, the endogamic principle is cherished most widely and most reverently. Persons almost wholly emancipated from caste concepts, and who repudiate any form of discriminatory treatment, marry and insist that their children marry within the caste. Here the heritage of caste is most strikingly evident today. Whatever may be the erosion in other caste strictures, roles, symbols of status, and social distance, few Sinhalese, fewer still of the village folk, marry outside their caste. Low caste persons embittered by the effects of communal isolation and discrimination repudiate the inequities of caste, but nearly always defend the principle of purity in blood. It becomes obvious that at all levels the passionate repudiation of romantic marriage is not fixed by the concepts of family stability or parental prestige so much as by the will to protect the family blood and its honor.

That the law of caste endogamy was rigorously and formally enforced in the past there can be no doubt. Today there is no such law in the technical sense, nor are there, in most areas, formal officers or bodies of extralegal status to enforce the custom. Nonetheless, Sinhalese seldom deviate from this long established part of the caste code.<sup>1</sup> Sawers, early in the nineteenth century, reported that the "legal murder" of one having intercaste sexual relations of proscribed character was no longer practiced, but "in several cases brought to the King's notice when the fact was notorious and undeniable, the Female was consigned as a Slave of the Crown, to the Royal Village, Gampola, and the Family was ordered to

<sup>1</sup> See also pp. 75-76 regarding the stringency of this law in former times.

deliver some Provisions to the Royal Store, and by this act become purified." <sup>2</sup> In 1830 and 1831 a case was brought to the attention of the British Government regarding the property rights of a woman who had married beneath her caste. The Government Agent supported the ancient view that such a marriage made forfeit all her claims arising from family and that she should suffer the virtual loss of all inherited property. Significantly enough the judiciary response indicated that the Agent had exceeded his authority, but that subject to qualifications his decision was in order.<sup>3</sup> The marriage ordinances promulgated by the British, however, made no reference to caste.

Although no part of the legal code, endogamy has the force of unchallenged, customary precept throughout most of the country. In the North-Central Province, but there only, formal quasi-legal judicial machinery exists for its enforcement. Here serious penalties may be imposed upon the families of offending persons and/or ostracism and even expulsion practiced against the deviating couple upon the judgment of the caste council. In most villages endogamy is well preserved without benefit of formal mechanisms. Ceylon is a society of immobile, cohesive village communities: the informal penalties of village ostracism and the cutting apart of the kin are matters of terrifying significance. More influential than the fear of penalty and ostracism, however, is the general agreement upon the rightness of the ancient order of marriage.

This arises out of communalistic in-group solidarity, obligations to kin, and fear of contaminating the birth status honor position of the family. Even if exempt from public censure, high castes have little to gain from intercaste marriage with higher; for the Batgam or the Beravā the possibilities would be great. The fact that the lower are at least as endogamous as the high is not because of the half-believed legends of Brahminic or Kṣatriya status which most low castes have. There is nothing abhorrent to a Beravāyā in the thought of a Goyigama alliance, although the reverse would be true

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in D'Oyly (18), p. 36. It is significant that the *Nita Nighantava* (58) describes the most serious caste offense as that of a female having criminal connection with a man of low caste. Knox also noted the greater weight put upon caste honor for the woman in illicit relations.

<sup>3</sup> D'Oyly (18), p. 86. Hayley (36), pp. 176-178, shows how the customary law of the Kandians was gradually overshadowed by court decisions and failure to give caste overt recognition in the ordinances.



for the Goyigama. There is in fact, however, no burning urge to marry or have one's child marry "above" his caste. The rightness of intracaste marriage is accepted at all levels. It is specifically supported by segregation and its limitations upon personalized contacts, preferential and arranged marriage, and the general impropriety of adolescent heterosexual contacts outside the home. All phases of local institutional structure from the proprieties of the adolescent play group to the symbols of social distance and the mores of marriage support integrity. To find *reason* for endogamy is to seek out an infinite number of seemingly distinct sentiments and institutional practices which support it. There is no evidence today, in tradition or in history, that the probably slight fissiparous tendencies in Sinhalese caste could be traced to intercaste union. (The exception to this is, of course, the *Roḍiyā*.) The progeny of intercaste connection are the illegitimate children of village mothers or they are the offspring of iconoclastic urbanites, some of whom fled the village in ostracism.<sup>4</sup>

About 1850 a British Civil Servant in the North-Central Province found his high caste informant baffled at what other than death could punish a woman marrying beneath her rank. In 1950 only a short distance from where that long forgotten interview took place, another high caste villager was asked precisely the same question. "Would you kill her?" the interviewer asked, expecting no serious reply. In 1950 the answer was, "How could we kill her now?" The behavior pattern has changed, the sentiments are little different. It must be admitted that endogamic conservatism is high in the isolated jungle and there, unlike any other part of the island, is the caste court dealing with those violating this fundamental

<sup>4</sup> A fully verified incident, which occurred in 1949 in the Low Country some 30 miles from Colombo, illustrates the village situation. A young village man and a young village woman were employed as servants in a household distant from their respective villages. A romantic attachment developed, resulting in the woman's pregnancy. Intermediaries found that the couple were deeply attached to each other and an immediate marriage was happily planned. A few days later the young woman discovered that the man was of Vahumpura caste, she herself being Goyigama; in spite of the young man's pleadings she was adamant in refusing to sully her name by marriage with one of low caste. Among urbanites some well-to-do persons have, with varying degrees of ill ease from their kin, married across caste. The expulsion of participants in cross caste marriages from villages has been noted in several North-Central Province localities. One Colombo rickshaw puller is known personally to be no longer an honored village cultivator due to similar indiscretion.



rule. Social death would be a matter of course. Exceptions are to be found, and sometimes kin relent, but more generally fate is never tempted. Romantic impulses and illicit sexual contacts are at least as common in Sinhalese villages as they are in any other society.<sup>5</sup> Marriage, however, is almost entirely a matter of arrangement. Romantic preferences are permitted only when they happen to conform to the traditional requirements for a spouse, the first and foremost of which is caste congruity. Illicit sexual intercourse is judged immoral, but is not usually an issue of caste. There is no doubt that high caste men have relations with low caste women, both as casual village affairs and in regular prostitution. It will be understood if the documentation of these observations is lacking in specificity. A well known case in point is the prostitution of Roḍiyās near many towns.

Caste congruity is supported by the general preference for cross-cousin marriages. This also tends to limit the status boundaries of marriage within the caste. It is not a disgrace to marry a nonrelative, but it would be criticized by relatives with marriageable daughters. There is some moral obligation to accept a preferential bride and thus save one's kin from excessive dowry, or worse, the possibility of an unmarried daughter. While cross-cousin preference is often flouted in less remote villages, arrangements always take into account the respective status of the bride's and the groom's houses. Theoretically, marriages are always between lines of equal "goodness" of name; practically, so long as it is within the caste, serious consequences do not necessarily follow interstatus but intracaste unions. In many localities House (Gē) status is not precisely defined. In the Low Country there are two or three major levels of Goyigama Houses within either of which any marriage otherwise appropriate may be consummated with impunity. To cross the intracaste boundary is to invite kin censure but not usually lasting ostracism.

In the Kandyan provinces the Goyigama are divided by more formalized subcastes, within which Houses sometimes hold differ-

<sup>5</sup> This is apparently no modern phenomenon. Knox (45), p. 146, says quaintly that "Indeed the Public Trade would be bad, and hardly maintain them that exercised it, the private one being so great." N. D. Wijesekera, *The People of Ceylon* (109), 1949, p. 65, comments on the frequency of village romances.

ent status positions. Here the subcaste line is generally the most essential boundary, within the caste. To all appearances the Kandyan subcastes are gradually merging. Examples have even been found of marriages between Radala and Vahal, although these are exceptional. Usually the "exceptional" instance is one in which a hypergamic union can be achieved. The wealthy House of lower status can usually find grooms among impoverished aristocrats. Wealth and a handsome dowry can break the intracaste limits of marriage. Wealth has no effect upon the stability of the caste line itself. In general the House status is less significant in castes other than Goyigama, but the caste boundary itself is maintained with equal rigidity.

It is a boast of democratized and urbanized Sinhalese that caste means no more than "marriage groups" today. Indeed it is paradoxical that with the intensity of endogamic restrictions caste should be so mild. The boast is warranted only in the general lack of serious inhumanities in intercaste behavior, and the absence of specific, universal and minute tabus affecting social intercourse. The phenomenon is still more than one of marriage classes, although many of its traditional precepts are unspecific and are weakening.

In the *Nita Nighantuwa* the second basic law of caste was segregation in eating, stated there as the offense of "eating in the house of a low caste person."<sup>6</sup> However, this was incomparably less serious than sex strictures. In the modern village, quite apart from the partaking of common food, the precepts of intercaste etiquette are most firmly maintained in the precincts of the home. Generally the castes do not mix at table in a private home. Actually the tabu upon joint eating in the home is but one in a complex of behavior and symbolic expressions of social distance.

Sinhalese attitudes toward food are not as complex as those of the Hindu. There are no intricate food tabus and cooking practices associated with caste difference. Buddhists generally have taken from Hinduism a distaste for beef which is neither strict nor rationalized to their ideology except vaguely in the concept of ahimsa (nonkilling). In respect to other animals ahimsa is frequently disregarded. There are no religious bases for distinction in

<sup>6</sup> *Nita Nighantuwa* (58), Introduction.



eating; it is a straightforward manifestation of social distance. Only in respect to the Roḍiyā is there a vestigial attitude of pollution associated with caste, although conservative high castes would not consider employing certain of the lower castes in their kitchens. Except for the Roḍiyā such attitudes do not extend to food in the raw state or outside the household. Only the Roḍiyā could contaminate raw paddy.<sup>7</sup> The Kandyan aristocrats' insistence upon kitchen help of Goyigama or of Vahumpura status is entirely unrationalized, on any but historical, traditional grounds. Nor is the use of a common well for drinking water frowned upon; only the Roḍiyā will stand off and respectfully beg a man of higher caste to fill his vessel for him. Similarly meat shot by a man of any caste would not be polluted in the eyes of the Goyigama, except perhaps if that man were a Roḍiyā. Such situations involving a Roḍiyā having handled potential food cannot be found in fact in modern Ceylon, and hence it is difficult to surmise what today would be the usual reaction. One guesses that the food would be used most reluctantly, if at all, by the modern villager. Food is but slightly associated with caste; eating together holds the association.

There are ceremonial occasions when the low caste eats at the home of high caste, and in some instances it is theoretically acceptable for certain castes to eat in each other's houses. When another caste eats at the Goyigama's home, it is never as part of the family circle but under rigidly maintained segregation and symbols of inferiority. To the wedding feast may come an entire Kandyan village, including half a dozen castes. They come as retainers, not as members of the wedding party. The Radaḷa may feed at his kitchen representatives of a dozen castes during a single day, and this is done with due respect to the status of the person fed. In a Kandyan village, the Vahumpura and the Pannayā may be served their curry on a plantain leaf covered by a woven leaf-like basket; the Beravāyā is served on an unadorned plantain leaf. These details of etiquette vary, but the important principle never varies, that the Goyigama has only Goyigama seated at the common board, and others are served in accord with their status. Certain lower castes may enter the house at the time of the wedding, *i.e.*,

<sup>7</sup> Sirc (90). Vol. II, pp. 211-212, writing in 1850, shows how strong this sentiment was at that time. For a full account of Sirc's anecdote see p. 228.



the Hēnayā who has a ceremonial role, but eating in equality with the Goyigama does not follow.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from great village events, it is unlikely that lower castes would come to high caste homes in circumstances associated with eating. However, caste status is also associated with the conventional offering of betel to a visitor. Thus a Radaḷa simply would not offer betel to a visitor lower than a Goyigama. The Goyigama of intermediate status would probably offer betel but instead of proffering it on the customary plate, it would be given by hand. A Low Country village Goyigama might offer a Karāva guest betel in the manner befitting one of equal status, but to one of lower caste it would either not be proffered or would be given directly by hand.

In some localities the caste status hierarchy can be most clearly determined through ascertaining the patterns of permissible eating. Invariably the caste of higher status will not take food from one deemed of lower status, although the reverse is not true. In any case, the status of castes eating together would be evidenced in differential seating. In a Kandyan village a Velli-durayī will not eat at the house of a Pannayā, though the reverse may happen. To a villager this is a demonstration that the Panna-durayī is of lower caste. In one village the Pannayā and Hēnayā were said to eat at each other's homes—indicating equality in formal status. This should not imply that intercaste eating is common; such lore pertains more to the permissible than the actual. Seldom indeed is a meal taken in company of mixed castes. When it occurs, the seating arrangements leave no doubt of the relative status of the participants, nor of the caste divisions.

Obviously in the villages there are few places to eat away from home. The only circumstances under which men eat with a group is in the fields or during a visit to a local tea shop. Since it is usual for men of various castes, *e.g.*, Goyigama and Beravā, to work together in the fields, they are together at the time of eating and after work sociability. Practices seem to vary widely regarding the

<sup>8</sup> A prominent Radaḷa family with democratic convictions has found it necessary to give up the traditional wedding feast. In their city home they have intimate friends of many castes whom they would normally invite to a household celebration. The wedding, however, draws in the village kin. It would be impossible to fail to antagonize either friends or relatives if the wedding banquet were held.

segregation in such eating, but usually the men mix freely together, the only distinction being in the use of separate drinking cups for each caste group. In the village tea shops most castes are served on a basis of equality, although if seats are available, only Goyigamas sit. Service discriminations are made against the Kinnarayā and the Roḍiyā, however, both of whom would stand outside the shop and be served in distinctive vessels, *i.e.*, half a coconut shell rather than a glass. In some localities similar distinctions apply to Beravāyā as well, and possibly others. These are more within the pattern of general etiquette and social distance than they are associated with eating. The tabus upon eating are chiefly associated with the inviolability of the home in respect to which the other behavior symbols of social distance are also most pronounced.

In primary relations, village homogeneity has protected the home from intercaste contacts. Neighborliness, resting on physical adjacency, can be and in many instances must be within the caste, often within the kin of the caste. The evening gossip in the lanes or at the tea shop tends to be with neighbors, of common caste. Pilgrimages are organized with neighbors of common caste. The entire life of the villager is conditioned by the presence of those having common caste bonds, quite apart from tabus upon intercaste intercourse. In matters pertaining to marriage the lines are drawn with reference to ancient precept and tabu as well as accident of adjacency. Marriage celebrations cut across village lines but never across caste lines, and seldom do they go many miles from the home village. While weddings are especially the gathering of kin, the lines of relationship are so complex and often so hazily defined that the wedding is as much an intracaste friendship group as it is a kinship group. Similarly, tabus upon intercaste eating, part of the hierarchical stricture of caste, inhibit interfamily intercourse where in nonhousehold relations recognitions of superiority in status would be forgotten.

In those areas of participation external to the home, the village lanes and fields, segregation is frequently not practiced. Nominally and in part actually the affairs of the market place, of the temple, of the school, government, and other larger community services are without caste. In these spheres the lines of caste are significant



in varying degrees, sometimes in the form of kinship loyalties, sometimes fortuitously and sometimes as expressions of sheer caste solidarity.

Other than for a *Roḍiyā*, the Sinhalese know nothing approximating untouchability. More accurately, their physical renderings of social distance are to be understood as degrees of avoidance. The etiquette of approach and avoidance and the symbols of inferiority and superiority are most clearly manifest in any behavior touching the home. The normal village life in the fields, gardens and lanes may be punctuated by evidences of intercaste etiquette in speech and overt behavior, but the *Goyigama* may chat with the low caste neighbor quite unconcernedly, laughing and joking over the affairs of the village day. As we shall see, this intercourse is not free from the distance imposed by caste, but there is little to show the onlooker that here is no egalitarian relationship. When the low caste man comes to the *Goyigama*'s home, or vice versa, there is no mistaking caste discrepancy. Symbols of actual avoidance and recognition of status differences are implicit in almost every relationship, but they are invariably explicit in the home. Close physical contact has no caste significance, provided the conventional symbols of distance are not lacking. Herein the Buddhist influence is clear. An affront to the dignity of blood may be viewed quite differently from a blot upon one's eternal life.

Even in a mixed caste gathering at a *Goyigama* home, the uninitiated might see no symptoms of stratification, but the niceties in distinction are nonetheless preserved and in some localities would be obvious. Due to the "community" of caste, such gatherings tend to be rare and limited to some matter of business or direct concern to both parties. In many villages the castes avoid meeting at homes due to growing sensitivity of the lower castes at the performance of the symbols of inferiority. Fundamentally, caste determines the intensity of the symbolic behavior, but usually it is in some ratio to the economic power of the man of superior caste. On days of festival it is the tradition that the low caste villagers pay their respects to the village leaders. Traditionally there are limitations upon the type of gift which a *Goyigama* might receive from various strata.<sup>9</sup> Lewis reported that fifty years ago in

<sup>9</sup> Lewis (49), Vol. III, Pt. II, p. 139.



the Western Province, Low Country, there were four kinds of complimentary offerings given to chiefs, dependent upon the caste status of the donor. It is doubtful if such restrictions are today highly formalized in many localities and such presentations are usually neglected entirely. Ordinarily the lower castes bring only gifts of betel, offered with worshipful and supplicating behavior, and this only to high caste persons of power, influence or office. In all situations, however, involving a visit of a low caste man to a Goyigama or Radala home there are minimum requirements in etiquette which are always observed. Obsequiousness beyond these limits is related to local caste feeling and particularly to the degree of dependence the low caste man has on the high caste. Where the high caste man is of Radala status, the minimum requirements are usually exceeded without regard to his specific power. The minimum depends in part on the low caste level, but for most, behavior is similar toward any other given caste. Since most lines of interaction between village caste levels are between Goyigama and all others, here the conventions are most formalized.

As Knox described nearly three centuries ago, the level upon which a Sinhalese sits is dependent upon caste. Today few Kandyan Goyigama homes, if they have furniture at all, are without the *kolombuva*, the low stool upon which all non-Goyigama castes, with only a few exceptions, invariably sit, if indeed they are invited to sit at all other than on the floor itself. The *kolombuva* is a visible and infallible mark of a Goyigama home. In the Low Country the stool is less ubiquitous, but the status of seating is preserved in the form of a bench, a low wooden chair, or some other device to assure manifestation of inferiority by the socially inferior. Such distinctions are infrequently preserved in the Low Country, particularly in reference to the Karāva, Salāgama, and even the Durāva. However, intercourse between these castes at a household level in the villages is unusual and if the lower caste man is also of lower economic position, differential seating is not uncommon.

Levels of seating are not like stair steps. For most castes lower than Goyigama, the stool if available will be offered, otherwise the guest sits on the floor. Even in situations where the village men are gathered in sociable chit chat, irrespective of caste, it is to be

noted that the lower caste participants, although in the group, are usually seated at the edge of the verandah on the floor. A mat will often be offered them. There is probably a greater tendency among the quite low castes, *i.e.*, Batgam, to sit on the floor than there would be for the Hēna, but these are matters which are inexact and vary with local views. Nowhere would either sit upon a chair.

The lowest castes would never sit on, and indeed would rarely approach, the verandah of a high caste home. Thus the Roḍiyā calls out from the garden gate or a short distance from the house. Only under unusual circumstances would a Kinnarayā stand upon the verandah of a Goyigama home. Actual entrance into the Goyigama home, beyond the verandah, an almost universal part of a Sinhalese house or village hut, is generally tabu for all other castes, except the Hēna. It should of course be recognized that among educated and liberal villagers of the Low Country some household intercourse between respected castes takes place, but this is the exception rather than the rule. In most villages and regarding most castes, the low visitor never enters the Goyigama home beyond the verandah, and the Roḍiyā or Kinnarayā not so far as this. Convention excepts the Hēnayā and in some localities the Vahumpura or Pannayā at the time of a wedding and other ceremonies, but properly none of these should enter except under such circumstances.<sup>10</sup> In actual fact the Hēnayā is frequently inside the house apart from the time of ceremonial performance. However, where he may be so favored, he would never consider sitting in a chair or otherwise showing equality with the host. Nor would he, nor any lower caste, sit when a Goyigama present was standing.

Seldom does the Goyigama visit the lower caste home, although if reason arises or possibly on special invitation to a festive event he might do so. It would be most unlikely that this would involve a family visit since intercaste interfamilial relationships are virtually nonexistent under any circumstances. A Radaḷa would under such circumstances be given a chair, probably covered with a white cloth, the traditional symbol of respect. Such respect would probably be paid the Radaḷa by lower status Goyigama households as well, and with the latter it is conceivable that on a great occasion the Radaḷa might dine. Eating together means only eating in the

<sup>10</sup> See Lewis (48).



same room, for the Radaḷa would certainly be seated at a separate table covered with a white cloth and served with great formality and fanfare. At lower caste homes a Radaḷa would sit in an honored place, his hosts probably standing or sitting on the floor. Under no circumstances would any expression of ostentation be given by the low caste. In varying degrees the common Goyigama would be given similar treatment by the lower castes. Although these old forms are widely maintained, they are not universal and may at times be upset by extraneous factors, particularly in the relationships of Goyigama of moderate grade and the lower castes. It would be the rarest of instances in a Kandyan village where the Goyigama guest would not be treated deferentially in respect to seating. In the Low Country the same can be said except where urban influences are most pronounced, and even in such villages differential seating is usually observed, although the white cloth is rarely seen.

In addition to those areas where lands are still held in feudal tenures, ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few. Seldom is a Goyigama the tenant of a low caste; the reverse is usual. Where the Goyigama is the landlord or a person of importance, etiquette in the home is more complicated, and the lower caste man practices all the forms of subservience. If he comes to secure the use of land, a presentation of betel is usual, and the relationship is not that of equal contracting parties but of a suppliant to the lord's largesse. Where favors are asked, they are accompanied by "worship," an exaggeration of the traditional Eastern form of greeting accompanied by low genuflection and bowed head. Rarely would such forms of respect be seen outside the home.<sup>11</sup> It is apparent that the etiquette of caste is most rigorously maintained when the contacts take place at the home of either of the interacting parties. Here at minimum is the offering of the conventional stool, at maximum the maintenance of a standing position by the lower caste, and incipient prostration. These rites are along a continuum, depending upon the castes involved and the power of the high caste.

<sup>11</sup> The greeting of Ceylon is made by placing the two palms of the hand together with fingers pointing upward. The position in which the hands are held in relation to the rest of the body can indicate whether or not the person saluted is being "worshipped," greeted as an equal or as an inferior.



Among the non-Goyigama villagers the etiquette of visiting is less formalized. At the lowest levels, any caste person is treated with respect. The Rodiyā or Kinnarayā have much the same home avoidance patterns toward others as to the Goyigama. Other castes living in the same village observe less formality towards each other, except that castes of disparate status would not indulge in inter-household visiting. Castes of approximately equal status would mix at a home if the occasion demanded.

In the Low Country the top three castes, Goyigama, Karāva and Salāgama, and in some localities the Durāva, all receive homage from the lower castes. Between these castes status differences are not pronounced and interrelationships among the men at home under informal conditions frequently would be egalitarian. In the presence of none of them, however, would the Beravā or the Olī visitor sit upon a chair. He would either stand or sit on the floor. The Navandanna would be offered a seat and probably would take a low one. Frequently the higher caste home will have a bench on the verandah, and anyone below the rank of Durāva would sit there.

The caste communal nature of village life tends to make inter-caste household visiting rare. Seldom do families as a unit visit other than relatives. Even where villages have diverse castes, there tends to be segregation into separate neighborhoods or subvillages and the contacts between families as groups take place strictly along caste lines. Individual contacts associated with the home are also, except on occasions of specific business, strictly limited to the caste. The community as a locality group is plural rather than singular, in much the same sense that the Southern Negro and white live in distinct community groups within the community locality. Villages have few secondary associations within which the entire community participates. The contacts between castes are many, however, in the daily movement in the lanes and in the fields. Not all symbols of status center upon the home.

In different localities visible signs such as clothing, ornamentation, hair arrangement, as well as speech and other behavior symbols, indicate status. All these traditional forms are in varying stages of disuse, but all have some manifestation in each locality, and everywhere some minimum of caste etiquette is preserved.

Seldom can a specific caste be determined by physical appearance, and usually today one can tell only that a person's caste is or is not among the lowest, and even the lowest cannot always be detected by superficial observation. Knox has indicated that in his day distinctions of dress were rigidly observed but the gradations were few. (See above Chap. 3.) Lord Valentia in the first decade of the nineteenth century observed that the Sinhalese were so jealous of symbolic privileges that a man who ventured to cover his house with tiles, without being entitled to that distinction, had it pulled down to the ground by order of his superior; and a poor tailor, whose love of finery led him to be married in a scarlet jacket, was nearly killed at the church door.<sup>12</sup> "The privilege of cast," said Valentia, "extends to the dress of the females, and many are prohibited from wearing a petticoat below their knees or covering their breasts."

Changes in these material symbols of caste come slowly to Ceylon, and indeed the transition is to be seen taking place today. The traditional insistence that lower castes wear no clothing above the waist has not wholly disappeared either in sentiment or in action. Paradoxically, the firmest retention of the traditional low caste garb is in the Low Country rather than in the more conservative Kandyan Provinces. Although intercaste conflicts are rare in Ceylon, the issue of a man's wearing a covering over his chest is the source of most conflicts which take place and these are Low Country phenomena. The prohibition lies only on the Beravā, the only low caste in any numbers outside the cities. Although all women today cover the breasts, among the Beravā villagers this is usually done by flinging the loose end of the sarree over the shoulder, rather than wearing the usual jacket and cloth of most Low Country village women. In the Kandyan Provinces greater liberality in matters of dress is permitted, although the older men of low caste; *i.e.*, Pālī, Kinnara, Roḍī, seldom wear a covering above the waist. Throughout the island there is a general feeling that the low caste person should dress unostentatiously, the women avoiding bangles and sarees, the men avoiding either shirts or fancy sarongs and belts. Among children, even Roḍiyās and the Low Country Beravāyās frequently wear "banians," the undershirt which is virtually

<sup>12</sup> Valentia (103), Vol. I, pp. 302-303.



the national dress of the Sinhalese villager. This is in considerable measure due to the influence of the public schools' insistence upon clothing. However, there are some localities where teachers conform to the local tradition rather than to the official concepts of democratic education. While it is the rare village Goyigama or Karāva who looks with favor upon the unseemly dress of the lower castes, either in the Low Country or the Kandyan Provinces, there is a prevalent attitude of "What can we do about it?" Unquestionably the bare body as a mark of caste will disappear in a few years.

Most villagers, particularly those of low caste, are too poor to live ostentatiously, but as Lord Valentia noted, there is strong community resentment at evidences of conspicuous consumption on the part of a low caste. While not perhaps creating a condition of violence, the Goyigama, and in the Low Country the Karāva as well, will usually resent a low caste house that is superior to those of common design. Thus one Beravā village claims that, although they are prosperous people, they would not consider having a tile roof on a house. Riding in private or hired motor cars is similarly deplored, as are other activities more of a middle class nature than a caste prerogative. In the Low Country, where caste restrictions are frequently resented, the nearby city is often an outlet for the display of finery which would in the home village cause trouble and even conflict. Often the Beravā villager wraps his banian in his sarong to don it when he is well beyond the range of his Goyigama neighbors. Among the castes of intermediate status throughout the land, the battle of the banian is already won. Nowhere is adverse sentiment attached to such clothing when worn by the Hēna, the Baḍahāla or the Vahumpura. In the Kandyan country, the durayī castes are well along in the process of banian wearing. Throughout Ceylon the banian is perhaps the most telling symbol of local conservatism in respect to the castes toward which the convention is applied. In the Low Country it has virtually become the symbol of the caste struggle for emancipation. There is no single caste symbol, and certainly no form of discrimination, which evokes as much heat as the banian and its superior brother, the bush-coat. Where the banian is worn, the bush-coat follows.

Unlike the days of Knox, today the Sinhalese wear no caps and this is no longer a mark of caste. Nor is the length of the sarong



today associated with caste, although there is a mild convention that to hitch the sarong high up on the legs, as is frequently done in the heat of the day, is bad taste in the presence of a person of high status. In the Kandyan areas, although hats are not worn in daily life, the Kandyan chieftain's regalia is worn on festive occasions but only by persons of Goyigama, and usually Raḍalā, caste.

For specific castes there are customs more or less preserved in modern times. One article of male hair dress that never ceases to capture the western eye is the circular head comb worn by men of high caste. This is alleged to symbolize a status in which the wearer would not be subject to the carrying of bundles on his head—after the common Sinhalese method of transporting loads. Actually the symbolic status of the circular comb is impossible to establish, but it is generally viewed as a prerogative of the higher castes and is limited to the Low Country. (It is obvious that members of these castes like all others carry their parcels on their heads.) Unquestionably the comb is of fairly recent origin, at least having been introduced during European occupation.<sup>13</sup> Today it is seldom worn in the villages. In the cities it is occasionally seen on those who are in contact with Europeans in some servile capacity.

Among Karāva women there is a tendency toward hair styling slightly different from the usual Sinhalese bun at the back of the head. This is a matter of no significance; it is a communalistic cultural variation to which no status feelings are attached. On the other hand, male hair styling among Kandyans of low caste has more significance. The Kinnara and perhaps the Palī are by tradition forbidden the *konde*, the hair knot typical of Kandyan men of all other castes. By some legendary edict of ancient times, they, but not the Roḍi, were forbidden this prerogative and in consequence have until recent times had their hair cut in a long bob. In the last few years this practice has all but ceased, but the Roḍiyā well remembers the tradition for he holds it as evidence that his own status is above that of the Kinnara and the Palī, a contention not accepted either by them or the villager at large.

In the comings and goings of village life, there is little to suggest that the Sinhalese caste system is the child of old India. There is no untouchability, barring the avoidance of Roḍiyā and Kin-

<sup>13</sup> A. Alvis (1) suggests that it was a late borrowing from the Javanese.

narayā, and as the village folk mix in daily affairs around the village lanes and fields, it is obvious that no proscriptions upon physical contact exist among the castes. Physical distance and its symbols surround the home, not the individual. Only the Roḍiyā stands outside the circle in which physical contact has no valuation in terms of caste. Even where the tabu of body covering for the low caste is observed, in actual fact, both low castes and high work side by side clad only in a G string, or talk together in the village lane or at the bathing place each clad only in a sarong. Beneath this egalitarian surface, however, there is a network of caste etiquette in speech and in manner, usually quite mild but nonetheless persistent. In Kandyan provinces the pattern of differential etiquette applies to relations between Goyigama and all others, except the extremely low who treat all with similar deference. In the Low Country the low castes give approximately the same homage to Karāva, Salāgama, and in some localities Durāva, as they do to Goyigama. Where the Radaḷa exists in Kandyan areas, he receives preferential treatment from both Mudali and low caste. Typically the etiquette of low caste towards high involves two gestures, to give way on a common path, and to remove from the shoulder the towel or small cloth which usually is carried there or worn as a protection from the sun. No low caste man would stand in the village lane with a Goyigama without removing his head-covering or the cloth riding on his shoulder. Nor will he be the originator of intercourse. Unless addressed he may make way for the Goyigama to pass saying nothing. In closely knit villages where status relationships are unquestioned but without bitterness, the man of lower caste may even omit the removal of his shoulder cloth unless addressed—or perhaps in such circumstances he himself will start the conversation.

Even in the personal matters of bathing in the village tank or at the nearby spring, the castes may mix freely, men at one side, women to the other. No one would be so immodest as to remove all his clothing while bathing. Needless to say no Roḍiyā or Kinna-rayā, nor likely a Paliyā, would join them, but among all others there is no exclusiveness. Only if one of Radaḷa caste comes would the bathers melt away to leave him in privacy, for where the Radaḷa survives he is still the village lord.



Verbal relations between anyone of Goyigama, and usually Karāva, with any other invariably manifest status differences. Sinhalese is a language highly inflected by status gradients. While there has been a tendency to drop from everyday speech some of the more degraded personal address forms and pronouns, Knox demonstrates quite clearly the linguistic reflections and supports given the prestige hierarchy:<sup>14</sup>

Their language is Copious, Smooth, Elegant, Courtly; according as the People that speak it are. Who are full of words, Titles, and Complements. They have no less than twelve or more Titles that they use when they speak to Women according to their ranks and qualities. . . . So that it is hard to speak to a woman without they know what she is before least they might mistake her Title. And the women are much pleased with some of the better Titles.

The men also have various Titles, tho not so many as the women. People give to them these Titles according to the business they have with them. If they come for some favor or kindness to be done them, they bestow the better sort of Titles upon them.

They have seven or eight words for Thou, or You, which they apply to persons according to their quality, or according as they would honour them. . . .

It is evident that in Knox' time the honorific behavior, as today, was a prerogative of caste but a flattery suitable for any relationship. Most of the forms mentioned by Knox are used today, as well as others he did not list. Always the Goyigama is addressed by an honorific rather than by name, the precise elevation of the term depending upon the locality and the circumstances of association. Only the Rodī, Kinnara and the Palī would ordinarily use the most exalted terms, commonly reserved for priests, and these he might apply to all regardless of specific caste. An address form such as *Nilame* is used only by lower castes addressing Goyigama and, while not exalted in meaning, has something of the connotation of "honored sir." *Rālāhamy* is a mild honorific applied usually to Goyigama or Karāva. *Hāmuduruvāne*, from which Knox' "Hondrew" is probably derived, is an exalted honorific applied always to the priest, sometimes to the Radaḷa, and, by the lowest castes, to Goyigama and perhaps others. In some localities Beravā still use the address for all Goyigama of good grade, and occasionally other

<sup>14</sup> Knox (43), pp. 167-168.



moderately low castes do likewise under special circumstances where favor is sought. In some Low Country areas the form "Hāmu" is used for aristocratic families even by ordinary Goyigama. In the use of personal pronouns, status gradients are more precisely reflected than in other speech forms. The current usage in one interior Low Country village will serve as an illustration, for, with minor variations, the same pattern is widely found.

PERSONAL PRONOUN	STATUS SIGNIFICANCE
<i>nama</i>	Used generally in reference to a Bhikkhu in the event that an honorific is not used.
<i>āttā</i>	Used to or in reference to, a most pious person.
<i>tānāttā</i>	Respectful form used by non-Goyigama to or in reference to, a Goyigama if an honorific is not used.
<i>eyālā</i>	Formal reference—neither respectful nor disrespectful.
<i>aya</i>	A form which is neither respectful nor disrespectful but is usually used by high caste persons to or in reference to, other high caste persons well known to them.
<i>umba</i>	A "soft" term used by a Goyigama to, or in reference to, one of lower caste when the relationship is friendly (as to the dhoby) or if the lower caste person is wealthy.
<i>tō</i>	Used by a Goyigama to, or in reference to, a low caste person generally. The term typically used in reference to, or in address to, a Beravāyā or a Roḍiyā.
<i>ū</i>	Used by a Goyigama in reference to one of lower caste, but never in face to face relations. The form is that used in reference to lower animals.

Although the lower caste person would ordinarily address the Goyigama by name, appropriate pronouns are typically used by Goyigama in addressing lower caste persons. There is nothing comparable, however, among Sinhalese to the degraded nouns found in some Indian tongues and used in reference to objects possessed by low castes.<sup>15</sup> The status difference is further indicated linguistically.

<sup>15</sup> See Hutton (40), pp. 75-76.

tically by other uses of "low language." Thus, a verb may have as many as four or five forms with identical meaning but with varying status connotations. (Forms used by the high to the low caste are sometimes used also by a father speaking to his son or wife.) Even in personal situations in which the higher caste calls his low caste neighbor by name, a derogatory contraction, with a doubly long "a" ending, leaves no doubt of the fact that caste position is not compromised by intimacy.

There is a movement toward abandonment of the most degraded pronouns, particularly among the western educated. In courts of law a formal and respectable pronoun (*Yusmatā*) has been introduced as applicable to all. This usage has no popular appeal, however. The degraded words and endings are, however, in use in most villages, particularly outside the urban coastal belt. Although there is resentment of them by lower caste individuals, they are usually applied without any self-conscious aggrandizement by the person of high caste. As is true in salutations of all types, the degree of the inferior's obsequiousness depends considerably upon his own financial position and the power of the superior. Disparity between caste position and economic status softens caste etiquette but obliterates it only in special relationships, such as those of low caste master and high caste servant. This circumstance is extremely rare outside the cities. To a considerable extent the etiquette of caste relations sets the pattern for interaction between those of differing economic classes within the same caste.

The frequent absence of strong avoidance tabus should not lead to misvaluations of the extent of caste segregation and "communalism." In peasant villages social functioning, outside the economic sphere, is primarily a matter of family, neighborhood and kin. Most villages are intricately interrelated at each caste level, multiple relationships existing between most individuals, so that the precise relationship of one person to another may be vague—not because it is distant but because the lines have mixed so complexly. The crises of life may be attended by various caste functionaries, but these are performers for a kinship and hence caste homogeneous group. Interfamily visiting, while not frequent in the Sinhalese village, never takes place between caste strata. Even the informal chat of neighbors is practically bounded by the caste



line, since the village house clusters are usually in caste homogeneous groups. Frequently the entire village is one caste and the nearby clusters of another caste are viewed as a distinct village.<sup>16</sup>

Noteworthy is the fact that physical segregation is almost never demanded in public affairs, either in the village or outside it. While there is a strong tendency for members of a minority caste to cluster together at a village meeting, *i.e.*, political rally, temple services, etc., this is in no way formalized. It goes without saying that at such a meeting, if seats are used, some recognition of comparative elevation might be made, but most village affairs are held without benefit of chairs. Schools sometimes have distinctions in seating of children from the various castes, but all play together freely both in the school yard and in the village lanes. The Roḍi are a case apart, and the current opening of the schools to them has occasioned some bitterness in village feelings, most of which has washed away quite easily. Nor would the Roḍiyā mix freely with others at any public event. In the Low Country similar school disturbances were occasioned by the opening of several local schools to Beravā children. Generally, however, the disturbance was short-lived.

Participation in public services and events exterior to the village is practically without segregation. Busses and trains generally afford no distinction whatever, nor do cinemas. Some bus lines permit Roḍiyās to ride freely and without distinction, others refuse them admittance to the busses, but not infrequently the Roḍiyā is unknown to a potentially discriminating bus conductor, and rides undisturbed. Villagers of other castes usually do not take offense at this, so long as the Roḍiyā behaves in an unaggressive and obsequious manner. Although temple worship is nominally free of caste segregation, in actual fact this is not always the case. Often the village temple is attended mainly by members of a single caste, and caste sectarianism has tended toward segregation in fact if not in theory. However, there is no restriction upon the access to the

<sup>16</sup> This is not reflected in administrative procedure where small villages are linked together under a single headman, an appointive position and, in the interior, virtually always filled by a Goyigama where members of that caste are to be found. Regarding segregation in residence, A. M. Hocart, *Ceylon Journal of Science* (39), Vol. II, pp. 86-87, gives some evidence of its antiquity in regard to the ancient cities of Ceylon.



Buddhist vihāre and most are visited by several castes. While there is no formal segregation, Roḍiyās and Kinnarayās would be likely to enter at hours when the temple is not usually occupied by others. In the dēvāle, the situation is quite different, for here the Hindu concepts of degrees of approachability to the shrine, depending upon caste status, are enforced.

These are facts of caste, and, as social facts, reflect in considerable degree the sentiments of the folk. However, articulate attitudes and professions of sentiment do not always conform to community behavior. Only in the most remote valleys and the jungle are low caste villagers complacent over symbolic inferiority and more material inequities. The repudiation of inferiority by the low is given a neat symbolic twist in some communities by the transformation of honorifics into sneer words. At this stage such perverse references would not be made in the company of one to whom honor was due. Seldom too, outside of these regions, are the Goyigama fully certain that the old ways are right and proper. Western conceptions of equality in opportunity and a universal standard of human dignity have made their inroads. The ideology of nondiscrimination is more widely professed than it is practiced. Zealous in guarding actual prerogatives and actual symbols of status, the majority of Low Country and accessible highland peasants realize that the new values have become respectable. To some indeterminable extent this represents sincere conviction that the old ways are wrong in the modern age, but the conviction is far more evident in speech reactions than in community organization. The fact that the new values are widely recognized as "respectable" is not without significance for continuing social change. Villages closely associated with Low Country city life are notably liberal in their caste professions, and indeed, superior-inferior caste behavior is at a minimum.

During June of 1950 an attempt was made to give statistical expression to the spread of westernized status concepts in four very different Sinhalese villages.<sup>17</sup> In three, the population was predominately Goyigama, and the observations made here refer only to members of that caste. In the fourth, the entire village was

<sup>17</sup> This was more fully reported in Bryce Ryan, *The Ceylonese Village and the New Value System* (82).

Karāva. One of these villages is in the interior Low Country and is probably as typical of that region as any single village could be. The second, typical of the most liberalized and educated peasant district in the highlands, is twelve miles from the city of Kandy. The third is an isolated and inaccessible locality in the eastern jungles, where attitudes are much the same as for most of the jungle regions. The fourth, a Low Country coastal village, is in the outskirts of a city, and, while entirely of Karāva caste, is mixed in occupation and economic interests. The following table indicates an almost complete acceptance of the old order in the jungle area, in contrast to the liberalized coastal village and the highly mixed judgments of the others. It is singular that in respect to discriminatory practice the well educated highland village is more liberal than the prosperous but less well educated interior Low Country village. The coastal folk appear to repudiate caste strictures generally, except as related to marriage. The highland peasants are generally in favor of granting impersonal rights to the Roḍiyā, but a sizeable minority would deplore his presence in a position of prestige and power, and the vast majority in a local position of power. Although the interior Low Country village is generally more conservative, it too is least desirous of seeing the Roḍiyā (or any low castes) in the Civil Service or a village headmanship. The vast bulk of both villages would impose strong sanctions on a daughter who married outside her caste. The jungle dwellers are all but unanimous in their desire to maintain the traditional *status quo*, in practically all respects.<sup>18</sup> In both of the larger Goyigama villages the age and the education of the peasant are important for his point of view. In each locality there are sharp differences between the youthful and the aged and the uneducated and the well educated. Thus, dividing the villagers into three nearly equal groups by age, we find in the Low Country nearly 90 per cent of the young supported education for the Roḍiyā, but only 58 per cent of the elders. Similarly in reference to the Roḍiyā's admission to the Civil Service, the opposition of the elders was more than twice as frequent as for the youthful. Very similar differences exist between villagers when classified by their varying degrees of educa-

<sup>18</sup> The apparent liberality regarding a village headman is inapplicable here, for these folk have no experience with mixed communities.

PERCENTAGES OF HIGH CASTE VILLAGERS IN SELECTED LOCALITIES  
GIVING WESTERNIZED AND TRADITIONAL RESPONSES ON STATUS QUESTIONS

	Kandyen Highland	Interior Low Country	Kandyen Jungle	Coastal * Low Country
TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES	72	87	24	96
	Western-Trad- itional	Western-Trad- itional	Western-Trad- itional	Western-Trad- itional
PER CENT				
If your daughter eloped and married a man of lower caste, would you,				
1. Accept them both	14	9	...	60
2. Permanently shun or disown	81	72	96	8
3. Interned, or quali- fied	...	19	4	32
Which of the two men below deserves the greater respect or which would you be prouder to have as your kinsman?				
1. Son of a peasant who became a fac- tory labourer and rose to rank of Managing Director	61	87	...	100



2. Son of Mudaliyar graduated, today managing inherited estate

...	36	...	...	12	1	...	46	17	...	...
Do you think a Rodiyā should be permitted to vote like anybody else?	72	25	3	65	25	10	25	67	8	...
Do you think it is as important to give a Rodiyā child as good an education as others?	94	4	1	73	19	8	59	33	8	...
Should a qualified Rodiyā be given a position in the Civil Service?	64	32	4	42	34	24	67	29	4	96
Do you think it would be better to have a Goyigama Headman in a Village mainly composed of other castes?	26	73	1	25	46	29	88	8	4	...

\* Karāva Village: Several questions not asked.

tion. In respect to the preservation of caste integrity in marriage, only the youngest and the most highly educated showed greater liberality than others. There was little indication that those of moderate age and moderate education were more liberal than the elders and the poorly educated. Thus, in the highland village, 16 per cent of those having over seven years of schooling admitted willingness to re-accept the erring daughter, in contrast to 7 per cent of those with less than four years' schooling and 6 per cent of the intermediate group. In respect to age differences, 21 per cent of the youngest, 4 per cent of the mid group and 13 per cent of the eldest would freely accept her.

There seems no doubt but that youth, and probably higher education irrespective of youth, is associated with greater liberality in matters of caste. However, it must be taken into account that few men under forty actually had marriageable daughters. Further, not one of them had married outside his caste, and in fact never in the history of the highland village has the caste line been violated, and in the Low Country villages, where it has been violated, not one offender has been readmitted into village life. Further, in the treatment of *Roḍiyās*, each of these villages lives up to the ancient discriminations economically and symbolically. No *Roḍi* settlements are in fact adjacent to these villages, but wanderers come through and the overt behavior of the young is no different to the eye of a close observer than the behavior of the old. Quite possibly it is through the young and the educated that changing behavior in the village takes place. It is doubtful if important community changes can be attributed to these groups except where other forces are at work. These would include changes in the economic position of the lower, or the higher, caste, the influence of a respected elder or government official who sets a liberal example, etc. Liberal attitude professions unquestionably reflect a frame of mind increasingly favorable for change. It is indeed highly significant if the new conceptions of social relations are sufficiently regarded that the villager with wider contacts feels called upon to articulate them. No such innovations are as apparent in the isolated regions. In regard to caste discriminations, it is probable that most of those on the side of the angels, the modern angels, are paying somewhat more than lip service to a new ideology. In so far as the issues deal

with impersonal realities most would support the new order; where the issues involve new forms of personalized relationships most would not, and many confess that they would not. The fact that the word "confess" can be used in this context implies change in the discriminatory strictures of caste. In respect to the preservation of the caste as a communal and endogamous group, support of the old order is not admission, it is still a statement of principle.



*Traditional Roles in the Modern Setting*

One of the chief, and to some students the most basic, characteristic of caste is the link between endogamous status groups and occupation. In addition to strictly secular vocational pursuits there is an allocation of ritual and secondary economic service roles among the strata. No doubt Ceylon, more than India, emphasizes the vocational and service aspect of caste.<sup>1</sup> Rather more plausible for Ceylon than India would be a theory of caste development on the basis of division of labor, for many of the castes have strong traditions of ceremonial or occupational monopolies. It should be realized that the ritual and the vocational functions of caste defy clear demarcation.<sup>2</sup>

Fundamental to any understanding of Sinhalese caste roles must be the recognition that the practice of agriculture is caste-free. Although there is a "cultivating caste," the Goyigama, this employment is in no sense a status monopoly. No doubt all except the Roḍiyā might engage in agriculture even under the kings, and that most did so is evidenced in the service tenure requirements of the various castes. Some members of many castes undoubtedly maintained strictly nonagricultural roles, but the majority in most castes practiced their status roles in conjunction with agriculture, and usually in return for cultivable land. Agriculture is honored as a

<sup>1</sup> It should be evident from Chap. 1 that there is no agreement here with those who would find a strict occupational origin for the caste system. In India it is even more obvious that caste is often dissociated from occupation. For India this is clear in innumerable works. See Abbe Dubois (19); Senart (88); Sherring (89); Ghurye (30). Hocart's attempt to interpret caste in purely ritual terms must be utterly discarded. Although he writes on Sinhalese caste, he seems to have been vastly more concerned with his thesis than with objective analysis of the system.

<sup>2</sup> Hocart (38), Chap. 1.

vocation, not because it has been a prerogative of caste. The modern Sinhalese, like their forebears, are predominately peasants; division of labor and specialization are rudimentary; the majority of all gainfully employed are in agriculture, and no doubt always have been.

It is possible that in historic times the Goyigama were not always conceived of as a caste, but simply as citizens. Ribeiro gives such an impression and with all Knox' attention to detail he provides no name for the highest caste, but instead a title of respect given them.<sup>8</sup> Howsoever this may be, the Goyigama were not differentiated by their agricultural vocation as such. They were, however, differentiated on the basis of prerogatives, honors, powers, and by particular agricultural roles in reference to the feudal authority. While many of the lower castes stood in service relationship to the high caste, the high caste stood in service relationship to the king or to the temple, although even these exalted objects of service were not his alone, for others as well served them both. The intra-Goyigama hierarchy of the highlands was associated with types of service responsibility, *e.g.*, wood cutters for the kings' elephants, messengers, etc. At its peak stood the lordly feudal vassals, at its base not another feudal estate but outcasts from the standpoint of service responsibility and personalized relationships. With the passing of the feudal monarchy, most of the functional elements within the Goyigama hierarchy were lost. Many Radaḷa families maintained their roles under the British Crown. Nilamakkāras still cultivate on temple service lands, and it is reported that other subcastes serve the temples. But those persons who serve are few. The remaining Goyigama subcastes were cut loose from their differentiating service roles by the end of rājākāriya. The service terminology in their subcaste classification is wholly obsolete. Distinctions of the subcastes, except for the Radaḷa, reside in the memory of tradition, not in any significant functional differences. Outside the central highlands status distinctions among Goyigama have functional significance only in respect to House lines, and this is purely historic. Nor is the undifferentiated Goyigama, wherever he may be, distinguished by the fact or memory of functional role; to a considerable extent he is distinguished by the lack of it.

<sup>8</sup> See above, Chap. 3.



As the dominant caste it is understandable that certain prerogatives resided and continue to reside with the Goyigama, which influence social function. Although there are no formal disabilities or abilities attached to caste in any governmental positions, there has been some tendency to recruit certain types of government officers from among the Goyigama.<sup>4</sup> While not fully monopolistic by caste, the fact of Goyigama status has clear advantages, in admission to such services as the police force, and in appointment as a village or Divisional headman in interior areas. Local and minor civil division leadership in predominately Karāva and Salāgama areas is not dominated by the Goyigama; elsewhere it may be looked upon as practically a Goyigama monopoly. In religious functions, the prerogative of the high caste is maintained, except where the minority sects (*i.e.*, not Siyam Nikāya) are dominant, a condition which is found only in the coastal areas of dense Karāva, Salāgama and Durāva settlement. The great temples, both vihāres and dēvāles, and their lands are perhaps without exception under the administrative control of Goyigama families, particularly Radala.<sup>5</sup> In respect to some positions, *i.e.*, the dēvāle kapurāla, the role is an hereditary one, a priestly one. Such offices affect very few individuals; the vast majority of Goyigama have no functions as such.

The remaining castes can be arranged crudely into three groups as regards traditional roles. (1) Those having a clear tradition of function, (2) those having no clear tradition of function, and (3) those traditionally dissociated from function.

Of the castes without functions, the Demala-Gattara are a peasant people of no fixed status and of unknown origin, but possibly late South Indian immigrants. It is conceivable that they are a branch of some other caste, but of this there is no positive evidence. As a caste they are distinguished not at all upon traditional grounds but rather as a communalistic, endogamous in-group resented for their assertiveness and belligerence. The Roḍi, whatever their historic origin, are treated in accord with traditional understanding. By some accounts they held a caste monopoly on elephant noose making, but, while begging is their predominate vocation, in this

<sup>4</sup> See also Chap. 12.

<sup>5</sup> See Hocart (37).



they have no monopoly. In a sense the latter is viewed by merit seeking Sinhalese as a Roḍi function, and this group might reasonably be classified in any of the three categories.

FUNCTION FAIRLY CLEAR	FUNCTION NOT CLEAR	NO FUNCTION
Karāva ( <i>fishing</i> )	Panna-durayi	Demala-Gattara
Salāgama ( <i>cinnamon peeling</i> )	Batgam Beravā	Roḍi *
Durāva ( <i>tappers</i> )	Kontadurayi	
Navandanna ( <i>artisans</i> )	Batgam	
Hannāli ( <i>tailors</i> )		
Hunu ( <i>lime burners</i> )		
Hēna ( <i>washers, etc.</i> )		
Vahumpura ( <i>jaggory makers</i> )		
Hinnā ( <i>washers, etc.</i> )		
Baḍahāla ( <i>potters</i> )		
Panikki ( <i>barbers</i> )		
Velli-durayi ( <i>Bo-tree guards</i> )		
Beravā ( <i>tom-tom beaters, etc.</i> )		
Oli ( <i>dancers</i> )		
Palī ( <i>washers</i> )		
Kinnara ( <i>mat weavers</i> )		
Gahala-beravā ( <i>funeral drummers, executioners</i> )		

\* The roles of begging and elephant noose making are traditionally attached to the Roḍiyā, but never as a chief differentiating feature.

For those having no distinct tradition of a caste role, it is a reasonable possibility that at least some are divergent branches of an original parent stock. Direct evidence for such a contention is lacking, and no reliance is to be placed on philological similarities. Most early observers have attributed some distinctive service roles to the Pannadurayi and the Batgam, usually with qualifications indicting the inexactness of the tradition. Today some members of the castes will recall ancient service roles but these usually reflect prestige desires more than legend.

The fact that the majority of the castes can clearly and definitively be linked with quite specific traditional functions is noteworthy. It unquestionably attests not merely legendary association

but actual historic feudal service, and guild-like monopoly. It is obvious that both types of linkages are present, as for example in the more guild-like Navandanna and the estate-like Beravā. The historicity of the service affiliations is attested not only by the questionable *Janavamsa* but in colonial documents and the reports of Europeans from the seventeenth century onwards and, in a number of cases, by the existing caste monopolies in the present day.

Measuring the extent to which ancient caste-linked functions are persevered with as distinctive caste roles in the present day is precarious.<sup>6</sup> No census has ever shown occupation by caste membership, and in so far as can be determined no census since that of the Low Country in 1824 has done more than barely admit the presence of caste among the Sinhalese. Conclusions are necessarily based upon rough empirical observation without benefit of statistical aids.

At no period, modern or ancient, is it likely that all members of a caste having distinctive functional roles actually participated in the service or guild-like duties, or, depending upon the viewpoint, privileges. In so far as function has significance for status, it is the potential function which counts. A Beravāyā wholly ignorant of drumming is still a "tom-tom beater," he alone has the hereditary right, although only in some cases, *i.e.*, service tenure, is he obliged to drum. It is thus necessary to think in terms of families and villages who simply associate themselves with the traditional role as well as those who perform its actual functions. Except for the Karāva it is probable that the majority of almost every caste is more dependent on agriculture than on any caste prerogative, and this, quite possibly, has always been the case. Thus the fact that not every Beravāyā is actually a drummer does not necessarily mean a deterioration in caste.

It is safe to say that most castes for which a traditional function is evident have in some degree a connection with that role today. In some cases the caste-linked service is frequently performed, in others only a few have remained in it; seldom have outsiders taken

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert (31) makes an ill-advised effort, largely on the numerical census distribution of occupations which disregard caste completely and, as is indicated here, could give only a result so distorted as to be meaningless.

it up. Most of the functions, in so far as they are performed in contemporary villages, are carried out by a traditionally appropriate caste. This is invariably true for ritual roles and true also for several of the purely secular prerogatives. Thus, tom-tom beating in temples and at festive occasions belongs to the Beravāyā, as washing and its associated ritual responsibilities belongs to the Hēnayā. Fishing, smithing, pottery making and the Kinnara-type mat weaving are virtually caste monopolies. In addition it is probable that while the majority of barbers may be Indian Tamils, the Panikki caste is primarily dependent upon barbering. Many villagers of Vahumpura caste make jaggory; <sup>†</sup> many Durāva are toddy tappers and some Hunu burn lime, but in these vocations members of other castes are also engaged. In general, caste-linked vocations are carried out by the appropriate caste in so far as they remain village enterprises. For several of the castes traditional work has been lost in urbanized and nontraditional vocations.

There is no doubt that a large minority, possibly a majority, of Karāva people are associated with village fishing and that few persons of other caste participate in that vocation. (Muslims are, in some localities, fishermen.) Except for a few government-owned trawlers, the Sinhalese fishing industry, at all levels, is practically a caste monopoly. But although fishing is a Karāva trade, there are a great many members of the caste outside it. Concentrated in the most highly urbanized part of the island, the Karāva have many representatives in urban pursuits, several generations removed from the sea. One aspect of this mobility is of particular significance here. Under early colonial rule stimulation was given to skilled trades in the southwestern coastal area. Persons of appropriate caste, Navandanna, are not to be found in large numbers in any area and they are particularly sparse in this region of European development. In consequence of this demand, many Karāva men entered into skilled crafts, particularly carpentry and woodworking.<sup>‡</sup> This is one of the few instances in which, even under foreign

<sup>†</sup> Hocart (38) points out that the Vahumpura are traditionally "cooks" rather than jaggory makers. Perhaps he is correct. In any case "cooking" as a caste role for the Vahumpura has even less active significance than jaggory making.

<sup>‡</sup> This is not wholly foreign to the fishing villages' work. Construction of the delicate outriggers has probably always been carried on by Karāva craftsmen, as it is today. Every fishing village of any size has its "workshops" manned by men of the caste.



stimulus, the distinctive work of a particular caste has been invaded in force by those of another stratum. While some occupations have been rendered virtually caste free, and others of course have arisen outside the caste milieu, Low Country carpentry is, like fishing, almost a monopoly of the Karāva.

The Salāgama, also subject to urbanizing influences, have moved into diverse urban vocations. While many of the caste are engaged in cinnamon peeling, and others are cinnamon estate owners or proprietors, this craft involving little skill is being invaded by persons of many castes. In some areas Vahumpura do cinnamon work; probably they are descendants of persons of that caste pressed into the industry in Dutch times. Toddy tapping is now divorced from caste significance, and although participated in by the traditionally appropriate caste, the occupation has become a source of income for diverse persons in many Low Country areas. Much the same situation has occurred in reference to the Hunu among whom lime burning is carried on, in some villages as an exclusive vocation; elsewhere it has been entered in recent times by new castes, and particularly by impersonal capitalists.

It is significant that each of the groups mentioned above, except the Vahumpura, is a Low Country caste. Although ancient functions are maintained by some, there has been a steady movement among them into urban pursuits, and except for the Karāva, whose skills are extremely difficult to learn, their places are being filled by the landless and poor of many castes. In lime burning the dissociation process has been hastened by absentee furnace ownership.

For the strictly Low Country castes of Panikki and Hinnā the situation has been somewhat different. The Panikki, in spite of their urban contacts through barbering, are usually uneducated and have for some reason preserved their caste trade and infrequently entered into either agriculture or middle class occupations. While the Karāva, Salāgama and Durāva tend toward a high and almost equal status, the Panikki is definitely a lower caste. In some part this is no doubt a product of their paucity in numbers and perhaps a tendency for their residences to be further from urban centers. The Hinnā of the West coast are frequently dissociated from their traditional washing and ceremonial roles for the Salāgama. Apart from a minority who have entered into business

and other urban occupations, they are usually agriculturalists. The members of the caste by the same name in the Southern Province, far from Salāgama concentrations, do not recognize the traditional washer role. For many generations some of their families have engaged in basket working, as they do today. Many are simply peasant agriculturalists who look down upon their basket-making neighbors.

The Hēna, Baḍahāla, Beravā and Olī are castes commonly found in both the Kandyan and the Low Country Provinces. Each of them has today a virtual monopoly on traditional caste practices, where these are preserved, except in so far as some substitution has occurred between the Beravā and Olī. For the Hēna and the Beravā traditional functions are closely observed, and it may be inferred that this is due to the strength of ceremonial rather than the utilitarian roles. The ceremonial activities of the Hēnayā are centered upon major crises of life, such as puberty and marriage. No doubt a testimony to the significance of this role lies in the fact that in the limited caste order of the Sinhalese, no caste was originally without its appropriate washer group upon which the ceremonial responsibilities fell.

Drumming is an important part of the most sacred ceremonials, those of the Buddha and of the various Hindu and Planetary Gods, and not infrequently associated with marriage and death.<sup>9</sup> Although every village Hēnayā does not serve in a caste role and many Beravāyās are dissociated personally from drumming, most would have neighbors or relatives carrying on the traditional activities. The emancipated, if they are not urban, have not moved into new vocations but are as they have always been, cultivating peasants. Even in the urban environment ceremonial drumming is a Beravā monopoly and practically all washing of clothes is carried out by Hēna. There are of course many families in the city, particularly of Hēna caste, who have dissociated themselves completely from caste functions.

The village washer guards his prerogatives closely; they are valued for their economic returns and for the uniquely favored status associated with them in Goyigama eyes. Every status service

<sup>9</sup> Neville, in *The Taprobanian* (97), June 1888, pp. 51-52, describes the Beravā as priests to the planetary gods and the Olī as priests to Gara Yakka.



calls for reciprocity by the Goyigama, and even where monetary payments are used, the high caste recipient of service could ill afford to be niggardly or to drive a bargain. The performing Hēnayā will be virtually always one whose status relationship with the Goyigama household has persisted over generations. Even where the price of service is monetarily stated, there is not a true contractual relation. The Goyigama and the associated Hēna alike see their relationship as one of hereditary reciprocity. In the Low Country, particularly in the narrow coastal fringe, status relationships are diminished. This fringe is urbanized and hence generally more mobile, impersonal and contractual. Equally important is the fact that in many of these localities the Hēnayā serves castes other than the Goyigama. In the peasant village, the washer serving persons, regardless of status, would usually be shunned by the highest. Often the Salāgama have taken the Hēnayā's service in replacement of the traditionally appropriate Hinnāvā, and even Durāva are served by some Hēna. In some areas castes of lower status would not be given service. With them the functions of the Hēna, or rather of the theoretically appropriate Pālī, are carried on by family members themselves. The limits within which the Hēnayā washes seem ultimately determined by the local economic position of the lower caste and the degree of urbanization.

Beravāyās drum in practically all of the vihāres of Ceylon, either in the role of service tenants or on a contractual or semicontractual basis, or, in isolated areas, out of purely traditional obligation. This service is usually fulfilled, even where money payment is made, by drummers who follow in the footsteps of their fathers who served the same vihāre. Since the vihāre is usually open to all castes, the service is not that of a status relationship to any particular segment of the society. Drumming upon festive family or village occasions has not the inviolable significance that is attached to the Hēnayā's rituals.

Devil dancing is normally carried on by the Beravāyā and usually will be performed for anyone who requires it and is able to pay the charges. Exorcising disease is a highly developed and conventionalized art requiring dancing, drumming and various histrionic demonstrations, some highly symbolic, some merely fearful, others amusing. In some localities Goyigama and other families have



learned the techniques and are looked upon as qualified performers, but generally the art and the practice is in Beravā hands.<sup>10</sup>

In the Low Country no distinction whatever is made in reference to the status of the recipient of such drumming. In Kandyan areas, where there are many castes of lower status than the Beravā, drumming is usually done for those of fairly high position but not necessarily Goyigama. While other castes are engaged in drumming, they are not differentiated on the basis of the status of those for whom they perform. The Batgam Beravā, and in a few cases, Olī, also drum at temples. The Gahala-beravā are traditionally only funeral drummers; a few of them, as well as the Batgam Beravā, Beravā and the inappropriate Batgam, follow this vocation today. Funeral drumming in the villages is usually dispensed with, and in the towns where it is frequently found, the functionaries are of low caste, most frequently Beravāyās.

The Olī, although traditionally the "dancing caste," are often dissociated from the art. In the Low Country even a recognition of the ancient service is often lacking, and traditional Olī functions are sometimes performed by Beravāyās. In some Low Country areas astrology is deemed to be an Olī monopoly. In the Kandyan Provinces the ancient dancing roles are maintained. There is no evidence that the Olī were ever the exorcisers of disease demons (more accurately, appeasers of supernatural apparitions and planetary gods having power over diseases) as are the Beravā. Although there has been some interchange in role between the two castes, the Olī claim special powers in exorcising the evil generated in the practice of some sacred rites. Their appeal, through mask dancing, is directed toward the beneficent demon-god, Gara Yakka. Ceremonies at the Kandyan dēvāles require the Olī and are performed by members of that caste today, often as service tenants on the temple lands. It is probable, however, that only a small proportion of the village Olī, of whom there are in total very few, know the

<sup>10</sup> Astrological functions are also carried on by Beravā but are no longer a distinctive caste role. Nor is it to be thought that all magical powers reside with the Beravā and Olī. Even in exorcising, certain types of ceremonies are caste free. Thus the devout Buddhist may also call upon Buddhist Bhikkus to chant pirith in time of crisis, or the equally devout Catholic, or sometimes Buddhist, makes pilgrimage to a Christian shrine. Vows are made to the area deities, especially by Buddhists, and even the "naive doctor," presumably an herb healer, utilizes magical formulae. Nor is black magic the prerogative of a caste.

ancient arts. In the Low Country the Gara Yakka mask is used by Beravā, particularly in the great beach ceremonies designed to insure abundant fish.

Pottery making, like fishing, is one of the few crafts not associated with ceremonial responsibilities. With it the congruence of occupation and caste is probably more perfect than for any other non-ceremonial caste. Comparatively few potters have left their villages for urban life, and most are engaged in their occupation, sometimes in conjunction with agriculture. Rarely does the potter stand in any functional status relationship with his neighbors. He has no ritual responsibilities, and his production is strictly upon a commercial basis. Frequently the potter himself or his family members hawk the produce through the villages; others cart it to the towns, for direct sale at a fair, or to retailers. The occupational role is maintained, but it is directed toward the market place rather than to members of the local community. No other castes engage in pottery making, although some enclaved Tamil villagers follow the same craft. In recent years some minor industrial development has occurred in ceramics and particularly in tile production, but this is dissociated from caste. Pottery arts are also engaged in at government craft schools; teacher and pupil alike will be quick to point out that their concern is art rather than vocation.

The Velli-durayi, Palī, Kinnara and Gahala-Beravā are all quite small castes virtually limited to the Kandyan Provinces. Of these the Kinnara is the only one having no traditional association with ceremonial functions, but through his caste isolation, landlessness and poverty, has remained close to his ancient and distinctive mat weaving art. Meager returns from mat weaving are supplemented mainly through wage labor on nearby estates and village lands. Until very recently no other caste wove mats in the artistic Kinnara design. At the present time the Kinnara technique is being introduced to others in government sponsored village craft centers. The Palī are almost extinct as a caste if indeed they were ever numerous. In a few localities they actually serve the castes of Batgam, Beravā and others, but mainly they are extremely low status and landless peasants living on the fringe of low caste villages and dependent upon casual labor. An economically secure Beravāyā



will usually have clothes washed by the Hēnayā in the nearest town, or by the Indian Tamil dhoby on some nearby estate.

The Velli-durayi are engaged in their traditional function only in the villages under service obligation to the temple of the Bo-tree. While not numerous elsewhere, where observed they have had no distinctive roles. Very few of the Gahala-beravāyās engage in funeral drumming, although in some parts of the Central Province they are the appropriate caste for such a function. They would be called for the service only at most ostentatious funerals, and the transaction would be upon a contractual basis. As has been noted, their principal village is more renowned for its prostitution than for presumably more traditional roles.

The Vahumpura, still another Kandyan as much as Low Country caste, has today no purely ritual function and is dissociated from the traditional vocation of "jaggory making." Vahumpura, probably more frequently than other castes, draw the kitul juice and make the jaggory sugar, but the trade is not strictly caste linked. On dēvālagams where caste services are maintained in accord with the ancient service prescriptions, Vahumpura tenants of course provide jaggory to the temple. The Vahumpura are fundamentally a peasant cultivating folk, usually living in homogeneous villages, and if following their ancient calling, doing so only in a supplemental way. Where feudal type relationships persist, the Vahumpura, alternatively with the Panna, is the appropriate caste from which the Goyigama would draw pingo bearers for wedding parties, and they are considered clean in matters of food handling.

Functional roles dependent upon caste are not limited to these specific vocational and ritual patterns of behavior. Even the castes without clear specific service traditions have approximate status roles assigned them. Labor of various types which would be unseemly for a Goyigama howsoever poor might be appropriate for a Panna or a Batgam. Such distinctions are not rigid and fixed, except in the case of extremely "degrading" work. Thus, even in the Low Country, when water for a Goyigama family festivity must be fetched from the well, a person of lower caste, *e.g.*, Baḍahāla or Vahumpura, will be summoned, even though in daily life the Goyigama women think nothing of this daily chore. "Summoned" is a word used advisedly, for though the low caste man might be



paid, probably in food, if he is a resident of the same village or dependent upon the Goyigama for land, he would not refuse. The relationship is scarcely a contractual one; he has a moral and social obligation to serve. No Goyigama would suggest, however, be he of potter or even Beravā caste, that he should clean a latrine. Every Sinhalese caste is above such work except the Roḍiyā and he rarely works outside his own small crafts, of basketry, drum making or begging. The Kandyan Goyigama requiring a pingo bearer to the town would scarcely call upon a Goyigama. Rather this is work for which Panna and Vahumpura are fitted, although where these castes are prosperous or at all urbanized, only the poor would accept the summons. Members of these castes as well might be summoned for garden and household chores. To be sure, impoverished Goyigama today take such employment, but in theory the "low caste" would be summoned.

Direct personal services to the Radaḷa and Goyigama are preserved in Kandyan Provinces, particularly where economic power, usually in the form of rentable land, is in the hands of the high caste. In the more remote villages a Goyigama summons would certainly be answered by a low caste from another and even economically self-contained village, if there was a tradition of service existing between them. If such a tradition did not exist the summons probably would not be given. This type of relationship should not be construed as coincidental to caste difference and simply the product of economic bargaining power. To the contrary, caste status must be approximately congruent with the type of service required, even where it is not caste specific. Further the relationship is only superficially a contractual one. The serving low caste is paid for his work, perhaps in food, perhaps in paddy or even in money, but this is not an economic valuation of the work, to be accepted or refused by the worker. Rather it is more of the nature of a reciprocal responsibility which the Goyigama would not shirk any more than he would expect the low caste man to fail in response to his call. If the Goyigama calls, the low caste comes. In localities where such relationships persist, to suggest that the low caste might not come is utterly ridiculous. As one Goyigama villager replied with obvious amusement, "He *will* come! And to the next question, "What if he did not?" came the response, "But he *will* come!" No doubt there are

villages today where the Vahumpura or the Panna or others are refusing the summons, but in most areas where the summons would be disregarded this type of service is not expected except on a straight contractual basis.

The less specific status services are found in association with Radaḷas, or in the more remote hills and the jungles where the caste feudal order is unchallenged, either by economic change or new ideological conceptions. Logically associated with this phenomenon, however, are common practices not strictly of a caste character but growing out of the feudal concepts. Frequently where one finds concentrated land ownership, a return to the landlord over and above customary rental is expected from the tenant. This is the case generally, apart from lands held in legally feudal relationships. It may be denied by Radaḷas and other landlords, but the scarcity of paddy lands has permitted the retention of service concepts in a nominally contractual landlord-tenant relationship. If the poor tenant is not prepared to serve the landlord as required, his chances of obtaining land another season are slight. This type of exploitation is practiced whether the tenant is Goyigama or not, and it is practiced by low caste landlords renting to other low castes. Since land ownership is concentrated in most villages and since the concentration is most likely to be in the Goyigama families, the practice in fact often resembles exploitation of the lower caste.<sup>11</sup> More accurately it is the exploitation of an economic class.

Wherever feudal and uncommuted tenure is to be found, especially on the interior dēvālagams and vihāragams, traditional caste functions are closely preserved. Here the fields are cultivated in perpetuity by families maintaining their distinctive caste prerogatives and roles in reference to temple maintenance and ceremonies. Particularly on dēvālagams this division of function on hereditary status lines is preserved in detail. The fact that villagers outside the

<sup>11</sup> The term "exploitation" is not applicable to the status relationship in its pure form. This tendency for landlords to profit both from feudal-type service and contract rent (usually one-half of the crop) is obviously iniquitous and is bitterly resented by most peasants whether low or high in the caste hierarchy. How general is this extortive technique cannot be determined accurately. It has been found to be common in the Central Province and undoubtedly obtains in other areas as well. Frequently the landlord's desire to maximize his position by renting to low castes is counteracted by the insistence of his poor kinsfolk that they may be given precedence as tenants.



dēvālagams probably do not personally practice the hereditary arts and crafts in the same proportion as in former days is partly from a repudiation of the ascribed functions, and partly an inevitable product of the general decay of a society of status. Where feudal service is prevalent the caste roles are fulfilled with a precision preserved from the distant past.

More remarkable than the general departure from caste roles is the widespread persistence of them in modern times. This is to be accounted for by the avidity with which ancient ceremonies are maintained, and the lack of mobility and alternative economic opportunity for the serving castes. In addition to these factors, less tangible and more subjective forces are also at work, especially in the interior. Briefly, these may be described as the inarticulate acceptance of a status economy and inability to visualize an orderly society in which service functions are assigned through competition. The inhumane aspects of the ancient times are disapproved, but many villagers, when they consider the matter at all, visualize chaos rather than a new social order in an occupationally competitive economy.

Although members of castes with status functions may be drained off into urban pursuits or into fully agricultural ones, only in exceptional instances have the members of one caste violated the caste preserves of another. Occupational mobility has usually come through urban migration, a very small movement in Ceylon, and even in the city neither vocation nor ceremony has been completely dissociated from caste.

Ceylon is beyond mid-passage in respect to disengaging social and economic roles from caste obligations. No one today is forced to hold an occupational or ceremonial position against his will, nor are *formal* hindrances placed in the path of occupational mobility. There is no doubt but that status-linked roles have been generally maintained under conditions wherein the acting caste had no superior economic alternatives. Indeed in some communities a service caste member is in an enviable position; he, like his Goyigama neighbor, may be a tenant cultivator, but unlike his *partially* employed high caste neighbor, he has steady sources of supplemental income. Seldom does the unurbanized washer wish relief from his obligations; they are to him valuable and satisfying perquisites of



birth. Drumming, of lower status, is less heartily clung to by the Beravāyā, but as a caste the Beravā are generally poor and uneducated, and the supplemental income is welcome. In more remote areas there is little sensitivity to this as a mark of status, since caste is the unquestioned and righteous order.

In sum it may be concluded that in so far as specific caste functions are concerned, practically every group with a tradition of specific service has some connection today with that function. Only the virtually extinct Hannāli might be considered an exception. However, it cannot be concluded that the majority of non-Goyigama villagers themselves directly participate in such services or work. It is certain, however, that sizable proportions of the Karāva, Navandanna, Panikki, Hēna, Baḍahāla, Velli-durayi, Beravā and Kinnara gain their livelihood through the performance of caste determined vocations. In the Low Country and in more urban influenced interior localities these vocations are seldom looked upon by the performer as a moral or social obligation and "proper" to him by virtue of his birth. The congruence of caste and vocation is preserved in the competitive economy through inadequacy of educational opportunity and the limited expansion of the total economy. In the more isolated regions, like the north-central jungles and unroaded mountain valleys, caste service with its ancient significance survives. Service is done out of recognized status responsibility and prerogative, and on terms that are essentially noncontractual.

## ❖❖❖ 9

### *Caste in the Kandyan Highlands*

Properly the Kandyan Provinces are those of the Interior, subject to Kandyan Law as guaranteed by the British in the treaty of 1815. Actually the nominal cultural-political homogeneity of this varied area encompasses wide ranges in social and particularly economic structure. The most fundamental regional difference is that between the mountainous highlands of the south-central interior and the great jungles of the north and east.<sup>1</sup> The contrasts are imposed chiefly by the ecological and economic characters of each, the one a densely populated, lush and well watered mountain land of peasant villages and plantations, the other a seasonally dry zone of forest-separated small villages eking out an existence from small paddy lands and the ubiquitous jungle. The dominant environmental and economic contrasts, as well as the comparative isolation of the jungle village, have produced significant differences in social structures including caste and caste relationships.

#### THE KANDYAN HIGHLANDS

The Kandyan highlands are not without towns and cities, but the former are no more than large peasant villages and the latter are few indeed. The capital of the Kandyan Kingdom of the early nineteenth century was Kandy, and this city today dominates the area of most dense village settlements in the entirely highland Central Province. Nearby are large local trade centers such as Matale, Gampola and Wattagama. Far to the south is the city of Ratnapura, the

1. See Ryan (81).

seat of government for Sabaragamuva Province, and at the eastern edge of the region is Badulla, in Uva Province. In the very heart is the "hill capital" of Nuwara Eliya, of more significance to planters and tourists than to peasants, for the highest lands were never a locale of dense village settlement. Surfaced roads and bus routes honeycomb the entire hill country, linking many villages to the cities by direct contact. Most of the remainder are within two or three miles of public transportation routes. Almost throughout, the villagers are in contact with cities, but with cities which are in no sense metropolitan and not particularly urban. The villager, served chiefly by local or nearby village bazaars, visits the city for important celebrations, court and legal transactions, and, if in easy reach, as a market center for special items such as cloth. Few villagers are isolated from urban contact, but few avail themselves of it frequently. The great bulk of Central Province and Sabaragamuva Sinhalese are village peasants, rural in residence and in their way of life.

Typically the highland village is situated in the valley lands, the peasant cultivating his paddy on the valley floor and his gardens near or surrounding the house. Above the village on the higher hillsides are usually estates, or, particularly in Sabaragamuva, crown owned jungle. In many areas the tea or rubber estates have invaded lands once used as chena by the villagers of the valley below. With an expanding population and limited valley lands, peasants have frequently come into dependence upon estates for irregular cash income. (The principal estate labor force is resident Indian Tamil.) Socially, however, the world of the village is distinct from that of the neighboring estate. The fact that perhaps most villages are served by motorable roads and usually nearby bazaar towns, is largely attributable to estate development. Communication and transportation facilities have, in accordance mainly with estate demands, been highly developed for a South Asian rural region.

Unlike the Low Country, the ancient past is a recent phenomenon in the Kandyans Provinces. Until 1815 the Kandyans preserved their king and with him the feudal bureaucracy and the ancient conventions. As has been observed, the advent of British rule was marked by considerable caution in the disruption of the



traditional social and governmental structure. Although guarantees of cultural and organizational autonomy may frequently have been circumvented by juridical and other devices, the Kandyanans are a scant century away from a period in which European concepts of law and society were threats rather than actual innovations. A century in the cultural life of an immobile, village centered, technologically undeveloped, and nationally proud people can be a very short time indeed. The institutions of the conqueror were not propagated as in the Low Country, and the incentives to become "westernized" were almost wholly lacking. Feudal concepts and structure, which had such a decisive role for the development of the Kandyan caste structure, were weakened but far from obliterated. Much less were the spheres of family pride and conceptions of status affected and less rapidly, too, did egalitarian ideology slip in through contact with liberal western thinking. On the other hand, the Kandyan areas were exempt from the exploitation of castes to suit the purposes of the conquerors, and the abolition of the Sinhalese court rendered meaningless many of the caste rules and functions.

The lesser emancipation of the highland peasants from feudal structure and concepts is no doubt reflected in a greater acceptance of the caste system as the proper order of society. We have seen that throughout the country there is little desire to break caste solidarity in marriage but a considerable resentment by the lower castes at the greater power and higher esteem associated with the higher castes. In the highlands resentment of inequities is less articulate than in the Low Country; more low caste peasants accept uncomplainingly the fact of their inferiority. Very seldom is there overt trouble between castes. The emancipation of the low castes from symbolic discriminations continues, but the transition is not pressed in the face of Goyigama opposition. It is perfectly clear that low caste obsequiousness is only partially the result of unquestioned acceptance of the ancient ordering: at least as important is the economic and political power resting with the Goyigama. Many a low caste peasant sneers privately at the pleasure it gives the village Goyigama to be waited upon with betel and worship. In some localities the subservient behavior of the low castes is a superficial veneer dictated by the power realities of the

village; elsewhere it involves a sincere conviction that homage should be paid those of high birth.

No less than in the remainder of Ceylon has communal caste solidarity been transformed into political realities. In some areas the inferior castes appear to support politically those to whom homage is due. More widely, however, there is an actual or potential solidarity on the caste basis. Generally it appears that where a low caste man is a candidate for office, he is likely to be supported by the low castes. If he is conservative, *i.e.*, government party, he may be supported by the Goyigama in spite of his caste. Since a single caste of low position is rarely numerically dominant in an electoral district, there is an ever present tendency for a single cleavage to occur between Goyigama and all others. Such political division is highly unstable and often subordinated to other bases of division, such as personal stature of the candidate, or local loyalties. The communist parties, appealing to the class interests of the poor, draw support mainly from the lower castes, Tamil estate labor and the townsmen. Where he is not held in bonds of feudal loyalty or fear, the lower caste peasant is more influenced by appeals to class solidarity than is the Goyigama. This is because the poor Goyigama is bound by caste and kinship loyalty to the conservative landed aristocracy. There is small doubt but that the government party is closely identified with landed interests.

The vote of the highland villages is predominately conservative. As has been indicated, this is due in part to the peasant Goyigama's identification with the landed powers who reasonably enough support the right, and less importantly to the acceptance of the landed aristocracy by all castes as the rightful holders of office. Political conservatism here, just as in other areas, is also related to the belief that the left is anti-Buddhist, while the right is known to be articulately pro-Buddhist. Among equally pious candidates of different caste, almost certainly, in any part of the highlands, the Goyigama low caste split would be significant in any election. In some instances men of low caste have gained parliamentary seats, but this has occurred in reference to exceptional personalities who had either the active support of the landed or were elected from districts almost equally divided by caste. Ultimately the established government party has less to fear from caste protest than from



class protest, but the latter will remain quiescent so long as feudal and familial loyalties are strong. The Goyigama is usually a majority, and caste loyalties to the conservative leadership are stronger than political party or ideological convictions, or, at this stage, economic protest.

#### CASTE STRUCTURE IN THE HIGHLANDS

With the exception of the Karāva, Salāgama and Durāva, each of the major Sinhalese castes is to be found in the Kandyan Highlands.<sup>2</sup> Indeed a number are almost exclusively found there. Villages of Velli-durayi, Kontadurayi, Panna, Batgam Beravā, Batgam, Kinnara, Palī and Gahala-beravā, and Rodi are seldom to be seen in non-Kandyan districts. In addition the suborders of the Goyigama are practically unknown in the lowlands. Of the major castes, the Goyigama, the Navandanna, the Baḍahāla, Vahumpura, Beravā and Hēna are found in every part of Sinhalese Ceylon.

In the total absence of census data, any effort to describe sub-regional caste distributions is mere guesswork. There is virtually no uniformity in distribution on an areal basis. In the vicinity of the city of Kandy, *i.e.*, a fifteen- or twenty-mile radius, there is, however, the highest *differentiation* of caste. The principal existing villages of Goyigama subcaste are likewise to be found within this area. This complexity is no doubt related to the demands of the king for the court services of his various estate-castes. Everywhere the Goyigama is to be found, his numerical superiority being subject to doubt particularly in the Balangoda, Kegalle and Kurunegala districts. In the first of these localities the Vahumpura are very numerous and the others have varieties of lower castes, especially Batgam and other durayi peoples. It is doubtful if such concentrations have much more than accidental historical significance. The more important fact sociologically is that few of these castes are strictly local. The majority, even though small, seem to be widely scattered, if only throughout Kandyan territory.

<sup>2</sup> Actually some Karāva villages are in Kandyan areas probably through migration within the last century or two. There are also a few Salāgama villages, whether through migration from the Low Country or as isolated survivors of a period when "Chalias" were more scattered, is not known. Statistically and functionally these castes are of no importance in Kandyan areas generally.



There is no reason for believing that territorial and geographic areas have been a significant basis for caste or caste-like boundaries within the Kandyan Provinces. On the other hand, for the Kandyan Provinces generally, the castes themselves are frequently distinct from the Low Country hierarchy and even where common castes are found there is a caste-like feeling of superiority on the part of the Kandyan.<sup>3</sup>

Rough impressions as to comparative numbers in the various castes for the region as a whole can be made only on the basis of extensive personal observation. Avoiding refined comparisons, they are grouped in a fivefold classification representing broad gradations in numbers, from large to small.

HIGHLAND CASTES ARRANGED IN DESCENDING ORDER OF:

<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Status</i>
I The Goyigama with its various sub-groups	I Goyigama with its various sub-groups
II The Vahumpura	II Navandanna
III Navandanna, Hēna (Dhoby), Beravā	III Hēna, Vahumpura
IV Panna, Batgam (Padu)	IV Beravā, Panna, Batgam (Padu), Kontadurayī, Velli-durayī, Batgam Beravā
V Hunu, Kontadurayī, Velli-durayī, Palī, Kinnara, Roḍi, Gahala-beravā, Batgam Beravā	V Kinnara, Palī, Gahala-beravā, Roḍi

To put these gradations into precise numerical terms is hazardous. It may be suggested that the Goyigama with its various sub-grades accounts for 50 per cent of the population. At the other extreme, it may be fairly accurately estimated that Roḍiyās amount to no more than three thousand for the entire island, and that most of these live in the highland region. The Palī can probably be numbered in scores of families, the Kinnara, Gahala-beravā and perhaps Batgam Beravā, in hundreds. The Hunu and Velli-durayī are somewhat more important in other regions than in this, but

<sup>3</sup> See Chap. 10 and also Chap. 11.

nowhere are they found in large numbers.<sup>4</sup> The Hannāli (tailors) are so near to extinction that they have been excluded here, as have a few islands of the "Kandyan" Karāva and Salāgama.

Viewing the highland castes hierarchically from the standpoint of status, it is apparent that the lowest status tends to be among the smallest, while the larger are high. Although no close correlation exists between numbers and status, the conventional status pyramid here, as is also true in the Low Country, tends to be inverted.

Regionally the castes are scattered in almost a haphazard manner, but within the local settlement residence is much less chaotic. The local community, almost invariably, has some, and usually a high, degree of ecological segregation. How this is worked out depends in considerable part on the history of the particular locality. Here an entire village may be composed of a single caste, there a single village may be heterogeneous in caste but with sharply defined areas of settlement. Often the distinction between a caste homogeneous village and a segregated area of a larger village is so inexact as to defy classification. Elsewhere a village of a single caste may be quite distinct geographically from any surrounding settlements, set apart by fields of paddy, estates, or natural barriers. In general, localities which have a clear historic or current *nindagam*, or *vihāragam* and *dēvālagam*, status are a highly heterogeneous collection of villages under a common headship. Here the whole gamut of caste-linked feudal services were maintained for the local overlord, and varieties of castes are brought into close proximity. Where the *Radala* and the manor are unrecognized there appears to be less heterogeneity within an area of contiguous settlement. A *Goyigama* village of any grade is seldom without a fringe of lower caste families for the maintenance of essential services. Thus the homogeneous high caste village typically has a few *Hēna* families and often one of

\* A Memorandum of The Sri Lanka Swajathika Sangamaya (94) (an association established for the advancement of the Vahumpura caste) addressed to the Soulbury Commission for constitutional reform, claims that over a million Sinhalese belong to the Vahumpura caste. If this is correct it could be said that about one-fourth of the total Sinhalese population are Vahumpura, and perhaps 70 per cent of the Kandyan. The statement is an exaggeration, although in my judgment the caste is larger than any other except the *Goyigama* in Kandyan areas, and possibly for the country as a whole.



Navandanna caste engaged in their traditional vocations. However, one finds non-Goyigama villages which are exclusively of a single caste. More frequently, a single village (contiguous settlement) may contain two or more caste groups for historic reasons that defy generalized contemporary reconstruction.<sup>5</sup>

Although few Highland villages are exclusively of a single caste, and virtually no Goyigama villages so homogeneous, the lines of personal social intercourse are strictly drawn on a caste basis. Segregation in living is a social fact rather than a social issue. Except for groups like the Roḍī, and to some extent the Kinnara and Palī, intercaste residential proximity is not viewed with shame, horror or fear. Where a single village is clearly of mixed castes there is usually no means of determining where one area stops and the other begins, and indeed there is often considerable overlapping. Where the lower castes are few in number, and perhaps own no lands, the more general tendency toward segregation does not appear and the villager is oblivious to it. Proximity of residence has no effect upon the quiet acceptance of *communal* boundaries.

With the varieties of status situations existing in the Highlands and the varying degrees of disruption of ancient relationships, greater understanding can be found by recourse to specific villages selected for their representativeness of the significant status situations in the region. The specific phenomena of caste behavior are local and must be given localized treatment. Unlike the Low Country, different types of situations cannot be treated on a subregional basis, for caste in the highlands is variable less by district than by strictly local historic sequences. In this representation of the total highland scene, selected villages are used to depict quite distinct situations. The first is perhaps the most prevalent, that of a stable and progressive high caste village fringed by its service low castes and a subordinate Goyigama subcaste. This village, Gamagalla,\* is twelve miles from Kandy, and town contacts are frequent. Caste relationships are similar to those of hundreds of villages in the more educationally advanced districts in the Central Province.

\* Pseudonyms have been used for all specific villages referred to throughout this work.

‡ There are various ways through which such heterogeneity came about. One obvious process was the placement of temple functionaries on lands acquired in a village previously composed of a single caste.



The second, a *dēvālagam*, is selected for its representation of the surviving feudalism in its association with caste service. The *dēvālagam* can be regarded as a window into the past, for it unquestionably evidences the historical validity of caste-linked roles which today, outside such anachronistic surroundings, are often disregarded. The third is a study of the death throes of a Goyigama subcaste; its actual differentiation and its contemporary efforts to reconsolidate with the caste at large. The fourth relates to a village in transition, where economic power has been disjoined from birth status. Finally, a brief consideration of the *Roḍiyās* is presented as a special type of situation most common to the Highlands.

#### CASTE IN THE SIMPLE HIGH CASTE VILLAGE \*

Gamagalla is one of a series of villages strung down the ten-mile-long valley of a minor spring-fed stream. To the stranger there is no mark separating Gamagalla from the neighboring villages to the south or to the north. All depend upon the paddy land in the narrow valley floor, and houses, usually thatched and often mud walled, are set in the continuous garden lands of bearing trees along both hillsides. In spite of its contiguity with villages to the south, Gamagalla is distinct from them, for they are of low caste, are governed under different headmen, and possess their own local institutions. To the north, the village of Balangalla also is largely Goyigama, although of *Paṭṭi* grade, and it shares with Gamagalla a common headman and to a large extent common participation in the same school and temple. Together these villages number fewer than a hundred households and, although the "good" Goyigama of Gamagalla would not consider marriage alliances with the Balangallans, every family is well known to every other and the differences, except for purposes of marriage, are more historic than real.

Both Gamagalla and Balangalla are poor. Paddy lands in the valley are limited and tea estates have covered the cultivable highlands above them. More determinative than the limits of village expansion in the poverty of the people is the fact that ownership of the village paddy lands is highly concentrated. In the case of

\* Pseudonyms have been used for all specific villages referred to throughout this work.

Balangalla, one family, of Radaḷa lineage, owns the village in virtual entirety; in Gamagalla, of the sixty-five households, less than half own any land whatever and the paddy fields are almost entirely owned by no more than six families. Most of the villagers rent paddy land from their village resident landlords and supplement their income by work on the nearby estates, principally on one also owned by the Balangalla Radaḷa.

For the two villages as a whole two-thirds are simple Goyigama and an additional tenth Paṭṭi. The small low caste population is composed of several Beravā households, and smaller numbers of Hēna and Baḍahāla, the latter living on the northern boundary. To the casual observer caste differences would not be apparent. Separateness of houses is only partial and could give the appearance of locational accident. Clothing and even ornamentation is identical, there being no feeling here that the Beravāyā should eschew banians or jewelry. (The fact that few of the high castes or the low castes can afford fancy dress is possibly significant.) In the fields the drummer, the potter and the dhoby work lands owned by the Goyigama landlords and join in the cooperative work groups at the threshing and harvest; only their eating on such occasions is separate. On the pathways of the village, Beravāyā stops to gossip with Baḍahāla, and both pass the time of day with Goyigama or Paṭṭi. Recently at the death of an impoverished but respected patriarch among the potters, all Gamagalla contributed in making his funeral a grand occasion. Such close and affectionate regard is not unusual and at any crisis a village man would aid his neighbor without thought of caste. Nor is there exclusion or even self-conscious segregation in the public affairs of the village. All participate, along with some of a neighboring low caste village, in a common school and a common temple; if seating in the latter is segregated it is less upon conscious caste lines than a tendency to sit next to kin. Mixing would cause no censure, and the thought of segregation in the school would be repudiated. Rural Development Society participation is casteless, as are the local volley ball contests and other games for men. Even funerals, which might be thought to fall within the guarded sphere of family affairs, are attended by the village, not merely by the kin and caste. Weddings, the actual ceremonies, are perhaps the only important events in



village life which are completely within the caste line, but even this is qualified by the fact that village friends of another caste are frequently invited to the "at home," the congratulatory get-together which follows every wedding. A Goyigama man and perhaps his wife as well do not feel it amiss to join the "at home" of the newly married potter, and the relationship is reciprocal. One man of potter caste is the village dancing teacher, highly respected and admired by all. His classes and troupe include mainly Goyigama children, and the drumming for their dances is sometimes done by a Goyigama man who has learned the art from a Beravā neighbor. Where now is caste?

As everywhere else in Ceylon, caste is fundamental for any marriage choice, even the subordinate Paṭṭi being inappropriate partners for a "good" Goyigama, and the caste supporting cross-cousin alliance is highly regarded and, where possible, practiced. At the marriage "feast" no outside caste will appear as a guest, and if a Goyigama were to be sufficiently rash to invite an outsider to the wedding, no others would remain, and scandal would be talked. Needless to say, no occurrence of this type, nor of intercaste marriage, blots the history of Gamagalla or Balangalla.

Although the lower castes are few in numbers here, and many of them in fact are cultivators, few are wholly emancipated from their traditional caste occupations. The Henayās wash for the well-to-do Goyigama. While one potter is a dancing *guru* and respected as such, his family maintains the ancient potting craft. In a village just over the hill from Balangalla, the Panna retain an ancient art of pandal construction, and demand as their due that in the local *peraheras* of the valley their art work precedes all others. The caste work of the drummers has long since been placed upon a monetary basis; the Beravāyā is paid in money for his services at either temple or private functions. The dhoby carries out his duties in the traditional manner, receiving from the prosperous high caste families he serves, a share in the paddy harvest. Even for the Beravāyā, whose position is nominally contractual, a rejection of a summons to beat would be unthinkable. Caste work is carried on by a sense of obligation, payment is more a status reciprocity than a return for money equated services. Most village puberty ceremonies and weddings are served by the Hēnayā, for



only he can attend to the customary cloths hung and used in the ceremonies. For this he receives a gift, sometimes in money, but scarcely as payment. To the weddings also come the Beravāyā, for in Gamagalla, unlike most villages, it is appropriate for them to bear the wedding parties' baggage, a function which elsewhere is usually reserved for the Panna or Vahumpura. For his work, as much symbolic of service as physically useful, food is usually provided. It is significant that in these villages where the many poor high caste men and women carry burdens to earn their daily rice, the ritual of burden bearing still rests with the low caste.

Although the appearance of egalitarian intercourse in social affairs has considerable substance, there are many subtleties in conduct associated with caste. The etiquette in greeting still requires deference to the Goyigama by all others, and in this respect the Paṭṭi share. The ancient custom of removing the headgear in the presence of one of high caste is rapidly vanishing, as is the obsequious manner and "stepping aside" on the village lane. Most villagers meet and pass on equal terms today, with no sign of aggressiveness in the lower castes' emancipation and no resentment by the high. Invariably, however, traditional terms of address are maintained, for caste must not be forgotten even though it need not be rubbed in. Beravāyās, Hēnayās, and Baḍahālas all address men of the Goyigama as "Nilame" and women as "Mānike." Status distinctions between the lower castes are recognized in the terms of address used by the Goyigama. The Beravāyā is always addressed by name, while the potter is called "vidane," an unextravagant honorific. While the Goyigama may address the children of lower caste by their names, children of high caste come early to expect honorifics from adult low castes; *Baṇḍāramahātamayo* (literally "Royal Master") to the boys and *Hin Mānike* (gentle lady) to the girls. The degrading pronouns available in Sinhalese speech are almost never used by the Gamagalla Goyigama, although some of the older Beravāyās say *ehei* in place of the common *ou* for "yes," an acceptance of the fact that the speaker is answering a superior.

The general equality in address adopted in public meetings and societies is significant for the introduction of new ideologies in the context of new social organizations. In a temple committee or in a Rural Development Society meeting, all are addressed as

*Mahatmayā*, which has little connotation other than that in the English "Mister" or "gentleman."

In household visiting and festivities, particularly in eating, the old customs are fully maintained. Lower caste neighbors do not avoid visiting a Goyigama home, but if they sit down it is invariably on the verandah and either on the floor or on the kolombuva. And, while the Goyigama would be less likely to visit the lower caste's home, his seating would invariably be higher than others, preferably on the largest chair available, his low caste hosts either standing, squatting, or sitting in a lowly position. In some Goyigama homes special plates and cups are kept for the use of low caste visitors, but more commonly, if the occasion requires the serving of food, the high castes dine from plates and cups, the low castes from a plantain leaf and well scraped coconut shell. Never would all sit at a common table or eat with such a posture as to indicate equality or forgetfulness of communal distinction. The preservation of social distance and status etiquette in the home is utterly without self-consciousness; a breach would embarrass the low caste fully as much as it would the high.

Formal leadership in the community is entirely limited to the "good" Goyigama. No one of lower status would consider running for office or pushing himself for appointment. The village headman is Goyigama, the officers of the village cooperative are Goyigama, as are those of the Rural Development Society. While the low castes would be pleased with honors and positions of importance in local life, they agree that it is seemly for them to be led by the Goyigama and that they in turn support those who possess the ancient claim upon positions of power.

At their root the attitudes of the various Gamagallans and Balangallans toward caste and the caste system are not dissimilar. Although the lower castes would enjoy positions of prominence and the honor of respectful address, there is neither breast beating nor bitterness. Caste affiliation is a natural fact and one that imposes quite mild indignities. A dissolution of the system would be farthest from the desires of Beravāyā or Goyigama; intercaste marriage shocks practically all of every caste. The vast majority at every level are convinced that honorable birth merits greater respect than position through achievement. Most are pleased at



finding the bulk of their intimate social life within the communal confines of caste, and believe it good that this is so. Obviously the rigorous communalism and sharp distinctions in etiquette and dress are passing. Some aspects of the traditional caste order are openly challenged by most, for democratic ideology is gaining ground, perhaps more rapidly among high caste than low, due to their higher economic position and hence greater education. The effect of education on caste and status sentiments is liberalizing, but although many indignities and injustices of caste are repudiated, the endogamous and communal foundations of the system are cherished by the vast majority of even the young and the highly educated. Preservation of caste integrity in marriage is more highly valued than in the Low Country and sanctions would be stronger.

Our picture of social stratification in the valley of Gamagalla has been one not of equality but certainly of harmony and friendliness, and utterly without brutality or inhumanity. No doubt it is liberalized somewhat more than many villages of its kind, but intercaste relations can be, and not infrequently are, idyllic. This is typical of situations in which firm belief in the rightness of birth status is being gradually leavened with newer conceptions of human dignity and justice. Were caste the only form of social stratification in this valley, we might conclude that Gamagalla is indeed idyllic in its interpersonal relations. But here the heritage of feudalism has been transposed into sharp cleavages of class which in their vital significance have dwarfed the significance of caste stratification. Caste and class are related but it is in the domain of class that human dignity is most affronted and tensions are readily apparent.

It has been observed that the lands of Balangalla are in the hands of a single house of Kandyan aristocrats and the lands of Gamagalla chiefly in the hands of a few village families. Clear and sharply defined economic layers arise from the facts of land distribution. At the peak stands the single Radała family, rich, influential and powerful, not only locally but nationally. Below them in caste prestige, wealth and power are the landlords of Gamagalla. Apart from these stand all others, differentiated slightly in that a few households own small holdings sufficient to maintain independence from any landlord. The bulk of the villagers are landless or nearly



so. This is scarcely a caste phenomenon. Although all non-Goyigama are among the landless, and all of the landed are Goyigama, the bulk of the latter are not much better off than their low caste neighbors. The landed aristocracy is a caste clique, but most are unseparated from the bulk of the village by any line of caste.

It would be incorrect to say that economic position is a closer determinant of social intercourse than is caste; in theory the latter is paramount and actually is highly important. Social and economic factors, as well as intracaste rank also are important. The Radala family contacts are mainly with persons outside the village and the Gamagalla landlords live socially among themselves. This is no accident of physical proximity nor even of mild class preference. The economic levels are associated with utterly different points of view, economic interests, and living standards. All this is reflected in a strong class feeling among the landless which cuts across the lines of caste and an equally strong feeling of superiority among the village aristocracy of wealth and power.

In the relationship of landlord and tenant the Kandyan feudal tradition blooms, although only in Balangalla is landed power associated with ancient feudal, and caste, rights. The landlord visualizes himself as a village benefactor, "giving" his land to the villagers that they may live; this "gift" made annually is in accord with long established custom. For a renter to acquire a field for the season, he must wait upon the landlord with betel and implorations. His first offer is that of *moderum*, a fee for the privilege of renting. Theoretically and sometimes actually fields are auctioned off on the basis of the highest offer. Whatever this payment may be, it has no relationship to rent. Rent is customarily fixed at one-half the crop, the cultivator furnishing seed, equipment, labor, and fertilizer. (A landlord may insist that in strict truth he sometimes furnishes seed but usually when this is so he advances the seed and at the end of harvest it is returned from the cultivator's share, in some instances plus interest.) In addition to *moderum* and rent, the landlord expects *dekum*, the traditional gifts, particularly of food, on each Sinhalese New Year's Day. In theory this is the end of the cultivator's obligations, in practice there are more. Regardless of the cultivator's caste, as a tenant he is obligated to serve his master, the nature of the service required usually being appropriate to the caste. This is not service tenure,

rather it is a perversion of that ancient practice into a contractual relationship as a purely exploitative device. Household and garden tasks must be done to curry favor of one who may at will deprive the landless family of its source of food. The landless peasant knows full well that the "helpful" man, regardless of his abilities as a cultivator, is never without land to operate. In a valley of limited land the subjection of the villager is virtually complete and in this the valley of Gamagalla is not unique. Feudalism and capitalism have combined to maximize the exploitativeness inherent in each.

There is no caste bitterness in Gamagalla but there is intense bitterness of the landless toward the landed. The village is rife with gossip of the iniquities of the landholders, tales of dishonest and tricky methods in the acquisition of lands, and there are contemptuous laughs at the indignities to which the peasants submit for the sake of land. The landlords talk securely of their simple village folk who as always are wedded to their benefactors and to the village. The simple village folk are convinced that their chances for land in the far off colonization scheme have been suppressed by their potent landlords. Toward the village Goyigama grown great by land, antagonism is much greater than to the Radala, long landed, much richer, but to the manor born. Distrusted perhaps, this conservative family is supported politically, for in it is a great Kandyan tradition, and the Valley of Gamagalla is still not emancipated from an awe and fear of the caste aristocracy. It is in the class structure of Gamagalla, not caste, that political dynamite is hidden, and the fuse is shortening.

#### CASTE IN THE DĒVĀLE-VIHĀRAGAM

The Potubedda Dēvālagam is one of the subordinate institutions dedicated to the Kataragama deity.<sup>6</sup> Actually it demonstrates the curious marriage of Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous super-

<sup>6</sup> The Kataragama god is identified with Skanda and is one of the most important deities in Ceylon. Lands dedicated to him are vast, and throughout the island both Buddhists and Hindus offer vows to him. It is said that he is the son of Mahesvara, god of war, and revered for his aid to Rama in the Ravena War. The central shrine is at the village of Kataragama in the jungles north of Hambantota. Thousands of pilgrims make their way to this isolated spot annually, particularly in the period of annual festival. Festivals are also held at the subordinate dēvāles such as the one described here.



naturalism which is typical of nominally Buddhist Ceylon. In its central village is the great *dēvāle* in which the Kataragama deity is celebrated and around which the extensive land system is primarily integrated, but in addition Potubedda has within its confines and organization a purely Buddhist *vihāre* and a Hindu *kovil* to the goddess Pattini as well. These seemingly diverse institutions have in part distinct organizations, but all share in the great service tenure system, and to some extent are integrated functionally. The supplicants and worshipers in each are the same individuals, all Sinhalese and all Buddhist.

Over this, and related temple land systems, is the nonresident *Basnāyaka Nilame*. Under his general supervision, the *dēvāle* and the *kovil* are directed by separate *kapurālas*, but since it is the *dēvāle* rather than the *kovil* which is the crux of the land system, it is the *dēvāle kapurāla* who is more significant. He is a priest to the Kataragama god, the resident manager of the locally dedicated lands, and a service tenant as well. The *vihāre* on the other hand is strictly under the control of the incumbent priests, but who like other functionaries are supported by the lands. Also like the other temples, the *vihāre* is maintained by service labor. Although the *kapurālas* have no functions in the strictly Buddhist temple, the *Bhikkhus* hold responsibilities to the *dēvāle* for the performance of which service lands have been dedicated. In festival time for the Kataragama deity, *pirith* is chanted and the *dēvāle* shrine room is cleaned throughout the year by the *Bhikkhu* holding the appropriate service land title.

Functionally the *vihāre* is a place of worship of the Buddha, like all of its kind, but its chief significance in Potubedda is as a supplementary institution to the *dēvāle*, for it is to Kataragama that the great organization is integrated. Similarly the *kovil* and its goddess have primary significance in reference to the *dēvāle* functions. Here, for example, are the protecting ceremonies to insure the safety of supplicants and functionaries participating in the supernaturally dangerous *dēvāle* festivities. The life of the *dēvāle* is centered upon the great festivals, particularly that lasting for fifteen days in August.

The lands of Potubedda are not extensive as *dēvālagams* go, but in the contiguous area of the *dēvālagam*, subject to its jurisdiction,



more than three hundred families (Nillakārayās) live and work. Following the ancient pattern of the manorial system, lands (paṅguva) are held in perpetuity on the legal condition of temple service. Muttetṭu lands (demesne holdings) owned by the dēvāle and not subject to service tenures are no longer cultivated as part of tenure service by the paṅguva holders (Nillakārayās) but are auctioned off to share tenants and are subject to bid by anyone. In actual fact many of the paṅguva holders today hold nothing but the service responsibilities to the dēvāle, they or their fathers having sold the hereditary lands to plantations and outside villagers. Land thus sold is still subject to the service requirements in the title, and the responsibility of performance rests with the purchaser. Obviously, such sales release the former paṅguva holder from responsibility, and theoretically the new owner pays the temple commutation charge in lieu of service. Actually the temple authorities, desirous of preserving and maintaining their institutions, have encouraged the retention of service functions by the previous owners and their descendants. Usually these functions are maintained and the new owner quits his responsibility by paying a fee to the original tenant family rather than the commuted service charges. Many of the temple "tenants" are persons or corporations wholly inappropriate for the performance of the duties attached to the land they own. These duties are carried out by the now landless temple peasants whose primary incomes are from day labor in the estates and adjoining fields.

The organization of functions and service responsibilities in Potubedda follows a pattern of caste-linked services typical both of religious and secular feudalism, although very rarely, if at all, has the structure been preserved in such detail under private ninda lords as it has been in the case of the temple lands.

Dēvālagam administration and supervision is in the hands of Kandyen Radaḷas, and so it always remains. The Basnāyaka Nilame is of a high and important family; the kapurāḷas and their assistants, although simple village folk, claim (falsely) Radaḷa status as well, and for them the temple roles are strictly hereditary. Beneath this caste-based priestly and administrative bureaucracy, the paṅguvas each hold specific responsibilities, many of which are appropriate only to members of some particular caste. Apart from the

Radaḷa directorship, at least ten different castes are represented, most of them living as homogeneous hamlets in various parts of the great dēvālagam.

Paṅguvas holding high status responsibilities are in the hands of Goyigama. Thus the "keeper of the dēvāle valuables" and the "keepers of the keys" are of this caste.

The paṅguvas are generally named and described in terms of the role of its holder and usually this name is also a caste designation. Thus the following list in which some chief responsibilities of the paṅguva holders are described fits closely the outline of caste roles, many of which have been previously described as matters of largely historic rather than contemporary significance. In addition to the generally "utilitarian" roles described here, each group has minutely defined responsibilities in the great festivals.

*Ācāri Paṅguva*

Held by members of the Ācāri (Navandanna) caste; duties include furnishing iron equipment needed for the buildings and premises of the vihāre and dēvāle; drawing carts in festivals and cleaning the shrine grounds.

*Radā Paṅguva*

Held by members of the Radā (Hēna) caste; duties include washing the ceiling cloths at the festivals and bringing food gifts to the gods twice a month.

*Baḍahāla Paṅguva*

Held by members of the Baḍahāla (potter) caste who must provide all pots needed for dēvāle and vihāre and change the roofing tiles when required.

*Paṭṭikarā Paṅguva*

Held by members of the Paṭṭi (Goyigama cattle keepers) subcaste who keep dēvāle cattle and supply ghee on each Wednesday and Saturday.

*Manikka Paṅguva*

Held by members of the Kavikāra (Malvara) caste, the men of which recite poems while the women dance in the dēvāle. Men also beat drums in the festivals but not at other occasions.

<i>Beravā Paṅguva</i>	Held by members of the Beravā (tom-tom beaters) caste who are required to beat drums for the Olī dancing at the festivals and upon <i>Poya</i> days at the Vihāre.
<i>Vahumpura Paṅguva</i>	Held by members of the Vahumpura (jaggory making) caste who provide all officials of the dēvāle as well as the Bhikkhus with jaggory and some other foods.
<i>Durayī Paṅguva</i>	Held by members of the Durayī caste (specific caste designation unknown—but probably Kontadurayī) who do menial labor and are said to have formerly guarded the Basnāyaka Nilame in the Perahera at the great festival.
<i>Yaman Paṅguva</i>	Held by members of the Batgam (Padu) community of which the Yaman people are a subgrouping. All services of this group have been commuted to cash payments.
<i>Mutteṭṭuvakāra Paṅguva</i>	Formerly held also by a member of the Yaman (Batgam) group who received it in turn for cultivating mutteṭṭu land.
<i>Olī Paṅguva</i>	Held by members of the Olī caste who have exclusive responsibility for dances peculiar to the caste, especially at the conclusion of the August festival.

In addition to special services associated usually with the appropriate caste, most of the lower caste Nilakkārayās share responsibility for repairs and maintenance of the dēvāle and vihāre. The specifications of service responsibilities frequently are more theoretical than actual except for participation in the festivals. As the Temple Land Commissioners pointed out nearly a hundred years ago, there is much evasion of responsibility. Lawsuits are frequently initiated by the Basnāyaka Nilame to force services from reluctant Nilakkārayās and to force payments to them, or directly to the temple, from current paṅguva title holders who are themselves inappropriate for the service.



Here, under the formal control and close organization of the temple, ancient caste roles are maintained which elsewhere are rapidly losing their caste association. This is particularly true at Potubedda for the Paṭṭi Goyigama, the Kavikāra, Vahumpura and the Olī. The cattle keeping function of the Paṭṭi is dimly remembered in most Kandyan localities, as the rājakāriya of the subcaste, but at Potubedda the role is institutionalized. Unquestionably, some of the Paṭṭi of Potubedda are marrying into the families of undifferentiated Goyigama, but for those who remain with the dēvālagam, they continue as an inferior subcaste. The Kavikāra, as had been noted (Chap. 5), are quite possibly found nowhere except on dēvāles of this Province, where they are a numerous caste group. Possibly those who have emigrated from dēvālagams are today Goyigama, although their claim to such status is strongly resented and repudiated by their neighbors. Like the Kavikāra, the Olī ceremonial roles are essentials in the dēvāle organization, and rarely outside this organization have Olī retained their ancient arts. Here too, the ancient Batgam (Padu) iron smelters, while their functions have long since fallen into disuse, are recognized as a subgrouping within their caste.

The penetration and preservation of Hindu restrictions on temple access is evident in the laity's relationships with the shrine. Caste differences in temple access have been redefined to fit the Sinhalese social structure. For the village pilgrims to the shrine, degree of access depends upon caste position. Six castes are not permitted to enter beyond the main doorway to the dēvāle although none of these is restricted in vihāre worship. The Roḍi, the Olī, the Batgam (Padu), the Beravā and the "Durayi" (in this region probably Kontadurayi) are so restricted, and vows made by them are heard at the entrance to the shrine and relayed by Goyigama functionaries to the kapurāla within. It is likely that in practice this restriction is closely maintained only for the Roḍiyā, although there is a distaste among the Kavikāra at the thought of their women dancing before low caste men. There is some evidence that the Kavikāra promote among the lower castes the belief that the gods wreak vengeance on the low caste person who enters the sacred premises.

The daily life of the dēvālagam is that of most conservative

Kandyan localities where the different castes live in their homogeneous hamlets. In the fields friendly and cooperative relations exist between men of disparate castes; home life and interfamily intimacies are strictly confined to kin and caste. Only in reference to the Kavikāra is there evidence of tension. Low caste persons frequently laugh at their pretensions of superiority and the high caste Goyigama resents their claim which he feels is aimed at capturing in marriage persons of "good" family. Such attitudes tend more to promote caste communalism in living rather than any overt conflicts in social relationships.

#### GATTARA: THE DEGRADED VILLAGE

The great antiquity of the castes has usually hidden their origins in a cloud of dispute, legend, and quasi-history. The gattara villages of the Kandyans are exceptional in that their origin legends are precise and possibly historic. Still more exceptional is the fact that their gradual demise as a subcaste is a matter of visible contemporary history. The village of Pahalagama brings into historical times the creation and the death throes of an outcast village which, with many like it, came to form a subcaste of the Kandyan Goyigama.

Pahalagama lies in a fertile valley of Lower Dumbara, north of the city of Kandy, several miles from any major road. To the west is another village of identical status, in other directions villages of many castes but chiefly of Goyigama and Patti, dominated by land owning Radaḷas. The "birth" of the two gattara villages is described by Lawrie.<sup>7</sup>

Under the Kandyan Government it was usual for the Malu-murakarayo to visit villages in search of good vegetables.

The people of this village, seeing that the best part of their vegetables were taken to the royal kitchen, sprinkled cowdung on what remained, with a view to disappoint the Malu-murakarayo the next time.

The following week the Malu-murakarayo found this out and

<sup>7</sup> Lawrie (47), Vol. II, pp. 708-709. The actual names of these villages have been deleted from this account. Lawrie's work is not widely available and there is no reason to give greater currency to the "shame" these villages are today seeking to escape. See also Lawrie, Vol. I, pp. 708-710.

went to the adjoining village; there also they found that coddung had been sprinkled on the vegetables, but at that place it had been done newly.

The king having heard of what had been done by the people of the two villages ordered that the village in which the coddung had been sprinkled some days since should ever afterwards go by the name of —, i.e., "old coddung," and that the other village in which the coddung had been newly sprinkled should ever afterwards be called ["Pahalagama"] or "new coddung."

Both these villages are said to have been degraded seven times by the Kandyan kings. There was a stone at [Pahalagama] with a carving of a dog on one side, and of the sun and moon on the other side, to commemorate this degradation, that not even a dog should eat from them.<sup>8</sup>

Under the Kandyan Government it was held disgraceful to have any money transactions with Gattaru, or to take boiled rice with them or to drink water from their wells.

Lawrie, like most others, thought that the gattara stone of Pahalagama had disappeared in 1898, according to him, buried. And that indeed is the story today in the countryside. But not only is the degradation, now at least a century past, still fresh in the minds of villagers for miles around, but the gattara stone, whatever its true origin, still stands as a shrill reminder to the villagers themselves, and a partial validation of the essence of the legend.

It is the contention of the countryside that the village name ending *gama* (Sinhalese rendering of "village") has come as a subtle shift from *goma* (dung), as ordained by the king. Neither this nor the origin story of the village can be authenticated.

My first visit to Pahalagama was not dictated by chance or random inquiry but by the detailed references to its status in the works of Lawrie and of Lewis, the former writing more than fifty years ago, the latter being his echo some thirty years later. Although Lawrie thought the gattara stone gone even in his day, here was

<sup>8</sup> Mr. C. W. Nicholas has pointed out to the writer that the symbol of the dog and the crow has quite a different significance from that assigned it by Lawrie, and also by Lewis (48 & 49). Rather than being a mark imposed upon certain villages, the symbols were placed on many inscriptions with the significance of "He who violates this edict will be reborn as a dog or a crow." The symbol is widely found in association with varieties of inscriptions. No inscriptions relevant to "out-casting" are known to Ceylon epigraphologists, but reference to a gattara village is given in one fourteenth or fifteenth century inscription. *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (21), Vol. IV, p. 105.



the opportunity to see how time and modern sentiments might have affected the degradation presumably imposed many generations ago.

Caste is a delicate subject with the Sinhalese and caste is a most delicate subject with Gattara, for they, where possible, assume simple Goyigama status. In the valley villages below Pahalagama, along whose lanes the degraded villagers must travel, the quest began. At the first village a land-owning, caste-proud Radaḷa spoke of them knowingly and with feeling. Only the courtesy bred in a Sinhalese villager permitted a continuing conversation upon the inquiry "Would you consider eating with them under any circumstances?" The answer was with a tense voice and shaking hands clenched on the arm of the chair, "I would not step on the ground wet by their rice water." Never had he trod on the ground of their village, and in his village *they* stayed firmly in the roadway. He knew of their once good blood, but in ancient times they had been cursed as gattara and gattara they were. Caste exclusion had lost little power here in the passage of years. Among the youthful such sentiments would be less emotionally expressed, but communal exclusiveness only slightly less.

The center of the village of Pahalagama is a single *boutique*, a temple and a few houses scattered in the lush gardens. The "royal" stone, it was said, was on the roadway less than a quarter of a mile on. The stone, easily reached, was large, and it was inscribed as a monument, but neither stone nor inscriptions bore remote similarity to the known features of the stone sought. Curious and, unusual in Ceylon, suspicious villagers stood by, more hostile than helpful. "You are right, this is not the stone." "Why do you seek the stone?" and from another, "The stone, yes, *that* is the only stone," and yet another, "The stone is gone. Why do you hunt for it?" This was no matter for offhand discussion or action; village leaders must be sought and the inquiry made formal—or dismissed. At the village boutique a conference of men gave a reluctant decision, based solely on the fact of their respect for that peculiar curiosity of academicians and respect for institutions of learning. But no man stirred to guide the way; three small boys led our party along a path, the men watching in silence. From a nearby house came a woman's screaming indictment, "Why are you show-

ing them the stone?" Twenty yards beyond, hidden completely from roadways, but square in the center of an old pathway, once the thoroughfare of the valley, stood the infamous stone.

The stone of Pahalagama rises as a cylinder a full eight feet from its base. Its diameter is perhaps four feet. Weathered as it is, traces of symbols of the sun and moon show on the side of the present path. But on the reverse, where legend places the dog and the crow, the rock has been chipped away. A youthful guide suggested that "at the next village they are the same and you may see the dog and the crow clearly. Their stone is where the pathway crosses the stream. Come, I will show you."

If the power of caste is dying in Ceylon, this valley has not fully learned that fact. The curse of an ancient king, or perhaps merely a presumed curse, is a constant shame. The gattara villagers themselves make no admission of their status, but respect for the past forbids destruction of the degrading mark, although not its mutilation and misinterpretation. No villager professes knowledge of the stone's significance; he "knows" it only as a royal mark, possibly some ancient honor. Indeed, he may be correct, but local opinion, like Lawrie's interpretation, has it otherwise. No one who has any regard for sensibilities or for the establishment of friendly intercourse in these villages speaks other than with the assumption that these are "good" Goyigama folk. No one in Pahalagama can even today laugh at the cruelties of the past, for the cruelties of the past still live, and these objects of a real or legendary king's displeasure view the matter very seriously indeed. The guilt of the past is as surely in their minds as is resistance to the injustices of the present.

That the people of Pahalagama never wholly lost their high caste status is evident in many ways. "Good" Goyigama confess them to be "above" the other castes, "they are different." Lower castes know them to be inferior Goyigama and behave toward them much as they do toward any simple Goyigama. Unquestionably when once outside their valley the people of Pahalagama *are* Goyigama and no doubt distant marriage alliances have been made in that character. It is a matter of common gossip that they marry locally with Patti, both sides professing simple Goyigama status and both keenly sensitive to the truth. In other localities villages once gat-



tara have disposed of all but the shreds of gossip regarding their past, and no doubt some of these are wholly unrecognized in the undifferentiated fold of the caste. Pahalagama's battle with the past has time, fading memory and increasing disinterest on its side. Since the village is a prosperous one they have also the advantage of making dowry proffers sufficient to create genealogical myopia in nearby more "respectable" Paṭṭi fathers. Like the Paṭṭi, they form part of the great consolidating movement within the caste.

#### THE DE-CLASSED HIGH CASTES

Welagoda is a village in the Eastern Highlands about three miles from one of the major towns of the region. Unlike the villages of the Kandy district, cultivation is limited by a sparse rainfall and the lush productive greenery of the hillside gardens is lacking. Welagoda, with its fifty odd families, lives mainly by valley paddy and intermittent work in tea estates and casual labor elsewhere. A few of the villagers have small plots of tea and some supplement rice with their gardens of manioc and other vegetables. On the fringe of the village is a Muslim settlement, wholly nonagricultural, supported by various mercantile employments and distinct culturally and socially from the neighboring Sinhalese.

The Sinhalese of Welagoda are predominately Goyigama, with a few families of Navandanna caste and a few also of Hēna. Nearby in the same valley is a village exclusively of Vahumpura folk. The Vahumpura, like the Welagoda Goyigama, are predominately poor and dependent upon wage labor supplements to their agriculture. The Goyigama, however, are convinced that their neighbors are more prosperous than themselves, a belief which may indeed be correct. Certainly these Goyigama are, with a few exceptions, desperately poor, and worse, demoralized.

The richest man in Welagoda is the headman, who of course is a Goyigama. He is the owner of a full five acres of the limited paddy land and in addition has a large hillside garden and perhaps two acres of tea. As a landowner he is respected, and as a headman he is both respected and feared. Beneath him in the economic hierarchy there is no member of his caste possessing more than subsistence in the soil and most are in a constant strug-



gle for existence. Politically, power nominally stops with the headman, but like every village, family relationships with those in power are matters of some consequence, and several of the Welagoda poor are his kin.

The dhobies and blacksmiths of Welagoda have not forsaken their traditional callings. The blacksmiths produce and sell to their own and other villagers the tools of agriculture. More importantly they produce and sell on neighboring estates implements of a quality which has gained them some local fame. Their ability to sell is limited by the primitive hand methods of production. With the Hēnayā the situation is not dissimilar; washing is done for the most prosperous of the village Goyigama, but in addition an extensive clientele has been built up in the commercial town a few miles distant. In addition to revenue of these types, both blacksmiths and dhobies own paddy land. One blacksmith not only owns paddy, which he rents on the traditional share basis to the landless Goyigama of his village, but he also has extensive gardens and a plot of tea besides. The Hēna families each own small paddy plots which they cultivate themselves. While none of these lower caste families is as rich as the village headman, none is as poor as the majority of their high caste neighbors.

Caste in this village has significance in terms of economic well being, but its significance is in antithesis to the conventional one. Not improbably, as the Goyigama bitterly point out, some of the lands held by these low caste families were ceded long ago as grants for service to the Goyigama. But, as the Goyigama do not so readily point out, conceptions of status have been considerably more significant. It is through the direct pursuit of their lowly caste callings that the inferiors have risen so high, and through their reluctance to pursue any but their dignified caste calling that the Goyigama have fallen so low.

Adjacency to a money market for services and products has been instrumental in the prosperity of blacksmith and dhoby. Although services within the village are normally, in this area, upon a contractual basis, fees, especially for dhobies, are set in traditional terms rather than as competitive market transactions. The blacksmith, however, in the estate market, has achieved a competitive price for his wares which even his fellow villager must accept, al-

though in fact village demand is very small. The dhoby similarly has gained through adjacency to an urban clientele, and also, curiously enough, from the impoverishment of the Goyigama. Although his village remuneration is still in the form of paddy gifts, at long established rates, few of the Goyigama can afford even this and so wash their meager wardrobes at home. The washer's time has been freed for cash work in the town. Further, both Hēna and Navandanna supplement these vocational earnings through cultivation. Circumstances and the accoutrements of caste have conspired to reward enterprise exceedingly well.

The Goyigama on the other hand have not profited in their traditional and honorable calling. Their numbers have grown and their lands remained stationary. Alternative and supplementary sources of income which would be congruent with their caste pride simply do not exist. Although honor is today compromised, the compromise is profitable neither monetarily nor in status. Unskilled in everything but cultivation, casual labor is the only escape from a dilemma having starvation as one of its horns. To these proud peasants, rendered the more proud by their obvious failures, estate labor status is despised.

The status system of Welagoda is a study in paradox and incongruity. Those holding positions of esteem by lineage have fallen low in economic power and position. Those low in lineage are relatively high in economic position, and to a certain extent in power, as evidenced in the landlord relationship of one low caste family to the high. Politically, power and prestige still reside with the high caste through the medium of the village headman. In common with most villages, the children of all castes freely participate in a nearby government school, in this instance an exceptionally good one. The shops of the city are equally available to all; the only criterion of service is the price of purchase. For the son of a low caste man desiring to remain in the village, the saturation point is not yet reached in the demand for his services; on the other hand, agricultural expansion is impossible. If the dhoby's son would become a merchant the city is close by and holds few impediments other than normal competitive ones. The dhoby's son, unlike the cultivator's, would have some capital behind him.

Disparities between the birth status system and economic class



have not wiped away the significance of caste, nor in some respects even relaxed it. Although the low castes have no economic dependence whatever upon the local Goyigama, there is still adherence to the old forms of etiquette and ritual services. The ritual, ceremonial role of the Hēnayā is maintained more widely than his functional one, *i.e.*, as washer of clothing. Village weddings, among the high caste, almost invariably require his service and, no different from the most thoroughly caste structured community, he comes upon summons and is remunerated in gifts. The relatively prosperous Vahumpura of the next village come at summons for the more elaborate weddings to carry the pingo for the wedding party. Indicative of some weakening of caste prerogatives is the fact that the Hēnayās of Welagoda wash for any person outside the village so long as he can pay. In any previous generation these Goyigama would never have permitted "their dhobies" to have washed for persons of low caste, nor for that matter would the Hēnayā himself have been willing.

In etiquette and patterns of intercaste relationship the old forms are not lost but they are relaxed. Interfamily mixing is of course as strictly tabu as was ever the case. Needless to say, attitudes toward caste endogamy are also as stringent here as ever. At the home of the impoverished high caste there is still the kolombuva upon which the visiting Hēnayā, Navandanna or Vahumpura sit. In meetings on the narrow village pathways the Goyigama is sure to be given precedence and to be addressed as "Nilame." On the other hand, there is a notable tendency for the lower castes to avoid visiting the homes of Goyigama neighbors and hence avoid the demeaning etiquette which they deplore but do not challenge. In matters of dress, the most bitterly contested phase of caste symbolism in some areas, the wealth of the lower castes is evidenced freely but not in an aggressively obtrusive manner.

There is no mistaking the galled and bitter acceptance of the facts of life by the de-classed Goyigama. "In our hearts we do not approve their going about in shirts and shawls but we can do nothing." Whatever may be one's personal values in reference to a caste system, the Goyigama of Welagoda are a tragic group; a proud people whose only sin is subscription to a social order that has played them false. They know full well that their blood herit-



age renders them a caste which is to be served and toward which others are supplicants. But they know equally well that the blacksmith and the *Hēnayā* are not supplicants and are polite but not servile. Equally apparent is the fact that it will be the low caste child who has the greater opportunity for higher education and that ultimate reward of the government service. In the low castes' kitchens there are no daily substitutes for the valued rice. Birth status has been dissociated both with material rewards and prospects, and to a lesser degree respectful rituals. The giving of a meal to a low caste functionary is no longer the beneficent act of the paternal and lordly, it is a direct raid on the family larder. Even those moderate symbols of honor hang by a slender thread. Although a few of the low caste men call at Goyigama homes on Sinhalese New Year's Day with gifts of betel and "worship," the reason is self-evident to all. The goodwill of the village headman must be preserved and these are his relatives. The lower castes will never openly challenge the Goyigama's right to honor, for someday the headman's testimony may be needed, a gun license required, or recommendation desired. No one, not even the dhoby, realizes this any better than the Goyigama themselves. It is their last defense.

Caste in Welagoda is no more than a ghost of caste in its rigorous meaning. Discriminations of dress are gone, discriminations in etiquette are passing, "worship" has become a crude and obvious instrument of flattery. The impersonalization of the outside market has conspired with the democratic institutions of the country at large to defeat the economic realities of caste and to demoralize the high caste. "In my young days," mourns an old man, "they would come to serve me when I called, and without shirts on their bodies. My ancestors. . . ." The elderly aristocrat contemplates his shambles of a house and unworked garden, oblivious to the steady hammering in a cadjan smithy directly across the paddy field.

### THE RODIVĀS

The lowest caste among the Sinhalese constitutes one of the smallest and most scattered, but it is also the one which has attracted the attention of most Ceylon observers and writers. As a

caste they are of little significance in the total society, but as a depressed body their relationships with modern Sinhalese communities throw additional light upon the transitions of the status structure.

The most prevalent origin legend of the Roḍiyās has been cited earlier (Chap. 5), and indeed this legend is as adequate a theory of their past as any spun by serious ethnographers.<sup>9</sup> The only historic facts seem to stem from the early European observers who were deeply impressed by the inexpressible loathsomeness attached to this degraded people. Tennent in the mid-nineteenth century was no less shocked than his forerunners, and his description of the Roḍiyās under the Kandyan monarchy is fundamentally accurate in that it conforms in most details with the diverse accounts of early colonial times.<sup>10</sup>

Under the Kandyan kings their humiliation was utter and complete. The designation Rodiya, or *rodda*, means, literally, "filth." They were not permitted to cross a ferry, to draw water at a well, to enter a village, to till land, or learn a trade, as no recognized caste could deal or hold intercourse with a Rodiya. Formerly they were not allowed to build houses with two walls or a double roof, but hovels in which a hurdle leaned against a single wall and rested on the ground. They were forced to subsist on alms or such gifts as they might receive for protecting the fields from wild beasts or burying the carcasses of dead cattle; but they were not allowed to come within a fenced field even to beg. They converted the hides of animals into ropes, and prepared monkey-skins for covering tom-toms and drums, which they bartered for food and other necessities. They were prohibited from wearing a cloth on their heads, and neither men nor women were allowed to cover their bodies above the waist or below the knee. If benighted they dare not lie down in a shed appropriated to other travellers, but hid themselves in caves or deserted watch-huts. They could not enter a court of justice, and if wronged had to utter their complaints from a distance. Though nominally Bud-

<sup>9</sup> Neville (57), 1886, pp. 81-96, was convinced that they were a distinct race and almost certainly an enslaved branch of the Gauris of Bengal who had been deported to India from Chaldea via Egypt. Tennent (98) subscribed to the view that they were of Indian Chandala origin, a depressed group mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*, and M. D. Raghavan, "Cultural Anthropology of the Rodiyas," *Sportii Zeylanica*, Vol. 26, Pt. I (70), 1950, would find them affiliated with the Vellidurayi and linked to the Bo-tree legend. As far as the evidence takes one, any of these or still another theory would be equally acceptable.

<sup>10</sup> Tennent (98), Vol. II, pp. 188-189.

dhists (but conjointly demon-worshippers),\* they were not allowed to go into a temple, and could only pray "standing afar off."

Although they were permitted to have a headman who was styled their *hollo-walkia*, his nomination was stigmatised by requiring the sanction of the common jailor, who was likewise the sole medium of communication between Rodiyas and the rest of the human race. So vile and valueless were they in the eyes of the community, that, under the Kandyan rule, when it was represented to the king that the Rodiyas had so multiplied as to be a nuisance to the villagers, an order was given to reduce their numbers by shooting a certain proportion in each kuppiyame [Rodiya settlement]. The most dreaded of all punishments under the Kandyan dynasty was to hand over the lady of a high caste offender to the Rodiyas; and the mode of her adoption was by the Rodiya taking betel from his own mouth and placing it in hers, after which till death her degradation was indelible.

Davy's observations, based on the circumstances of his own period, *i.e.*, 1816, serve simply to enforce the effect of Tennent's secondhand account. There is ample reason to believe that he accurately reported an incident occurring immediately after the British occupation of Kandy, in which police officers upon being ordered to arrest certain Rodiyās refused to pollute themselves but offered to shoot the "outcastes" down from a distance.<sup>11</sup>

The letter of the English Agent of Government at Ratnapura to the Secretary for the Kandyan Provinces in 1818 is ample evidence that neither Tennent nor Davy exaggerated the situation.<sup>12</sup> The Agent, in reference to an alleged theft of a firelock reported by a Kandyan Chieftain, found himself in an unhappy dilemma. A careful search for the allegedly stolen weapon convinced the officer that the charge was merely a pretext for seizing a group of Rodiyās. Convinced by the respectable Kandyans that the Rodiyās were public menaces, the unhappy agent begged leave of his superior not to release them in spite of the fact that no trial could be held due to the unwillingness of others to appear in court even against them. The general opinion, voiced by the great chieftain Doloswelle Dissave, conceived them "to be unworthy of a Trial by Law or any

\* Tennent could as reasonably have made this allegation in reference to all Sinhalese Buddhists.

<sup>11</sup> Davy (12), p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> This lengthy letter is quoted in full by Pieris (69), pp. 62-63.



Punishment short of Death by indiscriminate shooting, and even that must be done by the Durias."

Sirr, writing in 1850, reports an incident which, while unverified in other sources, is wholly credible.<sup>13</sup>

A mendicant *Rhodia*, since Kandy has been in our possession, demanded alms of a wealthy *Goewanse*, who was superintending the packing up of an abundant crop of paddy, which was piled in a huge heap before an outhouse. The rich man took a small handful of the grain, tied it up in a piece of an old mat, and threw it to the outcaste, telling him to take it quickly and be gone, that the atmosphere might not be tainted by his breath. The *Rhodia* lowly saluted, thanked the high-caste man for his gift, but entreated him to give a little more from his abundant supply; as what he had given would not make a meal for one person, and the poor *Rhodia* humbly told his tale of woe, saying that his aged father and mother were starving, not having eaten rice for many days. The *Goewanse*, with gibes and jeers, ordered the wretched outcaste to leave the place, and threatened to set the dogs at him if he did not do so instantly.

Still the wretched being implored by the love the high-caste man had for his own parents, that a little more grain might be bestowed upon him. The rich man, with brutal violence, hurled a large stone at the *Rhodia*, who, angered beyond endurance at this cruel treatment, untied the matting which contained the grain lately thrown to him, ran towards the huge pile of paddy, and dashed the grain over the heap, thereby polluting the whole mass, and fled into the jungle. The *Goewanse* immediately complained to the judicial authorities of the insult which had been offered to him by the outcaste and asked for assistance "to go and shoot the *Rhodia*," and appeared extremely surprised when he was refused the required aid, and informed that if he either assaulted or killed the *Rhodia*, he would be tried, and if found guilty, would either be punished for the assault, or hanged for the murder.

For a country blessed by the tolerance of Buddhism, here was untouchability with a vengeance. Such loathing and degradation can scarcely be surpassed in the dramatic anecdotes of Abbe Dubois taken from eighteenth century India. In 1858 Tennent could report that little benefit had come to the *Rodiyā* under a British rule "which recognizes no distinction of caste." While mentioning improvements in their creature comforts he concludes that "Socially their hereditary stigma remains unaltered;

<sup>13</sup> Sirr (90), pp. 211-212.

their contact is still shunned by the Kandyan as pollution, and instinctively the Rodiyas crouch to their own degradation."<sup>14</sup>

From such a background the Roḍiyā of modern times must be viewed. Time makes changes, but time with but the slight intervention of men makes changes exceedingly slowly. The Roḍiyā of today is typically a landless beggar, living in his segregated *kup-pāyamas* (Roḍi settlements), whining out his plea for alms and worshipping all with gestures of supplication and eulogistic salutations.

Contemporary Roḍi colonies are found in each of the Sinhalese provinces, except perhaps the North Central. They are, however, predominately located in the fringes of the Kandyan Hill Country. Raghavan has enumerated sixty-one households in the Central Province, ninety-nine in the Northwestern, ninety-two in Uva and, it may be inferred from his statements, about one hundred in Sabaragamuwa.<sup>15</sup> A few tiny settlements are to be found in the Low Country. If these numbers are correct, the total Roḍi population probably numbers approximately 1,600 persons. There is, however, a distinct possibility of underenumeration, since small colonies are difficult to locate, and a few individuals live wholly itinerant existences.<sup>16</sup>

Typically the *kuppāyama* is a cluster of huts, ranging in number from one or two to as many as seventeen or eighteen, distinctly separated from any nearby village of "respectable" caste, and often completely isolated from other villages. Particularly in the Northwestern and Uva Provinces their settlements are very inaccessible. In a few instances the colonies have modest lands which they cultivate, in some cases a few acres suitable for paddy but usually only small amounts of unirrigated highland used for garden crops like manioc, chillies and plantains. The most favored of all Roḍiyā groups, one in which the government has provided special assist-

<sup>14</sup> Tennent (98), Vol. II, p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> Raghavan (70).

<sup>16</sup> Mr. P. B. Goonetilleke, who has concerned himself closely with the Rodiyās of the Central Province, has estimated the Central Province population as 73 households, in contrast with Mr. Raghavan's 61, and the total Central Province population as 335 in contrast with the latter's 270. Mr. Goonetilleke's report on the Rodiyās is to be found in the Hearings of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission, 1949. Personal travels would indicate that the population is considerably larger than Mr. Raghavan believes, possibly amounting to 3,000 persons.

ance, has about two acres of land per family. Elsewhere, and usually held by "squatter rights" under the Crown, acreages for the entire kuppāyama seldom exceed two or three acres and often no land is available other than the tiny garden space surrounding the houses. Goonetilleke estimates for the entire Central Province Roḍiyā population there is a total of seven acres available for systematic cultivation. While colonies in Sabaragamuwa have been found by the writer in which nearly a self-sufficing living is to be had from the land, this situation is exceptional. Typically the Roḍiyā has no land, or virtually no land, other than that upon which his hut stands, and does not look upon himself as a cultivator. He is a beggar and occasional craftsman, and even where regular cultivation or crafts are practiced, returns are almost invariably supplemented and probably surpassed by begging.

Although it is reputed that in ancient times the Roḍiyās had their caste specialities in the unclean labor connected with hides and in making nooses, there is little trace of the traditional in their crafts today. Whatever is locally available in material is conjoined with what may be sold. In some instances high craftsmanship is to be found, as in drum making, more frequently simple basketry, horn combs and crude brooms. It is difficult to say whether the Roḍiyā's lack of agricultural activity is more a product of traditional aversion to it or of discrimination by those who have prior claim upon the land. It is unthinkable in most localities that land would be rented or sold by respectable villagers to the Roḍiyā, or that he would be hired to work in fields or estates, but on the other hand it is rare that these folk make *chenas* in the crown-owned jungles, as do landless peasants in the same regions.<sup>17</sup> Although the Roḍiyā usually insists upon his eagerness to cultivate, and the nearby landowners in fact offer him no encouragement, the techniques of begging are bred into the community, and its hold upon them is only now showing signs of weakening. Few indeed of even the more fortunate land-holding families have completely given up the ancient and honored art. Crafts are usually matters for the off seasons in begging. In rare instances Roḍi men are locally em-

<sup>17</sup> In one locality Roḍi women were plucking tea on an estate. They never work in the factory, however, since this would involve sitting in the same room with others.



ployed by absentee and particularly governmental sources, *i.e.*, as coolie labor on the railroads. Most, however, do not press for such recognition, preferring the simpler unaggressive and locally accepted life of begging.

Begging is fundamentally a seasonal occupation although it is engaged in intermittently at any period of need. During the seasons of paddy harvest, Roḍī groups, often of a single family, go out as small bands into the countryside, leaving small children at home in company of some family adult. In regions of dense settlement a nightly return to the home village is common, in the jungle areas trips lasting as long as two weeks may be made. During the harvest season small bands of Roḍiyās will be found perhaps twenty miles from their homes, using as headquarters some deserted rural court building or forgotten "community center." In areas of dense settlement the trips seldom last for more than overnight and often are simply daily excursions through the surrounding villages, as long as the harvest is in process. Gifts in paddy are seldom refused, as the Roḍiyās stand off calling to the villagers in words and gestures of worship and responding to gifts with words which leave no doubt of this lord's acquisition of merit and even Buddha-hood by virtue of his alms. The beggar makes no claim to merit through his actions, but he firmly believes that he is an agent in the donor's quest for Nibbāna. Apart from the seasonal begging, Roḍiyās are frequently found in the towns and cities asking money alms of all and sundry, usually accepting them in palms protected by a leaf so that the meritorious donor risks no danger of pollution.

The position of the Roḍiyā in Sinhalese life is changing and in this change there are inconsistencies in the enforcement of ancient tabus and ambivalence in attitudes as well. From a status which a century ago seems to have been that of unadulterated loathsomeness, the Roḍiyā today is held in a caste contempt mixed with a class pity. So long as no direct association is involved most villagers are pleased at proposals or programs in his favor; enmity is lacking except where the caste pushes beyond the local sentiments in the violation of traditional restrictions. In the enforcement of the old restrictive tabus there is wide regional variation, affected by such factors as nearness to urban centers, but also seemingly less severe in the Northwestern Province than in the more southerly Hill

Provinces.<sup>18</sup> Most of the symbols of degradation known in earlier times are to be observed today, but the observance depends upon circumstances, and the enforcement of social distance through physical untouchability is widely compromised.

In most localities the Roḍiyās conform closely to ancient symbolic forms when acting in their role of beggars. In some places the pingo is yet loaded only at one end, salutations of worship are given to practically all other castes, exalting the Beravāyā as much as the Goyigama. Clothing tabus are followed closely; the banian is never worn by men, and the women dress modestly. Similarly a close regard is paid the physical distance strictures, the Roḍiyā seldom entering the householder's garden, and when approached with alms accepting them as responses to supplication. Apart from begging tours, compromise is made with many of the symbols of social distance and the tabus on physical mixing. These creeping changes, associated as they are with the virtually complete traditionalism of the begging enterprise, are the groundworks for ultimate emancipation of the caste. The Roḍiyās are in a mood to be emancipated; admitting that their role is kamma, they frequently press against the frontiers of their restrictions, and socially minded neighbors sometimes abet them. Government policy, although disorganized in action, is clearly pro-Roḍiyā. With the softening of village attitudes on one hand, the Roḍiyā on the other has some pride of caste built of legends of royal birth. A social movement of the "outcaste" is under way which will necessarily mean a re-integration with the wider community.

At the present time the Roḍi man is usually a conformant to the old tabu upon the banian, not only on expeditions where traditionalism has monetary value, but on all occasions in the vicinity of his kuppāyama. Local feelings are insufficiently soft in many areas for him to defy the bare body dictate, and indeed

<sup>18</sup> Neville (97), June 1887, pp. 81-96, found considerable evidence of the latter difference in the late nineteenth century. He also maintained that significant cultural difference and social separateness obtained between what he termed the Wannī kandiya, and the Nahalle of the highlands. Although ethnological data were not seriously sought by the present writer, it appeared that, as Neville found, the Wannī Roḍi have stronger evidences of a matrilineal clan organization today and it seems clear that marriages and contacts with other kuppāyamas seem to follow the division Neville described. For some additional data on the ethnology of the Roḍi see Raghavan (70).



older men of the caste would be hesitant in any case. Children frequently dress as do other villagers on comparable occasions, and women do likewise. In the market towns they mix freely in the crowds without thought of physical contact, purchasing their needs as do others. In nearby boutiques, however, the Roḍiyā would not handle the food in the bins nor would he enter the store itself, but point out what he wishes and let the storekeeper act. Very generally the Roḍiyā is known throughout the large trade area, and in matters of eating and drinking the tea shop or toddy tavern proprietor watches carefully that the interests of his respectable customers are protected. If the Roḍiyā would sip tea in the boutique he will be served in a coconut shell outside the premises and a distinctive container will also be given him at the toddy tavern. In the town centers where he is known, discriminatory treatment for adults is to be found in practically every service except those under government auspices. The local government dispensary and the local offices of administration usually enforce state policy and the Roḍiyā stands his turn in the same queue as the Goyigama, the Beravāyā and the Kinnarayā.

Like the Government, impersonal and distantly directed, business organizations play some role in shattering local conventions. In practically all areas Roḍiyās ride the busses without discrimination, although within the local area they are circumspect in behavior. Indicative of the recency of this development in the Highlands is the fact that in one district served by two bus lines, the Roḍi are permitted to ride on one but not on the other. The line permitting them access is Low Country owned, the other is locally owned and operated.

Within the locality in which the Roḍiyā is recognizable, he seldom pushes strongly against the limits of village tolerance, for his economic existence is rooted in servility and the aggressiveness which once may have been present is seldom manifest today. He may complain unceasingly but his active claim to egalitarian treatment is limited to spheres in which he is protected by outside authority or in which anonymity is assured. More strictly than for any other group in Sinhalese society, his social life is bounded by his caste and band. The village temple, nominally caste free, is visited by him only after others have departed. Rare indeed is the



Bhikkhu who comes to his kuppāyama to give spiritual comfort or to ask alms, and indeed liberal urban Bhikkus who have done so have been subjected to strong censure within the Sangha as well as the community. Except for relationships to boutiques and taverns, his economic connections with the community are limited to begging and occasional peddling of his handicrafts. Participation in any formally organized community life is uncommon for any villager, and nonexistent for the adult Roḍiyā. Personalized relationships with nearby villagers are not wholly banned, although they are highly conventionalized. Thus one small kuppāyama uses water from the well of a nearby prosperous and respectable village Sinhalese.<sup>19</sup> The Roḍiyā would never himself draw the water or even closely approach the well or the verandah of the villager's house. As he stands near the well his request for aid will be heard and someone will draw the water for him. His benefactor will not touch him; supplications are met with some measure of contemptuousness, but there is no unfriendliness in the situation. Needless to say, the not unfriendly villager would heartily avoid, or at least avoid being seen, in the kuppāyama or in company with the Roḍiyā in any situation other than in the role of benefactor. In benefaction there is no censure, to the contrary, there is merit. In some localities, however, there is sharp antagonism between nearby high caste villages and the kuppāyama and although the village lane may give access to the settlement, intercourse of any type is studiously avoided by the Roḍiyā in self-protection. In one such locality an argument between Goyigama villagers and several Roḍi men was inadvertently stimulated in the course of field studies. The latter boldly denounced the "lies" of their neighbors who, as befitted high caste persons, actually local government functionaries, laughed contemptuously at the pretentiousness and gave assurances that no harm would come to the kuppāyama as a result. Except under the eye of an outsider, and particularly a "trouserred" European, the Roḍiyās would never have taken such truly dangerous liberties.

Where the Roḍiyās have settled in the outskirts of cities, as they

<sup>19</sup> Typically, the Roḍiyās themselves denied that this was so, claiming that in their great privations they were forced to carry water for several miles since no one would give them access to a local supply.

have even outside the Kandyan provinces, their community life is quite different from that in the rural environment. Even in the smaller cities where the Roḍiyā is recognized as such by all residents, few restrictions other than in segregation of housing are evident. This is attributable both to the greater tolerance of the towns and to the fact that such colonies are usually centers of prostitution. Prostitution may be demoralizing in some respects, but in the Roḍiyā's case it is at least associated with diminished servility and heightened self-assurance. Etiquette violation which might be disapproved by many townsmen has the support not only of the socially minded high castes but of the sexually minded as well. In a Roḍi colony of Colombo, they need worry little about the maintenance of old forms except in the direct act of begging. Here, in the most cramped and filthy of the city slums, close by the city's finest residential district, a living is eked out by begging, prostitution, vote selling and, very rarely, employment. In the rural kuppāyamas there is a sharply contrasting morale, pride in royal origins, and a cleanliness in both huts and gardens that surpasses even the normally neat Sinhalese villages. The urban Roḍiyā is wholly demoralized in the only social setting wherein caste disabilities could be escaped. It is reliably reported that at least one Roḍiyā woman has broken her connection with the colony and is an active worker in a Christian sect. Whether accurate or not, the claims by some Colombo Christians that "their church women actually kiss the girl" offers caste-bound Christians an exhibit "A" that in their faith they have utterly shattered the heathen bonds of caste.

It is perfectly clear that urbanization is bringing some transition in the nature of this lowest of castes. Fortunately for Ceylon, and the Roḍiyā, in spite of the alleged premium beauty of their women, there is little migration of the caste to urban areas.<sup>20</sup> The significant transition is going on within the Kandyan provinces and the rural localities. In large part the diminished loathsomeness of the Roḍiyā and the weakening of traditional symbols and dis-

<sup>20</sup> The beauty of the Roḍi women is proverbial in Ceylon and is mentioned in practically every account of the caste. It is also generally believed by most observers that prostitution has been common and while it undoubtedly exists in some rural kuppāyamas it has not been associated with serious breakdown in organization or community morale.



tance are part of the gradual liberalization of the caste code generally. This is furthered by special conditions in which the government plays a haphazard but positive role. It has been noted that in government departments and services, even at the local level, the enforced policy has in this situation moved more rapidly than community opinion. (Many villagers of high and of low caste are not pleased at standing next to the Roḍiyā in the dispenser's queue or post office.) In a few settlements, especially where a government official or a local high caste pressure group is interested, economic aids have been given, particularly in housing. Any reduction in the survival value of servility is sure to be reflected in a lesser adherence to the old forms. Where the higher castes oppose their economic amelioration it is not due to contemporary exploitation but rather to the very accurate realization that their prosperity will lead to disrespectful, *i.e.*, egalitarian behavior. The Roḍiyā is very far from economic emancipation at this time, and it is improbable that the symbolic aspects of inferiority will ever be generally shed until he is economically secure. (In lesser degree the same is true for other low castes as well.) However, at the present time one significant movement is in process. Roḍi children in the highlands are being educated, and perhaps as important as this fact itself is that in opening the schools to them, local community sentiment has been flagrantly violated.<sup>21</sup> Education alone will produce no sensational changes, but in requiring competition and mixing with the children of other castes, modifications in attitude can be developed both by Roḍiyās and by other children, and the way paved for ultimate economic development. The movement into the pale of society is surely in progress.

The opening of a number of Kandyan highland schools to Roḍi children in 1949 provided an interesting exposure of the caste attitudes of a society in transition. Within the months of October and November, 1949, the admission of the children from kuppāyamas in Sabaragamuva, Uva and the Central Province to Government schools occasioned high emotional unrest and a modicum of

<sup>21</sup> In the Northwestern Province and parts of Sabaragamuva children have been admitted to the schools for a decade or two without public rancor. Unfortunately, attendance laws are not closely enforced and dropouts in early years are undoubtedly more common than are continuants through even the elementary grades.



violence in several localities. The greatest unrest, and the most fully documented incidents, occurred at the large State schools of Uda Aludeniya and Daskara, in the Gampola area not far from Kandy. At these schools the arrival of Roḍi children was greeted by an immediate boycott on the part of caste proud parents. Advance rumor had informed the countryside and an immediate walk-out was staged at the instigation of parents. As a temporary measure, and announced as such, the local education official declared a ban on their attendance and the schools quickly returned to normal, the handful of Roḍiyās notably missing. It was quite apparent that the arrival of these children had not been entirely spontaneous. For some months an organization significantly named the Gampola Progressive Youths League had been working toward the event, and the local education officer had had prior instructions to admit the children. Obviously no groundwork was laid with parents generally, although under the auspices of the Youth League adequate clothing, and hence obviously improper for a Roḍiyā, had been collected from sympathetic citizens. Rebellion of the castes was immediate and no less rapid was the return to school when the offensive Roḍiyās had been banned.

The early lifting of the ban was quickly announced by the Ceylon Director of Education and public meetings called for the weekend before the promised return of the Roḍiyās. The meetings were attended by a large number of parents, including at one of them a group of Roḍi men who, quite properly, remained outside the hall. As reported in the *Ceylon Daily News* for October 18, 1949, the officials maintained a strong stand while appealing to the parents on many grounds. The responses of parents in these meetings were far more informative than any attitude polls could be.

At Uda Aludeniya all the appeals and announcements were received in dead silence and later a single woman parent stood up to speak in favour of the removal of the ban. At the same time she said that in view of the habits and customs observed hitherto in respect of the particular community it was difficult to persuade their children to deviate from them all at once.

Another parent, a father, was strongly of the opinion that, while they were not opposed to the welfare and progress of the Rodiyas, most of the habits and ways of life of the Rodiya community were

incompatible with those of other communities; and as such, the decision to send their children to the same schools was too sudden. That was the reason for the protest.

He suggested that until such time as the Chandalas [*sic*] were able to improve their habits their children should be educated separately. . . .

Another woman parent, who claimed to have several of her children attending that school, was loud in her protests, screamed that even if she had to kill her little ones she would never condescend to send them to the same school.

In spite of a few violent outbursts, the parents at Uda Aludeniya were notably passive in their resistance, although objection was implicit in most utterances from the floor. Departmental officers left no doubt but that they would enforce the law both in respect to Roḍiyās and the high caste parents. At Daskara similar appeals brought forth more emotional outbursts, one section greeting them with applause, another with angry protests.<sup>22</sup> One spokesman of the protesting parents inquired if the education ordinance provided for the destruction of time honored customs. Another described the action as an attempt to bring discord which might culminate in bloodshed and rioting. A Buddhist priest defended the attempts of parents to protect tradition, but sagely suggested that the matter be "discussed at the highest possible level." Generally it was felt that the Roḍī children should be educated, but not at the price of "age old customs."

On the Monday following these outbursts of parents, and even the Buddhist clergy, the schools at Uda Aludeniya and Daskara were opened under the immediate supervision of Departmental officials. The Roḍī children were present, as were the Goyigama and all others. Time honored custom was defeated not only by the firm stand of the officials, but by the knowledge that many respected community leaders stood on the platform with them. A year after this episode, some of the Roḍī children had dropped out of school, but for those who remained a Roḍī father volunteered the information that "Their children and ours are like those of the same mother."

<sup>22</sup> *Ceylon Daily News*, *ibid.*, and *Ceylon Observer*, Oct. 17, 1948.

## ❖❖❖❖ 10

### *Caste in the Jungle*

The greater part of the Island of Ceylon is covered by jungle. The entire northern portion, exclusive of the Jaffna Peninsula, the north-central, and practically the eastern half of the island from Jaffna to Tangalla compose this vast jungle domain. In terms of provinces, it includes part of the Northern, all of the North-Central, most of the Eastern and Uva and the northeastern part of the Northwestern. Except for a coastal fringe settlement on the east and, to some extent, the west, and a Tamil preponderance in the Northern Province, the entire region is dominated by Sinhalese. In terms of area this region is greater than all others taken together; in terms of population it is very small.

Jungle life, in a land of highly seasonal rainfall, has placed distinctive marks upon village structure. Throughout all of the area the villages are small, ranging in size from a few households to seldom more than seventy-five. Life is wholly conditioned by the seasonality and scarcity of water. Either the village is nestled by the bund of its tank (artificial lake), in which are stored the rains to await use in the water-demanding paddy fields, or, in lieu of stable water supply, migratory chena cultivation is the foundation of life. The most general condition is that of permanent settlement around the tank and permanent paddy lands. Only in the most remote jungles of the east are villages exclusively dependent upon shifting cultivation, although generally throughout the entire dry zone chena is cultivated as an important supplement to paddy. Everywhere population density is limited by the fact of water, as well as by the primitiveness of agricultural technology. Villages are fre-



quently surrounded by the jungle but usually are no more than a few miles from some similar settlement.

Throughout this region, contacts with urban centers are at a minimum. Bazaar towns are widely scattered, but the jungle is so vast and the population so sparse and poor that the majority of villagers would travel from perhaps three to fifteen miles to their nearest market town. Such contact is scarcely "urban," for the market towns are usually little more than a few blocks of boutiques (small shops) dealing in the necessities of life, with perhaps a government hospital and a few government offices. Within the great interior there is no center approximating the status of a city in the sociological sense, for the hinterland could not support it. Nor have many more westernizing and modernizing influences come through secondary channels. Schools are generally available, with instruction almost exclusively in the vernacular, but secondary schools are few and only very exceptional village families can afford either to take advantage of them or to send their children to Colombo or Kandy. By the 1946 Government Census figures for the North-Central Province, nearly a third of all males and nearly three-fourths of all females were illiterate. Radios and newspapers are exceedingly rare in the villages, and knowledge of events beyond the village horizon is very infrequent indeed.<sup>1</sup>

Socially some distinction should be made between the jungles of the North-Central area and those of the East.<sup>2</sup> The north-central jungles are more densely populated (*i.e.*, population density in the North-Central Province is more than thirty per square mile) and they are more completely dominated by settled agricultural life. In Uva Province, to the east, is found what has commonly been called the Vāddā Country, in which both the Vāddā remnants and the Sinhalese live in tiny, scattered villages more dependent upon chena than upon paddy. In the eastern jungles urban influences are almost nonexistent, and contacts even with market centers entail many miles of walking on trails and cart tracks through elephant and bear infested jungle. Literacy is extremely low and contact with world thought currents is virtually nil. Both the north-central and the eastern regions have in common the fact that they

<sup>1</sup> See Ryan (82).

<sup>2</sup> See Ryan (81).

are preponderately Sinhalese and also are partially bordered by Tamil-speaking areas. For the eastern Uva jungle, Tamil influences are probably slight and have no long historic basis in intercontacts. For the North-Central Province, however, Tamil Hindu influences have been persistent over hundreds of years, and the process of assimilation to Sinhalese culture can be perceived in some villages today.<sup>3</sup>

The interior jungles, like the south-central highlands, are Kandyan in their law and social heritage. But the social heritage of the jungle has been influenced by the force of the environment, isolation, and a much earlier breakdown of the closely knit feudal system which persisted so late in the Central Province and Sabaragamuva. The southward movement of Sinhalese civilization had by medieval times left much of the north as a hinterland between organized Sinhalese society and the Tamil invaders. Still later the Uva jungles were transformed from the seat of civilization to an isolated land of remnant villages. The center of Sinhalese society and culture moved southward and westward until finally the southern coasts and the highlands were its strongholds and the great dry zone of the north and east a land of monuments to the past, ruined cities, temple walls and tank bunds.<sup>4</sup> The resuscitation of these areas and their close unification with the civilization of the south were limited by a multiplicity of factors, especially the power of the Tamils in the north, the difficulties of terrain and communication and, perhaps most significant of all, the ravages of malaria.

#### CASTE STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The castes of the North-Central Province and of Uva are, with a few exceptions, identical with those of the Kandyan highlands and, also like the latter region, the Goyigama are the most numerous. Unlike other regions, villages are usually composed of a single caste living in physical separation from others. Ievers' (41) tabulation of villages by caste, made in 1899, probably gives a fairly accurate representation of their relative numerical significance even today.

<sup>3</sup> See Chap. 6.

<sup>4</sup> See particularly Mendis (53) and Parker (62).

NUMBER OF VILLAGES OF SINHALESE AND OTHER CASTES  
AS TABULATED BY IEVERS IN 1899 (NORTH-CENTRAL  
PROVINCE)

<i>Sinhalese Castes</i>		<i>"Other Castes"</i>	
Goigama ( <i>Vanni or Vellala</i> ) *	618	Veddahs	25
Karawe ( <i>fishers</i> )	5	Waggai	12
Vidanela ( <i>lowest of Vellala, slaves of chiefs</i> ) *	3	Moors	108
Guruvas or Pusaries *	4	Moorish Barbers	1
Blacksmith	53	Tamil	8
Potter	16	Kaffir	1
Madinno or Toddy drawers or Durawe	2		
Chalias	2		
Willi Durai	7		
Batgam Durai **	30		
Panna Durai	1		
Kandayo ( <i>Jaggory caste</i> )	23		
Tom-tom beaters	69		
Dhobies	65		
Mixed villages	9		

\* See below pp. 243-244.

\*\* Ievers' omission of the Batgam (Padu) should be noted. It is probable that they have been classed with the Batgam Durai (see Chap. 3 above).

From the above table it may be estimated that approximately two-thirds of North-Central Sinhalese villages were Goyigama and a few more of low grade members of that caste. While many additional castes are represented, the only ones of considerable size were the Hēna (Dhoby), the Beravā (Tom-tom beaters) and the Navandanna (Blacksmiths). Ievers was at a loss to find any significant geographical distribution of the castes except for regional differences in the presence of Sinhalese, Moor (Muslim) and Tamil. He notes, as is the case today, that the Vaggai are concentrated in Hurulu Palata (east of Anuradhapura).

The North-Central Province, but not other jungle areas, has several distinctive castes and subcastes, a few distinguished from their highland counterparts by more than terminological differences. Ievers, following the practice of his day, identified the Goyigama with the Vellāla, and in this there is no significance. He also identified with the Goyigama the Vanniyās, which in his time were aloof from "other" Goyigama and in some cases even



today maintain their traditional identity.<sup>5</sup> The Vanniyās are more strictly a parallel group with the Kandyan highland Radaḷa, although such an analogy is distinctly odious to the former. Nominally they are a feudal aristocracy tracing their descent from the royal overlords of the region during the period in which the area was a no man's land between Sinhalese and the Tamil invaders. For many generations this region was the stronghold of a people known as Vanniyās. The jungle domain of the North-Central Province is today familiarly spoken of as the Vanni.<sup>6</sup> Ievers, quoting from a Mr. Brodie's diary of 1851, gives some remarks of a local chief: "The people respect the Vanniyas more than the Vellala; but the former presuming on their superiority neglect education and are falling into the background. We are not mere Vellalas; we came over with Anyana Deviya long before the Bo-tree." In Ievers' time the distinction of Vanniyā and Goyigama was rapidly fading, and that process continues today. A few families remain who are recognized by the surrounding villages as being of Vanniyā status and, although the verbalisms of some of these elder noblemen are even today similar to those of Brodie's chief, there is no doubt of their general admixture by marriage with the less pretentious Goyigama. Ievers' prediction that fifty years would see their full amalgamation with the Goyigama has not, however, been fulfilled.

Aside from the Vanniyā, there are other caste groups identified by Ievers and still surviving in much the same sense that the Goyigama subcastes survive in the Kandyan Highlands. The "Vidanela," or as Ievers says, the "lowest of the Vellala, slaves to chiefs," do not identify themselves today, but nearby villagers recognize them as of this "caste." Unquestionably the distinction between them and the highland "Vahal" (slaves to the Radaḷa) is terminological, for functionally they hold the same status in reference to those of high feudal grade, *i.e.*, the Vanniyā, and this designation was an euphemism for "slave" also used in the highlands. Generally

<sup>5</sup> The Vanniyās referred to here are not to be confused with the semiprimitive people also called Vannia or Wanniyas in the Padaviya tank area west of Trincomalee. The latter Vanniyās are probably of mixed Sinhalese Vāddā stock and referred to by Ievers as "Veddahs." They are described in some detail by Parker (63) and are still to be identified, although today they are generally accepted as Goyigama Sinhalese.

<sup>6</sup> See Tennent (98), Vol. II, pp. 508-511.

throughout the region persons of Videnela status are known simply as "Goyigama," but for purposes of marriage the jungleside would be aware of their lower status.

The Guruvō (Gurava or Pusaries in Ievers' account) are another castelike group being assimilated rapidly in the Goyigama, and apparently without any contemporary parallel outside the North-Central Province. "Guruvō" is a "hate" word today, worse possibly than terms like "Padu" or "Gattara," and is seldom used by persons of any caste. The group so designated is referred to simply as Goyigama or by the name of their particular village, and while village memory is long, it is probable that there is some intermarriage between them and "good" Goyigama. Traditionally it is said that the Guruvō were the conch blowers in the temples and at funerals and are today sometimes referred to as the Hak-geḍiya people, *i.e.*, those who blow the hak-geḍiya or conch. It is reported by neighboring villages that west of Anuradhapura people of this caste today engage in the traditional role at *dēvāles*, but this report has not been verified.

The Vaggai, strictly a North-Central Province, and more particularly a Hurulu Palata, group, and the Velli-durayi, highly concentrated near Anuradhapura, have been treated earlier. The Vaggai are an excellent example of an invading Tamil people, whom Casie Chitty (5) believed to be lost descendants of the coastal Mukkuvās, in process of assimilation but not biological amalgamation with the Sinhalese. The Velli-durayi, whose actual origin is no doubt untraceable, but whose traditions associate them with the coming of the sacred Bo-tree, are fully a part of Sinhalese society and its caste structure.

Caste structure in the jungles of Uva Province is simpler than elsewhere. This is probably true because few villages are old, and the ancient feudal heritage is distinct from contemporary villages. It is probable that apart from the Vāddās much of this region was unpopulated for many generations and that many existing villages are no older than the early British period. Unquestionably organized on feudal lines during the British period, the paucity of people and their primitive, migratory life prevented differentiation in feudal service relationships. In so far as the region is settled today, the population is overwhelmingly Goyigama. In one large division



studied, out of a total of perhaps twenty-five widely scattered villages, about twenty were Goyigama Sinhalese, three Vāddā, by self-identification, one Beravā and one Vahal. In earlier times all of these villages, a few of which are even today migratory bands, recognized a single feudal overlord but, aside from his local demesne, relationships to him were infrequent and feudal organization more nominal than real. Today in this region caste is powerful as an ideology, but practically it is of slight significance, for the castes live in physical and social isolation from each other.

Removed equally from the thought currents of the modern world and disquieting effects of urban influences, caste in the jungle is the prototype from which all other regions vary. Only in the most remote valleys of the highlands is the past as vital as it is throughout this great region. It would be a rare village where the propriety of status relationships, caste inherited roles, and the long established symbols of social distance would be questioned. Here the lower castes seldom raise complaints at their inferior position. They, like their masters, cannot visualize an orderly society without caste and without hereditary service. Unlike the Kandyan villages of the Central Province, the new ideologies of equal rights and a common standard of human dignity have not been recognized as respectable values to be professed regardless of actual behavior. The old order needs no apology and the new requires no profession of acceptance.<sup>7</sup> Under such conditions it is not surprising that here caste is seldom a basis for cleavage on public issues. The initiative and leadership of the Goyigama is generally accepted as proper, and issues, in the sense of party ideology and national policy scarcely exist.

#### THE CASTE COURT

There is no doubt but that in earlier times the castes had more formal organization than they do today. Throughout the Low Country and the Kandyan Hills the concept of caste organization is practically unknown and not even vague traditions speak of a caste panchayat or other formalized caste bodies. The rules of caste are enforced not by castes but by families and villages. Only in the

<sup>7</sup> Ryan (82).



North-Central Province is there such organization and even there it is limited to judicial functions relevant to caste customs. Probably the earliest description of the caste court, or Rata Sabhāva or Variga Sammutiya, was by K. A. Kapuruhami, writing in 1909-1910.<sup>8</sup> As Kapuruhami foresaw, the concept and organization of the court was disintegrating and many of the details given by him are today disregarded. The court, however, persists and is a common and sometimes potent phenomenon, particularly in the eastern part of the North-Central Province.

In Kapuruhami's time it would appear that the principal officers of the court were Goyigama, and that they sat upon cases where caste rules were infringed regardless of the caste of the accused. In addition to the high caste officers a Vidane PEDIYA, of Hēna caste, was also appointed and was an essential member of the tribunal, and in still earlier days other castes were also represented. Appointments were received from high caste families who held the traditional right of appointment for jurisdiction over the Palata (civil division). Offenses coming under the jurisdiction of the court were those relative to tabus on intercaste relationships, and of the many listed by Kapuruhami, the following are especially informative as to the caste strictures and the power of the court in the region:

1. A woman eloping with a low caste man or a Low Country Sinhalese whose status is not known.
2. A man or woman living with another of a low caste as husband and wife.
3. A woman having illicit connection with a low caste man openly.
4. A woman suspected of having illicit connection with a low caste man.
5. A woman conceiving having no legal or known husband.
6. Inter-marrying with persons of another varige.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Rata Sabhāva," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Ceylon Branch) (43), Vol. XXXVIII, No. 106, 1948. Kapuruhami obviously had a close and intimate knowledge of the functioning of the courts and was dismayed at the signs that "the downfall is in sight." It is perhaps significant that nearly forty years elapsed between the writing of this important and careful analysis of caste phenomena and its actual publication in a Ceylon journal.

<sup>9</sup> The meaning of varige in this connection is not clear, since the term can stand for "caste," or simply "people" and, among the Vāddā, "sib." Quite possibly the significance here is that of caste, since the other rules relate to relationships with a person of lower caste and this refers merely to marriage outside the varige. It seems unlikely that the provision is one requiring sib endogamy, although mar-

7. Contracting a marriage within the prohibited degrees of relationship.
8. Eating in the house of a low caste man food prepared by a low caste man or woman and in their cooking vessels.
9. Drinking water from a vessel used by a low caste man.
10. Doing menial service to or in the house of a low caste man.
11. Getting beaten by a low caste man.
12. Associating with persons who have been banned temporarily or permanently in funeral and marriage ceremonies.
13. Doing services or acts which fall to the lot of low caste persons.
14. Failure to provide meals or provisions to the Rata Sabhawa when it is one's turn to supply them and due notice has been given beforehand.
15. Improper movements and acts done in the Rata Sabhawa or using improper words and terms while talking.

It is clear from the nature of many of the above precepts that the court was chiefly directed toward those of high caste, and that tabus limited to particular castes or relationships between particular castes did not exist. Thus marriage below one's caste is listed prior to all other offenses, but no formal recognition is given the degree of disparity in caste status between the offenders.

Kapuruhami is equally explicit in his listing of punishments imposed for violations of caste rules. Anyone suspected of any offense was, prior to trial, temporarily banned from village affairs, *i.e.*, joint eating, ceremonials, and the services of the Hēnayā. Undoubtedly the ban theoretically extended to other service castes but, in fact, washing and marriage functions performed by the washer are two of the few services actually performed for most individuals, a fact which accounts for the Hēnayā's presence at the court. The enforcement of these rules depended considerably upon the gravity of the alleged offense. The formal court proceedings established the guilt or innocence of the accused, although, as Kapuruhami notes, the court undoubtedly had strong convictions before it met. Punishment in serious offenses, *i.e.*, sexual relations or marriage of a woman with a man of lower caste, usually included casting out the offending person and placing money fines on her

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riage within the Gē is not necessarily disapproved. The fact that the designation for House (Gē) is identical with the ending of this term has no significance.

blood relatives. Such fines were usually extremely high in terms of village wealth. For an intercaste sex offense, the fine alone paid by blood relatives frequently amounted to 550 *ridi*. Minor, and especially procedural, offenses toward the court itself were punished by relatively small fines exacted from the offending individual. The total fine collected was divided into four equal parts, one share going to the chief of the district, the remaining three-fourths going to various officers and visiting dignitaries participating in the proceedings. The successful conclusion of a trial was followed by a feast, provided by the banned parties as a symbol of their return into the society; if the food were of high quality the court sometimes remitted a portion of the fines.

The functions and procedures of the Rata Sabhāva are essentially the same today as they were in the period described by Kapuruhami. The composition of the court seems to have been modified, and in some instances it has, as Kapuruhami foresaw, descended to the plane of ceremonial flapdoodle. Structurally the institution has lost its ancient formality, although none of its ceremonial trappings. Whereas in earlier days the court was composed of high caste appointees with a fringe of low caste "yes men" all operating under the direction of the district chief, the modern Rata Sabhāva appears to be no single body before which the offenses of any person may come. The single district Rata Sabhāva or Sammutiya with regional jurisdiction has been replaced by separate courts for each of the castes within the district. However, the descendants of former district chiefs (*Raṭāmahatmayā* or *Kōrālemahatmayā*) are waited upon for permission to hold court on any case, and they, like their predecessors of old, receive a share of the fine money.

There is no evidence that any caste in the eastern parts of the North-Central Province is without its Rata Sabhāva. Instances of proceedings in recent years were discovered in Goyigama, Hēna and Beravā villages. There has not been any great tendency for the court to degenerate into a local village phenomenon. In many instances at least, it still appears to be a regional caste affair, officers of the court being brought from surrounding villages to hear a case. Following the old tradition, bans are introduced upon persons accused, serious offenders cast out from the villages, great feasts



demand of the offending parties, and the fines pocketed by the court functionaries and the descendants of the district chief.<sup>10</sup>

There is a wide range in the seriousness with which the court is viewed, although in many villages it is still important. The following description of its operation is nearly a verbatim translation of a Hēna village leader's description of recent court affairs.

Recently, due to some trouble over some intercaste marriages, illegitimate births, and the killing and skinning of cattle,\* there had been trouble between the men of my village and those of neighboring villages of our caste. Since we had been at loggerheads for six long years, I, who was appointed by the Kōrālemahatmayā as Vidane Pēdiya [in charge of the Sammutiya] called for a court and settled everything in August. The people of this village being ignorant of the rules and regulations of the court, we invited better men who knew fully about the proceedings and elected one of them to preside. All of these members invited from outside were Pēdiyas [Hēnayās]. First the President was elected and he was an old and experienced man. Then two others [officers] were elected. We had invited two or three men from all of the villages [of the same caste] making a total of sixteen or seventeen and there were two or three old men of our village. Once the court met they called witnesses to give evidence, but in this meeting no fines were imposed on anyone, for the charges were found to be untrue.

A court was held last year at D... [a village nearby] due to two women of that village having had sexual relations with Bhikkhus. They were fined Rs. 200 each. The girls accused each other of the offense and later admitted the truth that they did it together. The

\* Just what the offense of "killing and skinning cattle" was could not be ascertained with precision, since killing is an offense against religion and it seemed implicit that the cattle were stolen. Furthermore, and perhaps this is really the point of the trial in this court, in this area it is regarded as a special function of the Goyigama to skin animals and for this he receives an established fee.

<sup>10</sup> An interesting question arises as to what happens to persons cast out from their villages, as some indeed are even today. One such case was discovered cultivating an isolated chena some miles off in the jungle beyond his home village, and another was found pulling a rickshaw in Colombo. The latter case offers a commentary upon the power of caste law. By pure chance, the writer found a hunger-weakened village man lying by a roadside in the city of Colombo. Questioning indicated that he had come to the city for medical attention. It was subsequently revealed that he had a brother in the city whose place of residence he knew only vaguely, and his reluctance to seek help from the brother was obvious. Wholly without money, weak now from hunger rather than sickness, and confronted with a journey to the distant North-Central Province, he flatly refused the hospitality of the brother who was ultimately discovered by the writer. The brother had been driven from the village as the result of an intercaste marriage.

Bhikkhu was disrobed. The fine money was shared in this manner: half of the money went to the Kōrālemahatmayā of the Palata [the Goyigama man who gave permission for the court to convene], the other half was shared between members of the court. After the payment of the fines the girls were accepted back into the village. Six years ago there was a case of a girl marrying out of the caste; her family was fined and the couple moved away.

In some villages and under some circumstances the court has less status and less power and has become a ceremonial whitewashing of caste violation—for a price. In a Goyigama village a Low Country Goyigama man settled in 1945 and married a village girl. Although of the same caste, the fact that the man was a stranger, of strange Gē, and more specifically not a Kandyan Sinhalese, some village leaders disapproved the match and called for a court hearing and the temporary ban. The court was convened in the village and presided over by the Kōrālemahatmayā with the elderly men of the village serving under him. The charge being obviously a true one, both the offending parties were fined heavily as the condition of their reacceptance in village life and affairs. Refusing to take the matter seriously, the Low Country offender would neither attend the court hearings nor pay the fine they imposed. The girl's family paid out the Rupees 200 demanded of them (a vast sum for a village family). (The recalcitrant male insisted that they were being hoodwinked in a ceremonious "carnival of justice.") Because of his obstinacy the court ruled that the Hēnayās of the nearby village could not wash for the couple nor could they henceforth attend or have guests in attendance at weddings and funerals.

The effect of this partial rejection of the court decree has been mixed. Within a few days the obstinate newcomer had regained friendly relations with most of the village. Although the Hēnayās might fear to wash for him on the traditional basis, this dilemma was quickly resolved by hiring a washer on a cash basis, as any stranger might. Only in attendance at ceremonial events in the village has the ban remained effective. Neither of the parties attends village funerals or weddings and no one might be expected to come to theirs. In a society with diminishing service relationships the effectiveness of a ban is not great unless village opinion is united and strong. In this instance the offense was not serious and



the offenders were popular, conditions which combined to make life tolerable in the village.

Outside the North-Central Province, offenses against caste tradition are punished by the informal ostracism of family or of village; here purity of the family and caste has remained a formal part of caste business. In some circumstances the strength of feeling in the local village and its service caste villages is sufficient to give the Sammutiya the power of a legal body. A fiction of its legitimacy is maintained through its connection with an official whose office is both traditional and, until recent years, legitimately governmental. Fully as important as a preserver of caste integrity, the Sammutiya serves to purify the atmosphere. Gossip and dissension are here brought into the open, publicized, formally acted upon and dismissed. No one may henceforth speak ill of the accused without himself incurring the threat of Sammutiya action, for the community itself has now accepted responsibility for that which has taken place.

#### CASTE IN A JUNGLE VILLAGE

Vanniaveva, a village near the border of the Northwestern and North-Central Provinces is, in its ecology, social structure and attitudes, similar to hundreds of other settlements in the great north central dry zone. While Vanniaveva is more prosperous than most of its neighboring villages, that fact has made little difference in social attitudes and social structure. The fifty-odd families of the village live closely clustered below the bund of the Great Tank which supplies them and their fields with water in all but the worst years of drought. Twelve miles from the nearest market center, life is practically circumscribed by the surrounding jungle and the three or four neighboring villages. The twelve miles to "town" are along a cart track through jungle, and although a car can maneuver the trail the fact is more academic than actual, for the villagers have no cars and the vast majority go by foot when shopping at the bazaar or fair is required. Vanniaveva seldom goes out into the world, and the world visits little in Vanniaveva. The former Kōrālemahatmayā, who by chance lives here, takes a daily paper, but this fact is of little interest to others of the village. A



school shared with a nearby settlement offers limited instruction to the children; no one residing in the village has had secondary or English school training.<sup>11</sup>

Like most Sinhalese villages, land ownership and economic power is concentrated in the hands of a very few families. The bulk of the village households own small plots of paddy land, and of course a few coconut trees surrounding their huts, but very few can suffice without additional rented land. Practically all cultivate chenas in the nearby jungle from which the curry stuffs for daily use are derived, and small surpluses which are the source of meager cash incomes. The three largest landowners, two of whom are brothers, own together perhaps three-fourths of village paddy fields, and in addition have small coconut plantations at the village's edge. Although the poor villagers cultivate their paddy lands on a share basis, labor on the coconut plots is done by outsiders. Tenant cultivation involves no loss of dignity to the peasant, wage labor is deemed degrading, and money transactions between fellow villagers, whatever their relative economic status, smack of the immoral. "When money passes between friends, their relationship can never be the same," says a village sage.

Vanniaveva, in spite of its economic differentiation, is a simple and highly familistic community. In actual fact it is not only virtually homogeneous by caste but every household of the caste is in blood relationship with every other one. The bonds of close association and kinship are the dominant ones for the village, and in them only one household is excluded by caste. Except for one Hēna (washer) household, the village is exclusively Goyigama and interrelationships by descent and marriage are so multiple and complex that few individuals can tell with precision just what relationship they bear to given neighbors.<sup>12</sup> It is not to be supposed that this village is entirely idyllic in its familism nor that the bonds of unity lack qualification. Like most Sinhalese villages, not only

<sup>11</sup> Unlike most villages of the area, one son of Vanniaveva is a physician in the government service and two more of the same family are away in secondary school. It is not to be expected that any of these will settle in the village, although the school boys spend vacations there and the doctor visits it occasionally.

<sup>12</sup> At the present time there is a Beravā family living temporarily in the village doing hired labor on coconut lands. They have not been considered in this discussion.

are the lands concentrated in a few families but the poor are both envious and distrustful of the rich. Organizationally, Vanniaveva is a unity of cooperative kin built upon a paternalistic pattern. Emotionally, the situation is more complex for the landless relatives of the landed. The rich are their leaders; they are respected kinsmen; but they are also viewed with suspicion as "land grabbers" and their pretensions to status in seeking brides from outside the village is resented. The poor villager confides in his equally poor neighbor that so-and-so is not to be trusted in this or that matter, but in actual fact he takes his problems to "so-and-so" and relies upon him in time of crisis. To the outside world, *i.e.*, other villages, Vanniaveva presents a united front; within itself paternalism is questioned not because of new ideologies, equality and individualism, but simply out of tensions inherent in a social order of paternalistic control.<sup>13</sup>

Except for the single Hēna family, Vanniaveva is exclusively of simple Goyigama caste without subcaste distinctions. However, as is practically universal in Ceylon, there are different Gē having somewhat different statuses, and in addition certain families who have lost caste privileges or, more precisely, have been excluded from rituals of their Gē due to offenses against the Gē prestige. The Goyigama of Vanniaveva are divided into three Gē groups or Houses, and among these there is a conventionally recognized status hierarchy. In addition there is one other Gē represented, through a matrilocal marriage, which is higher than any indigenous ones. The large house of highest position includes about two-thirds of the village households and in it is concentrated village wealth, although a number of its constituents are extremely poor. The House of lowest status is without exception one of economically poor households, about six in number.

In the daily life of the village, Gē status means practically nothing. Cooperative work groups are formed irrespective of Gē affiliation; the gossiping and bantering of the village lanes and tank bunds cross Gē lines freely; there is no tendency for exclusion or

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most acute analysis of social relationships in a Sinhalese jungle village was that made in fictional form by Leonard Woolf in *The Village in the Jungle* (190), 1931. The violence and bitterness described there is not to be found in Vanniaveva but the complexity of emotions and relationships is of similar quality.



segregation in worship or in household visiting. In ninety-nine out of a hundred relationships in the village Gē is irrelevant. There is, however, that subtle feeling that one House is better than another, and the ranking is agreed upon within the village. Only in matters of marriage is it significant. The highest House shuns marriage with the others, particularly the lowest, and among the intermediate families equality of Gē status is a factor to be considered in marriage. This does not mean that marriage between the Houses of the village does not occur, obviously it has; but usually it is frowned upon by the highest house and among the others accepted only at the price of high economic incentives to the family which steps down. Following the typical caste pattern, marriage feasts are normally reserved for equals, *i.e.*, those acceptable in marriage. Normally the lowest Gē does not sit at the wedding feasts of the highest, although among the poor these niceties of custom are frequently overlooked.

There are a few households of Vanniaveva which have been treated as quasi- or ceremonial outcasts by their Gē fellows, a condition which has nothing to do with the secular affairs of life. Thus a generation ago a man of highest Gē married a girl of lowest. Although the parties to this union are dead, several households of their male children live in the village today. These families suffer only ceremonial discrimination. They are not permitted to attend the highest Gē's wedding ceremonies, although they bear the Gē name, and while permitted at the wedding feast are required to eat separately. Nor will the proudest members of their Gē eat at their homes. In funerals they are not permitted to carry the coffin, a task usually reserved for Gē members in this area. In the friendly, casual life of the village their distinction is not to be recognized and in daily work and cooperative enterprises their position means as little as the Gē does generally. Quite possibly, had Vanniaveva participated in the caste court system, these offenders would have been "tried" and the air cleared of feeling against them, but Vanniaveva knows nothing of this judicial system.

It is significant that Gē status means more to the rich than to the poor, and that the traditional sanctions imposed upon those violating Gē honor apply more to the poor than to the rich. Unquestionably a rich man of highest House can compromise the family honor



with impunity. There is in the village one man of considerable wealth and power, who married a low Gē woman. In his case no exclusion has been practiced, even in the case of weddings, chiefly because he is the owner of a bicycle which other villagers like to borrow. In effect, it seems that violations of Gē honor bring ceremonial sanctions, but that these sanctions are inoperative where they conflict with matters of economic status and power. Probably the status grading of the Houses has been derived from historic economic position, but in any case its significance is exhibited today only where traditional status conforms to established economic status.

It should be understood that all the houses of Vanniaveva are "respectable" Goyigama; none is representative of a clearly differentiated subcaste and all are in some degree of blood kinship. Village attitudes toward marriage with inferior subcastes do not exist, simply because subcastes are unrecognized in the vicinity. Issues of this sort do not arise, since marriages are local in character and no person of unknown Gē would be admissible. In respect to intercaste marriage, Vanniaveva is a hundred percent homogeneous in attitude. Not only is such an eventuality inconceivable to the villagers, if it occurred absolute ostracism would certainly follow.

The important status differentiations of the village Goyigama are upon economic rather than truly hereditary bases. Although differentiation in social participation is not great, there is an obvious tendency for those of similar economic position to clique together, regardless of Gē. In the cooperative work groups (*kaiya*) which prepare the fields and harvest crops, men of similar economic position band together. The "rich man" might join the poor, but the poor peasant "cannot bear to invite a richer man to do his work."

Until recent years Vanniaveva was exclusively a Goyigama village without caste gradation within it. Some years ago a Hēna family was brought from the nearest village of that caste for the sake of convenience. The village from which the Hēnayā came has from time immemorial been pledged to the service of Vanniaveva and a nearby Goyigama village, and its lands held on the basis of that service. The dhoby makes his rounds of the village, collecting

and delivering the modest washings and serving ceremonially as the occasion arises. Some of the poorer villagers wash their own clothing and in this there is no loss of dignity, nor is the dhoby incensed, for it is well understood that they are too poor to share their income with him. Most of the village makes its annual presentation of paddy to the Hēnayā, with little regard to the precise amount of work he has done, and for ceremonial service he is rewarded as munificently as the family can possibly afford. Never has he been paid in money, although he frequently has excess paddy to sell. Beyond this, the Hēnayā has a rightful share in the proceeds of jungle hunting, which the villagers engage in despite their devout adherence to Buddhism. Any game shot is shared with him and often, but less systematically, with the village headman. In recent seasons the Hēnayā has also been given a plot of paddy land which his family cultivates on a share basis with its owner. Needless to say, the dhoby of Vanniaveva is one of the more prosperous citizens of the community. In his own eyes, and in the eyes of those around him, he has not been cursed by a caste birth; he has been blessed.

Although Vanniaveva is closely wrapped in its own small social life, a life of common work in the fields, evening games in the open coconut lands, hunting parties, and evening chats on the tank bund, it has loose ties with neighboring villages. Very near is another Goyigama village with which the temple and the school are shared, and with which there is some intermarriage and hence family bonds. From the standpoint of caste, however, their ties to other villages are more significant. In tradition, and probably in fact, these Goyigama villages were the center of an ancient circle of inferior caste settlements serving them and dependent upon this service for their lands. Within a five-mile radius there is a village of potters (Baḍahāla), one of Vahumpura, one of blacksmiths (Navandanna), and one of Hēna. (In addition there are, of course, other Goyigama villages not dissimilar to Vanniaveva.) In local tradition each of these villages held its lands on the assumption of service to the Goyigama. The wasting away of the intercaste service roles is fully evident today in the surviving remnants and symbols of what was undoubtedly a former utilitarian caste service.



In modern times the Navandanna and Baḍahāla have slight relationship to Vanniaveva. However, upon Sinhalese New Year men of these villages still come bringing presents, representing their crafts, to the oldest man of leading family. The blacksmiths come with a sickle and a knife; the potters come with a set of pots. Both are welcomed, treated with the customary formalities accorded to lower caste guests, *i.e.*, seated on mats and given food served on a plantain leaf. The value involved in the exchange is purely nominal. Although both craft villages still engage in their respective vocations, Vanniaveva today buys its pots and its sickles at the distant market town or at a new village settlement. (Actually the latter is a group of Tamil potters who have squatted in the jungle nearby and who, according to the women of Vanniaveva, produce pottery superior to that of other villages.) Relationships with the Beravā and the Vahumpura have been more closely preserved, and it should be noted that these castes have ceremonial functions, whereas for potters and blacksmiths tradition points only to utilitarian roles. The Beravāyās beat the tom-toms regularly at the village temple and come upon summons for special occasions. The Vahumpura are summoned less frequently, but in important weddings, *i.e.*, of the rich, they come to carry the wedding party's goods and to drive the wedding cart. Although food, and perhaps something additional, is given to those who serve, there is no contractual element in the exchanges. It is recognized by all parties that the lands of the inferior caste villages were bestowed upon them for the performance of these duties and the shirking of rightful obligation of one's birth is unthinkable. The Beravāyās, who serve most steadily, receive an annual gift of money and are paid in money for performing at special family functions. The amount of payment rests not upon the service but the status of the family served. Needless to say, neither type of payment is determined by market demand; they are reasonable reciprocities for services required of a status group.

The strictures of intercaste relations are much the same in Vanniaveva as they are in any Kandyan locality, *i.e.*, endogamy, inferior seating, segregated eating, differential address, etc. The propriety of these restrictions is questioned by no one in this area, although in practice some of them are compromised. As has been



observed elsewhere, the dhoby occupies a special position in the affections of most villagers. In Vanniaveva this is true; he, although actually quite young, is called by all Hēnayā Mama (Hēnayā Uncle). He was born into an inferior stratum, but life is good, and prosperous too. No one is unkind; rules of etiquette for him are right by rule of the ages. He is convulsed with laughter at the mere suggestion that he might depart his vocation—a right and duty of his birth. In practice the strictures of intercaste etiquette affect him but slightly. Since his position is never questioned by him or by those whom he serves, little attention is paid to the strict letter of the conventions. Only the village headman and the former Kōrālemahatmayā does he address as Nilame, a breach of etiquette in reference to others, but one born of a familiarity not found where caste communalism in living is maintained. Nor is he isolated in the life of the village. He chats on terms of friendly intimacy with the other village men and in the evening may join in the village gossip on the verandah of a Goyigama house, sitting of course on the floor or ground, never on bench or chair. And in the village lane he would remove any head covering if talking with a superior. He and his family have free and unsegregated access to both school and temple; his children will play daily with the nearby Goyigama boys and girls. Recently his sister was molested by an amorous Goyigama youth, and the girl was immediately taken into a nearby Goyigama house and sheltered for the night. The village gave the entire incident an almost studied disregard, but the protecting family gained rather than lost in village status. The same might have been done for a girl of Beravā caste, but in general relationships with them are stricter, for they are of lower status and not wrapped into the orbit of common village living.

Intervillage caste relations are largely confined to the Beravā, since the Hēnayā has been brought from his own village, and service relations to other castes, except the Beravā, are slight. The Beravāyās of Beragama just three miles from Vanniaveva accept their drumming for the latter and two other Goyigama villages as duties imposed in the titles of their lands. (These titles they have never seen.) This is an unchallenged responsibility, rightfully theirs, and one which would be broken only by a person having no respect of law or for the traditions dating from "Puranic times."

The duty is moral, traditional, and possibly legal. In matters of daily etiquette and intercaste relations, Beragama is only slightly more emancipated. The drummer says, "Yes, in the times of my grandfather we always removed a head cloth or shawl in the presence of a Goyigama, but today the practice is gradually being given up. I always remove a head covering before certain Goyigama men to whom I am obliged or who have helped me, to others I do not and nothing is said of it." But his wife interposes, "We are not allowed to wear the saree over our shoulders by tradition, and we do not, and we don't want to. There is nothing wrong in wearing it the way we do now. We are satisfied the way we are." Seating and eating arrangements are as strictly preserved in this area, as is the rule of endogamy, and all Goyigama men are saluted with the title Nilame.

The Beravāyās have no grievances against the high caste. "They are our friends and there is no trouble between us." Separated though they are, it is not unknown for a Goyigama man to help one of them in the preparation of a chena or in building a house, and such cooperative and unpaid help would be reciprocated. Such a friendly villager would certainly be treated with respect, seated upon a special chair, and might even be given food—not served on one of the regular household utensils. There is no tabu upon the common use of wells, and only a vague feeling that food for the Goyigama should be cooked in separate vessels; a feeling equally vague and hence generally overlooked when Beravāyō are fed by the Goyigama.

Attitudes toward the caste system are no different for the Hēnayā, the Beravāyā, or the Goyigama in this jungle locality. Some caste customs may be falling into disuse, but practices can change without materially influencing the structure or reflecting a disintegration of belief in the system's validity. Belief in the system is no doubt closer to ancient belief than the contemporary system is to the ancient order of society. Caste roles are frequently lost in fact, but caste roles are strongly defended in theory. "From Puranic ages we have been classified as tom-tom beaters; that is the way it was and that is the way we like it. We would like to be of higher position, but what is the use of wishing for what is impossible. If we were, who would then beat the drums? And if the Hēnayā were

not a Hēnayā then who would wash? Everything would be upset and it would not be good for people."

The Beravāyā here recognizes and understands a society which functions by status rather than contract, and the same is true for his Goyigama neighbors. "Without caste we would have chaos." But both high and low caste villagers realize that this is no full rationalization of Goyigama superiority nor of Beravā inferiority; there is in addition the unquestionable fact that "from Puranic times" it has been so. One need not probe beyond the validity of status in the power of tradition, but if one does the supporting doctrine of kamma will come forth. The unlettered Beravāyā of Beragama knows that the Goyigama is a Goyigama because he has spent a meritorious life in a previous birth and that those born into lower castes should hence accord him necessary respect. "We," says a man of Beragama, "could not become Goyigama in the next birth by just performing our duties. I would have to go further and do *pinkama* and other meritorious acts; part of my duty is respecting one who has been meritorious in a previous birth." In the more remote jungle, villagers have felt no need to re-interpret their religion in terms of modern democratic and contractual ideologies.



*Caste in the Low Country Towns and Villages*

The Low Country is a fairly clearly defined region culturally and socially. So distinctive has it been in some periods that in past centuries Europeans have written of the "Cinghalese" in contrast to the "Kandyans."<sup>1</sup> It is unlikely that the differences which appealed to European travelers reflected any ancient separateness or even any very fundamental differences. Although the pre-European invasions of South Indian peoples no doubt contributed to the cultural variation from the Kandyan, the more significant contrasts are a product of greater European influence in the coastal provinces. The Low Country generally was subjected to European domination some two hundred years before the Kandyan kingdom fell. Even such lengthy contact did not result in as much "westernization" as might be expected. Modifications in ideology and conceptions of status have been more the result of direct personal contact with westerners and their ideas than of studied indoctrination or policies of acculturation. There are many reasons why that has been so, ranging from the general respect paid by Europeans to local institutions to their highly concentrated areas of actual settlement. Western education and values seeped into the villages, but there was also a persistent movement of those affected into the new high status governmental and urban pursuits.

Culturally, as well as topographically, the Low Country is divisible into two very different zones. Immediately along the coast, seldom extending to more than a mile or two inland, is a chain of cities from Chilaw or Negombo to Tangalla, including at intervals

<sup>1</sup> For example see Cordiner (9). This issue of cultural separateness is discussed by Hayley (36), Introduction.

important urban centers like Colombo, Galle and Matara. To speak of the coastal belt as a chain of cities is an excellent analogy, for they are linked by a coastal highway and by railway as well. It was said that in the ancient kingdom of Ceylon a cock could go by rooftop from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa; it can be said of modern Ceylon, with only minor disregard for truth, that a cock can travel from Negombo to Galle in the same manner. The coastal fringe is a line of villages and bazaar centers inseparable from each other and merging into the more important cities. The belt is narrow but it is very densely settled. Along it the majority of people are perhaps villagers, but they are villagers whose daily lives are in direct or indirect contact with commerce and urbanity.

Outside the cities and bazaars the shore population from Chilaw to Tangalla is primarily engaged in fishing. And, with some notable exceptions, the vast majority are Karāva. Associated with fishing there is small scale coconut production and village coir (coconut fibre) processing in which Karāva villagers frequently engage. Many of the towns and even cities are dominated by Karāva merchants and skilled tradesmen, especially carpenters. The coastal village fringe is not exclusively Karāva; other castes and ethnic groups are indigenous as well, and the area is one of considerable mobility. Thus the Hunu, few in number, live along the coast often no more distant from the sea than the Karāva. One important local area is almost solidly Salāgama from the sea several miles inland, and of course the Hinnāvō are near them. Muslim settlements are to be found, particularly in the commercial centers. Unquestionably the majority in this narrow belt are Karāva.

When one going inland loses sight of the sea, ecology, economy and caste composition change abruptly. Side roads lead immediately into an agricultural peasant economy punctuated by coconut and rubber estates, which persists into the hills and thence to the Kandyan highlands of Sabaragamuva. Here the urban and western influences are little greater than for the Kandyan highlands themselves. Five miles inland from practically any coastal point no English is spoken, no trousers are worn, all are Buddhists, and practically all are simple agricultural or laboring peasants. The villages, surrounded by paddy, coconuts, and occasionally their own or estate rubber plantations, are outside the currents of urban and

commercial life. This is the region mainly of Goyigama, Durāva, Vahumpura, interior Hinnā, and Beravā, with the Goyigama a majority in most areas.

The numerical importance of the various castes is at best a surmise, and statistical documentation of the differences between the coastal fringe and the interior Low Country impossible. The Census of 1824 carried an enumeration of inhabitants by caste for the Low Country districts. These districts in each case include both coastal and interior areas which in total encompass the region known today as the Low Country. It is clear that since 1824 the growth of cities has been associated with migration leading, no doubt, to some changes in the caste population; however, most village emigration to the coastal cities has been from nearby Low Country localities.<sup>2</sup> We must recognize too that caste differentials in rate of growth could have modified the proportions, but this has probably occurred primarily through the process of increasing anonymity of caste—or claims to Goyigama status—among town dwellers. These and other conditions necessitate great caution in drawing current inferences from data now a century and a quarter old. In general, however, their import is substantiated by empirical observation and rough sampling throughout the Low Country. Observation would lead one to believe that migration into the Tangalla District has probably increased the proportion of Karāva, and migration from the hills of Sabaragamuva may well have added to the "Jaggerairoos" in all but the Chilaw District. There is no question but that the rank numerical order of the castes in 1824 is approximately that to be found today, with the Goyigama far in the lead in each District.

For the region as a whole not only are the Goyigama in a majority, but some three-quarters or more of the Sinhalese population should be considered high caste. Actually, by the 1824 census, Goyigama, Karāva, Salāgama and Durāva constituted over 80 per cent of the population in every separate district. Of these only the Durāva had a questionable status as "high caste." The high status of Durāva and Salāgama Sinhalese probably has no roots in pre-

<sup>2</sup> This cannot be proven but it is undoubtedly the case. Evidence has been given in Bryce Ryan, and Sylvia Fernando, "The Female Factory Worker in Colombo," *International Labour Review* (83).



CASTE COMPOSITION OF THE LOW COUNTRY POPULATION  
AS GIVEN IN THE CENSUS OF 1824 \* (PERCENTAGES)

Caste	District				Total
	Colombo	Galle	Tangalla	Chilaw	
Vellala **	56.6	42.2	60.1	50.3	54.3
Fisher	15.4	20.1	9.8	26.0	15.7
Chalias ***	5.6	19.3	3.1	1.1	7.5
Chandos †	4.7	3.7	9.5	4.1	5.6
Smiths	3.2	4.1	3.9	2.0	3.5
Washers	3.3	2.4	4.4	4.4	3.4
Jaggerairoos ††	3.3	3.0	2.4	.9	3.0
Patchies §	2.7	0.0	0.0	6.2	1.8
Tom-Tom Beaters	1.0	1.3	3.1	1.8	1.6
Potters	1.0	.7	.9	1.1	.9
Others ‡	3.2	3.2	2.8	2.1	2.7
Total Number	189,761	67,891	76,205	18,988	352,845

\* Non-Sinhalese excluded here.

\*\* Goyigama

\*\*\* Salāgama

† Durāva

†† Wāhumpēra

§ Batgam

‡ Including Hunus, Panna, Hinnā, Oll, Palli, Kinnera, Pallereyas, Demala Gattaras, Hannāli and Vannias

colonial times. Although the Karāva, Durāva and the Salāgama trace their descent from people of superior, *i.e.*, Kṣatriya or Brahmin, status, there is no doubt but that the Salāgama and Durāva were quite low in the hierarchy of the seventeenth century. While the Karāva were never low, judging from the available accounts, today their "inferiority" to the Goyigama is, in general attitudes, very slight indeed. These changes have not come through ideological repudiation of the caste system and the caste structuring; endogamy and communalistic loyalty is strong. *Vertical social distance* has been reduced vastly more than has social distance in the sense of communal separateness. The process through which this has come about relates to the expansion of economic opportunity in the coastal belt and to the fact that these castes were relatively concentrated in particular localities. The economic rise of members of these castes, coupled with a keen sense of communal solidarity and, at the local level, weight of numbers, resulted in a breakdown of symbolic evidences of inferiority. This has been gradually reflected in a heightened esteem position for the three castes generally.

## THE COASTAL BELT

The Karāva, although adjacent to Goyigama and other villages the full length of the coast, have maintained a surprisingly distinct village life. Fishing is as much a way of life as is agriculture and except for dependence upon nearby towns and cities, the Karāva villager lives in almost complete isolation from the others. In some areas, particularly in the Negombo and Colombo districts, even inter-caste participation in the temple does not exist. The Roman Catholic Church has been a potent factor in enhancing the cohesiveness of many fishing villages and concomitantly isolating them from the participation with neighboring peoples who are predominantly Buddhist. Where the Roman Catholic fishermen are in close relationship to Buddhists, the latter are usually unconverted fishermen of a neighboring village, of identical caste membership and status.

The rise of the Salāgama was instigated by the favors of colonial governments, rewarding their services in cinnamon production. Their ability to command respect also rested in factors other than economic power. The Salāgama are perhaps the most geographically concentrated caste of any size in Ceylon. As the Census of 1824 indicates, about half of them were living in the Galle District, where they accounted for nearly a fifth of the Sinhalese population. This does not do justice to the situation. The majority of these are today living in a small area centered upon the town of Balapitiya, and in the Balapitiya area they are the vast majority of the inhabitants in all occupations and in all walks of life. They have a tradition of aggressiveness coupled with strong caste pride and economic power. No local or peripheral peasant of higher caste could, if he wished, subject them to subservience.

For the Durāva the status position is lower and with them, too, economic power is less; concentration in settlement is not so pronounced, and caste pride and cohesiveness is less evident. Unlike the Karāva and Salāgama, caste status is not freely proclaimed. In some villages the old etiquette of seating is preserved in their relations with the Goyigama. Their status is, however, far above most other small castes and they are frequently included in that vague

generalization, "the good castes." Many of them are landless laborers "tapping" the coconut trees on a wage basis, while others are simple village peasants and shopkeepers.

The fact that these important minority castes, especially the Karāva and Salāgama, are adjacent to the urban coastal belt is of course influential in the reduction of caste symbolism and hierarchical arrangement. Although even Ceylonese urbanites participate but slightly in the world of secondary groups, there is sufficient westernization, mobility and concentration of population to prevent effective controls of a discriminatory caste nature. The juxtaposition of many related and unrelated conditions of the coastal fringe has brought to a minimum discriminations traditionally associated with caste, differential forms of etiquette, and symbols of inferiority and superiority. To jump from this fact to the conclusion that a rough equality of major coastal status groups is tantamount to the disintegration of the caste structure would be wholly unjustified.

Caste differentiation in this area of rapid transition dramatically illustrates the separateness of communalism from hierarchical and discriminatory elements in caste relations. Although analytically this distinction can always be made, the Low Country provides the classic example of the separation of the two phenomena. The hierarchical aspects of caste always abet communalistic differentiation and solidarity, but in the coastal belt the community of caste has survived the reduction of superior-inferior relations. The old order of caste goodness is accepted, but it is more frequently challenged, and both symbolically and in power relationships its expression is minimized. What is left of caste when the power relationship and symbols of status pass away?

It has been observed that the ecologic separateness of caste groups occurs within and between the towns and villages. To a limited extent this segregation is carried over into the neighborhoods of the larger cities. The fishing villages are distinct and homogeneous by caste. The Salāgama are concentrated in a specific town and village district. The Goyigama and other castes live in their homogeneous, or ecologically differentiated, villages abutting the Karāva and Salāgama nearer the coast. Most of the towns and all of the cities are mixed by caste and by infusions of non-



Sinhalese. In most there is a degree of ecologic separateness and in some this is pronounced. Throughout the region historic and occupational factors have conspired to make the locality of family living a caste locality. Physical adjacency has not produced caste, but it has enhanced the significance of its boundaries in social interaction. Nor should the impression be given that locality loyalty and locality participation have had a partitioning effect among the castes. It is true that the village is usually highly interrelated, but every villager has many family connections with nearby villages of the same caste. With family connections there flow the loyalties and the interaction which does much to make the caste lines themselves meaningful. Status differences within the caste are inter-village in their definition; egalitarian segregation has produced cohesive villages but has in no way sublimated or suppressed inter-locality caste connections or esprit-de-corps.

To the contrary, given the inter-village bonds of kinship and common caste traditions, the homogeneity of the locality group has been a potent factor in maintaining caste communalism.

*Class in Caste in a "Fishing Village."* The introduction of urban and business occupations into castes once homogeneous by occupation is unquestionably serving to solidify new types of class levels. In respect to personalized interaction between families these are more classes within castes than class systems in replacement of caste lines. In business and the world of men outside the home, caste lines have given way in favor of caste crossing occupational and professional affiliations. In the outskirts of the cities and towns particularly the caste homogeneous village is becoming increasingly differentiated by occupational and class status positions. A typical Karāva "village," actually a ward of a small coastal city exemplifies this type of development.

Karavella, ward of the city, was in historic times a fishing village several miles from a growing bazaar and carpentry craft center. With the increasing importance of the town, Karavella in recent years was incorporated into the legal limits of the present city, its village headman remaining but as both headman and urban government official. Although formally an urban ward the village has remained homogeneous in caste and in all social respects a local community in its own right, its members attending the village tem-

ple, or the Catholic church, shopping at the small village bazaar section and attending entertainments or meetings in its own community center, and sending their children to "village" schools. In employment the "village" is not self-sufficient, although the majority of its wage earners work within its boundaries. Practically all of the households have direct roots in the village, going back many generations.

That Karavella was, a few generations ago, little more than a fishing settlement there is no doubt, but today only one-fourth of its households depend directly or indirectly (*e.g.*, fish vendors, etc.) on the sea. On the other hand, half of the family heads are skilled craftsmen, practically all carpenters, and a fifth are white collar, business and professional people. This transformation is recent. Although only a fourth of the household heads today are fishermen, three-fifths had fathers who were fishermen. The gradual movement from the sea is evident in the present occupational layers. Nearly nine-tenths of the fishermen had fishermen fathers; two-thirds of the craftsmen, and not one of the topmost class, came from fishing homes. The movement from the sea upward on the social ladder has occurred among the elite of Karavella, but it is several generations old. The present craftsmen are in that social stratum midway in the rise to white collar status.

All members of each occupational layer are of the same caste, and nearly all trace their origins to the village's original fishing folk. The unfolding generations have brought along with occupational change a threefold class structure apparent in ecological patterns and in social interaction. Ecologically Karavella is a village of layers. Three almost clearly defined strata run parallel to the sea, reflecting and symbolizing the growth of urban class differences. Along the beach are to be found only the poverty-stricken cadjan huts of actual fishing folk. Their inland neighbors are predominantly skilled craftsmen living in more commodious cadjan huts or in mud-walled and thatched roof structures. Still more distant from the sea, and close to a main thoroughfare, are the well-kept tile roof houses of the small shopkeepers, net owners and white collar workers.

Kinship in the village knows no ecological boundaries. Those of the tile roofs freely admit their bonds with the fishermen, but in



daily interaction the two live in separate worlds. Between carpenters and fisher folk the distinctions are less pronounced, and not a few of the fishermen's sons are apprenticed to brothers or cousins who have left the sea. Although the first line of friendly daily intercourse is with those of like occupation, the two groups have much of the village world in common. More distinct are the social lines between craftsmen and those of the white collar, for this is a boundary between the world of "peasants" and that of urbanites. Its barriers are symbolized by trousers and shoes and English education. The topmost class has life within itself and with like persons in the nearby town. Their contacts with the fishing folk are casual although, in times of hardship, charitable. Significant evidence of the class hierarchy is to be observed in the tendency of each level to marry within itself. Eighty-five per cent of the fishermen had married the daughters of fishermen. In contrast, not one of the "white collar" class had married a fisherman's daughter, and only 27 per cent of the craftsmen's wives were from fishing families.

At all levels in village economy caste consciousness is found. Intercaste marriage is as widely repudiated as in the interior peasant villages of the Low Country, although less violently so. No case of actual intercaste marriage in Karavella could be found. The village rich have not repudiated their own; quite to the contrary, several of them are well known as champions of programs for aid to fishermen. The poor are envious of the rich relations, but find in them living evidence that the caste blood has what it takes to make good. Only in so far as the "upper class" man has been drawn into an intercaste world has *caste* solidarity diminished, and little of this touches affairs of family and home.

*Religion.* Frequently the Roman Catholicism of the Karāva has limited community participation not only in the religious sphere but in all those respects in which the Church embraces the social life of its members. Solidarity is built from within through church associations and symbols, which at the same time limit social participation. It is true that the solidarity of the Catholic Karāva is such that it does not embrace the Buddhist brothers and has, in effect, divided the caste into two endogamic groups. Since the marriages are usually within the general locality of residence, this schism is more theoretical than real. Where villages are divided in



their faith, it is significant that, apart from marriage and the tendency for kinship groups to cluster in neighborhoods, the relations of the fishermen of different faith are no different from those worshipping the same Lord. Conversion to the symbolism of Roman Catholic Christianity is all that would be necessary to break every barrier between the Buddhist and the Christian fisherman.

Sectarianism within Buddhism has had a more general differentiating influence, in spite of the fact that every *vihāre* is open to every Buddhist. Buddhist sectarianism is fundamentally a caste phenomenon arising from the caste exclusiveness of priestly orders. As has been observed in Chapter 2, even subsectarianism has developed where an important sect has been opened to several castes. A temple established by *Karāva*, whether in town or village, will almost invariably have a *Karāva* as a priestly incumbent. A temple established by *Goyigama* will invariably have a *Goyigama* incumbent. The same is true for *Durāva* and others. In a religion having a plethora of temples, frequently with several available within or in walking distance from any village, sectarianism in the priesthood is inevitably reflected in some caste differentiation in the worshippers. All things being equal, the *Karāva* Buddhist tends toward a temple of appropriate subsect, as does the *Salāgama* and the *Durāva*. The social relations of the temple are within the caste, the priestly neophytes are from the caste, and the priestly utterances are sometimes not fully emancipated from caste considerations.

To be sure, only in areas of solid caste homogeneity is the group of worship fully homogeneous. In most localities there is no complete adherence to sectarian loyalties. Frequently the recognized piety of a particular priest will supersede caste sectarianism. Physical convenience as well prevents any complete religious differentiation. No *Karāva*, *Salāgama* or *Durāva* is unwelcome in a *vihāre* of the *Siyam Nikāya*, nor is a *Goyigama* unwelcome in any *Amurapura* or *Rāmanya* temple. The basic drive toward differentiation has its roots in communalism, primarily as this is mediated through caste exclusiveness in the *Sangha*.

The teachings of the temple are not directed toward caste antagonisms or differentiation, but there is no doubt of a wide range in the attitudes of the priests in regard to the propriety of communal distinctions. If generalization can be made, it should place the

priest as a humane upholder of the *status quo*. There are priests, and even village priests, strong in their denunciation of caste, but there are also more who accept it as the order of society, and some who actively stimulate caste separateness and the preservation of the ancient symbols of status.<sup>3</sup> In more than a few Low Country communities caste sentiment is enlivened by the village Bhikkhu, not in his role as an interpreter of the Lord Buddha, but as a man of stature who has not escaped personally the prejudices of his society and the supporting influences of priestly sectarianism. It is not uncommon to find devout and democratically minded Buddhist laymen voicing a fear that "the Bhikkhus are more caste-minded than the villagers." For the erudite priests, of whom there are a considerable number, the tendency to repudiate caste discrimination and communalism is general. Seldom is there a recognition that caste and caste solidarity have some of their roots in the cherished principles of endogamy. There is a fairly widespread disinclination to approve caste hierarchy, but no movement in opposition to caste communalism. In the Low Country, the effect of Buddhism upon caste differentiation is clearly positive, through sectarian organization and conservative village priests rather than through doctrinal positions.

*Education.* Ceylonese schools, like the vihāres, are organized without reference to caste, and compulsory attendance laws apply equally. In the classroom and on the playing field children mix freely. Most schools tolerate no badges of caste in the form of clothing, and the very word is tabu in school affairs. But, like the vihāre, the principle of castelessness is both fortuitously and consciously vitiated in some degree for many Low Country schools.

It would appear that virtual segregated education arises through residential neighborhoods in villages and village areas. It is im-

<sup>3</sup> Thus an earnest village Bhikkhu near Tangalla, an area of unrest in respect to the still disfavored Beravāyā, is strong in his insistence that caste violence is wrong but that the castes should be maintained as endogamous communal groups. While unsure as to the rightness of the local tabu upon banian wearing by Beravāyō, he proposed that, to avoid trouble, they be permitted the banian but be obliged to wear a badge signifying their status. Another instance might be cited in which, during a piti ceremony involving priests of several sects, a Goyigama (Siyam Nikāya) delegated the ceremonial cutting of the palm flower to his colleague of Durāva (Amurapura sect) caste. This oblique reference to the traditional caste occupation of the Durāva (extracting toddy from the palm flower) could scarcely pass unnoticed by the company.



probable that many schools are strictly homogeneous in caste, although the majority of pupils are often of a single caste. Pains-taking and practically impossible researches would be required to ascertain the degree to which children's playgroups and cliques are organized with some reference to caste. It is probable that this type of cliquishness comes mainly in adolescence, except where status is widely variant. It is well known that in some schools childish jibing is practiced in which caste references are made. A flare of anger is frequently articulated in caste derogatory terms. More significantly, since school loyalties tend to follow the neighborhood, in so doing they reflect local caste attitudes. By and large, school children among themselves mix freely, and caste limitations upon this principle are generally circumstantial rather than by design. In the higher schools, mainly of the boarding variety, caste differences among pupils have little significance. In those higher schools which are coeducational the sexes are largely separated in their activities, and activities which in the West are associated with courtship are tabu.

More serious is the introduction of caste criteria in the selection of teachers. Very generally the teacher in the village school is a representative of the numerically dominant caste, unless that caste is distinctly inferior in status, *i.e.*, Vahumpura, Beravā, and such instances would be few. In "assisted schools" (private schools financially assisted by government) this is frequently an important criterion for appointment. Generally, teachers are employed from among local applicants in so far as this is possible. Where teachers are brought from the outside, it is usual for the headmaster to assure himself of the "respectability" of the newcomer's caste. If the area is solidly of a single caste, then a teacher of the same community will be sought. Such distinctions have no legal status whatsoever and are, in fact, in opposition to avowed government policy. They are nonetheless prevalent. Evidence that they result in supporting caste solidarity is equivocal. Curiously enough, children appear to be more sensitive to the caste of the teacher than to that of their playmates, no doubt in reflection of parental comments. In those rare instances where the teacher is known, or rather found out, to be of lower caste than his pupil majority, his lot is an unhappy one. This is more a product of hier-



archical than communal difference. There is ample evidence that even in the larger institutions of boarding school type caste issues are important bases of staff cliques, and are relevant in staff appointments. A few secondary schools are well known as being dominated by particular castes, and this in turn is reflected in selectivity in staffing and even in enrollment.

Issues of caste are given some organizational expression in the schools, but not on any significant level as regards interpupil relationship, except in the sense that neighborhood and community homogeneity are reflected in school affairs. In opposition to this mild organizational support of the caste differentiations, the effects of education as such probably tend to break down caste feeling. This is true particularly of the discriminatory aspect of caste relationships, and is more pronounced in the English speaking institutions than at the lower grade vernacular level. The findings in one Low Country village strongly suggest that liberalism is increased by schooling.<sup>4</sup> There is no indication that such a liberalization in point of view goes very far to include unconcern over intercaste marriage, or to remove the recognition of propriety in the higher esteem position held by the Goyigama. Significant, too, is the fact that communal loyalties are most evidenced by the Salāgama and Karāva in a district (Balapitiya-Ambalangoda) having high educational standards and a relatively high level of educational attainment in the general population.

The school obviously has a mixed effect upon caste feeling and an effect which varies between communities and between schools, depending upon the community homogeneity, sentiments, hostilities, and the attitudes of the teachers themselves. Where localities are of one caste, the school as an organization simply reflects and enhances the differentiated character of life. Where localities are mixed, children of diverse castes are brought together on terms of friendliness and equality. Although caste distinctions are known, they are inoperative in most school situations. Exposure to the great secondary world of books is probably liberalizing, but many of the bulwarks of caste lie in concepts strongly defended in the educational process, *i.e.*, marriage, family and kinship concepts. Adverse effects upon caste communalism are probably less than is

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 175-178.

popularly supposed or might logically be inferred from the horizon broadening of education.

*Secondary Groups.* The social life of the villager and of the bulk of town dwellers has a particular perimeter defined by primary relationships. There is little participation in the secondary and special interest groups common even in rural areas in the West. Clubs and associations are maintained only by the educated professional persons and government servants. At this level caste difference is inconsequential; the businessman's club of the town will include Goyigama, Karāva and Durāva with no thought of discrimination in membership or usually in officers. It should be understood that such organizations are participated in by men only, except in the rare instances of family clubs. Although friendship cliques may tend to follow caste lines, the club or professional association is emancipated. Below the four dominant castes, club membership would take blood status into some account. There are professional people of other castes in the Low Country towns, and in some instances at least they have been "neglected" by members of the high class circle. This, of course, does not refer to metropolitan Colombo.

It should be recognized that we are speaking here of townsmen having had exposure to higher education, part of whom would have spent some years in England. In this social class close to the village and serving villagers, caste has the typical urban definition. It will remain a line within which marriages are arranged; it may be a line of political significance, favoritism in appointment, and of interfamily relations, but it is not a line of differentiation in the professional or the friendly relations in secondary and nonfamilial associations.

Nor are the clienteles of professional persons or merchants strongly influenced by caste considerations. Recognized competence or the better price are vastly more influential than the bonds of common caste. While in some instances kinship loyalty must be a factor in choice, differentiation in patronage is judged by the character of the service rendered. In merchandizing this is evident in the prosperous growth of Muslim shops catering almost exclusively to Sinhalese villagers. Small shopkeepers of local origin in homogeneous caste villages sometimes complain at the fickle-



ness of their village (caste) folk. While small shopping and the evening gossip at the tea-shop is carried on at a local and usually caste homogeneous level, town bazaar shopping is virtually without regard to caste lines.

Under exceptional circumstances caste can and does play a role in the establishment of professional clienteles. This is seldom the case among the major castes. In the lower groups it is understandable that status discrimination leads to support of a professional man of low birth status. A young Hēna lawyer, for instance, might depend upon business brought by persons of that and of lower castes. When he is firmly established and has a reputation for specific competence, his clientele may shift toward the moneyed and numerically important upper castes. Caste loyalties seldom have sufficient strength to overcome rational judgment in matters directly significant to the health or economic well being of the individual. This is as true at the village as at the urban and metropolitan level.

Throughout the Low Country new types of relationships and new situations have arisen with the introduction of trade, professions, and institutional contacts foreign to the society in which caste had its roots. In the majority of these contexts caste traditions and solidarities have counted for little. The government hospital and its physicians take no account of caste in reference to the patients; the professional man has the patronage of every caste; the shopkeeper in the bazaar gains trade by service and price more than by caste loyalty; the school usually makes no distinctions in the admission of pupils. In part these reflect ideological change, in part the establishment of contexts incompatible with the very nature of caste. It would be easy to infer from this discussion that the transitions of caste in the coastal country are the transitions of disorganization. In the sense of hierarchical discrimination there is much to recommend such a conclusion, but in the sense of communal differentiation, the introduction of new institutions has not been wholly disruptive.

*Politics.* It is paradoxical that universal adult suffrage has provided a vehicle for intercaste hostility and stimulus to intracaste solidarity. Second only to endogamy, caste finds meaning in political behavior. The political significance of caste is both complex and



variable by regions and districts of the country. Where caste is presumably most liberalized, on the coastal belt, its significance is the sharpest. The phenomenon of the "caste vote" is extremely important in parliamentary elections. In some localities it is of determinative importance, elsewhere any election prognosis must take into account the three variables of caste, merit, and leftness. The weighting given each variable depends partly upon local differences, but mainly upon the particular combinations of these traits which the individual candidates possess, and their local appropriateness.

It might be expected that political protest movements would be advanced and supported by "depressed castes." To a certain extent this is true. As a decisive factor in politics it is relatively unimportant, for the castes suffering discrimination are small and generally without political leadership from their own numbers. The protest movements are very frequently subscribed to by the discriminated-against Beravā, but the leadership does not reside with them. For the Low Country generally, the radicalism of the low caste is not a determining factor. The most significant political manifestations of caste here arise in relationships between the dominant castes themselves, and are differently manifest in different areas.

The politics of the Low Country are profoundly important, for here in the most urbanized and feudally emancipated districts the "left" movements have prospered.<sup>5</sup> The "left" is strictly communist, for there is no opposition party standing between the moderate anticommunist government and the various Marxist organizations. Apart from minor schisms, there are three major parties in Ceylon: the Government party (U.N.P.), the Trotskyist Leninist Party (Sama Samaj), and the Communist Party (Stalinist). At the present juncture nearly every Member of Parliament from coastal districts south of Colombo is either a member of one or the other of the communist organizations or is supported by them. While it

<sup>5</sup> The current government of Ceylon, a coalition of political groups under the title of United National Party, is essentially a moderate socialistic government dominated by a landed, and in part merchant, aristocracy of wealth and blood. It is strongly anticommunist, although the Communist parties are legally recognized and have representatives in Parliament. Since the text was written, two non-Communist parties have appeared as partial splits within the U.N.P. Neither of these at this point is capable of setting up a new government, but one will draw strong support from the Goyigama caste vote.

is not to be argued that this is fundamentally due to caste; caste is one significant element in the alignment. In addition to the communist vote, in some areas caste is a political fact apart from party matters.

As a factor in the "left" vote, caste is significant mainly at the level of local leadership. Whether rightly or wrongly, there is a widespread feeling among leading urban Karāva and Salāgama men that the U.N.P., the present government, is a Goyigama-dominated clique. This conviction is sufficiently widespread to permit the appellation of "Uncle Nephew Party" to the U.N.P. At the grass roots the identification of the U.N.P. as a Goyigama "club" is not widespread, although the politically illiterate villager knows that the majority of Goyigama villagers are solid supporters of the *status quo*. The "left" vote is highly concentrated in the narrow belt along the coast in which the non-Goyigama high castes are dominant. The interior villages, dominated by Goyigama, contribute most of the U.N.P. support in otherwise predominately "left" coastal election districts. Very few agricultural peasant areas, *i.e.*, wholly inland village districts, are "left."

It is of course possible that the conformity of caste distribution with political party support is coincidental and the product of greater urbanization in the coastal region. Unquestionably coastal urbanism is a contributing factor in the political schism, but to interpret this as having much relevance for the rank and file of voters is to overrate the political sense of the populace. If one thing is certain, the vast and overwhelming majority of voters, "left" or "right," have no conception of political ideology nor of party politics. Individuals, not parties or representatives of ideologies or proponents of programs, are voted for in parliamentary elections. The most precise ideological analysis to be found among rank and file "left" voters is that "so-and-so wants to help the poor man" while "thus-and-so is one of those extravagant Colombo men." Many voters do not know the name of the party behind the candidate they support. No villager, and very few townsmen, has ever heard of Marx, Lenin or Trotsky. Few, practically none, have heard of world revolution. Revolution is farthest from the thoughts and hopes of the rank and file leftist; the suggestion that his vote might have such an implication is shocking to the Sinhalese vil-



lage leftist. Nor has he any conception of the difference between a leader put forward by the Soviet-linked C.P. and one supported by the Trotskyist L.S.S.P. (Sama Samaj). Actually, there is a tendency to look upon all "left" candidates as Sama Samaj, a title which means "Brotherhood"—about as far as any "left" candidate goes on ideological levels within earshot of the voter.

Political battles are nonideological at the village and town level. The appeal of the "left" is strictly one of protest, and it is only through the communist camps that the common man can articulate his dissatisfaction politically. What the Government party has not done for the poor man the "left" candidates promise to do, and in the voter's eyes party politics and ideological cleavages are as simple as that.<sup>6</sup>

The ideological convictions of the "left" party leaders are impossible to ascertain; that they are informed there is no doubt. Some are unquestionably sincere and doctrinaire Stalinists and Trotskyists, some unquestionably are not. Some gain office as "Independents," refusing a communist label but receiving organized communist support. Almost invariably their support is predominately non-Goyigama. Very low caste minorities of the interior frequently support the "left" partially as a caste protest.

The leftness of Karāva and Salāgama political leadership in these districts rests in two closely related phenomena; the first is their conviction that the U.N.P. is a Goyigama club. The Karāva and Salāgama are hence out-groups in their own eyes, and they are aggressive out-groups. Among some of their leading business and professional men there is a feeling that those of their caste who have accepted important political roles in the Government party are stooges of that party, given high titles in an effort to swing the Karāva or Salāgama caste vote, and for the use of their money. The second force pushing non-Goyigama political aspirants to the "left" is a recognition that there is a considerable caste vote in every area and in every caste. The conservative Karāva thus would lose all protest votes in his own caste and fail to gain conservative

<sup>6</sup> The principal ideological appeal of the "right," however, is a little different. Here the appeal to conservatism is heavily based upon a defense of Buddhism. The conservative inland villager opposes the "left" on an ideological level because of his conviction that it is anti-Buddhist. It may be taken by implication that a considerable share of the communist vote is Catholic.



votes from the Goyigama, assuming a conservative Goyigama opponent. A *left* Karāva could hold his caste vote and pick up both economic-protest Goyigama and virtually all caste protest votes. It should be understood that infinite complexities enter into every election situation, but very frequently an anti-U.N.P. position for the Karāva politician is both emotionally satisfying and politically expedient. Under some election conditions it is clear that the candidate's personal stature could secure his election regardless of his political position.<sup>7</sup> Caste solidarity in voting cannot be depended upon in all circumstances, but it is an election factor no intelligent politician overlooks. In some circumstances it becomes the dominant campaign issue.

The communal vote is most sharply evidenced in the Balapitiya-Ambalangoda electoral district, one of the few districts for which the electoral district Delimitation Commission admitted taking caste factors into account. This district comprises the area centering upon the town of Balapitiya and another area upon the adjacent town of Ambalangoda. The former is almost entirely Salāgama, the latter almost entirely Karāva. The Commission, which received petitions from minority castes in many parts of the island to recognize their areas of concentration and provide appropriate boundaries giving them a district majority, in this instance reluctantly conceded that caste was indeed an inescapable basis of political cleavage. The explanation and description of its action are given by the Commission itself, with typical governmental restraint on matters relating to caste.<sup>8</sup>

In one area, consisting broadly of the Ambalangoda-Balapitiya electoral district (no. 33 in the Southern Province), although it was impossible to obtain numbers which were at all reliable, we were satisfied of the existence of more than one caste group giving rise in effect to unusually intense communal tension at the time of the election. We are aware that this tension has arisen at most, if not all, elections and that on one occasion it led to violence to a candidate. No completely effective method of nullifying this communal tension was suggested to us by witnesses, nor were we able to devise one.

<sup>7</sup> Thus it would be generally agreed that a leading C.P. Member of Parliament from the Southern Province who is of Goyigama caste could be elected as easily whether his politics were fascist, socialist, capitalist-democratic or nil.

<sup>8</sup> Report of The First Delimitation Commission, Sept. 1946 (74), pp. 12-13.

Witnesses, in the main, were much more concerned with the preservation and enhancement of the opportunities of their particular groups, and could only suggest, as a means of reducing tension, isolation of the groups, giving representation to each. . . . After long and anxious consideration, we have come to the conclusion that some measure of alleviation would be achieved if, as far as possible, the full strength of the conflicting groups were included in the same electoral district. This would, at any rate, avoid to some extent the sense of frustration which a member of a group may feel by being cut off from his fellows by an artificial act of delimitation. Feeling, concentrated and sharply focussed, giving rise to the thought, "But for you the day is mine," which a candidate may harbour against his opponent in a single-member constituency, will tend to become dispersed in a multi-member constituency, where there must be more than two candidates before a contest can take place.

In accordance with this reasoning, the Balapitiya-Ambalangoda electoral district is one, but elects two members to Parliament. There is no instance in the short period of independent Ceylon in which the successful candidates have not won on an almost strictly caste basis, although one antigovernment candidate, the child of a mixed caste marriage, managed to secure the support of both groups.

It can be estimated that within the electoral district the Karāva and Salāgama constitute 75 to 80 per cent of the population in about equal numbers. The remaining 20 per cent are predominately Goyigama, with Vahumpura as the next largest minority. The possibility of a Goyigama achieving a parliamentary seat in the district is remote, but nonetheless they could carry an important minority balance position into every election. This balance is rendered ineffective by the fact that both the Karāva and Salāgama are predominately "left" and their candidates are "left," while the Goyigama tend to waste their votes on U.N.P. candidates. The effective leadership of the area is "left," drawn to this position as the result of aggressive caste feeling against a Government party identified with the Goyigama. There is no political, party, or ideological difference between Salāgama and Karāva, nor is there much difference in economic position. The opposition between them is strictly caste, their joint opposition to the U.N.P. is principally caste. The rational evaluation of candidates in



variably takes place within this framework, in so far as it takes place at all.

To be sure, the politics of this district are less simple than this. The additional complications are quite relevant to intercaste hostility. Thus the division of Salāgama into two subcastes of different status brings some intricate cadenzas into the more encompassing caste theme. Each supports its caste candidate up to, but not including, the point at which a Karāva may achieve office through a Salāgama split. Election contests in Balapitiya-Ambalangoda are thrilling affairs, sometimes involving violence and at least suspected corruption, but of not the slightest concern is the content of the contestant's oratory so long as it attacks the Colombo clique.

Elsewhere political caste cohesiveness is less evident. Partially this is true because nowhere else is there such concentration of two aggressive caste groups. Throughout the Low Country parliamentary elections are always fought with reference to caste. In some instances caste solidarity is dissolved in the face of issues of personal integrity or influence, or through overcoming caste inappropriateness by appeal to economic and caste protest groups. Nowhere is caste irrelevant, although local conditions may render it subsidiary to other factors. Local government is on an elective basis in the towns and cities. Here the caste issue may or may not be a determining factor. Generally it is less important than in parliamentary elections. Unlike those contests, election to the municipal council is more closely dependent upon the integrity of a candidate. Caste loyalty could send a demagogue to a distant parliament, but it would be less likely to turn the local purse-strings over to one whose only qualifications were his blood and family name. Towns and cities of the coastal region are, with few exceptions, small, and the office seekers well known. The standards of judgment applied are more often similar to those applied in the selection of professional consultants than in the election of parliamentary representatives.

Caste membership is a perfectly definite social phenomenon; caste as a factor in social action is ubiquitous but chimerical, and frequently seen only as one gets below the surface of social relationships. Seldom is it expressed in such purity as in the Salāgama



Karāva conflict in the political arena, but never is it wholly without meaning for social differentiation. The Low Country Sinhalese townsman on the coast is not consciously concerned with caste issues; the lines of social participation and friendly association are mainly class lines. But the lines of kinship loyalty are always within the caste, and the caste boundaries are always potential lines of schism for primary group relationships, politics and religion. Favoritism in appointments, as illustrated in the schools, is a favoritism by caste more than by kinship. The heritage of caste in the coastal belt is not in the institutionalization of an ancient power hierarchy, nor is it fully substituted for by economic class differentiation. Caste is simply another and complementary system of differentiation, usually imperfect from the standpoint of complete coverage of the individual's social life and loyalties, but never without differentiating significance in certain spheres of life and a competitor for power in others.

#### INTERIOR LOW COUNTRY

To a certain extent the division of the Low Country into the coastal belt of towns and villages and the interior has been exaggerated. The interior villages look to the coastal towns as their urban centers. Along the coast the traffic arteries are from north to south, punctuated frequently by lanes and roadways leading from the interior countryside to the coastal centers. At many points along the coast, villages of cultivators (Goyigama, Durāva, Hinnā, Beravā, Vahumpura and others) extend down to the seaside coconut groves of the Karāva fishermen, or to the outskirts of the larger towns. Beyond even this semiurbanized fringe of villages, the Low Country extends for many miles over the coastal plains and hills which jut out from the south central highlands in some places nearly to the sea. This is a land where the Goyigama is dominant. There are, however, scattered villages and subvillages of Durāva, Beravā, Baḍahāla (Potters), Vahumpura, and, in some limited localities, Hinnāvō, Demala-gattara and others. Here intercaste relations are quite different from those among the coastal high castes.

The interior village is usually a caste homogeneous village sur-

rounded by its paddy fields. Community life is exclusively within the caste and, to a large extent, within the village. Interfamily relations exist always with nearby villages of the same caste; other types of affairs lead to the inland or coastal towns in which relationships are of a transitory and usually a business character. Some Goyigama villages have adjacent "hamlets" or village sectors occupied by lower castes. Where this is true the daily social activities of the village are in effect those of two separate communities. Feudal service relationships have almost disappeared, household visiting between castes is rare, but when done for some specific purpose the traditional etiquette of seating and salutation is followed and social distance fully maintained. Casual contact in the village lanes calls for deferential behavior only in respect to certain castes, notably the Beravā. Discrimination in interaction is seldom pronounced between interior Durāva and Goyigama.

#### *Predominance of Goyigama*

Exceptions to communal separateness are to be found in school and in temple. With a preponderate Goyigama population the temples are mostly Siyam Nikāya, and here the other castes usually worship freely. Often at services some informal segregation is evident without formal schism or rules of relationship. Except where rules of dress are enforced upon the Beravāyā, and usually him alone, the outsider would scarcely be aware of the phenomenon of caste in the temple. The village school accepts the children of all castes and all play and study usually in harmony. Here as in other spheres of behavior it is usually the Beravāyā in reference to whom exception must be made in some localities. Seldom will there be more than a sprinkling of low caste children in the school.

The communal separateness of the caste groups outside the school and temple is also associated with recognized status differences even where the physical symbols of distance have fallen into disuse. The superiority in the attitudes of the Goyigama is clear and usually unchallenged. That the recognition of hierarchical position is not always so evident in action is due more to the fact of communal separateness than to any weakening of the Goyigama's claim to supremacy. It is to be seen first of all in his



monopoly of local positions and offices of power, and secondly, in relationships with the Beravā and other low castes.

Brave indeed would be the low caste villager who would enter a contest for local office against a Goyigama. Usually, except in large, solidly low caste areas, village headmen are Goyigama, village committeemen are Goyigama, the Vel Vidāna (cultivation officer) is Goyigama, the postmaster is Goyigama, if there is a post office, and the schoolmasters are Goyigama. This is typically the case even in villages or groups of villages where the Goyigama is in fact a minority. So long as the leadership prerogatives of the Goyigama are preserved and so long as the inviolability of the household is maintained and moderately respectful etiquette observed, the restrictions of caste are few and further symbols of social distance seldom practiced. That the majority of adult village Goyigama regrets the passing of the old order and the old restrictions upon dress and behavior there is no doubt. With a gesture more of helplessness than of tolerance, the high caste villager asks, "What can we do about it?"

#### *Caste in an Interior Village*

Kalugama is a predominately Goyigama village a few miles inland from the coastal city of Kalutara. Situated in the rubber producing area, it is more prosperous than many others for, in addition to the paddy and garden lands, many of the families own small plots of rubber, while the poorer ones supplement their agricultural incomes by labor in the nearby estates. Kalugama is relatively prosperous and it is large. Within the village are four hundred households, although the village is so differentiated by neighborhoods and by rubber and paddy fields that it is more a collection of tiny villages than a single large one.

With the exception of forty families of potters (Baḍahāla) and the inevitable village dhoby (Hēna), of which there are two, all the households in Kalugama are Goyigama. As is general in the Low Country, the Goyigama are not divided into subcastes, although mild status gradients are present among the Gē. These are without behavioral significance in the daily affairs of life, conditioning neither family friendships nor economic opportunity. Not castelike in their quality, they involve mere snobbery among



a few households in each of two Gē whose names signify scribelike status in ancient times. The majority of the village belongs to diverse Gē, nearly a hundred different ones, between whom no feelings of superiority or inferiority exist, and among whom the Gē means little. The potters, too, have their Gē, but these mean less even than for the Goyigama. Status within each caste is practically determined by acquired position or the acquired positions of relatives in recent times.

The potters of Kalugama are not merely "potters" by caste; potting is their source of livelihood today as it has been for centuries. The Dutch Tombas attest the antiquity of their trade in this village. Nor have they entered into the brick and tile industry which some of the Goyigama villagers have found profitable, and which to others provides a source of regular wage employment. Although one or two prosperous families among them own small paddy acreages, these are let out on share rent to Goyigama cultivators. Of the Baḍahāla, the Goyigama generally agree "they are hopeless at cultivation." The potters, on the other hand, insist, as is quite true, that they have little land, and further that their normal trade would suffer if they attempted to learn cultivation. Among the forty families of Baḍahāla caste in the village everyone is dependent upon potting, a craft to which each adolescent and adult household member contributes, with a keen regard for age and sex differences in the allocation of specialized roles. In recent years there has been little out-migration except for purposes of marriage. Sons are following fathers, and the not distant urban markets of the coast provide a steady and increasing demand for their products. The local industry is growing. Production is purely on a commercial basis. If Kalugama Goyigama wish pots, as they of course do, always they are paid for in accord with market price, usually in the medium of paddy.

Composing the village there are perhaps twenty distinct neighborhoods, frequently separated from others by lowland paddy fields or by stretches of rubber. In all but two of these areas the population is strictly Goyigama, except for the Hēna families living in the central bazaar area from which the entire composite of sub-village neighborhoods takes its name. (The bazaar is in fact a series of a dozen boutiques interspersed along the central lane with Goyi-

gama houses.) The potters live in their two neighborhoods, each bordering upon Goyigama households on at least one side. The neighborhood generally in Kalugama is socially self-contained, and in this the potters, with their additional bond of caste, offer no exception. Except for commercial transactions (there are no shops in the potters' neighborhoods), their lives are contained within their areas or cross the boundaries of the village into a neighboring one where people of their caste also reside. Except for a few neighborly Goyigama families, their extra-household social life is among themselves and with their kin in the nearby village. The secondary groups of village life, like the intimate associations, are distinct by caste, through disparity of interest as much as discrimination. The Rural Development Society with its predominately agricultural interests does not appeal to the potters, and while some belong to the cooperative societies they participate little. Obviously, leadership would invariably remain a Goyigama prerogative, but the potters would be welcome to attend if they were interested. In affairs of religion, every family in the village being Buddhist, the subtle influences of historic caste discrimination have a more obvious effect.

Until twenty years ago, Kalugama had a single temple in which both castes worshiped. It was, and is, dominated by the Goyigama, with a Siyam Nikāya priest, and located in a strictly Goyigama section of the village. But twenty years ago an event occurred which brought the issue of caste into temple activities. On a poya day (holy day) in 1930, one Baiya Baḍahālayā sat among friends of Goyigama caste on the *mandappa*, the high stage-like structure in the center of the preaching hall. When the priest entered he noted the situation, and immediately announced that the bana for the day would be "Bai Bana," *i.e.*, preaching for Baiya. His words are well remembered to the present day. Baiya was severely reprimanded by the priest for affrontery, and he and his people advised to remember their position in life. "For," said the Bhikkhu, "if you do such things in this birth, in your next birth you will surely be born into still lower caste." Upon that same day the potters of Kalugama began work on their own temple, for all knew that they had been publicly insulted as a body, and that the Buddha *Dhamma* is casteless. Although a number of the Goyigama leaders



felt badly over the incident, none dared take issue with the priest, and indeed, once the insult was given, it is unlikely that the course of events could have been changed. Four years later the potters, in a temple of their own construction, installed a priest of Amurapura Sect.

It might be thought that an incident so strongly felt would have brought a lasting enmity between the castes. In fact it had no such effect. The potters simply changed their place of worship, quietly, and incidentally, with the financial assistance of wealthy Goyigama grieved at the incident and sympathizing with their feelings. Nor did the lower caste completely withdraw from the religious life of the Goyigama community. Throughout they have attended intermittently at the now Goyigama temple, and at recent pirith ceremonies were to be found in number listening along with Goyigama men at the railing of the preaching hall. The chief priest is still no other than the one who gave the well remembered "Bai Bana" and the potters say unanimously, "If only he would ask alms of us, we would gladly give." But not being asked, the potters support only their own temple and the priest of their own caste.

One should not conclude from this that life in the village is completely equalitarian between these communal divisions. The Baḍahāla is still an inferior caste, although the symbols of their low birth and discriminations in behavior are inexact and mild. The last two decades have witnessed significant changes, both in the amount of friendly interaction and in the diminished symbols of social distance. Today no outsider can tell by the dress or manner of a man to which caste he belongs. Goyigama men of wealth or influence are addressed by potters as *Appuhamy*, a mild honorific which is maintained more by the personal status of the recipient than by a feeling of caste compulsion. Informal borrowing of money, particularly by potter from Goyigama, is not uncommon today, without interest and without formal acknowledgment of debt. Although the potters are never invited to Goyigama family festivities, the latter frequently attend similar events at the homes of potters. There is no doubt but that the lower caste family feels honored by such attention. However, at these events the visiting Goyigama is unmistakably and specially an honored visitor and some semblances of ancient tabus are maintained. Never would



the high caste guest eat food prepared in the low caste home, but he will certainly accept bottled drinks, alcoholic or otherwise, betel or perhaps a cheroot. As among themselves, it is the custom of the Goyigama to make a gift of money when he attends such a function, or alternatively, he may, without appearing, send the money upon receipt of an invitation.

The persistence of food tabus is also seen when an exorciser of Goyigama caste performs at a potter home, as he is always willing to do on the same terms as for others. A generation ago the potters had difficulty in getting such functionaries, not because they refused to perform, but because during their lengthy ceremonies no food suitably prepared could be provided. Today the exorciser will not eat food prepared in the potter home, but friendly Goyigama rise to the occasion, sending in food prepared in their caste clean kitchens.

Rarely does the lower caste call at the home of the higher, and indeed the reverse is equally true. When the Goyigama visits in the potter neighborhood, recognition of the honor is given in the humble manner of the host, his careful language, and in deferential seating, *e.g.*, a chair borrowed from a prosperous neighbor. If the potter goes to the home of the Goyigama he invariably receives friendly greeting, but under no circumstances sits on a chair or on the same bench or bed with his host or other of his host's caste. Many Goyigama homes have on the verandah a bench which, although used freely by Goyigama villagers in their evening chats, is explicitly the seat for a potter if for any reason he should pay a call.

There are no harsh nor galling discriminations in Kalugama. The potter buys his rice and curry stuff at the cooperative store or the privately owned Goyigama boutique, like his high caste fellows. In the school there is no breath of inequality nor even the subtle discouragement to study given low caste children in some localities. That there are no educated persons among the potters is due purely to the combination of disinterest and inadequate resources, although regarding the latter, several of them are moderately secure. The dhoby serves them in all the capacities in which he serves the Goyigama. And in the passage of twenty years there have been no serious disputes or antagonisms across caste lines, although

within each segment disputes and even violence are not uncommon. This is due more to the separation of the two castes in their daily living than to the passiveness of the potters. The line of Goyigama tolerance is rarely reached in the actual behavior of the lower caste, and that line itself is not clearly defined and is very flexible.

Ideologically the potters are more emancipated than the Goyigama only in respect to their convictions that all castes should have equal rights and opportunities. They are no less communal than the Goyigama in their loyalties and marriages. It is singular that in the village the Goyigama were, with a very few exceptions, supporters of the conservative U.N.P. in the parliamentary elections, while the potters unanimously supported an independent candidate, not a communist, but one popular with the "left." Superficially this might appear to evidence caste protest against the heavily Goyigama U.N.P.; actually the division is devoid of ideological significance, either caste or political. The Goyigama supported a Goyigama, and the potters gave their votes to a *Karāva*, not so much because he was of a minority caste, and certainly not because he was leftish, as because of his connections with the *Amurapura* sect and the influence of the local priest. The Goyigama vote, on the other hand, rested largely in communal loyalty, mediated and played upon by local persons of influence. The potters seek no relief from caste through political or other channels. They see little reason to protest. Only in the use of family names is there some tangible evidence that the symbols of caste are galling. There has been an increasing tendency to drop from the written name that portion which includes "*Baḍahāla*," as well as certain other telltale syllables. A dozen years ago a leading man of the community wrote his name as *Maggonā Baḍahālagē Liyanorisā Fernando*. Today he is simply *Maggonagē Liyanoris*. The deletions have removed his designation as a potter (*Baḍahāla*), they have removed the Portuguese addition *Fernando*, which happens to be distinctively non-Goyigama, and they have dopped the "*ā*" ending (which holds connotations of lowness), from an otherwise status-free given name. *Liyanoris* does not mind particularly that the *Kalugama* villagers, both Goyigama and *Baḍahālayō*, still refer to him as *Baḍahālayāgē Liyanorisā*, for that, he is free to admit,



is his name, but it pleases him before outsiders to be the indistinguishable Liyanoris whose ancestors were of Maggona. He is a potter and he does not complain at behaving like a potter, but in this modern age there is no reason why some outsider should put him down as "low caste."

### *Beravā Minority*

In localities having Beravāyās and, less frequently, ones having Demala-gattaras, Olī or Kinnera, the high caste has been less tolerant than in Kalugama. Real caste antipathy and coercion in the enforcement of symbols of distance are rare phenomena in Ceylon. Apart from occasional election fights, they are seen only in the relationships of Goyigama to the Beravā and Demala-gattara. Fortunately, both of these castes are extremely small in the Low Country. Beravāyās are scattered in small village clusters close to the economically dominant Goyigama. The Kinnera people, found in only one or two localities, are numerically insignificant but are treated as inferiors even by the Beravāyās, and subject to much the same discriminations by others. The Demala-gattara live in large homogeneous villages not far distant from the western coastal towns.<sup>9</sup> Although discriminatory relations are found locally in reference to the Vahumpura, bitter hostility and violence is usually limited to areas having Beravā or Demala-gattara. Troubles are sporadic, but the continued latent hostility is unmistakable, and among Beravā is clearly a manifestation of change from the old order. Hierarchy is preserved, but no longer is it accepted passively as the natural order of society. Numerically the Beravāyās have

<sup>9</sup> The Demala-gattara afford one of the more spectacular examples of caste conflict in Ceylon, but their very limited distribution does not justify their being treated as illustrative of Low Country conditions. Unlike the Beravā, the Demala-gattara are aggressive, particularly against the Goyigama. Supported by high concentration of their numbers in a contiguous group of large villages, they even bait their high caste neighbors with gross violations of caste propriety, and probably by theft and assault as well. There is no doubt of the fact that they are also subject to discrimination, and numerous incidents have occurred, a recent one being over the use of a schoolyard well by children of the caste. In one village, visited personally, the leading spokesman has attained his position of eminence as the result of having killed a Goyigama man who was allegedly in the process of rubbing cow dung on a wedding car in the Demala-gattara village. Having been acquitted of murder and freed, the killer brags of the exploit publicly, and has adopted an aggressive manner calculated to make other Goyigama neighbors either "put up or shut up."



little significance, and as a source of civil commotion their relationships with the higher castes are trivial in the perspective of national problems.

Apart from the large cities of the Low Country, the Beravā are concentrated in the Southern Province, and particularly in the general area of Tangalla and Matara. It will be noted that the Census of 1824 showed their greatest concentration in this area, at which time they were 3.5 per cent of the Sinhalese population. It is unlikely that the proportion is much different today, although subsequent emigration may have reduced it. While Beravā settlements are found too in the more westerly parts of the Low Country, their proportion in the total population is minute. On the edges of cities and in some villages symbolic marks of status are not used and caste tensions are slight. Generally, through the villages the intercaste position of the Beravā is essentially similar to that of the Tangalla-Matara area, although less sensational. Superior-inferior relationships are most clearly pronounced in reference to the caste in this district, and observations made here are most applicable there.

Typically the Beravā village is found close to the villages of the higher castes, often as a section of the high caste village. Sometimes it is isolated by as much as a few hundred yards of paddy field or coconuts, sometimes it is an indiscernible sector of the Goyigama or Durāva settlement. Where more than two or three Beravā households are found, residential segregation is always present. The larger settlements number from fifty to sixty families of this caste.

Economically, the Beravā are dependent chiefly upon agriculture, but usually are neither the owners nor tenants of paddy lands. Greatest revenue appears to be found in wage labor, particularly in the paddy fields, coconut holdings, and citronella fields, all of which are common in the inland areas between Matara and Tangalla. East of Tangalla small groups of Beravā are on a government colonization scheme, living under typical village conditions. In most settlements drumming at the temples is practiced by several families, as are devil dancing and other ceremonial activities. Although every temple has poya day drumming, and exorcising dances are regular occurrences, it is doubtful if the

majority of the caste follows the traditional arts. The traditional practices are almost entirely a monopoly of the caste, except that astrology is practiced by others. (A few families of higher status have taken up devil dancing on a professional basis, and other forms of exorcising are typically practiced by Goyigama.)

Throughout Ceylon there is a tendency for economic power to be correlated with caste status. The tendency, it is true, is frequently lacking in particular localities, and along the coast caste status itself has moved upward by the fact of economic power, as with the Karāva and Salāgama. The Beravāyō are generally poor, owning few lands in a country where land is the primary form of capital as well as a mark of status. There are exceptional individuals more prosperous than most of their high caste neighbors, but in general the Beravā are economically weak. Poverty is reflected in low educational attainments, for higher education usually requires attendance at a boarding school, entailing not only loss of youthful earning power but a drain on family resources which only the prosperous can stand. Very few Beravā youths are trained for the higher occupational or governmental posts. The town-dwelling Beravāyā is emancipated from many of the strictures of caste, but he is usually poor. Village Beravā are almost as low in economic worth and power as in caste status.

The low level of living and minimum of creature comforts in the Beravā village are not exclusive to them. Their living is no worse than considerable proportions of all castes, including the highest. While the Beravā are bitterly aware of poverty, economic inferiority is not the immediate source of local tensions. Caste tension is the result of the repudiation of traditional strictures having symbolic value, and that only. While these symbolic restrictions may seem to one outside the society to be trivial, they are not so to the villager.

*Battle of the Banian.* During the late 1940's caste tensions centering upon the Beravā reached such an active phase that they were given cognizance by both the Government and the press. The immediate cause lay in the opening of Southern Province schools to Beravā children who had previously not attended. Although in some areas children of this caste attended school freely, particularly in villages adjacent to the coastal towns, there had remained



a widespread disregard for compulsory attendance laws. This condition was less dependent upon the Beravāyā's disinterest in education than the high caste sentiment of the community and at times of the teachers and village authorities. Needless to observe, this boiling over of caste feeling has roots in traditions of social distance as well as in new ideological forces. Usually the high caste resentment was aroused less by the presence of the low caste children in the classroom, some of whom had always attended in most localities, than by their neglect of the current symbols of social distance and inferiority. Around these symbols, hostility and even violence are not new: the school became the current setting within which the battle for status symbols occurred.

Typical of these outbursts and illustrative, too, of solid democratic leadership, was a situation in a village near Tangalla in 1949.<sup>10</sup> In this mixed Goyigama and Beravā locality about fifty of the latter children suddenly appeared on their way to school wearing banians. In the assault which followed some of them had the banians torn from their backs. For several days following the episode hostilities were so pronounced that a Colombo newspaper referred to the situation as a "caste feud." Steps were being taken by the more conservative Goyigama to boycott the Beravā community. On the other side, a local government official supported police action as a means of preserving the peace and protecting the harassed low castes in the exercise of their rights.

This news story is particularly interesting, for it demonstrates the symbolic nature of the precipitating action, the role of youth in the introduction of the tabued symbol, and the active intervention on behalf of the low castes of a local official, himself of unimpeachable status within the highest caste. Most of the significant and complex forces relative to intercaste disturbance generally are implicit in this report.

The battle for the banyan reflects the age-old traditions of status differentiation in Ceylon as well as the symbolic basis for the Beravāyā's revolt from tradition. The banyan, an innocent knit, sleeveless undershirt, throughout Ceylon is far more a national costume than that which professional nationalists affect in the cities. In the tradition of ancient kings, the upper body covering

<sup>10</sup> Reported in *The Times of Ceylon*, Colombo, Feb. 18, 1949.



is forbidden the very low castes in many Sinhalese villages. Only in the Low Country, strangely enough, is it generally forbidden, or made difficult for, the Beravāyā. And here the measure of a community's caste conservatism is to be found in the drummer's undershirt, just as in Kandyan villages the same may be noted in reference to Roḍiyā or Paliyā. The utilitarian value of the body covering in the Low Country is nil; men of high caste in the villages are usually in the same state of undress through choice. An evening dampness can as readily be displaced by a shawl thrown over the shoulders, practiced not infrequently by the Beravāyā and others. The bare upper body is no mark or stigma; the proscription of upper body covering is the heart of the issue.

*Other Tension Areas.* Although the banian has become an all-important symbol, the actual strictures of caste are somewhat more inclusive. Marriage is, of course, never entered into between other castes and the Beravāyā, except perhaps a very exceptional cross-caste match with an Oliyā.<sup>11</sup> Residential segregation, with close blood kinship, operates here, as it does with most caste groups, to support caste communal life. For the Beravā communal distinctiveness within the village is scarcely fortuitous. In the village the Beravāyā rarely is upon personal egalitarian terms with one of different caste. Salutations express his inferiority; on the narrow pathway he steps aside, his demeanor that of an inferior. Interhousehold relationships with one of higher caste are in accord with traditional standards. His visit is determined by some specific purpose. Holidays and marriage festivities are separate celebrations. Only the children play together, and this is brought to a minimum through segregation and in some villages contemporary tensions.

At the village boutiques all castes trade and, if there is a teashop, all partake. At the tiny market shop the Beravāyā may stop to listen and possibly enter into the gossip of the day. Although others sit or stand talking together, he stands apart or, if permitted to sit, he does so in a lowly position. At the teashop he is served in

<sup>11</sup> In the Matara-Tangalla area the Oli, while also a very low caste, are fortunate enough to have their residence principally in the outskirts of the towns. While communally distinct and viewed as an inferior group, symbolic discriminations are not practiced. In some other localities and under village conditions the Oli are in much the same position as the Beravā.

special utensils. The Beravāyā complains that his teacup invariably has a broken handle or a crack; so also do those he has at home, but at the shop he knows full well that these are set aside for his use. Nor does he sit when he drinks his tea in many village boutiques.

Ten or fifteen years ago it was no doubt true that a Beravāyā could not have a house with a tile roof. This, along with narrow restrictions upon the upper body covering for women, has been forgotten. The more prosperous village Beravā sometimes have tile roofs; in only one village has overt difficulty been known to occur in recent years over such ostentation. Similarly, the women wear jackets in practically every village without thought of creating antagonism. Restraint is exercised in the wearing of sarees, bangles and in other forms of conspicuous consumption. It is said also that until recent years when children were in school, they were often required to sit on the floor. Today, even segregation in seating is not the rule, although without doubt some schools effectively prevent Beravā enrollment, and others have classroom segregation.

Participation in community institutions is not usually caste restrictive, although it is usually associated with some form of segregation. Intercaste mixing in the temples is not uncommon, but in a number of localities the Beravā attend Rāmānya temples to which only the more liberal high castes also come. Where the banian restriction is in order, not even temple worship is excluded from the tabu.<sup>12</sup> Schools in general make no caste distinction, and where they do, whether at the instigation of the headman or by the prejudice of the head teacher, the techniques are subtle, for the censure of the higher government education officers or of the higher district officials would be strenuous. The caste battles of 1949 were the result of putting banians on every child, frequently at the insistence of school authorities. In some places banians are not worn by Beravā school children even now, and frequently ill feeling is created where they are worn if the child does not remove that cherished symbol upon returning home in the evening.

That the Beravā have long since ceased to accept their tradi-

<sup>12</sup> One village had an incident of violence several years ago as the result of Beravā dancers in a ceremony wearing as part of their costumes long-sleeved undershirts.



tional status is evident, as are the diminishing discriminatory attitudes on the part of many high caste persons. Tensions are established through the differential rate of change in the attitudes of the Beravā and their nearby high caste neighbors. It would be impossible to find a Low Country Beravāyā who accepted symbolic discrimination as part of the moral traditional order. Resentment at differential treatment in respect to dress, sitting arrangements and inferior chinaware at the teashop is universal. This is not kamma; it is injustice. The repudiation of inferiority symbols does not imply a repudiation of caste. The Beravāyā is usually quite free to confess that his blood is inferior to that of the Goyigama, but just what he means is difficult to say. Here is an "inferiority" that should carry with it no disadvantages and no recognition of inferiority in behavior. This paradox is not infrequent in Ceylon, for even among the more equal coastal higher castes the "feeling" and mental outlook adheres to the hierarchy of superiority-inferiority in blood. The Beravā, like others not of highest caste, are mixed in these feelings. They have representatives who claim for them Brahminical Indian origins, although the villagers are usually unaware of this. Nor do they object to a communal basis of local social organization; there is no bitterness at the social exclusiveness of the higher caste, and caste endogamy is defended. Some, it is true, profess that a society wholly without caste is preferable, but the drive for emancipation is directed toward inferiority symbols; communal separateness is an issue of no great importance and one upon which the villager has never dwelt in his own thinking.

For the higher castes the attitudes are more complex. It goes without saying that at all levels the communal life on caste lines is accepted as the nature of society. Many high caste villagers are under no illusion as to the superiority of their blood. It would be difficult to say whether or not the majority has strong feelings regarding the preservation of low caste inferiority symbols. On the basis of extended discussions with villagers throughout the tension areas, it would seem, tentatively, that the overwhelming majority favors symbolic distinctions, and a large minority will participate in or condone coercive methods for retaining them. With noteworthy exceptions the higher caste villager, rich or poor, looks



with disfavor upon the decline of caste symbolism. A majority, perhaps, regret the changes they see, but recognize that times and manners are beyond their control. There is no evidence whatsoever that the preservation of caste conservatism is any stronger among the poor Goyigama peasant than it is among the landed village aristocrats and functionaries. In the present generation, well-to-do youth are perhaps more liberal since frequently they have attended the large central or town high school.

The attitudes of the prosperous Goyigama villager are given fairly typical expression by an English-speaking man near Galle in his description of caste relationship in his village:

Here in B. . . the blacksmith is offered a chair and treated in a friendly way. The dhoby is of course a servant and should be treated as a servant. He must sit on a mat and not eat or drink with us. The low castes are wearing banians now, and I personally have no objection, but you realize that one thing leads to another. After all one expects servants to be servile. You let him wear trousers and next he sits down beside you and then I find him sleeping in my bed. . . . A Goyigama man would never use abusive words on a low caste; that would not suit a person of high caste. But you can be sure that if he oversteps his bounds badly, some retaliation will come. He will pay for it. Perhaps I could throw a stone at a bush on a dark night. Oh, low caste means low manners.

Nor are these attitudes confined to the Goyigama. In some places the strength of Karāva and Durāva and Salāgama sentiment is as great. Usually members of these castes are not active in hostile relations, but it is widely believed by the Beravā and others that they often instigate the Goyigama to action. A simple and kindly Karāva near Tangalla sums up his views on the caste situation: "We (Karāva) think about the Beravā just as the Goyigama do. I do not like to see them or the Vahumpura either in banians. Allowing them to wear such things is just not good. It was not done by their parents nor by their grandparents."

In one locality a Beravā village is coerced into inferiority rituals and symbols by neighboring farmers of Durāva caste who form the majority in the area. Here there is considerable economic dependence upon the Durāva in the form of labor in the coconut plots and the citronella fields. Economic subservience has not retarded the Beravā's desire for emancipation. The village knows the high

tension and articulate complaints of the lower caste. It also is one of the few in which not only adults but also the children at school forego banians. The Durāva and Karāva teachers do not insist that they be worn. All other customary manifestations of inferiority are maintained and, by submissiveness in action although not in thought, conflict has been averted throughout the last fifteen years.

The Beravāyā man of this village says: "Even if I am sitting on my own bed in my own house and do not get up as the high caste man (Durāva) comes by, I would later be whacked on the road."

The Durāva living a quarter of a mile distant says: "It is right that the Beravāyā sits on a stool in my house and he must do so, and he should wear no banian. I think that he should be able to give his children an education if he has the money, and be permitted to rent fields from us."

In still a different area, the Beravā live dominated by the Hēna in numbers and in local political and economic affairs. Here it would appear that the Hēna, with the Karāva, are the responsible elements for the banian prohibition and other discriminations. Although the Goyigama is generally the *bête noire* for the Beravāyā, the other higher castes under similar conditions require much the same behavior. The only apparent difference is a tendency for the salutations to be less exalted.

Active conflicts between the low castes and the high are not frequent; the Beravā and the Vahumpura are unconscious gradualists. But there are few Beravā villages which over the past decade have not known some fighting, often without serious bloodshed, over the symbols of caste. A classic case in the village of K— illustrates the general pattern in its most virulent form.

At a major political rally in 1945 held in a nearby coastal town, a distinguished member of the Government made a public presentation of a banian to a Beravāyā. This recipient was from K—. The man proudly wore his new possession home and continued to wear it for some days without perceiving the growing tension among the Goyigama neighbors. Inevitably, on his way home from town one evening he was beaten by two men of the local Goyigama community. Immediately the minority group sought police protection and started local court action against the assailants. For a month and a half no village reaction was evident, but finally an



incident of violence occurred in which a Beravā man severed the hand of a Goyigama. In the ensuing month and a half there were said to be seventeen cases of assault in the village.

During the past year life in K—— has been peaceful but not without tension. With the assistance of town well-wishers of Goyigama caste, and incidentally political candidates, the Beravā have built up a central fund. This "fight fund" is expressly for the purpose of fighting legal battles arising from discriminatory behavior. Banian-wearing in the village today is an unsettled issue. A few brave men wear them when they go to town, most do not, and even the bold remove their finery when ordered to do so. Since the series of incidents children have worn banians to school but not after school in the village, the school itself being in a different village. Court action, warnings of magistrates, and the obvious assistance of important families outside the immediate locality have achieved an unsteady measure of success. The deflection of the Beravāyā from the wishes of the majority brought few sanctions other than physical violence, for the economic power of the neighboring Goyigama is not great. Paradoxically it is the Beravā who have imposed sanctions on their tormentors. Associated with the village and a neighboring one are several temples, representing each of the major sects. The Beravā participate in that of the Rāmanya order and since the violence have steadfastly refused to beat drums in temples attended by other members of the village.<sup>13</sup>

In K—— the caste situation is unstable but the direction of change is obvious. With the support of external high caste friends and a determination to press to the absolute limits of peaceful intercourse the symbols will slowly fade away. No doubt this would happen without the changes which will be brought by a new generation of high castes, at least part of whom will be more liberal.

Not yet is the economic position of the Beravāyā sufficiently

<sup>13</sup> This boycott is a serious matter for the Goyigama worshiper and has necessitated regular importation of drummers from some distance and at considerable cost. At one point the matter was brought to the attention of government officials and, out of personal respect for an official concerned, representatives of the Beravā discussed compromise. When the official found it impossible personally to guarantee their safety within the village, the drummers found it quite impossible to give up their boycott of these particular temples.



high to see its effects in village emancipation. The occasional well-to-do member of the caste is, in some respects, in a more difficult position than his poorer contemporaries. Seldom is his caste community sufficiently large or his economic power sufficiently great to hold the high caste hotheads in check and his wealth is a temptation to ostentatious display. Illustrative of such a dilemma is an occurrence in the village of U—— about 1946. A party of well dressed strangers alighted from the bus passing through the village and went immediately into a small teashop for refreshments and to inquire the way to the home of a well known Beravāyā. Village people, inveterately curious, followed close behind them and discovered when they arrived at the home that the strangers were there to make a proposal of marriage. It was obvious that those who had taken tea from the cups of high castes and seated themselves in the doing were themselves Beravā. A gathering crowd rained stones on the home in which nuptials were being arranged, until finally, in desperation, the women of the house came out to worship the Goyigama and plead the newcomers' ignorance of village conventions. Although the incident ended without bloodshed, the subsequent sanctions imposed by the village led ultimately to the sale of the Beravāyā's property and his departure from the community.

*Political Radicalism.* With the juxtaposition of caste discrimination and a general condition of landless poverty, it might be expected that the Beravā would be fertile ground for political radicalism. This is indeed the case, but only in so far as they are influenced by the possibility of immediate gains in social freedom and release from poverty. One can travel the length and breadth of the Southern Province without finding a single village Beravāyā who professes acceptance of any element in communistic ideology. They are strongly influenced by the leftist charges of extravagance in government and their indictment of the inequitable distribution of lands. Beyond this the villagers, regardless of caste, have not the vaguest conception of party differences and political ideologies. Strongly influenced by political leaders whom they personally respect, some of whom come to their aid in time of crisis, a few protesting villages vote solidly "right." Others for the same reasons

vote solidly "left." In general the strong economic protest of the area favors those who indict the *status quo*. This is a predisposition shared by the poor of many castes, where local leadership is "left." The communist vote of the Low Country is not articulated in caste terms; it is usually expressed by the low castes in words of economic protest. Thus, in a village referred to earlier, composed chiefly of Durāva and Beravā, in which the suppression of the latter was pronounced, both castes are predominately "left" in their votes. Both are poor, and both strongly influenced by a socially-minded and highly respected leftist leader in a nearby coastal town. Caste discrimination is scarcely a political issue in this locality. (As far as one might determine, no person of either caste had ever heard of communism as a movement and an ideology.)<sup>14</sup>

In the village of K—, where caste feeling and cohesiveness has become excessively strong, communist support has been rationalized to caste protest. It is significant that there a leading communist, himself of high caste, has provided both moral and financial support to the Beravā in their troubles. Ideologically, the people are far removed from the Stalinist position of their political mentor and leader. Strongly attacking the present Government in its failure to protect them, and the police for their corruption and lack of faith, the village men spontaneously offered the solution for their worst ills: "Bring back the British." "If," said an elderly spokesman in this discussion with the village men, "the British had not been here we would have been crushed by the Goyigama; the Government of Sinhalese will never antagonize the biggest section of the people. . . . If the British came back life would be much better, for we would be given fair treatment." Here indeed is revolution!

Ideologically, communism has not prospered in this climate of caste tension. Critics of the Government, many of whom are them-

<sup>14</sup> It is significant that in interviews with scores of Low Country villagers of all castes, only one person was not shocked by the suggestion that they were participating in a revolutionary movement. The one exception, much to the disgust of his listening neighbors, thought that he would be willing to fight for land, so long as it did not affect temple land and the Buddhist Sangha. That the virtual unanimity of antirevolutionary response was not due to respect for the feelings of the questioner is evidenced by the fact that he was taken for a leftist because of his informality of dress which coincided with that affected by leftist leaders!



selves ideological communists, have, however, gained office. As far as K—— is concerned they would have gained office more readily by defending "imperialistic exploiters." Caste discrimination is a minor part of the "left" movement. With the Beravā it has added to the general unrest and dissatisfaction also induced by landlessness. If they are more "left" than their poor Goyigama neighbors it is mainly because poor Goyigama tend more to identify themselves with the leading families and landlords who are firm in the support of their governing kin and the *status quo*. This phenomenon, present among Low Country Goyigama, is evidenced more sharply in the Kandyan region. In the Low Country one finds many villagers in opposition to the people who run things; that they support communists is the result of political accident and total ignorance of ideological and party principles. For every villager who would support revolution in principle or in fact, there are many who would seek the solution to present ills by return to a feudal order, with humanitarian modifications.

*Movements Away from Discrimination.* In several of the towns important individuals have been active in the movement to prevent discrimination. In time of hostility and the inevitable court actions that follow, defenders and even financial supporters are not lacking. In daily affairs examples are set by egalitarian relationships with persons of lower caste, sometimes at the risk of personal status in the community. Thus in one town a member of a local and highly respected Goyigama family, holding an important government office, employs a Beravāyā clerk and is known to eat at the same table with him. The personal, official and family status of the individual is so high that local censure remains covert. With the passing of the years the community has become used to the relationship and is scarcely conscious of its impropriety. In another town an important landholding and professional man, a Karāva, refuses to deal with a tenant or a client if he approaches with the salutation of worship. Keeping the low caste bench in his office, he assiduously points out to every man who moves toward it that it is reserved for those who refuse to wear banians. Political campaigners of all hue disclaim, in talking with Beravāyās, all interest in preserving the caste hierarchy. Some indeed are sincere,



and give their views in public meetings in the towns. A Cabinet member, in an effort to dramatize the antidiscrimination policy of the administration, presented a banian to a Beravāyā, as has been related. This event served mainly to kindle intercaste tension, to the temporary disadvantage of the low caste. In a town nobody thinks about the banian; the Beravāyā may dress as he pleases whether he shops in the boutiques or attends the local cinema or temple. Ordinarily the low caste villager wraps his banian or shirt in the fold of his sarong when he leaves his house, donning it as he nears the town. In town caste proscriptions are relaxed. This is due much less to any anonymity in the towns than to the disinterested frame of mind among those with whom they are in contact, and the fact that leadership here is in the hands of the western-educated professional and merchant class.

Throughout the Low Country, the discrimination of caste and the symbols of inferiority and superiority affect relatively few individuals, and at the worst are usually not seriously inhumane or degrading. At the present time the very conflict over status symbols demonstrates that the remaining relics of the past will pass away rapidly. To identify this transition with the disruption of the caste order is not justified. The caste order of hierarchy is fading in terms of symbol and prerogative. The influence of the towns, the greater opportunity for education and migration by persons of low caste, the liberalizing influence of the higher schools upon the high castes, and numerous other conditions work toward the demise of caste symbols. This transition is seen in the village as well as in the town, although the present period is one of instability and confusion in the rejection and the demand for preservation of the hierarchy. Village memory is long. Although the symbols of caste may be lost within a decade or two, the memory of status will survive longer. The sensitivity of the Karāva or the Salāgama to his "inferior" position attests the power of the status tradition even when divorced from symbols of inferiority and in opposition to the facts of economic and political power. The awareness of gradations will be written in personalities long after they are lost in concrete patterns of behavior. Where the lower castes are few and dispersed, as with the Low Country Beravā and Vahumpura, emancipation from behavioral symbols takes longer, and no effective claim can

be exerted upon the prerogatives of office and local privilege. A decade might conceivably obliterate all differential etiquette between Goyigama and Beravā; it would be many decades before a rising educational and power position by the latter could bring them to a point where they are viewed more as a differentiated community than as an inferior stratum in the society. And the die-hards will, no doubt, cling the harder to caste symbolism, for with the emancipation of these groups will go the last vestige of prerogative monopolies and whatever psychological satisfactions adhere to personalized discrimination. Shirts will soon be universal for the Beravā, but many years will pass before the higher castes lose sight of the fundamental fact that "throughout all history we have been better people than you."

Although marriage within the caste is approved by all, the pride of the higher caste has been potent in preserving the practice. To suggest to a liberal Durāva that his daughter marry a Goyigama has nothing like the reaction as to a suggestion that she marry a Beravāyā. Not that there is much doubt that caste cohesiveness, pride, and a strengthening of endogamic feeling accompanies the rise of a caste in social space. This has been shown in the instances of the Karāva and Salāgama, who in their rise have found rationalization in ancient texts for their pride in belonging to a brave and (although not admitted by the others) very high caste. The heritage of hierarchy persists to strengthen caste communalism generations after the hierarchy is meaningless in concrete precepts, power, and social position.

# *Part Four:*

CASTE IN THE NEW SOCIETY





*Caste in Urban and National Life*

The incongruity of caste with urban life is written into every feature that distinguishes the city from the village. Contractual relations, multiplicity and superficiality of social contacts, physical mobility, demands for new skills, and many other ingredients of urbanism combine with the fact that the city is the focal point in the introduction of new ideologies. The inherent attributes of urbanism and the introduction of western education and values have conspired to weaken a status system dependent upon tradition, localism, and immobility. The city is the natural habitat of achieved statuses and social mobility.<sup>1</sup>

The Sinhalese are an overwhelmingly rural people and Ceylon is mainly a peasant country. A small fraction of all Sinhalese live in urban areas and many of these savour more of the countryside than of the urban way of life. In the entire island, Colombo alone is a metropolitan center: it is *the* center of dominance, governmentally, economically, and educationally. With some half a million persons in its metropolitan area and more than half of these within the urban limits of the city, it provides the logical point for viewing the effects of city life upon the island's principal caste system.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the effects of urbanization upon caste in India see Mason Olcott, "The Caste System in India," *American Sociological Review* (59), Dec. 1944, Vol. IX, pp. 648-657; Ghurye (30), Chap. VIII; and L. S. S. O'Malley, *Indian Caste Customs* (60), 1932, Chap. IX. Unfortunately, most treatments of this subject are no more than deductive expositions based on the universal characteristics of cities, and presumably universal characteristics of caste, or fleeting references.

<sup>2</sup> Colombo has also a large non-Sinhalese population, chiefly Ceylon Tamil and Indian Tamil. The subsequent remarks relate only to the Sinhalese, but it is probable that similar effects are to be found among the Hindu peoples, although the degree of disruption is less.

As the island's center of dominance, Colombo is the center of national policy making and administration, a fact which renders it a particularly good vantage point from which the permeation of caste in national affairs can be approached.

#### CASTE IN COLOMBO

In Colombo caste distinctions and discriminations approach the minimum, and the institution itself mainly exists below the surface of easy visibility. No person's caste is signified by his dress, nor are symbols of status, systematic segregation in housing, or discriminatory treatment in schools, temples, or public places apparent. In all such visible manifestations, traditionally at the very core of the caste system, the urbanite is emancipated. Although ancient caste roles have affected the modern occupational structure, conformity to traditional occupations is of no great importance in the urban economy. Typically, the sophisticated Goyigama urbanite will assure the outsider that caste is meaningless in modern urban Ceylon, except for the quaint retention of caste preference in marriage, and the superficial observer usually agrees. Indeed, by comparison with the significances of social class differences in culture, life opportunities, and economic interests, caste seems a wan and anaemic institution. Class differences are far more visible and probably more objective and sharper than in Western nations. In manner utterly incomparable with the class structure of western societies, the fundamental status division of the urban population is into an English educated, shoe and trouser wearing, white collar and professional upper class, and the saronged, barefooted, vernacular-speaking labor class. This is the most highly visible status division of the society, and an extremely important one.<sup>3</sup> *With it caste bears no conformity.* Although of slight or no importance for issues of social welfare, caste still has more significance for urban affairs than might be expected from a "quaint marriage custom." The fact is that caste has not disappeared from the city. Although many traditional aspects of the system have died away, the deep

<sup>3</sup> To make such a dichotomy is not to discount the gross differences of economic interest within the strata. Thus the governing elite and the business elite are, from the standpoint of economic interest, each separated from the generally exploited white collar worker.



sentiments which still support the endogamic principle in marriage have been partially redirected and transformed. In an era of democracy and pleading for national loyalty above "communalism," many behavioral manifestations of caste have "gone underground."

Like the country as a whole, the precise caste composition of the city must remain unknown, for such census data have not been provided since the early nineteenth century. Nor would any investigator be sufficiently bold to attempt random inquiries on so delicate a subject. Certain empirical generalizations are possible and these conform generally with the city caste census of 1810. Due to the accident of its location and the more rapid westernizing of the coastal area, Colombo has been built disproportionately of the non-Kandyan castes. This process can be explained as the result of two distinct phenomena, the principle of short distance migration which was enhanced by the greater release of Low Country men from traditional controls, and the fact that Colombo in its very growth extended over pre-existing Sinhalese villages. Colombo as a city was a product of European colonial enterprise; it did not exist prior to the Portuguese conquest. As a center of power and of economic opportunity and culture, those favored by the conquerors have been attracted to it, not only in Portuguese times but throughout history. Since the limits of colonial control and influence did not reach the Kandyan Provinces until well along in the nineteenth century, the interior was scarcely tapped by the growth of this European-built city. Even today, due both to distance and traditionalism, the Kandyan is an infrequent migrant to the Low Country. The physical expansion of the city itself also brought into it Low Country peoples who by accident of location were in the path of urban growth. Many homogeneous caste villages were swallowed up as the city extended along the coast and to the interior. Along the immediate coastal stretches, old villages of Karāva, Hunu, and Durāva were encompassed and partially digested. Toward the interior, villages of Low Country Goyigama, Vahumpura, Hēna, and no doubt others, were absorbed. This process continues today in the suburbs of the city, where industrial expansion is laid upon caste village foundations. As the metropolis grew, by immigration and natural increase, and

was subject to internal mobility, the caste village pattern was overlaid and modified but not wholly obliterated even in older sections of the city.

The Census of 1810 indicated that about 12,000 Sinhalese resided in the limits of the city, outside the central fort area. Nearly 6,000 of these were Goyigama, most of whom undoubtedly were of Low Country origin. Over 1,500 were of "fisher" caste and about 1,000 were "washers" (Hēna). Somewhat smaller numbers of Durāva, Salāgama and "smiths" (Navandanna) were reported, as were sprinklings of potters, barbers, Vahumpura, Hunu and Beravā.<sup>4</sup> It is improbable that any major shifts in relative proportions have occurred in the past century and a half. It is likely, however, that some increase in the Vahumpura has taken place, and unquestionably, almost all of the Kandyan castes are represented in small numbers, a condition which was not true at that time. Numerical ranking at the present time would certainly place the Goyigama in the first position, with perhaps 50 per cent being of that caste. Karāva probably rank next, followed by Durāva, Hēna, Vahumpura and Salāgama in smaller numbers. The six castes mentioned here probably constitute in total more than 90 per cent of the Sinhalese Colombo population.

When the sophisticated and westernized Colombo Goyigama assures the westerner that caste is fast disintegrating and is today but a skeleton in an otherwise respectable cupboard, he speaks a large grain of truth. Most traditional manifestations of caste to be found in the villages have been thoroughly undermined by urban life and western humanitarian, individualistic and egalitarian doctrines. But a single traditional stricture has survived with vigor in the urban atmosphere, and this is the principle of caste endogamy. Here the erosion of the ancient institution is relatively slight; in other urban social situations traditional discriminations and roles, caste etiquette, social distance and symbols of status are far past the median in their decay, and some are entirely gone. Although these vestiges of the past will be touched upon, it is endogamy which must command first attention, for it is at once a manifestation of the traditional social order and a *sine qua non*

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Pieris (59), Appendix X.



for the translation of the old caste communalism into its contemporary urban counterpart.

Marriage within the caste is not universal among urbanites, but it is the rule. Everyone can enumerate cross-caste unions within the circle of his close or remote acquaintanceship, whether he be of "coolie" class or among the trousered elite. But the fact that this is so attests more the sensationalism attached to the violation of precedent than its frequency. No one would question the obvious fact that the vast bulk of marriages are within the caste. For formalized marriages it can be safely estimated that fully 95 per cent are within the caste, and for the emancipated minority crossing of the caste line is nearly always fraught with serious family and emotional conflict. There is nothing accidental in the conformity to caste principles: the caste remains as the effective unit within which mates are sought. Whatever additional requirements may be imposed, the first and foremost is caste congruity.<sup>5</sup> Where the precept has been violated, family disorganization usually has either preceded or followed the event. The only exception to this rule would be found in the very small Bohemian set, among whom traditional kinship concepts have been modified and the romantic marriage complex has taken root. This group is but a particle within the larger "westernized" population in which marriage of the young must still meet the requirements of the kin, and union with a lower caste person would mean temporary or permanent disruption of family ties, disloyalty to blood, and violation of an unwritten and religiously unrationalized moral code.

The general disapproval of youthful romancing, with its obvious caste implications, is infrequently challenged even in the westernized English-speaking population. "Dating" is virtually unknown at any social level, and adolescent heterosexual contacts are discouraged. Few of Colombo's secondary schools are coeducational.

<sup>5</sup> Indirectly, the frequency of noncaste marriages is given some indication in the figures on Burgher-Sinhalese unions, an almost strictly white-collar class, urban phenomenon, and one less seriously viewed by the Sinhalese family than actual intercaste marriage. For 1946 the Registrar-General reported a total of 114 Burgher-Sinhalese marriages in Ceylon. In many of these cases the Sinhalese party would have been temporarily or permanently disowned by the kin. In some instances, violent action and black magic is resorted to by the Sinhalese parents against the Burgher party to the union. This is no less true of Christians than Buddhists.



Perhaps the greatest emancipation is to be found among university undergraduates at the coeducational University of Ceylon. Here there is no dearth of romances, but scarcely in the sense of a western college campus. "Crushes" are common, but they are based usually upon most superficial contact: dating among Sinhalese girls is practically nonexistent, and the very occasional hand-holding couple are a source of widespread gossip and in some instances of bitter jingles that spread far beyond the campus. Courting in any western sense has here the implicit, although not necessarily accurate, connotation of sexual immorality. Unquestionably a small proportion of campus attachments culminate in marriage, but those which involved intercaste interest usually are crushed by the weight of parental authority and the negative power of the dowry. Instances are known where university authorities were asked to intervene when a distant parent heard rumors that the daughter was enamored, howsoever circumspectly, with a young man of differing caste. Impetuous campus romancers, often basing their affection on little more than a covert smile, usually rebound on another course when the obstacle of caste becomes apparent. Those who jeopardize the highly prized security of kinship must be prepared to face life alone for the sake of love. In most cases the deep culturally bred desire for security triumphs over impulses having no strong supports in the culture or in personal conditioning.<sup>6</sup> That Sinhalese youth idealizes romance there can be no shadow of a doubt, but to associate it with marriage is folly. Among many youths of this class, caste has lost its moral value, but so long as the true social security system in a security-minded country resides in kin who are not brought under comparable influences, intracaste marriage will survive in the city.

Among the great body of trouser-wearing clerical workers, caste endogamy is perhaps more valued than among the elite, and certainly more so than among those exposed to the liberalizing influences of university life and higher education in Ceylon. In this social segment, family integrity takes on a semblance of what in the West has been termed middle-class respectability or bourgeois

<sup>6</sup> Regarding some personality characteristics of Ceylonese University students, see M. A. Straus, "Mental Ability and Cultural Needs: A Psycho-cultural Interpretation of the Intelligence Test Performance of Ceylon University Entrants," *American Sociological Review* (96), June 1951.

morality. Proof against the bohemianism of the elite and living in a world bounded principally by kin, this "middle class" accepts the democratic ideology of the West while abiding by the caste morality of the East.

A great hiatus separates the English-speaking Sinhalese world from that of the saronged, barefooted coolie laborer and skilled artisan, where it is probable that the greatest biological mixing of the castes is taking place today. Paradoxically, it is within this same great segment that the caste hierarchy is taken most seriously in personal relations. Among the relatively secure and regularly employed, the old village morality of family and of caste integrity in marriage is maintained, but in that great mass of submarginal slum dwellers less importance is placed upon the niceties of custom.

The life of the urban-born slum dweller is in practically every respect conducive to family disorganization both in kinship affiliations and in marital family life. Household composition is seldom that of a normal marital unit; husband and wife are frequently separated in the struggle for employment; the day's rice is always a precarious gamble. Here, too, women have frequently entered into industrial pursuits and street trades without the conventions of a western society to guide their behavior.<sup>7</sup> Close identification with village kin has, for many, long since been shattered by mobility and shame in occupation. Marriage is frequently an extralegal condition of convenience without the bonds conducive to permanence and without the sanctity of marriage vows.<sup>8</sup> Legally many of the children in this lowest coolie class would be illegitimate and, in fact, a high proportion are fathered by temporary husbands.

At this coolie level the city dwellers' culture is that of the village more than it is that of the urban upper classes. Under the grinding circumstances of city life the village culture, transplanted to a foreign and unfriendly environment, produces social relationships

<sup>7</sup> See further Bryce Ryan and Sylvia Fernando, "The Female Factory Worker in Colombo" (83).

<sup>8</sup> In Buddhism marriage is not a religious sacrament and in no case is the *Bhikkhu* a functionary. It is a family matter first and a legal matter secondarily: it has not the moral significance of western marriage concepts. Historically there is no deep value attached to the eternal monogamic union of man and wife. Although illegal, both polyandry and polygyny are to be found occasionally in villages as community-recognized unions, and in Kandyan law divorce is extremely simple.



which are chaotic. Where the individual has lost the pride and the power of kin, marriage loses its institutional character without developing the brittle but usually orderly companionate character of western family systems. Caste endogamy cannot survive where the marriage and family system themselves are individualized and disorganized. Never has the endogamic principle applied to sex relations in the same manner as to formal marriage. When marital relations degenerate in more or less regularized sex relations, the collapsing institution can support neither the precepts of chastity nor endogamy.

It is paradoxical that the most pervasive principle of caste has been most widely broken in that segment of urban society farthest from western ideological influences. So closely entwined is the endogamous principle with the concept and structure of the family that only the gross demoralization of the latter yields extensive disregard for caste morality along with other marital strictures.

One should not suppose that this characterization is valid for the vernacular-speaking urban population as a whole. Obviously, vast numbers, no doubt the majority, live circumspectly in kin- and community-recognized marital families. Two conditions conducive to both family stability and continuing caste endogamy should be noted. Where the more or less self-contained "caste villages" survive within the urban web, kinship and hence familial power has remained strong. Although in some instances these districts are abject slums and even penetrated by vice, intercaste marriage is infrequent and the marital unit itself commonly one of permanence. The second condition conducive to marital caste purity is in the case of migrants, particularly women, to the city from the nearby countryside. Although the moral hazards for the single woman are not less in Colombo than in most other cities, village attitudes of propriety have a deep hold, and the village kin continue to be looked upon as the intimate social world and refuge. Heterosexual contacts are studiously shunned and marriages often arranged in the home village or through the mediation or, at minimum, approval, of village kin. The central location of endogamic disregard lies more with individuated and economically hopeless city-born but not rooted. How extensive this minority is in the total urban population defies estimation, but it is surely



among them that the basic precept of caste disintegrates most rapidly. At this stage in urban Ceylon, intercaste marital unions are usually merely one facet in the disintegration of the family institution. Through the great bulk of the urban population the family is still strong and fully integrated with the extensive village kin.

Also of central importance in the traditional caste system is the hierarchy of caste prestige. In the urban climate the hierarchy yet stands, but it is largely shorn of behavioral manifestations. Caste is a subjective reality even when behaviorally inconspicuous. The fact that the Goyigama is high and the Beravāyā is low is as well known to the city dweller as the villager, although it has less influence in daily conduct. Recognition of the ancient status differences is a significant factor in the personal sensitiveness of low caste persons mingling daily with the high caste. It is the conflict of urban egalitarianism in conduct and the subtle recognition that castes are not equal in goodness of birth that makes the topic of caste tabu in urban society. Segregation would be unthought of, but at most social levels a person not of Goyigama or Karāva lineage would be highly sensitive to even indirect allusions pertaining to caste, and immediately suspect patronization by one of "superior" birth. In the neighborhood quarrels of children, caste epithets are occasionally hurled.<sup>9</sup> In the westernized and wealthy class the castes mix freely at all social occasions, private and public, except sometimes at weddings held in family homes. Caste distinction would be unthought of unless by chance some slight, accidental or otherwise, occurred. To the person of low caste, birth status is always a potential explanation of untoward occurrences. On the other hand, leading citizens of low caste enjoy with sardonic amusement being offered honorary posts which are interpretable only as organizational techniques to demonstrate that "caste does not matter."

<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, subtle insults are given among adults upon occasion by reference to caste occupations in the company of persons of high economic position but low caste. A jocular tunesmith some years ago made a lasting impression at a large party by re-casting, for the benefit of a wealthy young lady of Hēna birth with whom he was dancing, the words of the popular song "I'm putting all my eggs in one basket," into "I'm putting all my clothes in one basket." In rare instances a pathological sensitivity is developed, as in a case currently observed of an elderly low class Vahumpura woman rising into rage when asked if she would like to eat jaggory.

In the University atmosphere where caste has little significance in any sphere of student behavior, the very topic is avoided as one would avoid the uncouth. Sensitivity to the simple topic of caste is so great that such discussion is likely to be carried on in low tones, and specific castes referred to by initials rather than by their full names. Students of high caste may be bosom companions of fellow students of low caste, but usually remain in studied ignorance of each other's caste position. Caste does not matter behaviorally in this milieu, but it would be the height of ill taste to divulge the fact that another student comes from low caste origin, although the fact may well be known to his high caste friends. For a person of high caste to speak too freely of his origins would arouse censure and the opprobrious comment that "he is communally minded."<sup>10</sup> Within this circumscribed milieu caste does not in fact matter in any objective sense: the individual bears the knowledge of high or of low birth, while speaking and behaving as if this traditional social fact were a myth. The feeling of caste hierarchy remains even where it has no behavioral significance. There is no doubt but that some students of village origin are perpetually tormented by the feeling of a birth inferiority, although they repudiate caste hierarchy. These same students could not, however, find any sphere of conduct within the academic circle in which their caste would be relevant. Such situations have psychiatric rather than sociological significance. They are relatively few, since for the vast majority caste is no worry subjectively or objectively. It is the social environment and ethos of the University, with its egalitarian mixing of minority groups, castes, and to some extent, classes, that makes of the institution a significant leavening agent in the democratization of urban society.

In the majority of daily social contacts the English-speaking world does not think in terms of caste, let alone behave in accord with ancient edicts. Class differences, based upon occupational prestige and wealth, are vastly more important barriers for equali-

<sup>10</sup> Several years ago, a lecturer in the University, actually a Bhikkhu, made pointed reference to the impropriety of a certain low caste woman on the campus wearing the Kandyan saree. The students, none of whom was of the caste concerned, gave warning of a boycott on his lectures if such remarks were repeated. It is doubtful if any caste-conscious expressions have entered a classroom since that date.



tarian interaction. The Ceylonese cabinet is composed of members of at least four different Sinhalese castes, and the parliament of even more. The business clubs are mixed in caste as well as ethnic groups, as are all professional societies. Occasionally it is rumored that certain medical specialists are not called in consultation by Goyigama practitioners, on account of caste feeling, but this is surely exceptional. In mercantile establishments office forces are mixed, as they are in government departments, and no thought is taken of the fact that an office director of Hēna caste gives orders to a Goyigama coolie or clerk.

There are, of course, die-hards in the urban elite, among whom the general pattern of egalitarian interaction is distasteful, and although such distaste is seldom openly expressed, wealthy families of low caste avoid association with them. Such reactionaries become open targets for luscious gossip among equally affluent persons of lower caste position. In one instance, for example, considerable pains have been taken to gather evidence that one such exalted family has hidden marriage connections with a quite low caste. These tales are relished by sensitive persons of low or moderately low caste position, some of whom awoke to the concept of caste through the jibes of Goyigama playmates in an era when the superiority of that caste was more blatantly claimed than today. If many Goyigama families desire to hold themselves aloof from those beneath them, the feeling is usually well hidden. In general, it seems that the days of this type of social snobbery are gone, or at least, are as puny as of Boston blue bloods or the D.A.R.

Below the level of the "trouserred class," caste traditionalism has somewhat more significance. The coolie, servant, and artisan sectors of the population seem to place more value upon caste position, and low class Goyigama are more articulate in proclaiming their status. In Colombo it is probable that the majority of Sinhalese household servants are Goyigama, many of them serving in households of Karāva, Salāgama and others. The disparity of caste between master and servant is seldom consciously noted by the Goyigama servant, although occasionally it may provide a little amusement to the "lower status" master. On the other hand, the Goyigama servant often is not a happy worker in a home where other servants of lower caste are also employed. And the very fact



that servants, more than office workers, seek out the caste of their associates is significant. No educated person would, before a European, speak of another as being a "low caste fellow," yet this could be expected from the uneducated urban Goyigama. Significant indeed were the words of a Goyigama house servant in response to questioning about the Buddhist sects: "Bhikkhu one shoulder open, good; both covered, not nice, Master."

As is to be expected in the city jumble of class and caste, manual workers of high caste stand side by side with those of low, under the supervisor of any caste. Behind this apparent egalitarian mixing there is the same subjective feeling of relative goodness to be found among the upper classes, only here it is less guarded and more self-conscious. In a survey of factory working women in Colombo, inquiry was made as to each woman's caste, obviously in private interviews. The accuracy of responses is given full testimony in one incident in which two sisters claimed to be of different castes; one hesitantly said "Durāva," the other replied more boldly "Goyigama," neither knowing the response of her sister. Similar reluctance to admit oneself to be Durāva would not be found in upper class situations, nor in situations where the Durāva constitute a majority. From the responses of the women themselves, 95 per cent would have been "Goyigama"; covert inquiry in the community revealed that possibly 60 per cent were, in fact, Goyigama. Also relevant was the response given by these women as to their willingness to work under the immediate supervision of a "person of lower caste than themselves." One-fifth admitted that they would not care for such a job; most of these said they would reject it. That this is untrue in fact is probable, for in several of the factories persons bearing distinctively non-Goyigama names were immediate supervisors. Although the majority professed unconcern, there is no doubt but that women, and men as well, of this economic level frequently like to believe that they would not take orders from an inferior. Similar attitudes are almost wholly unapparent among white collar workers. The latter quickly respond to the outsider that "caste makes no difference today."

At all class levels the symbols of superiority and inferiority are practically nonexistent. The family name, however, remains as a badge by which caste membership often can be roughly ascer-

tained. Discriminatory behavior may not follow such identification, but the name often insures a knowledge of the caste of one's associates even in the city. Usually it provides only approximations and is subject to wide error. Certain names are obviously Goyigama, some obviously Karāva, and others are well known as being largely limited to certain lower castes. Thus some of the Portuguese names which are common in the Low Country were taken up principally within particular caste groups; others are found among persons of widely differing caste. As identifying badges these terms are rendered even more inexact by the common practice of dispensing with the Gē name altogether, using it as an initial, or dropping the distinctive caste syllable from it. Name changing is common in Colombo, and no doubt some part of the movement represents efforts to mask caste identity. Most Sinhalese are too ill-informed of the caste system generally to make precise judgments of another's caste simply on the basis of the Gē name, even where it is in fact a close indicator; however, partly through literal Gē name significance and partly through knowledge of other persons by the same name, it usually will be known whether or not the individual is Goyigama. For one who seriously wants to escape from his caste, the name symbol would be the least of worries; sooner or later he will be identified by some neighbor to whom his home village is known. Many persons leave their caste position unstated, and indeed, the disinterest of colleagues and associates may be such that the caste is actually unknown in some circles of acquaintance. It is unlikely that many persons make the complete transition from one caste to another so effectively that they marry into respectable Goyigama lines. Certain city families are slyly referred to as "Colombo Goyigama" by skeptical acquaintances. The incentive to a caste switch in the city is scarcely worth the effort it would involve, and among Karāva, the most numerous non-Goyigama caste, there is no inclination or reason for either anonymity or switching.

Despite the breakdown of feudal caste roles in the Low Country, and particularly in the city, not all persons of lower caste have left their traditional vocations even in Colombo. Several of the old caste occupations are maintained as monopolies, although it is obvious that not all members of the caste are associated with such



work. Since occupations of high status in the urban environment have been dissociated from caste, the retention of such roles is among the lower economic classes. Within the urban economy monopolies are being maintained only by the Karāva, Hēna and the Beravā. Washing and tom-tom beating are strictly inherited vocations. Although the former is today frequently organized capitalistically, both proprietor and his hired laundrymen are of Hēna caste. Beravā drummers function regularly in funeral processions and temples. Practically all fishermen of the urban area are Karāva, as are proprietors of larger fishing boat and netting organizations.

These traditional retentions are less important than the introduction of new vocations utterly unaffiliated with the caste system. The disparity of occupation and caste in contemporary times is not born of intercaste competition for traditional caste roles, but rather in the competition of all castes for new industrial and clerical employments. Only in carpentry has an important vocation once caste-linked become multi-caste in its constituency. The linkage of caste and occupation has of course left its marks upon the prestige hierarchy of vocation. Manual tasks are held in much lower esteem than in the West, and "clean" white collar work is valued very highly, most particularly in the government service. The peculiar occupational status hierarchy of Colombo is more attributable to colonial administration engendered premiums on government service and the values placed upon security than to subtle transpositions of caste concepts into the urban world. For one of high economic or educational status, manual work is improper less by caste than by the exaggerated development of "leisure class" concepts and no compensating stimuli in the culture for mechanical dexterity and experimentation.<sup>11</sup> The fact that work in the connotations of honest toil and enterprise has never been sanctified in either Hindu or Buddhist civilizations, and that no value is placed upon juvenile "tinkering" and exploration, cannot be laid only at the door of the caste system. Anointment of the government clerk is a product not only of caste but of feudalism, colonial administration, and the ethos generally.

The foregoing discussion attests the partial accuracy of the

<sup>11</sup> See Straus (96).



common claim that in the city caste is fast disappearing and is of little account except in matters of marriage. This is but half of the story. The traditional inequities, symbols and rituals of social distance are unquestionably dying and near to extinction, but the communal solidarity of castes has been transposed into entirely new urban situations. It may be said, quite rightly, that the solidarity of communal groups is not caste, but it is nonetheless rooted in caste, and the feeling of status difference is essential for its vitality. This solidarity is expressed in caste preferences in appointments, both in government and in business, and political favors, and in the continuing tendency among low caste villagers to find support and leadership in the urban representatives of their caste rather than through their regular political and governmental machinery, or in addition to it. While we are dealing here with phenomena in the urban environment, their significance extends to the national level, for the economy and the government in Colombo are the nerve centers for the entire dominion. The utilization of caste for power purposes by a multi-caste elite and the utilization of it by the masses as a technique of personal advancement are products of modern urban life. The Ceylon historian G. C. Mendis has observed that the phenomenon of communal rivalry is a product of the rise of a "middle class" in modern times.<sup>12</sup> New economic and social forces brought forth a new class with a modern outlook whose members did not hesitate to exploit latent community and caste solidarities for the attainment of their ends.

While Mendis emphasizes the use of caste in governmental appointments, it is at least as significant, although less nefariously, in gaining private employment and in forming business associations. Among the lower classes there is a common phrase used in reference to a potential employer, which is roughly rendered into English as "He might be a cousin of mine." The higher posts in many firms tend to follow the caste of management, and the extension of cooperative business relationships are frequently along the caste line.

<sup>12</sup> G. C. Mendis, "The Causes of Communal Conflict in Ceylon," *University of Ceylon Review* (55), April 1945, Vol. I, No. I, pp. 41-49.

## CASTE IN NATIONAL LIFE

Ceylon's parliamentary and constitutional government is established and operated upon the principle that caste has no legal existence. Secondly, it attempts in so far as possible to assume that caste has no existence in actuality. In regard to Sinhalese caste, except for the Rodiyā, there is reluctance to admit its existence in official documents, utterances and actions. Obviously, a refusal to admit the presence of the caste system, or to deal with it, is in part contradictory to the ideological anticaste position maintained by the State. Frequently this inconsistency arises through that common but often mistaken assumption that the quickest way to end a problem is to cease to see it.

Parliamentary debates in 1948 on the proposal only to establish a Commission to inquire into conditions of the "depressed classes" is illustrative of the official paradox. Although the proposed Commission had its focus upon the infinitely more serious inequities of the lower Hindu castes, the Government's views, expressed by the Minister of Justice, a Sinhalese, are equally applicable to the Sinhalese.<sup>13</sup>

We sympathize with the objects underlying the motion but, before we decide whether to accept or reject a motion like this, we have to consider whether those objects can be achieved by giving effect to the proposal. That the rights and obligations of an individual in any State should be conditioned by the accident of his birth in any class or caste is an anachronism that is very evident particularly at the present time. If the laws of our country differentiate between a man of one class and a man of another class, it would be possible for a Commission to examine those laws and recommend what amendments in them are necessary. But, Mr. President, our laws do not make any such differentiation. Every individual, whatever his caste or class may be, is entitled to all the amenities provided by the Government and to the services of every Governmental institution.

The Minister continued to elucidate the principle of nonintervention in local customs, but nonetheless accurately described

<sup>13</sup> (*Hansard*) Parliamentary Debates, First Parliament of Ceylon, Vol. 2, Senate (35), 1948, pp. 1566-1594.



situations of overt caste trouble in which the government had intervened effectively and on the side of the angels. Where caste inequity and disharmony is covert the situation is best dealt with under that happy Berkeleyism that "that which we do not perceive does not exist." Caste does not exist in the eyes of the state and only where its actual existence contravenes explicit enactments of the state is it given official cognizance. This internationally prevalent type of political astigmatism has less serious consequences for the Sinhalese than for the Tamils only because the "depressed classes" among them suffer less depression and humiliation.

Inevitably the policy of withdrawal from the unpleasant realities of caste induces blindness to the actual penetrations of that social system into the functioning of the society and State. The government of Ceylon is dominated by Low Country Goyigama leadership, a fact widely recognized by upper class non-Goyigama as well as by the Kandyan aristocrat. Their leadership is not of strictly contemporary origin but dates back a few generations into colonial times. A generation or two ago there was a sizable literature of fulmination against the political pretensions of the Goyigama who by their self-assurance, numbers, and actual social status were the logical appointees of European powers desirous of native tranquility. The immediate groundwork for Goyigama political ascendancy lies in the British colonial period and is preserved in no small degree under a democratic self-government by the very fact that the Goyigama are by far the largest caste group in the island. Obviously this presupposes caste solidarity in voting and implies some significance of caste in governmental appointment and programs. Faced with the necessity of unified self-government independent of the British Crown, there has probably been a diminution in caste favoritism in recent years. So long as caste solidarity exists, caste cleavages will represent politically significant lines and, in view of this, the extent to which caste bias is lacking in administration is more surprising than its manifestations.

Allegations of caste favoritism and of policies systematically discriminating against certain caste minorities are virtually impossible to disprove or prove. It would be difficult to believe that such a fine political machine as that afforded in the caste community would not require a certain amount of lubrication. Nor can gov-



ernment officials be wholly exempt from pleas resting upon the appeal to loyalty toward one who "might be a cousin."

Instances are commonly cited among the lower caste intelligentsia wherein government appointment boards have subtly sought out the applicant's caste origin. It is improbable that such events occur frequently today, and, in the lower rungs of service, caste is surely irrelevant. At higher levels there is a frequent suspicion among non-Goyigama government servants that their caste is against them in matters of assignment and promotion. In some instances this attitude may be a product of unadmitted incompetence, but in others it unquestionably reflects caste-based favoritism on the part of higher officials.<sup>14</sup> Such biases, however, do not rest only with the Goyigama, but rather with any "communally minded" superior officer who cares to show favoritism toward his own caste. In 1949 a spurt of Civil Service resignations was partially interpreted in some circles as arising from a conviction among certain officials that their opportunities for personal advancement were limited by the fact of caste. The interpretation has doubtful validity, but the idea was current. In the vast majority of situations caste has no bearing on either appointment or promotion, especially at low and only moderately high levels. It should be firmly understood that this type of discrimination, in so far as it occurs, is not against "low castes" but rather arises out of communalistic feeling between the Goyigama and other high status groups, especially Karāva, and favoritism toward a subordinate who is of the superior's own caste.

For specific types of appointment, particularly those in which direct authority over the public is involved, there is almost certainly discrimination against low castes. As recently as 1926 it was admitted by the Colonial Secretary, in response to questions by members of the parliament, themselves of low caste, that such discrimination existed, as a matter of expedience.<sup>15</sup>

No one is disqualified from entering Public Service by reason of his caste; and Government is anxious in no way to encourage the

<sup>14</sup> Obviously, specific cases cannot be cited here, although one instance of such expression of caste feeling is intimately known to the writer, and others are reported by sober citizens of unimpeachable competence and integrity.

<sup>15</sup> *Hansard* (Ceylon), Vol. III (35), 1926, pp. 1157-1158.

recognition or perpetuation of caste distinctions. Their existence, however, cannot be ignored in localities where caste feeling runs high. There are certain officials, for example the Headmen in certain Districts, and Sanitary and other Inspectors who, if they belong to certain castes, could not perform their duties without unavoidable friction and embarrassment. In such cases the Head of a Department would rightly refuse to appoint or recommend the appointment of such an applicant. Similarly a constable who belongs to a certain caste could not efficiently perform his duties in a District where caste distinctions are still regarded as of importance.

This sweetly reasonable discrimination, that is not discrimination, was more succinctly restated by a Vahumpura pressure group. "The observance of caste distinctions in making appointments in the Public Service is silently but effectively tolerated by Government to the detriment of all progress of the Ceylonese Society. . . ." <sup>16</sup> Quite similar to the British Raj under Governor North over a century before, the Crown could sanctimoniously disapprove the abominable system while supporting it for purposes of tranquil rule. That the Ceylonese Legislative Council, as such, a forerunner of the present parliament, saw eye to eye with the administration there can be little doubt. Seldom indeed does the word "caste," or even the more common euphemisms, appear in the debates of that assembly. In 1931 and again in 1934 a Sinhalese representative raised the issue of different titular designations given the Government for village headmen of differing castes. The Government response was that "these vestiges of ancient usage are gradually disappearing. . . ." and the low caste representative, having done his bit for the voters, retired from the floor with, "I hope they [the Headmen Commission] will take some steps to see what could be done in the matter." <sup>17</sup> Titular distinctions were officially removed in a subsequent action; one which would have been equally simple in 1934 or earlier.

Probably the last articulate expression of caste prejudice in any official publication appeared in the transcript of a witness's testimony before an investigating commission in 1926. The witness, a former member of the Legislative Council and one-time high

<sup>16</sup> "Petition to the Royal Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon, 1927," by the Gramarakhaka Maha Jana Sabha of Dagedera, Galle (66), 1927.

<sup>17</sup> State Council of Ceylon (*Hansard*), Vol. II (35), 1934, p. 2095.



official in the Government, spoke forthrightly in favor of caste discrimination in police appointments, specifying castes which "did not belong to a respectable class."<sup>18</sup> The storm of protest which followed publication of the transcript led to an official statement that the witness did not represent the views of the Government, and included a strong implication that the subject would never have been broached had the effects been realized by His Majesty's servants. There is no indication whatever that the policy of Government has changed markedly since Ceylonese independence. Government's position in 1948, the first year of independence, bespoke vigor in favor of democracy and an equal reluctance to act in the field of ancient usage. It had, however, acquired a certain circumspection in what was released for public consumption.<sup>19</sup>

There is no doubt whatever of the sincerity with which the Ceylon Government has pursued a policy of equality in reference to public services and the courts. Caste discrimination in the application of medical, public health, postal, railroad and other government operated services would be unthinkable in modern Ceylon. Indeed, even village opinion overwhelmingly supports the principles of democracy in just such matters. In instances of overt conflict on caste bases, there is no doubt whatever of the strong democratic stand taken by the courts, and in fact, the courts have been instrumental in relieving the Low Country Beravā of their symbols of disgrace. Except for the judiciary, the anticaste ideology of the State is confined in action to the enforcement of equality or approximations of equality in access to governmental institutions and services. An exception to this generalization arises in reference to the Rodiyās who have received some haphazard special benefits, but more significantly, have recently been brought into the public schools. In a belated movement to educate the Rodiyā, the Government vigorously supported the principles of equality.

It has been observed that caste feeling inevitably arises in refer-

<sup>18</sup> Report of Select Committee on the Police Force, *Ceylon Sessional Papers* (75), 1926, Sessional Paper XI.

<sup>19</sup> Thus, the hearings of the Delimitation Commission for the establishment of present electoral districts are classified as secret documents at the present time. The writer was expressly forbidden access to the evidence recorded by the Delimitation Commission by His Excellency The Governor-General in a letter dated 3rd November, 1949.



ence to some promotion and appointment matters in government service. Similarly, it appears covertly in the extension of certain services to the public and in the organization of local government in village areas, which in Ceylon comes under the centralized jurisdiction of the national state. Qualifications upon the just provision of government facilities are sometimes dramatic, but of less deep and general significance than the Goyigama bias in local government appointments.

Generally speaking, the flow of government services to the people is without regard to caste, but in certain situations where government policies are activated by local functionaries, inconsistencies between policy and program arise. Since these occasions are within the "conspiracy of silence," their frequency cannot be ascertained; and they can be treated only on the level of isolated instances.

The village of Kandayo, for example, lies in a sparsely settled dry zone jungle district, a number of miles from the nearest road, and is composed of Vahumpura people entirely, with their own headman of that caste. Its access to the world has for years been via jungle track to the hard surfaced highway and thence to the trade center. Recently Kandayo decided that the time had come to seek the badly needed road connection with the highway, and addressed a petition to the Government with that view. The petition was acted upon favorably in Colombo, and work begun shortly thereafter. As the roadwork actually progressed, the Vahumpura villagers became aware that although a road was being constructed it was being routed toward the practically uninhabited jungle rather than toward the village itself. Puzzled and incensed by what was happening, village representatives sought the aid of an influential Colombo resident of the same caste, and personal appeals were made at a high level in Government. Inquiry revealed that the road in fact was moving toward a dead end in the jungle, but that work had progressed so rapidly that no correction in course would be feasible. With a promise of an ultimate connecting spur to the village, the peasants could do nothing but drop their case and wait. Inquiry pursued, not by the Government but by the wealthy urban Vahumpura businessman, revealed that the Goyigama head of the regional village committee had misdirected the

surveyors. Although in this instance the isolated Vahumpura village had a headman of that caste, his fear of losing the appointment had been too great to balk or to divulge the Village Committeeman's plan. Colombo acted, but Kandayo still has no road.

A parallel incident is described by a prominent plantation owner and politician who acted as an intermediary in its resolution. A school in a Demala-gattara village received a supply of equipment allocated to it by the Ministry of Education. The schoolmaster, of Goyigama caste, rejected the shipment upon arrival, assuring the driver that the address had been misread and the village specified was one of similar name but of high caste composition, some miles away. The teacher was subsequently transferred and the equipment replaced through the intervention of a Member of Parliament. This incident is not an isolated one. In a Beravā community of the Southern Province a school is known to have been maintained for years without playground area and with an arbitrarily limited curriculum. Reports to the Ministry consistently indicated that the play area met departmental specifications, and that the curriculum was restricted due to the unwillingness of the local folk to utilize greater study opportunity. With a recent change in district officers, it was found that the Goyigama headmaster was systematically discouraging study by the low caste children and had obstructed any action to improve educational facilities in the locality.

The appointment of teachers in local schools is probably influenced by caste considerations in a manner that could almost be described as systematic, in spite of the fact that many of these schools are directly under the Government's control and most others assisted by them. High caste villages or even urban districts are not happy in receiving a schoolmaster of low caste. The local inspector of schools has strong pressure brought to bear to insure the appointment of schoolmasters of appropriate status. Thus in a Low Country community composed of Durāva and Karāva sections, each group sent delegations to the School Inspector with ultimatums. Each demanded that the retiring Goyigama schoolmaster be replaced by a member of the petitioning caste, and the identical threats were made that if this were not done their children would be removed from the school. The Inspector soon discovered the



loophole through which harmony could be maintained. Neither group had opposition to the appointment of a Goyigama man if no member of the "appropriate" caste could be found. Accordingly the dilemma was resolved through a recommendation that due to the signal achievements of the current schoolmaster his retirement should be waived and he be permitted to remain in the school. Needless to say, the Inspector's reports and recommendations made no mention of "caste," "pressure" or "compromise."

It is alleged that similar miscarriages of the Government's fine ideological policy frequently occur. The truth of many allegations is extremely difficult to ascertain, and if true, whether they are systematically inspired or, like the incidents reported here, isolated products of local villainy. Of some evidential value of discrimination in the location of schools is the fact that wealthy and educated Vahumpura families have organized and maintain an extensive system of village schools ostensibly as a completely public service but in fact as a service to Vahumpura settlements. Leaders of this organization are well equipped with cases in which government schools have been placed in Goyigama villages, whereas the more central and logical locations would have been in villages of low caste. Proof is impossible, but the extensive Vahumpura school organization testifies to the disapproval of the low caste elite with the facilities provided their village castemen.<sup>20</sup>

In each of these situations, it would be unfair to brand national administration with a discriminatory policy. It is probable that there has been no studied program of caste favoritism in such matters at high levels in recent years. These instances point toward the significance of local caste phenomena for the functioning of the State and are symptoms of a network of Goyigama political power at the local level throughout the interior, supported by Goyigama power at the national level. Instances where the local power is utilized in a caste discriminatory manner are probably uncommon, but the preservation of local power in Goyigama hands is helpful

<sup>20</sup> This displeasure arises not only from the unavailability of schools but from a tendency of Goyigama teachers in interior areas to discourage study among lower caste pupils. This is undoubtedly dying, but current instances are too frequently cited for one to disbelieve the allegations altogether, and the incidents mentioned above have been attested by reputable witnesses—verification through official channels is obviously impossible.



to the maintenance of that caste as the dominant group in the national scene. It would be difficult to believe that the governing elite is unaware of the political machinery existing in the local headman system. Influential members of the Government realize full well that they are elected by a caste vote in their constituencies, and some have been elected by the use of local caste power in the intimidation of wavering Goyigama voters and resistant low caste ones.<sup>21</sup> Except in large villages or groups of villages solidly composed of a low caste, the village headman in most interior Sinhalese districts is Goyigama. This is a usage which still has very strong support in the folk. Even emancipated persons of low caste fail to complain about it, for they realize the practical impossibility of a low caste man fulfilling the duties of a headman over even a small Goyigama minority. The headman traditionally and in fact is virtually always from among the wealthy Goyigama land-owners. The conformity between caste status, local economic power, local and governmental power is a happy coincidence for the Goyigama candidate in a doubtful district. It is not surprising that local headmanships continue to be conferred by divisional government officers who in the Kandyan provinces are still recruited from within the Kandyan, and if possible Radaḷa, aristocracy. Needless to say, similar practices are not maintained in maritime districts in regard either to divisional officers or to headmen, but the Kandyan peasantry to whom they do apply have a political importance greater than that measured in simple numbers.<sup>22</sup> The interior peasantry have relatively greater representation than the inhabitants of the densely populated coastal areas, and it is in precisely these areas that Goyigama power and numerical superiority is most apparent. It is paradoxical that a caste vote, combined with caste economic power at the village level, is the greatest single factor,

<sup>21</sup> In the parliamentary elections first establishing some members of the present Government it is a matter of common knowledge that physical intimidation and outright coercion were practiced in at least one district in reference to voters of low caste. In another, rumor seemed to have it prior to election that the influential Goyigama landlord candidate might ultimately get access to the ballots, and elsewhere caste loyalty was used as an overt appeal.

<sup>22</sup> Representation is not strictly on a population basis, although it was presumed that this was a major criterion in the determination of electoral district boundaries. There is in fact a wide range in the number of persons represented by a single parliament member and this probably favors the more sparsely settled interior as compared with the densely settled Southwest coast.

other than Buddhism, in combating the communism of maritime districts.

As persistently as political power has gravitated to the hands of a conservative Goyigama elite, economic power in Ceylon has come to the Karāva. Although the Karāva Catholics undoubtedly gained special privilege under the Portuguese, the contemporary position of the caste elite is a product of the British period. The great fortunes in this caste are at most three or four generations old and had their origin in such diverse factors as Christian favoritism, nearness to the expanding commercial economy, and lesser involvement in the traditional feudal concepts of agriculture and state honors than was true for their Goyigama neighbors. As an inferior caste in the eyes of the Goyigama, and hence one jealous of its status yet handicapped in the political exercise of its status claims, a strong communal spirit developed, on a par with the Salāgama, and considerably stronger than that of the self-assured Goyigama. Enterprisers appeared, and in their train came sons, cousins, potential cousins, and sons-in-law.

If one were to enumerate the ten richest families of Colombo, a matter on which only educated guessing is possible, eight or nine of them would be of Karāva caste. Few have surface activity in national politics, and some of those who do are regarded within the caste as pawns of Goyigama leaders. Although the Goyigama elite are fundamentally one with landed security, venture capital and entrepreneurial initiative rest with the Karāva. Apart from families of great wealth, the expansion of small businesses in both coastal and interior regions is more in the hands of Karāva entrepreneurs than of any other Sinhalese caste. The caste separateness of political and economic power could be an inconsequential historical accident except for one fact, namely, continuing caste communalism. In no small part the rise of each group in the contemporary urban scene is built upon caste solidarity and pride. For the Goyigama there is the caste vote and political favoritism, for the Karāva the caste-bred support of struggling newcomers in business, and affiliations by intermarriage among cliques of lawyers, wholesalers, retailers and industrial producers. Behind these loyalties is a strong sense of communal pride. Karāva solidarity has been bred upon resentment of Goyigama smugness in a superior status,



and has probably been enhanced by the fact that many of them are adherents of Protestant or Catholic Christianity.

The significance of this peculiar distribution of political and economic power is understandable only in historical setting. During the first quarter of this century Ceylon was rife with the fulminations of caste bitterness and caste glorification. In an era of rising economic power among low caste families, the position of the Goyigama was challenged vigorously, particularly by Karāva, but also by Durāva, Navandanna and Vahumpura literati. The publication of the *Nīti Nighaṇṭuva* in 1880, and the writings of an infamous (to non-Goyigama intellectuals) and vituperative Buddhist Bhikkhu (Batteramulla) touched off controversies that live today. The order of caste position given in the *Nīti Nighaṇṭuva* was sufficient to bring upon its editor, Sir Tikiri Banda Panabokke, the designation of a "stalwart dog." Bhikkhu Batteramulla was more pungently described (and illustrated) with a transposition of the syllables of his name, as "a urinating dog," and called upon to fall before and worship the noble people he had maligned, *i.e.*, Karāva.<sup>23</sup> Batteramulla had been no less insulting to the Karāva. In about 1909-10 a Ceylonese journal, *The Aryan*, was established with the quite obvious purpose of promoting the interests of the non-Goyigama castes and destroying the illusion of Goyigama superiority.<sup>24</sup> Here the attack came chiefly from a Navandanna family, one member of which also wrote a monograph on the Brahminic origins of that caste, not without indictments of the usurping Goyigama.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> This most vituperative of caste protest literature *Handuru Bete* (Whiplash for the Handuru) (Sinhalese) (44), by A. F. Kawrawasekharā, was printed in 1904 with the notation that the first edition amounted to two thousand copies. The book is quite rare today, and for obvious reasons has never been translated into English. This and subsequent works in Sinhalese have been translated in whole or in part for the author by D. C. R. Wickremesinghe. Another work of similar nature is *Sudrabandana Sankhalikaya* (Fetters to Bind the Govi People) (Sinhalese) (93), compiled by Sri Kulasekara, "a narration of the truth to assail those mean literary pieces done by anonymous writers of the Govi caste." Undated. More restrained, but nonetheless bitter and devastating, was the English language work of G. A. Dharmaratna, *The Kara-Govi Contest; With an Appeal to The House of Commons* (17), 1890, in which the appeal to the Colonial Administration is made obvious by the title.

<sup>24</sup> *The Aryan*: An Illustrated Anglo-Vernacular Journal published monthly (79), Colombo, particularly Vol. II, No. 6 and No. 9, 1910. Edited by A. E. Roberts Ratnawera.

<sup>25</sup> A. E. Roberts (Ratnajinendra Rabel Ratnawira) *Visvakarma and His Descendants* (80), 1909.



The most significant feature of these attacks upon Goyigama prerogatives and status is that not one of them rested primarily upon rational or upon democratic ideological grounds. Invariably each demanded the overthrow of the Goyigama and the enstatement in appropriate ruling position of a caste which claimed traditional blood rights to that eminence. All find historical, legendary, mythological and philological reasons for branding the Goyigama as Sudras—"no better than the Padu." In turn, it is demonstrated by identical techniques that the Karāva are not South Indian fishermen but Kṣatriya warriors from the Kuru Country of India, hence Karāva or Kaurava. (Karāva is usually considered to be a derivation from a Tamil word meaning "coast.") Navandanna are Visvakarma Brahmins. In more seasoned and less inflammatory tones, the Durāva are ancient warrior chieftains, *i.e.*, Kṣatriya, and the Vahumpura were as well a warrior people.<sup>26</sup> In similar manner the Salāgama and other castes have met the power of the Goyigama majority by claims to status far beyond those of the most communally minded Goyigama. From the heat of anger touched off by prejudicial actions and impolitic caste statements at the turn of the century, these controversies have lost much of their invective, but not their attractiveness to the non-Goyigama elite. Even an England-reared and Oxford-educated Sinhalese of Karāva caste who is almost totally ignorant of caste matters will be sardonically pleased at any exposition which throws the birth status of the Goyigama in doubt. Others more deeply enmeshed in caste realities work actively even today to upset the "myth of the Govi" and to achieve recognition for their own people. Caste lore, symbols, legend and history in support of Kṣatriya claims make their irregular appearance in print.<sup>27</sup> In 1949 Karāva literati were greatly encouraged by the discovery of a manuscript of Hugh Neville, translator of the *Janavamsa*, attesting the existence of "a rare version [of the Jana-

<sup>26</sup> *Niti Ratnavaliya* (Sinhalese) (64), compiled by James Bastian Perera (published by W. G. Don Andrayas Perumal, Dehiwala, 1914), is a sober exposition of highly fanciful Durāva history. On the Vahumpura the case is also soberly presented in Martin Edward Munasingha, *Supplementary Memorandum Submitted at the Request of the Commissioners on the Reform of the Constitution with Reference to the History of the Vahumpura Caste of the Singhalese Race* (55), 1928.

<sup>27</sup> H. F. & F. A. Fernando (22); A. H. T. De S., *Ancient Kaurava Flags: With Apologies to a certain 'Note' to rebutte ignorant calumnies and in the Interests of Ceylon History* (15); A. P. G., *The Headmen and Persons holding Ceylonese Ranks & Their Insignia of Office* (26), 1935; A. P. Gomes, *Kuruviti Raala* (Prince of Uva) (Sinhalese) (32), 1939.

vamsa], which contains an authentic passage referring to the Karāva caste, suppressed now from most copies."<sup>28</sup> This hint of Goyigama suppression of the anciently accepted ruling status of the Karāva will undoubtedly be the source of new works in which all of the old arguments will be revived.<sup>29</sup> Whatever may be the truth of Karāva contentions, or those of other castes, regarding the ancient past, in modern Ceylon the Goyigama is secure in his position of highest blood prestige. Caste literature serves mainly to entrench caste "nationalism" and to enhance the schism between the Goyigama and other castes. Communal antiquities have much the same attraction to the Sinhalese as Revolutionary war genealogical records have to middle-class American women, to which is added a special meaning, because in this situation the antiquities are truly caste in character. In spite of professions of Ceylonese nationalism and of democratic anticaste ideology, the caste system *per se* is effectively supported in these tracts, and their very existence evidences the sentiments of cohesiveness. The fact that the Goyigama infrequently articulate status claims means only that they are secure, not that they are more democratic or emancipated.

The modern urban world has brought the decay of the behavioral manifestations of caste hierarchy, but caste feeling and solidarity have not been shattered. Partially they are manifest in the schisms of all minority castes and the Goyigama, for the former are more or less united in some degree of displeasure at Goyigama smugness and power. More serious is the schism between the cohesive and aggressive Karāva and the Goyigama, and the fact that the former are predominately Christian and the latter Buddhist intensifies the rift, particularly in an era of articulate and aggressive Buddhist revivalism.<sup>30</sup> It is in the internal solidarity of these distinct and ambitious elites that the phenomenon has its

<sup>28</sup> From Notes entitled "*Janavamsa*," British Museum Collection of Neville Mss. Vol. I, p. 27 (56).

<sup>29</sup> In course of investigations basic to the present work, it was seriously suggested to the writer by a Sinhalese scholar (not Karāva) that if attentions would be confined to the Karāva there would be no doubt of ample funds for publication.

<sup>30</sup> Since Ceylon independence the shift from Christianity to Buddhism among Goyigama politicians has been evident, and persistent agitation is present to make of Buddhism the state religion of the country. This move is opposed by most of the mature leaders of government, regardless of their caste, religion or ethnic origin.



most serious meaning for modern Ceylon. The situation is quite dissimilar to that of India where the Brahmin minority is being deposed by the lower status electorate. Here the high caste elite has majority support, but it has the opposition of a caste elite with great and growing economic power. It seems inevitable that this aggressive and capable minority of wealth will attempt to translate economic power into political power and political status.<sup>31</sup> The quaint marriage custom of the Sinhalese may yet be a most significant determinant in their political development. In this picture the Kandyan aristocrat counts for little, but for the time he can serve to prevent the low caste and politically defective Goyigama bolting the party. If a serious Karāva political movement develops, it may have the double effect of reducing the drift to the communist "left" and of intensifying, or at least bringing into the open, caste rivalries which are at present more covert. Obviously it could not succeed on a purely communal basis as might be possible with the Goyigama. To prognosticate political developments in any nation is difficult, and in a new nation hazardous. In a new nation which also has caste, it is foolhardy.

The Ceylonese are at the threshold of nation building. Some of their leaders know perfectly well that political independence is no more than a gateway to the extremely difficult path of national unity and self-consciousness. Obstacles lie in the village horizons of the folk and their indifference to issues of nation in contrast to those of locality and cultural minority. Localism and cultural pluralism inspire the fundamental divergences that must be accommodated in the growth of national solidarity and nationally common goals and values. Within the Sinhalese as well as the Tamil ethnic bodies, the presence of caste segmentation further complicates the attainment of nationhood, over and above matters of the ethnic nationalism. However, the solidarity of castes is more a complicating feature than it is fundamentally inharmonious with concerted action on national issues. If nationalism can be built upon bases of cultural pluralism, the divergences of the Sinhalese castes can be accommodated. Caste cleavages retard the achievement of

31. According to current rumor, Karāva interests have already made one unsuccessful bid to buy one of the two major newspaper concerns of the island, one of which is now Goyigama owned, the other largely British owned, and both U.N.P. supporters.



national unity by diverting attention and action from issues of practical economic and ideological significance to issues which have no functional significance in the attainment of national ends. At this point, caste differences are not correlated with sharply demarcated ideological lines nor even, for the bulk of the population, lines of conflicting economic interest.<sup>32</sup> As the populace awakes to the existence of national issues, caste and personalities as political facts may be secondary to issues and economic interests, or emerging issues and interests may tend to conform to caste lines. At present there is indication that both of these trends are occurring. Our sample village of Gamagalla indicates the tendency toward submergence of caste loyalties to those of economic interest. On the other hand, the increasingly competitive position of the Goyigama and the Karāva elites is also apparent. For the rank and file of the peasantry it is unlikely that issues of functional significance can follow the lines of caste, either separately or as the Goyigama opposed to all comers. At this point, and probably for many years to come, caste loyalties and antipathies, along with other functional irrelevancies, will serve to cloud real issues, and to retard the formulation of public opinion along lines of significance for national development.

<sup>32</sup> It is commonly and probably correctly believed that the prohibition movement has been associated with different caste interests. The arrack industry is largely a monopoly of the Karāva, and in the great prohibition movement of the first world war period, the attempted reforms were partially inspired by Goyigama Buddhists. This is one of the few instances in which conformity on a political issue has been closely associated with the economic interests of a caste. However, there are potential cleavages in other possible movements, *e.g.*, democratic elections of village headmen, reform of land tenancy, etc.

*A Social Structure in Transition*

With slight disregard for historical continuities, the development of the Sinhalese caste system can be described as a three-stage progression. The first stage, largely occurring in the distant past, and hence obscured in the haze of legend, is that of the transplantation of the caste concept from the Indian mainland. We may infer that the process of origination spread itself long in historical time and the actual structure of caste was not merely transplanted but a product as well of direct migration by tribes and castes, and perhaps guilds and even marauding bands and armies. The second stage of the development was in the feudal crystallization of a caste hierarchy under the aegis of both secular and religious authorities. The diverse settlers of Ceylon became culturally Sinhalized, and were integrated and reorganized in varying degrees under feudal regimes which persisted into modern times. Indeed, in a quite literal sense, they survive in the present day. Our major concern, however, has been in the third and present stage of transition. The contemporary period is not set apart simply as one characterized by social change; caste systems like all social institutions are in persistent flux. The contemporary transition is unique in that modern times have witnessed the challenging of the ancient system as part of the legitimate order of society. The challenge has been issued not only by shifting ideology and values, but also by basic modifications in motivations and relationships which yield conditions of life inharmonious with the requirements of caste phenomena. The modern transition does not spell the sudden death of caste, but it is wrenching the system, in part destroying and in part re-defining, and throughout affecting the society's reaction to modern seculariz-

ing influences which in the West were unlimited by caste concepts and schisms.

The contemporary transition of Ceylon is revolutionary. Not only has nationalism become an immediate and necessary goal, but similarly western values of political and economic democracy have become fixed points in governmental policy. Ceylon is emerging from an ancient peasant order, dominated by institutions of feudalism, caste, autocracy, and kinship and local solidarities. These institutional systems were supported by a static technology and a pervasive supernaturalism. Summarily the two-thousand-year-old civilization of Ceylon is being re-gearred toward the goals of an expanding economy, national solidarity, democratic government based upon an informed citizenry, and maximum equality of educational and economic opportunity at the various caste, class, ethnic and regional levels. Such goals represent antitheses to the orientations of a familistic, feudal, technologically stagnant, society of status. While the new goals may well be distant ones, Ceylon is on the move, and the move is toward a total re-orientation of institutions, whether or not this fact is widely realized by those whose life is in flux.

The revolution which is pervading all Ceylonese institutions cannot leave caste untouched, for caste is a phenomenon integrated with feudal, personalized, and familistic status relationships. Neither the values nor the structure of a secular and economically rational democratic state and economy can support this institution of another era. Many specific trends encompassed in the Ceylonese transformation operate to disrupt the caste system directly, as well as by shattering the social order which supports it. The widening popular, and virtually complete legal, acceptance of equality in opportunity and justice, and belief in the propriety of status by achievement bespeak a value system explicitly contradictory to caste. The joint development of urbanism and economic rationality with their combined effects upon mobility, the growth of contractual relations and impersonality, provide objective circumstances in which strictures of caste are unenforceable. Even more significantly, they establish disparities between traditional birth statuses and economic prestige and power.

Perhaps in the distant historical past inferior castes accepted



discriminatory treatment as part of the natural order of things, without question and without complaint. Such attitudes are rarely found today either in Ceylon or in India for that matter. The preservation of caste hierarchy in meaningful behavior terms is usually directly or indirectly a product of power. To be sure, there has always been a power basis as in the supernatural sanctions of a priestly caste, or in the politico-economic control of a landed aristocracy. It is the modern discrepancies between power and birth status that are of inestimable significance in the degeneration of the caste hierarchy.

Historically, power resided in a landed, feudal aristocracy having as well moderate religious prerogatives. In modern times the power of the highest caste rests more in numerical superiority, but generally within the caste are those locally potent in lands and political and religious authority. It is necessary to realize that at no time have all forms of status and power been perfectly correlated with caste. Long ago Robert Knox was astonished at a society in which fixed statuses were at obvious variance with the "Riches or Places of Honour the King promotes them to. . . ." The caste system in full bloom did not throttle status by achievement, but it confined and conventionalized it in such a way that persons of differing birth but like achievement did not form a power clique or class. Power of a type significant for social organization rested in a landed hereditary aristocracy. With this aristocracy a numerically dominant caste identified itself, sharing crumbs of homage that overfilled their cousin-lords' tables. While it is irrelevant for the stability of a caste hierarchy that the lower political and economic strata be mixed by caste, it is extremely relevant that the powerful elite be homogeneous by caste. When the sources of social power are shared by representatives of many castes, the hierarchy is immediately subjected to disorganizing influences. Power of a low caste elite over low caste subordinates can be consistent with caste hierarchy, but power of a low caste elite over high caste subordinates strikes at the roots of the system.

In contemporary Ceylon there is the incontrovertible fact that low caste men are gaining positions of power locally and nationally. No longer is the power of wealth neatly confined by feudal restrictions. In a capitalistic society, the power arising from enter-

prise or lands is free floating, and within its grasp come employees, consumers and tenants. Accidents of location and competitive processes upset the ordering by birth implicit in feudal organization. Not only do men of low caste hold high rank, as in former times; today they hold diffused power over other men regardless of caste. In the interior villages the strength of the highest caste is locally maintained by their landed position, but the caste-free power of the trader, the estate proprietor and the urban businessman is increasingly felt throughout the land. The distinctions of low birth and high, under such circumstances, come to be hollow theories bereft of operational significance. Low caste men are in fact gaining access to power and to the symbols of opulence which, in a period of increasing secularization, are more valued than symbols of lineage or ancient privilege.

To a considerable extent these disruptions of the caste hierarchy have been stimulated by ideological conversion anterior to the changed conditions of life. Governmental programs insuring equality of treatment and opportunity rest in the revolutionary doctrines of democratic individualism. Fundamental ideological shifts have made possible intercaste competition just as truly as did the abolition of monarchical feudalism. Even in the villages there is widespread belief in the fundamental rights of all, regardless of caste, to attain positions of intellectual, political, economic and occupational eminence, and there is a corresponding agreement that channels of social mobility be open to all.

This emphasis upon the transitional character of caste is not to imply that the caste hierarchy is dead, nor that caste symbolism, roles and strictures are rapidly disappearing. There are many forces which preserve the old order and with it the old hierarchy. In the isolated mountain and jungle reaches and on the feudal estates, status ideology has changed little, and social organization relies upon the reciprocities of caste relations. In these environments the caste order is still the legitimate order, although with leavening from the democratic institutions of the state. But from these extreme situations there are infinite variations in the erosion of the ancient hierarchy. Where economic power has fallen to a lower caste, the hierarchy of privilege and symbol breaks down. Disintegration of strictures can occur without conversion to democratic



ideology; but where democratic and individualistic values thrive, caste hierarchy and status roles diminish, regardless of unchanged power positions or comparative levels of living. Where caste communities are powerful by weight of numbers and wealth the status position of the caste itself is raised. Where actual urban conditions obtain, the hierarchy melts into vague subjective reality; symbolic features disappear and caste roles persist only through the inexact and impersonal forces of occupational immobility. The feelings of superior or inferior birth persist, but these are significant for action in the form of personalized responses rather than in socially accepted patterns of caste behavior.

It has been abundantly evident that the disintegrative processes proceed slowly, and that in many localities and in many spheres of behavior caste superiority or inferiority is a significant social fact. But the city, and more haltingly, the countryside, is moving toward a period in which the caste hierarchy will exist in no more than a theoretical and subjective sense.

If the modern transition is toward the disorganization of the caste hierarchy, it is not so clearly toward the disorganization of castes as structural entities in society. Caste as a system of communal divisions is hale and hearty in the modern setting, and in some ways contemporary conditions intensify its reality. The influences which have proved so upsetting to the hierarchy of caste have had no similar effects on caste as a series of precisely defined, endogamous, and socially self-contained groupings.

The shifting ideology of status can best be described as conventionalized disapproval of caste inequity rather than repudiation of caste *per se*. That we have found some 60 per cent of the young male adults of a village supporting the Roḍiyā's right to education is significant for social change. (Seventy-five per cent of the village elders rejected this view.) But in this same village, four-fifths even of the youthful repudiated the idea of any intercaste marriage, and the suggestion of marriage with the lowest caste would surely have brought forth hoots of laughter. In spheres such as this, caste sentiment has not been visualized as conflicting with new and respectable democratic values. To the contrary, the integrity of caste in marriage is consistent with the still sacred values of family honor. Individualism is not credited when it is counter to the integrity of



family and traditional parental prerogatives. Democracy means equity, but not the emancipation of the individual from the decisions of the kin. The family is above the individual, and family concepts are steeped in traditions of blood purity. Regardless of what may happen to the hierarchical relationships between castes, the precise reality of the caste group is insured for many generations. Only in a Bohemian elite and in the larger body of socially, morally and economically impoverished urban slum dwellers has the integrity of caste lost its positive value. For the impoverished, this is a product of social and personal disorganization generally, rather than ideological conviction. For the liberal elite, it is perhaps a product of ideological conviction, but nonetheless with serious consequences for the family values. The reality of castes will survive as long as familism.

For most rural Sinhalese, the boundaries of personalized interaction and loyalty are within the caste. Upon such foundations the caste may here provide the framework for a political machine, or there, the nexus of entrepreneurial associations, or even, as in the case of urban laundry establishments, the personnel basis for an entire industry. In matters of social discrimination, access to education, and other tangible aspects of social and physical welfare, the transformation of the caste system is one of rapid degeneration. In matters such as subjective recognition of lineage status and loyalties, marriage, and interfamilial social life, Ceylon's ideological and economic revolution is having relatively little degenerative effect.

It would be conceptually satisfying if we should conclude that the caste hierarchy is melting away in favor of a social class system. Although there would be great patches of truth in such a contention, the point takes no account of the complex interplay between status systems. The implication that at any period caste represented the sole status system or that a "class system" must develop in conflict with caste, are unsupported by the facts.

Caste as a prestige determinant is losing its potency in favor of occupational, political and economic factors. As status determinants these are not new ones, but they have more sweeping significance today than in the past. In the social pyramids of occupational, political and economic, and even religious prestige, there

is in every society a tendency toward equilibrium.<sup>1</sup> Imperfectly but persistently, the individual's rank in respect to any one of these tends toward his rank in respect to others.

Caste is of a different order. Theoretically, and in part practically, whatever the social status position achieved by individuals or families through wealth, politics or profession, the prestige of caste is immutable. No single individual or family can modify the goodness of caste by any type of achievement or material success. In a society having castes, the determination of prestige positions must proceed with the separation of caste status from other determinants of prestige. The concept of *general social status* can be applied only to members of single caste. Birth position cannot be averaged with the others: it is the immutable status of a group in contrast to the mutable statuses of individuals. It must be confessed that this distinction may be broken, for a total caste may, under some circumstances, rise or fall in the social hierarchy. Chiefly, however, the distinction becomes unimportant only in so far as either the mutable or immutable determinants are shorn of significance in behavior. So long as either system survives they are simply different categories of reality, as distinct as oil and water.<sup>2</sup> For as long as the subjective ratings of the castes are recognized, and for so long as the castes are real social entities, the system will condition and limit the nature of social class phenomena. Caste cannot be absorbed in the growth of classes. Every Sinhalese possesses both mutable and immutable statuses, and each variety relates to different aspects of his prestige position.

Any discussion of the relations between class and caste is made tenuous by the varied and conflicting connotations of the class concept. In the sense of open strata of individuals bearing similar degrees of economic well-being and similar "life chances," Ceylon

<sup>1</sup> See Sorokin's *"Social Mobility"* (91), and also E. Benoit-Smullyan, "Status, Status Types and Status Inter-relations," *American Sociological Review* (4), April 1944, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 151-161.

<sup>2</sup> The practical significance of this has been shown in villages where attempts have been made to rate the social status of individuals by panels of village "experts." The idea of a generalized status position is common in village thinking, and it is quite plausible for one to have a "position in society." The concept is implicit in the Sinhalese word *piligeneema*, well known to village folk. However, when a Goyigama rater is given a case whose caste is low, the typical response is, "He has no position in society."



obviously has social classes in the western sense. In fact, in this sense Ceylonese society is more definitively class-structured than are most western societies, for the socio-economic levels are more sharply distinguished from each other. In terms of comparative opportunity, comparative well-being and the range of subcultural differences, these classes are infinitely more important than castes.

It may be remarked that a concept of a social class which might include in a common aggregate the *Roḍiyā* and the *Radaḷa* is, for many analytical purposes, arbitrary and socially unreal. As a statistical device or a welfare concept such a division might have merit, but as a sociological concept, social class must connote some commonality in social life and interests, as well as equalitarian interaction. In such a sociological sense it is extremely doubtful if social classes pervaded Sinhalese society prior to modern times and western influences, and in this sense castes are today more significant than classes. Recognizing the fact that social classes in this sense are only partially discernible in western societies, the tendencies toward their growth in Ceylon are further qualified by the presence of caste. The development of social classes in any but the material and arbitrary classificatory sense bears unmistakable marks of the caste heritage.

Social class is a societal phenomenon: it connotes the operation of group-making factors among persons of like opportunity, like prestige, like economic interests, and like cultural backgrounds. To be sure, one can discern in Sinhalese society status gradations with which are associated unique economic interests, unique opportunity levels, etc. But to describe such entities as social classes is to overlook the differentiations of caste which occur at every level. We may speak of *classes within castes* and in so doing refer to a type of status gradient which is of universal significance in Sinhalese localities. We may, on the other hand, speak of classes that *cut across the divisions of caste* uniting individuals of diverse castes on the basis of common economic interest, similar power positions, etc. Class in this latter meaning is but an embryonic development even within city environments. The *caste-class* is an ubiquitous and real social grouping; the *societal class* is largely abstract. And, unlike the *societal class*, the *caste-class* is not disruptive of caste solidarity and caste feeling. Outside the cities, *groups*



based upon achieved statuses are usually bounded by caste. Marriage, as in western societies, is assortative by economic level, but here it is assortative by economic level within caste. Interfamily loyalties and friendships are similarly assortative by class position, but by class position within caste. In so far as status gradients are significant for social relationships, they operate chiefly within caste rather than across caste.

In the city the *caste-class* is as evident as in the villages, but it is less encompassing. Mating is within this sphere, but there is also a wide range of class-limited social relationships which are not caste-bounded. However, in those personalized situations of life in which the individual acts as a total personality rather than in some segmentalized role, there is a persistent tendency for his social world to be bounded by the *caste-class*. Throughout the society there is no doubt an increasing awareness of *societal class* interests. In part this is shown in the growth of communist sentiment in the proletariat. The urban elites undoubtedly have the widest range of intercaste egalitarian social contacts, and identities in interests serve to obscure caste cleavages for many practical purposes. However, it is significant that of the many Britishisms which the Ceylonese have acquired, that familiar one, even in America, "a traitor to his class," is notably lacking. On the other hand, it may be well said that in public life there are many individuals who have "never forgotten their own people."

Castes do not simply fade away into a hierarchy of classes, any more than caste statuses can be averaged in some general concept of prestige or status. As a matter of fact, the prerogatives of caste are fading, and the different opportunities of citizens are increasingly the product of simple economic power. The emerging form of social organization is one that is neither caste in the conventional sense nor class in the societal sense. It is a bastard product of Asian design, western ideology, and the imminent effects of moderate urbanization. The social organization system is increasingly similar to that of a noncaste plural society.<sup>3</sup> Unlike most plural societies, the lines of division rest in the sacredness of a common institution rather than in subcultural contrasts. As a practical wel-

<sup>3</sup> See in this connection J. S. Furnivall, *The Netherlands Indies; A Study in Plural Economy* (24), 1939.

fare reality the hierarchy of castes is moving toward an end, to be replaced by social grades which, if dependent upon birth, will not be dependent upon caste birth. The heritage of caste will persist in social cleavages within these grades and in bonds of loyalty which cut through them. The caste as a community of sentiment and intercourse will wither slowly.

## *Glossary of Terms as Used in the Text \**

(For caste listings see pp. 71-72 and 93-94.)

<i>Amarapura Nikāya</i>	A sect or ordination of Buddhist monks, the name of which (Amarapura) is derived from the capital of the Burmese Empire. This ordination was introduced into Ceylon about 1800 A.D.
<i>Anda</i>	Share: <i>anda</i> land is that cultivated by a share tenant.
<i>Appuhamy</i>	Currently a moderate honorific; formerly a term applied to the sons of chiefs.
<i>Bana</i>	Sermons derived from Buddhist Scriptures.
<i>Banian</i>	A knit undershirt for men, often worn as the only upper garment.
<i>Basnāyaka Nilame</i>	The lay chief of a <i>dēvāle</i> .
<i>Bazaar</i>	A permanent market or street of shops.
<i>Bera</i>	The long drum.
<i>Betel</i>	A substance commonly chewed: usually composed of areca nut, "betel" leaf, and chunam (lime).
<i>Bhikkhu</i>	A Buddhist monk (priest).
<i>Bo-tree</i>	The sacred tree of the Buddhists.
<i>Boutique</i>	A small shop or booth.
<i>Cadjan</i>	The plaited leaf of the coconut palm, used for thatching houses, etc.
<i>Chena</i>	High jungle land cultivated periodically by cutting and burning.
<i>Chunam</i>	Prepared lime.
<i>Coir</i>	Prepared fibre from the husk of the coconut.
<i>Coolie</i>	One who works for hire, <i>i.e.</i> , unskilled labor.
<i>Dekum</i>	A present given annually to a chief or lord (or landlord) by his subordinate.

\* For a more extensive rendering of most of these and other words see, Codrington, H. W. (Compiler), *Ceylon: Glossary of Native, Foreign and Anglicized Words Occurring in Official Correspondence and other Documents*. Government Printer, Colombo, 1924.



<i>Dēvāle</i>	A temple of a diety.
<i>Dēvālagam</i>	Feudal lands under a dēvāle.
<i>Dēvi-Dāsis</i>	Girls dedicated as dancers to Hindu temples.
<i>Dhamma</i>	(Skt: Dharma) The teachings of the Buddha.
<i>Dhoby</i>	A washerman; persons of castes having washing as a traditional occupation.
<i>Gama</i>	A village.
<i>Gē</i>	Unilinear name group.
<i>Guru</i>	Teacher (properly, spiritual teacher).
<i>Hak-geḍiya</i>	Conch: ceremonial horn.
<i>Hāmu</i>	High honorific used in the Low Country.
<i>Hāmudurusāne</i>	Exalted honorific.
<i>Hīnayāna Buddhism</i>	Theravada, one of the great branches of Buddhist thought found today in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.
<i>Hulāvaliyā</i>	A headman of the Roḍi; formerly applied to minor headmen of other low castes as well.
<i>Jaggory</i>	Sugar made from the sap of the Kitul palm.
<i>Jātakas</i>	The stories of the different existences of Gautama (Buddha), of which several hundred are recorded.
<i>Kaiya</i>	A cooperative work group, i.e., voluntary group of unpaid workers.
<i>Kamma</i>	(Skt: Karma) The Buddhist law of causation, especially the doctrine of rebirth.
<i>Kapurāla</i>	Officiating priest of a dēvāle.
<i>Kataragama</i>	One of the chief dieties of Ceylon to whom is dedicated numerous dēvāles, the chief one being at the village of Kataragama in Uva Province.
<i>Kitul Palm</i>	The jaggory palm.
<i>Kolumbuva</i>	The low stool or block used as a seat for inferiors.
<i>Koṇḍe</i>	Male hair style in which the long hair is wrapped into a chignon on the back of the head.
<i>Kōrālemahatmayā</i>	Headman of a civil division (Kōrāle) in Kandyan Districts.
<i>Kōvil</i>	Temple to Hindu diety.
<i>Kuppāyama</i>	A Roḍi settlement.
<i>Mahabadde</i>	The "great industry," i.e., cinnamon.
<i>Mahatmayā</i>	Common form of honorable address.

<i>Mahinda</i>	The son or younger brother of Asoka who was sent to Ceylon to convert the country to Buddhism.
<i>Mandappa</i>	Hall, especially the stage in the Buddhist preaching hall.
<i>Mānike</i>	Lady; respectful form of address.
<i>Merit</i>	Good <i>kamma</i> stored up by the individual through the practice of "Right Action."
<i>Moderum</i>	A present given by a cultivator to the proprietor or owner of land for cultivation.
<i>Muttettuva</i>	Land cultivated for the king or lord as feudal service, and also land acquired by the lord for which he is not entitled to exact service. The former is termed <i>nindamuttettuva</i> ; the latter, usually rented out on a share basis, <i>andamuttettuva</i> .
<i>Nibbāna</i>	(Skt: Nirvana) Personal goal of Buddhism: final spiritual attainment and cessation of rebirth.
<i>Nikāya</i>	Any one of the Buddhist sects or ordinations.
<i>Nilakārayā</i>	Possessor of <i>nilapaṅguva</i> .
<i>Nilame</i>	A moderate honorific, especially in Kandyan Provinces.
<i>Nilapaṅguva</i>	Land possessed on condition of cultivating the <i>muttettuva</i> , or performing other menial services, or both, for the grantee or chief of a village.
<i>Nindagam</i>	Feudal lands under a secular lord.
<i>Ola leaf</i>	The leaf of the palm as used for writing upon.
<i>Palata</i>	Civil division: subdivision of a Province.
<i>Panchyat</i>	Council, court, applicable here to caste bodies.
<i>Pandal</i>	A decorated shed constructed for ceremonial purposes: often used in the sense of a triumphal arch.
<i>Paṅguva</i>	Share of land: a holding.
<i>Pattini</i>	One of the important Hindu dieties in Ceylon: a goddess.
<i>Peon</i>	A messenger or orderly.
<i>Perahera</i>	A procession, especially as connected with the major <i>dēvāles</i> .
<i>Pingo</i>	A pliant length of wood carried on the shoulders, from the two ends of which burdens are carried.

<i>Pinkama</i>	Meritorious act or a religious festival (unspecific).
<i>Pirith</i>	Collection of Pali hymns and sermons publicly read with a view to warding off evil influences.
<i>Poya day</i>	The holy day of the Buddhists.
<i>Purānas</i>	Class of ancient writings expounding Indian theogony, cosmogony, and other topics, including references to caste.
<i>Rājakāriya</i>	Compulsory or feudal service to the king, loosely applied to tenure services performed for any lord.
<i>Rālāhamy</i>	An honorific.
<i>Rāmaṇya Nikāya</i>	The "Rangoon" ordination or sect of Buddhist priests, introduced into Ceylon in the middle of the nineteenth century.
<i>Rata Sabhāva</i>	The caste court.
<i>Ratūmahatmayā</i>	Chief headman of a Kandyan District.
<i>Ridi</i>	A coin no longer used, which consisted of silver wire doubled in the middle and stamped.
<i>Sangha</i>	The Buddhist "priesthood": members of the Buddhist monastic orders.
<i>Sarong</i>	The body cloth stitched together at both ends, commonly worn by Sinhalese men.
<i>Siyam Nikāya</i>	The Siamese sect or ordination of Buddhist priests introduced into Ceylon in the middle of the eighteenth century.
<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>	One of the holy books of Buddhism.
<i>Talipot</i>	A type of palm having gigantic fan shaped leaves, frequently used as umbrellas and for other purposes.
<i>Toddy</i>	The fermented sap of the palm, drawn from the blossom.
<i>Tomba</i>	Register, especially of land and population.
<i>Valauva</i>	The residence of a chief or manorial lord.
<i>Vanni</i>	Literally any wild forest: usually applied to the jungles of the northern part of the island.
<i>Vanniya</i>	Anciently, semi-independent princes in the North-Central region: also used in reference to a quasi-tribal people of the northeast: also used in reference to nominal descendants of the ancient <i>Vanniya</i> s.



<i>Varna</i>	"Color": used in reference to the four great strata of Hindu society, Brahmin, Kṣatryia, Vaiśya, and Sudra.
<i>Vel Vidāna</i>	Irrigation headman.
<i>Vidāne</i>	Title for a headman of some lower castes, used as an honorific for persons of lower caste.
<i>Vihāragam</i>	Feudal lands under a Buddhist temple.
<i>Vihā.e</i>	A temple of Buddha.



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*Beschryving van Kaap Der Goede Hoope, en 't Eyland Mauritius, Met de Zaaken tot alle de voornoemde Ryken en Landen behoorende, Met veele Prentverbeeldingen, en Landkaarten opgeheldert.* Joannes Van Braam, Amsterdam, 1726.

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