

SRI LANKA

The National Question and the
Tamil Liberation Struggle



SATCHI PONNAMBALAM

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Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle

Satchi Ponnambalam

Clifford Prasad

'A people which enslaves another forges its own chains.'

Karl Marx

'A socialist of any of the oppressor nations . . . who does not recognize and does not struggle for the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e. for the right of secession, is in reality a chauvinist, not a socialist.'

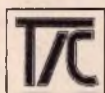
V.I. Lenin

'The old is dying, and the new is struggling to be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.'

Gramsci

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Owing to the horrific events that convulsed Sri Lanka in July 1983, Satchi Ponnambalam authorized the Publishers to rush the book out without his having time to approve or alter the edited manuscript, or participate in the proofing.

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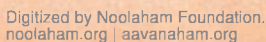
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The graph illustrates the growth of infrastructure in India. The x-axis represents time in years from 1950 to 1980, marked at 0, 5, 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50. The y-axis represents distance in miles, marked at 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50. Two lines are plotted: 'Railways' and 'Roads'. The 'Railways' line starts at (0,0) and increases linearly to (40,40). The 'Roads' line starts at (0,0) and increases linearly to (50,50).

Year	Railways (Miles)	Roads (Miles)
1950	0	0
1955	5	5
1960	10	10
1965	15	15
1970	20	20
1975	25	25
1980	30	30



Glossary

ACBC	All Ceylon Buddhist Congress
<i>Ahimsa</i>	Non-violence
<i>Api Sinhale</i>	We Sinhalese
<i>Arasu</i>	Government
<i>Arhats</i>	Saints
<i>Ayurvedic</i>	Indigenous medicine
<i>Bana</i>	Sermon preaching
<i>Bhikkhu</i>	Buddhist monk
BLP	Bolshevik Leninist Party
<i>Boddhisatva</i>	One who will become Buddha
<i>Brahmin</i>	Hindu priest; priestly caste
CNC	Ceylon National Congress
CP	Communist Party
CWC	Ceylon Workers' Congress
<i>Chakra</i>	The wheel, emblematic of the sun
<i>Dagaba</i>	Sinhalese-Buddhist <i>stupa</i>
<i>Dana</i>	Buddhist almsgiving
<i>Devale</i>	Shrine for god
<i>Dhamma</i>	Buddha's law of moral duty
<i>Dharmista</i>	Just and righteous in terms of the Buddhist doctrine
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DWC	Democratic Workers' Congress
Eelam	Tamil homelands of North and East Sri Lanka
EBP	Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (United Bhikkhu Front)
FP	Federal Party
<i>Hartal</i>	General protest strike
<i>Iswaram</i>	Famed Hindu temple of the supreme deity
<i>Jatakas</i>	Tales of previous incarnations of Buddha
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
<i>Kachcheri</i>	District administrative headquarters
<i>Kangany</i>	Leader of a gang of Tamil plantation labourers
<i>Karma</i>	The idea of retribution in the life cycle, whereby acts in previous existences lead to inevitable results in the shape of good or bad incarnations in later lives

LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
<i>Maha</i>	Low-country Chief Headman
<i>Mudaliyar</i>	
<i>Maha Nayake</i>	Chief prelate
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front)
<i>Mudalali</i>	Merchant
<i>Mudaliyar</i>	Low-country Headman
Nataraja	Siva as Lord of the Dance
<i>Nibbana</i> (<i>Nirvana</i>)	Death of the Buddha; Extinction of world desires and escape from transmigration
<i>Perehera</i>	Buddhist religious procession
<i>Pirit</i>	Reciting of sacred texts to exorcise evil spirits
<i>Pirivena</i>	Buddhist seminary
<i>Poya</i> days	Buddhist sabbath days
<i>Pooja</i>	Hindu ritual of devotional service
<i>Radala</i>	Kandyan 'aristocratic' clan
Rama	Hero of Ramayana
<i>Sala</i>	A tree with red flowers (<i>Vatica robusta</i>)
<i>Samenera</i>	Buddhist monk novice
<i>Sangha</i>	Buddhist order of monks
<i>Sasana</i>	The <i>dhmma</i> doctrine as taught by Buddha
<i>Satyagraha</i>	Passive resistance
<i>Satyagrahi</i>	One who resorts to <i>Satyagraha</i>
<i>Sil</i>	Meditation
Siva	The third member of the Hindu Trinity, emblematic both of destruction and procreative power
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SMS	Sinhala Maha Sabha
<i>Stupa</i>	Buddhist relic mounds in India
<i>Swabasha</i>	Indigenous languages — Sinhala and Tamil
<i>Tovile</i>	Devil dancing ceremony
TUF	Tamil United Front
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP	United National Party
<i>Vesak</i>	Celebration of birth, death and enlightenment of Buddha on the day of the full moon in May
<i>Vihare</i>	Buddhist monastery
<i>Vinaya</i>	Rules of discipline for the <i>bhikkhus</i>
VLSSP	<i>Viplavakari</i> (Revolutionary) Sama Samaja Party
<i>Yagas</i>	Prayers and offerings to god

Chronology

1505	Portuguese occupy low-country Sinhalese areas.
1621	Portuguese conquer and occupy Tamil Jaffna kingdom.
1656-1796	Dutch occupy low-country Sinhalese and Tamil areas.
1796-1802	British East India Company administration from Madras.
1802	British Crown colony established over low-country Sinhalese and Tamil areas.
1815	Sinhalese Kandyan kingdom cedes to British.
1833	British unify Sinhalese low-country, Tamil and Kandyan areas and establish Government of Ceylon. Legislative Council established.
1911	Legislative Council includes elected 'Unofficials'.
1915	Sinhalese-Muslim riots.
1919	Ceylon National Congress formed.
1921	'Unofficials' expanded in numbers in Legislative Council.
1924	Further expansion of 'Unofficials' in Legislative Council.
1928-29	Donoughmore Constitutional Commission.
1931	Donoughmore Constitution. State Council elected by universal suffrage. Board of Ministers formed.
1935	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) founded.
1936	Elections to second State Council.
1937	Sinhala Maha Sabha founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.
1943	Ceylon Communist Party (CP) formed.
1944	Tamil Congress (TC) founded by G.G. Ponnambalam. State Council adopts resolution on Sinhala and Tamil as official languages.
1944-45	Soulbury Constitutional Commission.
1945	Select Committee of State Council on Sinhala and Tamil as official languages appointed.
1946	Select Committee reports on transition from English to Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages. Soulbury Constitution. United National Party (UNP) formed.
1947	General election to House of Representatives returns UNP led

- by D.S. Senanayake.
- 1948** British grant independence.
Ceylon Citizenship Act denies citizenship to Tamils of Indian origin.
- 1949** G.G. Ponnambalam joins Senanayake cabinet.
Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act deprives Tamils of Indian origin of franchise.
Federal Party (FP) formed by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam.
- 1951** S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike resigns from UNP.
Sri Lanka Freedom Party founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.
- 1952** D.S. Senanayake dies.
Dudley Senanayake becomes Prime Minister.
General election returns UNP to power.
- 1953** *Hartal*.
Dudley Senanayake resigns.
Sir John Kotelawela becomes Prime Minister.
G.G. Ponnambalam and TC leave cabinet and government.
Revolt in the Temple published.
- 1954** Kotelawela declares intention to amend constitution giving "parity of status" to Sinhala and Tamil as official languages.
- 1955** Bandaranaike announces SLFP's language policy as Sinhala with 'reasonable use of Tamil'.
"Sinhala only" campaign by Mettananda and Kularatne.
- 1956** Kotelawela somersaults and announces UNP's official language policy as "Sinhala only".
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna formed.
Betrayal of Buddhism published.
General election returns MEP coalition.
Bandaranaike becomes Prime Minister.
"Sinhala only" Official Language Act passed.
Anti-Tamil rioting.
- 1957** **July:** "Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact" to protect Tamil interests.
October: J.R. Jayewardene marches to Kandy against "B-C Pact".
Anti-Sri Campaign of FP.
- 1958** "B-C Pact" abrogated by Bandaranaike.
May: Anti-Tamil riots.
Emergency declared and continued till March 1959.
FP M.P.s detained.
Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act passed.
- 1959** **September:** Bandaranaike assassinated.
W. Dahanayake becomes Prime Minister.
December: Parliament dissolved.
- 1960** **January 2:** Switch-over of administration to "Sinhala only".
FP calls *hartal* in North and East.

- March:** General election; Dudley Senanayake forms 'minority' government.
- April:** Government defeated; Parliament dissolved.
- July:** General election returns SLFP; Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike becomes Prime Minister.
- Nationalization of Schools.
- 1961** **February:** Federal Party stages *Satyagraha* in North and East. FP inaugurates Tamil *Arasu* (Government) postal service in Jaffna.
- Military occupation of Tamil areas for two years.
- Army atrocities in Jaffna.
- FP M.P.s arrested and detained for six months.
- Language of the Courts Act provides for "Sinhala only" in court proceedings.
- 1962** Army and Police *coup d'état* attempt discovered.
- Deteriorating economic situation.
- 1963** **August:** United Left Front (ULF) launched by MEP, LSSP and CP.
- 1964** **June:** LSSP enters SLFP government.
- "Sirima-Sashtri Pact".
- Kodiswaran language rights case.
- December:** SLFP-LSSP coalition government defeated in parliament.
- 1965** "Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact".
- Return to Righteousness* published.
- General election returns UNP and Dudley Senanayake forms 'national' government; FP and TC support government.
- 1966** **January:** Regulation for "reasonable use of Tamil".
- SLFP-LSSP-CP demonstrate against Regulation.
- 1968** District Councils bill published.
- R.G. Senanayake forms Sinhala Mahajana Peramuna (SMP).
- District Councils bill abandoned by government.
- 1969** FP withdraws from government.
- Privy Council rules partially in favour of Kodeswaran case.
- 1970** **May:** General election returns SLFP-LSSP-CP United Front coalition to power.
- Mrs Bandaranaike becomes Prime Minister.
- July:** Parliament becomes Constituent Assembly.
- 1971** **April:** Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection.
- Emergency declared and continued for six years.
- Appeals to Privy Council abolished.
- Draft Republican Constitution laid before parliament.
- 1972** **May:** Tamil United Front (TUF) formed.
- New Constitution adopted.
- Ceylon becomes Republic of Sri Lanka.
- Economic crisis deepens.

- 1973** Discriminatory standards applied against Tamil students for entry to university.
- 1974** Language of the Courts (Special Provisions) Law.
“Sirima-Gandhi Pact”.
Police atrocities at 4th International Tamil Conference held in Jaffna.
- 1975** Chelvanayakam declares for separate Tamil state.
- 1976** Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) formed with pledge to establish separate Tamil state.
- 1977** **July:** General election returns UNP led by J.R. Jayewardene.
August: Anti-Tamil riots.
- 1978** **August:** New Constitution of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka adopted.
Presidential system of government adopted.
Jayewardene becomes President.
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam proscribed.
- 1979** Prevention of Terrorism Act enacted.
Emergency declared for Tamil areas.
Military occupation of Jaffna district.
Army kills innocent young Tamils in Jaffna.
- 1981** **June:** Police-Army rampage in Jaffna.
Army sets fire to many places in Jaffna.
July-August: Anti-Tamil riots all over Sri Lanka.
- 1982** **July:** World Eelam Tamil Conference held in New York.
October: Jayewardene re-elected President.
Six crypto liberation organizations form revolutionary council advocating armed struggle to establish Eelam.
November: Tamil intellectuals and Catholic clergy detained under Prevention of Terrorism Act.
- 1983** **April:** President and Secretary of Gandhiyam detained and tortured.
May: Army burns Jaffna city again.
Liberation Tigers call for boycott of local elections and succeed.
June: Army empowered to shoot, kill and bury without post-mortem and judicial inquest.
Army kills and refuses to hand over bodies of several Tamils.
June-July: Anti-Tamil riots, massacres and holocaust.
Over 500 Tamils killed.
Tamils in the South and plantations flee to the North.

Preface

Most Western scholars and journalists have interpreted Sri Lanka as a tropical island paradise, ruled by 2,500-year-old Buddhist ideals of peace and compassion. Maintaining the entrepreneurial and profit-motivated capitalist system, yet stridently pursuing non-alignment, Sri Lanka is seen as a respectable working model of a Third World democracy, changing governments in classic style, with modernization uniquely facilitated by superimposition of the modern on the indigenous. Only occasionally do "race" riots and bloodshed, in the words of Ian Jack, "stain the face of paradise". (*Sunday Times*, London, 18 October 1981.)

One scholar wrote: "The political system provides a better model of a participatory democracy than many states of Europe or America . . . The ethnic minorities were preoccupied with protecting their interests against undue domination by the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority." The *Economist* (London, 13 June 1981), in a special 20-page *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, in its desire to cater to the world's multinationals and assure them that peace prevailed, sacrificed facts, compromised with objectivity and even presented the rioting in Sri Lanka as one *by* its Tamil community (the reverse of the truth). The opening paragraph stated:

Until 1977 it [Sri Lanka] was best known as a leading member of the non-aligned movement; a democracy that had voted every one of its governments out of office; a poor country that somehow avoided the harshness of its neighbours' poverty; an island of gentle beauty marred only by occasional riots *by* its Tamil minority. [Emphasis added.]

However interpreted, behind the romantic veneer and political facade lies the reality of deprivation of basic rights to citizenship, franchise, and the language of the Tamil ethnic nation of nearly four million people; three decades of national oppression; military occupation; police and army repression; and, today, a mandated Tamil genocide.

Bourgeois scholarship possessed no analytic tools to expose and come to grips with these social conflicts. The stark unreality of this inadequate bourgeois analysis, totally disregarding social formation, class conflict and socio-economic crises, was first revealed when the JVP revolution broke out in 1971.

When the seemingly secure and enduring state structure portrayed by these scholars crumbled and virtually collapsed, when thousands of Sinhalese teenagers resorted to armed insurrection and a revolutionary attempt to seize power to resolve the socio-economic crises generated by the reactionary policies of the ruling class, bourgeois scholarship was baffled. Similarly, these scholars have ignored the more than three decades of national oppression of the Tamil people. This is so even today, when national oppression has reached the most acute stage of genocidal repression: incarceration of Tamil intellectuals, Catholic priests, human-rights activists; and when armed revolutionary struggle for Tamil national liberation is engaging the total energies of the degenerate bourgeois state.

From 1971 state power has been maintained only by frequent national emergencies, by rifles and bayonets, deliberately provoked Sinhalese chauvinism, and a servile, sycophantic state-controlled press. Chauvinism has become an article of faith and to give it teeth President Jayewardene said in 1977: "If the Tamils want war they'll have war, if they want peace they'll have peace." The national question and even the legitimate struggle of the Tamils for justice is thus denied as *non est*. Patriotic liberation fighters are branded as "terrorists" and confronted by state terrorism.

In the absence of any properly grounded scholarly study and freely available information, the facts of the Tamil national question in Sri Lanka have been concealed from the Sinhalese, the Tamil people and the world community. Hence this attempt to bring together the several dimensions of this struggle, which David Selbourne has properly described as "a true national question, if ever there was one". My analysis is grounded on materialist, historical bases in order to expose the issue's complex historical causes and to correct grave misconceptions surrounding it.

In a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly in 1972, the late Handy Perinbanayagam, veteran nationalist, distinguished educationist, uncompromising social revolutionary and unrepentant Gandhian who, in the 1920s, was the first to admit "low"-caste people into his home, reflected the thinking of the concerned Tamils:

The "Sinhala only" Act and the change in political climate that ushered it in came about at a time when it seemed that Ceylon politics had outgrown the racist approach and that ideological alignments were taking shape When "Sinhala only" was made the law of the land, not the slightest effort was made to temper the wind to the shorn Tamil lamb. The self-esteem of the Tamil-speaking community was trampled underfoot. The law was stark, blunt and without any recognition of the fact that there was in Ceylon another sizeable linguistic group to whom their language was just as vital and precious as Sinhala was to the Sinhalese With the passing of the "Sinhala only" Act, the entire Tamil community became frustrated, unreconciled and psychologically uprooted. They despaired of human help and sought divine aid. Pilgrimages, fasts, Yagas were resorted to The self-respect of the Tamil

people was more precious than national unity . . . anyway there could be no national unity as long as the Tamils and their language were condemned to perpetual inferiority . . . The Tamil-speaking people of Ceylon will never be reconciled to an inferior status in their homeland.

Handy Perinbanayagam's organization, the Jaffna Youth Congress, in 1928, was the first in the country to demand independence for the people of Sri Lanka. For nearly 50 years he represented Sinhalese-Tamil unity. His commitment was so strong and his politics so principled that he declined the FP's nomination as its candidate in three elections to parliament in the 1950s and 1960s; standing as an independent he lost each time. He was the only Tamil to hold a clear position on the national question. I had many private discussions with him and his forthright formulation of the Tamil national question was that linguistic and cultural rights and equality are of fundamental importance, and that from those spring equality between two nations of co-ordinate status in a unitary state. He considered that ethnic and cultural loyalties override class interests, political party or any other group loyalty in society when a people is threatened and oppressed by another, and that unless equality is conceded, national self-determination of the oppressed nation would be the result. But until his death in 1977, he hoped for, and strived to achieve, the reversal of the "Sinhala-only" law and gain recognition of Tamil too as an official language.

The Tamil bourgeois FP and TC politicians never understood the national question in these terms and their political discourse was so conservative and reactionary that they alienated concerned socialist-oriented Tamils, and also the progressive Sinhalese, by their sterile romantic demagoguery and collaboration with the conservative UNP. They possessed no political coherence and advanced no strategies or tactics that took account of the class forces at work in the country.

If they had shed their conservatism and sacrificed their bourgeois — in reality, petit-bourgeois — class interests, and from the beginning engaged in revolutionary socialist struggle, the Tamil people could never have been driven into the captive situation to which the politics of personal power brought them.

The politics of revolutionary socialist struggle were advanced by the first Tamil Marxists, C. Tharmakulasingham and V. Sittampalam, in the mid-1930s and early 1940s, and in the *Lanka Sama Samaja* Party (LSSP) at that time they were the pioneers who correctly formulated the national question, class struggle and the course of the proletarian revolution. They challenged G.C. Ponnambalam's bourgeois communal politics, and Sittampalam wrote the famous tract *Communalism or Nationalism . . . A Reply to the Speech Delivered in the State Council on the Reform Despatch* (1939).

The LSSP and these Tamil party leaders correctly saw the plantation Tamil proletariat as the vanguard revolutionary force. In the mid-1940s Sittampalam organized them for the revolutionary socialist struggle. But unfortunately, both for the Tamils and for the revolutionary cause, Tharmakulasingham and Sittampalam died in 1945 and 1946 respectively, and the vacuum they left

was never filled. After 35 years, the Eelam Liberation Tigers have today come to advance the revolutionary struggle for Tamil national liberation.

The Sinhalese politicians were never willing to concede that the state structure agreed at independence was an alliance of the Sinhalese and Tamils to live under one central government with equal rights. On becoming fully aware of Tamil subjugation, and the blind alley into which the policies of Sinhalese chauvinists and Tamil conservatives were taking the Tamil nation, in 1969 I formed the Tamil Socialist Front, to join with any genuine socialist forces among the Sinhalese.

Again in 1979, along with some progressive Sinhalese socialists, including I.G. Herat Ran Banda and the famous political scholar *bhikkhu* (Buddhist monk) Panjaasara Thero, I launched the Podu Jana Party (Ordinary People's Party), which stood for equal rights for the Tamils and socialist advance. But each time it proved a Herculean task to fight the forces of reaction and the parties floundered. On the last occasion, as soon as the party was launched, the Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed and President Jayewardene sent the army with a mandate, as he put it, to "wipe out" the Tamil "terrorists" demanding a separate state. More than 10 young Tamils were killed by the army. I was driven to the conclusion that national oppression had reached such a level that life in a unitary state was impossible and national unity could no longer be advocated as a sensible political goal.

Sri Lanka, from the mid-1970s, degenerated into racist violence. Despite the paucity of writings on the subject, the publicity by Amnesty International (AI) of "racist" murder, detention and torture of young Tamils contributed to international awareness of the Tamil national question and freedom struggle. The AI report by Louis Blom-Cooper QC in 1975 stated:

... 42 young members of the Tamil community ... arrested for their agitation (generally peaceful, so AI understands) for greater autonomy for the Tamils, who feel that the provisions in the 1972 constitution regarding language and religion discriminate against them. They had been detained without trial under the Emergency Regulations for periods ranging from one year to two and a half years ...

The subsequent annual reports of AI from 1976 on contained details of young Tamils, often held incommunicado and tortured for their political beliefs. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), stated in 1977:

It would be a pity if Sri Lanka's leadership waited for bombs to explode and for prisons to fill up again, before conceding that the Tamils need reassurance that they have a place in the future of the island.

The Tamil struggle for independence by secession in a separate state of Eelam was internationalized when, in May 1979, the House of Representatives of the State of Massachusetts passed the Eelam Resolution calling for the creation of the Tamil state of Eelam. In 1981, several British MPs sent letters

and telegrams to President Jayewardene calling for an end to imprisonment of Tamils without trial and for their release. Addressing the Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar, held in Colombo in June 1981, Jayewardene angrily reacted, in these words:

. . . These telegrams and letters accuse this government of imprisoning people without trial, even murdering them. . . . There is one district in our country in which we are having some trouble with terrorists . . . I cannot release people without trial, who have been put into jail under the normal laws of the land. If I may say so, they are talking through their hat. When you meet your colleagues, please tell them that I said so. [*New Internationalist*, November 1981.]

Yet three months later, in August 1981, when the Sinhalese rioting against the Tamils broke out, Jayewardene stated:

A few days ago in several estates in the Ratnapura District, estate labourers had been subjected to violence and merciless harassment . . . by, I am ashamed to say . . . people of my own race . . . I am ashamed that this sort of thing should have happened in this country during my government. [*Ceylon Daily News*, 21 September 1981.]

Because of the rioting against the Tamil people, in August 1981 the Tamil Nadu State Assembly, in India, passed a resolution unanimously condemning the violence and expressing sympathy with the Sri Lanka Tamils. *The Hindu* (Madras, 22 August 1981) reported:

The Finance Minister and Leader of the House, V.R. Nedunchezian, who moved the resolution, and the Leader of the Opposition, M. Karunanidhi, and other party leaders who extended unqualified support to it, said they did recognize the dictum that no country had the right to interfere with the internal affairs of another nation. Where human and minority rights were at stake, everyone had a right to demand justice, they contended.

And the *Indian Express* (New Delhi, 13 July 1981) correctly summed up the Tamil national struggle in these words:

. . . the cause for *Elam* has picked up pace now and what it lacked in world propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s has been effectively achieved in the 1970s and the present decade.

In all my writings, past and present, I have steadfastly held to the dictum enunciated by C.P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian* for 50 years: "Facts are sacred, comment is free." In fact, comment has been kept to a minimum, to let the facts and events speak for themselves.

As with my previous book, in this work too I am greatly obliged to Robert Molteno of Zed Press, my publishers, for his constant encouragement, from the time he became aware that I was engaged in writing this book, and for his critical assessment of the manuscript. Lastly, once again I record my appreciation for the keen interest taken by my wife Vasantha in my writing of this book, and for her constant pressures to get back to writing, when I had, on the way, so often stopped writing because of my onerous duties on the Bench.

Satchi Ponnambalam

London

15 July 1983

1. Introduction

Sri Lanka is the name of the island earlier known as Ceylon. The new name was bestowed by the Republican constitution on 22 May 1972. "Ceylon" is the name by which the island came to be known to the outside world after Portuguese mercantile penetration in the early 16th Century.

To the Tamils and the Sinhalese, the indigenous people, the country had various appellations. Its earliest name, among the aboriginal Tamils, was Tamaraparani, the name of a river in Tamil Nadu, south India. The island is referred to by this Tamil name in Emperor Asoka's 3rd Century BC Rock Edict in Girnar, western India. Tamaraparani became Taprobane to the Greek travellers at the time of Alexander the Great. The early Indian Sanskrit works refer to the island as Lanka, its name in the Sanskrit language. The name Tamaraparani fell into disuse by the 1st Century AD and a new Tamil name, Ilankai, came into use. The island is referred to by that name in the Tamil classical *Sangam* literature (1st-4th Century AD). And so it continued until the 1970s, when Tamil consciousness led to the naming of the north and east of Sri Lanka, the traditional Tamil homelands from time immemorial, as Eelam.

There has been no name for the island in the Sinhala language, then or now. The present name Sri Lanka is its Sanskrit name, meaning "the resplendent island". The closest Sinhala name is Sihala, used just once in the *Dipavamsa* and twice in the *Mahavamsa*. Generally, Lanka has been the Sinhala name used. Sri Lanka has been variously described by the early travellers. "Ceylon is undoubtedly the finest island of its size in the world," said Marco Polo. Others have enchantingly described it as "the pearl of the Orient", "the pendant on the chain of India", "this other Eden, this demi-paradise", "the land without sorrow".

Sri Lanka is situated at the southern extremity of the Indian subcontinent, separated from it at its narrowest point by only 22 miles of sea called the Palk Strait. It lies between six and 10 degrees north of the Equator, and on the longitude of 79 to 81 degrees east. Sri Lanka is a medium-sized island, charmingly and strategically situated in the Indian Ocean. It became a trading post in the age of early European maritime adventure and a strategic naval base in the age of imperialism.

The island has an area of 25,332 square miles (16.2 million acres) — almost the size of Ireland or Tasmania. It has mountainous terrain in the central part, with an average elevation of 3,700 feet, surrounded by an upland area ranging between 1,000 to 3,000 feet. The rest of the country comprises a coastal plain, broad in the north and narrowing in the east, west and south. There is an abundance of rivers, all starting in the central hills and flowing outwards to the Indian Ocean. More than three-quarters of the land area is arable, and the climate is admirably suited for most tropical crops.

Sri Lanka is a country of heterogeneous culture, with two separate and distinct ethno-linguistic nations (Sinhalese and Tamils), five communities (the Tamils of Indian origin, Sri Lankan Muslims, Indian Muslims, Burghers, and Malays) and four great religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). According to the last population census, at the end of 1971, Sri Lanka had a population of 12.7 million, and it is now estimated to be about 15.5 million.

For reasons of history, the Sinhalese live in the west, south and centre, and the Tamils in the north and east. Until the administrative unification of the country by the British in 1833, this pattern of distribution was one of mutual exclusiveness. This was a result of differences in language, religion and culture and of political organization in the past under separate Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms. The areas the Sinhalese and the Tamils occupied were their traditional and exclusive homelands, to which they owed their first loyalty.

The Tamils were the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka, and, in this writer's contention, the Sinhalese came with the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd Century BC. The Muslims arrived to trade from Arabia or India, or even from Arabia via India, around the 10th Century; the Tamils of Indian origin after the opening of plantations by the British in the 1840s; the Malays from Malaya as mercenaries of the Dutch in the 18th Century; and the Burghers are the relic of the Portuguese and Dutch conquest, in the 16th and 18th Century respectively.

According to the 1971 census, there were 9,146,679 Sinhalese, constituting 71.9% of the population. The Sinhalese are divided into the low-country Sinhalese and the up-country, or Kandyan, Sinhalese. The former comprise 42.8% and the latter 29.1% of the population. The Tamils numbered 2,611,935, or 20.5% of the population. The Tamils are divided into the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Tamils of Indian origin. The former comprise 11.1% and the latter 9.4% of the population. The Muslims are divided into the Sri Lankan Muslims (6.5%) and the Indian Muslims (0.2%). The Muslims are Tamil-speaking. Hence 27.2% of Sri Lanka's people are Tamil-speaking. The Malays constitute 0.3% and the Burghers a similar figure.

Buddhism is the ancestral religion of the Sinhalese and is professed by 67% of the people, all Sinhalese. Hinduism is the ancestral religion of the Tamils and is professed by 17.6%, all Tamils. Christianity is professed by Sinhalese, Tamils and Burghers and is the religion of 7.7%; and Islam, professed by Muslims, is the religion of 7.1% of the population.

As stated earlier, the Sinhalese and Tamils are separate and distinct nations. Because of their particular historical past, and because of national-ethnic differences and the occupation of separate homelands, each possesses separate and distinct national consciousness and owes its loyalty first to its own homeland, and then to Sri Lanka.

The National-Ethnic Conflict

The British were the colonial rulers of the country from 1796. Having brought the Sinhalese and the Tamil nations together in 1833 for purposes of administrative convenience, after a century of colonial rule and colonial plantation economy the British withdrew at independence in 1948, leaving the two nations yoked together under a Westminster-model constitution in a unitary state structure.

Earlier, in 1946, the Sinhalese and Tamil political elite had arrived at a constitutional settlement for independence, the Sinhalese upper-middle-class political leadership promising just and fair government and power-sharing on the basis of partnership to reap the benefits of freedom and self-government. Both the Sinhalese and Tamil leadership, in perfect amity and unity, adopted the independence constitution as representing "the solemn balance of rights" between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples.

The independence constitution contained an entrenched and inviolable non-discriminatory safeguard, in Section 29(2), based on a provision in the Northern Ireland constitution. As in Northern Ireland, it proved ineffective in safeguarding the rights it intended to preserve inviolate. That constitution, bestowed by the British at independence, contained no law on citizenship, franchise or on individual and communal rights in a multi-national state.

After independence, the Sinhalese bourgeois political leadership, via the arithmetic of the ballot-box and gerrymandering, denied citizenship and franchise to one half of the Tamil people — the million Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin, long settled in the island. It then set half a million of them on a course of compulsory repatriation to India, a country most of them had never seen. The plantation Tamils of Indian origin were the largest component in the organized working class in the country and had already engaged in working-class struggle, displayed unexpected class solidarity and voted for the Marxist parties, who relied on them to advance their revolutionary struggle. This was the first line of attack by the upper middle class to keep power in its hands.

The Sinhalese governments, by a policy of aggressive state-financed Sinhalese colonization and resettlement of the traditional Tamil areas, sought to end the Tamils' exclusive occupation of their homelands in the north and east. Under this programme, which was accelerated after 1948, over 200,000 Sinhalese families were resettled in colonized enclaves, organized in clustered villages in over 3,000 square miles of the Tamil homelands. As a result, one-third of the Batticaloa district in the eastern province — in the Tamil heart-

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land – was taken into the new Sinhalese Amparai district. The Trincomalee district and the Batticaloa district (reduced in size because of the carving-out of the Amparai district), formerly exclusively Tamil, were according to the 1971 census 28.8% and 17.7% Sinhalese, respectively.

Then, in violation of the policy of governments from as early as 1930 to make Sinhala and Tamil the official languages of the country, Sinhala was made the only official language by the government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. The Tamils were administered in another's language and given the oppressive stamp of a subject people. The doors of government employment, on which the Tamils had principally relied for employment and economic advance, were closed to them. This forced Tamil government employees to study and work in Sinhala or leave employment. Tamil officers were given three years to learn Sinhala or face dismissal. This discrimination was extended to the security services, public corporations and other services, and to the private sector, where proficiency in the official language was an obvious premium.

Tamil parents and educationists resisted the teaching of Sinhala to their children, although often in the past they had done so voluntarily. Now they resisted, afraid they would lose their separate national-ethnic identity as Tamils and would face assimilation. Still worse was the government's decision that children should be taught in their mother tongue: Sinhalese children in Sinhalese and Tamil children in Tamil. This led to an anomalous situation: Tamil children were supposedly "educated" without knowing the official language of their country. They became alienated and could find no role outside their own regions. Hence their patriotism was directed towards their own homelands.

The younger generation of Sinhalese and Tamils became strangers to each other; and, to the Tamils, the unitary state became a monstrous irrelevance, which served only to perpetuate their disadvantaged condition. In short, the state not only failed to safeguard their interests, their language and culture, but actively discriminated against them because of their Tamil birth. In fact, they had no state; hence the urge to create a state, called Eelam, in their own homelands.

From 1956, the Tamils did not participate in the government of Sri Lanka. They were ruled by the Sinhalese. And the Sinhalese acted in their own interest, not in the interest of the Tamils. Hence the discrimination against them in employment and education. For the benefit of the Sinhalese, the government introduced lower qualifying marks in the competitive examination for entrance to the university. This eliminated competition. The merit system no longer existed. Yet various stratagems of "standardization", "district quotas", etc. were used to favour Sinhalese students, thereby removing a large number of Tamil students who had qualified for university admission.

It is these students, who were so flagrantly and unjustly excluded from university and prevented by the state from achieving their aspirations, who are today in the vanguard, providing the groundwork and leadership of the armed liberation struggle for the secession of the state of Eelam.

Of the four prevailing religions, Buddhism at first became the *de facto*

state religion of Sri Lanka. Then the 1972 Republican constitution directed the state to give the "foremost place" to Buddhism and to "protect and foster" it. The 1978 constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic went further and directed the state "to protect and foster the Buddha *Sasana*", i.e. to include not only the religious doctrine but also the Buddhist sects, monasteries and *bhikkhus*. Hindus, Christians and Muslims have only private rights of worship. The argument was advanced that, in the old Sinhalese monarchical society, the king was advised by the *Sangha*. In this manner, Sri Lanka was made a theocratic state.

From independence, the Sinhalese governments totally isolated the Tamil homelands from all economic development programmes and projects undertaken with massive foreign aid from Western donor countries. As a result, over the last three decades, while the Sinhalese people and their homelands have prospered and flourished, the Tamil people and their homelands have suffered and become the backyard colony of the Sinhalese.

There occurred four major anti-Tamil "race" riots, in 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1981; each time the Tamil people living in Colombo and the Sinhalese areas of the south had to assemble as refugees and withdraw to their homelands in the north and east. The last two riots were well organized and specifically directed against the plantation Tamils, many of whom abandoned the plantations and fled to the north and east. Previously mute, exploited, miserable coolies in the plantation enclaves, on resettlement they are becoming a new political force uniting with their brethren of the north and east. This is a development of great importance, not only for the Tamil national liberation struggle, but also for the proletarian revolution and socialist reconstruction.

In all these riots, hundreds of Tamil people were killed, many Tamil women raped and countless numbers of Tamil homes looted and burnt. After the 1958 riots, Professor Howard Wiggins wrote: "The memory of these events will retard the creation of a unified modern nation-state commanding the allegiance of all communities." It is important to remember that all these things happened despite the fact that the majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and despite the fundamental Buddhist concepts of *karuna* ("compassion") and *metta* ("universal love").

All these methods were used by the Sinhalese rulers to avoid and divert the class struggle, common to both the Sinhalese and Tamil oppressed and exploited classes, fuelled by the reactionary economic policies adopted to benefit their class and to consolidate power in their hands. So they resorted to Sinhalese-Buddhist propaganda. Their objective was to let national-ethnic forces divide, contain and smother class forces.

We shall see how the working class was betrayed, in crucial revolutionary situations, by its leaders, who were of the same social class as the rulers, and by their "Marxist" parties, because they could not advance a revolutionary proletarian programme. Since the leaders betrayed them, the proletariat failed subsequently in its historic task of fighting the oppression of the Tamil nation and supporting their right to self-determination. I shall come to these

matters shortly, when I deal with the national question.

Hence the goal of the Sinhalese ruling class, pursued and consummated within a relatively short period of ten years, was to achieve the conquest of the Tamil nation and its lands by the force of majority legislative power, executive edicts, military repression to quell peaceful political protest, anti-Tamil rioting and state-financed colonization. To these have now been added frequent states of emergency, the Prevention of Terrorism Law and "Tiger"-hunting to maintain that conquest.

As a result of the reactionary economic policies of the ruling class, the dependent capitalist agro-export economy has been in continual decline and perennial crisis. Whenever it is about to sink, it is kept afloat by foreign aid, IMF loans and World Bank-organized "Paris Club" Aid Consortium commodity import credits. The conditions for these included the devaluation of the rupee, cuts in welfare expenditure, removal of food subsidies and a general willingness to transfer the accumulating burdens on the poor. At the same time, to benefit the rich, both local and foreign, the government encourages an "open economy", liberalized imports, removal of exchange controls, incentives for foreign capital, tax holidays, constitutional guarantees for foreign investors, etc.

Yet, after 30 years of this type of policy, the economy today is in its deepest crisis ever. Sri Lanka, two years ago held out as the "IMF's success story", is today yet another "IMF disaster". While heaping the burdens on the poor, President Jayewardene stated in 1983:

The recent spate of price increases and revision of the Rupee against the dollar in Sri Lanka were the result of the requests of the IMF . . . the increased price of essential commodities, including rice and bread as well as transport fares, were necessary to obtain an Extended Fund Facility from the IMF to tide over the precarious balance of payments situation'.

The revolutionary pressures are contained by frequent states of emergency. Power frequently alternates between the political and the military. When it gets power, the military is not accountable to the politicians. The only connection is the family ties linking the two – at the top. But at the bottom, for soldiers and people, there is the same stark reality of brutality and suffering. This structure is maintained by guns and by a servile and sycophantic press. But the class question is about to come to the surface, as the national question already has done, in the form of revolutionary armed struggle for national liberation.

The National Oppression of the Tamils

We have seen that national oppression of the Tamils started in the very first year of independence, with the enactment of the Citizenship Act of 1948, which denied a million Tamils their basic right to citizenship, rendering them

stateless. This was followed by their disfranchisement the following year.

We have also seen how national oppression then extended to the Sri Lankan Tamils. The denial of their language rights seriously affected their political, economic, social, educational and cultural life. We have also seen how their lands were colonized and taken over by the Sinhalese. We have also seen how there were riots against them, and how both the Sri Lankan and the Indian Tamils were driven to their homelands. We have seen how life in a unitary state was made impossible and irrelevant to them. We have seen that, in reality, the Tamils had no state to protect and advance their interests. In that context, what was obviously and urgently needed was their own state, comprising their homelands in north and east Sri Lanka. The United States Declaration of Independence in 1776, in a similar situation, stated:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. . . . When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security . . . and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.

For about a quarter-century, the Tamil people and their bourgeois nationalist leaders attempted peaceful political dialogue, non-violent agitation and behind-the-scenes negotiations, and they entered into open or secret pacts with their Sinhalese counterparts to win recognition for Tamil as an official language or, as an alternative, regional autonomy. They even collaborated to win tangible concessions to soften the rough edges of their deprived status.

But each time pacts were broken, laws and regulations were not implemented, and they could not win a single concession. The Tamil people were second-class citizens even in their own homelands. They were given their children's birth certificates, their land titles, their tax certificates, their passports, in Sinhala. Mrs Bandaranaike, as prime minister from 1960 to 1964 and from 1970 to 1977, set her face resolutely against any political accommodation or *modus vivendi*. In 1964, she said that the Tamils "must accept" the place that she had allotted them. In the 1970s, with a six-year emergency in force, her army resorted to institutionalized repression of the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils and the Tamil-speaking Muslims. Her Republican constitution removed the meagre safeguards against discriminatory

legislation contained in Section 29(2), and the Tamils were reduced to their lowest position since 1948.

Because of the level of oppression, secession became the inevitable political goal of the Tamils, and at their insistence the Tamil bourgeois nationalist leaders formed the Tamil United Front (TUF). In 1975 its leader Chelvanayakam declared secession to be the goal of the Tamil people. In 1977, the TUF was re-formed as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and in the subsequent general election asked the Tamil people for a mandate to secede as the separate State of Tamil Eelam. The TULF stated in its election manifesto:

The Tamil nation must take the decision to establish its sovereignty in its homeland on the basis of its right to self-determination. The only way to announce this decision to the Sinhalese government and to the world is to vote for the Tamil United Liberation Front.

What the TULF was asking, in terms of the national question, was a plebiscite on secession. The people understood it as such and overwhelmingly expressed their collective national will to secede. They expressed, through the democratic political process, their thirst for self-determination. This was their answer to a quarter-century of national oppression. It was thus the task of the leadership to translate that will into reality.

This was a turning point. The Tamils no longer wanted to live in union with the Sinhalese but decided to organize themselves as a political state, separate from them. The historic significance of this decision was that the union, devised for the Sinhalese and the Tamils by their British overlords in 1833, had failed to be satisfactory or workable, after 115 years of British rule and 30 years of independence.

There was an important political dimension to this decision to seek secession. This was the role of young Tamils in the 1977 election. They had become the worst sufferers because of the "Sinhala-only" law, their educational disadvantages, the employment impasse, the economic stagnation of the Tamil areas and other forms of national oppression. From 1972, they were subjected to arbitrary arrests, and often to beatings by the police, whenever they protested against the various discriminatory measures employed by the United Front government to shut them out of the university, and whenever they organized black-flag demonstrations against visiting ministers. These led them to form themselves as the "Tigers" to oppose and resist national oppression. They were the leading force behind the TULF's decision to secede. In fact, the TULF had simply to endorse their position, because theoretically, as we shall see, they had become familiar with Marxism-Leninism and with all of Lenin's tracts on the "Right of [Oppressed] Nations to Self-Determination".

Just as in the 1970 election the young Sinhalese JVP had campaigned and secured victory for the United Front coalition, principally because of the UF's socialist programme in the Joint Election Manifesto, in the 1977 election the young Tamil "Tigers" campaigned and secured victory for the TULF,

principally because of the TULF's programme for secession. In the 1970 election, for young JVP supporters, unemployment, the high cost of living and income disparities were predominant issues which needed resolution; in the 1977 election, for the "Tigers", national oppression, questions of education, employment, language rights, cultural discrimination, Tamil self-respect and other aspects of the national question were the key issues.

Because of the role of young Tamils, the TULF won all 10 seats in the Jaffna peninsula, where it received 71.8% of the votes. Jaffna is the heartland and the intellectual capital of the Tamils, and such an absolute victory on the question of secession was decisive. Jaffna had given the lead in all political and social questions among the Tamils since political unification in 1833. The TULF won the four other seats in the northern province mainland, and in the eastern province it won Trincomalee, Batticaloa (1st member), Paddirippu and Pottuvil (2nd member). The young Tamils were active mainly in the peninsula and in the important town constituencies of the eastern province. The results indicated that they had won a "yes" vote in a democratic referendum. They were aware that Lenin had described the referendum as follows:

The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation. Specifically this demand for political democracy implies complete freedom to agitate for secession and for *referendum* on secession by the seceding nation [emphasis added].

That the young Tamil "Tigers" based their ideology and strategy for national liberation on Marxism-Leninism and Lenin's theses could be seen in *Towards Socialist Eelam*, a popular theoretical work published in Tamil, by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in 1980. This book is a Marxist-Leninist analysis of national struggle and class struggle and of the proletarian revolutionary strategies to be advanced concerning the Eelam national question. The second part of the book explains the failure of the young JVP revolution of 1971.

After 1977, legalized national oppression of the Tamils became the goal of the Sinhalese governments. The Proscribing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Law was passed in 1978, and the following year, it was repealed and replaced by the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the most draconian law ever to enter the statute book of Sri Lanka. This law did not define "terrorism", and treats every Tamil who commits "any unlawful act", at home or abroad, as a "terrorist" liable to be detained by the police for 18 months without trial. It authorized hitherto unknown powers of entry, search, seizure and interrogation, including keeping the arrested incommunicado by the police.

The provisions of this act clearly violate the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It has been condemned by the International Commission of Jurists and its repeal has been called for by Amnesty International.

Immediately after the passing of this act, a state of emergency was declared in the Tamil areas on 11 July 1979, and President Jayewardene dispatched one of the four battalions of the Sri Lanka army to Jaffna, with a mandate, in his own words, to “wipe out” the “terrorists” demanding secession. More than 10 Tamils were arbitrarily arrested in their homes on the very first day, and the bodies of two of them — Inpam and Selvaratnam — were put on public display. As a member of a delegation of MIRJE, a human-rights organization, I subsequently interviewed the families of both and received first-hand reports of how the army and police had come in, in civilian dress, and requested them to come to the gate of their houses and had taken them away for no known reason.

The army then resorted to arbitrary arrests of innocent young Tamils, detained them and engaged in systematic torture. David Selbourne, of Oxford University, poignantly described the torture the young Tamils were subjected to by the Sinhalese army in an army camp in the Tamil area:

The torture of Tamil detainees at Elephant Pass — “if they groan and cry there (*Aiyu, amma, amma!*) [unbearable, mother, mother!], no one can hear them — and at the Panagoda army camp is now a routine matter. And with a high turnover of short-term detentions — in which young Tamils are taken in, often repeatedly, for interrogation and a beating, and then released — an estimate of numbers is difficult. There have been a few Argentinian-style “disappearances” also . . .²

In November 1982, repression was for the first time extended to Tamil intellectuals and Catholic priests. The only law that has been applied to the Tamil people by the Sinhalese government, from the time of the 1979 declaration of the state of emergency, is the Prevention of Terrorism Act. And, according to the scope of this act, every Tamil is a possible “terrorist”. The armed patriotic resistance offered by the “Tiger” movement will be dealt with in Chapter 6.

The National Question

The Tamils differ from the Sinhalese in language, religion, culture, customs and traditions. The Sri Lankan Tamils are a separate nation with their Tamil language, Hindu religion, Tamil-Hindu culture and heritage, and a history of independent political organization, in separate sovereign kingdoms in the north and east, for centuries. Equally, the Sinhalese are a separate nation with their Sinhala language, Buddhist religion, Sinhalese-Buddhist culture and heritage and history of monarchical rule, in a number of Sinhalese kingdoms in the west and central areas, for centuries.

The fact that they are two ethnic nations is beyond dispute. As late as 1799, Sir Hugh Cleghorn, the first Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, wrote in the famous “Cleghorn Minute”:

Two different nations, from very ancient period, have divided between them the possession of the island: the Sinhalese inhabiting the interior in its Southern and Western parts from the river Wallouve to that of Chillow, and the Malabars [another name for Tamils] who possess the Northern and Eastern Districts. These two nations differ entirely in their religions, language and manners.

Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils were subjugated in battle by the Portuguese at different periods. The Portuguese, then the Dutch and until 1833 the British ruled the Sinhalese and Tamil areas as separate domains. In 1833, they were brought together by British fiat. During the colonial period, they lived in "union but not unity" (to borrow Dickey's phrase describing the relations between the French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians). The two peoples lived in concord and discord, amity and enmity, but were held together by a common master, a common language and an impartial rule.

The important fact is that, in the colonial period, they co-operated and combined and yet retained their freedom to live their own life, without let or hindrance. That Tamils and Sinhalese had an equal share in the national patrimony was accepted as axiomatic. But a strong common national bond, with a common culture, traditions, heroes and saints, and a common national ideology to hold the two nations together, failed to develop.

This was the case even at a time when, except at the level of the elite, the social organization of both Sinhalese and Tamils was basically non-competitive and non-acquisitive. Social emphasis was not on the individual but on the group, the village community. Progress or success was not the aim, and both groups, as we know today, suffered. Both were basically peasant agriculturists and the activities of the government did not touch them. The caste society of both provided considerable social cohesion, as each caste group was functionally related and dependent on the other.

All these no longer exist and competitiveness for scarce resources, and acquisition of wealth and influence, have become the objectives of a bourgeois society. These could have been held in check, or even satisfied, by a properly organized socialist society, but that was not what the ruling class wanted. The upper class, and its middle-class allies, have, by their policies and propaganda, brought about the break-up of the nation. These developments must be fully appreciated before we proceed to formulate the national question.

In their act of self-determination, through the democratic referendum of 1977, the Tamils expressed their collective desire to secede. It was a historic democratic decision but the Sinhalese political leaders were unwilling to concede the right of self-determination, in the sense of its secession and political independence. The UNP, in its election manifesto of 1977, had stated:

The United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people. The lack of a solution

to their problems has made the Tamil-speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate state. In the interest of national integration and unity, so necessary for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels such problems should be solved without loss of time. The Party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy the grievances in such fields as (1) Education, (2) Colonisation, (3) Use of Tamil language, (4) Employment in the Public and Semi-Public Corporations. We will summon an all-Party Conference as stated earlier and implement its decisions.

Yet when it came to power, with a five-sixths majority, it betrayed its pledge to the people, both Tamils and Sinhalese, and took no action to solve the problems of the Tamil people. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the 35-year-old subjugation of the Tamils will continue.

President Jayewardene demonstrated this when, in October 1982, he told David Selbourne: "They can't separate, and what we give them can't be different from any other part of the country." This clearly showed that he had no comprehension of the national question. It also showed that the "Tigers" were right in their belief that there would be no peaceful, political resolution of the national question.

Hence, to achieve secession, the Tamil nation was left with no alternative but armed struggle. Basing themselves on Marxist-Leninist theory, the patriotic Eelam Liberation Tigers viewed the Tamil national question, and their armed struggle, in terms of Lenin's theoretical analysis. In a letter to Prime Minister Premadasa, released to the local press, foreign high commissions and embassies, the Liberation Tigers declared on 20 July 1979:

The most important factor that we wish to state clearly and emphatically is that . . . we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice. We represent the most powerful extra-parliamentary liberation movement in the Tamil nation. We represent the militant expression of the collective will of our people who are determined to fight for freedom, dignity and justice. We are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed. We are not in any way isolated and alienated from the popular masses but immersed and integrated with the popular will, with the collective soul of our nation. Our revolutionary organisation is built through revolutionary struggles based on a revolutionary theory. We hold the firm conviction that armed resistance to the Sinhala military occupation and repression is the only viable and effective means to achieve the national liberation of the Tamil Eelam. Against the reactionary violence and terrorism perpetrated against our people by your Government we have the right of armed defence and decisive masses of people are behind our revolutionary struggles. [The full text of this letter appears as an Appendix.]

We have seen that the principal factor that generated the demand for secession is national oppression by the big Sinhalese nation of the small Tamil nation. Theoretically, Tamil nation, as an oppressed nation has the right to self-determination, and on the basis of a democratic referendum resolved upon secession. Some self-styled Marxists in Sri Lanka, lacking in theoretical clarity, while conceding that the Tamil nation as an oppressed nation has the right to self-determination contend that self-determination does not include secession. The correct theoretical position has been precisely and clearly stated and restated by Lenin that self-determination of nations is nothing but secession and the formation of an independent state. To clear up the theoretical muddle it is necessary to quote some passages from Lenin:

Self-determination of nations in the Marxist programme cannot, from a historico-economic point of view, have any other meaning than political self-determination, state independence, and formation of a nation state' (Lenin: *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*)

Again, Lenin formulated:

Consequently, if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or "inventing" abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of those nations from alien national bodies and the formation of an independent national state'.

Lenin advanced the freedom of an oppressed nation to secede as a universal socialist principle of workers' democracy. He viewed the struggle of an oppressed nation to secede as a revolutionary mass action and a necessary part of the proletarian attack on the bourgeoisie. In the case of the Tamils too, since their historic decision in the 1977 elections, the struggle for secession needs historical fulfilment, and the revolutionary struggle advanced by the Eelam Liberation Tiger Movement has been on the basis of socialist democracy and proletarian revolution. Hence it is a classic and authentic attempt to resolve the national question, and one that is *sui generis* and needs to be supported by all freedom lovers, liberationists, Tamil patriots and genuine Marxist-Leninists.

One last point needs to be averted to. Many readers may be left with the question as to how in the face of such genocidal repression by the state terror machine secession could be achieved and the Eelam state established. I could do no better in answer than refer to Lenin, again:

Under no circumstances does Marxist confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at the given moment only, recog-

nizing as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, inevitably arise as the given social situation changes." (*Collected Works*, Volume II, p. 213)

References

1. In the appendix to the Tamil book *Towards Socialist Eelam*, all Lenin's writings on the self-determination of oppressed nations are cited, without a single exception.
2. David Selbourne, "The Sinhalese Lions and Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka", in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, 17 and 24 October 1982.

2. National-Ethnic Structure and Early History

Sri Lanka presents a rich diversity of peoples and cultures, some ancient and indigenous, others modern and transplanted. From the early centuries of its long history, Sri Lanka has been a diverse society, the components of diversity being ethnicity, language and religion.¹ The island's geographical proximity to India, its strategic location on the east-west sea-route and the mercantile and territorial encroachments of the European powers contributed to the ethno-linguistic and religious make-up of the country.

Every great change that swept India had its repercussions in the island and, until the beginning of the 16th Century, Sri Lanka was a pawn in the power struggles of the south Indian Tamil kingdoms of Pandya, Chola and Chera. During the four and a half centuries of European rule, beginning with the Portuguese conquest of maritime areas in 1505, the elements of diversity have kept increasing. And by the time of the British conquest, in 1796, the island had acquired its multi-ethnic structure, the two well-developed ethno-linguistic cultures of Sinhalese and Tamil, and the four great religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. While the island as a natural geographical unit imposed a certain unity on the people, their diverse cultures, which are a residue of history, dictated separate collective identities and solidarities.

The outstanding fact of Sri Lanka's nationality structure is that, from ancient times and continuously over the last two millennia, two major ethnic people — the Sinhalese and the Tamils — have lived in and shared the country as co-settlers. This shared descent is traceable to the 2nd Century BC. The history of the people before that time has not been unravelled on a valid historical basis and is wrapped up in myths and legends invented by the Pali chronicles of the Sinhalese — the *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* — written in about the 4th and 6th Centuries AD, respectively. Both these chronicles are verse compositions in Pali, the Buddhist scriptural language, written by Buddhist monks, not in the historical tradition but as being the words of Mahanama, the author of *Mahavamsa*, "for the serene joy and emotion of the pious". They were written unabashedly from the Sinhalese-Buddhist standpoint, lauding the victories of the Sinhalese kings over the Tamil kings, treating the former as protectors of Buddhism and saviours of the Sinhalese, while deriding the latter as invaders, vandals, marauders and heathens.

In an effort to establish that the Sinhalese are the original occupiers of the island, the chronicles misrepresent the aboriginal Nega and Yaksha (or Raksa) Tamil people as non-humans, and validate their version by creating myths about the past. Yet these chronicles and their stories have been relied upon by historians for the reconstruction of the early history of the island, and this mythological history has been retold in later Sinhalese historical and literary works, and repeated in the Buddhist rituals, so that they constitute the current beliefs of the Sinhalese. They exert a direct influence on present-day ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. As Walter Schwarz, a perceptive writer on the national question in Sri Lanka, has observed: "The most important effect of the early history on the minority problem of today is not in the facts but in the myths that surround them, particularly on the Sinhalese side."²

Sinhalese and Tamils – Origin, Myth and Truth

It is not established on valid historical grounds when and how the Sinhalese emerged as an ethnic people in the country. There exists no historical evidence for a Sinhalese presence before the 2nd Century BC. The place of evidence has been taken by the Vijaya legend, invented by the authors of the chronicles. The *Dipavamsa*, literally "The Story of the Island" (probably written in the 4th Century AD), purports to narrate the story of the island from the earliest human times.

It introduces Vijaya, as the first occupant and founder of the Sinhalese, in these words: "This was the island of Lanka called Sihala after the lion. Listen to this chronicle of the origin of the island which I narrate." According to the chronicle, Vijaya, the grandson of a union between a petty Indian king and a lioness, on being banished for misconduct by his father Sinhabahu (the lion-armed), came with 700 men by vessels and landed on the west coast of Lanka, at a place called Tambapanni, in 543 BC, on the day Buddha died, i.e. passed into *nibbana*. Vijaya's men were lured into a cave and captured by a demoness (Yaksha) queen named Kuveni. Vijaya rescued his men, married Kuveni and had a son and daughter.

Vijaya later told Kuveni that before being crowned king of Lanka he should marry a human princess. He therefore banished Kuveni and the children into the jungles, sent his ministers to the Tamil king Pandyan, who ruled the Madurai kingdom in south India, and took the king's daughter as his wife. His men also obtained their wives from the Madurai region. Kuveni was later killed by the demons. In the jungles, the children married incestuously and had many children, from whom, the chronicle states, the Veddas³ of Sri Lanka arose.

Vijaya is said to have held his coronation and made himself the king of Lanka and ruled for 38 years from Tambapanni, his capital. He and the Tamil princess had no children and hence, on his death, his brother's son Pandu Vasudeva came from Bengal and became the king of Lanka. This story has been re-told with greater embellishment in the *Mahavamsa*, literally

"The Story of the Great Dynasty" (written in the 6th Century AD), the source of the present-day early history of Sri Lanka.

There is no historical evidence whatsoever for the arrival of Vijaya and the related story. There is no trace of a place named Sinhapura or of the petty king Sinhabahu in Bengali history. But because of their inability to account historically for the emergence of the Sinhalese, historians follow the lead of the Vijaya legend.⁴ Thus K.M. de Silva, Professor of History at the University of Sri Lanka, states:

Both legend and linguistic evidence indicate that the Sinhalese were a people of Aryan origin who came to the island from Northern India about 500 BC. The exact location of their original home in India cannot be determined with any degree of certainty. The founding of the Sinhalese is treated in elaborate detail in the *Mahavamsa* with great emphasis on the arrival of Vijaya (the legendary founding father of the Sinhalese) and his band in the island.⁵

On the basis of this legend, the present-day Sinhalese claim that they are the first settlers and are of Aryan origin. The foremost propagandist of the Sinhala-Buddhist "revival", Anagarika Dharmapala, wrote in 1902 on the origin of the Sinhalese:

Two thousand four hundred and forty-six years ago a colony of Aryans from the city of Sinhapura in Bengal . . . sailed in a vessel in search of fresh pastures . . . The descendants of the Aryan colonists were called Sinhala after their city Sinhapura, which was founded by Sinhabahu, the lion-armed king. The lion-armed descendants are the present Sinhalese.⁶

The chronicles introduce the mythical Vijaya and his men as the first settlers and proceed to misrepresent the settled Tamil Naga and Yaksha people as non-humans. The former are described as "snakes" and the latter as "demons". This has also been uncritically repeated by modern historians, according to whom the Nagas and Yaksha are non-humans of pre-historic times.

But it is an undeniable fact that, in the proto-historic period of the island (c 1000-100 BC), there were two Naga kingdoms, one in the north called Naga Tivu in Tamil, and called Naga Dipa in the Indian Sanskrit works, and the other in the south-west, in Kelaniya. Even the Pali chronicles mention them in a different context, in connection with the purported visits of Buddha to the island. The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the two great Indian epics written in Sanskrit before the 6th Century BC, mention the Naga kingdoms and their conquest by Ravana, the Tamil Yaksha king of Lanka. So does the Greek astronomer and geographer Ptolemy, writing in the 2nd Century AD, who locates Naga Dipa in the north, covering the territory from Chilaw in the west to below Trincomalee in the east.

According to tradition, the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka are the lineal descendants of the Naga and Yaksha people. The aboriginal Nagas, called *Nakar* in Tamil had the cobra (*Nakam*, in Tamil) as their totem. The Hindu Tamils, to this day, continue to worship the cobra as a subordinate deity in the Hindu pantheon and there are many temples for the cobra deity all over north Sri Lanka.⁷ Equally, the Yakshas were not demons but worshippers of demons, as shown by the still prevalent practice among the Hindu Tamils of propitiating the demons, which arose out of primitive fear and belief in the destructive power of demons.

Ptolemy describes the Tamil Yaksha people: "The ears of both men and women are very large, in which they wear earrings ornamented with precious stones." The wearing of ear-rings by both men and women is a custom still extant among the Tamils in the villages of north Sri Lanka and in south India, and the poor, unable to purchase gold ear-rings, wear rolled palmyrah leaves instead. That the ancestors of the present-day Tamils were the original inhabitants of Lanka is well brought out by the historian Harry Williams: "Naga Dipa in the north of Sri Lanka was an actual kingdom known to historians" and "the people who occupied it were all part of an immigrant tribe from South India — Tamil people called Nagars".⁸ Another writer states: "... long before the coming of the Sinhalese there would have been long periods when the island was inhabited by the ancestors of the present Tamil community".⁹

Recent archaeological excavations of burial mounds in the old Naga Dipa area, which covered a region from Chilaw up to Trincomalee through Anuradhapura, have shown skeletal remains of a people of megalithic culture who practised inhumation as a mode of burial in the proto-historic period. The artefacts found within, such as rouletted pottery with graffiti symbols, iron nails, bronze seal rings, arrow-heads, spears and daggers, show that those people had a settled and civilized life. The *Sangam* literature (1st-4th Century AD), reflecting the indigenous cultural tradition of the Tamils of south India, mentions inhumation as a custom then prevalent. These finds have, on paleographical reckoning, been dated to not later than the 4th Century BC¹⁰ and the skeletal remains classified as those of south Indian type.¹¹ The north-western urn burial site (Pomparippu) is said to offer many parallels with those found on the Coromandel coast of Tamil Nadu, south India.¹²

Ptolemy refers to Naga kingdoms on the Coromandel coast, and towns with toponyms like Nagar Koil and Naga Patinam, appearing from the earliest times, confirm that Naga people of the same origin occupied the Tamil areas of south India and Sri Lanka. The latter may have migrated from south India in early times, when Sri Lanka was certainly joined to mainland India through the shallow ridge of sandbanks called Adam's (or Rama's) Bridge in the Gulf of Mannar. Furthermore, the important find of a statuette of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of good fortune, in the Anaikoddai excavation (1982) confirms other evidence that the Naga people were Hindus and that Hinduism was the religion of the people of Sri Lanka before the introduction of Buddhism.¹³

The conclusions that could validly be drawn from the new historical

data clearly establish that the ancestors of the present-day Tamils were the original occupiers of the island, long before 543 BC, which the Pali chronicles date as the earliest human habitation of Sri Lanka.

How, then, does one explain the emergence of the Sinhalese as an ethnic entity in the island? In the 3rd Century BC (the date usually assigned is 247 BC), Buddhism was introduced into the island by missionaries led by *bhikkhu* (Buddhist monk) Mahinda, possibly the son of Asoka, the great Emperor of India (c 273-232 BC), who became converted to Buddhism and was determined to spread the religion far and wide. Devanampriya Theesan, the Tamil Hindu king of Lanka at that time, accepted the missionaries from Asoka and became converted to Buddhism. Since, in those days, the religion of the ruler became the religion of the people, and because Hinduism has always been infinitely flexible and little given to rigorous dogma, Buddhism, being an offshoot of Hinduism, spread fast in the island.

Mahinda brought not only the religious message but also the Pali canon, i.e. the scriptures as preached by Buddha in Pali, a language of Aryan people who overran India in ancient times, driving the Dravidians — the pre-Aryan people of north and central India — southwards. The Buddha *dhamma* (the doctrine comprising the moral order), or at least the basic “five precepts”, were taught to the people in Pali, and they are still recited by the Buddhists in Pali. The *Sangha* (the order of Buddhist monks), whose prerogative it was to know and preach the doctrine, learnt Pali in order to understand the *dhamma* as well as the *Vinaya* (rules of discipline for the *Sangha*). In this way, with Buddhism came Pali, a new language, and it was learnt by the *bhikkhus* to preach the *dhamma* as well as for the writing of books, just as Latin was used by the Christian clergy in medieval Europe.

In the course of time, the Sinhalese language as well as the alphabet and the script grew from the Pali language. With the spread of Buddhism and the growth of the Prakritic Sinhalese language, there occurred a religio-linguistic division of the people into those who remained Hindu Tamils and the emergent Buddhists speaking the Sinhalese language. This development can be inferred from a number of Sinhalese-Buddhist features in Sri Lanka. Firstly, there is no evidence whatsoever of the Sinhalese as a people, or of Sinhala as a language, before the introduction of Buddhism in 247 BC. The earliest cave inscriptions are in the same Brahmic script as the famous Rock Edicts of Asoka in western India. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states:

The earliest surviving specimens of the (Sinhalese) language are brief inscriptions on rock, in Brahmi letters, of which the earliest date from c 200 BC. The language of these inscriptions does not appear to be greatly different from the other Indian Prakrits (i.e. chronologically Middle Indo-Aryan languages) of the time.¹⁴

Secondly, the Sinhalese Buddhists, in the practice of Buddhism, have not quite succeeded in freeing themselves from their Hindu past. They continue to worship the Hindu deities, although Buddha revolted against the worship of gods and Buddhism opposes idol worship.¹⁵

Thirdly, the caste system, the central feature of Hindu society, prevails among the Sinhalese Buddhists, although Buddhism is opposed to caste. This again is a vestige of the Hindu past.

These, taken together with the historical and archaeological data outlined earlier, lead one to the irresistible conclusion that Sinhalese emerged as a result of the ascriptive cleavage consequent upon the spread of Buddhism in the Pali language. The Sinhalese, then, in terms of their origin, are not an Aryan people as popularly claimed, but Tamil people who adopted a language which developed from Pali, an Aryan dialect.

Even the pioneer Sri Lanka historian Dr G.C. Mendis, although he uncritically accepted the Vijaya legend of the chronicles, was left in doubt about its validity and observed: "... it is not possible to state whether they [the Sinhalese] were Aryan by blood or whether they were a non-Aryan people who had adopted an Aryan dialect as their language".¹⁶ Equally, Dr S. Paranavitana, the former Archaeological Commissioner, stated: "Thus the vast majority of the people who today speak Sinhalese or Tamil must ultimately be descended from those autochthonous people of whom we know next to nothing."¹⁷

The Sinhalese Ethnic Identity

There is, however, no single origin of the present-day Sinhalese, as over the centuries diverse people have merged to form the Sinhalese ethnicity. The Tamils, living among the Sinhalese in the south, "gradually adopted the Sinhalese language, as some of them still do in some of the coastal districts, and were merged in the Sinhalese population".¹⁸ Between the 14th and 18th Centuries, large numbers of Dravidians, mostly from Malabar, south India, came over and settled and were assimilated as Sinhalese. So did the Colombo Chetties, whose ancestors came from the Chettiar community, in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, owing to a great famine there in the 17th Century.

Furthermore, in 1739, since Sri Narendrasinghe, the Sinhalese king of the Kandyan kingdom, had no suitable progeny to succeed him, the brother of his Tamil queen, from the Nayakkar royal dynasty in Madurai, ascended the throne and took on the Sinhalese name Sri Vijaya Rajasinghe. This line of Tamil kings continued until the Kandyan kingdom was ceded to the British in 1815. The kings of the Nayakkar dynasty took on Sinhalese names and professed Buddhism to please their subjects. So did their families, courtiers and retinue, who came over in substantial numbers.¹⁹

Hence, in reality, as Dr N.K. Sarkar has put it: "... no matter what the racial origin, little remains of the original stock, except a belief in it".²⁰ Broadly speaking, in terms of present-day identification and self-image, a Sinhalese is one who bears a Sinhalese name and speaks the Sinhala language, whatever his origins may be.

The Sinhalese people and the Sinhala language are found only in Sri Lanka. The Sinhala language is the mother tongue of the Sinhalese, who are 71.9%

(69.3% in 1953) of the Sri Lankan population, today a little over 15 million. In 1953, Sinhala was the only language spoken by 58.9%, Sinhala and Tamil by 9.9% and Sinhala and English by 4.2% of persons three years and over. The Tamils (both Ceylon Tamils and "Indian" Tamils) constitute 20.5% (22.9% in 1953) of the Sri Lankan population. The Tamil language is the mother tongue of the Tamils and also of almost all Ceylon Muslims (or Moors) who form 6.5% of the population, and the Indian (or "Coast") Muslims who form 0.2%. Tamil was the only language spoken by 21.6%, and Tamil and English by 2.9% of persons three years and over.²¹

The Sinhala language grew out of Pali and is not connected to the present-day Indo-Aryan languages of northern India, which are all related, with varying degrees of kinship, to Sanskrit language. The vocabulary consists basically of Pali words with many Sanskrit and Tamil loan words. The long vowels of the Pali words are shortened and the double consonants reduced to single ones. Dr W.S. Karunatillake admits: "There have been several linguistic traditions that have exerted varying degrees of influence on the development of the Sinhalese language. Of these Tamil is one of the most important. There is reason to believe that in the past, the study of Tamil language and literature was cherished by the Sinhalese scholars."²²

Sinhalese is written in a variation of the Pali script, but in rounded letters like those of the Dravidian language scripts, closely resembling Telegu letters. In the first century AD, the Sinhalese alphabet showed a sudden deviation from the letters inscribed in the rocks and resembled those in the inscriptions of the Andhra kingdom, and was probably introduced from there. At that time, Andhra was a great centre of Buddhism, with the famed Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, on the river Krishna. And, according to Benjamin Rowland, in his *Art and Architecture of India*, the Nagarjunikonda "monasteries included one building specifically reserved for resident monks from Ceylon".

Until the 6th Century, the Sinhalese language remained in its Prakritic stage, and it was only by the 10th Century that the language and script developed almost to its present form. Pali died out in India by about the 12th Century but is used as the standard language of Theravada Buddhism, which prevails in Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Kampuchea. The earliest Sinhalese literary works were produced towards the end of the 10th Century. Much literature was produced in the 13th and 14th Centuries, all by *bhikkhus*, and this is considered to be the classical period of Sinhalese literature. They were all of Buddhist religious inspiration, comprising commentaries on sacred texts and elaborations of the *Jatakas* (the tales of previous births of Buddha). As the premier work of Sinhalese poetry, *Kavsilumina*, states: "The choicest flower of the tree of scholarship is the portrayal of the grandeur of Buddha." Secular literature began only in the 20th Century.

Buddhism and Hinduism were the only religions of the Sinhalese and Tamils, respectively, until, following upon the Portuguese conquest of the littoral areas in 1505, Catholicism was introduced by the Portuguese and a minority of the Sinhalese Buddhists and Hindu Tamils became converted to it. Later, under the British conquest and occupation (1796-1947), there

were further conversions to Protestant Christianity by both Sinhalese and Tamils, particularly the English-educated elite. Today, 67.4% are Buddhists (all Sinhalese), 17.6% are Hindus (all Tamils), 7.1% are Muslims, 6.4% are Catholics and 1.4% are Protestant Christians. 93.5% of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and 6.5% are Catholics or Protestant Christians. Of the Tamils, 81% are Hindus and the rest are Catholic or Protestant Christians.

Religious division has taken place in such a way that being a Buddhist implies being a Sinhalese, and being a Hindu implies being a Tamil. Despite this contrasting ethno-religious configuration, there has been no conflict between the two on religious grounds. Between the Buddhists and Muslims there have been conflicts, such as the 1915 riots, and also sporadic fighting in recent times over religious differences. There were also clashes between the Sinhalese Buddhists and Sinhalese Catholics in the early 1960s over Catholic dominance of the public and defence services, over education and over what the Buddhist chauvinists then objected to as the Catholic clergy "representing a foreign power" and engaging in "Catholic action", i.e. insidious priestly intervention in the recruitment and promotion of Catholics in government jobs.

The *Mahavamsa* links the story of the landing of Vijaya, the "origin myth", to a series of religious myths regarding the place of Buddhism in Lanka, as ordained by Buddha. According to the chronicle, Vijaya landed on the day Buddha passed into *nibbana* (death and enlightenment). Both these events are recorded as having occurred in 543 BC. The chronicle states: "The prince named Vijaya, the valiant, landed in Lanka, in the region called Tambapanni on the day the *Tathagatha* (another name for Buddha) lay down between two twin-like sala trees to pass into *nibbana*."

In this way, the chronicle vests the "origin myth" with a religious significance. Even more important is the assertion in the chronicle that Buddha, just before his death, summoned Sakka, the king of gods and the divine protector of the *sasana* (the *dhamma* doctrine as taught by Buddha), and instructed him: "Vijaya, son of Sinhabahu, is come to Lanka . . . together with 700 followers. In Lanka, O Lord of Gods, will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Lanka." By such injunctions of the Master, the chronicle represents Vijaya and his supposed descendants — the Sinhalese Buddhists — as a chosen people with the special mission of preserving the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka.

These are reinforced by further myths of visits of Buddha to the island, to make the "pious" believe that the island has been consecrated by Buddha. His first visit is set out thus: ". . . at the ninth moon of his buddhahood, at the full moon of Phussa, himself set forth to the isle of Lanka, to win Lanka for the faith, for Lanka was known to the Conqueror as a place where his doctrine should shine in glory".

According to the chronicle, this visit was to Mahiyangana, in the south-east, where Buddha is said to have quelled the heathen Yakshas. His second is said to be to Naga Dipa, in the north, where he quelled the Nagas. On his third visit, Buddha is said to have gone to Kelaniya and several other places,

including Anuradhapura, and “left traces of his footprints plain to see on Sumanakuta”, i.e. Adam’s Peak. In the 1960s, when the renowned archaeologist Paranavitana (himself a Buddhist), in an attempt to demythologize these tales, declared that the chronicle’s account of Buddha’s visits was pure legend, the *bhikkus* raised a hue and cry. These myths haunt the minds of the people and prevent honest scientific inquiry into Sri Lanka’s antiquity.

In their myth-making endeavour, the chroniclers falsified not only the early history of the island but even the great historical event of Buddha’s *nibbana*. They wrongly took 543 BC as the year of Buddha’s *nibbana* and made the supposed arrival of Vijaya coincide with it. Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Bode, the eminent scholars of Pali Buddhism, date Buddha’s *nibbana* in 483 BC. According to the views of such scholars as General Cunningham, T.W. Rhys-Davids, Max Muller, Vincent Smith, Percival Spear and H. Parker, Buddha’s *nibbana* could not have occurred before 486 BC. D.C. Sircar, the epigraphist of the government of India, convincingly calculates *nibbana* to have occurred in 486 BC.²³ This is 57 years subsequent to the date stated by the *Mahavamsa*.

When such a great historical and religious event of international importance could be distorted to suit the whims of the author of the chronicle, could any reliance be placed on the other stories of the chronicle? That they were written as panegyrics “for the serene joy and emotion of the pious” has been forgotten. On the distortion of historical events by *Mahavamsa*, H. Parker in *Ancient Ceylon* observes:

Tissa ascended the throne in 245 BC and is said to have reigned for 40 years; but this cannot be trusted, as the reign of kings who lived about the time have been extended to make the supposed arrival of the first Magadhese settlers under Vijaya synchronise with the very doubtful date adopted by the Sinhalese historians as the time when Buddha attained Nirvana or died, viz. 543 BC.²⁴

Regarding Buddha’s visits, there is no evidence whatsoever, not even legends in India or any of the Buddhist countries, to support them. This genre of *Mahavamsa* stories is nothing but a tangled web of cleverly contrived fictions purely for “the serene joy and emotion of the pious”. But because of their unquestioned repetition in later historical and literary works (*Culavamsa*, *Pujavaliya*, *Thupavamsa*, *Rajavaliya*, etc.), all of religious inspiration, and on being orally transmitted from generation to generation in the Buddhist rituals, they occupy a revered place in present-day Sinhalese-Buddhist popular beliefs. Sinhalese scholars have represented these myths and fictions as the early history of Lanka. In 1956, Dr Walpola Rahula, the scholar monk, wrote that “for more than two millennia the Sinhalese have been inspired that they were a nation brought into being for the definite purpose of carrying the torch lit by Buddha”.²⁵

Contemporary Buddhism in Sri Lanka has little of the doctrinal and philosophical goals of the ancestral religion. The doctrine’s prime non-worldly goal of striving for salvation, by withdrawal and ascetic renunciation

of worldly craving, has been drastically transformed in recent times by self-styled “revivalists” under the slogan of a “return to righteousness”. As such, the Buddhism of the urban elite vigorously pursues the goods and wealth of this world. It is also markedly anti-Buddhist in being aggressively intolerant of other religions and ethnic entities, and is encrusted with grand visions of Sinhalese-Buddhist domination of the island. Village Buddhism, on the other hand, is steeped in magic and exorcism, folklore and myths, pilgrimages and pageantry. While the belief in the truth of the doctrine certainly prevails and iconic images of Buddha are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka, the knowledge of the doctrine and the practice of the Buddhist ethical way of life are conspicuously absent at all levels. Surveying the scene, Dr E.W. Adikaram, a lay Buddhist scholar, recently protested:

The Buddhists who get worked up over real or imaginary wrongdoings of others are injuring themselves first. They are also creating an oppressive atmosphere which is not conducive to any spiritual growth. A person with even a little sensitiveness can feel this oppressive atmosphere in Sri Lanka today . . . If Buddhism is merely an empty shell devoid of love and compassion, the earlier it disappears the better it is for the world.²⁶

Though Buddhism infinitely values human life as being the one and only condition from which *nibbana* is attainable, Sri Lanka is reputed to have the highest murder rate per capita in the world. The *Mahavamsa* made a virtue of killing in defence of Buddhism, in its panegyric of the victories of the Sinhalese prince Dutugemunu over the Tamil king Elalan, in the 2nd Century BC war in which thousands of Tamils were killed.

The chronicle capriciously states that Dutugemunu’s war-cry was: “Not for kingdom, but for Buddhism.” According to the chronicle, Dutugemunu, in repentance over the lives lost in war, addressed the eight *arhats* (saints): “How shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?” The *arhats* replied: “From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven . . . Unbelievers and men of evil life were they, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men.” This 2nd-Century BC war was recalled by Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinists and, in 1956, Dr Walpola Rahula characterized it as the “beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese”.²⁷ On the perpetuation of this myth, Professor Gananath Obeyesekere states:

. . . the mythic significance of Dutugemunu as the saviour of the Sinhalese race and of Buddhism grew through the years and developed into one of the most important myths of the Sinhalese, ready to be used as a powerful instrument of Sinhalese nationalism in modern times. Although the justification for killing is unusual, the general

message that emerges is everywhere the same: the Sinhalese kings are defenders of the secular realm and the *sasana*; their opponents are the Tamils.²⁸

The Sinhalese-Buddhist collective consciousness is symbolized in pilgrimages and *percheras* (religious processions), *bana* (sermon preaching), *sil* (meditation), *pirit* (reciting of sacred texts to exorcise evil spirits), *vesak* (celebration of the birth, enlightenment and passing away of Buddha), *dana* (giving of alms), *tovile* (devil dancing) and other ceremonies.

The Sinhalese are broadly divided into the low-country and up-country (or Kandyan) Sinhalese. This division is not ethnic, but came about as a result of the European occupation of the littoral and the rise of the Kandyan kingdom, which prevailed from the 16th Century till its cession to the British in 1815. The low-country Sinhalese are now 40%, and the Kandyans 29%, of the total Sri Lankan population. The former occupy the western and southern coastal, mainly urban, areas and were subject to European influence continuously from the time of the Portuguese conquest. The latter live in the central highlands and the north-central plains, mainly rural areas, and had a traditional social structure and way of life centred around the monarchy, feudal aristocracy and Buddhist monasteries.

Both the low-country and the Kandyan Sinhalese are predominantly Buddhists. Of the Sinhalese Christians, the low-country Sinhalese are about 62% and the rest are Kandyans. Although the cultural differences between the two were slight, the Kandyan traditional elite opposed the early British attempts to administratively integrate the Kandyan with the low-country regions. And in the 20th Century constitutional reform representations, the English-educated Kandyan elite stridently asserted that they were a "nation" separate and distinct, for fear of domination by their more articulate low-country brethren.²⁹

The personal laws of the Kandyans are their own customary laws, whereas the low-country Sinhalese come under Roman-Dutch law, introduced during the Dutch occupation of the littoral from 1656 to 1795. The low-country Sinhalese were the first to take advantage of the political and economic changes which colonialism brought about. They serviced the coffee plantations established by the British as building and cart-transport contractors, artificers, arrack and toddy renters and retail traders, and with the profits earned they bought coffee, coconut and later rubber estates.

It was also from the low-country Sinhalese that the British recruited the local intermediaries for the consolidation of colonialism. Those who played this role soon abandoned the Buddhist religion and embraced Christianity, put on Western dress, repudiated traditional customs, values and food, and adopted European customs, consumption patterns and life-styles. Their leaders were soon co-opted as nominated members into the Governor's Legislative Council, and they advanced politically through the Ceylon National Congress, founded in 1920. Since independence, the low-country Sinhalese have provided the leadership of all Sinhalese political parties,

with the exception of Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike (*née* Ratwatte), who, being born into a Kandyan feudal aristocratic (*Radala*) family, married S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, a scion of a low-country Sinhalese family, which received great rewards and patronage from the British.

There exist significant internal differences within the Sinhalese on the basis of caste. A caste society has endogamous kinship groups, with hierarchical ordering of occupations and services on a hereditary basis. Caste divisions were integral to, and a surviving remnant of, ancient Hindu society. There is no certainty as to how it arose but has been perpetuated by the old Hindu conception of the group as the basic unit of organization, and by the belief in *karma*, i.e. the state of life a person is born into is due to his actions in his previous birth.

But, although Buddhism and Christianity are theoretically opposed to caste divisions, such divisions prevail among the Sinhalese, low-country and Kandyan, Buddhists and Christians, alike. But the Sinhalese caste divisions are not as deep, nor their influence so pervasive, nor their observance so rigid, as among the Hindu Tamils. In particular, there are no Brahmin priestly caste and no "untouchables" among the Sinhalese.

The conventional "highest" caste are the *Goyigama*-caste Sinhalese, in origin agriculturalists, and they predominate among both the low-country and the Kandyans. They form about 51% of the low-country Sinhalese and nearly 85% of the Kandyan Sinhalese.³⁰ Within the low-country Sinhalese, the *Karava* come next (about 17%), followed by the *Salagama* (about 8%) and the *Durava* (about 6%). Those who constitute the last three castes are mainly Tamils and Malayalis who came from south India between the 14th and 18th Centuries as fishermen, cinnamon peelers, etc. and were not socially accepted by the *Goyigama*, although they became Sinhialized by acculturation. The "low" or "depressed" castes among the low-country Sinhalese are the *Batgam*, *Wahumpara*, *Berava*, *Hina*, *Rajaka*, etc.

Traditional Kandyan society was one of status-based feudal relations between the landowning aristocracy, or the *Radala* (Kandyan *Goyigama*), and the landless who rendered various obligatory services to the former. The landless comprised a number of *Goyigama* sub-castes placed lower down in the ritual hierarchy. There were also a few non-*Goyigama* low-caste groups. Professor Bryce Ryan, in his study of Sinhalese caste patterns, observed: "Where the *Radala* 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."³¹

The caste division among the Sinhalese is most evident in endogamy, cross-caste marriages being rare compared to inter-ethnic marriages and marriages outside one's religion. In the rural, particularly Buddhist areas, caste and class boundaries often coincide: the rich and the dominant are the *Goyigama*; the poor and the oppressed are of low caste.

During the British colonial period there were considerable factional rivalries for political and economic ascendancy between the elite of the low-country *Goyigama* and the *Karava*; and between the low-country

Goyigama and the Kandyan *Goyigama*. The Tamil *Vellala* (the equivalent “highest” caste to the *Goyigama*) elite always combined with the low-country *Goyigama* and against the *Karava*, on the basis of upper-caste exclusiveness and loyalties.

It must be remembered that interdining and intermarriage between castes was taboo. With the bourgeois, loyalties were based first on class, then on caste, and ethnicity at that time did not seem a likely framework for domination. Because of this, the *Goyigama* always treated the *Karava* with contempt, while it freely coalesced with the Tamil *Vellala*.

This was to have its repercussions later on, when, mainly in order to crack this low-country *Goyigama*-Tamil *Vellala* alliance, the *Karava* elite created the “Sinhala-only” law and became its most unrelenting agitators. Nearly all the front-line “Sinhalese-only” zealots, and the *bhikkhu* campaigners of the Ramanya sect, were *Karavas*.

From that time to the present, it has been the *Karava* pressure group that has determined the course of the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic conflict in the country. Briefly stated, it has a powerful vested interest, for it is also basically a lower-middle-class group and earlier found itself in competition (in education, employment, etc.) with the Tamils, predominantly a functional lower-middle-class community. The *Karava* took a headstart in servicing the plantations and serving the colonial administration, and were initially in the ascendance, but were ousted from about 1920 by the low-country *Goyigama* elite.

Sinhalese collective identity, in terms of self-ascription, is not an ethnic identity but an ethno-religious identity – Sinhalese-Buddhist. The dominant distinguishing mark is Buddhist religious culture, which is central in the self-perception of the Sinhalese Buddhists. The emergence of the Sinhalese Catholics and Protestants brought about a cleavage in Sinhalese identity. To the Sinhalese Buddhists – in particular, to the Kandyans – the Sinhalese non-Buddhists are as much non-Sinhalese as Tamils or Muslims, for their point of reference is religion and not linguistic identity.

Professor Gananath Obeyesekere pointed out that this self-image resulted from the conversion of some Sinhalese to Christianity.

This identity simply equates Sinhalese = Buddhist – the two cultural labels are the constituent elements of a single identity . . . The Sinhalese Buddhists today perceive the Sinhalese Christians as not only non-Buddhists, but also in a sense as non-Sinhalese, for their Christian cultural markers are viewed as alien.³²

This religious centrality in the self-perception of the Sinhalese Buddhists is not something new; it was so in the pre-colonial times. Professor Obeyesekere states:

Up to the 16th century, being a Sinhalese implied being a Buddhist . . . With the advent of the European powers, a split in the Sinhalese identity

occurred as a result of the existence of Catholic and Protestant Sinhalese who were clearly not Buddhist. Sinhalese ceased to be an ethnic identity.

The Catholic and Protestant Sinhalese, too, define themselves more in terms of their respective religion than their linguistic culture. It is their religious sub-culture that is critical in their self-ascription. In fact, when English held sway, i.e. before the “Sinhala-only” law in 1956, the Sinhalese Christians found more in common with the Tamil Christians than with the Sinhalese Buddhists. And up to the “Sinhala-only” law, there was considerable religious tolerance between the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus.

But today the Tamils, be they Hindus or Christians, view the Sinhalese as a monolithic entity united in a single endeavour to subjugate and destroy their identity as a distinct ethnic entity in the country.

Tamil Ethnic Identity

The Sri Lanka Tamils of today are the lineal descendants of the original inhabitants of the island. To this ancient ancestry, the latter-day invasions by the armies of the south Indian Tamil Pandyan, Chola and Chera kings, and those raised by the usurping Sinhalese kings, made successive additions. In the proto-historic period of the island, the early totemistic Tamil tribes migrated from their homelands in south India and settled in the north, in the south-west around Kelaniya and in the south-east around the river Walawe Ganga. In the north, they founded a sovereign kingdom called Naga Dipa. In the 2nd Century AD, Ptolemy located the earlier Naga Dipa kingdom as covering the territory from Chilaw in the west to below Trincomalee in the east. The ancient Tamil name of the island was Tamaraparani. From those ancient times of the Naga Dipa kingdom, the Tamils have occupied the north-eastern littoral, which is their exclusive homeland.

At the time of the introduction of Buddhism (3rd Century BC), Tamil kingly rule was centred in Anuradhapura, the ancient capital which the Tamil kings founded. Devanampriya Theesan, the Tamil king at that time, was followed by Senan and Kuddikan (177-155 BC) and by Ellalan (145-101 BC). With the defeat of Ellalan by the Sinhalese prince Dutugemunu, in 101 BC, which is a historical fact, Anuradhapura became the seat of the Sinhalese dynasty. The popularized Sinhalese version of Sri Lanka history, however, represents Devanampriya Theesan as a Sinhalese king (which is wrong, for, as was earlier contended, Sinhalese emerged subsequent to the introduction of Buddhism), and Ellalan (called Elara in Sinhalese) as “a Chola prince, who invaded Ceylon . . . captured the [Sinhalese] government at Anuradhapura and ruled for about forty-five years”.³³

The fact that Tamil kings ruled from Anuradhapura before the rise of the Sinhalese kings is borne out by *Mahavamsa* itself, which in Chapter 24, with its usual mystification of kings and events, states that when Dutugemunu informed his father Kavantissa, ruler of the southern principality of Ruhuna,

that he was going to declare war against the Tamils, his father replied: "Let Tamils rule that side of the Maha Ganga [now Mahaweli Ganga] and the districts this side of the Maha Ganga are more than enough for us to rule."

The chronicle goes on to say that Dutugemunu's first battle was with a Tamil petty king Chathan, who was ruling Mahiyangana in the south-east, and thereafter he is said to have fought 31 Tamil petty kings from Mahiyangana to Anuradhapura, before he met Elara in battle.

These episodes from *Mahavamsa* clearly indicate the location and area the Tamils occupied, and contradict the notion that Ellalan was a Chola invader from India. Even after the passing of Anuradhapura into the hands of the Sinhalese kings, a number of Tamil kings at various times ruled over the Rajarata kingdom.

The history of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka after Ellalan's death is lost in obscurity as, for the next 1,000 years, the Pali chronicles describe only the struggles of the Sinhalese king with the invading south Indian Tamil forces. Hence there is no continuous history of the fortunes of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka until 1214, when an independent Tamil kingdom, with its capital in Jaffna, came into existence.

From that time, Sri Lanka was divided into two ethno-linguistic nation-states; the Tamils in the north and east, and the Sinhalese in the south and west — the two effectively separated by impenetrable jungle. These two ethno-linguistic nations remained separate and isolated by reason of separate political loyalties and differences in language, religion, culture and customs.

According to Ibn Battuta, a North African Muslim traveller who visited Ceylon in 1344, the Tamil king Ariya Chakravarti, who had his royal palace in Jaffna, was a powerful ruler who owned sea-going vessels and a cultured man who could converse in Persian.³⁴

Then, in 1505, the Portuguese conquered the maritime Sinhalese kingdom of Kotte, near Colombo, and for over a century attempted to conquer the Tamil kingdom, but met the Tamil military forces in losing battles. The Tamil king Sankili gave great assistance to the Sinhalese king of Kandy by obtaining reinforcements from south India in the latter's war against the Portuguese. This made the latter determined to conquer the Tamil kingdom. In 1621, the Portuguese finally won the war of conquest, thanks to their superiority in steel and gunpowder, captured the Tamil king Sankili and took him as captive to their headquarters in Goa, India, where he was hanged. For a few years thereafter, the Tamils continued their resistance to foreign rule, under the leadership of a coastal petty king, Varnakulathian, but were subjugated.

The Portuguese administered the Tamil "Jaffna Patnam", as they called it, as a separate domain from their Sinhalese maritime possession. So did the Dutch, who captured it from the Portuguese. In 1802, by the Treaty of Amiens, Holland ceded her possessions in Sri Lanka to the British, who also continued to retain the separate identity of the Tamil areas until 1833, when, for the first time, for administrative convenience, the British unified the low-country Sinhalese, the Kandyan and Tamil areas, and brought them under a single unitary political authority — the government of Ceylon.

In this way, the Tamils and the Sinhalese were defeated, severally and at different times, in battle with the Portuguese *conquistadores*. Their separate collective identities and political loyalties were extinguished by conquest and were brought within a unitary Ceylonese nation-state. Sir Robert Brownrigg, an early British governor of what were then the separate (Tamil) Jaffna Patnam and the low-country Sinhalese region, wrote in his despatch dated 10 July 1813 to the Secretary of State for Colonies: "The Tamil language, . . . which with a mixture of Portuguese is used through all provinces, is the proper tongue of the inhabitants from Puttalam to Batticaloa northward inclusive of both these districts. Your Lordship will therefore have no objection to my putting the Tamil language on an equal footing of encouragement with the Sinhalese."

Throughout the British colonial period, the Sinhalese and the Tamil people remained equal in their subordination to the British raj. Both Sinhalese and Tamil languages were also equal in their subordination to English, and so were Buddhism and Hinduism to Christianity.

According to the 1971 census, Ceylon Tamils numbered 1,415,567, or 11.7% of the population, and the Indian Tamils, who were recruited as labour for the British plantations in the 19th Century and settled in Sri Lanka, were 9.4%. Tamil is also the mother tongue of almost all the Muslims, who are 6.7% of the population. As such, Tamil is the mother tongue of 27.8% of the people of Sri Lanka.

In India, Tamils number 50 million and live in Tamil Nadu state, extending from Pulicat Lake to Cape Camorin, and from the Western Ghats to Coromandel coast – the homeland of Tamils in India. There are substantial settled Tamil communities in Malaysia and Singapore, and in smaller numbers in Burma, Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana; their forefathers were recruited in south India under the indentured labour system, by the British in the 19th Century, to work in the plantations that were then being opened up. Although the Tamils have one generic culture, because of this diaspora there are variations in dialect and distinct sub-cultural characteristics.

From 1956, large numbers of educated Sri Lanka Tamils have emigrated as a direct result of Sinhalese being made the only official language, of escalating violence owing to ethnic conflict and of government discrimination of Tamils in employment and other fields. Today, these Tamil emigrants constitute sizeable numbers in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia. They have chosen to live in these countries, amidst alien cultures, racial discrimination and low social status, rather than submit to indignities and humiliation in their own country. From the mid-1970s, a number of political activists and freedom fighters demanding a separate Tamil state of Eelam, comprising the north and the east, have fled from police and army repression instigated by the Sri Lanka government and found asylum in India, Britain, France and West Germany.

The Tamils are Dravidians, an ethnic division (earlier believed to be only a linguistic division from the Aryans) which includes the Canarese, Malayalis

and Andhra people who occupy the whole of south India. Tamil is the oldest and the principal Dravidian language; in fact, "Dravida" and "Tamil" are two forms of the same word. The Tamils claim that the word "Tamil" means sweetness. Karl Graul, the eminent German philologist, says: "The Tamil language, if well spoken, is extremely pleasing to the ear; like honey it is." In fact, the greatness of the Tamil language, and its antiquity, has been proclaimed not only by Tamils but by foreign philologists such as Pope, Caldwell, Ellis (British), Zeigenbalg and Fabricus (German), Roberto di Nobili and Constantine Beshi (Italian) and Kamil Zvelebil (Czech).

The Tamils have an ancient literary and cultural heritage. The first Tamil grammar, *Tholhapiyam*, was compiled as early as the first millennium BC. The classical *Sangam* literature dates from the 1st to the 4th Centuries AD and consists of a collection of poems including the Eight Anthologies (*Ettutogai*) and Ten Idylls (*Pattupattu*) and a number of literary works dealing with war, love, religion and society. To these were added, in the 6th Century, the lyrical epic works *Silapadikaram* and *Manimekhalai* and the two didactic works *Thirukkural* and *Naladiyar*. The Ceylon Tamils have maintained their own separate and distinct linguistic and cultural continuum in the island for so many centuries that in reality the Tamil literary and cultural heritage of south India operates only as a source of historical inspiration, particularly in the present context.

As noted earlier, Hinduism was the only religion of the Tamils until the advent of European powers led to the introduction of Christianity and the conversion of a minority of Tamils to Catholic or Protestant Christianity. Hinduism is the traditional religion of India and contemporary Hinduism is a synthesis between Aryan Brahmanistic Vaisnavism and Dravidian Saivism (a cult exalting Siva as the Supreme Being) and Hindu practices. The latter alone prevails among the Sri Lanka Hindus. Hindu religious practices consist, in the main, of the worship of deities and a host of rituals. Hinduism is a religion without missionaries, and is not an "organized" religion. Conversion to it is technically difficult because a Hindu is born into a particular caste, which the Hindus believe is predetermined according to one's *Karma*, actions in a previous life which influence the present and future. These notions greatly influence both the religious and social life of Hindu Tamils.

The Tamil ethnic identity remains a linguistic and cultural identity, unlike the all-inclusive ethno-religious identity of the Sinhalese Buddhists. To the Tamils, it is the language-culture index that is dominant and commands loyalty, not any particular religious adherence. The Sri Lanka Hindus faced no such religious problems as the Hindu-Muslim confrontation in India. The original link between Tamil ethnicity and the Hindu religion has come to be severed, and the Sri Lanka Hindus effectively regard religion as a matter of private conscience. The Hindus have never called for any official position for their religion in the affairs of state and do not exert any religious political pressures.

The introduction of Christianity did not cause any split in Tamil ethnic identity or self-perception, nor lead to the emergence of any perceptible

antithesis between Tamil Hindus and Tamil Catholics or Tamil Christians. This is so despite the fact that 81% of Tamils are Hindus. And the Hindu revivalist movement initiated by Arumuga Navalar (1822–1870) to denounce Christianity and regenerate Hinduism did not evoke much public enthusiasm.

The strongest attack on Christianity was by the Buddhist and not by the Hindu revivalists. This ethno-linguistic primacy in Tamil collective identity is evident in the acceptance of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, a Christian, as the leader of the (Tamil) Federal Party (FP), and later of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and also in the comfortable majorities he won from a predominantly Hindu electorate from 1947. At the same time, G.G. Ponnambalam, the veteran leader of the rival Tamil Congress (TC), although a Hindu, suffered defeat at the hands of Alfred Durayappah, a Christian, in 1965, and C.X. Martyn, a Catholic, in 1970, in Jaffna, another predominantly Hindu electorate. On the contrary, a non-Buddhist Sinhalese rarely contests a Buddhist seat and no Christian has been the leader of any of the Sinhalese political parties, for Sinhala-Buddhist identity is a *sine qua non* for leadership of political parties, including even the “socialist” Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Communist Party (CP).

An important facet of Tamil collective identity is that, owing to centuries of an insular linguistic and cultural way of life and a shared historical experience, the Sri Lankan Tamils possess and assert an identity distinct and separate from both the Tamils of south India and the Indian Tamils. They almost consciously cut themselves off from the former because of their desire for a unified polity in which they felt their future laid. They also prided themselves on speaking “pure” Tamil, in contrast to Madras (south Indian) Tamil; which is heavily laden with Telugu and Mayalam words. With the plantation Tamils, the Sri Lankan Tamils had no connection whatsoever until recent times, and then it was a tenuous political link at leadership level. This link led most of the Tamil bourgeois MPs to join in the campaign of the Sinhalese political class, soon after independence, to deprive working-class plantation Tamils of their Sri Lankan citizenship and franchise.

This orientation of the Sri Lankan Tamils has driven them into such a critical situation that, even in the face of the gravest threat to their continued survival as a nation, they are unwilling to compromise with their separateness from the Tamils of mainland India, or to break with their integration (scarcely more than a century old) with the rest of the island. Tamil political consciousness has always been innately conservative, and Tamil leadership has lacked the perspicacity to comprehend, and the dynamism to come to grips with, the nature and sweep of Sinhalese policies. Hence the Tamil political leadership has evinced no genuine desire to recreate an independent Tamil state. And the alternative of seceding, with a view to confederating with the Tamil Nadu state or federating with the Indian federal union, has not even entered the realms of political debate.

Tamil society, from the earliest times, was caste-based, but not on the lines of the familiar fourfold division of the Aryan caste system. Caste stratification among the Tamils has a variation of its own. The “highest” caste are not

the priestly Brahmins but the *Vellala*, who form about 75% of the Tamils. Caste and class boundaries among the Tamils coincide, and the Tamil "bourgeoisie" and political elite are the *Vellalas*. The *Karaiyars*, equivalent to the Sinhalese *Karava*, are the next in size and importance. There are then several lower castes, descending in order of importance of the services required by the *Vellala* in the traditional society, and affected with increasing degrees of pollution in the eyes of the *Vellala*. The lowliest are the "untouchable" *Pariah*, the scavengers.

Much of the early sharpness of caste differences has now been blunted by mobilization and agitation at the political level and changed socio-economic conditions. Rules of endogamy continue to be rigidly observed, but concepts of purity and pollution, and the hierarchical ordering of occupations, are a thing of the past. "Untouchability" and its attendant degradations have virtually ceased to exist, and discrimination in public against lower castes is banned by the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, 1957.

Traditionally, the Tamils lived by agriculture in the "dry" or "arid" zones, less favourably endowed by nature than the "wet" zones occupied by the Sinhalese. As a result, the Tamils took advantage of the colonial government's decision to open the administrative service to locals proficient in the English language. They studied English in the Christian missionary colleges established in Jaffna, and, in open competition with the rest of the population, entered the civil, clerical, technical and professional services in significant numbers.

This avenue of employment gave increased incentive for English education, which the Tamils came to venerate, and government service became their biggest — indeed their only major — industry. Fortified with English education, some Tamils emigrated to Malaya and found employment in the then Federated Malay States government service. At independence in 1948, Tamils occupied about 30% of the positions in the government service and an equal percentage of places in the University of Ceylon. The attractions of white-collar employment weaned later generations away from agriculture, dependent as it was on the vagaries of the weather.

These made the Tamils virtually a lower-middle-class community in the island. And, in the competitive context in which they found themselves, they developed the middle-class virtues of hard work, thrift, loyalty and single-minded devotion to duty, and the conservative traits of security, narrow individualism and slow advancement. These developments tied them firmly to the government and the nerve centre in south Sri Lanka, where the Tamil political leaders, mainly lawyers, made their money and reputations and had a personal interest in remaining.

Hence their policy of seeking to protect future interests of the Tamils within the existing political structure. This has today come under fire from the new generation of young Tamils in Jaffna, who, feeling the brunt of discrimination, deprivation of language rights and the indignity of living as aliens in their own country, have taken up arms in the struggle for liberation and for a separate Tamil state of Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

“Indian” Tamils

The so-called Indian Tamils are in the main the descendants of the workers imported from the Tamil areas of south India by the British planters, with the assistance of the colonial government, from the 1840s, as cheap labour for the large-scale coffee and later tea plantations in the hill country areas. They arrived in gangs of 25 to 100, each under a *kangany* (leader) as the recruiting agent. Beginning with about 3,000 in 1839, the arrivals increased to 77,000 in 1844. With the establishment of tea plantations in the 1880s, more workers, men and women, arrived. Although in the coffee era they came mainly as migrant workers for seasonal coffee plucking, with the establishment of tea plantations which required intensive labour they came as immigrant workers and settled in the island.

In the 1911 census, when they were separately enumerated as Indian Tamils, they totalled 530,983 and outnumbered the Ceylon Tamils (528,024). On arrival, they were hired by the estates but continued under the *kangany*, who then became their labour contractor and supervisor. They were paid a pittance of a wage and housed in barrack-like ghettos, back-to-back 10-by-12-foot “line” rooms within the estates. Nearly all of them were poor and illiterate and often belonged to lower-caste groups, accustomed to social inferiority, discrimination and oppression. In Sri Lanka, they had no contact with the world outside the estate and lived wholly alienated from the surrounding Sinhalese villagers, separated from them by ethnicity, language, culture and religion. Their collectivized working life and their presence in alien surroundings made them hold on to their Indian roots.

To the Sinhalese, they were a slaving Tamil community, and the Sri Lanka Tamils regarded them with condescension. Their enslaved and miserable plight lowered the esteem of Tamils in particular, and India and Indians in general, in the eyes of the Sinhalese people. Although their enterprise and toil opened up the forests, hills and valleys of central Sri Lanka for coffee, tea, rubber and cocoa, and their cheap labour laid the foundations of the island’s prosperity based on those exports, in human terms they remained a classic agricultural proletariat and, as a class, little better off than bonded slaves.

The Indian Tamils do not express their collective identity in terms of language, culture or religion. It is their class identity that is always in the forefront. From the 1930s, they came to be organized into trade unions and, by the 1950s, every Indian Tamil was a member of a union, often allied to the left-wing political parties. Their distinctive position as the largest proletarian force and their unionization, resulting in class solidarity and militancy, brought about substantial improvements in their previously exploited working life.

But soon they came under trade unions organized by second-generation leaders of their own community, and their strength came to be dissipated in inter-union rivalries and attempts to bolster the self-image of their leaders. The Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC), which in the 1940s was the representative union and political wing of the Indian Tamil workers, splintered in the 1950s

into the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) and the Democratic Workers' Congress (DWC), with the leadership of both allied to capitalist interests.

In 1927, the Donoughmore Constitutional Reform Commission estimated that 40% to 50% of the Indian Tamils could be regarded as permanent residents of Sri Lanka. In 1938, the Jackson Report on Immigration estimated that 70% to 80% of them were permanently settled. It is therefore reasonable to assume that at independence in 1948 nearly all of them, numbering about 900,000, were permanently settled in Sri Lanka. The Indian Tamils voted in the 1931 and 1935 elections for the colonial State Council and in the 1947 election for the first parliament, to which power was transferred at independence. In the 1947 election, eight Indian Tamil members of parliament, of whom six were from the CIC, were elected, and their strength bolstered the Tamil representation to 24 of the 95 elected members.

But soon after independence, the government of D.S. Senanayake enacted the Ceylon Citizenship Act, 1948, which made the Indian Tamils non-citizens. In the following year, by the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act, they were disfranchised. In this way, they became not only voteless but also stateless, for Articles 5 and 8 of the Constitution of India defined citizenship in terms which excluded persons of Indian origin settled outside India.

Sri Lanka and the "Indian" Muslims

The origins of the Muslims (also called "Moors") of Sri Lanka remain obscure. Though the presence of some Muslims who came as traders to the island can be traced to about the 10th Century, the Muslims became a settled community only from about the 12th Century. They came to the island for trade but it is not certain whether they are of Arab or Indian descent.

Just before the creation of Muslim representation in the Legislative Council in 1889, there arose a controversy as to their origin and ethnicity, as the Tamil member had hitherto been considered their representative, an arrangement in which the Muslims had acquiesced. P. Ramanathan, the then Tamil member, contended that the Muslims originated in south India and were Tamils who had embraced Islam.³⁵ Professor Vijaya Samaraweera states:

Ramanathan's thesis caused great consternation among the Muslims. Evidence shows that there was among them equally a tradition that their ancestors were Tamils of South India who had been converted to Islam, at the same time as a tradition that they originated from Arabic migrants to Sri Lanka, but the assertion of the latter tradition took a new immediacy and importance within the context of the political developments of the 1880s . . . Given Ramanathan's stature, within and without the administration, it became imperative that his views should be challenged . . . The critics did not deny that culturally there were points of similarity between the Muslims and the Tamils; this was, to them, the result of the inevitable process of acculturation

of a minority people. The use of Tamil as the every-day language of the Muslims was easily explained; Tamil was the *lingua franca* of commerce in the region at the time the Arab migrants reached the ports of south India and Sri Lanka and they adopted it for obvious reasons of convenience.³⁶

The Muslim spokesmen sought to make out that their ancestors came as traders or were the Hashemites who left Arabia in the 7th Century on account of persecution by a new ruling dynasty.

Tamil is the mother tongue of nearly all the Muslims, but they do not seek their collective identity in language or culture but in their religion — Islam. They possess religious unity but lack a common ethno-cultural unity and therefore do not make a distinct ethnic entity. From early times they have been dispersed all over the island and do not have a defined territory in the island as their homeland.

An early 20th Century impression of them is as follows: “They are an enterprising and speculative race [*sic*]. Their chief occupation is petty trade and as traders it is difficult to surpass them. They are ubiquitous and active in the metropolis [Colombo] and in the remotest village.”³⁷

Although they are a predominantly trading community, in the eastern province they are a large peasant community, constituting about a third of the population of the area, and in Colombo a large number of them are workers. Since the 1911 census, Muslims born in the country have been classified as Sri Lankan Muslims and those who acknowledged that they came for trade, and would return to India, as Indian Muslims. In the 1971 census, Sri Lankan Muslims numbered 824,291, or 6.5% of the population, and Indian Muslims 29,416, or 0.2%.

The Muslims were persecuted by the Portuguese both for their trading activities and for religious differences. The Dutch too kept them out of their traditional occupation. As a result, many Muslims moved to the areas of the Sinhalese Kandyan kingdom. There occurred a Muslim revival in the last quarter of the 19th Century. It took the form of laymen, learned in the Koran and in Arabic, challenging the authority of the religious *mullahs* over doctrinal matters. These lay activists were of the view that “the community became *mullah*-ridden and men and women were led into a state of blissful ignorance in the name of religion”. They criticized the manner in which the *mullahs* and *ulama* managed the mosques. By their constant attacks they confined the religious leaders to a narrow spiritual role. They regarded themselves essentially as a business and religious community, became inward-looking and did not participate in the rising “nationalist” movement in the country. Their withdrawal was perhaps also due to the Sinhalese-Muslim riots of 1915, when Muslims were subjected to brutal attacks by rioting Sinhalese in the Kandyan areas. This led them to look to the colonial government for protection and to collaborate with it. In fact, throughout the whole constitutional process leading to independence, the Muslim voice was hardly heard.

Even in the post-independence period, the Muslims have displayed a

conservative political profile, never confrontational, but always looking for advantages in the shifting political landscape. Their principal concern has been to maintain their entrenched role in the wholesale and retail trade. There have been long-standing Muslim "notables" in the conservative United National Party (UNP) and the centrist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and they have been getting the best out of both. There have been Muslim ministers in the cabinets of all governments since 1948, and between 1965 and 1970 there were 12 Muslim MPs although as a community they were a majority in only six electorates. In terms of today's politics of personality and charisma, the Muslims are reckoned as important in winning elections for they are everywhere in Sri Lanka.

Burghers and Malays

The Burghers and Malays are two small ethnic communities. The Burghers constituted 0.6% of the population in 1953 but are now 0.3%. They are a relic of the Portuguese and Dutch occupation of the island. With the British conquest, they adopted English as their language and are divided between Catholics and those belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church. The Portuguese Burghers are entirely Catholic and some of them still speak Portuguese. Most of them speak Sinhalese, and the Portuguese Burghers in Jaffna speak Tamil.

Although small in number, the Burghers are not homogeneous. There are divisions between those of pure European descent, registered by the Dutch Burgher Union, and the rest. During the British period, they occupied a favoured position and were an influential community, important in the professions, politics and government, and the mercantile services. But with the dethronement of English by the Sinhala-only Act in 1956, about half the Burgher population emigrated, mainly to Australia. The 44,000 who remain today, 31,000 of them in Colombo district, are learning Sinhalese and will eventually become assimilated.

The Malays number 43,000, or 0.3% of the Sri Lanka population. Nearly all of them live in two areas, one in Slave Island, a municipal ward in Colombo, and the other in Hambantota. The Malays are regarded as Muslims since their religion is Islam, but they are distinct from the other Muslims in that they speak the Malay language. They have a separate collective consciousness and during the process of constitutional reform in the 20th Century some Malays asserted a separate identity from the Ceylon Muslims. The Malays possess a high degree of adaptability, for most of them in Colombo speak English, Sinhalese and Tamil as well as Malay.

References

1. The descriptive phrase "plural society" has been uncritically applied by many social scientists to describe the ethnic and community structure in Sri Lanka. That phrase, as used by J.S. Furnival to describe and interpret the Burmese and Javanese social patterns of colonial times, is inappropriate to the Sri Lankan situation for it implies cultural minorities in a foreign country held together by the political power of the native dominant group. Furnival wrote: "In Burma, as in Java, probably the first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples – European, Chinese, Indian and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit; Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines;" *Colonial Policy and Practice*, Cambridge, 1948, p. 304.
2. Walter Schwarz, *The Tamils of Sri Lanka*, Minority Rights Group, London, 1975.
3. The *Veddas* of Sri Lanka did not originate in the way *Dipavamsa* makes out. They are the descendants of the Tamil Yakshas and are racially akin to the Toddars, Kurumbars and Pulindars – the Dravidian jungle tribes of south India who still live in Nilgris, Quilon and Coromandel regions. Of the *Veddas*, the Harmsworth Encyclopaedia states: "The *Veddas* are the descendants of king Ravana and they are still living in the jungles of north-eastern provinces of Ceylon with their ancient customs. Both the Toddars of Nilagiri and the Vedda are Dravidians." According to Tamil tradition, Ravana, the Tamil king of Lanka, conquered the Malaya archipelago and the Tamil people colonized the whole of south Indo-China, all of which comprised the Tamil Yaksha empire. Confirmation for this comes from the Hindu customs and beliefs that are dominant in these countries. That may also be due to the expansion of the Tamil Chola empire in the 11th Century, which covered the whole of south Indo-China. Dr G.C. Mendis states: "The *Veddas* belong to the same racial stock as the pre-Dravidian jungle tribes of South India such as Irulas and the Kurumbars, and are said to be racially connected with the Toalas of the Celebes, Batin of Sumatra and the Australian aborigines"; *Early History of Ceylon*, p. 4. A.C. Burnell, in *Elements of South Indian Palaeography*, states: "South India was the source of the early civilization of Java." He states that Dravidian words occur in Kawi and Javanese and they are apparently all Tamil, and that the architecture in Java is south Indian; "... we might then assume that the legend referred to is simply an allegorical allusion to emigration of some Raksas from South India and Ceylon to the northern coast of Sumatra. This version would appear to receive corroboration from the tradition of Ravana's conquests in the Malaya archipelago; and should it prove acceptable, we must conclude that Sumatra was originally a country of Raksa empire. At all events the legends deserve consideration, as indicating the sources

- from where Sumatra received her settlers, or at any rate colonizers”.
4. K.M. de Silva (ed.), *Sri Lanka, A Survey*, C. Hurst, London, 1977. How far this version constitutes the official as well as the established history of the island can be seen from the following. In *Ceylon*, a picturesque book published by the government of Ceylon (1952, p. 3), it is stated: “About 500 years before the birth of Christ, immigrants from North India settled in the island and established Sinhalese dynasties of Anuradhapura and later of Polonnaruwa. The ancient Chronicles of Ceylon tell us that the first immigrants were a band of Aryan-speaking adventurers from North India, under the leadership of Vijaya who is generally regarded as the founder of the Sinhalese race.” Professor S.U. Kodikara, in his *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence*, writes: “According to tradition, the Sinhalese . . . are the descendants of settlers who came from North India in the 6th Century BC.” Dr I.D.S. Weerawardena, former lecturer in politics in the University, wrote in *Ceylon and Her Citizens*: “The Sinhalese . . . came more than 2,000 years ago, probably from the region close to Bengal. You must have read the story of Vijaya and his 700 men. That story illustrates the fact that our Sinhalese ancestors came from North India . . . It is difficult to say exactly when the Tamils came to this country. Some people think that a few Tamils might have been in Ceylon as traders even when the Sinhalese first came, but it is certain that they came in large numbers in the Tamil invasions which began very early in our history. In the 13th Century, they were powerful enough to establish an independent kingdom in the North.”
 5. K.M. de Silva (ed.), *supra*.
 6. Anagarika Dharmapala, *History of an Ancient Civilisation*, 1902.
 7. Having names of gods as prefixes or suffixes to their names has been a long tradition among the Tamils. Since the cobra is venerated, many Tamils have names with the prefix “Naga”, such as Nagarajah, Nagaratnam, Naganathan, Nagamany, etc.
 8. Harry Williams, *Ceylon, The Pearl of the East*, Hale, London, 1950.
 9. Zelanicus (pseud.), *Ceylon, Between the Orient and Occident*, Elek, London, 1970.
 10. V. Begley, “Proto-historical material from Sri Lanka and Indian Contacts”, in K.A.R. Kennedy and G.C. Possehl (eds.), *Ecological Backgrounds of South-Asian Pre-History*, New Orleans, pp. 191-196.
 11. P.K. Chanmugam and F.L.W. Jayewardene, “Skeletal Remains from Thirukketiswaram”, in *Ceylon Journal of Science*, 1954.
 12. S.K. Sitrapalam, in “Anaikoddai Excavations”, in the *Tribune*, Colombo, 3 April 1982.
 13. Four ancient temples for Hindu gods were built centuries before the Christian era — Tirukketiswaram, Muneeswaram, Tirukkoneswaram and Kathirkamam — in the northern, western, eastern and southern directions of the island, respectively, and Tamil tradition has it that Hindu gods are guarding Lanka on all four sides. There are references to these temples in the *Mahavamsa* (Chapter 34).
 14. In Vol. 20, p. 567.
 15. The Hindu deity Ganesha has been enshrined at the entrance to the sacred pipal tree at Anuradhapura from time immemorial, and

- Buddhists worship it before going to the inner courtyard of the pipal tree. The pipal tree is venerated as a branch of the tree under which Buddha received enlightenment in Bodhi Gaya.
16. G.C. Mendis, *The Early History of Ceylon*, Calcutta, 1943, p. 9.
 17. S. Paranavitana, quoted in 12 *supra*.
 18. Mendis, *supra*, p. 10.
 19. See L.S. Deveraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom, 1707-1760*, Colombo, 1972.
 20. N.K. Sarkar, *The Demography of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1957, p. 191. And Sir Ivor Jennings wrote: "The Sinhalese 'race' is as mixed as the English, if not more so. Any difficulties that this mixture might cause is overcome by the polite fiction that if the father is Sinhalese the offspring are Sinhalese, whatever the mother may be"; *The British Commonwealth of Nations*, Hutchinson, 1961, 4th ed., p. 107.
 21. These statistics are from *The Census of Ceylon*, Vol. III, Part I; Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo, 1960, p. 604.
 22. W.S. Karunatilake, "Tamil Influence on the Structure of Sinhalese Language", a paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Tamil Studies, 1974.
 23. D.C. Sircar, *The Inscriptions of Asoka*, p. 9.
 24. H. Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*, London, 1909, p. 423.
 25. Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period*, Colombo, 1956.
 26. Quoted in *Race Relations in Sri Lanka*, Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, p. 61.
 27. Walpola Rahula, *supra*, p. 79.
 28. G. Obeyesekere, "The Vicissitudes of the Sinhala-Buddhist Identity through Time and Change", in George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Communities and Change*, reprinted in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities: Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1979, p. 286.
 29. John A. Halangoda, *Present Politics and the Rights of the Kandyan*, Kandy, 1920, also *The Rights and Claims of the Kandyan People*, Kandy, n.d. (?1929).
 30. The census does not classify people according to castes and therefore no statistics of caste are available. R.F. Nyrop, *Area Handbook for Ceylon*, Washington, 1971, contains a list of castes among the Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamils and "Indian" Tamils.
 31. Bryce Ryan, *Caste in Modern Ceylon*, New Brunswick, 1953, p. 99.
 32. Obeyesekere, *supra*, p. 282.
 33. Walpola Rahula, *supra*, p. 79.
 34. *Ibn Battuta*, H.A.R. Gibb, London, 1929.
 35. See Hansard, Legislative Council, 1885, Vol. II, p. 234; also Ramanathan, "The Ethnology of the 'Moors' of Ceylon", in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)*, Vol. X.
 36. Vijaya Samaraweera, in "The Muslim Revivalist Movement, 1880-1915", in Michael Roberts (ed.), *supra*, pp. 243-276.
 37. P. Arunachalam, in "Population", in Arnold Wright (comp.), *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, London, 1907.

3. Colonial Rule and Sinhalese-Tamil Responses

The Portuguese conquest and occupation of the Sinhalese littoral and Tamil areas was followed by the Dutch in 1656 and the British in 1796. After initial control by the British East India Company from Madras, these areas became a British Crown Colony in 1802. The Kandyan Sinhalese kingdom, which withstood the Portuguese and early British attempts at conquest, was ceded to the British by the Kandyan Convention of 1815. The four and a half centuries of European rule effected great changes in the political, economic, religious and social structure, in the ethnic collective identities and in the outlook and life of both the Sinhalese and the Tamil people.

The Portuguese conquest occurred in the early stages of what Marx called the period of primitive accumulation. Earlier, the Arab caravans had taken overland to the eastern Mediterranean the spices, silks, muslins, carpets, etc. of the Orient which Europe's wealthy classes considered necessities, at a time when trade was draining Europe of its gold and silver. Since the Mediterranean had become almost a Muslim lake, the Portuguese set out to discover an alternative Christian trade route to seek the wealth of the Orient. Following upon Vasco da Gama's discovery of the Cape of Good Hope in 1498, the Portuguese maritime adventurers made their way to Sri Lanka.¹

The Portuguese *conquistadores* arrived when capitalism was not yet the dominant form of production; the world market and the international division of labour were still to emerge. To them conquest was to acquire a trading post and secure the sea route to the East. Expansion of the realm, or colonization for settlement, was not their objective. They administered the Sinhalese and Tamil areas as separate territories. Conquest was followed by conversion, to extend the frontiers of medieval Christendom. Except for Catholic proselytization almost at the point of the sword, there was no change in the politico-socio-economic structure.

Much the same is true of the Dutch. They continued the separate administration of the Sinhalese and Tamil areas. In the Sinhalese portion, they introduced Roman-Dutch law and effected certain reforms within the interstices. Dutch patronage, in the form of "land grants" to the low-country Sinhalese *mudaliyar* (area headmen) "aristocracy", signalled the beginning of a contradictory historical dynamic. In the Tamil portion, they codified the *thesawalamai* (customary laws of the Tamils) and compiled the *tombos* (land titles).

The Dutch ruled primarily for commercial gain and expanded the spice trade. Unlike their predecessors, they were not great zealots of religious proselytization.

During this time, for the Kandyan Sinhalese, the monarchy became the focal point of loyalty and the sacred symbol holding society together. The Kandyan social structure became authoritarian and hierarchical, dominated by feudal aristocratic families and temple chiefs. These controlled the royal court but were divided into rival factions. In 1760, they unsuccessfully rebelled against the Nayakkar king Kirti Sri; and in 1815 they succumbed to the machinations of the British governor, deposed Nayakkar king Sri Wikrema and ceded the Kandyan territory to the *imperium* of His Britannic Majesty.

Politico-Socio-Economic Changes

After the conquest, the British continued to administer the Sinhalese and Tamil areas, and after 1815 the Kandyan areas, as separate entities. But in pursuance of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission recommendations, the separate administrations were abolished and the Sinhalese and Tamil people were brought together in a single politico-geographic entity under a centralized government. A nominated legislative council was established in 1833, including three non-British members. Thereafter, progress to representative government was through reform of the council and membership of it became the grand prize which the Sri Lankan elite fought for.

By subsequent introduction of representation on ethnic and communal lines, the colonial government kept ethnic differences alive and prevented the growth of cross-ethnic all-island political identification. For purposes of administration, the island was divided into the western, northern, eastern, southern and central provinces, each under a government agent. Since the northern province, administered from Jaffna, was found to be too large, the north-central province was created in 1873. Two additional Kandyan provinces, Uva and Sabaragamuwa, were set up in 1886 and 1889 respectively.

From early times, the colonial government encouraged the study of English as empire-builders from Roman times have recognized the great influence language wields over colonized people. Macaulay wrote in his historic minute of 1835 (in a comparable situation in India): "We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, morals and intellect."

English education was provided mainly by Christian missionary schools, set up to aid Christian proselytization. The government's policy was one of limiting state schools and granting state aid to private schools. The colonial government recruited local personnel, proficient in English, for junior and middle-level bureaucratic positions. Hence English education came to be valued and it spread outwards, particularly to Jaffna, where a number of

mission schools was established. English education became the primary means of economic advancement, social mobility and elite status.

In this way, English education, Christianity, Western culture and values became the dominant forces in the country. But they remained the preserve of the upper and growing middle classes. Towards the close of the 19th Century, the prestigious civil service, the apex of the colonial administrative structure, was opened up to Sri Lankans, and from 1920 rapid "Ceylonization" of the bureaucracy took place. Alongside government service, the English-educated went into the medical, legal and teaching professions, engineering, technical and allied occupations, and banking, brokerage and mercantile jobs. This bureaucratic bourgeoisie, having power and privilege over the local populace and benefiting from colonial rule through various patronage networks, quickly climbed up the hierarchy.

From the 1830s, the estate system of coffee plantations, established by British capital and entrepreneurship, produced fundamental socio-economic changes. The new export economy, dominated by the demands of commodity production, was linked to the imperial network and controlled by the metropolis. It was vitally dependent on foreign trade, capitalist production, a permanent labour force and low wages – a structure which was the antithesis of the prevailing self-sufficient rice-growing village economy. Large areas of the mid- and up-country highlands, which were used by the Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese villagers for slash-and-burn cultivation, firewood collection and grazing land, were declared crown land and sold to the coffee planters. Being landless and deprived of their traditional means of production, the villagers became tenant cultivators or agricultural labourers.

The importation of a large number of Tamil workers as cheap labour to work the plantations created a human problem of considerable dimensions. They came to be regarded with contempt and resentment by the Sinhalese people in whose areas the plantations were set up. The establishment of plantations, and their linkage by road and rail to the port of Colombo for export, opened many new avenues of profitable enterprise. The low-country Sinhalese who went to service the plantations, as forest clearers, building and cart-transport contractors, arrack and toddy renters, retail traders and suppliers of food, accumulated large amounts of money with which they bought coffee and, later, coconut and rubber estates. By 1880, the low-country Sinhalese owned 13,500 acres of coffee land.

The low-country Sinhalese *mudaliyars* and *maha mudaliyars* (chief headmen), receiving the patronage of the British administration for their services to colonialism, acquired "waste lands", which were then declared crown land, and became the landed elite. Between 1860 and 1889, of the 247,500 acres of crown land alienated, the *mudaliyars* acquired 83,700, or one-third.²

With the extraction and export of graphite becoming important from the 1870s, some of the newly rich acquired graphite mine lands and became mine owners. The improvement of communications led to the expansion of the market and to the rise of merchant capitalism. The local bourgeoisie created by plantation capitalism and commercialization of the economy set up the

Low Country Producers' Association (LCPA) in 1908, as a counter to the European-controlled Chamber of Commerce, and declared their interests as follows:

Most of us are planters. Our interests are in many respects identical with those of the [European] planters. It is true that many of them have shown us the way and they deserve the credit for having brought capital into the country and shown us the path along which we may all win prosperity. We have followed in their footsteps and our interests are now the same.³

The political and economic processes at work during the British colonial period restructured society and determined the movement of national affairs. The bureaucratic opportunities, the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and the avenues of upward mobility for the few, divided society on the basis of economic and social classes. The ethnically divided political society became economically differentiated and socially diversified, giving rise to a new social pyramid.

The old ethnic differences came to be subsumed by class interests which crystallized in the emerging bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie comprised the two main strata noted earlier: one arising from the colonial bureaucratic and professional system, and the other from plantation capitalism and commercialization of the economy.

The interests of the bourgeoisie, in line with its comprador formation, were complementary to those of the metropolitan colonialists. But, as it developed, it sought to consolidate and advance itself, and so came into conflict with the metropolitan ruling class. The expression of this desire by the indigenous bourgeoisie came to represent the Sri Lankan brand of nationalism. The local bourgeoisie expressed no genuine desire to acquire sovereignty or independence in the sense of political liberation. It was "national" only in the sense of being inter-ethnic in composition, but dominated by the low-country Sinhalese. It was united in its desire for politico-socio-economic ascendance as a "serving class" along the path of dependent agro-export capitalism which the colonial structure ordained.

Separate National Loyalties Predominate

Despite political unification and class solidarity, the national society was not defined by loyalty to the political state, but involved separate ethno-cultural and religious loyalties. What, in effect, took place under colonial rule was political and administrative nation-building at the centre. The sectional loyalties often surfaced but were held in check by a common master, a secular state, a shared language (English) and a relatively impartial rule.

While the low-country Sinhalese and the Tamils, being long accustomed to foreign rule, acquiesced in British overlordship and sought to make the best

of the changing conditions, the Kandyan Sinhalese, coming under foreign rule for the first time, and having vivid memories of monarchical rule and kingly charisma, looked back with nostalgia and steadfastly held on to the traditional norms, ideologies and religious institutions of the old society.

When the Kandyan aristocracy and the Buddhist *bhikkhus* had ceded the kingdom to the British by the Kandyan Convention of 1815, Governor Brownrigg and the British agreed to maintain the privileges of the aristocracy and support the Buddhist religion. But soon these elements grew dissatisfied as the British showed little inclination to implement the agreement, and in 1817-18 they resorted to a violent rebellion to get rid of the British, popularized in Sri Lankan history as the "Great Rebellion". Though the insurrection was put down with ruthlessness, the British alienated the influential Kandyan aristocracy and the Buddhist *sangha*.

Again, in 1848, the Kandyan Sinhalese, as well as the low-country Sinhalese and the Tamils, rebelled against the imposition of a series of new taxes by the colonial government. The Kandyans attempted to drive the British out of Kandy, but failed. Although British rule was consolidated, the Kandyans continued to resent their amalgamation with the low-country areas, the establishment of plantations, the influx of low-country Sinhalese settlers and Indian immigrant labourers, and the general failure of the British to support the Buddhist religion.

Kandyan national consciousness was the central problem facing the colonial administration in the first half of the 19th Century. In 1850, Governor Torrington wrote:

... the theory of attempting to break up the so-called nationality of the Kandyans by annexing different portions of the Kandyan country to the adjacent districts of the Maritime Provinces has in reality proved a failure and as such it is better to meet and provide for the remnant of the Kandyan nationality, if such it can be called, than to be voluntarily blind to the fact of its existence.⁴

British rule, in the second half of the 19th Century, was marked by an attempt to alleviate Kandyan grievances. The traditional *gansabhava* was revived as the unit of village-level administration; proselytization in the Kandyan areas almost ceased; and the Kandyan provinces of the north-central region, Uva and Sabaragamuwa, were created. Governor Gregory, the architect of the Kandyan pacification policy, showed sympathy for Buddhist sentiments but emphasized the neutrality of the government in religious affairs. Governor Gordon (1883-1890), who followed him, went even further and revived the old aristocracy with increased power and influence, in order to deflate the growing assertiveness of the Westernized elite.

From the 1890s, the Kandyans became supporters of the colonial government. Professor K.M. de Silva states:

... Kandyans between the 1880s and the attainment of independence,

took satisfaction in a new role, that of associates of the British, and a counterweight to the reform movement dominated by the indigenous Western educated elite. The leaders of Kandyan opinion seldom showed any sympathy for the political aspirations of the reform movement. They stood aloof, hostile and suspicious.⁵

Early Inter-Ethnic Elite Unity

Even after the establishment of the unified colonial state, both the Sinhalese, low-country and Kandyan, and the Tamils, continued to live in their traditional areas, and migration outside their respective areas was limited to employment, professional life and trade. In this respect, the Tamils significantly outnumbered the Sinhalese, since the capital city, Colombo, in the south, was the centre of gravity. The Tamils who moved to Colombo by and large settled there, and the influence the Tamil elite wielded was so great that, in 1912, Sir P. Ramanathan, a Tamil, was elected to the first "educated Ceylonese" seat in the Legislative Council. And, in 1920, the Tamil political elite sought nomination from the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) to stand for the Colombo Town seat.

Those were, of course, the palmy days of English-educated middle-class unity, when the indigenous bourgeoisie was consolidating itself in order to wrest constitutional concessions from a reluctant imperial government. The extent of Tamil migration to the south can be gauged from the fact that, according to the 1971 census, 365,000 (or one quarter) of the Sri Lanka Tamils lived in the Sinhalese areas; and in Colombo city they numbered 103,000.

Under colonial rule, Sinhalese and Tamils participated in the political process, in economic activity and in national life as equal partners. Most Tamils who moved to the Sinhalese areas spoke Sinhalese, and vice versa, though at the upper-class level English was the common language and the only language the brown sahibs could speak. There was considerable social intercourse and personal friendship between Sinhalese and Tamils who came into contact with one another. Amity was more pronounced at the level of the ordinary people than at elite level, where jostling for advancement and prestige often brought them into competition.

Early Anti-British Agitations and "Revivalist" Propaganda

By the time the Kandyan national question had receded into the background, the low-country Sinhalese had become the focus of national political activity. This was so both in terms of informal agitation over specific policies of the colonial government and formal political activity involving the advancement of the bourgeoisie through the legislative council and organizations formed to elect members to the council.

As to specific government policies, the acquisition of land for plantations, and the excise policy of licensing taverns for sale of arrack and toddy on a wide scale, became the early issues for anti-government agitation. The opposition to the former was spearheaded by the Chilaw Association, an elitist grouping of Chilaw Christians, who later became one wing of the middle-class "nationalist" movement. C.E. Corea, the leader of this association, described the land-acquisition policy as "flagrant shameful robbery" of the sort "which placed British rule in Ceylon on a level with the . . . most barbarous types of government by plunder".⁶ Opposition was not widespread, however, and failed to evoke as great a response from the people or the government as the temperance and prohibition issue.

The manufacture, sale and consumption of arrack and toddy increased with the growth of the plantations, the construction of roads and railways to link the plantation areas, the building of the southern railway line to Matara, the construction of irrigation works, etc. The liquor business was one of the principal avenues by which many low-country Sinhalese, particularly the *Karava* Catholics, earned their fortunes in the early days of the plantations. It did not call for much investment but the returns were enormous because of the system of "farming" or "renting" which the government adopted for easy collection of revenue.

Beginning as a criticism of government policy by moderate Christians who wanted reform, the temperance movement soon became fairly widespread in the western and southern provinces and caused concern to the government. The movement passed into the hands of Sinhalese-Buddhists, who campaigned by portraying liquor consumption as a foreign Christian vice, contrary to Sinhalese culture and the tenets of Buddhism.

Defined in this way, the issue evoked religio-cultural and national sentiment and became the springboard for more militant and vociferous Sinhalese-Buddhist propaganda against British rule, colonial bureaucracy, the Christian religion and the Western way of life. At the same time the pre-colonial Sinhalese past was idealized as a virtuous society and a glorious civilization.

This propaganda was initiated by Anagarika Dharmapala, a confused and quixotic Buddhist with a crusading missionary zeal, and carried on by his protégé Piyadasa Sirisena, a Sinhalese writer, novelist and publicist, and later by Munidasa Cumaratunga, a Sinhalese grammarian and literary figure. The propaganda was based on distortions, half-truths and lies, but, peddled as historical evidence of the glories of the ancient Sinhalese, it called upon Sinhalese Buddhists to reject all that was foreign and to resurrect the past. Dharmapala wrote:

The sweet gentle Aryan [sic] children of an ancient historic race are sacrificed at the altar of the whisky-drinking, beef-eating belly god of heathenism. How long, O how long, will unrighteousness last in Lanka . . . Practices that were an abomination to the ancient Sinhalese have today become tolerated . . . Arise, awake, unite and join the army of Holiness and Peace and defeat the hosts of evil.⁷

In order to idealize the Sinhalese past, Dharmapala wrote: "No nation in the world has a more brilliant history than ourselves . . . There exists no race on earth today that has had more triumphant record of victory than the Sinhalese."⁸ In 1906, Piyadasa Sirisena wrote: "The Sinhalese nation has for 2,540 years (reckoned on *Mahavamsa's* year of arrival of Vijaya in 543 BC) been unsurpassed in virtue."⁹ And Cumaratunga wrote: "There is perhaps no other nation older than we. How can we, therefore, accept the theory that everything of ours is derived from outside?"¹⁰

Once a "nationalist" note had been struck by his blasts against everything foreign, Dharmapala turned his invective at the Anglicized and Christianized Sinhalese elite, ridiculing them for their Westernized life, foreign dress and European names (such as Perera, Silva, Diaz, Cabral, Gomez). Finally, he turned to the Tamils, Muslims and other non-Buddhists in the island. He wrote: "We do not find fresh fields to increase our wealth . . . Tamils, Cochins [meaning Indian Tamils], Hambarakarayas are employed in large numbers to the prejudice of the people of the island — sons of the soil . . . who belong to a superior race."¹¹

This propaganda created a new Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology, not based on history or pristine Buddhism, but exerting a great influence on the Sinhalese Buddhists — meeting the aspirations of the emerging Sinhalese bourgeoisie and inspiring the dormant Buddhist village intelligentsia. It served to feed the earlier myth and folklore retailed by *Mahavamsa*, and eventually brought all Sinhalese Buddhists into the Dharmapala mould.

The formal political activity of the indigenous bourgeoisie was conducted in copy-book fashion, according to the rules laid down by the colonial rulers. "Several nationalists accepted the idea that they must 'satisfy the authorities' regarding their 'fitness' for responsible government and their capacity to operate democratic institutions. They were imbued with a strong attachment to British model of parliamentary government."¹²

Since the colony was run by the governor with his mainly European-nominated executive council and administered by a British-dominated bureaucracy, political activity was directed at achieving constitutional concessions and participation in the government and administration, by seeking representation in the legislative council and securing increased recruitment of Ceylonese to the colonial bureaucracy. In the beginning, the demands were limited to these issues and agitation was the result of disappointment at the slow rate of advance which the British were willing to concede.

Early Inter-Caste Rivalry

In 1911, the legislative council was enlarged to include "unofficial" Ceylonese members and with it a new platform came to be provided for the articulation of demands for further participation. With this political advance, the Sinhalese and Tamil elite came together and intra-Sinhalese caste rivalry at that time was so great that national leadership roles fell to the Tamils. They came

together as equal partners on a vague platform of proto-nationalism engendered by class interest, not on the basis of anti-colonialism or a desire for political liberation. Their separate ethnic loyalties and identities were nevertheless held intact but were temporarily subsumed by the desire for political consolidation. At the time, inter-caste rivalry among the Sinhalese was of political importance, as the *Karava* Sinhalese were economically and politically dominant and the *Goyigama* Sinhalese were bent on ending *Karava* dominance, at least politically.

So in the 1912 election to the legislative council, the *Goyigama* elite supported Sir P. Ramanathan, against Sir Marcus Fernando, a *Karava* Sinhalese, and the former got elected. This surface-level political unity was somewhat cemented when the colonial government, mistaking the 1915 Sinhalese-Muslim riots for an insurrection, declared martial law, resorted to repression and imprisoned Sinhalese political leaders including Sir Don Baron Jayatilaka, Don Stephen Senanayake and W.A. de Silva.¹³

Sir P. Ramanathan, as a member of the legislative council, lambasted the government for over-reacting and successfully called for the release of his compatriots and the lifting of martial law. This strengthened their unity and led to the founding in 1919 of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC). Sir P. Arunachalam, Ramanathan's brother, was elected as its first president. The CNC, from the beginning a conservative political organization, dominated Sri Lanka's politics until independence.

Early Inter-Ethnic Elite Conflict

A wedge was driven into the structure of Sinhalese-Tamil political unity by the colonial government's concession of constitutional reform in 1920. It introduced territorially-elected representation and enlarged the legislative council to 23 members, with an unofficial majority. This made the Sinhalese think in terms of their numerical strength and, *ipso facto*, greater representation and the need to appeal to their own constituencies and electors. Hence the Sinhalese leadership went back on an earlier pledge given to the Tamils "to actively support a provision for the reservation of a seat to the Tamils in the western province", and denied nomination to Sir P. Arunachalam for the Colombo Town seat in the 1920 election. In consequence, the Tamil leadership, viewing their counterpart as unworthy and dishonourable political allies, left the Congress and formed a segregated political pressure group called the Tamil Mahajana Sabha on the basis of ascriptive solidarity – a pattern that has often been repeated to the present day.

The introduction of territorial representation, the elective principle and segregated formations gave rise to mobilization of the respective ethnic communities for political purposes. With the constitutional reform process gathering momentum after 1920, the Tamils took on a new self-image as a national minority, vocal and articulate, on the lines of the Scots and the Welsh (but not the Irish) in British politics. They did, in fact, compare

themselves to the Scots in their political struggles and bargains with the Sinhalese. The Tamil political leadership then resorted to demanding communally-weighted representation and constitutional and legal safeguards, and sought to bargain with the Sinhalese leadership.

By now the CNC had passed into the domination of the low-country Sinhalese, and reforming Congress politicians such as E.W. Perera, Paul E. Peiris, C.E. Corea, D.S. Senanayake and George E. de Silva advocated united nation-state and a secular nationalism embracing the various ethnic, linguistic and religious communities. Many attempts were made to patch up differences and bring back the Tamils into the Congress. In 1924, C.E. Corea, a moderate Congress politician, was elected president in order to show "proof of Congress's desire to secure unity and co-operation with the Tamils and Kandyans".

At the time, there was no monolithic Sinhalese entity, but deep divisions within the Sinhalese on the basis of low-country/Kandyan, *Goyigama/Karava*, Buddhist/Christian rivalry and mistrust. In this context the Tamils were quite a major force. The centrifugal forces among the Sinhalese were so great that, in order to appease the Kandyan Sinhalese, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, in 1926, wrote in favour of a federal state structure for Sri Lanka.¹⁴

In 1920, the Kandyan Sinhalese, suspicious of the low-country Sinhalese and the Congress, formed the Kandyan Association and asserted the distinctiveness of "the Kandyan nationality". This association described the reform proposed by the Congress in 1920 as one that "threatens to destroy the present position of the Kandyans". It accused the Congress politicians of seeking to keep "the whole of the administrative power in their hands to dominate the weaker minorities".¹⁵ By 1925, most of the Kandyan notables had left the Congress and founded their own political organization, the Kandyan National Assembly.

While the Kandyan Sinhalese, with much weaker claims to nationhood, asserted a separate nationality and were soon to demand a federal form of government, the Tamil leadership failed to perceive the Tamil ethnic community as a nation, although it possessed all the attributes of nationhood in full measure and was historically a separate nation-state. This was because of their denationalized and *deraciné* outlook and their bourgeois interests, which made them allies of the dominant low-country Sinhalese. Their conceptual view of the state was derived from British history, thought and institutions; their model was multi-ethnic Britain; and their perception of themselves was that of the Scots. Hence they were content to demand "minority rights" rather than define themselves as a nation, with rights of autonomy and self-determination. The division between low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese also made them believe they could strike favourable bargains within a united political structure.

It was only in 1951 that, for the first time, Tamil politicians defined the Tamils as a distinct nation. The first annual convention of the Tamil Federal Party declared: "the Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nation-

hood".¹⁶ The Ceylon Communist Party had, as early as 1944, defined the Sinhalese and Tamil people as distinct nationalities, and recognized their right of self-determination, including "the right, if ever they so desired, to form their own independent state".¹⁷ In order to "unify the different nationalities in the period of the general national movement for freedom", the Communist Party advocated a federal structure of government for independent Sri Lanka.

The predominant goal of virtually all the low-country Sinhalese, as well as the Tamil political elite, was to forge a unitary state structure and to weld the people into a single political community. But these groups, in particular the Sinhalese leaders, were not inspired by any selfless desire to create a common nationalism out of cultural diversities. They peddled as much Sinhalese-Buddhist jingoism as the Dharmapala-Sirisena propaganda, based on an exaggerated vision of the Sinhalese past. Dr Michael Roberts states:

The trumpets of Sinhala-Buddhist cultural revivalism, moreover, were sounded by a host of Sinhalese political activists among the local elite. There is room to conjecture that in its essentials their thinking centred around the concept of a Sinhalese nation.¹⁸

One such activist, E.T. de Silva, wrote:

Ceylon is the home and country of the Sinhalese while the north perhaps is the home and country of the Ceylon Tamils With a few exceptions to be found in every country the blood of the Sinhalese race is as pure and unadulterated as it was in the times of their own kings¹⁹

Earlier, in 1915, E.T. de Silva proclaimed: "This is a Sinhalese country. I say so boldly."²⁰ Even the few Sinhalese politicians who believed in an all-island Ceylonese nationalism failed to challenge this kind of propaganda. They were all self-serving, middle-class power-seekers engaged in furthering their own interests, with little or no concern for the future of the country or the people.

The 1920-24 constitutional reforms, cumulatively called the Manning Constitution, which created a Sri Lankan majority in the legislative council, brought about a great confrontation between the legislature and the executive. The Ceylonese used their majority to convert the legislative council into a court of inquisition to question British civil servants and in general to attack government policies. The pressures exerted in this way were so great, and the deadlock that ensued so paralyzed the administration, that Governor Sir Hugh Clifford openly stated in 1926 that it was "quite impossible for the Government to carry on its administrative duties".²¹ He therefore requested the Colonial Office to send a special commission to recommend changes to the constitutional structure.

The Donoughmore Constitutional Commission

In November 1927 the special commission, under the chairmanship of the Earl of Donoughmore, arrived in Sri Lanka with the following terms of reference:

To visit Ceylon and report on the working of the existing constitution and on any difficulties of administration which may have arisen in connection with it; to consider any proposals for the revision of the constitution that may be put forward, and to report what, if any, amendments of the Order-in-Council now in force should be made.

Many organizations and public figures sent memoranda and went before the commission. The Ceylon National Congress urged the extension of territorial representation and asked for full responsible government, but opposed the introduction of adult franchise which the commission proposed. The Tamil leadership, on the other hand, pressed for the continuation of communal representation, introduced in 1923, which had brought Sinhalese-Tamil representation in the legislative council to a ratio of 2:1. The Kandyan National Assembly requested a federal system of government. Its memorandum stated:

Ours is . . . a claim of a nation to live its own life and realize its own destiny We suggest the creation of a Federal State as in the United States of America A Federal system . . . will enable the respective nationals of the several states to prevent further inroads into their territories and to build up their own nationality.²²

Many public figures, both Sinhalese and Tamils, went before the commission and declared that their respective castes, creeds and communities would perish if their rights were not safeguarded by special representation in the legislature. In general, everybody wanted the continuation of colonial rule. The Kandyan and the Tamils, in particular, wanted the continuation of British rule as a necessary safeguard against any possible low-country Sinhalese domination.

The Donoughmore Commission Report (1928) made many recommendations of far-reaching significance. In recommending the abolition of representation, on ethnic and communal lines and an extension of territorial representation, the report said: "Territorial electorates, drawn with no eye to the distribution of communities, mean rule by the majority community with no safeguards for the minorities, while safeguards for the minorities inevitably deepen the division of the nation on communal lines." It added:

In surveying the situation in Ceylon, we have come unhesitatingly to the conclusion that communal representation is, as it were, a canker in the body politic, eating deeper and deeper into the vital energies of the people, breeding self-interest, suspicion and animosity, poisoning

the new growth of political consciousness and effectively preventing the development of a national or corporate spirit There can be no hope of binding together the diverse elements of the population in a realization of their common kinship and an acknowledgement of common obligations to the country of which they are all citizens so long as the system of communal representation, with all its distintegrating influences, remains a distinctive feature of the constitution.²³

Representation on ethnic lines prevailed from the time of political unification in 1833. From that year to 1889, a Sinhalese, a Tamil and a Burgher were nominated to the legislative council to represent their respective communities. In 1889, the council was restructured and a Kandyan Sinhalese and a Muslim were also nominated to represent the interests of their communities. Alongside it, in 1920, a measure of territorial representation was introduced and expanded in 1924. From the beginning, the council was conceived as a body that would mirror the diverse ethnic and community groups in the island. The reality was that, though the ethnic entities were brought together by the British, their separate loyalties as distinct nations prevailed and national integration failed to take root.

By abolishing communal representation altogether, the commission removed a delicate and pivotal balancing mechanism built into the political system to mirror the nationality structure in the country. The commission's optimistic assumption that, with the abolition of communal representation, the different ethnic entities would cease to think on communal lines and national integration would take effect was proved totally unfounded. Throughout the 1930s and up to independence, the question of the proper Sinhalese-Tamil ratio in the legislature became the central bone of contention in the country. In fact, it further deepened the divisions within the nation.

The ratio of 5:1, brought about in the 1931 and 1936 elections on the basis of the Donoughmore reforms, was conceded by the Sinhalese as being in their favour and was resented by the Tamils as being grossly inadequate. In fact, in 1944, the Sinhalese leadership was willing to concede a ratio of 57% to 43%, but the emerging Tamil leader G.G. Ponnambalam rejected it and continued his demand for "balanced representation", i.e. 50 seats for the Sinhalese and 50 seats for the other communities.

Whatever the outcome, the abolition of communal representation would have been a progressive step only if suitable institutions, with adequate powers, were brought into being within the unitary structure, for the full development and realization of the aspirations of the separate nations. Perhaps with this in view, the commission recommended limited devolution of power to new district councils. But these were never created and hence territorial representation without devolution of power at once exposed the Tamil nation to the overwhelming majority of the Sinhalese. Hence, subsequent Tamil attempts to redress this imbalance.

The Donoughmore Commission recommended a state council, to be

electd on universal adult suffrage and a territorial electoral system. The adult franchise increased the electors in each electorate to about 30,000, compared to about 5,000 in each for elections to the previous legislative council. The new system of head-count brought the Sinhalese-Tamil representation in the state council, as stated before, to a ratio of 5:1, whereas in the legislative council it had been 2:1. The state council was to divide itself into seven executive committees, each of which would elect a chairman who would be appointed as minister by the governor. Each committee would be responsible for a particular area of government. Public service, law and finance were placed in the hands of three British officers of state, who would be responsible to the governor but would be non-voting members of the board of ministers and the state council.

While rejecting the demand of the CNC for full responsible government, the commission stated:

If the claims for full responsible government be subjected to examination . . . it will be found that its advocates are always to be numbered among those who form the larger communities and who, if freed from external control, would be able to impose their will on all who dissented from them. Those on the other hand who form the minority communities, though united in no other respect, are solid in their opposition to the proposal. A condition precedent to the grant of full responsible government must be the growth of a public opinion which will make that grant acceptable, not only to one section, but to all sections of the the people; such a development will only be possible if under a new constitution the members of the larger communities so conduct themselves in the reformed Council as to impose universal confidence in their desire to act justly, even at a sacrifice to themselves.

The greatest drawback of the Donoughmore scheme was that franchise and territorial representation were to operate at a time when there were no political parties. The commission failed to anticipate that, in the absence of political parties, the dominant rallying point for candidates and constituents would be ethnic or communal loyalty. Hence, as it turned out, territorial representation, instead of rooting out the "canker" of communalism, actually encouraged it. When there were elections with political parties, the politicians perfected and perpetuated this trend. According to Sir Ivor Jennings, the scheme

far from encouraging the formation of parties, actually discouraged them because it gave the independent member a substantial power as a member of an executive committee and so split up the functions of government that a party policy was impracticable.

The commission failed to come to grips with the all-important national question in Sri Lanka. Its starting point was that the people of Sri Lanka

are one nation, divided into a number of communities; whereas, in reality, Sri Lanka is one country, or politico-geographic entity, with two nations (Sinhalese and Tamils) and five communities (Indian Tamils, Sri Lanka Muslims, Indian Muslims, Burghers and Malays). A nation and a community are fundamentally different.

According to Joseph Stalin's definition: "A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture . . ."²⁴ It is generally accepted that a nation possesses a common ethnic identity, a continuous linguistic and cultural tradition, a defined territory as homeland, a common way of life and a shared historical experience. It is all these together that generate in a nation a dominating sense of collective consciousness which gives it the capacity and the will for political organization.

In most cases, where two or more nations live together in a single state, the political structure is federal, each nation having an autonomous state or regional government, with mutually-agreed degrees of centralization or devolution. It is in this autonomy, and in the inviolability of its territory, that a nation in a multi-ethnic state finds its security for the preservation of its separate identity, language and culture.

Although the Donoughmore Commission failed to correctly formulate the nationality structure in Sri Lanka, its recommendation for devolution of power to district councils indicates that it addressed its mind to the question. The erroneous majority/minority equation, then advanced by the Tamil leadership, may have prevented the commission from going further and providing for fully autonomous states under a federal system of government.

The legislative council approved the Donoughmore Commission Report by a narrow majority of two votes. Almost every low-country Sinhalese member voted for it, while all the Tamils and most Kandyan members voted against it. Based on the report, the Donoughmore Constitution (1931) granted limited internal self-government. Under the new constitution, the legislative council that had functioned since 1924 was dissolved, and elections to the state council were fixed for May 1931. This was the first election under adult franchise and with it Sri Lanka became the first Asian country to exercise the franchise.

The 1931 election shifted the political focus, for a time, to Jaffna. The Youth Congress, an amorphous grouping of progressive-minded young men in Jaffna, being inspired by the Indian freedom movement and following Mahatma Gandhi's ideals, had by 1929 resolved to seek complete independence for Sri Lanka. The Youth Congress stood for a free united Sri Lanka and was resolutely opposed to the communal politics of both the Sinhalese and Tamil leadership of the time. It welcomed the Donoughmore reforms abolishing communal representation and extending the franchise, but condemned the failure to grant responsible government.

Hence, when the 1931 election was announced, the Congress, without due deliberation, called for a national boycott of the election, emulating the call of the Indian National Congress for a boycott of the Simon Commission

in 1928. The Youth Congress expected organizations among the Sinhalese to follow their lead. Although a number of Tamil leaders, who were members of the dissolved legislative council, had earlier announced their candidature and had reservations about a boycott, they did not want to defy the call and decided not to contest the election. Hence there was no election for four Tamil seats in the northern province.

The Jaffna election boycott was hailed in the Sinhalese areas as a great act of protest. The *Ceylon Daily News* wrote: "Public opinion in Jaffna is a potent thing. Those who defy it do so at their peril. Ever the home of virile politics, Jaffna is determined to see that the public spirit of her citizens is equal to any crisis."²⁵

The All-Ceylon Liberal League expressed support for the boycott. A joint telegram from Francis de Zoysa, E.W. Perera and T.B. Jayah to the Congress read: "Congratulate Jaffna heartily on her brilliant achievement and deplore failure to act likewise here for want of unity and a sufficiently strong public opinion. Endeavouring to mobilize public opinion to attain the common object by best means available."²⁶

There was still sufficient scope for accommodation and consensus between Sinhalese and Tamil politicians. The Sinhalese leadership was conservative and moderate and aware that consensus was the touchstone for the Colonial Office in Whitehall in deciding whether to grant further constitutional advance and an eventual transfer of power. In the 1936 election, the Tamils contested the northern constituencies and entered the second state council. The election brought into the state council G.G. Ponnambalam, the emerging Tamil leader, and Philip Gunawardena and Dr N.M. Perera, two Marxist socialists from the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), formed in 1935, which called for independence and nationalization of the means of production.

The question of adequate Tamil representation became the central issue and Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott, in a confidential despatch of 28 October 1939 to Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote: "... all our political fissures radiate from the vexed question of minority representation".²⁷

Governor Caldecott advised that a new delimitation committee be set up to increase Tamil representation in the state council. Earlier, Caldecott had come out in favour of abolishing the three officers of state, who retained control over public service, law and finance, and transferring these functions to the elected ministers, and, above all, for a cabinet government in place of the board of ministers and the executive committee system.

The governor's views were welcomed by the ministers and, in 1936, a seven-member all-Sinhalese board of ministers was constituted, avowedly to agree on steps to advance to full self-government. By then, the Sinhalese political leadership had come under D.S. Senanayake, a cautious conservative politician committed to building a united free Sri Lanka, on the basis of majority-minority partnership of the Sinhalese and Tamil nations.

But when the package of constitutional reform proposals had been successfully negotiated between the governor and the ministers, the war broke out

and derailed further progress and elections due in 1940 were put off until after the war.

Internal Self-Government and Upper-Class Ascendancy

The granting of limited internal self-government, and the establishment of a board of ministers under the Donoughmore Constitution, paved the way for the political ascendancy of the upper-middle class. It enabled the "notables" in this class to become ministers and membership of the state council was limited to this class and its supporting allies, since the constitution barred the election of anyone who "is unable to speak, read and write the English language". Up until 1931, the mass of the people regarded government as remote. With adult franchise and wider electorates, their interests were aroused and politicians became aware that they needed to identify with the people.

Sinhalese-Buddhist propaganda had earlier been directed at the citadels of colonial power: Christianity and Western culture. It now came to be directed at local targets. Munidasa Cumaratunga was quick to make the masses aware of the importance of the franchise. He wrote:

if we do not inquire what those whom we elect and send to the legislature are saying and doing, and if on the other hand we are willing to clap hands and to have processions . . . and to go and vote unashamedly when [someone] who has been doing nothing but disservice for five years comes again before us displaying non-existent geniality, expecting to get into the legislature once more, what do we deserve to get except a bolt of thunder?²⁸

Again he wrote: "The power of the vote you have received, O Sinhalese! is a sure weapon to destroy meanness. If, however, you give it away succumbing to force, to sermons or to money, think intelligently, what succour will there be for the country?"²⁹ He revealed his antipathy to the Sinhalese political leadership: "Sinhalese youth! The time has come for you to step forward . . . our elders are intoxicated with their superiority in age . . . They have no use for the ordinary people."³⁰

As early as 1922, Cumaratunga attacked the de-nationalized character of the leaders and pressed the need to use Sinhalese in the affairs of state: "If people whom we send to the legislature cannot come into our midst and speak to us in our language about what is needed for the development of our own country, we will never be able to enjoy the benefits of self-government."³¹ His fanatical love of the Sinhalese language made him not only discredit the politicians who could not speak it, but write them off as politically irrelevant. He wrote: "At the next general election let us adopt a new policy; let us say beforehand that we shall not vote for a person who will not pledge himself to speak exclusively in Sinhalese in the Council."³²

In this way, Cumaratunga made Sinhalese language a *sine qua non* for political survival and laid the basis for the later elevation of Sinhalese into the only official language of the country. Cumaratunga's influence was great, for, according to Dr K.N.O. Dharmadasa, he was usually referred to as *Guru Devi* (The Teacher-God) and reverently called *Cumaratungu Muni* (Cumaratunga the Sage). Professor G.P. Malalasekera, Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Sri Lanka, wrote in 1948: "The services rendered by Cumaratunga to the Sinhalese language are so great that his name will be cherished as long as the Sinhalese language will last."

On account of these attacks, some of the old-guard politicians hastened to discover their forgotten past. They learnt the Sinhalese language, abandoned Christianity, re-embraced Buddhism, discarded Western attire and donned improvised local attire, calling it the "Aryan-Sinhalese" dress.

Solomon West Ridgeway (named after British Governor Sir Joseph West Ridgeway)³³ Dias Bandaranaike, who, on his return from Oxford in 1925, apologized to a delegation of his *walauwa* (manor) for not being able to speak to them in Sinhalese and coming from a Westernized family which had converted to Christianity, soon learnt Sinhalese, re-embraced Buddhism and adopted local dress.

These politicians, for the sake of political survival, took upon themselves the task of elevating the Sinhalese language and Sinhalese-Buddhist culture from the *déclassé* status to which they had been reduced by the English language, Christianity and Western culture.

The Two-Languages Resolution of the State Council

In 1932 G.K.W. Perera moved two resolutions in the state council calling for the use of Sinhalese and Tamil in the judicial and civil administration.³⁴ Two years later, at the annual meeting of the CNC, he said: "One of the greatest handicaps the people suffer from is the language of government. It is most absurd for us to fight for rights on behalf of the large majority . . . when we deny ourselves the right of conducting our government in the people's languages."³⁵

In 1937 Philip Gunawardena of the LSSP moved a resolution in the state council calling for the use of the Sinhalese and Tamil languages in recording entries at police stations and in lower court proceedings.³⁶ In 1939, the CNC demanded that Sinhalese and Tamil be introduced as the official languages.³⁷

This emphasis on the national languages was carried into the educational field. In the 1930s many central schools were established in the Sinhalese rural areas with Sinhalese as the medium of instruction. In October 1945 the state council resolved to introduce "free education" and accepted, in principle, that education should be in one's mother tongue.

In May 1944, a resolution moved by J.R. Jayewardene was passed in the state council that Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages.³⁸ This was followed up by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who on 20 September

1945 proposed that steps should be taken to effect the transition from English to Sinhalese and Tamil. A select committee of the state council made its report in 1946, entitled "Sinhalese and Tamil as Official Languages".³⁹

The Beginning of Class Conflict

These efforts at reform were used by politicians to mask the class conflict in the country. By the 1930s, new classes had effectively crystallized and a new social synthesis had emerged, with the upper-middle class at the apex, exploiting the working class at the base; and a lower-middle class, although exploited, maintaining the upper class and helping it to reproduce itself. Working-class agitation and strikes by trade unions became widespread, particularly in 1939-40.

The Ceylon Labour Party, essentially a trade union, formed by A.E. Goonesinha in 1928, and the LSSP were in the vanguard of organized working-class struggle. The LSSP, which was opposed to the colonial government's involvement of Sri Lanka in the war, used the opportunity of labour discontent and called a series of strikes of agricultural workers in the plantations. The hitherto tranquil plantations became a centre of defiance by working men and women, who often resorted to violence.

The European planting community grew frightened. The European-owned *Times of Ceylon* described the situation as a threat to civil order. The local upper class was alarmed as to what was in store after the transfer of power. The battle-lines had already been drawn on the basis of classes. Hence the ruling class stumbled upon the language reforms to stifle and divert the class struggle. Its hopes are evident in the following passage from the Report of the Select Committee of the State Council on official languages:

We trust that our efforts will remove the gulf that now divides the people into two classes, and thus not only afford the vast majority of our countrymen better opportunities of participation fully in the life of the nation but also create a cultural and literary renaissance equalling the golden ages of Lanka's historic past.⁴⁰

The Consolidation of the Bourgeoisie

With political advance and economic consolidation, the interests of the local bourgeoisie came into conflict with its European counterpart. Their spokesmen often alleged that they were denied equal facilities in commerce, banking and business. In 1919 K. Balasingham, a Tamil politician, advocated protectionist tariff policies. In 1926 A. Mahadeva, another Tamil politician, stated in the State Council: "something should be done to develop and to promote our interests, and also to adopt some system of protection for the Ceylonese". He attacked the European economic domination as follows:

... How much of the enormous profits do we share? What proportion of it goes out of the island ... The profits are mostly distributed among absentee landlords and absentee shareholders. We are unable, in the face of local monopoly that is actually in the hands of the European merchants and the European mercantile community, to contest or wrest from them any share in the commercial development of the island, or any share in the profits. The profits of accumulating capital are entirely and jealously guarded by the European ring.⁴¹

Michael Roberts correctly observes: "Whatever share the Ceylonese elite had actually gathered for themselves, clearly, several politicians were not ready to acknowledge this fact on the public platform."⁴² In connection with the establishment of institutions to offer greater credit facilities, H.W. Amarasuriya stated in 1937: "Commerce and trade are the life-blood of a nation and unless a fair proportion of the island's trade is controlled by the Ceylonese, the task of achieving economic independence would appear to be futile."⁴³

These politicians repeatedly called for protective tariffs on imported goods and demanded that local markets be reserved for local producers. Often they voiced the interests of the local coconut plantation capitalists, i.e. their own interests. The Sinhalese-Buddhist propagandist Anagarika Dharmapala was also in the forefront, demanding that metropolitan capitalism be replaced by Sri Lankan capitalism. The Buddhist Theosophical Society, to which Dharmapala belonged, consistently pressed the point that it was "the business of the Ceylonese to consider ways of accumulating capital".⁴⁴

Thus, in regard to economic nationalism, the bourgeoisie, both Sinhalese and Tamil, and the Sinhalese-Buddhist propagandists were united. The CNC even took up with the anti-imperialist stand of the LSSP and sought to use it, when the 1939 programme of the Congress stated: "It will be necessary to show [the people of the country] that [they] are exploited, chiefly by the British imperialists, the other Europeans and foreigners."⁴⁵

Bandaranaike Forms Sinhala Maha Sabha

In the political field, a significant development in 1937 was the formation by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike of the Sinhala Maha Sabha (the Great Council of the Sinhalese), a segregated Sinhalese political organization. Bandaranaike was then in the CNC and was the minister of local government in the state council.

The Sinhala Maha Sabha was formed not because of any pressing need for a segregated political organization, or in response to the political symbolism necessary to win votes. It was formed, as he himself stated, on account of his own perception of the need for Sinhalese unity. Bandaranaike was dissatisfied with the CNC stalwarts of the time, like Sir Baron Jayatilaka and D.S. Senana-

yake, and was probably motivated by the desire to set up his own political base, yet continuing within the CNC. It must also be said that he was not giving notice of any preference for purely communal politics. But the Sabha came to fill a vacuum in becoming the meeting point of the culturally subservient Sinhalese elements, who were then the underdogs.

Indeed, it would have needed great courage to assemble such an ethnically segregated body, for, at the time, despite Sinhalese-Tamil wrangles, any overt pandering to ethnic loyalties was considered parochial, mean and divisive by many of the establishment politicians. In fact, the older gentry in the CNC assailed him for resorting to communally divisive politics, leading Bandaranaike to state the rationale for its founding as follows:

We [the Sinhala Maha Sabha] saw differences amongst our own people – caste distinctions, up-country and low-country distinctions, religious distinctions and various other distinctions – and we therefore felt that we should achieve unity, which is the goal of us all. Surely, the best method was to start from the lower rungs: firstly, unity among the Sinhalese; and secondly, whilst uniting the Sinhalese, to work for higher unity, the unity of all communities.⁴⁶

On a lighter note, it needs to be added that Bandaranaike was the son of a low-country *maha mudaliyar* and he married a Kandyan *radala*; political gossip has it that he deliberately married a Kandyan in order to build a bridge between the two groups. In the same way, D.S. Senanayake's marriage to a Kandyan is also regarded as a means to link the two divisions of the Sinhalese people.

The Constitutional Reform Negotiations

In the area of constitutional reform, Whitehall's delay in giving approval to the consensus package presented by Governor Caldecott in 1939 led to considerable disappointment. The unrest arising from the spate of strikes in 1940 led the European community to express fears to the Colonial Office about their future in Sri Lanka. The Europeans advocated a Royal Commission before any further constitutional dispensation. In 1940, the Colonial Secretary implicitly rejected the package when he suggested that the governor convene a conference of the ministers and representatives of the Tamil minority to negotiate a settlement of existing differences. By then, G.G. Ponnambalam had begun to formulate the "fifty-fifty" demand, as it was then popularly called, i.e. 50 seats for the Sinhalese and 50 seats for all other communities in a reformed legislature, and a similar proportion in the cabinet.

The British government was bent on getting the wholehearted support and co-operation of the Sri Lanka government and politicians for the imperial war effort. With Japan's entry into the war, Lord Mountbatten's headquarters

for South-East Asia Command was established in Sri Lanka. The country became a "strategical base and a source of essential war materials, rubber in particular". Hence, in order to placate the local politicians, the War Cabinet in December 1942 declared that the constitutional objective was "the fullest possible development of self-governing institutions in Ceylon within the Commonwealth". This, the ministers felt, was "too indefinite" and Governor Caldecott, agreeing with the ministers, suggested that Whitehall withdraw it and substitute another declaration, in May 1943, committing Britain to the offer of "full responsibility for government under the Crown in all matters of civil administration". When it was pointed out by the Colonial Office that a more specific constitutional goal might result in the loss of minority support for the war effort, Governor Caldecott replied:

It must be realized that the minority communities are just as keen to be released from Whitehall apron strings as the majority, and that their disagreement with the latter is solely in regard to the allocation of Council seats and share of Government appointments, etc. i.e. in regard to the machinery and not the essential characteristics of the administration which all agree to keep national.⁴⁷

The May 1943 declaration envisaged a stage of constitutional advance short of dominion status. By 1935 the Marxist LSSP, and in 1940 the Communist Party, founded as the United Socialist Party, had called for "the achievement of complete national independence". Inspired by this, some politicians in the CNC, in particular Dudley Senanayake and J.R. Jayewardene, also set their sights on independence and in the 1942 annual sessions voted for "complete independence". Although the May 1943 declaration was a long way from independence, at the urging of D.S. Senanayake it was accepted by the Board of Ministers, which included Sinhalese and Tamils, of the CNC.

In July 1943 the Colonial Office clarified the declaration as requiring the formulation of a draft constitution by the board of ministers, on condition that, when approved by the Colonial Office, it must receive a three-fourths vote in the state council. In effect, what the Colonial Office was seeking was a national consensus for the provisions of the new constitution. The Colonial Office also included a reservation that a constitution so formulated would be examined by "a suitable commission or conference" once victory had been won.

The draft constitution, prepared by the board of ministers, allocated 57 seats for the Sinhalese, 15 for Ceylon Tamils, 14 for Indian Tamils and eight for Muslims.⁴⁸ The draft was sent to Whitehall in March 1944 and in July the Secretary of State, Oliver Stanley, announced in the House of Commons that a constitutional commission would be appointed to visit Sri Lanka to examine the draft constitution and to consult with the various minority interests. The ministers objected to this, on the grounds that the May 1943 declaration requiring a three-fourth majority of the state council for the adoption of the constitution was sufficient protection of the interests of minorities.

The Soulbury Constitutional Commission

The Constitutional Commission, with Lord Soulbury as its chairman, arrived in the country on 20 September 1944 to examine the draft constitution and with a specific term of reference "to consult with various interests, including the minority communities, concerned with the subject of constitutional reform in Ceylon". The board of ministers resolved on an official boycott but "allowed their own scheme to speak for itself". The commissioners, however, held private discussions with D.S. Senanayake, the leader of the state council, and Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, the civil defence commissioner.

G.G. Ponnambalam, who in the same year founded the Ceylon Tamil Congress, took his demand for "fifty-fifty", or "balanced representation", before the commission and presented his case in a 10-hour marathon session, arguing that Tamils would suffer discrimination at the hands of a numerically predominant Sinhalese majority in the legislature. But the commission was unimpressed and rejected the argument, not because the fifty-fifty equation was unacceptable, but because it was opposed in principle to any ethnic balance or ratio of representation.

The commission held that there had been no proven acts of administrative discrimination against the Tamils and was optimistic that there was not likely to be any in the future. It noted that "the growth of left-wing opinion already constitutes a potential solvent of racial or religious solidarity" and that there were "definite indications of the growth of a Left-Wing movement more disposed to concentrate on social and economic than on communal lines".⁴⁹

To prevent discriminatory laws being enacted, the commission provided a safeguard prohibiting the enactment of any law which would make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions were not made liable, or confer advantages or privileges on persons of any community or religion which were not conferred on persons of other communities or religions. This provision, which became Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution (1947), proved to be totally ineffectual in preventing either individual discrimination or outright deprivation of existing collective rights of franchise, citizenship, language, etc. However, Lord Soulbury later said he felt he had "entrenched all the protective provisions for minorities that the wit of man could devise".⁵⁰

In regard to the commission's scheme of territorial representation, it was led astray by the seemingly attractive territorial stipulation which the ministers' draft constitution contained. The commission accepted the ministers' proposed basis of distribution, namely one seat for 75,000 persons and one seat for every 1,000 square miles of territory. The commission believed that the territorial stipulation would work out to the advantage of the minority communities, while the other stipulation (one seat for 75,000 persons) benefited only the rural Kandyan Sinhalese areas. The scheme of representation which the commission approved resulted in 67% Sinhalese representation in the 1947 election. Even this ratio was not written into the constitution but

was left to be worked out by a delimitation commission to be appointed after every census. The abhorrence with which both the Donoughmore and Soulbury Commissions viewed ethnic- or community-based ratios led them to adopt territorial schemes which became one of the principal routes for later governments to gerrymander and bolster Sinhalese representation to 80% by 1970.

Ponnambalam's "Fifty-Fifty"

The commission virtually rubber-stamped the ministers' draft constitution. Its attitude was conditioned by several factors. Firstly, the state council had earlier in 1944 passed a resolution that both Sinhalese and Tamil would be the official languages, and in 1945 a select committee of the state council was appointed to suggest the steps necessary to effect the transition. Hence, on the matter of Tamil language rights, the commission was left in no doubt about the equality of Tamil with the Sinhalese language.

Secondly, all Tamil state councillors, notably A. Mahadeva, who was a minister and member for Jaffna, were actively collaborating with the Sinhalese leadership. Sir W. Duraiswamy, a Tamil, was then the speaker of the state council. In this context, G.G. Ponnambalam with his "fifty-fifty" was seen as a lone dissenter with unfounded fears of discrimination by the Sinhalese. Professor S. Arasaratnam is very right when he states: "Far from presenting themselves as a communal colossus waiting to crush under their feet the numerous other minorities, the Sinhalese appeared to an impartial observer to be an unorganized, disadvantaged people, relatively backward in education and with large pockets of rural poverty."⁵¹

Thirdly, the commission was faced with an official boycott by the ministers and it was therefore not inclined to mutilate the ministers' draft constitution submitted on the basis of consensus. Furthermore, D.S. Senanayake and Sir Oliver Gonetilleke met the Commissioners unofficially and would certainly have supported the draft constitution and pressed its acceptance.

Lastly, the internal government by the board of ministers from 1931 redressed many of the Kandyan grievances and conferred great benefits, so that the Kandyan Sinhalese leadership acquiesced in the provisions of the ministers' draft constitution. All these circumstances led the Soulbury Commission to endorse all the essentials of the ministers' draft constitution.

Towards Self-Government

The Soulbury scheme envisaged an intervening constitutional stage before the granting of dominion status or full self-government. In fact, the commission considerably restricted the external sovereignty of the country. But with the victory in the war, the Labour Party, which swept to power in the 1945 election, was committed to a quick process of post-war dissolution of the

empire.

In July 1945, D.S. Senanayake went to London, met the new Secretary of State, G. Hall, and pressed for the immediate granting of dominion status. He came back with an assurance that "His Majesty's Government will co-operate with the people of Ceylon so that such [i.e. dominion] status may be obtained in a comparatively short time".

The Soulbury constitution was presented as a white paper in October 1945 for acceptance by the state council, with a contingent promise of dominion status if the new constitution worked successfully. The white paper was regarded as the first signal of an early transfer of power and independence. On this assumption the state council debated the new constitution on 8-9 November 1945. In the debate D.S. Senanayake, the leader of the state council, president of the CNC and architect of Sri Lanka's independence, urged the Tamils and other minority communities to accept the constitution and assured them:

Do you want to be governed from London or do you want, as Ceylonese, to help govern Ceylon? . . . On behalf of the Congress and on my own behalf, I give the minority communities the sincere assurance that no harm need you fear at our hands in a free Lanka.

The Tamils accepted this assurance, and all Sri Lanka Tamil members unanimously voted for the acceptance of the Soulbury constitution. The motion was passed in the state council by 51 votes to three. Two Indian Tamils and a Sinhalese voted against. Thus a constitutional settlement was reached between the Sinhalese and the Tamil leadership to press for independence in unity.

With the unanimous acceptance of the Constitution by the Tamil leadership, D.S. Senanayake's hand was strengthened to take on the Colonial Office in his demand for self-government. In early 1946, Sir Henry Moore became the new governor and in early 1947 Arthur Creech Jones replaced Hall as Secretary of State. In February 1947, independence for India and Burma was announced by the Colonial Office. With these developments, independence for Sri Lanka became a clear prospect. Once more, the Colonial Office raised the minority question, but with the Tamils accepting the constitution and supporting the demand for self-government the road to independence was clear.

Class Conflict Hastens Transfer of Power

In the meantime, working-class agitation and Marxist-inspired labour unrest culminated in the general strike of 1946, in which, for the first time, government employees took a leading part. S. Kandasamy, a key trade unionist, was shot and killed by the police while heading a procession. A general election was due any time and the Marxist parties – the LSSP, the BLP and

the CP — were making a strong bid for power, attacking Senanayake's gradualism and continuation of colonial rule.

In this situation, the granting of self-government became a matter of political survival for Senanayake and his men, while the Colonial Office and the governor perceived it as necessary to save Sri Lanka for imperialism and capitalism. Sir Charles Jeffries, then deputy under-secretary at the Colonial Office, who handled the negotiations leading to Sri Lanka's independence, later wrote:

... it became clear daily to the Governor Sir Henry Moore and to the Secretary of State ... that if Ceylon was to be saved for the Commonwealth and the free world, there would have to be something more positive than the policy of gradual evolution contemplated by the 1945 White Paper.⁵²

Hence transfer of power was to be hastened and, in July 1947, the Secretary of State announced in the House of Commons that, upon the signing of "agreements on defence and external affairs" between the two governments, Sri Lanka would be granted fully responsible status within the Commonwealth. Following this, a general election for a new House of Representatives was announced.

The Ceylon National Congress was converted into the United National Party (UNP), with D.S. Senanayake as its leader. The UNP included Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim "notables" of the CNC. The polling for the election was spread over the period 23 August to 20 September 1947. At party level, the election was a clear left-right contest between the three Marxist parties on the one hand and UNP on the other. Ethnic cleavage, caste and religious considerations, patron-client linkages and deferential relationships, all played an important part. The UNP won 42 of the 95 seats, the LSSP won 10, the BLP won five and the CP won three, including the 1st Member in the three-member constituency of Colombo City. The Tamil Congress won all seven Tamil seats in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Ceylon Indian Congress won all eight seats in the plantation areas, where the Tamil workers predominated. There were 21 independent candidates who were also returned. Since the UNP failed to win an absolute majority, Senanayake wooed a number of independent members and with their support formed the government.

On 4 February 1948, independence was granted to the people of Sri Lanka and power was transferred to the Senanayake government. Sri Lanka thus became the first of the British crown colonies to be granted independence.

Independence and Constitutional Hiatus

The transfer of power was effected by removing the legal limitations on extra-

territoriality contained in the Soulbury constitution. This was done by an order in council and an act of parliament conferring "statute of Westminster powers" and by amendments to various UK statutes. No constitution setting out the checks and balances necessary for the governance of a sovereign independent multi-ethnic state was framed by the British government. Nor was a constituent assembly set up, as in India and Pakistan, to devise a constitution to suit the particular nationality structure and to meet the needs and aspirations of all the people of Sri Lanka.

In fact, prior to the transfer of power, no examination whatsoever of the Soulbury constitution was undertaken by the Colonial Office to assess the adequacy of the provisions of that constitution in the field of internal government when the country became independent. Yet the important fact is that the Soulbury constitution was designed for a stage in constitutional evolution prior to dominion status and full self-government. The questions of crucial importance to an independent state — citizenship, franchise, individual and group rights — particularly in a multi-ethnic state, were not the concern of the Soulbury commission, as it was not fashioning an independence constitution. At the time, there were no citizens of Sri Lanka, as all were subjects of the UK.

But the British government granted independence on the basis of this constitution, which contained no law on citizenship, franchise and protection of individual and group fundamental rights. These lacunae in the law of the constitution bequeathed by the British to the people of Sri Lanka at independence led a million plantation Tamil people to lose their citizenship and franchise within two years of independence, and another million Sri Lanka Tamils to lose the right to use their own language in the affairs of state. And they opened the floodgates for blatant discrimination of Tamils in employment, education and other areas of national life.

Because of this constitutional hiatus, left as a result of British naivety or irresponsibility or a combination of both, independence was achieved, in effect, only by the Sinhalese and not by the Tamil people. As a matter of fact, prior to the transfer of power, the India Office in London had raised with the Colonial Office the question of safeguards for the Tamils of Indian origin settled in the island, but the matter was brushed aside.

Professor K.M. de Silva points out that, when D.S. Senanayake went to England in July 1945, "he had obtained one vital concession — problems relating to citizenship, the Colonial Office agreed, were to be treated as falling within the ambit of the Sri Lanka government's powers under the new constitution".⁵³ If this is true, and there is no reason to doubt it, then the British Government is guilty of the gross betrayal of a million people who had toiled and produced the wealth for the British to rule the colony.

The proper course for Britain would have been to bring the question of citizenship of these people, whom British rule had brought to Sri Lanka, and to resolve it before independence was granted to India and Sri Lanka. Because of this failure, one million people became stateless and remain so today. The denial of citizenship, followed by their disfranchisement the

following year, not only made them stateless and voteless but altered the whole Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic structural balance in the country and paved the way for the deprivation of language and other rights of the Sri Lanka Tamils.

The consequences of the British legacy drove some Tamils, 20 years after British withdrawal, to petition the British monarch for redress. They went to London in 1968 with a petition, signed by thousands of Tamils, setting out the plight in which British rule had left the Sri Lanka Tamils, and presented it to H.M. Queen Elizabeth, seeking her intervention as queen of Sri Lanka at that time.

Lord Soulbury, after having served a term as governor-general of independent Sri Lanka, in a spirit of repentance for the failure of the British, took the blame upon himself and later admitted: "I now think it is a pity that the Commission did not also recommend the entrenchment in the constitution of guarantees of fundamental rights."⁵⁴

References

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2. Patrick Peebles, *The Transformation of the Colonial Elite: The Mudaliyars of 19th-Century Ceylon*; University of Chicago, D.Phil. dissertation, p.245.
3. *Ceylon National Review*, No.5, February 1908.
4. *Report of the Committee of the Executive Council on the Fixed Establishments of Ceylon*, HMSO, 1852, p.175.
5. K.M. de Silva, "Resistance Movements in 19th-Century Sri Lanka", in Michael Roberts (ed.): *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, p.144.
6. C.E. Corea, "The Sinhalese Peasants' Title", in the *National Monthly of Ceylon*, February-March, 1914.
7. From Anagarika Dharmapala's writings, in Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*, Government Press, Colombo, pp.484 and 660.
8. *Ibid.*, p.735.
9. Piyadasa Sirisena, *Jayatissa saha Rosalin*, Colombo, 1971 edition, p.ii.
10. Quoted in K.N.O. Dharmadasa, "Language and Sinhalese Nationalism: The Career of Munidasa Cumaratunga", in *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol.3:2, July 1972.
11. *Supra*, Ananda Guruge (ed.), pp.515-16. Against the Muslims, Dharama-

pala wrote: "What the German is to the Britisher the Muhammedan is to the Sinhalese. He is an alien to the Sinhalese by religion, race and language. He traces his origin to Arabia, whilst the Sinhalese traces his origin to India and to Aryan sources. To the Sinhalese without Buddhism death is preferable. The British officials may shoot, hang . . . or do anything to the Sinhalese, but there will always be bad blood between the Moors and the Sinhalese." This is an extract from a letter Dharmapala wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated 15 June 1915, soon after the Sinhalese-Muslim riots, p.541.

12. Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*.
13. Dharmapala, at that time, was in Calcutta and he was interned there by the Government, and Piyadasa Sirisena was held in custody during the riots.
14. In articles written by Bandaranaike serialized in the *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 19 May-30 June 1926.
15. Quoted in K.M. de Silva, *A History of Ceylon*, p.397.
16. *The Case for a Federal Constitution for Ceylon: Resolutions passed at the First National Convention of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi*, Colombo, 1951.
17. Quoted in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.42-3.
18. *Ibid.*, p.344.
19. *Ibid.*, p.350.
20. *Ibid.*, p.56.
21. *Ibid.*, p.372.
22. See *The Rights and Claims of the Kandyan People*, Miller & Co., Kandy, Sri Lanka, n.d. (?1927).
23. *Ceylon - Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution*, July 1928, London, p.39.
24. J.V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, New York, 1942, p.16.
25. *Ceylon Daily News*, 4 May 1931.
26. Quoted in Silan Kadirgamar (ed.), *Handy Perinbanayagam, A Memorial Volume*, Chunnakam, Sri Lanka, 1980, p.81.
27. Quoted in K.M. de Silva, "The Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka: A Review of British Perspectives, 1938-1947", in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.422.
28. Quoted in K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *Supra*, p.141.
29. *Ibid.*, p.141.
30. *Ibid.*, p.142.
31. *Ibid.*, p.141.
32. *Ibid.*, p.142.
33. Governor Ridgeway wrote of the people of Sri Lanka: "They are quiet and law-abiding, but impulsive, excitable and often ignorant and therefore credulous", *Administration of the Affairs of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1903.
34. *Debates of the State Council of Ceylon*, 1932, pp.794 and 1641.
35. Quoted in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.406.
36. *Debates of the State Council of Ceylon*, 1937, p.881 and 3090.
37. See Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.406.
38. See *Debates of the State Council of Ceylon*, 1944.
39. "Sinhalese and Tamil as Official Languages", *Sessional Paper*, XXII, of 1946.

40. *Ibid.*, p.12. Much the same was said by Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike when she was Prime Minister in the 1960s: "We have tried to eliminate the wide gap which existed between the government and the governed, between the elite and the masses. By giving the due and rightful place to the Sinhala language as the official language of the country, we have made it possible for these voiceless millions who spoke only that language to play an effective part in the affairs of the country."
41. *Hansard*, Legislative Council, 1926, pp.845-46.
42. Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.393.
43. Quoted in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.389.
44. *Ibid.*, p.65.
45. *Ibid.*, p.400.
46. See S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, *Towards a New Era, Selected Speeches ... made in the Legislature of Ceylon, 1931-1959*, Government Press, Colombo, pp.50-51.
47. Caldecott's despatch marked "Personal and Secret" to Oliver Stanley, 17 February 1943.
48. Reform of the Constitution, *Sessional Paper XIV* of 1944.
49. *Ceylon - Report of the Commission on Constitutional Reform*, London, 1955, paragraphs 262 and 267.
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51. S. Arasaratnam, in "Nationalism in Sri Lanka and the Tamils", in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.505.
52. Sir Charles Jeffries, *Ceylon - The Path to Independence*, London, 1962, p.112.
53. K.M. de Silva, in "Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka: A Review of British Perspectives, 1938-1947", in Michael Roberts (ed.): *Collective Identities*, p.431.
54. Quoted in Walter Swarz, *supra*.

4. Sinhalese-Buddhist Ethnocentrism

Freedom came on 4 February 1948, after four and a half centuries of subjugation to foreign rule, without a shot being fired or a life being lost. These centuries were, however, to take their toll with a vengeance in the next three and a half decades, because of the nature of the freedom conferred. The transfer of power from the departing British to the local ruling class, "a tiny educated minority of English-speaking islanders", was marked by "extreme gentility". While the latter rejoiced in celebrations and festivities with the visiting British royalty and scions of nobility, it was not a "tryst with destiny" for the mute millions of ordinary Sri Lankans. At the appointed hour, the Rt. Hon. D.S. Senanayake mounted the podium in pin-striped suit and tail coat to symbolically receive the instruments of the transfer of power from the Duke of Gloucester, representing HM King George VI.

Soon, through the arithmetic of the ballot-box and Sinhalese-Buddhist sectarianism, this freedom and independence became the prerogative of the Sinhalese; the Tamils, left with assurances, gentleman's agreements and state council resolutions, witnessed the collapse of them all and were aghast at their betrayal. Starting as equals with the Sinhalese in subordination to the British, the Tamils for a time became "junior partners" and, by the 1960s, had been reduced a subject people under the rule of Sinhalese masters.

Of the social character of the class to whom power was transferred, the sociologist Marshall Singer observes:

When the British made the decision to grant substantial degrees of political authority to the "natives" in 1924, 1931 and finally complete political independence in 1948, they granted that power to those who most closely approximated themselves. In terms of social background, this meant that the group to whom the British first began to transfer political power were (1) broadly Ceylonese, (2) largely Christian, (3) mostly high-caste, (4) highly urbanised, (5) highly Western-educated, (6) largely engaged in Western-type occupations, (7) of the highest economic and social class. More important for the operation of the political process in Ceylon, in terms of self-image and world-outlook, those individuals possessed a strong sense of identification with the

British values, attitudes and perspectives.¹

When independence came, the ordinary Sinhalese people had not been socially emancipated; they were still bound in servility and were subordinate to their economic and social superiors. Their self-identification stopped at the level of their primordial loyalties and immediate social group. The Sri Lankan people, in general, had not organized a political society nor developed political consciousness and the capacity to unite at the wider national level.

In 1959 the delimitation commission observed: "The people, we are afraid, have not yet learnt to think sufficiently in terms of principles and policies in preference to race, caste or religion."² Contrary to this reality in 1959, and even today, the Soulbury Commission had optimistically asserted in 1946 that "the growth of left-wing opinion already constitutes a potential solvent of racial or religious solidarity."³ We will see how, in the contest between Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism and left-wing Marxism to shape the future of Sri Lanka, the former triumphed and electoral politics drove Marxist politicians to become "Sinhalese Marxists".

National Flag Issue

The first expression of Sinhalese-Buddhist ethnocentrism was revealed in the designing of the national flag of Sri Lanka, on the eve of independence. It was a time when Sri Lanka was emerging as a modern nation with ethnic, linguistic and religious differences. The flag of the new nation should have been a symbol that would evoke the spontaneous loyalty of all the people of Sri Lanka. In similar circumstances, at independence, India adopted the tricolour and Asokan *Chakra*. In the historic past, the Sinhalese kings had depicted a lion on their flag and the Tamil kings a bull. The lion represented the origin myth of the Sinhalese, while the bull was the sacred animal of the Hindus.

The question of the national flag became a matter of great controversy. The Sinhalese wanted the lion flag, while the Tamils resolutely opposed it. Some Tamils suggested Adam's Peak, a mountain in central Sri Lanka and site of a rock bearing a depression resembling an enormous footprint. It is a revered place of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim pilgrimage. In Buddhist legend, it is the site of *Sri Pada* (or Sacred Footstep of Buddha), the imprint of Buddha's last contact with this world. In Sinhalese, it is called *Samanala*. The Hindus call it *Sivanoli Patam* and they believe it to be the footprint of Lord Siva. In Muslim legend, it is the footprint of Adam. Christians also worship it as the footprint of St Thomas.

The Senanayake government was unyielding in its determination to adopt the lion flag but was willing to add a stripe each to represent the Tamils and Muslims. Hence, the national flag, as adopted by parliament in 1948, comprised the lion flag and two stripes. The lion flag has a highly stylized yellow standing lion, with a sword held aloft in its front right raised paw,

against a red background with corners indented by four leaves of the pipal tree, under which Buddha attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. And outside the lion flag are a saffron stripe for the Tamils and a green stripe for the Muslims. The whole flag is surrounded by a yellow border, the same colour as the lion.

The national flag is thus essentially the Sinhalese lion flag. Indeed the 1978 constitution, in article 6, states: "The National Flag of the Republic of Sri Lanka shall be the *Lion Flag* depicted in the Second Schedule" (emphasis added). The flag depicted in the second schedule to the constitution is the one adopted in 1948. The very existence or relevance of the two stripes has come to be forgotten by the parliament which enacted this later constitution.

The Nature of the Post-Colonial Government Structure

The British bequeathed to Sri Lanka at independence a typical Westminster model of parliamentary government. It must, however, be added that this was not entirely a matter of British choice, for this was the scheme contained in the ministers' draft constitution. It is also a matter of note that the ministers' draft constitution, although fathered by D.S. Senanayake, was fashioned by Sir Ivor Jennings, then the vice-chancellor of the University of Sri Lanka and the unofficial constitutional adviser to D.S. Senanayake.

There was to be a government and an opposition, elected and constituted on party lines. The legislature was to consist of two houses. The House of Representatives was to consist of 95 elected members and six members nominated by the governor-general to represent minority interests not adequately represented by the elected members. The Senate was to consist of 30 members, of whom 15 were to be elected by the lower house and 15 to be appointed by the governor-general.

The legislative power of the Sri Lanka parliament was "to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the island", a hallowed phrase in English colonial law which connotes "the widest law-making powers appropriate to a sovereign". And section 29(2)(b) and (c) provided that no such law shall impose any disabilities, or confer any advantages, on members of any one community only. The executive powers were to be exercised by a cabinet of ministers. The queen was to be the head of state of the dominion of Ceylon, with a governor-general performing the constitutional functions of the British monarch.

All these institutions were to operate according to English constitutional law and conventions and parliamentary practices and procedures. On the eve of transfer of power, the British and Sri Lanka governments signed "defence and external affairs" agreements of the widest import, according to which Britain would give military assistance to the latter and the former would be permitted to station and have bases for HM army, navy and air force in Colombo, Trincomalee and Katunayake, as before. It was also agreed that Sri Lanka, as a dominion, would be within the British Common-

wealth, as it was known at that time. All this meant that, even after independence, foreign influence was not to end but would increase, with a host of transplanted institutions to be grafted onto the future political structure of Sri Lanka.

After the 1947 election, with the help of the independent MPs, Senanayake formed the government and became the first prime minister. He assembled a cabinet of 14 with two independent Tamil MPs, C. Suntharalingam and C. Sittampalam, and the rest UNP MPs. His cabinet included his son Dudley Senanayake, Sir John Kotelawala, a nephew, R.G. Senanayake, another nephew, and J.R. Jayewardene, a kinsman. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was the only important member of the cabinet not belonging to the Senanayake family tree. The Senanayake cabinet was a miniature collection of representatives of the highest economic class who had benefited from colonial rule and from plantation and commercial capitalism. The opposition was led by the Marxist LSSP, BLP and CP, and included, at the beginning, the Ceylon Tamil Congress and the Ceylon Indian Congress, which as a working-class organization was allied to the Marxists. Dr N.M. Perera, the leader of the LSSP, was elected leader of the opposition, which included personalities like Dr S.A. Wickremasinghe, leader of the CP and the first Marxist to enter the legislature (in the 1931 election), Philip Gunawardena, Dr Colvin R. de Silva, Pieter Keuneman and 13 other fellow Marxists.

The cabinet and the shadow cabinet presented a picture of pro-British "constitutional" conservatives being directly confronted by anti-British Marxist "revolutionaries". These Marxist politicians were attracted by Marxist theory in the cause of national liberation while students in England in the 1930s, and on their return propagated Marxism and founded left-wing political parties based on trade unions. Once independence was granted, they adopted a socialism aimed at electoral acceptance and abandoned the goal of the revolutionary overthrow of the dominant exploitative forces that controlled the post-colonial state. Broadly speaking, they were almost of the same social class as their political adversaries. They possessed the means and the leisure to engage in full-time parliamentary politics. Most of them, like the UNP "notables", were not exposed to electoral vicissitudes as they controlled safe "family" seats. Dr S.A. Wickremasinghe, for instance, was returned for the same seat continuously from 1931 to 1970.

In the political battlefield, they scathingly attacked the family politics of D.S. Senanayake and characterized the UNP as Uncle Nephew's Party. They severely criticized the independence that Senanayake had achieved as a fake, pointing to the continued presence of British military forces. Their reasoned critique of the neo-colonial stranglehold on the country evoked much response. It was soon taken up by Bandaranaike, in a vague manner, when he quit the UNP in 1951, and was later adopted by the Sinhalese-Buddhist propagandists, who diverted it into sectarian channels, eventually degenerating into the fanaticism of the Sinhala-only activists in the late 1950s.

Indian Tamils Lose Citizenship

The Senanayake government directed its axe first against the Indian Tamils of the plantations. By the Ceylon Citizenship Act No.18 of 1948, all Indian Tamils, even those born or domiciled in Sri Lanka, were denied Sri Lankan citizenship. The Citizenship Act laid down the law governing citizenship of Sri Lanka and prescribed qualifications necessary for a person born before or after 15 November 1948 to become a citizen of Sri Lanka. The qualifications deliberately aimed at excluding the Indian Tamils from Sri Lankan citizenship. The relevant sections of the act are as follows:

- 4(1) Subject to other provisions of this Part, a person born in Ceylon before the appointed date (i.e. 15 November 1948) shall have the status of a citizen of Ceylon by descent, if (a) his father was born in Ceylon, or (b) his paternal grandfather and paternal great grandfather were born in Ceylon.
- (2) . . . a person born outside Ceylon before the appointed date shall have the status of a citizen of Ceylon by descent, if (a) his father and paternal grandfather were born in Ceylon, or (b) his paternal grandfather and paternal great grandfather were born in Ceylon.
- 5(1) . . . a person born in Ceylon on or after the appointed date shall have the status of a citizen of Ceylon by descent, if at the time of his birth his father is a citizen of Ceylon . . .

These provisions mean that a person born in Sri Lanka before 15 November 1948 shall become a citizen only if his father was born in Ceylon, or if his paternal grandfather and great grandfather were born in Sri Lanka. If he was born outside Sri Lanka before 15 November 1948, then his father and paternal grandfather, or his paternal grandfather and great grandfather, must have been born in Sri Lanka. A person born in Sri Lanka after 15 November 1948 can only be a citizen if at the time of his birth his father was a citizen of Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka Citizenship Act is unique in that it denies citizenship to a person born in the country before or after 1948 unless, at least, his father was born in or was a citizen of Sri Lanka. Citizenship is not related to one's birth in the country but to the birth of one's ancestors. This crude legal formulation was designed to deny citizenship to the plantation Tamils of Indian origin, not only those living but those still to be born. With this citizenship law, nearly a million men, women and children of Indian origin, working and living in the country and for whom Sri Lanka is their permanent home, became non-citizens. As stated in Chapter I, the 1938 Jackson Report on Immigration estimated that 70% to 80% of them were permanently settled in Sri Lanka. And because the Constitution of India, 1950, treated persons of Indian origin permanently settled in another country as citizens of their respective adopted countries, they became stateless persons.

D.S. Senanayake had for a long time viewed the Tamils of Indian origin

with disfavour and argued that they were not permanent residents of Sri Lanka. He took this view on the grounds that some of them used to go to India and come back, and some sent money to their families in India. Senanayake played a dominant role as chairman of the Land Commission in the late 1920s. Its Interim Report of 1927 defined "Ceylonese" so as to exclude the Indian Tamils. The report stated: "by Ceylonese, we mean the Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamils, Burghers, Ceylon Moormen [i.e. referring to Muslims], Ceylon Malays and Europeans domiciled in Ceylon, i.e. those who have adopted Ceylon as their permanent home."⁴

Based on this report, the Land Development Ordinance of 1935, framed by D.S. Senanayake as minister of agriculture and lands, excluded Indian Tamils from the benefits of land alienation by the government. As early as 1940, Senanayake is on record as saying:

It is unthinkable that we should give . . . full rights of citizenship to people who have not made Ceylon their permanent home. The vast majority of the Indians in Ceylon consider India to be their home and Ceylon their place of occupation . . . They are here only to earn and to make money and to take it away to India . . . Unless we stem the tide of the growing domination of Indians in Ceylon in our economic and social life, our extinction as a Ceylonese nation is inevitable.⁵

Senanayake must have known that this was untrue and that he was inventing arguments to achieve a purpose, i.e. to deny citizenship to these Tamils for a variety of reasons: *inter alia*, they were Tamils who had bolstered the Tamil population to 23% in the island; they had expressed working-class solidarity and increasing militancy in 1930-40; they had supported the left-wing political parties. The fear of "inevitable extinction", then of the "Ceylonese nation", later of the "Sinhalese nation", has been the only rationale of Sinhalese politicians, for all the denials, deprivations and discriminations which became the only coherent and systemized state policy from 1948.

In much the same way, in refusing to accept Tamil as an official language alongside Sinhalese, Bandaranaike said in parliament: "The fact that in the towns and villages, in business houses and in boutiques most of the work is in the hands of Tamil-speaking people will inevitably result in a fear, and I do not think an unjustified fear, of the inexorable shrinkage of the Sinhalese language . . ."⁶

So, because of these fears of "inevitable extinction" in the 1940s and of "inexorable shrinkage" in the 1950s, the Indian Tamils were denied citizenship and the Sri Lanka Tamils were denied the use of Tamil as their official language. As Sinhalese statements reveal, the real motive on each occasion was economic, i.e. to prevent the Tamils from earning money and to eliminate them from employment and business.

In truth, however, these Sinhalese positions were adopted, not out of any great love for the Sinhalese people or the Sinhala language, but to divide the

working class, both Sinhalese and Tamil, which was united, militant and threatening upper-class control of the late-colonial and post-colonial state. That power to challenge and change the status quo was amply demonstrated by the 1939 strikes and the defiance of the Tamil plantation workers, and the 1946–47 general strike of both the Sinhalese and Tamil working class, reaching its climax in their electoral solidarity with the Marxist parties, and the CIC allied to them, in the 1947 election.

Senanayake's statement shows that he entertained a xenophobic hatred of the Indian Tamils. He had conceived the idea of excluding them from citizenship as early as 1940; yet he made no public mention of his design until power was transferred. And the Colonial Office either acquiesced in this design or was inveigled by Senanayake's cajolery and gave the "concession", as Professor K.M. de Silva sees fit to describe it, that citizenship should be treated as a matter "falling within the ambit of the Sri Lanka government's powers" after independence.

Though in his 1940 statement Senanayake implicitly conceded that there was, at least, a small minority of Indian Tamils who considered Sri Lanka as their permanent home, yet in 1948 he enacted legislation denying citizenship to every one of them. He was clearly aware of the money these labourers were sending to sustain their kith and kin, but he had no thought for their sweat and toil, which alone made Sri Lanka economically strong enough to be granted independence in 1948. Sir Charles Jeffries stated that Sri Lankan independence was regarded by the Colonial Office as "a special case" justified, among other things, by its "economic strength".⁷

Senanayake also had no thought for one of the worst forms of human degradation — statelessness — that he was inflicting on one million people, whose exploited conditions — as later documented by Edith M. Bond in *State of Tea* (1974)⁸ and revealed by *Granada Television's* documentary on the *Plantation Workers of Sri Lanka* (1975) — were to shake the conscience of the Western capitalist world.

Indian Tamils Lose the Vote

In 1949 Senanayake successfully wooed the Tamil Congress leader G.G. Ponnambalam to join the government with his six Sri Lanka Tamil MPs. Ponnambalam, being a conservative politician, was from the start ill at ease with the Marxist firebrands seeking to upset the status quo. Ponnambalam was appointed minister of industries in the Senanayake cabinet, and the roles of the Sinhalese and Tamil conservative politicians were almost those of senior and junior partners until 1953, when Ponnambalam resigned.

With Ponnambalam, the most articulate and vociferous Tamil agitator, domesticated in his cabinet, D.S. Senanayake went in for the kill. By the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act, No.48 of 1949, which was an amendment to the 1946 order in council on franchise, Senanayake tied the franchise to citizenship and deprived the Indian Tamils of their vote.

The 1949 act, in section 4(1), simply stated: "No person shall be qualified to have his name entered or retained in any register of electors in any year if such person is not a citizen of Ceylon."

The Indian Tamils had voted in 1931 and 1936, and in the 1947 elections they elected eight Tamil MPs, all belonging to the left-oriented Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC). The Indian Tamils elsewhere voted for the Marxist parties and helped the election of LSSP and CP MPs. The 1949 amendment deprived them of their vote and they became a million stateless and voteless people. Both of these steps were taken because they were Tamils who bolstered the Tamils' strength in parliament and because their working-class solidarity with their Sinhalese counterparts was a constant danger to the upper-class control of the state.

The problems that later confronted them arose from their statelessness. From then on, their role was to make the plantation agriculture, the backbone of Sri Lanka's economy, earn the necessary foreign exchange, so that the island's citizens could enjoy imports, the government could collect the revenue and the British plantation holding companies could reap the profits.

The passage of the 1949 act broke the Sri Lanka Tamil Congress. Two MPs, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and C. Vanniasingham, resigned from the TC and founded the Federal Party (FP), which from 1956 became the dominant political party of the Sri Lankan Tamils. On resigning in 1949, Chelvanayakam declared with prophetic foresight: "Today it is the Indian Tamils. Tomorrow, it will be the Sri Lanka Tamils who will be axed."

Earlier in 1949, the Indian and Pakistani Residence (Citizenship) Act, No.3 of 1949, sought to offer "citizenship by registration" to persons of Indian origin on proof of (1) 10 years' continued residence in Sri Lanka prior to 1946, without a break of more than 12 months in the case of unmarried persons, and (2) seven years' continued residence for married persons. This act fixed a two-year time limit (i.e. 5 August 1951) by which applications must be made by those wishing to be considered for "citizenship by registration".

The Ceylon Indian Congress at first chose to register its opposition by calling upon those of Indian origin not to apply. It demanded that the distinction between "citizenship by descent" in the 1948 act, and "citizenship by registration" in the 1949 act, be removed and that citizenship should be on the basis of "a simple and easily ascertainable factual test of residence and a declaration of intention to settle permanently in Ceylon".⁹ There was opposition to this act in India and the Indian government protested at its discriminatory content, causing relations between the two governments to become strained.

Since the government was unyielding, a few weeks before the deadline the Ceylon Indian Congress lifted the boycott and 237,034 applications were made at the closing date. No administrative machinery competent to process these applications was set up until 1962, and by 1964 only 134,188 persons of Indian origin were admitted as "citizens by registration". As Professor A.J. Wilson has written: "The sum effect of all three Acts was (1) to

disfranchise the overwhelming majority of Indians who had up to date possessed the right to vote, and (2) to make it extremely difficult for those Indian and Pakistani origin people who wished to become citizens to qualify.”¹⁰

“Sirima-Shastri Pact”

The question of citizenship for persons of Indian origin became a subject of continuing dispute between the governments of Sri Lanka and India. “The government of India made it clear that it would not accept responsibility for those Indians whose applications for citizenship were rejected by the Sri Lanka Commissioner for the Registration of Indian and Pakistani Residents.”¹¹ Discussions between the two governments continued, and in October 1964 agreement was reached between Sirima Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, and Lal Bhadur Shastri, Prime Minister of India, an agreement popularly known in Sri Lanka as the “Sirima-Shastri Pact”.

It was agreed that of an estimated 975,000 persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka who were without citizenship, (1) 525,000 persons would be granted Indian citizenship and progressively repatriated to India over a period of 15 years (together with the natural increase in their number); (2) 300,000 persons (together with the natural increase) would be granted Sri Lanka citizenship during the same 15-year period; (3) both repatriation and granting of Sri Lanka citizenship phased over 15 years would, as far as possible, keep pace with each other in proportion to relative numbers; and (4) the status and the future of the balance of 150,000 persons were to be the subject of separate agreement between the two governments.

This agreement came into effect as the Indo-Ceylon Agreement (1964). But the Indian Tamils in the island were very dissatisfied with it.

With the deprivation of the franchise, the Ceylon Indian Congress ceased to be an electorally relevant organization. Forced to confine itself to trade unionism, and no longer needing to look for electoral alliances with the Marxist parties, its interests in building its own membership among the plantation workers brought it into conflict with the trade unions of the LSSP and the CP. Because of the denial of citizenship and deprivation of the franchise, the Indian Tamil workers became distrustful of those trade unions allied to political parties with Sinhalese leadership, although the Marxist parties and their MPs had opposed and voted against those laws.

In the late-1950s, the Ceylon Indian Congress splintered into the Ceylon Workers' Congress and the Democratic Workers' Congress. The former, with more than 150,000 members, was led by S. Thondaman, owner of the 1,000-acre Medagoda Estate and the 800-acre Wavendon Estate, employing more than 2,000 of the very working-class people he was leading. The Democratic Workers' Congress, with about 45,000 members, was led by A. Aziz, a Colombo-based business magnate. The Indian Tamil plantation workers trusted their own community leaders, even though they represented estate-

employer and capitalist class interests. In this way, the largest and the most formidable proletarian force in the country fell into the hands of reactionaries opposed to their class interest and came to be lost to the working-class movement and the left-wing parties.

The Indian Tamil workers lived in continual fear of the police, the law, government officials and the Sinhalese people around them. These drove them increasingly into the hands of District union officials who were openly corrupt and often deceitful. In fact, the unions became their "government", a sort of "government within a government", and the district union officials their "MPs". They became the unfortunate victims of their leaders, who used the strength of their numbers to bargain with the capitalist parties, the UNP and SLFP, which alternated in power, and had themselves elevated as nominated MPs and their yes-men as Senators. They could not obtain any solution to their peoples' fundamental politico-socio-economic problems.

The Indian Tamils have been denied local-government participation and are barred from seeking employment outside the estates. They have, by law, been made ineligible for land alienated by the government under village expansion and colonization resettlement schemes. And, owing to a continuing fall in export prices of primary produces, they were the victims of periodic retrenchment by the plantation companies. As a result, they were frequently forced to encroach upon jungle "crown" land and, whenever they did, would suffer police brutality and were quickly evicted. Theirs is an acute problem that cries out for redress after 35 years of independence and 50 years of adult franchise, which they once exercised. All their problems are a direct consequence of the denial of citizenship and franchise.

In 1981, HM Queen Elizabeth graced the Republic of Sri Lanka government's celebration of 50 years of adult franchise by her visit to a country where one million former British subjects have been deprived of citizenship and franchise because of irresponsible British colonial policy.

By making the plantation Tamils stateless and voteless, by denying them participation and representation even in local government, and by debarring them from employment outside the estates, Sinhalese politicians rendered the largest working-class force impotent, docile and alien. By co-opting their capitalist leaders into the government, they forced these workers to look to them as their "saviours", and they in turn silenced and imprisoned them in furtherance of their own interests and those of the Sinhalese ruling class.

In this way, the Sinhalese upper class ensured its continued control of the post-colonial state, without any serious challenge from a united Sinhalese-Tamil working class. In so far as it made the ordinary Sinhalese people feel that they belonged to the ruling ethnic community, they accepted the position of domination conferred on them. That feeling was enhanced when the Sinhalese politicians and their agents instigated riots by the Sinhalese people in the villages and towns against the plantation Tamils, so as to keep them continually in fear of their lives and to remind them of their alien condition in the country.

Apart from the workers of Indian origin there were the Indian traders who

had for a long time controlled importing, wholesale and the bulk of the retail trade. While the Indian Tamils, particularly the Chettiers and the Muslims, controlled the food sector, a small community of Sindhi and Borah merchants from Bombay controlled the import and wholesale trade in textiles. The Citizenship Act of 1948 vested in the minister a discretionary power to grant citizenship to not more than 25 persons a year who had rendered distinguished service in various spheres of public life. Most of these traders, by lavishly contributing to UNP funds, obtained their "distinguished citizenship" from the minister.

Although agreement was reached between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments for repatriation and registration, its implementation – involving a million men, women and children; their employment, home and worldly possessions; their past, present and future – was not easy for governments and people. The inter-governmental agreement was reached on the assumption that 525,000 persons would be willing to be repatriated to India, while what they wanted was to become citizens of Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka government became aware that the departure of more than half the plantation workforce would bring plantation agriculture to a grinding halt. The trade unions found that repatriation of such a large number of members would undermine their strength, and they would lose the "check-off" membership subscription of five rupees per worker per month. The union bosses preferred them to remain in Sri Lanka, even as a stateless, voteless and degraded humanity.

Hence, when Dudley Senanayake's UNP came to power in 1965, which made S. Thondaman, the CWC boss, an appointed MP, and formed a broad-based "national" government, with the support of the FP, TC and CWC, the implementation of the 1964 agreement was deliberately slowed down. As a result, at the end of this government's office in early 1970, only 12,798 persons had been repatriated and 7,316 had been registered as Sri Lanka citizens.

In July 1970, Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike came to power and made A. Aziz, the CWC boss, an appointed MP. She speeded up the process of repatriation and registration and, in July 1974, concluded another agreement with Mrs Indira Gandhi with regard to the balance of 150,000, on the basis that 75,000 would be repatriated and the other 75,000 would be registered as citizens of Sri Lanka. This agreement is popularly referred to in Sri Lanka as the "Sirima-Gandhi Pact".

However, when Mrs Bandaranaike was voted out of office in July 1977, only 211,821 persons had been repatriated and 152,524 had been registered as citizens of Sri Lanka. The others continued to be stateless and voteless, 30 years after denial of their citizenship and franchise, and 13 years after agreement was reached between the two governments.

Citizenship-Franchise Case in the Privy Council

The question as to whether the provisions of the Citizenship Act of 1948 were contrary to Section 29(2)(b) and (c) of the Soulbury constitution, which prohibited the Sri Lanka parliament from enacting any law which would impose disabilities or restrictions on members of any community or religion, came to be decided by the Privy Council in the case of *Kodakan Pillai v Mudanayake* in 1953.¹²

The appellant, an Indian national resident in Sri Lanka for two years prior to June 1950, was first refused registration as a voter under the 1949 franchise law, on the ground that he was not a citizen, by the registering officer. He appealed to the Revising Officer (a district judge), who held that the Citizenship Act, 1948, and the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act, 1949, were *ultra vires* vis-à-vis the constitution. He also stated that the Citizenship Act was in no true sense legislation to create the status of citizen, but was, with the 1949 act, part of a legislative plan to reduce the electoral power of the Indian community. The Crown appealed to the Supreme Court, which allowed the appeal. Then the appellant appealed to the Privy Council, which, while dismissing the appeal, stated *inter alia* as its reasons:

It is . . . a perfectly natural and legitimate function of the legislature of a country to determine the composition of its nationals. Standards of literacy, of property, of birth or of residence are, as it seems to their Lordships, standards which a legislature may think it right to adopt in legislation on citizenship, and it is clear that such standards, though they may operate to exclude the illiterate, the poor and the immigrant to a greater degree than they exclude the other people, do not create disabilities in a community as such, since the community is not bound together as a community by its illiteracy, its poverty or its migratory character, but by its race or its religion. The migratory habits of the Indian Tamils are facts which . . . are directly relevant to the question of their suitability as citizens of Ceylon, and have nothing to do with them as a community.

On the legal question of the *vires* of the acts in question, the Privy Council stated:

The principle that a legislature cannot do indirectly what it cannot do directly has always been recognized by their Lordships' Board . . . But . . . the court will not be astute to attribute to any legislature motives or purposes or objects which are beyond its power. It must be shown affirmatively by the party challenging a statute which is, on its face *intra vires*, that it was enacted as part of a plan to effect indirectly something which the legislature had no power to achieve directly.

The Privy Council made a serious error in its formulation of the legislative

function of the Sri Lankan legislature. After independence, the Sri Lanka legislature's competence was limited to determining who its future nationals should be, and could not extend to a power to choose nationals who already composed the state. Any view to the contrary would make the state of Sri Lanka and its legislature, vis-à-vis its pre-existing nationals, not a successor state and legislature but a revolutionary state seeking to repudiate the obligations of the previous state.

But Sri Lanka on independence was not such a state, as it received its law-making power as a constitutional grant from a paramount authority. Since, up until independence, all residents were British subjects, on transfer of power their citizenship in the new state simply accrued, by the operation of the law of state succession, as none was excluded nor a specific power vested to prescribe qualifications for pre-existing nationals.

These implications were not even referred to by the Privy Council, although they constituted the starting point for the determination of the question of legislative competence. Secondly, the Privy Council failed to ascertain the meaning of the undefined word "community" used in Section 29(2). The word "community" had been used in all official papers and documents in Sri Lanka without ever defining elements of race, religion and culture, and not, as the Privy Council stated, "by its race or religion". Since 1911, the Indian Tamils had been separately enumerated and officially recognized in the census reports as a community. The Ministers' draft constitution of 1944 had itself provided 14 seats for the Indian Tamils on the basis that they were a community.

It was not open to the Privy Council to substitute its own conception of the word "community" when it had acquired a specific meaning in official usage, and hence in the constitution. If the Privy Council had ascertained its real meaning, it would have found no difficulty in recognizing that the provisions of the citizenship and franchise laws imposed a disability on one community, and were part of a plan to achieve indirectly what the legislature had no power to achieve directly. What disability is more serious to a community than denial of citizenship, and, based on it, deprivation of the franchise?

The Privy Council went on to declare that a community is not bound together by its illiteracy, poverty or migratory character; yet, in reality, these were the very characteristics that made the Indian Tamils a collective community. The Privy Council, in its exposition of the law, and in its inclusion of literacy and property as possible "standards" for citizenship, give one the impression that their Lordships were holding court in another world.

Their interpretation of the legislative power of the Sri Lanka parliament rendered the safeguards in Section 29(2), in legal language, otiose, i.e. serving no useful purpose. The government of Sri Lanka hailed this decision as a great victory, and later governments were encouraged to use other legislative measures depriving Tamils of other rights. This decision provoked widespread disillusionment.

The disfranchisement of the Indian Tamils had two effects. Firstly, it made

them a community with no representation in the future legislatures of the country. Secondly, all eight elecorates in which they were represented – Nuwara Eliya, Talawakale, Kotagala, Nawalapitiya, Maskeliya, Haputale, Badulla and Bandarawela – came to return Sinhalese MPs to parliament, with very few voters in each of them. This increased the Sinhalese representation in parliament from 67% in the 1947 election to 73% in the 1952 election and, after the 1959 delimitation, to 78%. This was considerably more than the proportion of the Sinhalese population, which was 67.3% in the 1953 census and 71.2% in the 1963 census. And, in the 1970 election, Sinhalese comprised 80% of the legislature when their population was only 71.2% in the 1963 census and 72.9% by 1971.

It was a case not simply of the head-count and the arithmetic of the ballot box, but of a predominant ethnic majority squeezing out an ethnic minority by every means that the electoral system provided.

Founding of the SLFP and its Two-Languages Policy

On the political front, in July 1951 Bandaranaike resigned as minister of health and local government from the Senanayake cabinet, and from the UNP, and took with him five other MPs. While in the UNP cabinet, he had kept his Sinhala Maha Sabha (SMS), an ephemeral grouping, as a going concern throughout the 1940s. Bandaranaike occasionally came into conflict with Senanayake for criticizing UNP policies of gradualism, and in 1949 he had to answer charges. In his speech before he crossed the floor to join the ranks of the opposition, he did not articulate any policy fundamentally different from the UNP's.

In September 1951 Bandaranaike disbanded the SMS and founded the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), on the lines of the earlier CNC and the UNP, with Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. In fact, at its founding, Bandaranaike got two Tamils elected as vice-presidents of the SLFP. The SLFP's founding manifesto, issued in September 1951, included the following under the heading of "National Languages".

It is most essential that Sinhalese and Tamil be adopted as official languages immediately, so that the people of this country may cease to be aliens in their own land, so that an end may be put to the inequity of condemning those educated in Sinhalese and Tamil to occupy the lowliest walks of life, and above all that society may have the full benefit of the skill and talents of the people. The administration of the government must be carried on in Sinhalese and Tamil.

Except for the call for an immediate change, there was nothing new in this, for it was the accepted policy of the UNP government, and of politicians of the time, that both languages should officially replace English. In fact, in early 1951, the UNP government had appointed the Official Languages

Commission on the basis that both languages should be the official languages, as the commission's name itself indicates.

The 1953 General Strike and Fall of Dudley Senanayake

In early 1952 D.S. Senanayake suddenly died and the UNP was thrown into a state of confusion over who should succeed him. The ultra-conservative elements supported Sir John Kotelawala, but Senanayake's son, Dudley Senanayake, who was minister of agriculture, was preferred by the party stalwarts and Dudley became prime minister. Kotelawala, Dudley's uncle, then minister of transport, felt cheated and, since he was in charge of the UNP propaganda machinery, he put out the famous "Prime Minister Stakes", an anonymous leaflet revealing the goings-on within the UNP hierarchy. Eventually, however, he agreed to serve in Dudley's cabinet.

In May 1952, Dudley Senanayake called a snap general election and won an overall majority with 54 members. The SLFP faced the hustings for the first time, and again Bandaranaike did not articulate any policy significantly different to the UNP's. The SLFP won nine seats. In the Tamil north and east, the Federal Party also went to the polls for the first time and won two seats, while the Tamil Congress won four seats. The Marxists had by then re-grouped as the LSSP under Dr N.M. Perera, the *Viplavakari* (Revolutionary) LSSP under Philip Gunawardena and the CP under Dr S.A. Wickremasinghe, and won nine, two and two seats, respectively. Even in the 1952 election, the independent MPs emerged as numerically the second largest group. When the new parliament convened, Bandaranaike was elected leader of the opposition, since the VLSSP and CP, owing to differences with the LSSP, refused to support Dr N.M. Perera, a fellow Marxist. This new role gave Bandaranaike the opportunity to confront the UNP with its mistakes.

The UNP governments of the early post-independence period failed to discern the vulnerability of the dependent agro-export economy that the country had inherited, and were content to perpetuate its imbalances and stagnation. The country's role on the periphery of the world capitalist system, as an exporter of raw materials and an importer of consumer and luxury goods, was accepted as the natural order of things. Nothing was done to break away from the inherited dependent capitalist system, and to build a new structure capable of satisfying the needs of the people and establishing social justice.

"The political leadership of the day was reluctant to make changes in an economic system with which their own interests were identified. The result was that in the economic structure, as in the political, there was an emphasis on the maintenance of the status quo."¹³ The maintenance of that system was for the benefit of the ruling class and, when it led to inevitable periodic crises, the people were made to suffer by the rulers.

J.R. Jayewardene, finance minister from 1948 to 1953, presented budgets that were in continual deficit. The importation of luxury goods increased

sharply, while export earnings remained stagnant. No corrective measures were taken. The economy was kept afloat by running down the accumulated war-time foreign reserves. The 1950–51 Korean war boom, for a time, relieved the situation but, with its collapse, the first economic crisis of independent Sri Lanka began to surface. The country's external assets, which stood at Rs1,208 million in January 1952, fell to Rs685 million by the following July.

Jayewardene, presenting his 1953 budget, stated:

We are faced with the collapse of the boom, a heavy fall in our export prices, and rising import prices. A combination of all these factors could contribute to the downfall of the economy . . . I know the solution lay largely in the elimination of the overall deficit but it was not possible to take this step, without removing as well the subsidy on food.

In these words he was preparing the country for drastic cuts in social-welfare measures which benefited the lower classes. In early August 1953, Dudley Senanayake abolished the subsidy on rice so that the price soared from 25 cents to 70 cents a measure; sharply increased the price of sugar; abolished the free midday meals for schoolchildren; cut down the public-assistance rate; and doubled rail fares and postal rates. The government sought to revamp the economy by cutting down the redistributive expenditure going to the poorer strata of society, while leaving the rich and privileged classes untouched.

The indignation which this provoked exploded in the *hartal* (general protest strike) of 12 August 1953 – the first mass agitation in independent Sri Lanka. The working and lower classes spontaneously erupted and resorted to violent disorder and disturbances all over the country. It was the most remarkable display of militant class solidarity and open class conflict ever to take place in Sri Lanka. The rulers were frightened, and Dudley Senanayake was widely believed to have taken refuge in a ship berthed in Colombo harbour.

A state of emergency and curfew were declared, and repression and terror were let loose to quell the people. The army was called to protect the rulers from the wrath of the people. A number of people were killed by army firing. "Dudley Senanayake had to face these troubles without a loyal cabinet since Sir John Kotelawala had not forgotten or forgiven Senanayake for his being appointed Prime Minister over his own claims."¹⁴

Being manifestly incapable of facing the situation, Senanayake resigned and was immediately succeeded by Sir John Kotelawala. He restored the rice subsidy, which afterwards became a sacred cow in Sri Lankan politics. G.G. Ponnambalam refused to serve in Kotelawala's cabinet and withdrew the Tamil Congress from the government. For the next 20 years, no elected Tamil MP became a minister in a Sri Lankan government cabinet.

Kotelawala as Helmsman

The Senanayake charisma had been an important factor in Sinhalese politics and had welded the UNP into a closely-knit conservative party. Although within the Senanayake family, Kotelawala was not personally in the same mould. Whereas the Senanayakes were cautious and moderate, Kotelawala was outspoken, brash, flamboyant. He liked hunting and horse racing, parties and guests. He was also out-and-out pro-British and pro-Western at a time when Asian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Sukarno of Indonesia and U Nu of Burma were evolving the new ideology of neutralism and non-alignment for resurgent Asia. Sri Lanka, under the influence of the Marxist parties, was at that time striving to rid herself of neo-colonial ties.

The Senanayakes were closely associated with Buddhist affairs and were patrons of the reformed Ramanya sect, which comprised the largest number of *bhikkhus* of the low-country Sinhalese *Karava*, *Salagama* and *Durava* castes. Though they maintained the image and ideal of a secular state, they were the first prime ministers to pay deference to the Buddhist clergy in public and so opened the door to religious pressure.

Kotelawala, however, was no more than a nominal Buddhist and gave no quarter to the *bhikkhus* in secular affairs, failing to pay them the customary deference in public and thereby alienating them. In 1954 he went to Nepal and went hunting with the king of Nepal. This infuriated the Buddhist purists.

About the same time, Sir Lalita Rajapakse, minister of justice from 1948 and president of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC), resigned from the cabinet. The ACBC was formed in 1918 as a lay Buddhist organization of middle-class professionals to promote the interests of Buddhists. It had as its past presidents such prominent politicians as F.R. Senanayake, D.B. Jayatilaka and H.W. Amarasuriya. In 1955, it became a statutory body by the ACBC Act, which empowered it "to represent the Buddhists and act on their behalf in public matters affecting their interests".

In April 1954, the ACBC set up a high-powered Buddhist commission of inquiry. The ACBC and many Buddhist agitators had long viewed the Christian lead in education as the key to their dominance in national affairs. From the 1930s, they had demanded the take-over of all schools by the government and an end to the government's grant-in-aid system from which all Christian schools received funds. In 1930, there were 1,353 Christian schools and only 240 Buddhist schools. In the early 1950s, the president of the ACBC, Professor George P. Malalasekera, outlined Buddhist dissatisfaction with the Christian-dominated educational system. The Buddhist commission of inquiry was set up mainly to produce a report and make recommendations so that the government could be pressured to take over the schools.

Dharmapala School of Propaganda

Sinhalese-Buddhist propagandists have, over the years, won many converts and made significant strides in their cause. Their propaganda became multi-faceted – attacks on Christianity and Christians, Tamils and the Tamil past and on Western culture and institutions; the revival of Buddhism, the glorification of the Sinhalese “race”, and the restructuring and purification of the Sinhala language; attacks on political personalities and academics; and so on.

Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1931), whose earlier name was Don David Hewavitarne, took the name Anagarika (in Pali Buddhism meaning “the homeless one”) and Dharmapala (meaning “the guardian of the doctrine”) and founded the newspaper the *Sinhala Baudhaya* (Sinhalese Buddhist) in 1906.

Piyadasa Sirisena (1875–1946), whose earlier name was Pedrick de Silva, was at first the correspondent of *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, which according to contemporary impressions was “the mouthpiece of two millions of Buddhists in Ceylon”.¹⁵ In 1903 Sirisena founded *Sinhala Jatiya* (Sinhalese Race), a monthly journal in Sinhalese. In 1910 he wrote that *Sinhala Jatiya* had been started to “improve the fortunes of the Sinhalese nation” by spreading “modern knowledge: so long as they do not acquire modern knowledge they will not be rid of unfounded fears and a sense of inferiority: so long as such a sense of inferiority remains the Sinhalese nation will not be rich and powerful”.¹⁶

We have, in Chapter 2, seen what “modern knowledge” Sirisena spread, and we will see now who consumed this propaganda and what they did from 1956.

These propagandists evolved the slogan “*Rata, Jatiya, Aagama*” (“Country, Race, Religion”) and popularized it among the Sinhalese. In his *History of an Ancient Civilisation* (1902), Anagarika Dharmapala wrote:

Ethnologically, the Sinhalese are a unique race, inasmuch as they can boast that they have no slave blood in them, and were never conquered by either the pagan Tamils or European vandals who for three centuries devastated the land, destroyed ancient temples, burnt valuable libraries, and nearly annihilated the historic race . . . This bright, beautiful island was made into a paradise by the Aryan Sinhalese before its destruction was brought about by the barbaric vandals . . . For the student of ethnology the Sinhalese stand as the representatives of Aryan civilization . . . In the name of Humanity and Progress, we ask the British people to save the Sinhalese race from the jaws of the demon of alcohol and opium let loose by Christian England for the sake of filthy lucre.¹⁷

In 1911 Dharmapala proclaimed: “The Country of the Sinhalese should be governed by the Sinhalese.” In Dharmapala’s view, the Tamils and others

had no place in Sri Lanka. Dr Michael Roberts states:

... in a pamphlet conveying "A Message to the Young Men of Ceylon", in 1922, "Ceylon" and "the Sinhalese" are constantly juxtaposed and viewed in synonymous terms: the essay begins by referring to the arrival of "a crisis in the history of our nation" and with a reference to "we the heirs of our beloved Lanka", and proceeds to exhort readers in terms of "We Sinhalese"; it refers to "the Sinhalese nation" and cautions that they "must look to the future and protect the interests of the coming generation of Sinhalese". In Dharmapala's vision, there was hardly any place for the Ceylon Tamils, Moors or Burghers in Sri Lanka.¹⁸

Roberts continues:

... Dharmapala even denied a place to the Sinhalese Christians: thus in the very same letter, he referred to "the sons of the soil, the Sinhalese Buddhists" – a phrase that is of great significance because in his thinking the concept of "sons of the soil" recurs over and over again and carried a status of near-deification ... nor was Dharmapala an isolated example in early 20th-Century Lanka. Not dissimilar notions were echoed by such propagandists as John de Silva, Charles Dias and Walisinha Harischandra.¹⁹

Professor Gananath Obeyesekere states: "In his speeches and in the newspaper he founded, he castigated the Westernized upper class and idealised the glories of the past. The following passage is typical:

My message to the young men of Ceylon is ... Believe not the alien who is giving you arrack, whisky ... Enter into the realms of our King Dutugemunu in spirit and try to identify yourself with the thoughts of that great king who rescued Buddhism and our nationalism from oblivion."

And Obeyesekere also states that in Dharmapala's perception there is no place for the Tamils and others:

He held up the glories of the Sinhalese past as an ideal worth resurrecting: "No nation in the world has had a more brilliant history than ourselves". "There exists no race on earth today that has had a more triumphant record of victory than the Sinhalese" ... The country, as he perceives it, is a Sinhalese-Buddhist one, and there is hardly a place in it for Tamils and Muslims, who are viewed as exploiters. The Christians are condemned as meat eaters of "low Caste". "The country of the Sinhalese should be governed by the Sinhalese." While on occasion he addresses himself to Sinhalese *qua*

Sinhalese, rather than Buddhists, the general bias in his polemics is for a Sinhalese Buddhist nation.²⁰

On the impact of Dharmapala, Obeyesckere states: "Though his initial impact was on members of the alienated Sinhalese intelligentsia living in the villages . . . schoolteachers, monks, ayurvedic physicians, various types of government officials, representatives of local bodies ('village committees') . . . he later had an impact on all Sinhalese Buddhists."²¹

Hence, to say that Dharmapala has been ruling Sri Lanka from his grave since 1948 is in no way an overstatement. It seems that he had been doing so even earlier, for Professor A.J. Wilson states:

Many of the measures adopted in the economic field by the Sinhalese ministers of the 1930s could be traced back to the exhortations of Anagarika Dharmapala in the first two decades of the 20th Century. Anagarika had urged the Sinhala Buddhists to imitate the industrious Muslim traders. He had attacked the Ceylon Tamils, Indian Tamils and Muslims on the score that they were "employed in large numbers to the prejudice of the people of the island", by which he meant the Sinhala Buddhists.²²

Sarath Amunugama writes,

Dharmapala's propaganda — both media and message — helped actively to fashion Sirisena's career. Dharmapala's public meetings, articles, newspapers, popular organizations . . . all . . . impinged at various times on Sirisena's life . . . Many young revivalists, including Sirisena, took Dharmapala as their model. Like him they adopted "Aryan" names, changed their dress and devoted their life to Buddhist agitational activity. Though Sirisena did not adopt the lifestyle of an Anagarika, he faithfully emulated the philosophy and propaganda techniques of his mentor. He too undertook speaking engagements, joined various organizations for Buddhist advancement and was a frequent essayist on issues which concerned Sinhala Buddhists. He was also well known as a poet. Later he was to adopt journalism as a career. Though he is better known today as a novelist, it is of significance that journalism remained his principal source of occupation . . . [Besides, *Jayatissa saha Rosalin*] Sirisena wrote many other popular novels, all dealing with the theme of Buddhist-Sinhalese virtues. He became a household name in the island . . .

In the introduction to *Jayatissa*, Sirisena wrote, "There are many books written by me to put the Sinhalese people on the proper path." The novel was dedicated to "the Sinhalese nation which for 2,450 years has been unsurpassed in virtue." Amunugama shows how Sirisena carried his cause into the novel:

A large part of the novel is taken up by a dialogue between Jayatissa and his Catholic adversaries . . . On the Buddhist side, it took the form of ridiculing Christianity with quotations from the Bible and of expounding various aspects of the Buddhist doctrine. There was also an attempt to contrast the glory of ancient Sinhalese civilization with the low level of culture in Europe. The Christians are shown in a bad light, as being dupes of arrogant, pleasure-loving foreign priests who keep their flock in bondage with threats of damnation. When confronted with the "truth" as shown by the young crusader Jayatissa, they see their folly and embrace Buddhism . . .²³

According to Michael Roberts, "on one occasion in 1937 Piyadasa Sirisena even argued that it was futile to govern Ceylon with the co-operation of Tamils and Moors and that it was preferable to endure British rule if Sinhalese could not win independence for themselves."²⁴

An equally important propagandist was Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887-1944). Of him Dr K.N.O. Dharmadasa writes,

Cumaratunga was one of the most outstanding personalities of the Sinhalese literary scene in the period extending from the 1920s to the 1940s. He is remembered today mainly as a grammarian and a literary figure. As a grammarian his contribution was singular, unprecedented and, as yet, unsurpassed. He was moreover, a gifted literary artist and a perceptive critic . . . his career had a significance that extended beyond the literary and linguistic spheres and its impact on Sinhalese society was much deeper than hitherto recognized.

In place of the earlier slogan, "Country, Race, Religion", Cumaratunga substituted a new slogan in a new trinity: "*Basa, Rasa, Desa*" ("Language, Nation, Country"). He placed language first, carrying on a consistent campaign for "purity" of the Sinhalese language, i.e. the removal of roots and words borrowed from Pali, Sanskrit, Tamil and English. In his estimation, among all these languages, pure Sinhalese — "*Helse*" as he called it — ranked highest. Answering a query in *Helio*, the English periodical he edited, he declared, "Please understand that *Helse* language is older than the oldest of Indian languages."

Dr Dharmadasa states, "His views, especially on the history of the Sinhalese race and the Sinhalese language, were mostly passionate beliefs based on his own conviction rather than on historical evidence. And the manner in which he criticized those who disagreed with his views sometimes lacked concern for propriety and etiquette."²⁵

For a time, Cumaratunga was a member of Bandaranaike's Sinhala Maha Sabha, but left and founded his *Hela Havula* ("The Pure Sinhalese Fraternity"), which developed into a movement comprising many Sinhalese schoolteachers and Buddhist monks. Cumaratunga subjected the Buddhist hierarchy, both clergy and laity, to virulent criticism. He also attacked Sinhalese university

dons for having created “a language of their own which is at once debased, insipid and inelegant”. He attacked Sir D.B. Jayatilaka, the home minister and Leader of the State Council and an accredited Sinhalese scholar, for producing an unsatisfactory Sinhalese dictionary. He characterized Bandaranaike as “the presumptuous leader of the Sin-Halese”.

All the political and propagandist currents and cross-currents of the Sinhalese came to converge, and received a respectable and, to many, acceptable formulation, in D.C. Wijewardene's *Revolt in the Temple*, published in 1953 in anticipation of the forthcoming Buddha Jayanti — the anniversary marking 2,500 years of Buddhism — in 1956. Wijewardene, a close relation of the Senanayakes and brother of Sri Lanka's press baron D.R. Wijewardene, was a Buddhist propagandist who was seeking to be a political messiah. He wrote:

Since English education and Christian faith were the keys to lucrative government jobs, a hybrid class of half-educated, Europeanized Sinhalese was soon formed. Buddhism and the Sinhalese language, Sinhalese customs and manners, and even personal names, came to be looked down upon as the contemptible residues of Oriental barbarism . . . Everything English and Christian was at a premium . . . It was the lowest level the Sinhalese as a nation had ever reached.

In this way, having so elegantly and quintessentially vindicated and accepted the whole corpus of the Dharmapala school of thought and of the ACBC, Wijewardene proceeded to open the political Pandora's box with messianic fervour. He attacked the dominion status and independence which Sri Lanka had received, and asserted that “it does not confer national freedom on Ceylon . . . Our ultimate goal should not be Dominion Status, but independence . . . and a constitution, not imported from Whitehall but drafted by a Constituent Assembly.”

He advocated the replacement of the monarchy by a republic, severing of the Commonwealth connection, and abolition of the Senate. He prescribed a non-capitalist, non-communist, but democratic-socialist — and Buddhist — future for Sri Lanka. Wijewardene argued that Buddhism, democracy and socialism were mutually compatible and called for a democratic state founded on Buddhist religion and governed by socialist concepts. He wrote: “The Buddha himself was a staunch democrat. The Buddhist assemblies were fully democratic and had elaborate rules of procedure, election and debate . . . The task remains to convert the State to a programme of socialism through the conquest of the public opinion.”

He expressly rejected class struggle and idealized political co-operation as “the Buddhist ethic and the last word in nationalism”. To Wijewardene, there were only Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The socialism that he was holding out did not include a change of the ruling upper class or in the status quo. It was “socialism” as a catchword designed to perpetuate the existing state power in the hands of the upper class and to confuse and destabilize the working class.

He was advocating co-operative socialism, in order to epitomize the Buddhist middle path, when that middle path and all that was cardinal to the Buddhist doctrine had long ago been jettisoned, lock, stock and barrel, by followers of Dharmapala who were grooming themselves as the apostles of the rising Sinhalese bourgeoisie.

Dharmapala, coming from a rich merchant family had written:

We must learn to stand on our own legs and not depend on the alien. We must revive our industries . . . We consume but we do not produce fresh wealth. Our ancestral wealth we squander in luxuries, and we do not find fresh fields to increase our wealth by industries . . . Tamils, Cochins (and others) are employed in large numbers to the prejudice of the people of the island – sons of the soil – who contribute to the largest share . . . All Asia and Europe are moving towards progress, and we who belong to a superior race . . .²⁶

Wijewardene concluded with a clarion message: “The final solution of the problem . . . will neither be communism or capitalism but something midway between the two, represented by that new social and economic order known as Socialism . . . If Lanka takes the right path, the rest of the world will follow.”²⁷

Bandaranaike, who, since his departure from the UNP, had been at a loss for a political ideology, fell for this nebulous middle path and became the heir to Wijewardene’s vague visionary hopes. This vitiated the class struggle and made national-ethnic forces override class factors. Upper-class dominance and control of the state was saved, at the cost of ethnic conflict and carnage. We shall return to these issues shortly.

Kotelawala’s “Parity of Status”, and a Somersault

At the political level, with Kotelawala at the helm, everything began to go wrong, not only for him but also for the UNP in the mid-1950s. In order to placate the rising Buddhist lobby, the party hierarchy made much of Kotelawala’s hunting expedition with the king of Nepal near Buddhist shrines. In 1953, Maithripala Senanayake, an important MP from the North-Central Province, resigned and joined Bandaranaike’s SLFP. Kotelawala’s brash manner in keeping the *bhikkhus* at bay led the Ramanya *bhikkhus* to turn away from him and from the UNP.

Amidst these shifting loyalties, Kotelawala went on a tour of Jaffna, the homeland of the Sri Lanka Tamils, in early 1955. His last public meeting was in Kokkuvil, presided over by the veteran nationalist and earlier Youth Congress leader Handy Perinbanayagam, who suggested to him that Sinhala and Tamil should be written into the constitution as the official languages.²⁸ Kotelawala readily agreed, since it was the accepted policy of the government that both should be the official languages. He told the meeting, “Provision

will be made in the constitution to give parity of status to Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages of the country."

This apparently innocuous statement, reported in the newspapers, was taken up first by L.H. Mettananda, a Buddhist propagandist and principal of Anansa College, the leading Buddhist school. He misrepresented the phrase "parity of status" as necessarily involving the study of Tamil by the Sinhalese, so that the Sinhalese would thereby lose their identity as a Sinhalese "race". Much publicity was given to his views by the Lake House group of newspapers, founded by D.R. Wijewardene, a devout Buddhist. P. de S. Kularatne, another Buddhist propagandist, soon echoed the same views. They all seized upon the phrase "parity of status", suggesting that it implied the extinction of the Sinhalese.

Agitation was soon mounted, cleverly orchestrated by the Mettananda-Kularatne duo and supported by the Ramanya *bhikkhu*, for Sinhalese to be the only official language. Mettananda denounced the UNP for betraying the Sinhalese. Bandaranaike knew that the issue had the potential to propel him to power, and, in September 1955, announced that "the language sub-committee of the SLFP had resolved that Sinhalese language be declared the official language of the country with reasonable use of Tamil".

In this way, the long resolved two-official-languages policy became a political issue. Because of Bandaranaike's statement, other political parties soon took up positions. The LSSP and the CP declared for both Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages, and Dr N.M. Perera pledged the LSSP's parliamentary support for amending the constitution to make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages. Philip Gunawardene, who in 1950 had broken away from the LSSP (because of the re-entry of the Bolshevik Leninist Party into the LSSP) and had formed the Viplavakari (Revolutionary) LSSP, stated that his party stood for "Sinhalese only", with Tamil as a regional language.

Meetings were organized to mobilize support for "Sinhala only". Processions and demonstrations were held by "Sinhala-only" enthusiasts and the language issue became heated. Some UNP MPs became supporters of "Sinhala only" for the sake of their political survival. Many rank-and-file members deserted the UNP. The war against the UNP under Kotelawala came to be waged from within. Some leading Ramanya monks, including Henpetigedera Gnanaseeha, the famous political *bhikkhu*, approached Dudley Senanayake, who was then in self-imposed political exile, to lead a new party. But Dudley "felt that he could not work against the UNP because it had been formed by his father".²⁹

At the Kelaniya sessions of the UNP in February 1956, Kotelawala himself proposed UNP's policy as "Sinhala-only". It was a monumental volte-face by the very person who, as prime minister just a year before, had said that "provision will be made in the constitution to give parity of status to Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages". It was regarded as a betrayal by the UNP, which at its previous sessions, held as late as 21 January 1954, reiterated its accepted policy of making Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages.

Kotelawala did not have the decency to resign with honour. Instead, confident that he had taken the wind out of his opponents' sails by the Kelaniya resolution for "Sinhala only", he decided to take the language issue to the electorate. Hence, he called for the premature dissolution of parliament on 18 February 1956.

History of the Two-Languages Policy

The acceptance of Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages during the state-council period of the 1930s and 1940s was briefly outlined in Chapter 2. As we saw, in May 1944 J.R. Jayewardene, who had just been elected to the state council, proposed a motion to make Sinhalese "the official language of Ceylon within a reasonable time". V. Nalliah moved an amendment to the motion, that "Sinhalese and Tamil be made the official languages", which was accepted by the proposer, Jayewardene. In the debate that followed, D.S. Senanayake declared: "The essential task is to build up a nation, and build up a nation not with one language but with two." S.W.R.D.

Bandaranaike said: "It is necessary to bring about that amity, that confidence among the various communities, which we are striving to achieve . . . Therefore, I have no objection to both languages being considered official languages; nor do I see any harm or danger or real difficulty arising from it." The amended motion was carried almost unanimously, with 27 votes for with two against.

In pursuance of this resolution and at Bandaranaike's proposal, on 20 September 1945 a select committee of the state council was appointed, under the chairmanship of J.R. Jayewardene, "to consider and report on the steps necessary to effect the transition from English to Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages". The select committee in its report of 1946, entitled "Sinhalese and Tamil as Official Languages", recommended that by 1957 all public servants should be able to conduct business in both national languages, and that courses in both Sinhalese and Tamil should be provided in secondary schools so that administration on a bilingual basis should become feasible.

After independence, this accepted policy continued until the Sinhalese-Buddhist lobby became active in 1953-54. In 1954, a commission on higher education was appointed under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Wijewardene (a retired Chief Justice). Sinhalese-Buddhist propagandists such as L.H. Mettananda went about collecting figures of Sinhalese and Tamil students entering the university and presented evidence to the commission that the proportion of Tamil students was considerably greater than their proportion in the population.

The commission produced a majority report, written by Sinhalese, recommending that "in the interests of equal opportunity" provision for higher education should be available to at least six Sinhalese students for every one Tamil student. The commission was also pressured by the Sinhalese-Buddhist lobby to go beyond its terms of reference and question the desirability of having two official languages.

The commission accordingly questioned the need for two official languages. This provoked the governor-general, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, to write to the commission as follows: "You are no doubt aware that it is the accepted policy of the Government that Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages of the country, and any examination of this policy would be contrary to the terms of reference."

Sinhalese Politics of Manipulation

The policy of "Sinhala only", as adopted by the SLFP and later by the UNP, constituted the high-water mark of the Sinhalese "politics of manipulation" that had been adopted from the time of the Manning constitution in the 1920s. From that time to the present, political issues and pressures in the country have generally not arisen from consensus and the considered will of all the people. Nor have there been any proper studies of the pros and cons of the policies to be adopted. On the contrary, they have been generated by manipulative pressures to serve the economic and political interests of the dominant class and to enable it to stay in power.

Since in these fields the middle and lower classes are always the losers, plenty of accommodation is afforded them in the cultural and religious fields, which again are manipulated to benefit the dominant ethnic group. Thus the Sri Lankan state represents and safeguards the interests of the dominant class (the upper class) and the dominant ethnic group (the Sinhalese). This is principally because the upper-class politicians have had long experience in the exercise of "power without responsibility" – witness their paralyzing the colonial administration when Governor Clifford had to call for a special constitutional commission because, as he put it, it had become "quite impossible for the government to carry on its administrative duties"; or their role as ministers from 1931 to 1947.

Law is not viewed as the instrument of good and just government aimed at securing the willing compliance, loyalty and respect of the people, but simply as an edict to be made and enforced, come what may. Hence, all manner of devious arguments are advanced, and extraneous pressures exerted, in the making of law. Bandaranaike told parliament in 1957:

... although the circumstances of the situation were such that the Sinhalese language had to be declared the official language of this country, there was no intention in fact to cause any undue hardship or injustice to those whose language is other than Sinhalese in the implementation of the Act.

Even in matters affecting the fundamental community rights of the Tamil people, if the deprivation of such rights could be reduced to law by the show of hands of the Sinhalese MPs, then that law acquired such sanctity that the whole Tamil community could be imprisoned for challenging it.

Parliament, government and law are all transplanted institutions which must work on the basis of unwritten conventions, norms and limitations, and not by the simple show of hands of an ethnic community. They are institutions foreign to the Sinhalese tradition of authoritative monarchical rule whereby people are subjects — and are still regarded as such by the present-day ruling class. Extolling this tradition, Sam D. Bandaranaike publicly supported a dictatorship in 1964, explaining that “Ceylon was developed during the reign of the Sinhalese kings because they governed the country on autocratic lines”.³⁰ And in the 1960s Felix Dias Bandaranaike was reported to have said that “a little bit of totalitarianism is good”.

The vision of an ideal Buddhist ruler presented in the *Digha Nikaya*; the advice of king Dhammasoka in his Fourth Pillar Edict; the virtue of magnanimity in the *Dasa-raja dhamma*; the precedent of Parakramabahu the Great (1153-1186), who built temples for Hindu priests and even prohibited the carving of bulls, sacred to the Tamil Hindus, in the ornate threshold stones of his structures, so that their image would not be trodden upon — all have been consigned to the limbo of a forgotten past.

In the old Sinhalese society, the king, literature and art were all servants of Buddhism. And in Buddhism it is the prerogative of the saffron-robed *bhikkhu* to know the doctrine and expound it to the laity. The *bhikkhu* is at once a knowledgeable religious teacher and a holy man. The *bhikkhus* became highly articulate, employing forceful means of expression, often alluding to parables, fiction and poetry in their communications with the laity, who gathered to listen to them. In the mid-1950s newspapers were rare in Sinhalese villages, and it was the *bhikkhu* who conveyed the political events to the people. They used old forms and old symbols to serve new ends. Every village had its local *bhikkhu*, the religious story-teller, venerated for his knowledge, service to Buddhism and ascetic life. When such men resorted to religious pressure for political purposes, as they did in the 1956 elections to make Sinhala the only official language, all hell was let loose in the country.

The 1956 MEP Election Victory

For the May 1956 general elections, an electoral front called the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) (Peoples' United Front) was formed between Bandaranaike's SLFP, Philip Gunawardena's VLSSP and W. Dahanayake's newly-formed Sinhala Bhasa Peramuna (Sinhala Language Front). Bandaranaike was the leader of the MEP. Denzil Pieris described the MEP as “a collection of resentments against the UNP”.³¹ The MEP also attracted individuals like I.M.R.A. Iriyagolle, a Sinhalese writer, and R.G. Senanayake, who had earlier resigned from the UNP.

Although the MEP election manifesto included “Sinhala only” with “reasonable use of Tamil”, during the campaign Bandaranaike made no mention of the “reasonable use of Tamil”. This was probably because Kotelawala, in order to go one step further than the SLFP and VLSSP, had in

the February 1956 UNP Kelaniya Resolution made no mention at all of Tamil. In the circumstances, it would not have been of advantage for Bandaranaike to mention the point when campaigning in the Sinhalese areas. But this kind of electoral politics was to have its effects, once "reasonable use of Tamil" was sought to be put into effect. In the campaign, Bandaranaike promised to make "Sinhala only" a reality "within 24 hours, if elected to power". The MEP promised the dethronement of the English language, the Christian religion and Western culture from their positions of dominance.

The LSSP and CP campaigned for Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages. For the UNP, Kotelawala in his election manifesto claimed that he had gone to polls early "to enable me to form a government which will, as its first term of business, seek, by amending the constitution at once by legislative and administrative measures, to implement the resolution that Sinhalese alone should be made the state language."³²

Although previously a few *bhikkhus* had been members of political parties like the LSSP and CP, but had never engaged in election campaigning, for this election the *bhikkhus* formed the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP) ("United Bhikkhu Front"), with Buddharakita, the High Priest of the famed Kelaniya *Raja Maha Vihare* (the greatest of the great temple), as secretary to support the SLFP for "Sinhala only". At that time, on one estimate, there were more than 12,000 *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka.³³ The Buddhist Commission of Inquiry set up by the ACBC in April 1954 had published its report, *The Betrayal of Buddhism*, in February 1956.³⁴ The Bhikkhu Front became a mighty political force.

Kotelawala persuaded the *Maha Nayake Theros* (the Chief Prelates) of Asgiriya and Malwatte to issue an injunction against *bhikkhus* taking part in electioneering, but they defied their religious heads. This is because Buddha placed every *bhikkhu* on an equal footing. He did not envisage a hierarchy and absolute authority was not vested in any higher *bhikkhu*; for the authority is the *dhamma* of the Buddha.

The Bhikkhu Front presented a ten-point programme (the *Dasa Panatha*) to Bandaranaike at a massive rally in Colombo. The programme called for an SLFP government to be elected to practise non-violence, oppose injustice, implement the Buddhist Commission Report, make Sinhala the only official language, defend democracy against fascism and communism and acts of UNP government, give Buddhism its rightful place, promote ayurvedic (indigenous) medicine and withhold state assistance from institutions not promoting communal harmony or peace and equality among peoples. During the election campaign,

every meeting was addressed by members of the *Sangha* [the *bhikkhu* monk order], leading and popular *bhikkhus* went from meeting to meeting, from electorate to electorate. Some of the *Privenas* (Seminaries) in Colombo and the Provinces were turned into election headquarters. The older monks went from house to house. The small *samaneras* (novices) did other work such as writing of election cards,

drawing of posters, flags and other odd jobs.³⁵

The Sinhalese schoolteachers, the ayurvedic medicine practitioners and others who would immediately benefit by Sinhala replacing English organized their own campaigns for the SLFP. These two groups, along with the *bhikkhus*, the feudal remnants and the landlord moneylenders, constituted the traditional power structure in Sinhalese villages. These groups had remained cut off from national political and economic power and from the medium through which to achieve them – English. They were aware that, with Sinhala replacing English and the changes that would flow from this, they would have ready access to national power.

Hence they came forward and delivered their block votes in the villages to the MEP, in the expectation of privileges and patronage. The vast majority of the ordinary poor – the landless tenant farmers, agricultural workers and village artisans – for whom some of these village power groups were oppressors and exploiters, found themselves with no choice but to follow them and vote for the MEP. It was in the wake of this reactionary response, and not on the crest of any revolutionary wave, that the MEP was voted into power.

The MEP polled 39.5% of the votes and won 51 of the 95 seats and so formed the government. The UNP was decimated, gaining a mere eight seats although it polled 27% of the votes. The LSSP won 14 seats, polling 10.5% of the votes. The CP won three seats, with one in the Tamil north, polling 4.6% of the votes. In the Tamil areas, the “Sinhala-only” policy made the Tamils vote for the FP, led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, which with its call for federalism seemed to be the only party that could fight for the preservation of the rights of the Tamil people. The FP won 10 seats, polling 5.4% of the votes, and G.G. Ponnambalam alone from the TC was returned. For the first time, the Tamils elected a leftist, P. Kandiah of the CP, as MP for Point Pedro.

It is important to note that, despite the massive mobilization of the Sinhalese by the “Sinhala-only” politicians and the Buddhist *bhikkhus*, more than 15% of the Sinhalese voters rejected their call and voted for the Marxist parties with which they identified their interests as a class. Their ability to stand up to Sinhalese chauvinism is the greatest proof that, before “Sinhala only” and the coming to power of Bandaranaike, people were dividing on a class basis and that ideological alignments had clearly taken root and shape. At a time of fanatical electoral campaigning, at least 15% (or 394,000) of the Sinhalese voters had outgrown chauvinism and showed that they eschewed the “racialist” appeals of their political leaders.

In the MEP government formed in 1956, Bandaranaike became the Prime Minister, Philip Gunawardena, the Minister of Industries, and W. Dahanayake, the Minister of Education. Dr N.M. Perera, leader of the LSSP, became the Leader of the Opposition. From the beginning, both the LSSP and CP adopted a policy of “critical support” for the MEP government, except on its language policy. Both these parties failed to understand the crucial social conflicts

under way, and misread the electoral defeat of the UNP as an important stage in the onward march to socialism. They failed to unmask the real upper-class character of the controlling forces within the MEP. In the process, they even underestimated the 15% electoral support they had received. Lacking theoretical comprehension of the concrete historical condition, and incapable of advancing a revolutionary programme, they tried to interpret the victory or defeat of two basically upper-class-controlled parties, in elections to a bourgeois parliament, as acceptance or rejection of socialism. The CP's view was that "the electoral victory over the UNP and the formation of the new government represented a significant shift in the balance of forces in Ceylon."

Bandaranaike and others, even some "Marxists", have often claimed that the MEP victory in 1956 was a "revolution" by the ballot, and that it heralded a "new era" for the common man in the country.³⁶ Nothing like that happened. The leader and his men were from the old ruling class and there was no shift whatever from upper-class control of power. When Philip Gunawardena, as Minister of Agriculture, sought to introduce a mildly radical agrarian reform law, the conservative forces got together, staged a "cabinet strike" by 10 ministers and got him expelled from the cabinet. Stanley de Zoysa, the Finance Minister, was the son of Sir Francis de Zoysa, the veteran CNC politician of the 1920s, and R.G. Senanayake, another Minister, was the nephew of D.S. Senanayake.

Dr I.D.S. Weerawardena was right in stating of the MEP government: "From the point of view of education and occupation the preponderant majority of the candidates came from the middle-middle and upper-middle classes. Parliamentary leadership therefore continues to remain in the hands of this class."³⁷ The failure to unmask the real class character of the new rulers resulted in the "Marxist" LSSP and CP lending "critical support" to the government.

"Sinhala-Only" Act of 1956

The first important legislative act of the new government concerned the "Sinhala-only" promise on which it had campaigned and got elected. On 5 June 1956, Prime Minister Bandaranaike introduced in the House of Representatives a bill to make the Sinhala language the only official language of Sri Lanka. From the day the bill was introduced to the day it was passed, the precincts and approaches to the House were barricaded and armed police and army personnel stood guard outside. The galleries were closed to the public. It was a short bill, with just three clauses, but it gave rise to the longest debate in the annals of Sri Lanka's legislature.

The bill was supported by the MEP and the UNP and opposed by the LSSP, CP, FP and TC. In commending it, Bandaranaike stated, "The fact that in the towns and villages, in business houses and in boutiques most of the work is in the hands of the Tamil-speaking people will inevitably result in a fear, and I do not think an unjustified fear, of the inexorable shrinkage of the Sinhalese

language . . .”

Dr N.M. Perera, the LSSP leader declared:

The LSSP's demand for Sinhalese and Tamil as the state languages, it should be made very clear at the outset, flows from a very real concern for the interests of the people who speak these languages . . . We have been for *Swabasha*, that is, for Sinhalese and Tamil, ever since we started in 1935. That was one of our items in our first programme issued by the LSSP, that the administration of the country should be in Sinhalese and Tamil . . . Our Party has taken a consistent attitude ever since . . . We have never faltered or wavered from that position because we felt that that was the correct line to take. That position we still adhere to however unpopular that action might be.

G.G. Ponnambalam, the leader of the Tamil Congress, said: “The imposition of Sinhalese as the sole official language of this country must inevitably and inexorably put an end, even if that is not your real objective today, to the Tamil nation and the Tamil people as such”.

Leslie Goonewardene, the secretary of the LSSP, said:

. . . We oppose the injustice done to the Tamil-speaking people by this Bill. We feel just as the Sinhalese people should have the right to be ruled in the Sinhalese language and conduct their business with the government in the Sinhalese language, so also the Tamils should have the right to conduct their business with the state in the Tamil language and to be ruled in the Tamil language.

Pieter Keuneman, of the CP, said:

I am a communist and I am proud to be a communist . . . [The CP] opposes this Bill. It opposes oppression in whatever form it appears. It is because of this fundamental basis of our political philosophy that we of the CP oppose this Bill with all our strength. We believe that all nationals of this country have a natural and unfettered right to use their language, to govern themselves in their language, to build and develop their language and cultures. This is a right which in the case of any one linguistic group is neither more nor less than in the case of the other linguistic group. No person or linguistic group should, because of his or its language, be placed in a position inferior or superior, in the exercise and enjoyment of the rights and obligations of citizenship, to another person or language group.³⁸

M. Sivasithamparam, of the Tamil Congress, predicted the result of the government's language policy: “One language, two countries; two languages, one country.”

The “Sinhala-only” bill was passed in the teeth of opposition by all the

Tamil MPs within the House, protests and *Satyagraha* by the Tamils in the country and rioting by the Sinhalese against the Tamils in the Eastern Province. The “Sinhala-only” bill was passed entirely by the MEP and UNP Sinhalese MPs.

The “Sinhalese-only” language policy passed into law as the Official Language Act No.33 of 1956, and reads as follows --

An Act to prescribe the Sinhala language as the one official language of Ceylon and to enable certain transitory provisions to be made (Date of Assent: 7 July 1956).

1. This Act may be cited as the Official Language Act No.33 of 1956.
2. The Sinhala language shall be the one official language of Ceylon.
Provided that where the Minister considers it impracticable to commence the use of only the Sinhala language, for any official purpose immediately on the coming into force of this Act, the language or languages hitherto used for that purpose may be continued to be so used until the necessary change is effected as early as possible before the expiry of 31 December 1960 and, if such change cannot be effected by administrative order, regulations may be made under this Act to effect such change.
3. (1) The Minister may make such regulations in respect of all matters for which regulations are authorised by this Act to be made and generally for the purpose of giving effect to the principles and provisions of this Act.
(II) No regulation made under sub-section (1) shall have effect until it is approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives and notification of such approval is published in the Gazette.

To make Sinhala the one “official” language, for the benefit of the Sinhalese, was easily achieved. But how would the measure be implemented among the Tamils? To meet this situation, the “Sinhala-only” bill had a provision for the use of Tamil, but this was killed by the agitation mounted by the *Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna*. A minister later stated that the provision had been dropped because “extremists, opportunists, people who wanted to create chaos . . . took to start an agitation”.³⁹

The proviso to Section 2 gives the minister the power to put off the implementation of the measure if he finds it “impracticable”, and to continue with English until the end of 1960. The proviso was necessary to effect the transition, and was dictated by the practical impossibility of Sinhala becoming the official language of administration of the Tamil people in the north and east.

If, by the proviso, English would continue until the end of 1960, how would the Tamil people be administered after that time? Would the Tamils become Sinhalese or Sinhala-speaking after 31 December 1960? Or would Sinhalese officers study Tamil to administer the Tamil people? Or would the Tamil officers study Sinhala and administer their own Tamil people in Sinhala?

However much the Sinhalese may refuse to believe it, the simple fact is that Sinhala cannot be the official language of the Tamils. The Tamil people, in practice, have to be administered in Tamil, as it is their language in the same way that Sinhala is the language of the Sinhalese. When that happens, Tamil will be a *de facto* official language. And then, as far as Tamils are concerned, Tamil will be their official language.

So the injustice of denying official-language status for Tamil becomes so self-evident that Tamil resistance builds up like internal combustion. In such a situation the writ of the "Sinhala-only" government cannot run among the Tamil people.

It is important to remember that the constant feature of nationalist movements has been the passionate commitment to one's language, which often assumes mystic significance. More about this will be said in the Conclusion. Language is very basic to man; it is the very definition of his identity; it is the mirror that reflects his past and determines his present loyalties.

Anthropologist Edmund Leach, after studying the welter of ethnic groups and their language-culture and social relations in Upper Burma, wrote:

"For a man to speak one language rather than another is a ritual act, it is a statement about one's personal status; to speak the same language as one's neighbours expresses solidarity with those neighbours, to speak a different language from one's neighbours expresses social distance or even hostility."⁴⁰

The importance of language for each of the linguistic nations of India was quickly learnt by Jawaharlal Nehru before independence, in his work in the Linguistic Provinces Committee. The experience he gained prevented the imposition of Hindi on the non-Hindi people, and thus the disintegration of India was averted. Nehru wrote: "The inquiry has been in some ways an eye opener for us . . . Some of the ablest men in the country came before us and confidently and emphatically stated that language in this country stood for and represented culture, race, history, individuality, and finally a sub-nation."⁴¹

To the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Tamil language represents everything that Nehru referred to. Its place as an official language cannot be denied simply because of the numerical majority that the Sinhalese have. Their voting majority, as we have seen, was secured by manipulation and by depriving the Tamils of Indian origin of the franchise. The imposition of "Sinhala only" is a negation of the independence of the Tamils and represents the subjugation of the Tamils by Sinhalese imperialism.

Since the Section 2 proviso provided for the continuation of English where the minister found it impracticable to commence the use of Sinhala only, the measure had an immediate impact on the Tamils living outside the north and east — against whom "Sinhala only" was intended to be used from the beginning. Before the law was enacted, the targets of Buddhist propagandists, particularly the ACBC, were the English-educated Catholics, Christians, Burghers and Tamils — to undermine the elite position they held through ability in English. But they had no ready weapon; so Kotelawala's

pronouncement about “parity of status” was pounced upon, and distorted, to make a case for “Sinhala only” in order to get the jobs and positions the English-speakers held.

The underlying cause, however, in the 1953 *Hartal* and in all the other socio-economic conflicts that were to follow, was the reactionary economic policy adopted by UNP governments from 1948, which led to cumulative economic stagnation, decline and crisis. While the upper class felt secure in its continued control of the state, the growing middle and lower classes became restive for lack of jobs and opportunities.

In this context, the Tamils became an easy target for they held many jobs, proportionately more than their percentage of the population, and were seemingly prosperous. It was not realized that their seeming prosperity was because of their thrift and saving. Nor was it realized that, in a unitary state with a competitive system, national-ethnic communities do not advance proportionately in the different spheres of national life. For if access to jobs, power and scarce resources were to proceed according to population ratios, there would not be competition for socio-economic mobility and ascendance — the essential basis of any modern state.

For historical and other reasons, each of the communities advanced in the fields for which they were particularly suited and possessed the right resources. There was no envy or jealousy. The Muslims predominated in trade and business; the Sinhalese in landownership of plantations. In 1952, the Sinhalese owned 88% of all the plantations of more than 20 acres and 52% of the area occupied by such plantations. In the case of plantations under 20 acres, the ownership was entirely Sinhalese, and these produced, in the 1950s, 72% of the total coconut crop and all of the coconut surplus for export. “At the present time [1953], Sinhalese interests and capital predominate in the plantations, and the people who produce for export are better off than those who produce for the local markets.”⁴²

Likewise, the Burghers went into the professions, and mercantile and government jobs, while the Tamils advanced through education into the professions and government employment, mainly because of their inhospitable “dry-zone” lands. Except in the higher echelons of the civil service, government employment was the least coveted option and was basically a lower-middle-class opening. However, because of economic stagnation after 1948, government employment, in which the Tamil middle class seemingly prospered, became a ready object of envy, particularly by the Sinhalese *Karava*.

The “Sinhala-only” policy was created and articulated mainly by the *Karava*, supported by the Catholics and Christians; the *Goyigama* leadership and the people were at first against it and were never very enthusiastic about it. While it united the Sinhalese “racially”, the Catholics and Christians were soon the losers when the “Sinhala-only” war-cry was later converted into the “Sinhalese-Buddhist” battle-cry. After the “Sinhala-only” act, there emerged the straightforward Sinhalese/Tamil antithesis.

The implementation of “Sinhala only” was placed in the hands of Sam P.C.

Fernando, the Minister of Justice, a Christian. He issued directives that all public servants, including Tamil officers, in service, and future recruits, must pass a proficiency test to the GCE 'O' level in Sinhala within three years in three stages. Failing any stage or the final stage would result in their annual increments being stopped, leading to suspension and eventual dismissal. With this directive, government employment, hitherto the principal avenue of employment and economic advance of the Tamils, became barred. The immediate struggle came to be how those in service and already advanced in age could hold on to their jobs. The English-speaking Burghers emigrated to Australia and other English-speaking countries, and the proportion of the population declined from 0.6% to 0.3% between 1953 and 1971. We will return to the "Sinhala only" policy, which dominated politics since 1956, after a brief look at the Sinhalese rioting which helped to get the "Sinhala only" act onto the statute book.

The 1956 Tamil *Satyagraha* and Sinhalese Rioting

On 5 June 1956, the date the "Sinhala only" bill was introduced by Bandaranaike in the House, as an act of protest Chelvanayakam, the leader of the FP, led a party of 300 Tamil volunteers and staged a sit-down *Satyagraha* (peaceful protest), of the kind popularized by Mahatma Gandhi in the days of the Indian freedom struggle. It was a peaceful sit-down protest outside the House, on the Galle Face Green.

On the same day, the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna had organized a march to the House to get the "reasonable use of Tamil" clause in the bill removed. The Bhikkhu Peramuna procession converged on the House, followed by thousands of supporters of "Sinhala only", and when they found the Tamils staging the *Satyagraha* they set upon them and beat them.

Satyagraha had evolved in British India as a weapon of peaceful protest. The accepted tradition is that the *Satyagrahis* are not disturbed, even by the strong arm of the law. The protesters invoke suffering upon themselves in order to draw attention to their cause, as a last resort. And the custom is that the police cordon off the *Satyagrahis* and offer them protection and assistance.

On that day, the police were all around but allowed the *Satyagrahis* to be beaten up. The Tamil protesters never imagined the *bhikkhu* holy men would be a party to violence. Some Tamil *Satyagrahis* were thrown into Beira Lake, near the Parliament House. From that moment, every Tamil seen on the roads of Colombo was attacked. Tamil office employees going home from work in public transport were caught and manhandled. Tamils had to stay indoors for personal safety, for days on end. Sinhalese hooligans took charge of the situation and went on a rampage of arson and looting of Tamil shops and homes. The rioting and violence were instigated by the government and actively supported by the Sinhalese organizations and *bhikkhus* to frighten the Tamils into accepting the "Sinhala-only" act.

The violence and rioting spread to Gal Oya and Amparai, where, under an irrigation and resettlement scheme, thousands of Sinhalese had been resettled in clusters around thinly distributed Tamil villages in the eastern province. "In the 'race' riots in 1956 150 people died."⁴² This included many Tamil women and children. The 1956 riots were the first of a series of riots to which the Sri Lanka Tamils and those of Indian origin were subjected because of the "Sinhala-only" policy and the 1956 language act which divided the people on national-ethnic lines.

The 1956 National Convention of the FP

The initial feeling of frustration and anger that gripped the Tamil nation because of the Sinhala-only act soon turned into a grim determination to resist the tyranny of the Sinhala-only government. The Tamils, hitherto unattracted by federalism, turned to the Federal Party. With the Sinhala-only law on the statute book and the firm resolve of the government not to accord equal right to the Tamils, federalism became the only way out for the integrity and future of the Tamil nation.

The Federal Party summoned its national convention in the naval port of Trincomalee in the eastern province. That convention, held on 19 August 1956, passed the following resolutions:

1. the replacement of the present pernicious constitution by a rational and democratic constitution based on the federal principle and the establishment of one or more Tamil linguistic state or states incorporating all geographically contiguous areas in which the Tamil-speaking people are numerically in a majority as federating unit or units enjoying the widest autonomous and residuary powers consistent with the unity and external security of Ceylon;
2. The restoration of the Tamil language to its rightful place enjoying the absolute parity of status with Sinhalese as an official language of the country;
3. The repeal of the present citizenship laws and the enactment in their place of laws recognizing the right to full citizenship on the basis of a simple test of residence for all persons who have made this country their home;
4. The immediate cessation of colonization of the traditional Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people.

From that time, these became the four major planks of the Tamil Federal Party. "Colonization", meaning government-sponsored resettlement of Sinhalese from the wet zone in the jungle-cleared dry zones, mainly in the age-old Tamil areas, had been a matter of great resentment in the Federal Party and a source of friction between it and successive governments. The FP regarded the traditional Tamil areas as inviolate and therefore not open for

planned government-sponsored resettlement of Sinhalese in large numbers. The government believed that, in a united country, no part was the exclusive domain of any one community.

The FP's objection to Sinhalese resettlement was not only because of loss of territory, but because of the resulting alteration of the ethnic composition of their own areas. From the mid-1930s, jungle clearing, land development and Sinhalese resettlement had been matters of great concern to D.S. Senanayake and, later, to all governments. From that time until the mid-1970s, some 250,000 Sinhalese had been resettled under the various colonization and resettlement schemes.

Between 1947-48 and 1973-74, the government spent no less than 3,700,000,000 rupees on agriculture, irrigation, land development and Sinhalese resettlement. The settlers were given at first eight, later five, acres of cleared land, a buffalo for ploughing, a house, a well, seed paddy, and subsistence allowance until the first harvest — all at state expense. They were also provided with irrigated water, free of charge, from river dams constructed at high cost.

The resulting increase of the Sinhalese population in Tamil areas can be seen in the following table:

Table 4.1
Tamil-Sinhalese Population Change Due to State-sponsored Sinhalese Resettlement in Four Tamil Districts

	<i>Tamils</i>		<i>Sinhalese</i>		<i>Increase of Sinhalese</i>
	<i>1953</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1953</i>	<i>1971</i>	
Jaffna	477,304	673,043	6,183	20,402	14,219
Batticaloa	130,381	246,582	31,174	94,150	62,976
Trincomalee	37,517	73,255	15,296	55,308	40,192
Puttalam	9,010	30,994	31,587	309,298	277,711

Source: Memorandum of the Ceylon Institute for National and Tamil Affairs

A clearer picture over a longer period becomes discernible from the following figures. It must be remembered that planned government-sponsored resettlement schemes were started in the mid-1930s and accelerated from the late 1940s.

Because of government-sponsored settlement of Sinhalese in traditional Tamil areas, particularly in the eastern province, the government in the early 1960s created a new district, Amparai district, out of what was previously Batticaloa district, in which the Tamils had predominated as late as the 1946 census. The new district appeared as a separate district from the 1963 census, and had an 80% Sinhalese population. At a later distribution of electoral constituencies, Amparai District was given two constituencies by the

Table 4.2

Ethnic Distribution of Population in Two Select Tamil Districts of the Eastern Province (in percentage)

	<i>Trincomalee</i>				<i>Batticaloa and Amparai</i>			
	<i>Sinhalese</i>	<i>Tamils</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Sinhalese</i>	<i>Tamils</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Others</i>
1921	3.0	55.2	38.1	3.5	4.5	53.3	39.7	2.3
1946	20.6	44.5	30.5	3.7	5.9	50.3	42.2	1.6
1971	28.8	38.2	32.0	1.0	17.7	46.4	35.1	0.6

Source: Michael Roberts, in Michael Roberts (ed): *Collective Identities*, p.75.

Delimitation Commission, namely Amparai and Seruwila. Both these constituencies returned Sinhalese MPs, and the Sinhalese representation in the legislature was thereby increased to 80%, although they represented only 71.9% of the population, according to the 1971 census.

These two parliamentary constituencies comprised 1,500 square miles of territory, or two-fifths of the land area of the eastern province, where the Sinhalese were a mere 5.9% at the 1946 census. Even more important is the fact that Amparai Town and its adjacent area constitute a strong Sinhalese enclave, breaking up the geographical contiguity of the traditional Tamil homelands in the eastern province. The Tamils living further south of Amparai were cut off from Batticaloa because of the creation of this Sinhalese enclave. Also, because of resettlement, in Trincomalee district, which in 1953 had a 2:1 Tamil/Sinhalese ratio, the Sinhalese were rapidly becoming a larger proportion of the population. The same was true of Vavuniya district. These resettlement policies would soon render the Tamils a minority in their own heartland and obliterate the Tamil nation's possession of an exclusive, distinct and separate territory as its homeland. This would entail the loss of their claim to separate and distinct Tamil nationhood in Sri Lanka.

Bandaranaike's Proposals for "Reasonable Use of Tamil"

To Bandaranaike, "Sinhala only" was a slogan designed to make political capital out of the situation. Of all people, he was most aware that "Sinhala only" was, in practical terms, unworkable in a country with two separate nations where Tamil was the mother tongue of 27% of the population, including the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils and the Sri Lankan and Indian Muslims.

When campaigning for "Sinhala only", he never imagined the extent to which he would be held prisoner by the forces he had let loose. Bandaranaike was by conviction a liberal and a democrat. As a skilful politician with a sharp intellect and much foresight, Bandaranaike wanted people to believe he would run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. But that was not to be.

He expected the fanatical pressure groups to withdraw, leaving the politicians to work out a political settlement. He would then resort, in theory, to his "balancing act" between "Sinhala only" and "reasonable use of Tamil", but in effect according equal rights to the Tamil language.

That this was his hope can be inferred from many of his statements. When he first adopted "Sinhala only", in September 1955, he referred to "Sinhala only" as the official language, but added, "with recognition accorded to the Tamil Language in the Legislature, Administration and Education" (see Appendix 4). He also said: "All citizens shall have the right to transact official business in Sinhalese or Tamil in any part of the island".

Bandaranaike went even further. In the same statement he declared: "Every pupil should be encouraged (but not compelled) to learn the other language as a second language and, if the parents of one-third of the pupils in any school desire to do so, the school shall be compelled to provide the necessary facilities." That was Bandaranaike's vision of "Sinhala only". He held steadfastly to it, but did not have the firmness to enforce it.

A second, even more telling, example is the statement he made in the course of the debate in the House on the Official Language Act. He said that, "except for this sentimental attachment to parity", he was prepared to concede the same status to the Tamil language. In the "Sinhala-only" bill he incorporated provisions conceding full equality to the Tamil language, but the pressures of the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna killed these provisions at the bill stage.

Then, when the FP was planning a *Satyagraha* campaign towards the middle of 1957, he again came forward with proposals, this time rather nervously and tentatively, for "reasonable use of Tamil". At the end of April 1957, Prime Minister Bandaranaike told the House:

The House and the country know that it has always been the policy of the Government Party that, although the circumstances of the situation were such that the Sinhalese language had to be declared the official language of this country, there was no intention in fact to cause any undue hardship or injustice to those whose language is other than Sinhalese in the implementation of the Act. I wish also to point out that the Government Party prior to the elections in their manifesto gave the assurance that while it was their intention to make Sinhalese the official language of the country, reasonable use of Tamil too will be given . . . I am in a position to make a statement in general terms. . .

Bandaranaike's proposals, "in general terms", were as follows:

1. The right of every Tamil to be educated in Tamil up to the highest level of the educational system;
2. Tamils would be entitled to sit for public-service examinations in Tamil, with the provisions that they acquire proficiency in Sinhalese in a stipulated period after recruitment as probationers;
3. Tamils would be entitled to correspond with the government and

- receive replies in Tamil; and
4. Local authorities in Tamil areas would be given the power to transact business with the government in Tamil.

The nervousness and resulting vacillation that characterized Bandaranaike's handling of the Tamil national question were evident when he prefaced his proposals thus: "I am in a position . . . to make a statement in general terms – of course. The details will have to be worked out and discussed and Members of the House *and others* will be given the opportunity of expressing their views in due course [emphasis added]."

When he concluded his statement he reiterated the good intent of the government and again showed his lack of resolve. He said:

In other words, the policy that the Government intends to follow is that while accepting Sinhalese as the official language, citizens who do not know Sinhalese should not suffer inconvenience, embarrassment or any trouble as a result of that . . . Some of my Hon. Friends opposite who hold an extreme point of view will think differently. There are extremists on both sides. We cannot decide these issues on grounds of extremism whether it be on this side of the House or on that side. We have to take a rational, reasonable attitude in these matters. Of course, Sinhalese has been declared the official language of the country. The Government now propose to take these steps and everybody will have an opportunity to make suggestions. I have only given a broad outline of what we intend doing.

This passage clearly shows that he had lost the courage of his earlier convictions. He had been browbeaten and became overawed by the *bhikkhus*, who had put him in power and felt he was only a tool in their hands. (This statement of proposals by Bandaranaike appears as Appendix 5.)

"Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact"

Bandaranaike's April 1957 statement and proposals brought the government and the FP face to face to iron out their differences by negotiation. A series of meetings was held between, on the one side, Bandaranaike and members of his cabinet, representing the government, and on the other S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and MPs of the FP, representing the Tamil people. Their discussions resulted in an agreement, popularly called "the B-C pact", which was tabled in the House on 26 July 1957.

The cornerstone of the "B-C pact" was the regional councils to be established in Tamil areas, almost on the lines of those recommended by the Donoughmore Commission. According to the "B-C pact", the northern province was to constitute one regional council and the eastern province was to be divided into two or more councils. They were to be allowed to

amalgamate even beyond provincial limits. Regional councillors were to be directly elected. Parliament was to delegate powers to the regional councils by act of parliament. The regional councils were to have wide powers over specified subjects including agriculture, co-operatives, land and land development, colonization, education, health, industries and fisheries, housing and social services, electricity, water schemes and roads. In regard to colonization and resettlement schemes, it was agreed that the regional councils were to have the power to select those whose land was to be resettled.

The finances of the regional councils were to come from block grants provided by the government. The councils could raise taxes and borrow. The prime minister also promised to give "early consideration" to the question of Sri Lankan citizenship for people of Indian descent. The FP, for its part, agreed to drop its demand for "parity of status" for the Tamil language provided the proposed legislation (1) recognized Tamil as "the language of the national minority of Sri Lanka", and (2) the language of government administration in the northern and eastern provinces was Tamil, with provision for Sinhalese-speaking people in those areas. This would take place "without infringing on the position of the Official Language Act". Because of the B-C pact, the FP agreed to call off the proposed *Satyagraha*. (The B-C pact appears as an Appendix.)

The B-C pact constitutes the miniature devolution of autonomy to the Tamils within the existing framework of the unitary state. Even before entering the legislature in 1931, Bandaranaike had in 1926 advocated a federal state structure for Sri Lanka to appease the Kandyan Sinhalese, who were then demanding a separate state for themselves.⁴³ As longstanding minister of local government in the state council, Bandaranaike possessed a detailed knowledge of the devolution of powers to decentralized bodies, and was attracted by the English county-council system.

Hence, in agreeing to delegation of powers to regional councils, he shared none of the fears of other Sinhalese politicians. Moreover, the joint statement which prefaced the B-C pact declared that the government had already prepared a draft Regional Councils Bill for the whole country, and that had been examined by both parties "to see whether provision could be made under it to meet reasonably some of the matters in this regard which the FP had in view". From the contents of the joint statement and the provisions of the B-C pact, it appears that Bandaranaike felt that it was "Sinhala only" that the Sinhalese militants were interested in, and that, if he safeguarded this, they would not be concerned about the regional councils and their delegated powers, which in any event was a separate matter of government policy.

But, once again, this was not to be. The "Sinhala-only" militants and the Bhikkhu Peramuna wanted "Sinhala only" and Tamil subjugation. To give expression to these hopes, J.R. Jayewardene of the UNP, who had been defeated by Mrs Wimala Wijewardene at Kelaniya in the 1956 election, led his famous march to Kandy on 4 October 1957, to invoke the blessings of the *devales* (the gods) for his campaign against the B-C pact.

Perhaps because of dissatisfaction and protests by Sinhalese "extremists"

against the B-C pact, for five months Bandaranaike took no steps to translate the pact into law and gave no indication of his willingness to implement it. Instead, in December 1957, he tabled a bill in parliament to put the Sinhalese letters "SRI" (i.e. the prefix "Sri" in "Sri Lanka") in place of the English letters that had hitherto been used on motor vehicle number plates. This was just a cosmetic change; but Sri Lankans are used to such cosmetic changes. At that stage, the FP, as a matter of equality, pleaded that the Tamil equivalent of the Sinhala letters "SRI" be authorized for vehicles registered in the Tamil areas. But this was rejected by Bandaranaike, who in the B-C pact had agreed that Tamil should be the language of administration in Tamil areas.

This ambivalence and inconsistency on the part of Bandaranaike gave the FP and the Tamils serious doubts about whether the B-C pact would be implemented. At that stage the FP was unwilling to accept that the Sinhalese letters "SRI" should be displayed on motor vehicles in the Tamil areas. Hence, it organized meetings calling for the use of the Tamil equivalent on motor vehicles in the Tamil areas, as from 1 January 1958.

According to the Motor Traffic Act, the use of any unauthorized letters was an offence liable to punishment. Accordingly, when the Tamil letters "SRI" were used several FP MPs, including Chelvanayakam, were prosecuted in the courts. Chelvanayakam was convicted and served a sentence of two weeks imprisonment at Batticaloa jail.

Following these events, on 9 April 1958 a group of Buddhist *bhikkhus*, led by Mrs Wimala Wijewardene, minister of health in Bandaranaike's cabinet went in procession to the prime minister's residence in Colombo, squatted in front of it and demanded a written undertaking that he would abrogate the B-C pact. Instead of ordering their arrest and removal, Bandaranaike nervously complied with their demands, stating in writing that he abrogated the B-C pact with immediate effect.

Walter Schwarz was quite correct in stating that the "Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 embodied one of the few statesmanlike compromises . . . ever to be attempted in Sri Lanka". Had it been carried out it would, as the prime minister later claimed, have "safeguarded the position of the Sinhalese while, at the same time, [meeting] reasonably the fears of the Tamils".

Many observers have been unable to understand why it was not implemented. The reason is simply that Sinhalese-Buddhist extremists were, for the first time, claiming the whole of Sri Lanka for Sinhalese and Buddhism. They were beginning to deny any legitimate place for anyone other than the Sinhalese-Buddhists, and for any cause other than Sinhala-Buddhism. National-ethnic rights, national education, public and defence services, Marxism and even business must all serve Sinhala-Buddhism. Sri Lankan politics thereafter was the story of how this position was turned into a reality.

The 1958 "Race" Riots

Thereafter, the Tamils defied the law prescribing the Sinhala letters "SRI" and used the Tamil equivalent on their motor vehicles. The Buddhist *bhikkhus* retaliated by leading a campaign to deface Tamil writings on the name boards in government buildings in Colombo and throughout the Sinhalese areas. They also incited the ordinary Sinhalese people against the Tamils. There were sporadic acts of violence against the Tamils in Colombo and other suburban areas. Tamil-owned shops were looted and Tamil homes stoned.

Towards the end of May 1958, the Federal Party held its annual convention at Vavuniya, in the northern province, and resolved to "launch direct action by non-violent *Satyagraha* as the 'B-C Pact' had been abandoned". Tamil FP supporters from Batticaloa district, returning by train after the convention, were stopped at Polonnaruwa railway junction and assaulted. Some were knifed and killed. Violence against the small number of Tamils in Polonnaruwa became the order of the day.

On 25 May 1958, a Jaffna-bound train from Colombo was derailed at Polonnaruwa and Tamil passengers were beaten and their baggage stolen. On the same day, one Senaratne, a Sinhalese ex-Mayor of Nuwara Eliya, was shot dead at Kalawanchikudi, in Batticaloa district, as a result of personal rivalry. This was announced over the radio several times to show that a Sinhalese had been killed by Tamils. In this way, the 1958 "race" riots of Sri Lanka, poignantly chronicled by Tarzie Vittachi, then editor of the *Ceylon Observer*, in his book *Emergency '58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*,⁴⁴ commenced.

Sinhalese mobs went on the rampage, stopping trains and buses, dragging out Tamil passengers and butchering them. Houses were burnt with people inside, and there occurred widespread looting in all areas where Sinhalese and Tamils lived together. Tamil women were raped and pregnant women slaughtered. A Hindu priest performing *pooja* ceremonies at Kandasamy temple at Panadura, near Colombo, was dragged away and burnt alive.

After two days of rioting, on the 27 May, the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka contacted Prime Minister Bandaranaike and asked him to declare a state of emergency. But Bandaranaike vacillated. During the next two days the rioting intensified. Hundreds of people were killed, homes burnt and shops looted. The police stood by, not knowing how to control the Sinhalese mobs. Even then Bandaranaike did not want to proclaim an emergency.

On the fourth day of rioting, instead of waiting for the prime minister's advice, the Governor-General, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, with the consent of the prime minister (and therefore technically on "advice"), proclaimed an emergency, called in the army and restored order. Before order was restored, however, several hundreds of Tamil people had lost their lives and thousands their homes. About 150 Tamils, including the 10 FP MPs, were arrested and detained. About 10,000 Tamil people assembled as refugees in Colombo refugee camps, set up by the government, and were sent to Jaffna by commandeered cargo ships berthed in the Colombo harbour. A de facto

division of the country and the people, into the Sinhalese south and the Tamil north, had taken place.

Tarzie Vittachi concluded his book with the question: "Have the Sinhalese and the Tamils reached the parting of the ways?"⁴⁵ But Tamil political leaders were confined in detention until September, hence there was no leadership to decide whether May 1958 represented the parting of the ways.

Professor Howard Wiggins wrote cautiously:

In the event, the majority community succeeded in obtaining the language reform legislation its ardent spokesmen sought. The alarming riots of 1958, unparalleled in the island's history, were the direct result of these reforms and of government's reluctance to insist that public order be maintained and individuals protected. The memory of these events will retard the creation of a unified modern nation-state commanding the allegiance of all communities.⁴⁶

Bandaranaike's Murder: Chaos and Confusion

With the emergency in force and the FP MPs in detention, the Bandaranaike government, in a desperate attempt to compromise, enacted the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958, containing substantially modified "reasonable use of Tamil" provisions regarding education, public-service entrance examinations and administration in the northern and eastern provinces. The act did not contain any enforceable right to use Tamil or mandatory provisions directing the use of Tamil, but merely authorized the Prime Minister to make regulations to give effect to the use of Tamil in the areas specified in the act. No regulations were made until 1966, and the act remained a dead letter till then. In 1966, when Dudley Senanayake's UNP government proceeded to make the regulations, the SLFP, LSSP and CP, then in opposition, opposed the "reasonable use of Tamil" regulations and called for a demonstration in protest. In the ensuing disorder, *bhikkhu* Nandasara was shot dead. As a result, though the regulations were made in 1966, seven years after the enabling act was passed, the provisions of the regulations were never put into operation.

In 1959, internal fissures within the MEP government led to a "cabinet strike" when 10 right-wing ministers demanded that Bandaranaike expel Philip Gunawardena from the cabinet. Bandaranaike duly sacked Gunawardena from the MEP government in May 1959. At this, the LSSP and CP withdrew their "critical support" and moved into open confrontation with Bandaranaike's government. The CP's statement on that occasion said: "Now that the right wing has taken command of the Government and set a course that can only lead to an increasing repudiation of the progressive policies of 1956, the CP will not extend to such a Government the critical support it gave the MEP Government in the past."⁴⁷

The right wing was always in command; only the CP's and LSSP's blinkered

view rendered it incapable of taking the correct attitude towards the MEP. From the beginning the intense struggle within the cabinet over Gunawardena's original draft of a radical agrarian reform law, the Paddy Lands Bill, made him say in exasperation that it was "castrated" by the cabinet.⁴⁸ Inside parliament the Marxist parties proposed a no-confidence motion against the government. Outside they resorted to a spate of wildcat strikes which paralyzed industry, commerce and the port, and destabilized the government.

In this deteriorating situation, on 25 September 1959 a *bhikkhu* named Somarama shot and killed Bandaranaike on the veranda of his residence when he was paying obeisance to the visiting monk. This resulted in *bhikkhus* being chased and stoned on the streets, and for a time they confined themselves to their monasteries. Involved in the conspiracy to murder Bandaranaike were Buddharakita, the Kelaniya temple high priest and secretary of the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna, and another. At the trial, the former was convicted of murder and the latter of conspiracy to murder.⁴⁹

The assassination of Bandaranaike was not a simple act carried out by a murderous *bhikkhu*, at the instigation of Buddharakita. It had wider political ramifications. During the trial two ministers, Stanley de Zoysa and Mrs Wimala Wijewardene, and a number of others were mentioned as possible accomplices. Bandaranaike's murder was the culmination of a running struggle by extreme right-wing reactionaries and Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists against his eclectic middle-of-the-road policies and his lack of resolve to stand up against the Marxist politicians and their trade-union agitators. With his murder the SLFP seemed to be on the verge of disintegration at the hands of caretaker Prime Minister W. Dahanayake. In the ensuing interregnum the country steadily slipped into a state of political confusion and chaos which resulted in another premature dissolution of parliament in December 1959, with elections fixed for March 1960.

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13. K.M. de Silva, in "Sri Lanka in 1948", in the *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol.4, Jan-Dec. 1974, pp.5-6.
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15. Arnold Wright (comp.), *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*; London, 1907, p.318.
16. Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities*, p.224.
17. Anagarika Dharmapala, *History of an Ancient Civilisation*, Colombo, 1902.
18. Michael Roberts (ed.), *supra*, p.343.
19. *Supra*, p.344.
20. *Ibid.*, p.304.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.302-303.
22. A.J. Wilson, *supra*.
23. Sarath Amunugama, in Michael Roberts (ed.), *supra*, pp.314-334.
Amunugama further states: "What is most significant about Jayatissa's character is that it is not the ideal as viewed from the perspective of pristine Buddhism . . . Though he is full of book learning and skills of casuistry he [Jayatissa] is not interested in his personal salvation. *He speaks of the degradation of the Sinhalese not because they do not seek salvation but because they are powerless as a political entity* . . . Significantly, Jayatissa's goals are identical to those of the Buddhist bourgeoisie" (emphasis added).
24. Michael Roberts (ed.), *supra*, p.344.
25. K.N.O. Dharmadasa, "Language and Sinhalese Nationalism: The career of Munidasa Cumaratunga", in *Modern Ceylon Studies*, University of Sri Lanka, Vol.3:2, July 1972. Dharmadasa further states: "In elevating *Helese* to an exalted status he vehemently rejected the accepted theory of its Indo-Aryan origin . . . He said, "There is perhaps no other nation older than we. How can we, therefore, accepted the theory that everything of ours is derived from outside'."
26. Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*, Colombo, pp.534-535.
27. D.C. Wijewardena, *The Revolt in the Temple*, Colombo, 1953.
28. This was quite a well known fact at the time.
29. See James Jupp, *Sri Lanka - Third World Democracy*, London, 1978, p.60, and the sources quoted by him, which included Dudley Senanayake.
30. *Times of Ceylon*, 14 April 1964.
31. Denzil Pieris, *1956 and After*, Colombo, 1958, p.10.
32. *UNP Election Manifesto*, Colombo, 1956.
33. At the time no official register of *bhikkhus* was kept, but one was compiled in 1972, according to which there were then 18,000 *bhikkhus* in Ceylon.
34. The Buddhist Commission of Inquiry, *The Betrayal of Buddhism*,

Balangoda, Sri Lanka, 1956.

35. "Background to Politics", in *Ceylon Observer*, 17 July 1962.
36. Denzil Pieris, *supra*, wrote: "The Revolution of 1956 worked through the election which put the MEP into power and indicated the shift of political power from the Westernised bourgeoisie into the hands of the national bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie who lived in small towns and villages", p.5.

Also Howard Wriggins stated: "Bandaranaike drew rural masses into political participation and while evoking the Sinhalese Buddhist 'revolution' steered it safe within the confines of national unity", in *Sri Lanka since Independence*, University of Ceylon, 1974, p.155.

As against these Gunnar Myrdal correctly observed: "Political leadership remained in the hands of the upper stratum; the only difference was that those who had taken power were more responsive to the aspirations of the educated Sinhalese", in *Asian Drama*, p.351.

It must be said that many of these partial theorizations fail because they do not discern clearly the nature of the class structure in the country and because of the failure of the "Marxist" parties to advance a revolutionary programme. Under the guise of "class struggle", the latter struggled to "bourgeoisify" the working class by resorting to "wage struggle" by trade unions.

37. I.D.S. Weerawardena, *Ceylon General Election - 1956*, Colombo, p.95.
38. All these are from *House Debates, Official Report 1956*, Vol.24.
39. Walter Schwarz, *supra*, p.10.
40. E.R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, London, 1954, p.59.
41. Quoted in S. Harrison, "The Challenge to Indian Nationalism", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.34, 1956, p.621.
42. Pierre Gourou, *The Tropical World*, London, 1953, pp.151-152.
43. James Jupp, *supra*, p.247.
44. See Reference 14 in Chapter 2, *supra*.
45. Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58: The Story of Ceylon Race Riots*, London, 1958.
46. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, 1960.
47. The CP's May 1959 statement is contained in *Twenty-Five Years of the Communist Party*, p.74.
48. Ronald Herring, in "The Forgotten 1953 Paddy Lands Act", in *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 1972, Vol.3, No.2, 121. Herring wrote: "The final form of the 1958 Paddy Lands Act is . . . emasculated in several critical respects; this dilution of the Bill, and the isolation of Gunawardena politically as a Marxist in a non-Marxist coalition proved fatal to the Act".
49. See L.G. Weeramantry, *Assassination of a Prime Minister*, Geneva, 1969.

5. Tamil Subjugation and the Birth of Separatist Nationalism

With the seeming disintegration of the SLFP, then leaderless, and with many MPs deserting it to form numerous small parties to fight the March 1960 election, Dudley Senanayake re-entered national politics to lead the UNP, asserting that “the SLFP is no more”.¹

The SLFP campaign was led by C.P. de Silva, the minister of lands. Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike, although not a candidate, was harnessed by the SLFP to appear on its election platforms. She extolled the virtues of her departed husband and lamented the calamity that had befallen her.

With the demise of Bandaranaike and with the middle-of-the-road SLFP in disarray, the LSSP believed that it was the only alternative to the rightist UNP. It therefore fielded 100 candidates, confident of winning the election. If it had understood the MEP victory as being the result of a reactionary upsurge, and had from 1956 advanced a truly revolutionary programme, while opposing the opportunist policies of Bandaranaike, the LSSP would have romped home to victory in the March 1960 election.

The MEP's middle path was thoroughly discredited and the electorate stood confused. Dudley Senanayake, who had heaped miseries on the ordinary people and been forced out in 1953, was clearly unacceptable, as the election verdict showed. The standard of living had gone down because of the reactionary economic policies followed by the UNP and the MEP from 1948, and these had produced socio-economic fissures and conflicts. Class contradictions were once more resurfacing and, as could be expected of the upper-class Sinhalese politicians, they were seeking to divert it by further extreme anti-Tamil rhetoric and postures and new alignments to secure their rule.

March 1960: Anti-Tamil Campaign

Because of the numerous SLFP breakaway groups and one-man parties, there were 23 parties in the run-up to the March 1960 election. These included the MRP, now led by Philip Gunawardena, the Prajathantravadiya Party of W. Dahanayake, the Bosath Bandaranaike Party of Sam D. Bandaranaike (a cousin of the dead leader), the extremist Sinhalese Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna

of K.M.P. Rajaratna and the rabidly Sinhalese-Buddhist Dharma Samajaya Party of L.H. Mettananda. Most of these catered for rural Sinhalese electorates and employed exaggerated rhetoric and extravagant promises.

Since in 1956 the SLFP had won on the basis of "Sinhala only" and Buddhist "revival", all the Sinhalese parties and leaders in the March 1960 election seemed convinced that something along the same lines would bring them victory. Since 2 January 1960 was the first working day in the change-over to the "Sinhala-only" administration, and the FP had called for a *Hartal* (general strike) in the north and east on that day, all the Sinhalese parties pledged to the Sinhalese voters that, if returned to power, they would rigorously enforce "Sinhala only".

In order to be one step ahead of the others, Dahanayake promised the wholesale repatriation of Indian Tamils if he came to power. The MEP and Mettananda issued a joint statement promising to implement the *Sasana* Commission Report, which had recommended granting Buddhism its rightful place in the affairs of state and in the government "take-over" of schools. At the opening MEP rally, Mettananda predicted that "Philip Gunawardena will be the next Prime Minister".² Mettananda called for the *pooya* days (Buddhist sabbath days – two days a week) to be declared public holidays. With the "father of Sinhala only" by his side, Philip Gunawardena, the popularly acclaimed "father of revolutionary Marxism in Sri Lanka", became in 1960 a Sinhalese chauvinist reactionary. The Bosath Bandaranaike Peramuna demanded the repatriation of the Indian Tamils and the nationalization of foreign assets, including the plantations.

In this way, the Sinhalese parties were unanimous in their attitude towards the Tamils; their only difference was one of degree. The UNP under Dudley Senanayake carried out a virulent anti-Tamil campaign, but won only 50 of the 145 seats in the reformed legislature. The SLFP, though battered and torn, won 46 seats. The LSSP and MEP won 10 seats each, and the CP three. Because of the extravagant anti-Tamil positions of the Sinhalese parties, the Tamils rallied behind the FP, which won 15 seats in the north and east, thereby emerging as the representative political party of the Tamils.

Dudley Senanayake, being the leader of the largest number of seats in parliament, formed a minority UNP government, which was at once defeated on the Speech from the Throne on 19 April. The following day parliament was again dissolved, with an election due in July 1960.

July 1960: Anti-Tamil Campaign

The March 1960 election verdict made the LSSP realize it had irretrievably lost its position to the bourgeois centrist SLFP. Since, in alliance with the Sinhalese forces, Philip Gunawardena's MEP had won as many seats, the LSSP leaders became convinced that for electoral purposes Marxist rhetoric must be blended with Sinhalese chauvinism. Hence the LSSP began to shift from its "parity-of-status" position, implicitly accepted "Sinhala only" and,

with the CP, entered into a no-contest pact with the SLFP, which now came to be led by Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike. One stalwart LSSP candidate, Mrs Vivienne Goonewardene, felt such concern for the Sinhalese that she called her uncle Philip Gunawardena “the number-one enemy of the Sinhalese nation”.³

In the July 1960 election the anti-Tamil rhetoric of Sinhalese politicians reached its nadir. Mrs Bandaranaike, then a novice at the Sinhalese political game, was content to state that she would follow “Bandaranaike policies”, implement “Bandaranaike socialism” and continue “the Bandaranaike revolution begun in 1956”. By insidious propaganda, the credulous rural Sinhalese-Buddhist voters were made to believe that her husband had been a *Bodhisatva* (one who will become Buddha) who had given up his life for the cause of the Sinhalese-Buddhist people.

At the polls, Mrs Bandaranaike’s SLFP emerged victorious with 75 seats, which gave her an overall majority. Since the SLFP polled only 33.6% of the votes, it was clear that it had benefited most from the no-contest pact with the LSSP and the CP. Indeed the UNP polled more votes than the SLFP — 37.6% — but won only 30 seats. The LSSP won 12 seats, but received the lowest ever percentage of votes — 7.4% — again because of the no-contest pact. In 1947 it had received 10.8%; in 1952, 13.1%; in 1956, 10.4%; and in March 1960, 10.5%. Philip Gunawardena’s MEP won only three seats. The Tamil FP won 16 seats and received 7.2% of votes — both the highest figures it ever obtained. One can thus see how Sinhalese policies were driving the Tamils increasingly into the fold of the FP.

Mrs Bandaranaike was sworn in as prime minister and thereby became the first Kandyan Sinhalese, as well as the world’s first woman, prime minister. To this government too, the LSSP adopted a policy of “critical support”. Leslie Goonewardene, the LSSP secretary, wrote: “The LSSP, while functioning as an independent group bound neither to the Government Party nor the Opposition Party, today adopts a position of general support of the Government, holding itself free to criticize the Government as well as vote against it where it disagrees.”⁴ The LSSP had reached the apogee of bourgeois parliamentary dilettantism, and from then on its leadership lost all leftist political directions, shed the external trappings of Marxism and degenerated into an unprincipled reactionary force coveting ministerial positions for its leadership.

First Military Occupation of Tamil Areas

When Mrs Bandaranaike made no progress whatever on the language front, the FP launched a *satyagraha* and civil-disobedience campaign, in February 1961, in the north and east. The FP had earlier called on Tamil government employees not to study Sinhala; it now called on them not to transact any business in Sinhala. It had also called on the Tamils to correspond with the government only in Tamil. In February 1961, by assembling thousands of

Tamil volunteers, both men and women, the FP blocked access to the *Kachcheries* (district administrative headquarters) in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. This continued for days, with batches of sit-down *satyagraha* volunteers taking turns, and effectively paralyzed the government's administration of the Tamil districts.

Finding that it had lost control of these areas, Mrs Bandaranaike's government in March declared a state of emergency and dispatched military troops to occupy the northern and eastern provinces. With the army moving in, the Tamils for the first time faced military brutality in the cause of "Sinhala only" and became aware of the Sinhalese government's resolve to use force to beat them into submission. The repression was so horrendous that an official inquiry was later set up by the government.

The government went ahead with rigorous enforcement of "Sinhala only" and passed the Language of the Courts Act, making the courts conduct their business in Sinhala rather than English. In April 1961, as a symbol of "Tamil self-government", Chelvanayakam inaugurated the "Tamil *Arasu* (Government) Postal Service" by issuing the FP's own postal stamps in post offices in Jaffna district. This was quickly suppressed by the military forces on the orders of the prime minister. All FP MPs were arrested and held in detention for the next six months. On these events, James Jupp writes:

During this period Jaffna had been cut off and the whole Tamil areas occupied by the troops. The movement had very broad support, ranging from the estate workers' unions who struck in protest against the arrest of the MPs, the Muslim Traders Association of Batticaloa, who closed their shops, most of the Leftwing unions and even the All-Ceylon Brahmin Priests Association.⁵

Nationalization of Schools

Mrs Bandaranaike, being a Kandyan Sinhalese-Buddhist from the Ratwatte *Radala* family, long-time patrons of the Kandyan Malwatte and Asgiriya sects and closely connected with the Dalada Maligawa Temple in Kandy, began to move decisively in favour of Buddhism and to the advantage of the Sinhalese Buddhists, in particular the Kandyans. The Sinhalese-Buddhist lobby had from the 1880s waged a battle against the Christian mission school system, which became intense with the statutory incorporation of the ACBC as a lay-Buddhist pressure group in 1955. From 1930, the Buddhist lobby had stridently demanded a government take-over of all schools in the country and an end to the grant-in-aid system. The Catholic and Protestant church hierarchy and their school organizations had, until 1960, fought back successfully.

From the 1947 election, the Catholic church had openly supported the UNP and called upon its flock to vote for it at every election. In the run-up to the 1952 election, Archbishop Joseph Cooray described the LSSP as

blow Christians had to face since the Dutch left our shores in 1796".¹⁰ We shall return to this school of "national-harmony" propagandists in the concluding chapter.

Since the take-over did not really affect the Catholics and the Christians, "the tension between the Buddhists and Catholics and Christians, which had risen to a peak with the schools take-over, subsided relatively quickly".¹¹ It led to the Sinhalese Catholics and Christians, on orders from the Vatican, "Sinhalezing" their religious practices. The mass, for example, came to be held in Sinhala. In this way a further strand was added to Sinhalese ethnic-religious integration.

Kodiswaran Language-Rights Case

Since the FP had called upon Tamil government employees not to study and work in Sinhala, the government in response offered bonuses to those passing the Sinhala-language proficiency tests and withheld increments and promotions from the bulk of those who refused to sit them. To coax them to sit the tests, the government promised that their salary increments would not be stopped if they sat; but without success. The government misinterpreted the Tamil officers' defiance as being solely due to the FP's call. In fact, they defied the measure because it involved abandoning their ancestral past, jettisoning their culture and language, draining away everything that was Tamil in them, in order to earn a living. And this was at a time when the Sinhalese were saying that "language was the life-blood of the Sinhalese nation".¹²

The government's response was an even more rigorous enforcement of "Sinhala-only", to make the Tamils believe that "Sinhala-only" was irreversible and the language issue frozen.

Many Tamil government employees were served with six months' notice, to persuade them to study Sinhala. The General Clerical Service Union (GCSU), the national trade union of which the Tamil officers were members, failed to make an issue of their notices of dismissal. The reason was that the Sinhalese officers, forming a majority in public service, benefited from "Sinhala-only" and the dismissal of the Tamil officers. This was how the ruling class divided the working class on the basis of ethnicity.

Hence the Tamil officers resigned from the GCSU and founded a Tamil union, the Arasanga Eluthu Vinayar Sangam. Its president, S. Kodiswaran, a senior Tamil officer in the executive grade, had earlier refused to sit the Sinhala proficiency examinations and his increment had been stopped. He sued the government in the Colombo district court, on the grounds that the regulation under which his increment had been stopped was illegal and unreasonable, since the Official Language Act of 1956 transgressed the Section 29 constitutional prohibition against discrimination. The trial judge, O.L. de Kretser, a Burgher and the most senior member of the judicial service, upheld Kodiswaran's plea and ruled that the Official Language Act and the

regulation in question were *ultra vires* and contravened the Section 20 prohibition.

But the government appealed against the judgement to the Supreme Court, which set aside the judgement on the (erroneous) ground that a government servant had no right to sue the Crown in a court of law for salary or increment. The Supreme Court failed to consider the constitutional issue but gave judgement on the preliminary point to the Crown. The Supreme Court, however, stated that if it became necessary to consider the constitutional issue, the matter would be placed by the Chief Justice before a five-judge court.

This was the decision the government wanted; it was politically acceptable but legally erroneous. Kodiswaran appealed to the Privy Council in London, which set aside the Sri Lanka Supreme Court's decision and directed that the Supreme Court should now rule on the constitutional question. The Privy Council judgement stated that, as the constitutional issue had not been considered by the Supreme Court, "the case should be remitted to the Supreme Court for consideration of this issue".¹³ This was in 1969; the case had started in 1962. At the time of the Privy Council judgement, Dudley Senanayake's government was in power and Mrs Bandaranaike was the leader of the opposition.

It was the general legal consensus at the time that, if the case went back to the Privy Council on the constitutional issue, the Privy Council would uphold the district court's decision. The government panicked. Mrs Bandaranaike, then custodian of Bandaranaike's "Sinhala-only" policy, was furious with the Privy Council. The Sinhalese politicians wondered what to do next. The Tamils felt that, at long last, justice had triumphed and their cause had been partially vindicated. And they had no doubt that in the next round the justice of their cause would completely triumph and they would become equal citizens in their motherland.

But this was not to be. Kodiswaran's case never came before the Supreme Court again. Instead, as a direct outcome of the case, Mrs Bandaranaike's UF government, which came to power in 1970, abolished appeals to the Privy Council (by Act No. 44 of 1971). Kodiswaran's and the Tamil people's legal case, over the unconstitutionality of "Sinhala only", was summarily dismissed by political means. And Section 29 of the Soulbury constitution, then seen to be the Tamils' only legal safeguard, was done away with by the UF government's repeal of that constitution and the enactment of the Republican constitution of 1972. The role of the courts as the bulwark of justice, and of the constitution as the guarantor and protector of the "solemn balance of rights" between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, could no longer be countenanced by the Sinhalese. We shall return to these issues in later chapters.

New Alignments for Continued Upper-Class Rule

Mrs Bandaranaike's government soon fell victim to a Catholic military

conspiracy. Having been called upon to intervene and adjudicate in politics, and inspired by this new role, the Catholic (Sinhalese and Tamil) top brass of the army and police plotted a coup d'état in January 1962 to overthrow Mrs Bandaranaike. The plot was uncovered in the nick of time and some 24 senior army and police officials were indicted of conspiracy to overthrow the government under a hastily prepared but legally invalid retrospective Criminal Law (Special Provisions) Act No. 1 of 1962.¹⁴

Mrs Bandaranaike felt that she could trust none but the Kandyans. She replaced the low-country Sinhalese Christian governor-general, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, with her uncle William Gopallawa, a Kandyan Buddhist. Richard Udugama, a relation, was appointed commander of the army and Stanley Ratwatte, another relation, was appointed commander of the army volunteer force. Similar replacements were effected in other areas of security and public services.

Kandyan control of the state apparatus was so marked that Lakshman Rajapakse, a low-country Sinhalese MP in the SLFP, protested: "We cannot be blind to the active discrimination now practised by this government against the low-country Sinhalese".¹⁵ He left the SLFP and founded the Ruhunu Rata Balavegaya.

By 1962 the Communist Party had abandoned its "parity-of-status" stand on the language question and had adopted "Sinhala only". This split the CP, and Tamil members left the party. The LSSP was soon to follow. In 1963 a United Left Front (ULF) was formed between the LSSP, the CP and Philip Gunawardena's MEP. It is important to note that the ULF did not include the largest organized proletarian force in the country – the plantation Indian Tamils. It could not, for the reasons already stated – namely, that their leadership represented capitalist interests.

The LSSP and the CP abandoned their "critical support" of Mrs Bandaranaike's government and, at the ULF inaugural 1963 May Day rally, declared that the ULF would defeat the government and establish a socialist state.¹⁶ In August 1963 Leslie Goonewardene, the LSSP secretary, said that "the Left parties would never again extend their co-operation to the SLFP government".¹⁷

However, in less than a year's time, the LSSP had become part of the SLFP government, and in 1970 Leslie Goonewardene himself became a minister in Mrs Bandaranaike's cabinet.

Since "Sinhala-only" had been achieved with relative ease at the same time as the formation of the ULF, the "father of Sinhala-only", Mettananda, had founded his *Buddha Jatika Balavegaya* (Buddhist Sinhalese Race Movement) and was demanding the establishment of the Buddhist-Sinhalese state of Sri Lanka. Paradoxically, Mettananda was a close ally of Mrs Bandaranaike and also the principal ally of Philip Gunawardena, who at the ULF inaugural rally had declared that he would establish a socialist state. Since 1963 Mettananda had pressed Mrs Bandaranaike to accept into her cabinet Philip Gunawardena, the accredited "father of revolutionary Marxism" in the country. She was reluctant, since he had been sacked from

the cabinet by her husband in 1958. Although in 1961 he had said that “the SLFP is a *Radala* clan, inefficient and devoid of progressive ideas”, in 1964, even after declaring that he would establish a socialist state and forming the ULF, he was pressing to enter Mrs Bandaranaike’s cabinet.

Mrs Bandaranaike’s government was faced with a critical economic situation because of a severe foreign exchange crisis, and imposed import restrictions, import quotas and exchange controls. There were shortages of several imported goods and the government instituted rationing of all consumer goods. Even dry fish and maldivian fish (both imported) came to be rationed for the first time. Shortages and food queues became the order of the day. No finance minister of her government survived to present his second budget. Felix Dias Bandaranaike, when finance minister, proposed to reduce the weekly issue of rationed rice by half a measure in his 1962 budget. But knowing that in such a crisis the people would erupt against the government, the SLFP government party itself opposed it, and he was forced to resign.

The economy was slowly grinding to a halt. Opposition was once again resurfacing against the ruling class. Mrs Bandaranaike was fully aware that in a rapidly escalating crisis the people would not only rally round the ULF, but would even be prepared for a revolution, since the “middle path” had once again been discredited and they associated the rightist UNP with the 1953 *Hartal* (general strike). It was the convergence of all these factors that had brought about the ULF. Mrs Bandaranaike felt that it was far better, in the circumstances, to share power with the leaders of the working class than to be overthrown by the working class itself.

She made overtures to the LSSP to join her government with the promise of three ministries, including the ministry of finance. In this way, she realized she could rule securely; the LSSP would manage the economy for her and, if it failed, the LSSP and its socialism would be discredited. All this socio-political flux and these behind-the-scenes manoeuvres for cabinet posts broke up the ULF in less than five months after its inauguration.

At its delegates’ conference in June 1964, the LSSP accepted “Sinhala only” and resolved by majority vote to enter Mrs Bandaranaike’s government. This made the genuine revolutionary Tamil Marxists, led by Bala Tampoe, and their Sinhalese colleagues, led by Edmund Samarakkody, leave the LSSP and found the LSSP (Revolutionary), which became affiliated to the Fourth International.

Professor James Jupp writes on these events: “After three months of contorted manoeuvres and plots, designed mainly to exclude Philip and the Communists from the government, N.M. Perera, Anil Moonesinghe and Cholmondley Goonewardene entered Mrs Bandaranaike’s Cabinet.”

Why was all this happening to the “Marxists”? They were romantic arm-chair socialists who could not advance Marxian theoretical discourse towards a revolutionary socialist struggle. They had grave misconceptions of socialist theory and hence failed to advance the proletarian struggle. They were alienated from the Tamil people and failed to come to grips with the national

question and with the democratic demands of the Tamil people as an oppressed people. Their knowledge of Marxism-Leninism was evidently superficial and hence they failed to understand that it was their task to struggle against national oppression and to support the right to self-determination of the Tamil people.

We have seen that the Communist Party formulated its political strategies on this basis in 1944, but deviated from it in the 1960s. If the Marxist parties could not successfully prevent national oppression, then it was their clear duty to fight for the liberation of the oppressed Tamil nation. Lenin, in his "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination", states:

The proletariat must struggle against the enforced retention of oppressed nations within the bounds of the given state, which means that they must fight for the right to self-determination. The proletariat must demand freedom of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by "their own" nation. Otherwise, the internationalism of the proletariat would be nothing but empty words; neither confidence nor class solidarity would be possible between the workers of the oppressed and the oppressor nations.

If they had formulated their programme on genuine Marxist-Leninist bases and advanced the proletarian political struggle, and the struggle against the national oppression of the Tamils, they would at least have held in check the upper-class rulers and their lower-middle-class cohorts, and the Sri Lankan state would have been saved from the national disaster that it faces today. Instead, the old "revolutionaries" were becoming the new reactionaries, jockeying for cabinet posts and turning proletarian internationalism into Sinhala "Marxism", blended with chauvinism for electoral success. With the old "revolutionaries" holding *pirith*, attending *bana* and offering thanks to the Dalada Maligawa temple on their election victory in 1970, Sinhala "Marxism" became the Sinhala-Buddhist "Marxism" of the Republic of Sri Lanka.

With the LSSP entering the SLFP government, a fast-escalating revolutionary situation was averted. Mrs Bandaranaike generously thanked and complimented the LSSP: "The LSSP plays a dominant role among the urban working class and there are no basic differences between the two parties as the LSSP had eschewed revolution."¹⁹ She appointed the LSSP leader Dr N. M. Perera as minister of finance. This statement clearly reveals what she thought of the leaders and what she feared from the workers. It is also clearly indicative of her willingness to subdue the working class by co-opting their leaders, who were socially of her own class. The upper-class rulers knew that their class was a tiny minority without the necessary social base to justify retaining power in their hands. Hence their new political strategy of power-sharing by their co-optation of the bourgeois leaders of the working class and by their willingness to accommodate even the most extreme demands

of the Sinhalese-Buddhist lower-middle-class pressure groups.

With this strategy, new alignments and new contours came to be drawn in the political landscape of the country. We have seen that, in the early period, rivalry between the Sinhalese *Goyigama* and the *Karava* elite was intense, and the Tamil *Vellala* elite always combined with the *Goyigama*. Hence the *Karava* elite came to be hostile to the Tamils. They were intent on cracking the Sinhalese *Goyigama*-Tamil *Vellala* alliance as "senior" and "junior" partners.

They alone created the "Sinhala-only" policy, became its most extreme advocates and seized upon it as the opportunity to achieve their objective. The Sinhalese *Goyigama* leadership was at the beginning against the policy but reluctantly fell in line with it, without sharing their extremism, solely out of political expediency. That was Bandaranaike's stance. Jayewardene resorted to his famous march to Kandy because he was smarting under the first electoral defeat of his political career and wanted to make things difficult for Bandaranaike.

We have seen that at first the Sinhalese people were not enthusiastic about the chauvinist attitudes of their political leaders, who were really manipulating "Sinhala only" to achieve political power. The subsequent reality and the obvious benefits of "Sinhala only" unified the Sinhalese – low-country and Kandyan, *Goyigama* and *Karava*, Buddhists, Catholics and Christians.

Internally, these caste and religious groups were minorities within the dominant Buddhist *Goyigama* majority, which treated them with contempt. But now, with the achievement of "Sinhala only" and with the *Goyigama* Sinhalese-Tamil *Vellala* alliance effectively severed, the Sinhalese *Goyigama* ruling group had to share power with the Sinhalese minority caste and religious groups. That was precisely what the latter wanted and achieved.

What was further needed for the newly emergent ruling Sinhalese upper class to perpetuate its power was the support of the Sinhalese urban working class and the continuing support of the Sinhalese lower middle class. They gained the support of the bourgeois leaders, who having "eschewed revolution" were willing to share power as subordinates and to domesticate the working class. There was no question of power for the workers and the people, whose leaders were willing to be the agents of the rulers.

The lower middle class, reaping the benefits of "Sinhala only", was advancing in public service and other employment at the expense of the Tamils, who had come to be excluded from these jobs. To fortify their position, the lower middle class was pressing for a Sinhalese-Buddhist state and *poya* holidays, while the *Karavas*, in the vanguard, were hell-bent on ensuring that the Tamils were in no way accommodated, from fear of the revival of the Sinhalese *Goyigama*-Tamil *Vellala* alliance. The upper class was willing to give in to these pressures and were accommodating, at times, to the Tamil *Vellala* bourgeois leaders, but never to the grievances of the Tamil masses.

This new alignment secured the upper class in power. The Tamils were continually held down at the bottom of the new social pyramid and, to

perpetuate this situation, they needed to be portrayed as disobedient, recalcitrant, contemptible and disloyal. The Sinhalese working class, for all its suffering, was made to feel that it was at least on top of the Indian and Sri Lanka Tamils. Until this class alignment plays itself out, or is smashed, power will continue to be in upper-class hands and there will be no solution to the class question or the national question.

The LSSP's decision to accept "Sinhala only" shattered the Tamils' last hope of obtaining recognition of the Tamil language as their official language. They became gloomy and helpless, realizing that "Sinhala only" had become irreversible. Unwilling to reconcile themselves to such a reality, large numbers of Tamils looked to emigration as an alternative. There was a great exodus of educated Tamils to Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and other emergent countries of Africa which wanted their learning, skills and expertise. Many uprooted themselves and went to Australia, Canada, the United States and Britain, never to return. But this option was only available to the educated; it was an escape from oppression for the intellectuals.

The Tamil nation had to face the full fury of "Sinhala only" and covert and overt discrimination by the Sinhala government and the Sinhalese people in every walk of life. In Colombo and other Sinhalese areas, the Tamils were even afraid to speak among themselves in Tamil in public transport and public places. The discrimination effected under "Sinhala only" and the frequent beating, rape and murder of Tamils, and destruction of their homes in anti-Tamil riots, reduced them to the status of a contemptible alien people in the eyes of the Sinhalese. Hence they had to hide their Tamil identity, even change their dress and their traditional ways of life, so as not to show their cultural distinctiveness.

In 1964 Mrs Bandaranaike's government fell victim to the shifting sands of bourgeois political loyalties. When she sought to gag the Lake House newspapers in 1964, the UNP hatched a political plot with C.P. de Silva, her minister of lands and leader of the house, to defeat her on the floor of the house. At the vote on the Speech from the Throne during a new session of parliament, C.P. de Silva crossed the floor with 13 SLFP MPs and defeated the government, as they had calculated, by one vote. Mrs Bandaranaike declared that "the plot was promoted by those very same forces that engineered from behind the scenes the abortive coup d'état of January 1962".²⁰ Parliament was once again prematurely dissolved and a general election was fixed for March 1965.

Birthpangs of Tamil Separatism

The arrest and detention of all the FP MPs for six months, the two-year state of emergency and military occupation in the Tamil areas and, most of all, Mrs Bandaranaike's waging of a proxy war through Sinhalese soldiers to beat the Tamil people into submission — all these gave rise to a new era of oppression, and led the Tamils increasingly to question their plight.

From 1960 to 1964, Mrs Bandaranaike set herself up as a political master unwilling to have anything to do with her recalcitrant subjects. She was against dialogue and resolutely opposed to the FP MPs. As a result, during her premiership the Tamils remained outside the political system, with an intractable language problem and subjected to national oppression. Her tactics were to isolate the FP MPs and to show the Tamils that *satyagraha*, and other disruptive methods adopted by the FP, would not work and that the Tamils would therefore be the losers, having been misled by the FP MPs.

From that time, this line of thinking became dominant among the Sinhalese politicians of all parties, most of all among the “left-wing” politicians. Their propaganda disseminated it to the Sinhalese people. Its essence was that the Tamils had no language problem; it was the FP which was the cause of the trouble.

A great many Sinhalese sincerely believed this. In a paper read at a seminar on “National Unity”, as late as February 1976, a scholar *bhikkhu*, Baddegama Wimalawansa Anunayake, typified this thinking:

... there are in this country a handful who work against the Sinhalese. Yet, except for political disruption carried on by the Federal Party, which is considered a Catholic organization even by the Hindus, I do not think there is any clash among the communities in this country.²¹

The reality was that the Tamils, seeing the stark reality of Sinhalese rule and their own enslaved plight, were pressing their conservative FP MPs for immediate restoration of their language rights and their human dignity. It was they who suffered from “Sinhala only” and the resulting loss of dignity, self-respect, jobs and educational opportunities. It affected their everyday lives. They began to search for solutions. They were ahead of their MPs. In their minds, the situation dictated the assertion of Tamil independence. The impasse was impossible to endure. Every Tamil had become confident that there was no alternative but to resist Sinhalese rule – the goal being immediate equality within a unified polity, or independence and a separate sovereign Tamil state comprising the north and east.

The FP still wished to collaborate with Sinhalese politicians of the UNP. In the run-up to the March 1965 election they entered into a secret pact with Dudley Senanayake to lend him parliamentary support in return for Tamil language and other rights. On the other hand, C. Suntheralingam, always an independent Tamil MP, who in the colonial period had been in the forefront of the campaign for national unity, and had been a minister in the first D.S. Senanayake cabinet, was the first to articulate Tamil separatism in the early 1960s. He correctly understood that the goal of Tamil nationalism was simply equality between people, their languages and cultures; it would never accept subservience.

His long association with his conservative Sinhalese counterparts made him aware of their new goal of Sinhalese hegemony. He unequivocally, and prophetically, declared that “the Sinhalese would never honour political

agreements and Sinhalese politicians, be they on the right, centre or left, will never concede to the Tamils their language rights”.

Suntheralingam rejected the unitary state and called for the restoration of the *status quo ante*: a separate Tamil state of Eelam, comprising the ancient Tamil areas of the north and east Lanka. This demand was later taken up by V. Navaratnam, the MP for Kayts, on resigning from the FP. In this way, Tamil separatist nationalism was born.

Though at that time the FP felt there was still room for accommodation in parliamentary terms, this was very much in doubt. The FP secretary, in 1964, gave the first vague parliamentary expression of separatism, in these words:

If the leaders of the Sinhalese people persist in this attitude, I will say that when you will be advocating federalism, we will rather choose to have a division of the country even at the cost of several lives.

Dudley Senanayake Forms a “National” Government

By attempting to gag the press, Mrs Bandaranaike paved the way for her defeat not only in parliament but also in the country. For the March 1965 election, she entered into a no-contest pact with her new-found partner the LSSP and her ally the CP. The UNP, led by Dudley Senanayake, formed an alliance with C.P. de Silva’s newly-formed Sri Lanka Freedom Socialist Party (SLFSP). The UNP also agreed to participate in running the MEP of Philip Gunawardena, who had become a total reactionary and a willing tool in the hands of the Sinhalese-Buddhist fanatic Mettananda. Senanayake also concluded a secret pact with Chelvanayakam, the FP leader. Smaller groupings like those of Dahanayake, Iriyagolle and Rajaratna, whose methods included political somersaults and chicanery, were allied to the UNP.

By its opposition to the schools take-over, the UNP had forfeited the total support of the Catholics, which to some extent it had already lost in July 1960. By assembling about 6,000 *bhikkhus* for a mass rally against the Press Bill in November 1964, the UNP had won the support of the Buddhist leadership. This support, however, had another motive. The *Maha Nayakes* were opposed to Mrs Bandaranaike accepting the “Marxist” LSSP, even though at that time it supported “Sinhala only”. Since “Sinhala only” was well entrenched and rigorously enforced, the UNP, MEP, SLFSP and their allies stated that they were for a Buddhist government. In the election campaign, while attacking Mrs Bandaranaike, Mettananda said that he would ensure that the Buddha *Sasana* was protected, although he was not a candidate.

Mrs Bandaranaike’s theme during the campaign was that she had faithfully followed “Bandaranaike’s policies”. To the people, faced with a siege economy with food queues and consumer shortages because of the “closed economy” from 1960 to 1964, this hyperbole meant nothing. It certainly appeared unconvincing since they saw men who had worked closely with

the late leader, such as C.P. de Silva, Philip Gunawardena, W. Dahanayake *et al*, now ganged up against her.

Mrs Bandaranaike and her allies' trump card was Dudley Senanayake's secret pact with Chelvanayakam. Dictated by the cut-throat electioneering of all political parties, it was kept secret by Senanayake, but gave his adversaries the opportunity for plenty of speculation. They assailed the pact as involving the repeal of the "Sinhala-only" act, the Sinhalese having to study Tamil, "parity of status", etc. Such rhetoric did not altogether convince Sinhalese electors, since the "father of Sinhala-only", Mettananda, was against them, and prominent supporters of the "Sinhala-only" act were allied with the UNP.

In her 1965 Independence Day (4 February) message, which was delivered during the election campaign, Mrs Bandaranaike wrote to the Sinhalese nation:

We have removed the disabilities placed on the majority of our people by the foreign ruler. The language and the religion of the majority, which had been deliberately impeded and discouraged by the foreigner for his purposes, have been developed and their rightful place ensured. While respecting the rights of the minorities, the government, mindful of its obligations to the majority of the people, has restored their lost rights.²²

The election verdict was inconclusive, in that no single party obtained a working majority. Out of 145 seats, the UNP won 66, the SLFP 41, the LSSP 10, the CP four, the SLFSP five and the MEP one. In the Tamil areas, the FP won 14 and the Tamil Congress of G.G. Ponnambalam three seats. The SLFP lost in all nine Catholic-majority seats. It won only one of the 18 urban seats and only six of the 27 low-country Sinhalese Ruhunu seats, as against 14 in July 1960. These reversals were a reaction against Kandyan-Sinhalese ascendancy under Mrs Bandaranaike. The SLFP won only 22 of the 69 predominantly Kandyan-Sinhalese seats, as against 41 in July 1960. Her poor performance in the Kandyan stronghold was because of Buddhist opposition to her alliance with the one-time Marxist parties.²³

By force of circumstances, Dudley Senanayake formed what he called a "national" government with the support of C.P. de Silva, Philip Gunawardena, Dahanayake, Iriyagolle, *et al*. The FP and the TC lent him their support, the FP in accordance with its secret pact and the TC according to its tradition. To enhance the government's truly bourgeois "national" complexion, Dudley Senanayake co-opted S. Thondaman, the leader of the one million Indian Tamils, by making him a nominated MP. The co-opting of bourgeois leaders was Dudley Senanayake's strategy for assuming power without conceding equal citizenship to the Tamils.

He offered cabinet portfolios to the FP, but Chelvanayakam politely declined. The FP leader sought nothing for himself or the party MPs. His was a mission fired by the cause of Tamil equality in a unified polity, if a separate state for the Tamils proved impossible to achieve. Being a conservative, he worked within the existing legal parameters, a strategy which proved

totally incapable of resisting the sweep of Sinhalese chauvinism.

Chelvanayakam had another reason for declining a post. At its 1956 national convention, the FP had resolved not to enter the cabinet of any Sinhalese government until the Tamil language was given "parity of status". But as a courteous gesture, Chelvanayakam nominated an FP stalwart, M. Tiruchelvam, who was not an MP but entered the cabinet through the senate.

Since the FP had done so, G.G. Ponnambalam, the TC leader, also refused Dudley's offer. Dudley's cabinet included C.P. de Silva, Philip Gunawardena, Dahanayake, Iriyagolle, *et al.* It was an eminently conservative cabinet, held together by dire necessity because of the inconclusive electoral verdict. It was a strange combination of friends and foes with diverse political interests and power bases.

At first it seemed that there was some accommodation of the Tamil leaders and MPs, without much recognition of their cause. Since, while supporting the government, the FP and TC opted to stay out of the cabinet, Dudley Senanayake formed a "committee of ten", which included Chelvanayakam, Ponnambalam, Thondaman and some senior cabinet ministers, as an unofficial cabinet. Senanayake set about taking steps to implement the pact with Chelvanayakam, kept secret until the election was over.

But no sooner was the government formed than criticism of it, because of its dependence on Tamil support, was mounted by the SLFP-LSSP-CP trio, then in opposition. In the course of the debate on the Speech from the Throne, they savagely attacked Senanayake for appointing Thondaman a nominated MP and Tiruchelvam as minister of local government. They described the government as *Hath Haula* (seven feuding partners). Felix Dias Bandaranaike of the SLFP asked pointedly how the local government of the Sinhalese could be entrusted to a Tamil minister.

Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact

Immediately after the dissolution of parliament in December 1964, a series of meetings was held between Dudley Senanayake and Chelvanayakam, at the former's request. Dudley wanted the support of the FP if he formed a government, as all the omens seemed to indicate. Because of its isolation by Mrs Bandaranaike and the pressure of the Tamil people for an immediate solution to their problems, the FP presented a minimum set of demands along the lines of the abortive "B-C pact" of 1957, as a quid pro quo for its support. After discussions, Senanayake agreed to a somewhat modified package.

Like its predecessor, the central feature of the "Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact" of 1965, from the FP's standpoint, was the establishment of district councils with delegated powers, which were to be agreed later. On the use of the Tamil language, since the 1958 Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act remained a dead letter and no regulations had been framed under it, Senanayake agreed to frame new regulations making the Tamil language the

language of administration and record in the northern and eastern provinces.

It was also agreed that provision would be made in the regulations for Tamil-speaking people to transact official and other business in Tamil throughout the country. Senanayake also agreed to amend the 1961 Language of the Courts Act, which had substituted Sinhala for English in court proceedings in the northern and eastern provinces. As to colonization and resettlement, it was agreed that lands in the northern and eastern provinces would, in the first instance, be granted to landless residents within the districts of the two provinces, then to Tamil-speaking residents in the two provinces, and finally to other citizens, preference being given to Tamil citizens, resident in the rest of the island. (The "Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact" appears as an Appendix.)

The provisions of the pact reveal, on the face of it, a retreat by the FP out of anxiety to find a face-saving formula. The FP's many reversals at the hands of Mrs Bandaranaike were also clearly imprinted in the terms of the pact. The FP's policies had been overtaken by events. It had no comprehension of concrete historical conditions or of the dynamics of Tamil separatist nationalism. Its leaders were seeking to imprison the Tamil struggle within their conservative policies of alignment with their bourgeois counterparts.

Because of their many reversals and sufferings, the Tamils were beginning to shed their traditional conservatism and were becoming a progressive force. Some were even seeking to join with genuine progressive forces among the Sinhalese, but none could be found free of chauvinism and opportunism. Perhaps it is appropriate, in this context, to record that in August 1969 the author brought together a number of ex-LSSP and ex-CP members, including Dr S. Anandaraja, R. Panuthevan, E. Vivekanandan and others, and formed the Tamil Socialist Front, which held its inaugural meeting at Anaipanthi College of Higher Studies. But its progress was greatly undermined by the LSSP and it soon collapsed.

The FP MPs, following the lead of their Sinhalese counterparts, first wanted to win elections, then seek an accommodation. They had romantic notions of being the kingmakers between the contending Sinhalese factions.

They were relying on the ingenuity and sincerity of Chelvanayakam — whom they reverently called *Thanthai* (Father), a man of 75 years, suffering from acute Parkinson's disease — to bring deliverance to the Tamil nation. In the political game, they too, following their Sinhalese counterparts, preyed on the passions of the Tamils, instead of evolving a realistic programme for the liberation of the oppressed Tamil nation.

Their policies led the Tamils to total disaster, reducing them to a community of slaves subjected to genocidal repression.

The Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact substituted district councils for the regional councils of the "B-C pact". The term "regional" clearly implied autonomy and so was unacceptable to Dudley Senanayake. Hence "district", the prevailing unit of local governmental administration, was substituted. The regional councils had referred to the geographically contiguous Tamil areas of the north and east and the B-C pact had contained provisions for

their amalgamation “beyond Provincial limits”. But the district councils were to be fragmented units, without politico-cultural coherence; yet somehow this had become acceptable to the FP, which at its 1956 national convention had called for the “establishment of one or more linguistic state or states . . . of the Tamil-speaking people”.

The “B–C pact” had contained agreed areas of devolution, even wider and more extensive than those granted to the states under the Indian constitution, to the regions under the Nigerian federal system or to the provinces under the Canadian constitution. This new pact did not specify, even in outline, what devolved powers were to be given to the district councils. How could the FP have agreed so abjectly to an empty shell of district councils?

The FP’s political rhetoric to the Tamil people had from the first been couched in terms of Tamil *Arasu* (government). On this basis it had sought votes and won elections, ever since 1956, rivalling the politically nondescript, lame duck Tamil Congress. The FP had held the Tamil people enthralled with romantic and utopian notions of federalism and Tamil *Arasu*, but in bargaining with their political masters proved unable to secure the simplest forms of devolution of power.

The Tamil language provisions in the new pact were no more than any Sinhalese government would concede from sheer expediency. The colonization and resettlement provisions merely blunted the rough edges of current practice. Here, too, the FP retreated from the fundamental need to secure recognition of exclusive territories for the Tamil people. It also agreed to the introduction of D.S. Senanayake’s nebulous citizenship qualification for land entitlement, thereby denying the Indian Tamils the right to obtain land from the government in the Tamil homelands.

Crux of the Conflict

The FP never learnt any lessons from the fate that befell the “B–C pact”. It also never understood the goals of the Sinhalese politicians who, after independence, adopted Dharmapala’s ideas for the Sinhalese and for Sri Lanka. During the Sinhala-only campaign they propagated these ideas among the ordinary Sinhalese. Sinhala-only was later contrived as a stepping-stone and as the foundation from which to articulate “Sinhalese people only”, and then “Sinhalese-Buddhist people only”, in Sri Lanka. This was the message of Dharmapala, the prophet of the “sweet gentle Aryan children of an ancient historic race”.

In 1965, Dharmapala’s writings were collected and published by Mrs Bandaranaike’s government, in particular by the ministry of education and cultural affairs, with the highly evocative title *Return to Righteousness*.²⁴ As we have seen earlier, in Dharmapala’s view there is not only no place for the Tamils, but “the pagan Tamils . . . devastated the land, destroyed ancient temples . . . and nearly annihilated the historic race”. As the custodian, perhaps, of Dharmapala’s beliefs and vision, Mrs Bandaranaike declared in

1967: "The Tamil people must accept the fact that the Sinhala majority will no longer permit themselves to be cheated of their rights."²⁵

And having perhaps been convinced by Dharmapala's falsified history, the *Maha Nayake* of the Ramanya sect said, in May 1967, that: "If the Tamils get hold of the country, the Sinhalese will have to jump into the sea. It is essential therefore, to safeguard our [*sic*] country, the race, and the religion, and to work with that object in mind."²⁶

In order to achieve the goal set by Dharmapala, Sinhalese politicians resurrected his falsified history of the country and the people, published it at state expense and let him convince the present-day generation of Sinhalese of the need to deprive and enslave the Tamil people so that they might claim the whole country as theirs. Since independence, the aim of the Sinhalese, translated into state policy, had been to deny the birthright of the Tamils and the other communities, and to achieve the goal set by Dharmapala — Sri Lanka belonged to the Sinhalese, the "sons of the soil" and, as he said, "the country of the Sinhalese must be governed by the Sinhalese".

The realization of this goal was no easy task. It required the conscious and concerted effort of the whole Sinhalese nation — the politicians, the Buddhist *bhikkhus*, the ministry of education and cultural affairs, the university — so that learned Sinhalese could give an academic rationale to Sinhalese chauvinism by depicting it as the flowering of Sinhalese nationalism — the army, the police, in short, every institution the government could muster in the cause.

They erected statues of Dharmapala in many places in Colombo city and in the towns and villages. Likewise, many streets were renamed Dharmapala Road. In the 1960s, the second most important arterial highway in Colombo city was renamed Dharmapala Road, and a Dharmapala statue was erected beside it. In place of the earlier "country, race, religion" and the later "language, nation, country", the unspoken trinity came to be "Sinhalese, Buddhism, Dharmapala". His title the "guardian of doctrine" was embellished to become the "guardian of doctrine, people and country". How these three were brought together in a monumental edifice can be seen in the following passage by Gananath Obeyesekere, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California in San Diego:

Imagine a drive down a major highway in Colombo, formerly known as Turret Road, but recently renamed Anagarika Dharmapala Road. If we turn right, we come to a traffic roundabout at a point where three roads meet. Behind the roundabout is a large *bo* tree (*figus religiosa*) the [branch of the] tree under which the Buddha received enlightenment). On the roundabout are four huge concrete maps of Sri Lanka about five feet high, facing the four directions in a square. In the middle of each map is engraved a precept of Buddhism: *mudita* ("sympathetic joy"), *upeka* ("equanimity"), *karuna* ("compassion"), *metta* ("universal love"). At the top of each map is printed the traditional national

emblem of the Sinhalese, a highly stylised lion with a sword held aloft in one paw. The lion relates to the origin myth of the Sinhalese, the themes of which deal with bestiality, incest and parricide. Thus the abstract universal ethical concepts of Buddhism are juxtaposed to a symbol representing the very opposite. This concrete edifice expresses a simple but telling fact: the Sinhala Buddhists are claiming Sri Lanka as their nation.²⁷

The ethical concepts of Buddhism do indeed stand alongside the lion on Anagarika Dharmapala Road, guarded by Dharmapala himself in concrete form. The monument is clearly significant for the Sinhalese but an affront to the Tamils. To the Sinhalese, it represents what cannot be reduced to words. For our study, the most important aspect of this edifice is that the lion stands on top of the map of Sri Lanka (not within or below it), i.e. immediately over the heartland of the Tamil people, with sword held high. The structure, with its concrete maps of Sri Lanka faces in all four directions – west to east, north to south – signifying that the lion is supreme and master of all Sri Lanka.

Professor Obeyesekere states: “Anagarika Dharmapala died in 1933; in 1948 the Ceylonese achieved independence, and in 1956 effective political power was in the hands of the Sinhalese-Buddhist population . . . it became possible for them to claim for Sri Lanka the status of Sinhala Buddhist (not simply Sinhalese) nation.”

The crux of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka is over this claim, which the Sinhalese politicians want to turn into reality and which requires that the Tamil people be subjugated and enslaved.

New Sinhala-Buddhist Ideology

The inconclusive electoral verdict of 1965 constituted an important watershed in Sinhalese politics. Despite the SLFP's break-up and the departure of 14 MPs, and with all the traditionally powerful electoral forces – the Buddhist *bhikkhus*, the press, the Catholic church, Mettananda, etc. – assembled against her, Mrs Bandaranaike's SLFP won 41 seats and received 30.24% of the votes, while the UNP got 66 seats and 38.93%. The combined SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance won 55 seats and received 40.40% of the votes.

Value judgements aside, this meant that the Sinhalese electorate had substantially accepted Mrs Bandaranaike's policies. There was no reason why it should not. These policies amounted to Sinhalese-Buddhist paramountcy. All secular issues had to be judged as to how best they served the interests of the Sinhalese people and the Buddhist religion. This was the new super-structure and the new status quo erected on Dharmapala's philosophy to achieve his goal. Any other political ideology must serve this object; if it even remotely conflicted with it, it would be jettisoned. Even the UNP had to accept this, and did accept it. There emerged a consensus, on the essentials

of this new ideology, between the two main political parties. In his analysis of Sri Lanka's politics, Professor James Jupp comments on this consensus:

Because the *Sangha* acts so effectively as a veto group it is essential that no Sinhalese party leader should omit to worship in public or to give thanks after election campaigns. At the week-long celebrations in 1969 surrounding the placing of a gold rail around the Bo tree at Anuradhapura, both Mrs Bandaranaike and the Prime Minister took an active part, Dudley Senanayake even went so far as to pledge "that he and Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike would work together without any differences and party prejudices in all religious matters for the greater glory and welfare of the Buddha *Sasana*". Part of the consensus established between the major parties is that religious observance has a legitimate part in politics. While not accepted officially it is a natural corollary of this that monks should take part in politics both as individuals and in organized groups. Above all it institutionalizes, as surely as in ancient Ceylon, the principle that the *Sangha* advises the state. The golden age when this was so is regularly referred to by most militant Buddhists . . . The general consequence of this (Buddhist) religious pressure has been to transform the secular state of 1948 into one in which the government is obliged to give Buddhism the "foremost place" . . . After 1956 Buddhism had become sufficiently well-organized to exert constant pressure, even if it had no ideological consistency.²⁸

It was during the period of the final and fairly rapid evolution of this new Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, and the state policy that reflected it, that heightened Sinhalese-Tamil conflict occurred. This was only natural. What was taking place was a transformation from a secular state, in which all persons were equal and all communities and groups possessed equal rights, held together by an impartial state and ruled by an impartial judiciary, to a quasi-theocratic state under the hegemony of the Sinhalese people and the Sinhala language, with Buddhism as the "state" religion, Sinhalese-Buddhist partisan rule and a judiciary which lived in fear.

This new ideology was systematized by Piyadasa Sirisena, Munidasa Cumaratunga and a host of others. When the political floodgates were opened by the arithmetic of the ballot box, this ideology burst forth and made the goal a reality within a very short time. Neither the ideology nor the method arose historically; nor did political events, nor the conflict which they engendered, occur dialectically. They were merely manipulations of the Sinhalese people and of the body politic of the country. Hence the benefits that had been obtained could be retained only by an army of Sinhalese soldiers.

To establish a Sinhala-Buddhist state, new propaganda was necessary to show that the Tamil people had no legitimate place in Sri Lanka. It was here that *Mahavamsa* myths and the Vijaya legend became directly relevant. The Sinhalese people were encouraged to absorb these myths and legends, which haunted them and prevented any honest scientific investigation into

ancient history. In the early 1960s, when the renowned archaeologist Dr S. Paranavitana declared that the traditional account of Buddha's visits to the island was pure legend, the *bhikkhus* were furious.

To convince both the Sinhalese and the Tamils that there was no rightful place for the Tamils, the new propaganda became multi-faceted. To support the "Sinhala-only" campaign of the 1950s, it was asserted that the Tamils had only recently come from south India and occupied a part of the country, and were now trying to occupy the rest and push the Sinhalese into the sea. This prospect was held out to the Sinhalese in meetings organized by the *bhikkhus* for the MEP in 1956. Similar ideas were expounded by the *Maha Nayake* of the Ramanya sect in 1967.

This was what some 90% of Sinhalese politicians believed. As for the Sinhalese people, this type of propaganda was immensely successful: 99% of them believed it. Asked by the Sinhalese how recently the Tamils had come, the propagandists would point to the Indian Tamil plantation workers, inferring that the Tamils of the north and east were part of the same immigrant community who, on arrival at the Talaimannar port, instead of proceeding to the plantations, had settled in the north and gradually drifted to the east — and now wanted to take over the rest of the country.

Sinhalese university academics played a very useful back-up role in this propaganda. They would neither affirm the facts nor deny the propaganda, but in a subtle way emphasized the 2,500-year-old story of Vijaya and his men, and treated the Tamils as invaders from south India. A typical example is the standpoint taken by I.D.S. Weerawardena, Professor of Politics and Government, in his *Ceylon and Her Citizens* (1956):

The Sinhalese who form the largest group in our [*sic*] country came more than 2,000 years ago, probably from the region close to Bengal. You must have read the story of Vijaya and his 700 men. That story illustrates the fact that our Sinhalese ancestors came from North India. They settled in the north-central part of the island and gradually spread over the rest [*sic*] of the country. It is difficult to say exactly when the Tamils came to this country. Some people think that a few Tamils might have been in Ceylon as Traders [*sic*] even when the Sinhalese first came. But it is certain that they came in large numbers in the Tamil invasions which began very early in our [*sic*] history. In the 13th Century, they were powerful enough to establish an independent kingdom in the North.

Even more important is the belief among the Sinhalese that the real home of the Tamils is Tamil Nadu, south India, and that, having recently come to Sri Lanka, they live there thanks to Sinhalese-Buddhist compassion and magnanimity. The *bhikkhu* Baddegama Wimalawansa Anunayake wrote:

The Buddhists of Sri Lanka have never done any injustice to anyone. It is the tradition of the Sinhalese Buddhists to receive even strangers

very cordially At present there are in this country a number of communities The Buddhists expect the goodwill and co-operation of them all If there were wars, they were only against the Dravidian invaders from South India.

According to the propaganda, even after being allowed to stay and being given a part of the country, the Tamils wanted to create trouble for the Sinhalese. Since they threatened the integrity of the Buddhist state, then military occupation, state terrorism, the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act were all justified.

As a result of these beliefs, Mrs Bandaranaike sought to cut off any connection between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Tamils of Tamil Nadu. She banned the small Dravida Munnetra Kalazagam group in Sri Lanka in 1962; got Dudley Senanayake to ban it again in 1967; restricted and eventually banned the importation of Tamil newspapers, periodicals and films from Tamil Nadu; refused visas for Tamil film actors to visit Sri Lanka; refused to permit the visit of M. Karunanithi, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu state; deported Dr Era Janathanam of Tamil Nadu; and sanctioned police atrocities in which nine Tamils were killed, at the Fourth International Tamil Research Conference held in Jaffna in 1974, where scholars of the Tamil language and literature had assembled from all over the world.

A more recent example of this propaganda is the claim that the Tamil liberation struggle is being supported by the government and people of Tamil Nadu. David Selbourne, an investigative journalist who visited Sri Lanka in October 1982 to study the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, wrote:

At the Headquarters of the Sri Lanka Buddhist Congress, its secretary, the Venerable Diriyagaha Yasassi (*bhikkhu*) complains that the Buddhists are "at a disadvantage". "They," he adds – the Tamils of Sri Lanka are always *They* – "have the support of outside powers."

"Who?" I ask.

He smiles broadly, but he does not answer. He is referring to the dark mass (in his mind) of 50 million other Tamils across the channel from Jaffna, in Tamil Nadu. In the fevered imaginations of the Buddhists, these "outside powers" are breathing down their necks, a majority with a minority complex . . . Constitution, laws, army, government – to say nothing of Lord Buddha and the Prevention of Terrorism Act – are on their side. Theirs is the official language and state religion; even the national flag carries a Sinhalese lion and four leaves of the peepul tree . . . Yet the Buddhists say of the Hindus: "They can always go to India. Where can we Buddhists go?" This is insularity with a vengeance.²⁹

Not Majority-Minority, But Two Nations

The so-called "majority-minority" mystification has been the rationale for much Sinhalese chauvinism and for the continuation of the oppression of the Tamil people under their bourgeois leadership.

The majority-minority idea arose historically from the nature of British liberal democracy in 1790. The British liberal conscience was nurtured on the Benthamite idea of the "greatest happiness of the greater number". This rested on the belief that, in a culturally homogeneous state, there is always a majority opinion and that opinion should be discovered on the basis of one man one vote and given effect.

It is taken for granted that the majority opinion must be right, at least at the time. Therefore the elected majority, since it had received democratic sanction, had the right to impose its will on the minority which held a contrary opinion. It was also conceded that the minority had rights and that government by majority should be based on justice and fairness. In this way, the idea that the will of the majority should prevail became sanctified. It became mystified in the dictum: "The majority shall have its way and the minority shall have its say."

It is in this sense that J.S. Mill wrote against the "tyranny of the majority" in his *On Liberty*:

... In political speculation "the tyranny of the majority" is now generally included among the evils against which society requires to be on its guard. Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived that when society is itself the tyrant — society collectively over the separate individuals who compose it — its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates; and if it issues wrong mandates instead of the right, or any mandates at all in things which they ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since . . . it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development and, if possible, prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.

Later writers used the terms "majority" and "minority" in this sense, without ever defining them. In the states which arose on the principle of

nationality, from the end of the 18th Century, in which the people were culturally homogeneous or had become assimilated to the dominant culture, it was found unnecessary to define these terms, since they necessarily referred to "majority" and "minority" on a social basis, never on the basis of national-ethnic or cultural plurality.

In Britain, Wales became part of England in 1536. The accession of James I of England united the crowns, without necessarily uniting the two countries. The Act of Union of 1707 united England and Scotland and created the United Kingdom. English language, a mixture of Teutonic and Latin elements, became the language of the British people. The government was secular. Imperialism further united the British, for it was colonial exploitation and the plunder of India that led to the industrial revolution and the prosperity of the middle class.³⁰ British society divided on the basis of classes — the rich and the poor — and the majority-minority concept referred to social opinion on the basis of classes, and not to the majority English and the minority Welsh and Scots. At any rate, it never meant the majority English having their way and the minority Welsh and Scots only having their say.

The term "minority" denotes by implication a part of a larger whole. In a culturally homogeneous society like Britain, the minority Welsh and Scots are part of the larger whole. But in a culturally heterogeneous society like Sri Lanka, the Tamils are not part of the Sinhalese nation, and Sinhalese and Tamils are not one nation but two, distinct and separate.

The Tamils are not a minority in the sense in which that term is used by sociologists or political scientists. In Sri Lanka, the democratic process of one man one vote does not produce a majority opinion distinct from the opinion of the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples as culturally diverse ethnic nations. The real majority in Sri Lanka is the oppressed class of ordinary people, both Sinhalese and Tamil; and the minority is the small upper class which, by manipulating the system through its wealth, has got hold of political power and continues to govern. If the majority have the right to govern, the oppressed majority class must be put in power, or seize power, to safeguard its interests.

The Sinhalese and the Tamils are two nations, with equal national-ethnic rights, living within the same geographic entity and participating in one state. In view of their separate nationhood, numbers cease to be of any relevance. The one is not a "majority" or a "minority" vis-à-vis the other, for they are not larger or smaller parts of a whole.

The Tamils are not a minority sub-cultural group differing from the dominant group in an alien land, such as the Asian immigrants in Britain, or the Chinese in Malaysia, or the Indians in East Africa. These are cultural minorities who have no independent capacity for political organization to alter or change the state structure in those countries. The Tamils are a separate and distinct nation with an exclusive homeland of their own to which they owe patriotism as the land of their birth and of their forefathers. They are a nation possessing the capacity to alter the existing state structure and to constitute themselves a political state by their collective self-determination.

The 1966 Tamil Language Regulations

The clearest affirmation of the new Sinhala-Buddhist consensus between the two major Sinhalese political parties was evident in Dudley Senanayake's declaration, as soon as he assumed power, of the Buddhist *poya* days as the weekend holidays, making Saturdays and Sundays working days. This underlined to everyone that political power would be utilized to exalt Buddhist practices in the affairs of state.

Sri Lanka depended heavily on international trade and shipping, which were thrown into chaos by the decision. Yet this chaotic state of affairs continued until 1970, when Mrs Bandaranaike came to power and reversed it, as the accredited custodian of the new Sinhala-Buddhist statism.

As a concession to win Tamil FP and TC support, Senanayake removed the dismissal notices served on Tamil public servants and gave them the option to retire from service on the ground of non-proficiency in the official language. As a further demonstration of goodwill, he sent his traditional Tamil ally, G.G. Ponnambalam, to head the Sri Lanka delegation to the UN General Assembly in 1967.

In 1966, Dudley Senanayake's government formulated and published the regulations under the Tamil Language (Special Provision) Act 28 of 1958. The regulations provided for the use of Tamil in government business in the northern and eastern provinces, and for the maintenance of public records there. They also allowed official correspondence, and the conduct of affairs of local bodies, in these areas to be in Tamil. Finally, they provided for all legislation, subordinate rules and orders, and official publications to be issued in the Tamil language.

The regulation was, however, silent on the use of Tamil outside the north and east, where one-quarter of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the bulk of the Tamil-speaking Muslims and all the Indian Tamils lived and worked. The obvious reason was that "Sinhala-only" should prevail and they must learn Sinhala.

This was to be so even though the "Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact" had stated: "Mr Senanayake also explained that a Tamil-speaking person should be entitled to transact business in Tamil throughout the island" and "agreed that action . . . would be taken" to give effect to it. Nor did the regulation contain any provision regarding the use of the Tamil language in court proceedings in the north and east, as agreed in the pact. These provisions were said to be subject to the clause: "Without prejudice to the operation of the Official Language Act 33 of 1956, which declared Sinhala language to be the one official language of Ceylon." (This regulation appears as an Appendix.)

Since the forging of the "Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact", the SLFP-LSSP-CP trio had waited to see what form its provisions would take. They were confident that, if Dudley sought to give effect to the provisions, they could cause his precarious "national" government to fall. Dudley was equally aware of what was in store for him if he gave teeth even to these muted and virtually ineffectual provisions. While they waited, they had their guns

pointed at him.

Hence the toothless provisions of the Tamil Language Regulations of 1966. Yet Dudley was aware that he had not successfully pre-empted his opponents. It was not a question of the Tamil people and their rights, but a power struggle and a propaganda campaign designed to keep people in the dark. Dudley had taken good care to nip in the bud any agitation against the provisions. The SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance declared that the regulations were a sell-out to win Tamil support and were *ultra vires* vis-à-vis the main 1958 act. They found nothing more concrete to seize on.

The opposition called for a leaderless procession, organized by some *bhikkhus*, along Dharmapala Road to the parliament building, as the first offensive. The demonstrators resorted to violence on the way by stoning and breaking shops; the police opened fire and one *bhikkhu* was killed. The opposition realized that the regulations, as now framed, were not worth their powder and shot.

They continued, however, to attack them as a betrayal of the Sinhalese-Buddhist cause and a concession to the Tamils. Afraid of the long-term consequences, Dudley Senanayake refused to implement the regulations. In this way, the 1958 Tamil Language (Special Provision) Act, and the regulations framed under it eight years later, remained dead letters from the beginning.

The FP became aware that nothing could be obtained from the Sinhalese political parties. Yet it continued to be part of the government, hoping that the promised district councils would provide a face-saving formula to end its political predicament. To satisfy the FP, in 1968 Dudley Senanayake laid before parliament a District Councils Bill, designed to group together the primary local bodies, with no powers other than those they already possessed.

Even these powerless district councils were attacked by the opposition as yet another concession to win Tamil support. Dudley panicked and, not wanting to run into a storm that might affect his precarious power base, quickly abandoned the bill. The FP was left high and dry. The Tamils had once more reached a blind alley. A feeling of hopelessness engulfed them.

But these reversals made some of them more self-reliant, looking no longer to government employment but to self-employment, to make the best of the "arid" lands. Young educated Tamils, without waiting for jobs which the discriminatory system would not provide, took to farming of subsidiary food crops. They set up the Muthu Iyan Kadu Youth Settlement Scheme, which became a model of success for the whole island. In this scheme, by cultivating onions and chillies,

three youths earned over Rs. 20,000 each by cultivating three acres of jungle land allotted to them and eighteen others earned between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 20,000. These youths then purchased eight new tractors . . . The average annual income each youth received on this scheme (comprising 300 youths) was Rs. 6,117 – significantly higher

than what any of them could obtain from white collar employment.³¹

These are the success stories of individuals seeking to change the situation, but they do not constitute a solution to the national problems. The problem was created politically and must be solved politically, by the Tamil nation for the Tamil nation. This realization was slow in coming. We shall go into it in the next chapter.

About the same time as the District Councils Bill was aborted, the FP urged the UNP government to declare the precincts of Koneswaram, one of the four ancient *iswarams* (famous Hindu temples) of Sri Lanka, situated at Trincomalee in the Tamil eastern province, as "a protected area", like the Buddhist shrine areas. This aroused strong objections from the Sinhala-Buddhists, who were not prepared to concede that the Tamils had their own exclusive language, land or temples. If temples were to be protected, it must be only Buddhist shrines. If Hindu temples were to be protected, then the Buddha image must first be placed in the temple so that it became a Buddhist place of worship as well, as had happened in Kathirkamam.

Nothing should be exclusively for the Tamils. This was the thrust of Sinhala-Buddhist ethnocentrism. Hence in disgust the FP nominee, Tiruchelvam, a devout Hindu, resigned from the cabinet. The FP joined the ranks of the opposition. But the new Sinhala-Buddhist consensus rendered the FP politically ineffectual within parliament. Nothing of importance happened until the dissolution of parliament in late March 1970, when a general election was fixed for May 1970.

References

1. *Ceylon Daily News*, 4 December 1959.
2. James Jupp (*supra*, p. 83) wrote: "Mettananda's own proposed election broadcast for the MEP was rejected by the Minister for Posts (in charge of Radio Ceylon) because 'from the beginning it breathes anti-Catholic venom'. Philip Gunawardena, not to be outdone, promised to distribute the lands of the Catholic Church . . . and to expel all foreign fascist Catholics. Adding her small piece, Mrs Rajaratna of the Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna (Race Liberation Front) said that 'the LSSP was a Tamil political organisation whose leader Dr N.M. Perera was a traitor'."
3. *Ceylon Daily News*, 8 July 1960.
4. See Leslie Goonewardene, *A Short History of the LSSP*, Colombo, 1960, p. 65.
5. James Jupp, *supra*, p. 183.
6. *Ceylon Daily News*, 28 March 1952.
7. *Ceylon Daily News*, 17 May 1952.
8. C.R. da Silva, in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities* . . . , p. 471.
9. See *UN Yearbook of National Accounts*.
10. Fr Tissa Balasuriya, in *Race Relations in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1978, p. 146.
11. C.R. de Silva, *supra*, p. 472.

12. Quoted in K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *supra*, p. 131.
13. 72 *New Law Reports*, p. 337.
14. *Liyanage v. Reginam* (1966), 1 AER 650.
15. *Ceylon Observer*, 19 November 1963.
16. *Times of Ceylon*, 2 May 1963.
17. *Daily Mirror*, 12 August 1963.
18. In the tragic history of the rise, growth and decay of Marxism and "Marxists" in Sri Lanka, the Marxist parties polled a clear 387,544 or 20.54% of the votes in the 1947 election. But in the October 1982 presidential election, the LSSP leader Dr Colvin R. de Silva, who proclaimed that he would win, polled 584 votes, which was 0.83% of the total votes polled.
19. *Ceylon Observer*, 13 December 1964.
20. *Ceylon Observer*, 20 December 1964.
21. Reproduced in *Race Relations in Sri Lanka*, (ed.), Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, 1978, pp. 53-54.
22. "Prime Minister's Independence Day Message", in *Ceylon Today*, Vol. XIV, 1965. Since 1956 the Ceylon Independence Day has been observed as a day of mourning by the Tamils. They hoist black flags in their homes and shops in the north and east.
23. I have adopted what I consider to be the generally valid grouping of Sinhalese electorates made by James Jupp, contained in the Appendix II in *Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy*.
24. Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness – Selected Writings of Anagarika Dharmapala*, Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Colombo, 1965.
25. Quoted in Robert Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon*, Ithaca, Cornell, 1973, p. 163.
26. Quoted in S.U. Kodikara, "Communalism and Political Modernisation in Ceylon", *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1970, p. 103.
27. Obeyesekere, *supra*, p. 311.
28. James Jupp, *supra*, pp. 175-176.
29. David Selbourne, "Sinhalese Lions and Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka", in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, 17 October 1982.
30. Brooke Adams, in his *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1928), pp. 259-60, wrote: "The influx of Indian treasure, by adding considerably to the nation's cash capital, not only increased its stock of energy, but added much to its flexibility and the rapidity of its movement. Very soon after Plassey, the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London, and the effects appear to have been instantaneous, for all authorities agree that 'industrial revolution' began with the year 1770. . . Plassey was fought in 1757, and probably nothing has ever equalled the rapidity of the change that followed. In 1760 the flying shuttle appeared, and coal began to replace wood in smelting. In 1764 Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, in 1776 Crompton contrived the mule, in 1785 Cartwright patented the power loom and in 1768 Watt matured the steam engine . . . But though these machines served as outlets for the accelerating movements of the time, they did not cause the acceleration. In themselves inventions are passive . . . waiting for a sufficient store of force to have accumulated to set them working. That store must always take the shape of money,

and money not hoarded but in motion. Before the influx of the Indian treasure, and the expansion of credit which followed, no force sufficient for this purpose existed . . . Possibly since the world began, no investment has ever yielded the profit reaped from the Indian plunder, because for nearly fifty years Great Britain stood without a competitor."

31. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis – Sri Lankan Economy 1948-1980*, London, 1981, p. 82.

6. Heightening Conflict

Before the dawn of the 1970s, Sinhalese rule and Buddhist hegemony had been asserted and successfully established. What now remained necessary was to entrench them in a constitution. The state machinery and national finances (including foreign aid) had been used to benefit the Sinhalese and had been denied to the Tamils. They had been symbolically affirmed by the use of the lion and the pipal leaves in the national flag, by the Sinhalese national anthem, by the Sinhalese national emblem, by the declaration of Anuradhapura as a "sacred city" and by the conversion of the ancient Hindu Kathirkamam temple, in the south, into a Buddhist shrine, while the Hindu request that the Koneswaram temple precincts be made a "protected area" had been turned down.

The Tamils had been reduced to a subject nation. Their future had been tied to Sinhalese power politics and to the chariot-wheels of Sinhalese imperialism. From the deprivation of citizenship in 1948 to the "Sinhala-only" act and beyond, they had suffered reversal after reversal. In the 1970 election campaign, there was nothing left for the Sinhalese chauvinist forces and their leaders but to beat the drum of Sinhala-Buddhism.

The economy had moved into stagnation and crisis because of the reactionary policies adopted to perpetuate the status quo. During Mrs Bandarnaike's administration of the 1960s, no finance minister could survive to present a second budget. Under Dudley Senanayake's administration, the growth of the economy in conventional terms benefited only the rich, and the poor continued to suffer. The strategy of the upper-class politicians of both parties to divert the wrath of the Sinhalese against the Tamils for a time contained the revolutionary pressures, which continued to smoulder.

Hence, in the 1970 election campaign, there was much talk of socialism and constitution-making, and the wildest promises were made to win power. The Tamil FP and its bourgeois politicians were under the illusion that, in the factional struggle for power between the two contending Sinhalese forces, they could wrest something from both, since many believed the 1970 election verdict was likely to be inconclusive. In fact, this prospect generated such optimism and made the FP so oblivious to the political consensus that had taken shape among the Sinhalese parties, that A. Amirthalingam, the FP secretary, naively asserted during the campaign that "the FP MPs are going

to have to decide whether the UNP or the SLFP would form the government”.

The 1970 Election Campaign

In the run-up to the May 1970 general election, the opposition parties — SLFP-LSSP-CP — which since their defeat in 1965 had been collaborating closely, formed the United Front (UF) alliance. The UF drew up a common programme and a joint election manifesto. Neither said anything about the Tamil national question but, under the inspiration of the LSSP and CP ex-Marxists, made the framing of a new constitution and “further advance towards a socialist society” their priorities. They declared that, on coming to power, the UF would set up a constituent assembly to frame a Republican constitution, but made no mention of what the essentials of the new constitution would be. With regard to the “socialist society”, they were more explicit in their rhetoric. But their “socialist society” did not entail changing the ruling class. The common programme stated:

We shall put an end to these policies of economic dependence and neo-colonialism which have characterized the UNP's regime. Instead, we shall seek to develop all branches of the economy at a rapid rate and according to a National Plan in order to lay the foundation for a further advance towards a socialist society.

The “socialist society” was to be achieved by nationalization of banking, plantations, state monopoly of the import trade, assertion of national sovereignty, opposition to imperialism, etc. According to the programme, all these were to lead the country to “the progressive advance towards the establishment of a socialist democracy that was begun in 1956 under the leadership of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike”.

The SLFP had, by now, added to its feudal and notable family loyalists a number of upper-middle-class members possessing the legendary bourgeois qualities of parasitism and lethargy, as well as the new *Dasa Mudalalis*, who depended on bonanzas and patronage rather than enterprise and hard work. By their association with the more progressive LSSP and CP since the mid-1960s, the SLFP leaders had developed vague anti-capitalist, pseudo-socialist rhetoric, which they articulated during the election campaign. With veteran left-wing politicians such as Perera, de Silva and Keuneman behind her, Mrs Bandaranaike assumed a supremely confident posture in the election rallies. As for the LSSP, it had purged its revolutionary Marxist sections in the early 1960s and had gravitated towards a compromising centrist leadership, which — like the CP — had established ties with Buddhism, some even beginning to attend *pirith* ceremonies and offering *dana*. These mutual adjustments among the UF partners were conceived as strategic imperatives in playing the parliamentary game of musical chairs.

Even the conservative UNP had, at its Kalutara sessions in the mid-1960s, adopted a democratic socialist society as its goal. Dudley Senanayake started the UNP campaign very confidently with the boast that his food production drive had brought the country almost to self-sufficiency. If he was given another term the country would even export rice, in view of the impending implementation of the Mahaweli Ganga project. The emotive and volatile issues of language and religion had been previously exploited and were no longer useful. Mrs Bandaranaike sought to woo the Catholics and Muslims: to win over the former she promised to revert to the Saturday-Sunday weekends, and to placate the latter she gave great prominence to Badiuddin Mahmud.

Of the smaller parties, mention must be made of the Sinhala Mahajana Paksaya (SMP) (Sinhalese People's Party), formed in June 1968 by R.G. Senanayake, which contested the 1970 elections with 51 candidates. R.G. Senanayake, while vice-president of the SLFP, had in the mid-1960s founded the Api Sinhale (We Sinhalese) movement, articulating an extreme chauvinist anti-Indian and anti-Tamil position. In 1967 he had established accord with the Sinhalese-Buddhist extremist Hema Basnayake, who had just retired after being Chief Justice for over 10 years. At the inaugural founding ceremony of the SMP he had presented his programme to the *bhikkhus*. It attacked the Indian Tamils and demanded their repatriation, attacked the Sri Lanka Tamils, the 1966 Tamil Language Regulations and the District Councils Bill, and threatened to run 100 candidates to save Sri Lanka for the Sinhalese and Buddhism. In the 1970 elections, the SMP fielded 51 candidates. The Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna and the MEP also contested the elections.

At the end of the UNP's five-year term of office, their capitalist economic and social policies ensured that the rising cost of living, unemployment and increasing inequalities of income were major election issues. The hitherto relatively stable cost of living index (1952 = 100) rose from 112 in 1965 to 122 in 1970. The rise in prices was due to policies which tied the country to the global economy and to pressures generated by money supply increasing at twice the rate of the GNP, because of the government's expansionary financing. In 1969 unemployment shot up to 546,000, or 14% of the total labour force, including a high proportion of educated rural youth. According to the official socio-economic survey, 65% of the people were living below the poverty line in 1969.

Meanwhile the UNP's policy of paternalism towards the rich and the business class, by the introduction of a dual foreign-exchange system to encourage exports, the open general licensing system for imports, special land leases for companies and capitalist agriculture under the "Green Revolution" programme brought visible prosperity for the few. In this context, the UP's programme of socialism had immediate relevance, offering salvation from intolerable economic conditions. Furthermore, for the 1970 elections the voting age had been reduced to 18. "These 18-21 years group organized themselves so well that they left nothing to chance to undo the Senanayake

government.”¹

During the closing stages of the campaign, the UNP's decision to cut the weekly rice ration from two free measures to one became a contentious issue. The opposition UF seized on it as their trump card in a highly demagogic campaign. Mrs Bandaranaike promised to restore the second measure of free rice. When Dudley Senanayake countered that this was an empty promise because there was a world shortage of rice, she replied that she would give the second measure even if the rice had to be brought from the moon.

Table 6.1
1970 Election Results

Party	Total Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Votes Polled
United National Party (UNP)	128	17	37.9
Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)	106	90	36.9
Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)	23	19	8.7
Federal Party (FP)	19	13	4.9
Communist Party (CP)	9	6	3.4
Tamil Congress (TC)	12	3	2.3
Independents	85	2	5.9

The results of the May 1970 elections surprised victors and vanquished alike. As Table 6.1 shows, although the UNP polled the largest percentage of votes, it won only 17 seats. The SLFP received only 36.9%, less than the UNP, but won 90 seats. The turn-out of voters was an incredible 85.2%. All the parties in the United Front had benefited from their coalition. In fact, the LSSP's 19 seats was the highest it had won in its 35-year history; likewise the Communist Party's six seats was the best result in its 27-year history. In the Tamil areas, support for the FP was considerably reduced although it won 13 seats as against 14 in 1965. The FP's percentage of the total votes polled – 4.96% – was its lowest since 1952. Its leader Chelvanayakam lost support in his own constituency. Two FP stalwarts, the party chairman S.M. Rasamanickam from the eastern province and deputy leader E.M.V. Naganathan, were defeated. The TC virtually retained its 1965 position and won three seats, although its leader G.G. Ponnambalam was defeated by a narrow margin in Jaffna town.

Mrs Bandaranaike Takes Power

Mrs Bandaranaike formed the SLFP-LSSP-CP United Front coalition government. From the LSSP, she appointed three MPs as ministers – Dr N.M. Perera

(finance), Dr Colvin R. de Silva (plantation industries and constitutional affairs) and Leslie Goonewardena (communications); and from the CP, Pieter Keuneman (housing). Surprisingly, she appointed a Sri Lankan Tamil political non-entity, C. Kumarasuriar, a practising chartered engineer, as minister of posts and telecommunications through nomination to the Senate. This was intended to show the Tamils that they were not completely ostracized and that, if they and their representatives toed the line in accepting the new Sinhala-Buddhist order, there was still room for them in Sri Lanka.

The strategy of Prime Minister Bandaranaike and of the UNP's J.R. Jayewardene in the 1970s was not to deal with the Tamil MPs, particularly the FP MPs, but to foist their chosen yes-men on them, or induce the Tamil MPs to leave their party and join the government. Such a strategy immediately exposed the remaining FP MPs as powerless in the eyes of their constituents, who faced all manner of problems with education, jobs, land, passports, trade licences – all created by the government – problems whose solution required Tamil MPs to collaborate with the government, not oppose it.

In this way, the whole object of Mrs Bandaranaike and likewise of J.R. Jayewardene, was to break the will of the Tamils and undermine the determination and solidarity of their elected MPs to struggle for Tamil equality, if not full Tamil liberation and the establishment of a separate state of Eelam. In pursuance of this objective, Mrs Bandaranaike appointed Kumarasuriar a minister, induced S. Thiagarajah and A. Arulampalam, two TC MPs, to support her government and appointed Thiagarajah as the powerful District Political Authority for the northern Tamil districts. She also made a great hero out of a political novice and opportunist, Alfred Duraiyappah, the defeated independent MP for Jaffna, who on agreeing to become the SLFP organizer in Jaffna was given full government patronage.

In the same way, Jayewardene won over S. Canagaratnam and R. Rajadurai, two FP MPs from the eastern province, who on leaving the FP in 1978 were made ministers. In this way, he drove a wedge between the unity of the MPs and people of the northern and eastern provinces. Nothing was said about the subjugation of the Tamil people by these deserters or their patrons. After two of them – Thiagarajah and Duraiyappah – were shot and killed by the Tamil liberation fighters for betraying the Tamil cause, Jayewardene found that this strategy did not work. Therefore, in 1983, he came up with a new formula – a “national government of all parties”. This will be considered in more detail in a later chapter.

What was important to Mrs Bandaranaike was the Tamils' acceptance of the Sinhala-Buddhist system. Excluded from power-sharing the Tamils began to look inwards. Following Dudley Senanayake's earlier stratagem of appointing Thondaman, the Indian Tamil leader of the CWC, as a nominated MP, Mrs Bandaranaike appointed Abdul Aziz, the leader of the rival DWC, as a nominated MP in 1970.

The election results made the parliamentary opposition futile in the face of the steamroller majority of the UF's government partners. This introduced a new attitude of intolerance and total disregard of the opposition and of its

conventional role in criticizing the government of the day. The first symbolic act of the prime minister and her cabinet, including the ex-Marxists, was to go to Kandy and offer their thanks to the Dalada Maligawa temple and the *Sangha*.

In July 1970, on the invitation of Prime Minister Bandaranaike, the parliament returned in the May 1970 elections constituted itself into a constituent assembly to draft a new Republican constitution for the government and people of the country.

The 1971 JVP Revolution to Take Power

It was expected that the new government would take action to resolve the economic difficulties. The socialist option, which the people had decisively chosen, meant the adoption of policies to reduce the cost of living, unemployment and income inequalities and to eliminate poverty. But, once victory was won, the campaign rhetoric was forgotten and the government actively pursued constitution-making, with great fanfare, to entrench itself more securely in power.

It was this unwillingness, or more correctly refusal, to translate the rhetoric of socialism into social and economic action that led to the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna's (JVP) (People's Liberation Front) armed attempt in April 1971, less than a year after the election, to take power. The JVP had existed as a secret political movement from the late 1960s. It consisted mainly of rural Sinhala-Buddhist youths from the *Karava*, *Durava*, *Wahumpara*, *Batgam* and other lower-caste groups, who had received some measure of education in Sinhala.

The movement was born of the leadership of Rohana Wijeweera and Mahinda Wijesekera, both Sinhalese-Buddhist *Karavas*. From the exclusively non-*Goyigama* composition of the JVP's supporters, it was evident that the movement was directed against the *Goyigama* and Christian *Karava* caste's dominance in the national life of the country. The movement became critical of both the pseudo-socialist politics of the traditional left-wing parties and the family politics of the UNP and SLFP. The JVP leadership had a limited grasp of Marxism and revolutionary theory and practice, yet succeeded in organizing a vast force of young people who wanted to remould Sri Lanka's future.

At first, the JVP sought a democratic political solution to the socio-economic crisis, by supporting and campaigning for the socialist programme of the SLFP-LSSP-CP United Front in the May 1970 elections. But from the start the JVP quickly became aware that the UF government was not committed to a socialist programme, and so it secretly organized an insurrection. The JVP leadership drew inspiration from the Chinese and Cuban revolutions. Though the movement was fairly widespread among young low-country Sinhalese, its clandestine character, which was its strength and brought it close to success, also constituted its chief weakness, since it failed to develop into a mass movement.

On 5 April 1971 the insurrection started with a concerted attempt to attack police stations, capture Mrs Bandaranaike and her ministers and take power. At dawn 93 police stations were attacked and a large area of south and west Sri Lanka fell into the hands of JVP forces. The government declared a state of emergency and a curfew, and, finding the army incapable of facing the "insurgents", called in foreign military assistance from Britain and India. It was the prompt military (particularly airforce) assistance from the Indian government that saved the day for Mrs Bandaranaike.

What is important for the theme of this book is that the armed forces were called in, not to defend the state from aggression, but to defend the new rulers who had taken power by deceiving the people.

The ex-Marxist ministers were quick to justify the army's ruthlessness, which led to the death of more than 5,000 youths. Dr Colvin R. de Silva, who came into politics as the leader of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party in the 1940s and was Mrs Bandaranaike's minister for constitutional affairs, described the JVP uprising as a putsch and gave the following rationale for crushing it ruthlessly:

The country was facing an unusual and unprecedented situation created by a group of narrow-minded people, conspiratorially organized, who had launched an effort by force of arms to displace the duly constituted government of the day in order to replace the entire system of parliamentary democracy.²

This was the view of the deputy leader of the LSSP. Yet when attacking the Soulbury constitution less than a year before, Leslie Goonewardene had stated the LSSP's opposition to that constitution thus: "The present constitution in Ceylon aims at two ends – one to collect taxes from the people and the other to suppress the people if they try to rise against the government in power."³

The 1972 Republican Constitution

As stated earlier in Chapter 2, on independence and transfer of power in 1948 no independence constitution had been framed for Ceylon by the British parliament. The Soulbury constitution, which had been in operation from 1946, was intended for a constitutional stage prior to independence. As such, it had not been enacted by an act of parliament but by an order in council – the Ceylon (Constitution) Order in Council, 1946. That constitution gave power to the Ceylon legislature "to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the island". When independence was being hurriedly prepared in the circumstances outlined earlier, the Ceylon Independence Act, 1947, was passed by the British parliament providing that, as from 4 February 1948, (1) HM Government should have no responsibility for the government of Ceylon, and (2) the parliament of Ceylon should have full power to make laws having extra-territorial operation. The Soulbury constitution was to continue to

operate as the independence constitution.

Although in legal terms Ceylon became independent and the Ceylon parliament had full legislative power, it transpired that it was not a sovereign legislature with unfettered legislative power as befitted an independent country. It was a legislature bound by conditions imposed by the Soulbury constitution itself. In 1964 the Privy Council, in the case of *Bribery Commissioner v. Ranasinghe*⁴ stated that "a legislature has no power to ignore the conditions of law-making that are imposed by the instrument which itself regulates its power to make law". Before we proceed to discuss the restrictions on the legislative power of the Ceylon parliament, it is necessary to set out the relevant provisions of the Soulbury constitution, namely, the instrument which regulated the Ceylon parliament's power to make law, as contained in Section 29.

- S.29 (1) Subject to the provisions of this Order, Parliament shall have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the island.
- (2) No such law shall —
- (a) prohibit or restrict the free exercise of any religion; or
 - (b) make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable; or
 - (c) confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions; or
 - (d) alter the constitution of any religious body except with the consent of the governing authority of that body.
- (3) Any law made in contravention of subsection (2) of this section shall, to the extent of such contravention, be void.
- (4) In the exercise of its powers under this section, Parliament may amend or repeal any of the provisions of this Order or any other Order of Her Majesty in Council in its application to the island:

Provided that no Bill for the amendment or repeal of any of the provisions of this order shall be presented for the Royal Assent unless it is endorsed on it a certificate under the hand of the Speaker that the number of votes cast in favour thereof in the House of Representatives amounted to not less than two-thirds of the whole number of Members of the House (including those not present).

These provisions, which give the Ceylon parliament the power to make law, impose two restrictions — one absolute, the other conditional.⁵ The absolute restriction is that the parliament has no power to make law on matters touching on S.29(2)(a), (b), (c) and (d). If it did, such a law would be void. The conditional restriction is that a two-thirds majority is necessary to amend

or repeal any of the provisions of the constitution.

In the 1964 case mentioned above, the Privy Council ruled that the Soulbury constitution was based upon separation of powers, and that the judicial power of the state was vested in the judiciary, not by the constitution but by the Charter of Justice of 1833. The Ceylon parliament was therefore unable to take away that power except by amendment of the constitution by two-thirds majority, in accordance with S.29(4).

Thus the Bribery Tribunals, established by the ordinary process of law-making, were *ultra vires* the constitution. The Privy Council further stated that the independence of the judiciary from political control was secured by constitutional provision – namely, that judges of the Supreme Court could not be removed except on address of the Senate and House of Representatives, and by vesting control of the lower judiciary in the hands of an independent Judicial Service Commission, consisting of the judges of the Supreme Court.

Section 29(2) – unalterable, entrenched provisions

In *Bribery Commissioner v. Ranasinghe* the Privy Council went further and stated that Section 29(2)(a), (b), (c) and (d) – the provisions prohibiting the making of any law discriminatory against persons of any community or religion – were unalterable, entrenched provisions in the constitution. To quote: “No such law shall – (a) prohibit or restrict the free exercise of any religion; There follow (b), (c) and (d), which set out further entrenched religious and racial matters, which shall not be the subject of legislation”.

The Privy Council then went on to say: “They [S.29(2)] represent the solemn balance of rights between the citizens of Ceylon, the fundamental condition on which inter se they accepted the constitution; and these are therefore unalterable under the constitution.”

In other words, the S.29(2) safeguards were built into the constitution by the Soulbury Commission as its cornerstone and were so accepted by the Sinhalese, Tamils and others, when they accepted the whole of the constitution. Earlier in its judgement, the Privy Council referred to the Soulbury Commission Report. By implication, if the S.29(2) safeguards had been absent or had been unacceptable to the Sinhalese or the Tamils, then the constitution itself would have been unacceptable to the people of Ceylon and there would have been no transfer of power and no independence.

It was on this basis that the Privy Council gave it “unalterable and entrenched” status “under the Constitution”. Further, it was not “ordinary entrenchment” which the Privy Council stipulated, but what in constitutional law is called “inviolability”.⁶ This was made clear when the Privy Council judgement stated: “S.29(3) expressly makes void any Act passed in respect of the matters entrenched on and prohibited by S.29(2), whereas S.29(4) makes no such provision, but merely couches the prohibition in procedural terms.”

The Ceylon parliament had therefore no legal power or competence to alter, amend or repeal S.29(2). This could only be done by the paramount authority – the Queen in Council or the British parliament with royal assent.

In the same judgement, the Privy Council also stated that “the Court [the Supreme Court of Ceylon] has a duty to see that the constitution is not infringed and to preserve it inviolate”.

The judgement directly affected the creation and working of the Bribery Tribunals outside the regular courts structure. But the clear and unequivocal opinions expressed as to the restrictions imposed, and the “unalterable and entrenched” status of S.29(2), caused a great flutter in legal and political circles. This was not so much because the Ceylon parliament was denied the status of a sovereign legislature, but because a number of laws had already been passed contravening the separate judicial power vested in the judiciary. Moreover the important appeal over the case of *Liyanage et al v. Regina* was already pending before the Privy Council. Also, because of the clear and forceful opinions expressed by the Privy Council with regard to the S.29(2) safeguards, the fate of the ‘Sinhala-only’ act, raised by the Kodiswaran case, which was then on its way to the Privy Council, was already clear.

In the more important case of *Liyanage et al v. Regina*,⁷ the Privy Council struck down the Criminal Law (Special Provisions) Act No.1 of 1962, passed by the first Sirima Bandaranaike government to try and punish the suspects in the attempted coup. This law, introduced by Felix Dias Bandaranaike, cut across the known canons of criminal justice, created new crimes and set out mandatory minimum penalties, with retrospective effect, specifically applicable to those who were to be tried for conspiracy to overthrow the government. Contrary to regular procedure, this law provided for the nomination of three judges by the minister of justice, to try the defendants without a jury. The judges so nominated held their nomination, and other features of the act, to be contrary to the constitution, but nevertheless convicted the defendants according to the new law. It was clear that the judiciary was being circumscribed and intimidated.

The defendants appealed to the Privy Council, which struck down the law as *ultra vires* the constitution and condemned it in these words:

If such acts as these were valid the judicial power could be wholly absorbed by the legislature and taken out of the hands of the judges What is done once, if it be allowed, may be done again and in lesser crisis and in less serious circumstances; and thus judicial power may be eroded. Such an erosion is contrary to the clear intention of the constitution. In their lordship’s view the Acts were *ultra vires* and invalid The convictions should be quashed.

Both these decisions made it clear that the Ceylon parliament was not omnipotent, but was a legislature with severe restrictions on its law-making power. The S.29(2) safeguards had been held to be immutable. In these and a number of other cases, such as the *Devanayagam Case*, the Privy Council consistently struck down legislation enacted by the Sri Lanka parliament as being *ultra vires* the constitution.

The SLFP governments under Mrs Bandaranaike could not work within

the constitution, the laws and the courts' powers. This was so despite the fact that the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike had argued that "the independence of the judiciary was the last citadel of democracy".⁸ Mrs Bandaranaike could not countenance the supremacy of the constitution: to her, political power, however obtained, was supreme.

At the same time, according to the Privy Council's direction, the Kodiswaran language-rights case was to be decided by the Supreme Court on the constitutional issue. But the case was held over from 1969, without being brought before the Supreme Court. It was not the Supreme Court's decision that was important to Mrs Bandaranaike but constitution-making. With the summoning of the constituent assembly and under the state of emergency declared because of the JVP revolution, Mrs Bandaranaike and the UF government abolished appeals to the Privy Council by Act No. 44 of 1971. What then of the Kodiswaran language-rights case? We shall return to it at a later stage in our discussion of the Republican constitution.

The Making of the New Constitution

Because of the forthright view expressed by the Privy Council in these cases that (1) the judicial power of the state resided in the judiciary, and (2) the Ceylon parliament was not sovereign in the extent of its legislative powers, clearly the parliament could not legally repeal the existing constitution and replace it with another. Hence a new device had to be contrived. From the beginning, great care was taken, on the advice of certain self-styled constitutional pundits, to show symbolically that the MPs were not acting as the parliament of Ceylon but as a "constituent assembly". According to these constitutional pundits, if the parliamentarians called themselves a constituent assembly, then they would make a break in the legal continuity of the state, and the new constitution would not derive its legal validity from the existing constitution.

This was simply a bid to press into service Professor K.C. Wheare's notion of constitutional autochthony⁹ with reference to Eire, India and Pakistan. The pundits mutilated Wheare's concept of autochthony and made it the rationale for the so-called constituent assembly to draft and enact a new constitution for Ceylon. Relying on this concept, Colvin R. de Silva argued that there had been a "legal revolution" in Ceylon in 1970 and that the "constituent assembly" had received a "mandate" from the people to draft and enact a new constitution for Ceylon.

Hence, breaking with tradition, the inaugural session of the constituent assembly was held at Navarangahala, a stadium three miles from the parliament, with great fanfare and with Buddhist ceremonies.

The principal engineer of this comical spectacle was Colvin R. de Silva, the minister for constitutional affairs. The constituent assembly was summoned on the invitation of Mrs Bandaranaike. All MPs, including the FP and TC MPs, attended. They did not seem to be aware of the Privy Council's decisions. Nobody asked how Mrs Bandaranaike had acquired the power to assemble such a body to draft a constitution. If they knew anything

about the Privy Council decisions they should have questioned how its entrenched and inviolate safeguards could be removed.

Only C. Suntheralingam, the father of Tamil separatism, petitioned the Supreme Court for a writ to prohibit the so-called constituent assembly from functioning. Predictably, the Supreme Court refused, on the ground that it had no power to prohibit a meeting of the MPs, whatever name they called themselves, until they had produced an illegal result. Suntheralingam prepared to appeal to the Privy Council, but appeals to the Privy Council were soon abolished by the 1971 Act.

The ministry of constitutional affairs accordingly called for representations and memoranda from all interested parties, organizations and individuals. Various memoranda were sent, of which only the FP's need receive our consideration. The FP asked for a federal form of government, with an autonomous Tamil state, an autonomous Muslim state and three Sinhalese states. The FP's ignorance of autonomy was so great that it could define neither the basis for Muslim and Sinhalese autonomy nor the territorial boundaries of the different autonomous units or states it was calling for. It therefore failed to make a case even for a federal form of government for the Tamil people, which had been the cornerstone of FP policies since 1951. Not surprisingly, the FP's ludicrous demand for five autonomous states was summarily rejected.

Then, while continuing to participate in the constituent assembly, the FP asked for the provisions of the 1966 Tamil Language Regulations to be incorporated into the constitution. Even this was refused, for, according to Colvin R. de Silva, "... the view of this Government, as was the view we held and which we continue to hold, [was that] these regulations were *ultra vires* the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act and that therefore this Government was not applying these regulations in the administration".¹⁰ Equally, Felix Dias Bandaranaike, minister of public administration and justice, said: "... I think you have no right to vindicate, because I believe those regulations are *ultra vires* the main Act".¹¹

The FP had once again come to the end of the road in its compromise negotiations. The party's feelings on the situation ran high:

Realizing the futility of any continued participation, the Tamil representatives in the Constituent Assembly walked out. The Assembly meeting of 22 May 1972 which was summoned to pass the constitution was boycotted by 15 out of 19 elected Tamil representatives ... Hence it is obvious that this constitution was rejected 100% by the Tamil people. The manner in which the unanimous opposition of the Tamil nation was ignored and how the new constitution was imposed on them has only confirmed the psychology of the Sinhalese imperialistic masters that they are ruling over a slave nation according to their own whims and fancies. They have done away with the meagre safeguards provided for the minorities in the constitution left behind by the British ... and through this imposed constitution made the Tamils their

slaves without any share in the political power of this state.¹²

On 22 May 1972 the constituent assembly purported to enact the draft constitution as the constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka. The earlier constitution was not expressly repealed but, by Article 12 and Schedule 1, it was effectively abrogated. Mrs Bandaranaike sought to give the constitution religious sanctity, since it possessed no legal validity. She went to the Dalada Maligawa temple in Kandy and ceremonially invoked the blessings of the sacred-tooth relic on the new constitution. She declared: "Today we are in a proud position of owing no allegiance to anyone else, but totally and in every respect, owing allegiance only to our own country."¹³

Between the 1970 election and the purported enactment of this constitution, the constitution-makers had done nothing to consult the people of the country. There was no referendum or plebiscite on the constitution. However, the preamble to the constitution stated:

We the People of Sri Lanka being resolved in the exercise of our Freedom and Independence as a Nation to give to ourselves a Constitution . . . Which will become the fundamental law of Sri Lanka deriving its power and authority solely from the people . . . Acting through the Constituent Assembly established by us Hereby Adopt Enact and Give to Ourselves This Constitution.

The plain truth is that it was not the people of Sri Lanka, but less than 125 MPs who were in rebellion against the people of Sri Lanka, the constitution, the laws and the courts, who resolved that this should be the new constitution of the country.

The Main Provisions and Their Effects

The 1972 constitution cannot be called a genuine constitution for it did not give the people what they wanted. By "people" is meant all the people of Sri Lanka, for whom a constitution is "a solemn balance of rights", not one section of the people, the Sinhalese Buddhists. The makers of the "constitution" (we shall call it so for convenience) had two objectives: firstly, to get rid of all that stood in the way of their unbridled exercise of political power under the earlier constitution; and, secondly, to write into the new constitution all the gains that had been made and that needed to be made in turning Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist state.

The separate judicial power of the state vested in the judicature since 1833 was abolished, and with it the separation of powers. This was made explicit in Article 5, according to which the "National State Assembly is the supreme instrument of state power of the Republic", in which was vested the legislative, executive and judicial power of the state. The judiciary was subjected to political control, for, according to Article 126, "the appointment of judges and other state officers shall be made by the Cabinet of Ministers". To balance this, the nominal independence of the judiciary was affirmed in Article 131,

according to which, in the exercise of its judicial powers, it should not be "subject to any direction or other interference".

One of the immediate results of this change was that Jaya Pathirana, a former SLFP MP, was made a judge of the Supreme Court. From that time, to give effect to this new reality, all judicial appointments were only of government party loyalists, supporters or sympathizers. The Soulbury constitution's "solemn balance of rights between the citizens of Ceylon . . . the fundamental condition on which they accepted that constitution", and on the basis of which independence had been granted, was abolished.

The question of state and legislative sovereignty was resolved in the first and fourth articles. The first declared: "Sri Lanka (Ceylon) is a Free, Sovereign and Independent Republic." Article 4 unequivocally affirmed: "The Sovereignty of the People is exercised through a National State Assembly of elected representatives of the People."

The questions of federalism, devolution and the like were unequivocally put to rest by Articles 2 and 45(1). Article 2 stated: "The Republic of Sri Lanka is a Unitary State." Article 45(1) provided: "The National State Assembly may not abdicate, delegate or in any manner alienate its legislative power, nor may it set up an authority with any legislative power, other than the power to make subordinate laws."

Article 6 stated: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism." Other religions were given the private rights of freedom of thought, conscience, worship, observance, practice and teaching.

In Article 18(1) individual fundamental rights, severely restricted by law "in the interests of national unity and integrity, national security, national economy, public safety, public order", were provided for. It was expressly stated that "all existing law shall operate notwithstanding any inconsistency with" these so-called fundamental rights. The fundamental rights of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups were not recognized, however.

In this connection, it is instructive to note that the Indian constitution in its Chapter on Fundamental Rights, in Article 29(1), begins: "Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same." And Article 30(1) states: "... all minorities whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish and administer schools of their own". The Indian constitution-makers, comprising such eminent men as Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Benegal Rao, Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer and Ramasamy Iyengar, left the task of drafting the Chapter on Fundamental Rights to an equally eminent but minority caste leader, Dr Ambedkar, and thus secured a consensus and compromise to bind together the diverse peoples of India into a single political unit.

In the *State of Bombay v. The Bombay Education Society* the Supreme Court of India interpreted Articles 29(1) and 30(1) as necessarily implying the fundamental right to impart and receive educational instruction in one's own language, and thereby secured for every linguistic group, however small,

a fundamental right to its linguistic and cultural preservation. More important, in the famous *Golak Nath* case the Supreme Court of India, in 1967, went further and held that the Chapter on Fundamental Rights was unalterable, inviolate and beyond the reach of the Union Parliament of India.

On the official language, Article 7 of the Republic of Sri Lanka constitution reaffirmed: "The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala as provided by the Official Language Act, No. 33 of 1956." The Official Language Act provision was thus enshrined in the constitution, despite the judicial decision that it was *ultra vires*.

The status of the Tamil language reached its nadir. According to Article 8, the use of the Tamil language shall be in accordance with the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958. This act, as we have seen, had no substantive provisions and therefore the 1966 Regulations had to be framed. The constitution said that the Tamil Language Regulations "shall not in any manner be interpreted as being a provision of the constitution but shall be deemed to be subordinate legislation". This meant that the Tamils outside the northern and eastern provinces, as well as the Muslims and the Indian Tamils, were effectively tied to the yoke of "Sinhala only" by the constitution of the country. Even the 1966 Tamil Language Regulations were substantially whittled down and "Sinhala only" was given constitutional teeth by Article 9, which provided that all laws should be enacted in Sinhala. What was permitted in the Tamil language was mere translation.

Article 11 provided that "the language of the Courts and Tribunals shall be Sinhala throughout Sri Lanka and accordingly their records, including pleadings, proceedings, judgements, orders and records of all judicial and ministerial acts, shall be in Sinhala". Again, what was permitted, even in the Tamil northern and eastern provinces, was mere translation.

The Illegality of the 1972 Constitution

We have seen that the S.29(2) safeguards are entrenched and immutable, and that they could be changed only by the Queen in Council or the British parliament with royal assent. It is a trite dictum in law that if a part cannot be withdrawn, then the whole cannot be withdrawn. This is the rationale for inviolate and unamendable provisions to safeguard certain interests in the constitutions of multi-ethnic countries such as Ceylon and Cyprus. Having an inviolate and unamendable provision is not unusual and is not contrary to the principle of legislative sovereignty. The legislature is aware that such a provision is a protective safeguard, a cardinal feature of the constitutional settlement between the citizens, and it agrees to be elected to uphold and work within that provision, according to the constitution.

The safeguard becomes a fetter only when the legislature wants to ride roughshod over the interests protected by it, as was the case with Mrs Bandaranaike's government, which sought to achieve objectives destructive of the Ceylonese nation state and so prohibited by the constitution. When Mrs Bandaranaike's government came into conflict with the constitution, the courts upheld the constitution.

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to clear up two misconceptions introduced and perpetrated by the 1972 constitution-makers and widely believed in Sri Lanka. These relate to the basis on which Mrs Bandaranaike and her men came together as a constituent assembly and enacted the 1972 constitution.

First, it was asserted that, since the UF had received a more than two-thirds majority, the special majority necessary for constitutional amendment according to S.29(4), it had the power to repeal the constitution and replace it with another. This is not so. The special majority was necessary to "amend or repeal any of the provisions" of the Soulbury constitution, not to repeal the constitution itself. The Ceylon parliament possessed no legal power to repeal the constitution. It must be remembered that, even by a two-thirds majority, the S.29(2) safeguards cannot be amended or repealed. Hence the repeal of the constitution, which involved repeal of S.29(2), was void.

Second, and more important, it was asserted that the people of Sri Lanka had an "inalienable right", based on sovereignty, to devise and enact a constitution for themselves, that this was the basis on which the constituent assembly proceeded. This too does not stand up. When a constitution is in force which binds the legislature, the people and the courts, and there is a prescribed legal procedure for its amendment and a known legal mechanism for its repeal or replacement (by the Queen in Council or the British parliament with royal assent), there is no legally recognizable sovereignty which enables the people to assemble somewhere, call themselves a constituent assembly, abandon the old constitution and replace it with a new one, as Mrs Bandaranaike and her men did in 1972.

The existing constitution must be legally repealed for the repeal to be valid. Otherwise, any citizen can claim that the earlier constitution is still in force and the courts will uphold him. Both the repeal of an old constitution and the enactment of a new one are legal steps and must comply with the law. Since there was no legal power within Sri Lanka to repeal the old constitution, the assembling of MPs under the name of a constituent assembly could not give them any legal power of repeal. In fact, the "constituent assembly" was simply the parliament of Ceylon, whose legal powers were limited to those of a parliament and did not include the legal power of repeal.

Furthermore, the "constituent assembly" never existed in the eyes of the law, because there was no law that created it. Hence any purported repeal was illegal. Equally, the purported enactment of the new constitution was also illegal.

Thus the constitution that prevailed from 1972 to 1978 was an illegal constitution. The claim that there was a "legal revolution" and a break in the legal continuity of the state was a shibboleth. Legal theory and the courts the world over recognize only a successful coup d'état and a revolution as the two instances of a break in the legal continuity of the state. The foremost constitutional authority on Commonwealth constitutions, Professor S.A. de

Smith, hastened to condemn the 1972 constitution as illegal.¹⁴

The entire enterprise of the "constituent assembly" was a farce, but it became illegal only on 22 May 1972 when the assembly declared it had enacted a new constitution. The question may be asked: if the constitution was illegal, why has the Supreme Court not declared it illegal? It is in answering this question that the whole plot comes to light.

The new constitution, by Articles 132 and 133, required every judge and judicial officer to take an oath to uphold it. According to Article 132, if they failed to take that oath they "shall cease to be in service or hold office". The oath required the judges to swear to "bear true allegiance to the Republic of Sri Lanka . . . and duly and faithfully execute the duties of my office . . . in accordance with the constitution". Once the judges had been compelled to take this oath and execute their duties in accordance with the constitution, the question of the illegality of the constitution was placed beyond issue in the courts.

It may perhaps be asked at this point: if the new constitution was illegal and the earlier constitution legal, what of the oath the judges would have taken to uphold the old constitution? The earlier oath was a judicial oath which did not require the judges to uphold the old constitution. In fact, constitutions everywhere in the world are left open, so that judges can adjudicate whether they are legally valid or not. The 1972 Sri Lanka constitution was the first constitution in the world to compel the judges, under the threat of losing their jobs, to uphold the constitution. This was simply because the "constituent assembly" was fully aware that the constitution was illegal. Worse still is the 1978 Jayewardene constitution, which remains in force. Its illegality was so self-evident to the parliament which framed it that the oath was made much more explicit. It says: "I will to the best of my ability uphold and defend the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka." Such oaths are contrary to judicial office and against the judicial conscience.

The simple truth is that the Sri Lanka legislators have never known how to act within the law; for if they had, they would have been unable to create the Sinhala-Buddhist theocratic state in 1972, or to let loose state terrorism against the Tamil people after 1978. The courts have not been allowed to act as the bulwark of justice in Sri Lanka. In November 1982 the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka charged that executive action had eroded the position of the Chief Justice and the judges of the Supreme Court. President Jayewardene was quick to deny it.¹⁵

Sinhalese Gains and Tamil Losses

From the early 1930s, when power came into the hands of upper-class Sinhalese politicians on the basis of universal franchise and national elections, they turned the state into an instrument of political gain by adopting vote-winning policies. D.S. Senanayake was the first to commit the govern-

ment to satisfying the Sinhalese people in return for their votes, by introducing Sinhalese peasant resettlement, free education, free health services, subsidized food rationing and subsidized transport. From 1956, government policies underwent a structural change when they began to be conceived, not from the point of view of Sri Lanka as one nation, but in terms of how they would benefit the Sinhalese nation.

Janice Jiggins rightly stated in 1976 that, from 1956, "over the next 20 years MPs have increasingly expressed their role as largely, if not wholly, relating to the satisfaction of their supporters' demands, the solution of their problems . . . by personal intervention and the securing of tangible benefits for their constituents".¹⁶

This resulted in the use of national resources for the benefit of the Sinhalese people and their outright denial to the Tamil people. The Sinhala-Buddhist system at the ideological level combined with Sinhalese-Buddhist welfare and advancement at the practical level, in the implementation of government policies. Hence, to the Sinhalese, the Sri Lankan government became a benefactor encompassing every facet of their life; while, to the Tamils, the government became a monstrous leviathan crushing them under its heel.

The "Sinhala-only" policy and its implementation divided the people and turned the government into one for the Sinhalese people only. From 1956, everything in national affairs came to be viewed by the Sinhala-Buddhist politicians in terms of Sinhalese-Buddhist advancement. The equally chauvinist Sinhalese academics and social scientists, instead of attacking and exposing policies fraught with national disaster and advocating a culturally neutral secular state, interpreted and justified them on the basis of Sinhalese "nationalism", "majority", "preponderance", "redress of past wrongs and present grievances", etc.

Professor Shelton Kodikara wrote superficially that "the communalization of politics has certainly contributed to increased political consciousness and political participation among all communal groups in the island".¹⁷ Again, while describing Sinhalese chauvinism as "political modernization", he wrote:

Just as individuals, groups and structures are adapting themselves to a dominant Buddhist ethos, the present outlook of Sinhala Buddhism itself is accommodative rather [than] aggressive. The teaching and practice of Buddhism has emphasized the virtues of toleration, non-violence and peaceful co-existence, and the *Sangha* are assertive only to the extent of redressing the past wrongs and present grievances of Sinhala Buddhists.¹⁸

We will go into this type of rationale in the next chapter. Such rationales led to Sri Lanka being caught up in ethnic quotas, Sinhalese-Tamil proportions and educational ratios, despite the fact that it is a unitary state in which the equality of all citizens is a necessary precondition for its forward

march as one nation. All these policies and rationales led to the destruction of the Sri Lankan nation and to the justification for its division.

The single major field of government investment from 1948 to the present day has been irrigation, dry-zone land development and Sinhalese peasant resettlement. As an ILO publication states

... the government has controlled between two-thirds to four-fifths of total productive investment. As a share of GNP this investment rose from around 4% in 1963 to between 6% and 7% in recent years ... irrigation has remained the major single component, accounting for some 2% of GNP. It is this sizeable portion of government investment which has financed land development in the dry zone.¹⁹

No less than Rs. 3.7 billion was spent in this field between 1948 and 1974, and not even 0.01% accrued to the benefit of the Tamil people. One can see how the Sinhalese peasantry were rehabilitated from the following statement in the same ILO publication:

Resettlement programmes have opened around 700,000 acres of jungle land for agricultural production and human settlement and have directly benefited over 80,000 landless families. This would have meant that around 160,000 people have been provided with primary employment in agriculture.

All those resettled were Sinhalese from the wet-zone areas. The ILO's indictment of this governmental programme is very revealing:

The irrigation and resettlement programmes have been highly capital intensive. The cost of settling one family was as high as Rs.21,000 in Gal Oya (1965) and remained around Rs.16,000 for other major schemes. The foreign exchange share of major schemes has been close to 55% and for colonization 75% ... The majority of these schemes have been low yielding, often not paying back their full cost even after 50 years. With the project costs amortized over 50 years the benefit cost ratio worked out to only 0.56 for Mahakandarawa and 0.67 for Rajangana. For Gal Oya, one of the oldest and largest, it was only 0.5.²⁰

How these policies directly benefited the Sinhalese peasants is described in the same ILO publication:

These schemes have created a class of well-to-do farmers who have not only received a fully developed holding and other amenities at no cost but also continue to absorb a high proportion of benefits — most from incentive prices and subsidies — offered by the state to the peasant sector. As a result income disparities have increased between colonists

on the one hand and the peasants in their original villages of the wet-zone . . . on the other.

This is not all. Successive governments adopted a systematized policy of enriching the new Sinhalese peasantry by giving them cheap credit and subsidized fertilizer, seed paddy and agro-chemicals. Credit was introduced in 1947 and, despite a disastrous record of defaults, every subsequent government was willing to write off the debts and bring the defaulters into newer schemes with an offer of increased credit. As a result, of the Rs.805 million granted as credit between 1967 and 1977, only 40% was recovered and Rs.477 million was lost.²¹

The ILO report stated: “. . . credit has now become virtually a political issue, its withdrawal likely to seriously affect the vote”.

The policies of the present Jayewardene government, however, in the field of dam construction, irrigation, land development and Sinhalese resettlement have surpassed all that went before. Since 1977, several major high-dam and irrigation projects, including the Mahaweli Ganga scheme, have been financed by major Western donors (Britain, the US, Canada, France, West Germany and others) to the tune of more than Rs.50 billion. Neither the Sri Lanka government nor the donor countries can speak of a single project in the Tamil areas. The Tamil homelands stand virgin and untouched by these developments and, in contrast, look atrophied and desolate.

What of the major industrial development projects established by the Sri Lanka government with foreign aid? Since independence, all the industrial and manufacturing factories established have been sited in Sinhalese areas. The predominant consideration has been employment. The three factories in the Tamil areas — a cement factory at Kankasanturai, a chemical factory at Paranthan and a paper factory at Valaichenai — were built before independence and sited in Tamil areas because of their mineral resources. Industrial projects in the Sinhalese areas include a steel factory at Oruwella, a foundry at Enderamulla, a tyre factory at Kelaniya, a sugar factory at Gal Oya, a glass factory at Nattandiya, a plywood factory at Kosgama, a paper-board mill at Embilipitiya, three large textile mills at Tulkiriya, Veyangoda and Kandy, a hardware factory at Yakkala, an asbestos factory at Colombo, ceramic factories at Nittambuwa and Piliyandala, an industrial estate at Ekkala, a barbed-wire factory at Colombo, a petroleum refinery at Kelaniya, a fertilizer factory at Hunupitiya, cement factories at Puttalam and Galle, a flour mill at Colombo and many others.

Between 1970 and 1975 alone Rs.10,908 million was spent by Mrs Bandaranaike's UF government as capital investment in state industrial ventures — all in Sinhalese areas.²² Although a Russian petroleum prospecting corporation carried out a seismic survey of Sri Lanka and recommended Jaffna and Mannar for oil exploration, Mrs Bandaranaike commenced petroleum prospecting in Mannar, which turned out to be a failure. She did not want to try out Jaffna, being the heartland of the Tamil people, as any success would have made the Tamils economically strong.

In the early 1960s, the World Bank recommended, after a survey, the establishment of a large sugar plantation and factory in the Thunukkai-Pooneryn area, which it considered the ideal location for sugar in Sri Lanka. Because these were Tamil areas, the projects were shelved by Mrs Bandaranaike, although, according to the proposals, they would have made Sri Lanka self-sufficient in sugar in three years.

The numerous requests by Tamil MPs for the development of the Kankesanturai and Trincomalee ports were turned down, but millions were spent to turn the uneconomical port of Galle, in south Sri Lanka, into the second port. Even the US government's offer to develop the Kankesanturai port as a grant-in-aid project was not accepted.

Thus there has been no development of the Tamil areas since 1948. As a result, the Tamil nation has been losing ground at an increasing pace while the momentum generated by high capital transfers of foreign aid, at unprecedented levels since 1977, has made the Sinhalese a prosperous master nation. In this way, Tamil self-reliance was denied and dependency on the Sinhalese government was firmly established.

Before we go into the government's policies, and their effects, in the important educational and employment fields, it is necessary briefly to cover the cultural field. The assertion of Sinhalese-Buddhist hegemonism in this field began even before the "Sinhala-only" campaign.

Anuradhapura city and its vicinity to the south constituted the dividing line between the Sinhalese areas to the south and west and the Tamil areas to the north and east. The city was the ancient capital of the Tamil kingdom of Ceylon and, after the death in battle of the Tamil king Ellalan in 101 BC, of the Sinhalese kingdom. As stated earlier, Ellalan reigned from Anuradhapura for 44 years from 145-101 BC. He treated the Tamils and Sinhalese equally and gave equal status to Hinduism and Buddhism, building Hindu temples and Buddhist *vihares* (monasteries), even though he was a Tamil Hindu king. On winning victory in battle, the Sinhalese prince Dutugemunu decreed that the people should pay homage to Ellalan for his just rule. Ellalan's tomb lies in Anuradhapura to this day. In 1928 Professor Malala-sekera wrote that "... it is to the credit of the people of Ceylon that during two thousand years or more they obeyed this decree and continued to pay their homage to one who was a brave man and just and humane ruler".²³

At the Ruvanweli Saya Buddhist temple in Anuradhapura town, probably built soon after Dutugemunu, the statues of both Ellalan and Dutugemunu have remained side by side from that time, near an icon of Buddha. Thus Anuradhapura is a great historic city for both the Tamils and the Sinhalese. In the late 1940s, its Tamil and Sinhalese citizens were equal in number, and until 1956 the chairman of the urban council was generally a Tamil.

The Sinhalese and the Tamils lived together, side by side and in perfect amity. Up to the mid-1950s the Sinhalese often voted for Tamil candidates, and vice versa, in the urban council elections. In 1954, when Queen Elizabeth visited Sri Lanka, the Mayor of Colombo (Rudra) and the Chairman of the Anuradhapura urban council were both Tamils, and so the Queen was

received, in both the new and the old capital, by Tamils. This caused great resentment among the Sinhalese chauvinists.

Accordingly, on Bandaranaike's assumption of power, a plan was drawn up to destroy the power and influence of the Tamils in Anuradhapura. The Sinhalese crusaders claimed it as a Buddhist "sacred city"; while the Tamils claimed it as the capital city founded by Tamil kings and the site of Ellalan's tomb. The former won. The urban council was dissolved, Anuradhapura was declared a Buddhist "sacred city", the residents were forcibly evacuated to a new town nearby costing several million rupees, and there the Sinhala were put in total and effective control.

There was no economic return whatever from this new town building; the only purpose was to destroy the power of the Tamils, erase the Tamil connection with the old city and build a new image of Sinhalese dominance. The many millions spent on founding the new Anuradhapura city, and on the Gal Oya irrigation and Sinhalese resettlement scheme, drained away the nation's resources and were the underlying cause of the economic crisis the country faced from the early 1950s.

Immediately the "Sinhala-only" law was enacted, the Vidyodaya and Vidyalandara *Privenas* (Buddhist seminaries) were elevated into universities and opened to Sinhalese-Buddhist students. Then a ministry of cultural affairs was created, at the prompting of the ACBC. Later this became the ministry of cultural affairs, information and broadcasting. All these were defined only in terms of Sinhala-Buddhist culture. The history of the Tamils in Sri Lanka on the basis of archaeological finds was deliberately ignored as it would have contradicted the popularized history based on legends and myths.

Belatedly, in the 1970s, a University of Sri Lanka campus was established in Jaffna. The teachers, using endowments from a German foundation, undertook archaeological excavations and, on the basis of their finds, asserted that the Tamils were the aboriginal inhabitants of the island, several centuries before the 6th Century BC. This was in early 1982. Soon afterwards, to counter this claim, the director of archaeology, Dr Hema Ratnayake, issued a press release stating that he had found archaeological remains at Jetavanaramaya consisting of Buddhist statues, clay vessels, etc., which could be dated to as early as the 5th Century BC. This statement was made in August 1982.²⁴ The director of archaeology had forgotten that Buddhism was introduced to the country two centuries later, in 247 BC.

In the 1970s Mrs Bandaranaike banned the importing of Tamil films, books, magazines, journals, etc. from Tamil Nadu. She once more proscribed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Tamil Youth League. Culturally, the Tamil people were cut off from Tamil Nadu. In 1970 she cut off foreign exchange for the long-established practice of Tamil students going to India for university education. Equally, examinations for external degrees from the University of London were abolished.

Having thus cut off Tamil students from their traditional educational opportunities, Mrs Bandaranaike's government introduced various restrictions

on Tamil education.

Tamil Educational Disaster and Employment Impasse

From early times, the Tamils took to education not so much as a means of gaining knowledge but to acquire a qualification for a job, mainly in the government service. In the system of meritocracy instituted by the colonial government, through open competition, the Tamils entered the higher civil service and the lower general clerical service in substantial numbers. To the Tamil people, education was the central artery of life and “nothing arouses deeper despair among the Tamils than the feeling that they are systematically squeezed out of higher education”.²⁵

But with “Sinhala only” the government decreed a change to *swabasha*, i.e. either Sinhala or Tamil as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. Children must be educated in their mother tongue – Sinhala for Sinhalese children and Tamil for Tamil children. Pedantic educationalists lent their support to this on the ground that there should be no linguistic gap between home and school, and that the cultural influence of the child’s home environment must operate in the learning process as well. The practical objective – using education to gain employment – was relegated to the background.

For the Sinhalese student the argument was valid, since the language used at home, school and work was Sinhala. But what of the Tamil student, who studied in the Tamil language in a county where Sinhala was the only official language and the language of employment and administration?

This policy negated the very purpose of education and served to shut out Tamils from their traditional avenue of employment. Simply by requiring a knowledge of the “official language”, it became possible not only to eliminate the Tamils but also to open the door for the employment of Sinhalese without any competition. As a result, the Sinhalese, knowing the official language, became the effective rulers and the Tamils were reduced to a subject people, never reconciled to their inferior status.

The requirement that Tamil students should study in Tamil, their mother tongue, exposed the futility and the basic contradiction of “Sinhala only” as the official language. For Sri Lanka became the only country in the world where the official language was not taught to all students and in all schools. Even then the folly of “Sinhala only” was not admitted. Instead, in 1963, Mrs Bandaranaike’s government appointed a national education commission to sort out the mess.

The commission’s majority report (the Tamil members submitted a dissenting report), accepted with some amendments by the government and published as a White Paper, offered an ingenious solution. The medium of instruction should be Sinhala or Tamil, according to the wishes of the parents. This was designed to put pressure on Tamil parents. The commission considered that, since Sinhala was the language of employment, Tamil parents would

opt to have their children taught in Sinhala. In the case of Indian Tamil children, the commission recommended (and its position was reflected in the White Paper) that, to achieve their integration with the indigenous population surrounding them, they should be taught in Sinhala.

The minister of education, P.B.G. Kalugalle, threatened to send some 2,000 Sinhalese teachers to the northern and eastern provinces and also said, in a press interview, that his conscience would not give him peace unless he did all in his power to teach Sinhala to Tamil children so that "they may equip themselves for employment under the government".

These threats were not carried out, however, for Mrs Bandaranaike's government was soon defeated.

The two-language policy nevertheless continues to this day, and Sinhala is not taught, even as a second language, to Tamil schoolchildren. It cannot be, because Tamil parents and the school authorities have resolved that the Sinhala language will not be taught unless Tamil is made an official language.²⁶ The government's policy segregated the younger generation of Sinhalese and Tamils.

In the implementation of "Sinhala only" as the language of administration, the government progressively phased out Tamil recruitment which was eventually no more than a trickle in public services, teaching, defence and other areas. At independence, employees in the service of the government numbered 82,000, of whom 30% were Tamils. Although government recruitment then expanded rapidly to 225,000 by 1970, the proportion of Tamils declined to 6% in the same year.

In 1973, of 100 persons selected for higher administrative service by examination, 92 were Sinhalese, four were Tamils and four were Muslims. The decline in Tamil recruitment to government service from 1956 to 1970 was as follows:

Table 6.2
Employment of Tamils in Government Service,
1956, 1965 and 1970 (in percentages)

	1956	1965	1970
Ceylon administrative service	30	20	5
Clerical service (incl. postal, railway, hospital and customs services)	50	30	5
Professions (engineers, doctors, lecturers)	60	30	10
Armed forces	40	20	1
Labour forces	40	20	5

But these figures do not tell the whole story. After 1956 the biggest creators of jobs were the state industrial and commercial corporations that were established, and from these too the Tamils were shut out because of "Sinhala only". Between 1956 and 1970, 189,000 persons were recruited by

the public-sector corporations and 99% of them were Sinhalese.²⁷ The Ceylon Transport Board, the biggest employer in south Asia, recruited 52,000 employees up to 1970, of whom more than 98% were Sinhalese.

The Ceylon Institute for National and Tamil Affairs, in a memorandum to the International Commission of Jurists, stated that in the private sector "the chance of a Tamil securing employment is negligible, if he is not Sinhala educated. In government-managed corporations recruitment is at the discretion of the Minister and not by open competition. The chances of a Tamil securing employment are very rare".

Of 22,374 teachers recruited between 1971 and 1974, when Badiuddin Mahmud was minister of education, 18,000 were Sinhalese, 2,507 were Muslims and only 1,807 were Tamils. During those four years, 3,500 Tamil teachers retired and hence there was no net addition but an actual decline in the number of Tamil teachers. In the police and defence services, Tamil recruitment after 1970 was virtually nil.

As to the admission of students to the university, the national education commission headed by Professor J.E. Jayasuriya (in its Sinhalese majority report), pandering to the Sinhala-Buddhist lobby, recommended that admissions should be determined by quotas based on the religious composition of the country.²⁸ Because of the *swabasha* policy, the enrolment of students in secondary schools increased from 65,000 in 1950 to 225,000 in 1960. Due to the economic crisis resulting from the dependent capitalist policies pursued over the years, which created a large pool of unemployed, increasing numbers of secondary-school leavers sought admission to the university, particularly from the Sinhalese-Buddhist areas. There was an explosion in the numbers seeking university admission – from 5,277 in 1960 to 30,445 in 1970. The number of available places, on the other hand, only increased from 1,812 in 1960 to 3,471 in 1970.

Since the bulk of Sinhalese students who had entered the university in the late 1960s and graduated in arts subjects were without jobs, Sinhalese students turned to science courses. But in the Sinhalese areas the schools and colleges providing science courses were few, because of the absence of laboratory facilities compared to the northern and eastern province schools, which provided 70% of the university science student admissions in 1970. In the prestigious medical and engineering courses, the Tamil students were equal in number to the Sinhalese, who were mostly from the leading Colombo schools. Until 1970, no distinction was made between the Sinhalese and Tamil students seeking admission to the university, and admission was strictly by merit on the basis of open competitive examination held in the English medium.

In 1970, however, the science, engineering and medical faculties adopted a two-language policy, using Sinhala and Tamil. It was felt by the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists that, if admission were by merit, the Sinhalese students would not get as many places. Hence, on the eve of the release of that year's engineering course admissions, a rumour was started that, of the 160 students who had qualified, 100 were Tamils. On the basis of this rumour, a strident

campaign was mounted by the Sinhala-Buddhist lobby, under the aegis of the ACBC, for the merit system to be abandoned. As a result, on the direction of the ministry of education, lower qualifying marks were fixed for Sinhalese than for Tamil students, both regarding the language of instruction and the subjects themselves. The different qualifying marks were as follows:

Table 6.3

Minimum Marks for University Admission in 1971

	<i>Sinhalese Students</i>	<i>Tamil Students</i>
Medicine & dentistry	229	250
Physical science	183	204
Bio-Science	175	184
Engineering	227	250
Veterinary science	181	206
Architecture	180	194

Source: C.R. de Silva, "Weightage in University Admissions: Standardization and District Quotas", in *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol.5,2, 4 July 1972.

Once the norm of open competition had been abandoned owing to Sinhala-Buddhist pressure, then to make it look more acceptable and to secure further benefits, new stratagems were invented which constituted further departures from the previous norms. In the next four years, four different schemes of university admission were devised by the ministry of education and put into effect, each of which brought further benefits to the Sinhalese at the expense of the Tamil students. The four schemes were: standardization in 1973; standardization and district quotas in 1974; standardization and 100% district quotas in 1975; and standardization and 70% on marks, and 30% on district quotas, in 1976.

All these resulted in large numbers of Tamil students, who had studied and passed the examinations and were qualified for admission to the university, being debarred because they were Tamils. The percentage of Tamil students entering engineering courses fell from 40.8% in 1970 to 24.4% in 1973, and 13.2% in 1976. The percentage of Tamil students entering science courses fell from 35% in 1970 to 15% in 1978. The fall for medical courses was from 50% in 1970 to 37% in 1973, to 26% in 1974, and to 20% in 1975. In dental surgery, veterinary science and agriculture the denial of places for Tamils was even greater.

Each of these schemes generated great controversy. The country came to be caught up in debates on quotas, weightages, proportions and the like. Nobody seemed to realize that in a multi-ethnic country, with two distinct nations living under a unitary form of government, all these issues were destroying the very fabric of the Sri Lanka nation state.

Professor C.R. de Silva, who made a detailed study of these schemes, stated:

... each successive change brought further gains for the Sinhalese The application of the [1973 standardization] system resulted in considerable gains for the Sinhalese and won support among several sections of this group. The share of the Sinhalese in places for Engineering courses shot up to 73.1% and that for medicine to 58.8%. The Tamil share in places for Engineering dropped precipitously to 24.4%.

Taking all these schemes into account, he wrote of their results:

The Sinhalese emerged as the main beneficiaries. Their share in admissions to science based courses rose to 75.4% in 1974 and to over 80% (estimate) in 1975. Since they have consistently had over 85% admissions to Arts-oriented studies for many years, their representation in all fields of study within the university rose to proportions well above their percentage of the population.

These manifestly discriminatory schemes in the field of higher education shut out a large number of young Tamils who had qualified for university education. The only reason they were debarred was because they were Tamils. The young Tamils saw their Sinhalese counterparts, who had failed the admission examination, enter the university in their place because they were Sinhalese. Faced with this situation and having nothing to lose, they sought to correct the disadvantage of Tamil birth by taking up arms to liberate the Tamil nation and create a separate state of Tamil Eelam.

Professor C.R. de Silva, himself a Sinhalese, sums up the Tamil educational disaster and its consequences thus:

On the other hand the damage already done by discriminatory measures against the minorities is considerable. Unlike in the case of the struggle for the schools take-over the hostility and suspicion between the Sinhalese and the Tamils is unlikely to die away Unlike the Roman Catholics whose religion was the only factor which distinguished them from the rest of the Sinhalese (or Tamils), the Tamils of Sri Lanka have developed feelings of nationalism on their own and the question of educational opportunity only aggravated the conflicts that had risen owing to questions of language and employment. Nevertheless the question of University admissions is clearly one which mobilized the youth in Jaffna and prodded the Tamil United Front leadership to declare in favour of a separate state.²⁹

Formation of the Tamil United Front

Since the constituent assembly had rejected outright all the proposals of the

Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, and had proceeded to adopt a Buddhist theocratic state structure, the hitherto divided Tamil political parties and pressure groups came together even before the constitution was "enacted" by the constituent assembly. The FP, TC, CWC, the Eela Thammilar Otrumai Munnani and several Tamil youth and student organizations met at Trincomalee on 14 May 1972 and formed the Tamil United Front (TUF).

The TUF was born of the realization of the danger facing the Tamil nation and because of the uncompromising manner in which the proposals of the Tamil parties had been rejected by the constituent assembly. The three bourgeois Tamil leaders – S.J.V. Chelvanayakam (FP), G.G. Ponnambalam (TC) and S. Thondaman (CWC) – had no vision for the future of the Tamil nation except the need for their own unity and a new front to project it. But the smaller groups which joined the TUF were aware that the opportunity for political solutions was long passed and that the new constitution was the clearest affirmation not only of Sinhala-Buddhist rule but also of Tamil subjugation.

The TUF adopted a vague six-point programme: (1) a defined place for the Tamil language; (2) Sri Lanka should be a secular state; (3) fundamental rights of ethnic minorities (*sic*) should be embodied in the constitution and made enforceable by law; (4) citizenship for all who applied for it; (5) decentralization of the administration; and (6) the caste system to be abolished.

These proposals, on the face of it, meant a whittled-down negotiating basis for the Tamil political leaders, but meant nothing to the Tamil people, for whom qualitative equality with the Sinhalese, and the results that would flow out from this were the important issues. As far as the Tamils were concerned, there was only one clearly defined place for Tamil: the Tamil language must enjoy the same status as Sinhala, as the official language of the country; this was not a matter for political compromise or negotiation by Tamil politicians. If they could not achieve that, they alone were to blame for the policies they had pursued over the years. The institution of a Buddhist theocratic state and the denial of fundamental national-ethnic, linguistic and religious rights to the non-Sinhalese were the very bedrock of the constitution and therefore they had become non-negotiable.

With regard to citizenship, the constituent assembly had resolved that the laws in force on the subject should continue. They became Article 67 of the constitution. The question of the abolition of the caste system was not a contentious matter vis-à-vis the Tamils, Sinhalese and others, and its abolition was always within the grasp of the high-caste Tamil leaders themselves. The abolition of caste was stumbled upon because of the temple entry issue that raged in the late 1960s, when the Tamil politicians cautiously stood aloof from the controversy. They now incorporated the abolition of caste into their programme because of increased depressed-caste militancy and the arrival of Buddhist *bhikkhus* in Jaffna, seeking to capitalize on the situation and convert the low-caste people to Buddhism; also because, to undermine the FP's political solidarity, Mrs Bandaranaike nominated the depressed-caste leader

George Nalliah as a senator in 1970.

Although the Tamil leadership came together after nearly a quarter-century of personal rivalry between Ponnambalam and Chelvanayakam, they failed to formulate any strategy to galvanize the people and their struggle for survival as a distinct nation. The FP and the TC consisted, in the main, of middle-class lawyers to whom politics was an out-of-court pastime; because of their conservatism they lacked the intellectual capacity to formulate the correct theoretical position and evolve the appropriate strategies to meet the threat of Tamil national extinction. Their policies were merely the tricks of the charlatan, without any rigour of thought, speech or analysis. Hence they were often ridiculed, threatened and challenged by Sinhalese politicians. In the face of these challenges, they let the Tamil people's cause go by default, by resorting to compromising postures — walk-outs and boycotts when they should have carried home their points and convinced the Sinhalese waverers and the resignation of MPs' seats — all useless gimmicks of bourgeois politicians, not the policies of the leaders of an enslaved nation.

Protesting over the proclamation of the new constitution, Chelvanayakam resigned his seat for Kankasanturai in December 1972 and challenged the government to hold a by-election. Under the constitution, as enacted without the participation of the Tamil people and their representatives in the legislature, there was no longer any justification for Tamil MPs to continue in the legislature. But they stayed, and their very presence gave the illegal constitution a colour of legitimacy. They still believed in elections and political solutions, when the contrived relationship ordained by the constitution was that between Sinhalese masters and Tamil subjects.

Even the political agitation against the constitution by the Tamil politicians was muted. No one denounced the constitution as illegal, having no legal binding force or effect on the Tamil people. They were afraid of the state of emergency that lasted from 1971 to 1977, when political activity and even trade-union work were severely curbed, citizens' liberties circumscribed and judicial independence substantially curbed. The 1970 elections produced an unbridled monster in the UF government, which ran wild for seven years until it met its inevitable nemesis at the hands of the people in the 1977 elections.

Like the "Sinhala-only" act, the "Sinhala-only" provisions of the constitution regarding the language of the courts were unworkable. Hence the Language of the Courts (Special Provisions) Law was passed, in March 1973, providing for the use of Tamil in proceedings in courts and tribunals exercising jurisdiction in the northern and eastern provinces. This act provided that the courts and tribunals must cause a Sinhala translation to be made in the event of appeal. The legislature was particularly careful to emphasize the dominance of Sinhala in the Tamil areas, and so provided for the right to interpretation and translation into Sinhala for those not conversant with Tamil. This was essentially to benefit those Sinhalese who had been resettled under the government's colonization schemes. But it showed no concern for the language rights of the Tamils in the Tamil areas when the constitution was

framed and proclaimed, or for the Tamils outside the northern and eastern provinces when this law was enacted.

According to Section 6 of the 1973 law, regulations had to be made to put its provisions into practice. But no regulations were made. Hence these legal provisions for the use of Tamil language in court proceedings in the northern and eastern provinces remained a dead letter. But, once again, they were of necessity put into effect in the Tamil areas.

Tamil Black-Flag Demonstrations

Mrs Bandaranaike's continued strategy in the 1970s was to have nothing to do with the FP MPs. Since G.G. Ponnambalam, the TC leader, failed to win the 1970 elections, the three TC MPs were leaderless in parliament. So Mrs Bandaranaike inveigled S. Thiagarajah and A. Arulampalam to support her by offering the powerful post of District Political Authority, created outside the constitution, to the former, and extensive political leverage to the latter.

To isolate the Tamil FP MPs she entered into alliance with the Tamil-speaking Muslim MPs of the eastern province. And generally she was willing to placate the Muslims in order to show the Tamils that co-operation, not defiance, would bring some amelioration to their enslaved plight.

She appointed the defeated MP Alfred Duraiyappah as the SLFP organizer for Jaffna, and in January 1973 sent her appointee in the cabinet, C. Kumarasuriar, the Tamil leader chosen by her, to visit Jaffna. He was promptly greeted with a large black-flag demonstration by the Tamil students excluded from the university by the discriminatory "standardization" policy. He retreated post-haste to Colombo.

Then in March 1973 the ex-Marxists Pieter Keuneman and N.M. Perera went to Jaffna to win support for the government. They too were met by students demonstrating with black flags and by the closure of shops in Jaffna. In order to break the growing Tamil student solidarity and militancy, over 100 Tamil students were arrested and kept in custody. As a result on 15 March 1973 Tamil students, for the first time, called a strike and boycotted schools and colleges in the whole of Jaffna.

When the 1972 constitution came into force all government employees, and even lawyers in private practice, were compelled to take the oath to uphold it. Kasi Anandan, a young revolutionary Tamil poet in government service, refused to do so and was arrested and incarcerated for more than 1,000 days. Because of increasing Tamil student militancy Mavai Senathirajah, Vanni Ananadavinayagam and more than 200 other young Tamils were arrested and held in custody for more than four months in 1973.

Because of these arbitrary student arrests under emergency powers, young Tamils became a political force and demanded that the TUF resolve upon separation of the Tamil areas as the only political alternative. Hence the TUF Action Committee met at Valvettiturai in May 1973, under the chairmanship of Chelvanayakam, and resolved upon a separate state of Tamil Eelam as its

goal and adopted the rising sun as the flag of the state of Eelam.

Police Atrocities at the Fourth International Tamil Conference

Until about the 1950s, it was the received wisdom that Aryans (*Arya* means "noble" in Sanskrit), a nomadic race of horsemen from the steppes of southern Russia who had occupied north and central India between c. 1500-500 BC, were the earliest people of India, who gave India her first civilization, the Sanskrit language and Hinduism. This thesis, mainly from the linguistic point of view, was first popularized by Sir William Jones, the father of Indo-European linguistics, in the 19th Century. While studying Sanskrit (a language long since dead), he was struck by the affinity between Sanskrit and most of the languages, living and dead, of Europe.³⁰ He contended that all Indian languages arose from Sanskrit.

But his thesis was challenged by scholars like Pope, Ellis, Taylor, Caldwell, Roberto di Nobili and others, who contended that the south Indian Dravidian languages of Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Canarese were of a distinct and separate family, and were anterior to Sanskrit and Sanskrit-based Aryan languages. Their contention was proved right in the 1950s by the discovery of the Indus Valley civilization (dated from about 2500 to 1900 BC) consisting of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, two great ruined cities with more than 100 towns and villages built over 4,000 years ago in the Indus Valley (Harappa is near Lahore, Mohenjo-Daro north of Karachi). It extended from the Afghan border to Uttar Pradesh, and from Jamuna in the north to Gujerat in the south-west.

These sites were excavated from the 1930s, and in the 1950s it was established that the Indus Valley civilization was that of the Dravidians, who had settled in north India before the invasions of the Aryans, who, being nomads, had no use for city life and so destroyed the city civilization of the Indus, fought many wars against the Dravidians and pushed them into southern India, where they live today. The Dravidian language was spoken by the people of the Indus Valley.

Because of their history, the Dravidian languages are still spoken by Brahuis, the aborigines of Baluchistan in west Pakistan, by small tribes in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, and in the Rajmahal hills on the Ganges. The splendour of the Indus Valley civilization was such that it ranked on a par with Mesopotamia and Egypt, and these three came to be regarded as the earliest civilizations of man.

The Indus Valley cities

are notable for their geometrical planning, their careful drainage systems, their artistic seals, their evidence of cotton culture and extensive trade, including contact with Sargonid Mesopotamia There remains the evidence of religious cultures There are clear traces of the worship of the bull and fertility cults, including the Hindu cult

of the great god Shiva.³¹

The caste system also arose because of the Aryan invasions and conquest.³² Hence, as Sir Ivor Jennings stated:

The oldest living civilization, however, goes back beyond the beginning of recorded history. It is that of the Dravidian-speaking peoples, the Tamils, Malayalis, Kanarese and Telugus It is possible that they were spread throughout the Indian peninsula before the Aryan invasions The Dravidian civilization has been profoundly influenced by Aryan ideas, especially through Hinduism, but it remains distinct.³³

With these findings, the view that the Aryans were the first civilizers had to be revised. Great international interest was aroused in the antiquity of the Dravidian, particularly Tamil, language, history, grammar, lexicography, epigraphy, religion, etc. This was because Tamil was the oldest and the principal Dravidian language and the only ancient classical language which had survived as a spoken language with its basic structure unchanged; also because, apart from Sanskrit, Tamil literature was the oldest in India.

The new knowledge of the Dravidian past led to two important developments of interest to our study. Firstly, the Dravidians of south India, becoming aware that their culture and civilization had been overrun and overwhelmed by Aryan and Sanskrit influences, campaigned to “de-Sanskritize” and “de-Brahmanize” Tamil culture, language, literature and religion. Further, arising from this, E.V. Ramasamy Periyar launched a political movement for secession and the creation of a separate state of Dravidistan, comprising the four southern Dravidian states which, in British India, were called the Madras Presidency. His ideals were taken up by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), led by C.N. Annadurai, who in the 1960s became the chief minister of Tamil Nadu state. However, while this separatist movement was gaining ground, the Chinese attacked the Indian border areas in the early 1960s and because of external aggression Annadurai publicly abandoned separation as the DMK’s goal and supported a united India.

The second development of importance was the interest evinced by many foreign scholars, universities and governments in Dravidology and Tamil linguistics, which led in the late 1950s to the founding of the International Tamil Research Conference, an organization (on the lines of the English-Speaking Union) with membership open to all Tamil speakers and foreign Tamil scholars.

The conference was the brainchild of Fr Dr Xavier Thaninayagam, a Jaffna Tamil, then Professor of Indian Studies at the University of Malaysia. He, with Kamil Zvelebil, Professor of Dravidian Comparative Linguistics and Tamil Philology at Charles University, became the joint-secretaries of the conference, which meets every few years to discuss research in Dravidology, Tamil linguistics, history, culture, antiquities, Indian culture, etc. The first conference, hosted by the government of Malaysia, was held in Kuala Lumpur

in 1966; the second, hosted by the government of Tamil Nadu, was held in Madras in 1968; the third, hosted by various cultural organizations, was held in Paris in 1971; and the fourth was held in Jaffna from 3 to 10 January 1974.

From the beginning, Prime Minister Bandaranaike was opposed to the idea of the conference being held in Sri Lanka, but she could not expressly forbid the holding of an international conference of scholars. Hundreds of scholars from various parts of the world came to participate at the Jaffna conference. It was a historic and joyous event, and an occasion for reflection on the past achievements and present problems of a people in a country where the Tamil language was denied official status and the Tamil people were oppressed and enslaved.

According to the custom of the conference, on the last day a public meeting was organized at the Jaffna esplanade so that delegates could address the people. At that meeting, on 10 January, while Professor Nainar Mohamed was giving a discourse on Tamil literature and the assembled Tamils were listening in a state of rapture, hundreds of Sinhalese policemen threw tear-gas into the crowd and attacked the people. As a result nine Tamils died and hundreds were injured.

The police brutalities were absolutely unforeseen and totally unprovoked. The government refused to condemn them, or hold an inquiry, or even express sympathy for the loss of lives. This made the Tamil people believe, with good reason, that the atrocities were committed with the connivance, or at the instigation, of the government as a warning to the Tamils.

Chelvanayakam Calls for Separate Tamil Eelam State

Although Chelvanayakam resigned his seat as a protest against the new constitution and challenged Mrs Bandaranaike's government to hold a by-election to test the acceptability of the new constitution by the Tamil people, no by-election was held until December 1975. In the meantime, having constitutionally legitimized Sinhalese rule and the Buddhist theocratic state structure, Mrs Bandaranaike sought to break the Tamil people's will by various stratagems, as outlined earlier.

Believing that she had been successful, in 1974 Mrs Bandaranaike visited Jaffna, for the first time, to open a new campus of the University of Sri Lanka. Since the 1950s, Tamil politicians and educationalists had been demanding a Tamil university in Jaffna. In response, in 1974 the government simply converted Jaffna College, the main secondary school in Jaffna, into a campus of the University of Sri Lanka. This angered rather than pacified the Tamil intellectuals and educationalists. Believing that she had made a great concession to the Tamils, Mrs Bandaranaike ordered the by-election to be held in January 1975, more than two years after the seat had been made vacant. Chelvanayakam sought the Tamil people's mandate for separation and won by a majority of 16,000 votes — his best result since 1947. On

winning the by-election, Chelvanayakam declared:

Throughout the ages the Sinhalese and Tamils in the country lived as distinct sovereign people till they were brought under foreign domination. It should be remembered that the Tamils were in the vanguard of the struggle for independence in the full confidence that they also will regain their freedom. We have for the last 25 years made every effort to secure our political rights on the basis of equality with the Sinhalese in a united Ceylon. It is a regrettable fact that successive Sinhalese governments have used the power that flows from independence to deny us our fundamental rights and reduce us to the position of a subject people. These governments have been able to do so only by using against the Tamils the sovereignty common to the Sinhalese and the Tamils. I wish to announce to my people and to the country that I consider the verdict at this election as a mandate that the Tamil Eelam nation should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the Tamil people and become free. On behalf of the Tamil United Front, I give you my solemn assurance that we will carry out this mandate.³⁴

With such open advocacy of separation as the political goal of the TUF and the Tamil people, Tamil politics came to be radicalized by the intervention of young Tamils who had suffered incarceration and torture and had been released from police detention without any charge. Under the state of emergency and with censorship of news, the police resorted to increased repression in the north.

One Pararasa, a bank clerk, was shot dead while returning from a temple festival. FP politicians were threatened whenever they intervened over police detention of young Tamils. There was no legal recourse against arbitrary arrest and detention, because of the state of emergency and because the judiciary had been subjected to direct political control.

Letchumanan, a young Tamil in the tea plantations, was shot dead by the police. The plantations were in a state of ferment over the land take-over, whereby the Sinhalese were led to believe that the plantation lands were to be given back to them. Hence they set fire to the Tamil labourers' lines and attacked and robbed them, to intimidate them and make them leave the plantations. Sinhalese thugs and hooligans were encouraged by Sinhalese politicians to terrorize the plantation Tamils because of their leaders' support for the UNP in the 1965 and 1970 elections.

In Jaffna, Alfred Duraiyappah, the agent Mrs Bandaranaike had chosen to consolidate her power over the Tamils, was shot and killed. This was the first political murder in Jaffna. The government suspected young Tamils and arrested a large number of innocent young people and detained them. The police tortured detainees to extract confessions and implicate possible suspects. Although more than 100 youths were held in detention for more than a year, nobody was charged with murder.

All this escalated the political conflict and brought the young Tamils into

the centre of the Tamil political arena. The Sinhalese police became the custodians of the ruling power of the Sinhalese and, under a near-permanent state of emergency, they went on the rampage in 1975 and early 1976. Seven Muslims praying inside a mosque in Puttalam were massacred by the Sinhalese police. More than 200 houses, 50 shops and two fibre factories belonging to Muslims were set ablaze. The Sinhalese police burnt down two mosques in Puttalam and, in the Sinhalese rioting that broke out against the Muslims, two young Muslims were burnt alive by the Sinhalese police. The government refused to hold an inquiry into these riots and police atrocities. Sinhalese chauvinism had come into its own.

Formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front

Amidst this situation of insecurity for the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Indian Tamils and the Tamil-speaking Muslims, the TUF leaders met at Vaddukkodai, a constituency in the north, and reconstituted themselves as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). At its first convention, presided over by Chelvanayakam, they resolved to restore and reconstitute the state of Tamil Eelam. Their resolution was as follows:

The First National Convention of the Tamil Liberation Front, meeting at Pannakam (Vaddukodai Constituency) on the 14th day of May 1976, hereby declares that the Tamils of Ceylon, by virtue of their great language, their religions, their separate culture and heritage, their history of independent existence as a separate state over a distinct territory for several centuries till they were conquered by the armed might of the European invaders and above all by their will to exist as a separate entity ruling themselves in their own territory, are a nation distinct and apart from the Sinhalese and their constitution announces to the world that the Republican Constitution of 1972 has made the Tamils a slave nation ruled by the new colonial masters, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities of employment and education and thereby destroying all the attributes of nationhood of the Tamil people.

And therefore, while taking note of the reservations in relation to its commitment to the setting up of a separate state of Tamil Eelam expressed by the Ceylon Workers' Congress as a Trade Union of plantation workers, the majority of whom live and work outside the Northern and Eastern areas.

This convention resolves that the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right of self-determination inherent in every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in this country.

One can see in the words of this resolution the ambivalence of middle-class Tamil political leaders to the political disaster facing the Tamil nation. They did not speak in terms of political liberation or freedom, or even separation, but in terms of restoration and reconstitution of the political reality that had existed 400 years ago. They were not convinced that Sinhala rule, Buddhist hegemonism and Tamil enslavement had become irreversible.

Even in 1976, they believed that, regrettably, Tamil self-determination had become inevitable. They were constitutionalists to the core, unwilling to realize that their political methods were inappropriate and irrelevant to a nation's struggle for political liberation against an oppressor who had given himself an illegal constitution and maintained himself by a state of emergency and police repression.

These leaders harnessed "socialism" as the goal of the state of Tamil Eelam, but they could see nothing in socialism except the use of the word.³⁵ The libertarian content of socialism regarding freedom from oppression, and its theory and practice for achieving liberation, were of no interest to them. Their only hope was that the inclusion of word "liberation" in their programme would magically produce Tamil liberation. They took no meaningful steps to raise the level of the Tamil people's political consciousness of a clearly defined ideology and path of liberation, so as to bind the people to that goal. They failed to take a single step forward to make a reality of their new resolve for Tamil self-determination. They wanted the political kingdom to be given to them on a platter.

References

1. *Parliament of Ceylon – 1970*, Ceylon Daily News, Colombo, p.14.
2. *Ceylon Daily News*, 30 April 1971.
3. *Ceylon Observer*, 24 June 1970.
4. *Bribery Commissioner v. Ranasinghe* (1964) 2 A11 ER 785.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Another instance of inviolability are the "basic articles" of the Cyprus constitution of 1960, which could not be amended or repealed by the Cyprus legislature.
7. *Liyanage et al v. Regina* (1966) 1A11 ER 650.
8. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings*, Colombo, p.163.
9. See K.C. Wheare, *Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth*, Oxford. Professor Wheare's thesis was that "the Members of the Commonwealth will, as a rule, take steps quite soon after they achieve independence through a constitution made in Britain . . . to proclaim that independence in a document which they can claim owes its validity and authority to no outside country or institution but to themselves alone". See also Kenneth Robinson, *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol.1. For a criticism of Wheare's thesis, see Kenneth Roberts-Wray, *Commonwealth and Colonial Law*, Stevens.
10. House Debates, Vol.2, No.6, Column 334 of 9 May 1972.

11. *Ibid.*, Vol.1, No.28, Column 2107 of 25 June 1971.
12. From the FP 1977 election manifesto.
13. *Ceylon Daily News*, 1 June 1972.
14. Quoted in *Annual Review of Commonwealth Law*, Butterworths, 1972, London.
15. *Ceylon Daily News*, 18 November 1982.
16. Janice Jiggins, *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese 1947-1976*, Cambridge, 1979.
17. S.U. Kodikara, 'Communalism and Political Modernisation in Ceylon', *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, January 1970, p.100.
18. *Ibid.*, p.104.
19. Peter Richards and Wilbert Gooneratne, *Basic Needs, Poverty and Government Policies in Sri Lanka*, ILO, Geneva, 1980, p.76.
20. *Ibid.*, p.124.
21. See *Economic Review*, Colombo, January 1978.
22. For annual breakdown of these and other capital investments in Public Sector Corporations for this period, see Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy 1948-1980*, London, p.127.
23. G.P. Malalasekera, *Pali Literature of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1928, p.25.
24. The full statement appearing in the first page of the *Sunday Observer* of 15 August 1982, entitled "Pre-Christian Era finds at Jetavana", is as follows: "The archaeological finds at Jetavanaramaya will help shed more light on the Sri Lankan history of the pre-Christian era. Director of Archaeology, Dr Hema Ratnayake told the 'Sunday Observer'. Among the finds the most important are three life-sized sand stone statues of which two are female figures . . . The complete female figure found in the site is extremely interesting and could possibly be the only one of its kind discovered so far in the country. These statues are said to belong to the fifth century BC. A large number of local and foreign clay vessels had also been found. A clay dish found near the ruins of a building supposed to be a monastery has inscribed on it the name of a monk."
25. Walter Schwarz, *supra*, p.12.
26. In the 1940s and early 1950s, when the declared policy of the government was that both Sinhala and Tamil would be the official languages, Sinhala was taught in nearly every school in Jaffna, often by a *bhikkhu*. Some of them turned out to be not only teachers of Sinhala but also learners of Tamil. One of them, Dharmaratna Thero, who taught in Kokuvil Hindu College and learnt Tamil, became the author of a Tamil-Sinhala dictionary and translated into Sinhala two classical Tamil works. In the 1960s he was awarded a silver medal by the Governor of Madras for his contribution to the Tamil language.
27. Robert Kearney, 'The Marxist Parties of Ceylon', in Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda (eds.), *Radical Politics in South Asia*, Cambridge, Mass., 1973. In 1966 a World Bank report stated that "the public enterprises and corporations are grossly overstaffed as a result of political patronage", see *The Foreign Exchange Problem of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1966.
28. See *National Education Commission (Final Report)*, Colombo, 1962, p.164.
29. C.R. de Silva, 'The Schools Take-over and the University Admissions', in Michael Roberts (ed), *Collective Identities . . .*, p.474-497.

30. This was because it was one branch of the same Aryans, speaking the same or an allied language, who by about the 5th millennium BC went over into Asia Minor and south-east Europe. In Europe they appeared as the Mitanni and the Greeks. In the Tigris-Euphrates area they founded the riverine civilizations of Mesopotamia.
31. Percival Spear, in 'India', in *The Making of the Modern World*, London, 1971, p.205.
32. The Aryans were fair-skinned and since only warrior-men came and conquered north India, because of a shortage of their own women, they married the darker-skinned Dravidian women. But they had colour prejudice and as soon as possible, this practice was stopped for fear of losing their identity. When the fair-skinned Aryans became the rulers and the darker-skinned Dravidians their slaves and servants, intermarriage was forbidden by unique rules, really of colour and class, which eventually became rules of caste endogamy. In its origin, the formula was *varna*=colour=caste. The aspects of touch and taboo were developed to buttress and fortify endogamy instituted on the basis of colour, class and caste.
33. Sir Ivor Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations*, London, pp.79-80.
34. Quoted in Walter Schwarz, *supra*, p.1.
35. The Tamil leaders who formed the TULF were plantation owners and employers of Indian Tamil estate workers. G.G. Ponnambalam was the owner of Sri Niwasa estate at Waga; S.J.V. Chelvanayakam was the owner of an estate in Maskeliya, and Thondaman was the owner of Wavendon estate in Pussellawa and Medagoda estate in Dolosbage.

7. The Tamil Liberation Struggle

Although the parliament elected at the May 1970 election was to last for five years, the Republican constitution adopted in May 1972 extended its life by two years. Article 42(5) provided that the parliament “shall continue for a period of five years commencing from the date of the adoption of the constitution by the Constituent Assembly”. Accordingly, this parliament continued until 18 May 1977, when it was dissolved and a general election was fixed for 21 July 1977.

Earlier, in September 1975, the LSSP, one of the partners in the UF coalition, had been dismissed from the government by Mrs Bandaranaike, and in early 1977 the CP, the other UF partner, had defected from the government ranks.

On account of the seven-year “long parliament” and its expectation that it could avoid a general election, the ruling SLFP found itself in complete disarray when parliament was dissolved. During the last few years of the parliament Mrs Bandaranaike’s government had come to revolve around an inner coterie comprising two cabinet ministers connected to the prime minister by family ties. A few other family members, though outside parliament, seemed more important even than the senior cabinet ministers.

Because of the nature of the policies adopted by the UF coalition government, the economy began steadily to slip back, resulting in deepening economic crisis. In 1973 the UF finance minister, Dr N.M. Perera, cut the subsidy on rice, on which the poor depended, and stated: “Clearly, we cannot do without either internal security or development effort. What we can do is to call upon the people to shoulder a greater responsibility by relying less on welfare measures.”

The price of rationed rice was increased several times, as a result of which the open-market price shot up so much that people could not afford to buy it. There was a great food shortage. Starvation, particularly of the urban poor and the Indian Tamil estate families, became the order of the day in the mid-1970s. In fact eating rice, the staple food of the people, became a luxury. Hence Mrs Bandaranaike launched what she called “the food production war”.

Unemployment reached crisis proportions. Prices soared to dizzy heights. Capitalist policies, and incentives such as tax holidays, multiple exchange

rates and convertible rupee accounts granted to businessmen, brought about the greatest disparity in income and wealth the country had ever seen. From 1965, the country embarked on a series of foreign loans; when these matured in the 1970s, the repayments siphoned away 25-30% of export earnings. Hence more was borrowed, which created a debt economy and deepened the vicious circle. It was the ordinary people who had to suffer the consequences of the failure of these policies.

The 1977 Election

The five-year state of emergency and its attendant repression brought into the 1977 election campaign a set of new issues — the need for guarantees of personal liberties, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, control of police excesses, support for the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the repeal of the *ex post facto* penal laws. For the Sinhalese themselves, Sri Lanka under Mrs Bandaranaike had become a vast prison, and the first priority was to revert to an open and democratic process of government. *The mercurial J.R. Jayewardene, the veteran campaigner of so many elections*, who had, on Dudley's death, taken over the leadership of the UNP, realized the public's mood. He quickly pledged that he would usher in what he called a government that was *dharmista* (just and righteous in terms of Buddhist doctrine) if voted to power.

Because of the Tamils' demand for separation, the need to find a solution to the problem became important in Sinhalese politics and in the 1977 election campaign. Each political party took up a position on the Tamil national question. The UNP election manifesto, entitled "A Programme of Action to Create a Just and Free Society", stated:

The United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems has made the Tamil-speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate state. In the interest of national integration and unity so necessary for the economic development of the whole country, the party feels such problems should be solved without loss of time. The party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy the grievances in such fields as (1) Education, (2) Colonization, (3) Use of Tamil language, (4) Employment in the Public and Semi-Public Corporations. We will summon an all-Party Conference as stated earlier and implement its decision.

The SLFP manifesto, under the heading of "National Unity and National Problems", stated:

A State Advisory Council would be set up representing all nationalities to advise the government to discuss essential factors and to take

steps including institutional reforms on cultural, social, economic, national and all language problems of the people of all minorities.

The United Left Front, formed between the LSSP and the CP, declared in its election manifesto, under the heading of "National Minorities":

While retaining the unitary character of the state, the principle of regional autonomy will be applied within the general national framework of District Councils. While protecting and implementing to the full, language rights already provided for, our Government will facilitate the use of Tamil as the language of administration in the Tamil-speaking areas. The Republican Constitution will be amended to include the rights already administratively granted to the Tamil language. Tamil will be declared a national language, in terms of the Constitution, without prejudice to the status of Sinhala as the official language of the country. Discrimination in education or employment on the basis of race, religion, or caste will be prohibited. Incitement of racial or religious hatred will be declared a penal offence.

These were the pre-election posturings of the Sinhalese political parties after 20 years of "Sinhala only". To the UNP, the Tamil problem needed attention only "in the interests of national integration and unity so necessary for the economic development of the whole country". "Economic development" was more important than the Tamil national question.

In this context, it is apposite to quote what Lenin wrote of Russia in the early 1920s:

Our five years' experience in settling the national question, in a country that contains a tremendous number of nationalities such as could hardly be found in any other country, gives us the full conviction that . . . the only correct attitude to the interests of nations is to meet those interests in full and provide conditions that exclude any possibility of conflicts on that score. Our experience has left us with the firm conviction that only exclusive attention to the interests of various nations can remove grounds for conflicts, can remove mutual mistrust, can remove any fear of any intrigues and create that confidence, especially on the part of workers and peasants . . . without which there absolutely cannot be peaceful relations between peoples or anything like a successful development of everything that is of value in present-day civilization.¹

When the UNP came to power on winning the 1977 election, without seeking to solve any of the problems which its manifesto had conceded were facing the Tamils, Jayewardene confronted the Tamil people's movement for separation by sending the military forces with a mandate to "wipe out" those spearheading the demand for a separate Tamil state.

The TULF election manifesto to the Tamil people stated:

. . . What is the alternative now left to the nation that has lost its rights to its language, rights to its citizenship, rights to its religions and continues day by day to lose its traditional homeland to Sinhalese colonization? What is the alternative now left to a nation that has lost its opportunities to higher education through "standardization" and its equality in opportunities in the sphere of employment? What is the alternative to a nation that lies helpless as it is being assaulted, looted and killed by hooligans instigated by the ruling race and by the security forces of the state? Where else is an alternative to the Tamil nation that gropes in the dark for its identity and finds itself driven to the brink of devastation?

There is only one alternative and that is to proclaim with the stamp of finality and fortitude that we alone shall rule over our land our forefathers fuled. Sinhalese imperialism shall quit our Homeland. The Tamil United Liberation Front regards the general election of 1977 as a means of proclaiming to the Sinhalese Government this resolve of the Tamil nation . . . Hence the TULF seeks in the General Election the mandate of the Tamil nation to establish an independent, sovereign, secular, socialist State of Tamil Eelam that includes all the geographically contiguous areas that have been the traditional homeland of the Tamil-speaking people in the country.

The manifesto, an elaborate document, went on to describe the structure of the Eelam state, its citizenship, its official language, the abolition of the caste system, its economic policy, and advocated non-alignment in foreign affairs and support for anti-imperialist forces and democratic liberation movements. As to how liberation would be achieved, the manifesto stated:

The Tamil nation must take the decision to establish its sovereignty in its homeland on the basis of its right to self-determination. The only way to announce this decision to the Sinhalese government and to the world is to vote for the Tamil United Liberation Front. The Tamil-speaking representatives who get elected through these votes, while being members of the National State Assembly of Ceylon, will also form themselves into the National Assembly of Tamil Eelam which will draft a constitution for the state of Tamil Eelam and establish the independence of Tamil Eelam by bringing that constitution into operation either by peaceful means or by direct action or struggle.

In this manner, the TULF firmly and unequivocally committed itself to take steps to establish the Tamil state of Eelam immediately after the election. The Tamil people were enthusiastic. They believed the TULF and

were willing to struggle in the cause of liberation. They voted in their thousands and returned 17 TULF candidates throughout the Tamil north and east. They voted for them primarily as their representatives to the promised proposed National Assembly of Tamil Eelam, which would draft a constitution and “establish the independence of the Tamil Eelam”. As to what happened after the election, we shall return to this shortly.

In the 1977 election, the SLFP for the first time stood alone and isolated. It was attacked by the UNP on the one side and the ULF (LSSP-CP alliance) on the other. The SLFP was criticized for the arbitrary exercise of power, police brutalities, the high cost of living, the growing unemployment, abuse of power, family patronage, the creation of a new *mudalali* capitalist class. The UNP manifesto pledged to put all this right and to pursue “democratic socialism”.

What the people wanted was simply to be freed from seven years of SLFP tyranny. Jayewardene’s promise of a *dharmista* government seemed to offer just this. The Tamil people outside the north and east were hopeful of solutions to their problems because of the UNP’s pledges in its manifesto. The UNP’s victory was both a reaction against political excesses and arbitrary exercise of power, and an expression of hope that the UNP would save the people from the deepening socio-economic crisis.

Sri Lanka’s eighth general election resulted in a massive landslide for the UNP. The SLFP and its former coalition partners (LSSP and CP), who had been voted into power in 1970 by a three-quarters majority, were now defeated by an enormous five-sixths majority for the UNP. The UNP won 139 seats, or 83% of the seats in parliament. The SLFP won only eight and the LSSP and CP failed to win one. The election narrowed the representation in parliament to just three parties – the UNP, the SLFP and the TULF. The turn-out had been a record 86.7% – the highest in any democratic election in the world. The 1977 election results were as follows:

Table 7.1
The 1977 Election Results

Party	Total Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Votes Polled
United National Party (UNP)	154	139	50.92
Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)	147	8	29.72
Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)	24	18	6.75
Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)	82	—	3.61
Communist Party (CP)	25	—	1.98
Ceylon Workers’ Congress (CWC)	2	1	1.00
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP)	27	—	0.36
Independents	295	1	5.65

Source: *The Economic Review*, July 1977.

For the first time in the parliamentary history of Sri Lanka, the former governing party was so decimated that it failed to become the largest opposition party. Apart from Mrs Bandaranaike and one minister, all the SLFP ministers were defeated. The ex-Marxist LSSP and CP ceased to be a parliamentary force. The opposition came to be led by A. Amirthalingam, who became the leader of the TULF on the death of Chelvanayakam. This at once turned the parliamentary confrontation between government and opposition into one between a Sinhalese government and a Tamil opposition.

This was a disaster for Tamil politics. Any position taken up by the opposition was interpreted as coming from a party that stood for the division of the country. In his naivety, however, Amirthalingam seemed to be delighted with his new role as leader of the opposition. This was in a parliament where the opposition was totally ineffectual and the government party commanded a five-sixths majority. J.R. Jayewardene became the prime minister and formed a cabinet giving important portfolios to raw, inexperienced figures. K.W. Devanayagam, a Tamil UNP MP from the eastern province, was made minister of justice. S. Thondaman, elected as an MP from the multi-member Nuwara Eliya constituency, joined the government party and was later appointed a minister.

The 1977 Anti-Tamil Riots

In late 1975 Walter Schwarz wrote: "Sri Lanka appears very likely to be on the brink of a fresh deterioration in its community relations. What form it will take is an open question." But such warnings went unheeded. Within a month of the UNP government taking office, the anti-Tamil riots of August 1977 engulfed the country.

For two weeks from 16 August, Sinhalese thugs and hooligans, instigated by the chauvinists, went on the rampage. They attacked the Tamils wherever they found them, killed hundreds of Tamil men, women and children, burnt Tamil houses and shops and looted Tamil houses in broad daylight and later set them ablaze.

Fr Tissa Balasuriya wrote of these events:

During the last two weeks of August 1977 many in Sri Lanka lived agonizing days and nights of looting, arson and lawlessness. Gangs have beaten, inflicted horrifying injuries and even resorted to manslaughter. All this is apparently due to racial animosities . . . According to official sources over 100 have lost their lives. About 50,000 have left their homes and moved mainly to the north . . . houses, shops and residential lines have first been looted, then set ablaze. The lines of division have once again gone into the hearts of people . . . innocent children have lost a mother or father . . . Bewildered children will for all time remember the refugee camps — the only place of solace for their mothers and fathers for days and nights . . . Tens of thousands

of innocent plantation workers were worst affected by the communal disturbances of August 1977.²

Fr Balasuriya refers to the events as “communal disturbances” and studiously refrains from describing them as Sinhalese rioting and the murder of innocent Tamils. The government declared a state of emergency and curfew, but in the 1977 holocaust the police and army were on the side of the Sinhalese thugs, looters, arsonists and murderers, for it was their wish that the Tamils be taught a lesson for demanding a separate state.

A new dimension with important consequences that emerged in the 1977 riots, and which was to be repeated in 1981 and 1982, was that the Indian Tamils in the plantations were as seriously affected as the Sri Lankan Tamils. Bernadcen Silva confirms this when she writes:

A new feature has emerged in the communal disturbances of August 1977. Though it lasted only two weeks, it seems to have created more bitterness both among the Tamils and the Sinhalese. This time, many more indigenous Tamils do not wish to return to their old places of work in the Central, Western and Southern Provinces. Some of those of Indian origin who have received Ceylon Citizenship want it revoked to return to India, while others want to be re-settled in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the traditional areas where they feel safe.³

It must be remembered that S. Thondaman, although a party to the TULF, was not for separation. He probably felt that, since the plantations were located outside the north and east, the interests of the Indian plantation Tamils were best served by a united Sri Lanka. But the 1977 and 1981 anti-Tamil rioting drove many plantation Tamils to the Vavuniya areas in the north, for reasons of security.

These Tamil refugees were resettled in farming schemes established in the Vavuniya area by humanitarian groups, with aid from certain overseas volunteer organizations. Over the years, they have grown into Tamil villages and there are now about 40 of them in the Vavuniya area. From being tea pluckers and rubber pruners and line-room-dwellers living and working under wretched conditions, these resettled Indian Tamils have become a new political force uniting with the Sri Lankan Tamils. When they were in the plantations, they were attacked in their line-rooms and driven away by Sinhalese thugs and villagers. Once they were resettled in the north, they came to be harassed and beaten up by the army in their search for “Tiger” suspects. David Selbourne writes graphically of their present plight and their determination to resist:

The police and the army — as many as a thousand at a time have invaded, some landing in helicopters, others driving their armoured cars (“it was like ploughing”) across the new crops — harass the settlements, searching for Tigers and beating up suspects . . . The former

plantation coolie . . . was tied, struck in the face with fists, and hung upside down from the roof beams, face bleeding, for hours. He crosses his thin arms on his chest to show how they tied him . . . the harassment has made the settlers even more determined: "We will stay here and die here", they say . . .

Because of their insecurity, these plantation Tamils have resolved to fight for Tamil liberation and Tamil Eelam. Selbourne writes:

"We have started moving towards liberation," said a squatter-village headman, 20 miles from Vavuniya, formerly a tea-plantation worker. "Here everybody is for Eelam." On the up-country estates, they ask: "What good will Eelam do us? Will it find jobs for one million plantation workers?" But, here, they say, "We are fighting for the next generation." Free of the suffocation of the line-rooms and the shackles of their serfdom, this is a new political language and a new defiance. Vavuniya, not Jaffna, is the front-line of the Tamil struggle; and on this battlefield, they are not likely to be defeated.⁴

UNP's Betrayal of Election Pledge

The UNP had in its election manifesto accepted that there were numerous problems confronting the Tamil people, in particular education, colonization, the use of the Tamil language and employment, and had pledged to solve these problems when it came to office. Once in power, however, it assumed a position no different to Mrs Bandaranaike's. The Tamils outside the north and east had believed the UNP and voted for it. Yet it failed to summon the all-party conference it had promised in the manifesto, although there were just three parties in parliament and the UNP had a four-fifths majority. It could even be argued that it had received this majority specifically to solve the Tamil problem which had bedevilled the country from 1956. Soon after the formation of the government, the *Maha Nayake* of the Asgiriya — the high priest of the most influential Buddhist sect in the country — in August 1977 reminded Prime Minister J.R. Jayewardene:

1. You are Prime Minister not only of the Buddhists, but of all countrymen,
2. You must hold the scales evenly among the Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims,
3. Religion and language should be treated equally,
4. You should do everything to correct the situation that has hitherto prevailed.⁵

This reminder was not heeded by Junius Richard Jayewardene. In his rhetoric, however, he was sublime. He told the World Peace through Law

Centre Conference in August 1977:

My Government is dedicated to the elimination of all forms of discrimination. In this task, the redress of the grievances of all ethnic, religious and caste groups will receive my Government's urgent attention. To this end an all-party conference will shortly be summoned to consider the problems of non-Sinhala speaking people and its decisions will be incorporated in the proposed constitution.⁶

Without calling the promised all-party conference or taking any steps to redress Tamil grievances, Jayewardene proceeded to declare war by sending in the army with instructions to "wipe out the terrorists", i.e. the young Tamils fighting for liberation from Sinhalese enslavement who were shut out from the university because of government's discrimination against them.

The 1978 Constitution

The 1972 UF constitution was the first constitution in the world to provide for its own repeal and replacement. This was contrary to known constitutional principles, according to which a constitution, if legally enacted, is a document of permanent validity unless legal continuity of the state is broken by a coup d'état or a successful revolution. What was even more astonishing was that the 1972 constitution made the process of making a new constitution a legislative function by two-thirds majority of the parliament of Sri Lanka, the same majority required for constitutional amendment.

Although the 1972 constitution was illegal, as contended earlier, since the UNP possessed the required two-thirds majority, it proceeded to repeal the 1972 constitution and replace it with a new one in August 1978, declaring Sri Lanka a Democratic Socialist Republic.

The central feature of the 1978 constitution was its provision for an executive presidential government with a cabinet of ministers, collectively responsible to parliament. Under this constitution, Jayewardene was "deemed for all purposes to have been elected as the President of the Republic", and would hold that office "for a period of six years from 4 February 1978". The President was "the Head of the State, Head of the Executive and the Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces", with power to appoint and dismiss the cabinet of ministers and to dissolve parliament.

The 1978 constitution reiterated that Sri Lanka was a unitary state and described the territory of the Republic of Sri Lanka as consisting of the 24 administrative districts. This constitution for the first time described the national flag (the lion flag), the national anthem and the national day.

As to the place of Buddhism, it went much further than the 1972 constitution and in Article 9 stated: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddha *Sasana*." The Buddha *Sasana* includes the

doctrine as taught by Buddha as well as the Buddhist church.

In regard to the official language, Article 18 stated: "The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala." The change from the 1972 provision is striking. According to the 1972 constitution, "the official language shall be Sinhala as provided by the Official Language Act", but the new constitution did not define it in terms of an *ultra vires* act, but constitutionally provided for Sinhala as the official language. In this way, both Buddhism and Sinhala were further exalted by the 1978 constitution.

In Article 22 the constitution stated that "the official language shall be the language of administration throughout Sri Lanka". To this a proviso was added that the "Tamil language shall also be used as the language of administration for the maintenance of public records and the transaction of all business by public institutions in the Northern and Eastern Provinces". Article 19 stated that "the National Languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil". This, of course, is absolutely redundant, merely stating an existing fact.

Article 24 declared that "the Official Language shall be the language of the courts throughout Sri Lanka and accordingly their records and proceedings shall be in the Official Language". To this again a proviso was added that "the language of the courts exercising original jurisdiction in the Northern and Eastern Provinces *shall also* be Tamil and their records and proceedings *shall* be in the Tamil language" (emphasis added).

Although reluctantly and circuitously arrived at, this was dictated by practical necessity, as a minimum concession to the Tamil language in Tamil areas. Although repugnant to "Sinhala-only" zealots, it was now conceded and written into the constitution. It went further and provided for the use of the Tamil language in court proceedings throughout Sri Lanka if any party or applicant or lawyer required it.

The constitution also abolished the long-obsolete distinction between "citizen by descent" and "citizen by registration", and provided for one citizenship.

Following the 1972 constitution, it vested the judicial power of the state in the parliament and thereby subjected the judiciary to political control. However, it nominally enhanced the independence of the judiciary by re-introducing the independent Judicial Service Commission, consisting of Supreme Court judges.

But by providing in Article 163 that "all judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts . . . holding office on the day immediately before the commencement of the constitution shall, on the commencement of the constitution, cease to hold office", the government excluded two functioning judges and thereby secured a politically acceptable judiciary. By requiring the judges, on threat of compulsion, to take an oath to uphold and defend the constitution, the UNP government placed the question of the constitution's legality outside judicial review.

In this and numerous other ways, the citizen's freedoms were curtailed by the government and its constitution, although Article 3 stated that "In the Republic of Sri Lanka sovereignty is in the people and is inalienable". In Article 81, the constitution provided for expulsion and imposition of civic disability on MPs if a special commission of inquiry so recommended. Availing itself of this provision, the UNP government appointed a Special Presidential Commission to investigate Mrs Bandaranaike. On its recommendation it expelled her from parliament and imposed civic disability on her, so that Jayewardene's principal political adversary was kept out of the political arena for seven years.

According to the preamble of the constitution, "the people of Sri Lanka having, by their Mandate freely expressed and granted . . . entrusted to and empowered their Representatives elected . . . to draft, adopt and operate a new Republican Constitution . . . We the freely elected Representatives of the people of Sri Lanka, in pursuance of such Mandate . . . do hereby adopt and enact this constitution . . ." As stated earlier, the people who vote at elections do not give a mandate for the framing of a constitution; they simply elect a legislature for a fixed term to make laws, not to make constitutions which outlive their makers.

The constitution is the supreme law and its formulation must be according to the law. The mandate to create a constitution does not arise out of some process of internal combustion at every election. Since the legitimacy of the 1978 constitution was not derived from the illegal 1972 constitution, but from a so-called "mandate", it must be asked where this mandate came from. For 49.08% of the voters had voted against the UNP, and 6.75% of the Tamils voted for a separate Tamil state and for the proposed National Assembly of Tamil Eelam to draft a constitution and "establish the independence of Tamil Eelam". Where, then, was the mandate?

The truth is that, even with the Sinhalese people, the Sinhalese ruling class and its governments were in perpetual rebellion. And true to bourgeois tradition, they survived by mystification of those who enabled them to subjugate others. They played on the credulity of the people and the co-operation of the intellectuals and their conspiracy of silence. The 1978 constitution, like its predecessor, was illegal and the entire presidential system, and the power that was usurped and wielded under it, had no constitutional legal basis and therefore no legal effect.

The Proscribing of the "Tigers" of Tamil Eelam

In the euphoria of victory, the Jayewardene UNP government adopted a confrontational posture towards the TULF, the leading opposition party in parliament, and towards the Tamil activist groups which had vowed for liberation if a negotiated solution to their problems was not forthcoming. The Sinhalese chauvinists in the governing UNP expected the FP to join them once more in the parliamentary merry-go-round. But the TULF realized

that the Tamil people had come to the end of their tether and there was no room for manoeuvres and betrayal. To forestall the TULF's militant stance, Jayewardene called for a "national" government without any regard to the Tamil people's problems. The TULF knew that this would be suicidal.

When the government put forward its conventional policy statement in August 1977, Amirthalingam, the leader of the opposition, proposed an amendment to it:

It [the policy statement] studiously refrains from referring to the mandate given by the people of Tamil Eelam to the TULF for the restoration and re-constitution of a free, sovereign, socialist, secular state of Tamil Eelam . . . Government policy has failed to take note of the fact that the Tamils are a separate nation by all internationally accepted standards . . . and are therefore entitled to exercise their inalienable right of self-determination.

Such a forthright position, from a hitherto docile and pliant TULF, infuriated the UNP Sinhalese chauvinists. The UNP was determined to tame the new militant stance of the TULF. In this task, which was well planned and orchestrated, Cyril Mathew, the minister of industries, was allowed to emerge as the most extreme anti-Tamil Sinhalese chauvinist, the Sri Lankan counterpart of Enoch Powell.

Using the privilege of the house, Mathew attacked Amirthalingam (and even his wife) in a series of vulgar diatribes of a type unknown in the country's parliamentary history, solely aimed at denouncing him as the enemy of the Sinhalese. These were given great publicity in the press and on the state radio, and it became clear that new battlelines were becoming drawn up between the Sinhalese and Tamil politicians. The former were aware that the TULF leader, as the leader of the opposition, had an exalted status in the conventional world with which to bolster the Tamil claim for separation. In the heated atmosphere, some UNP Sinhalese backbenchers even threatened to cross over and join the SLFP, so as to take over the position of the leader of the opposition for the Sinhalese. The UNP and its leadership felt their task was to face down the demand for Tamil separation and to curb the young Tamils who were known to be pressing the reluctant TULF leadership with their vocal clamour for separation.

When large numbers of young Tamils were arrested and detained, all of them were tortured to give a foretaste of what was in store for them, and then released without charge. This was how the government proposed to muzzle the growing militancy of the young Tamils. Once in detention, they had to prove their innocence to unrelenting police torturers. They became familiar with police methods and who their perpetrators were. In April 1978 they cleverly snared and ambushed the notorious Inspector Bastiampillai, and two others, and shot and killed them. Their success in finishing off this notorious police torturer emboldened them to go on the offensive and declare themselves as the "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam". The

Jayewardene government quickly enacted the Proscribing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Law (No. 16 of 1978).

Even then the government did not feel impelled to get to the root of the Tamil problem. What it wanted was the gradual destruction of the Tamils' identity as a national community and their assimilation with the Sinhalese. It felt that if it was unrelenting, this objective would be achieved.

It was clearly unaware that as a result of indiscriminate police arrests and torture, the young Tamils' political objective had become one of struggle for national liberation. In this, the initiative was with the young Tamils and not with the bourgeois politicians. The escalating dialectic of oppression and resistance was leading to a level of national oppression which could only be met by armed revolutionary struggle. This escalation gave the young Tamils a unique opportunity to adapt revolutionary practice to suit their peculiar conditions, in which an integral dimension of the national liberation struggle was emancipation from "racial" oppression and from internal colonialism.

The 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act

In July 1979 the Jayewardene government repealed the Proscribing of the Liberation Tigers Law and replaced it with the Prevention of Terrorism Act, No. 48 of 1979, the most draconian law ever to enter the country's statute book. This again was a result of misreading the situation. A nation's urge for freedom cannot be contained by repression at the hands of another nation bent on subjugation. Such repression will further unify the oppressed nation and generate patriotic resistance, on the basis of national unity against the oppressors. This is what has been happening since 1979 in Sri Lanka. Tamils abroad are also becoming united by the urge for freedom.

Before we go on to see the obnoxious provisions of this 1979 Act, it must be noted that it was a law made by the Sinhalese to be applied only against the Tamils. In its sweep, this law is of the same import as the notorious 1967 Terrorism Act of South Africa. Since Section 30 states that it repeals the Proscribing of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Law, it is openly directed against the Tamil people only. This is also clear from the preamble: "Public order continues to be endangered by elements or groups of persons or associations that advocate the use of force or the commission of crime as a means of, or as an aid in, accomplishing governmental change in Sri Lanka." The act declares that "grievances should be redressed by constitutional methods".

It was the government, through the police and the army, that had used force against the Tamils and in particular had tyrannized the young Tamils. The government assumed that it had *carte blanche* to use the Sinhalese armed forces against the peaceful Tamil youths and the people. The Tamils were not seeking any "governmental change"; they were seeking their national freedom, which had been denied to them by the Sinhalese governments.

The patriotic young Tamils who had chosen to call themselves the “Eelam Liberation Tigers”, were, for the first time in the history of Tamil politics, correctly defining the objective reality facing the Tamil nation and advancing the national liberation by positioning themselves at the vanguard of the freedom struggle. In partisan politics, a fighter is a “patriot” to the oppressed and a “terrorist” to the oppressors. Arthur Griffith of Ireland, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and U Aung San of Burma were labelled “terrorists” by imperial governments, but were patriotic liberators to the oppressed people.

It was oppression that produced the “Eelam Tigers”, and their courage was also born of the dynamics of oppression.

By the 1979 law, the Jayewardene government abdicated civil government of the Tamil people and substituted police and military rule over a historically law-abiding and peaceful people. It abrogated all legal and constitutional safeguards with regard to arrest, detention, protection against self-incrimination and retrospective criminality. This law is unique in the whole legal corpus as an attempt to resolve or contain political, social or ethnic conflict.

Section 28 of the law stated that it was to operate “notwithstanding anything contained in any other written law”, and its provisions were to prevail “in the event of any conflict or inconsistency” between it and any other written law. Thus the Prevention of Terrorism Law became the supreme law of the land. This mirrors the state structure of Sri Lanka today. Although this law purports to prevent “terrorism”, it nowhere defines it but includes ordinary penal-code offences such as criminal intimidation, mischief, robbery and even erasing or defacing a board or fixture in a street.

According to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, where the minister of defence “has reason to believe or suspects that any person is connected with or concerned in *any unlawful activity*”, he could order that person to be detained incommunicado and without trial for 18 months. It further provided that such an order “shall be final and shall not be called in question in any court or tribunal by way of writ or otherwise”. There was no remedy against torture during this long period of incarceration or even against death in detention.

Why such long detention without trial and the exclusion of the power of the courts to review the executive act? The Jayewardene government had no respect for human rights or powers of judicial review, and was in rebellion not only against the Tamil people but even against its own institutions. It had faith only in military solutions. Were not these provisions designed to drive terror into the Tamil people and make them submit to Sinhalese rule and abandon their demand for freedom? Had not the government declared war on the Tamil people?

The act contained special provisions that made admissible in court confessions, even oral confession, extorted from suspects and fellow suspects while in detention. The police — and the army, now invested with police powers — were given absolute powers to enter and search any premises, and to search or arrest anyone. The term “unlawful activity” was defined as

“any action taken or act committed by any means whatsoever whether within or outside Sri Lanka whether such action was taken or act was committed before or after the date of coming into operation of the Act”. Do not these provisions negate every safeguard of human liberty?

Jayewardene's Mandate for Tamil Genocide

No sooner was this act enacted than Jayewardene declared a state of emergency in the Tamil areas, from 11 July 1979, and dispatched the Sinhalese military under a brigadier with orders to “wipe out” the “terrorists” spearheading the demand for a separate Tamil state. Jayewardene wanted this to be done before 31 December 1979. With these instructions, the army went on the rampage. On the first day it arrested and killed a number of innocent young Tamils and threw the mutilated bodies of two of them – Inpam and Selvaratnam – onto the Pannai Causeway.

Four other Tamil youths – S. Parameswaran, S. Rajeswaran, Rajakili and R. Balendran – “disappeared” after police arrest on 14 July and, according to Amnesty International's 1982 report, their bodies have not been found. Another Tamil youth, Indrarajah, also arrested on 14 July, was admitted to Jaffna hospital the next day with many injuries and died the following day. The Jaffna magistrate, after an inquest, returned a verdict of homicide and stated: “There is evidence of assault by the police.”

There was a reign of army terror in the Jaffna peninsula. The Amnesty International (1980) report states:

In the period immediately after the emergency declaration a pattern of arbitrary arrest and detention existed and torture was used systematically Six young men, reported arrested in the days after the emergency declaration, died in the custody of the police after having been tortured and the bodies of three of them have still not been found. When the Emergency was declared, the President had instructed the Commander of the Security Forces in the Jaffna District to carry out his mandate before 31 December 1979 In a subsequent letter to the President, Amnesty International . . . said it had recently received testimonies which indicated that serious violations of the right of freedom from torture and from arbitrary arrest, detention and punishment – rights also guaranteed in the Sri Lanka constitution – had occurred in the months after the emergency declaration.

Articles 3 and 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security”, and “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment”. A memorandum from Amnesty International to President Jayewardene states:

Various methods of torture have been used by both the police and the

army in the period immediately after the emergency declaration, including suspending people upside down by the toes while placing their head in a bag with suffocating fumes of burning chillies, prolonged and severe beatings, insertion of pins in the finger tips and the application of broken chillies and biting ants to sensitive parts of the body and threats of execution. After these and other methods of torture had been applied, statements were extracted and recorded.⁷

The Sinhalese army, as we have seen, was mandated to “wipe out” – in other words, to kill – Tamils. Is this not publicly proclaimed genocide? The UN Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide (General Assembly resolution 2670 of 1948) defines genocide as “the killing or causing serious bodily or mental harm of a national, ethnical, racial or religious group committed with intent to destroy such a group in whole or in part”. Article IV of the convention states: “Persons committing genocide shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals.”

The Amnesty International memorandum requested the repeal of the 1979 law and independent investigation of complaints of army and police brutality and torture.

A memorandum of the Ceylon Institute for National and Tamil Affairs (Cinta), dated 1 September 1982, addressed to President Jayewardene, states, *inter alia*:

Already serious allegations of torture have been made before our courts . . . in cases of a number of persons detained under this Act. . . . The recent case of the University student Wimalarajah underlines the fact that the Prevention of Terrorism Act is counter-productive and also shows how the Act is being implemented among the Tamils. It does not appear to be applied to members of any other ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Student Wimalarajah was arrested and kept in detention for more than a year without being brought to trial or any charge made against him. The student world in the North finally moved into action with a series of protest meetings The government responded with the release of Wimalarajah and several other persons similarly detained. All this and the bitterness that it engendered could have been avoided if the normal human rights and the Rule of Law standards had been observed, instead of resorting to repressive legislation like this Act. . . . But the real damage that this Act causes is that its operation is not confined to the persons who are arrested or detained. The very continuance in force and the working of this Act plays havoc with an entire community, namely the Tamil-speaking people, particularly of the North. It subjects them to deep-seated fears and growing sense of insecurity which has lasted from the first post-independence Race Riot of 1956 and has been sharpened by repeated racial assaults on the minorities since the tragedy of 1977. An alarming feature of the whole

law and order situation in the North is the manner in which the armed forces seem to be operating. Almost daily [mid-1982] there are incidents in which members of the public are suddenly subjected to search at some junction or other place. At the end of the search and rough handling some of the people searched are thrashed indiscriminately and then sent off.⁸

The Prevention of Terrorism Act and the subsequent repression made the Tamils shed their conservatism and radicalized them. The Liberation Tigers came to be the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle for Eelam liberation. In July 1981 the Liberation Tigers attacked the Anaicottai police station, killed two policemen and escaped with firearms. Subsequently they attacked the Chavakacheri police station and again got away with the firearms. They killed a UNP organizer in Jaffna.

State terrorism gave birth to heroic resistance in the cause of national liberation. The result was clear. No people can be held down by the force of military might, particularly of another oppressive ethnic community. The situation escalated into a "race" war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The report of the International Commission of Jurists on *Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka*, under the heading of "Effectiveness of Terrorism Act", states:

The provisions of the Sri Lankan Terrorism Act are not only objectionable from the human rights point of view but it is doubtful that the Act is effective in controlling terrorism. The limitations on human rights, therefore, do not seem acceptable as a necessary means of maintaining public security. Since 1979, when the Act was adopted, terrorism had not declined but rather increased in the Northern Tamil area. Increased police and army surveillance of the population have not curtailed violence but seemingly stimulated it. This experience is similar to that of some other countries which have attempted to control terrorism by armed force rather than dealing with the fundamental factors contributing to the recourse to violence.⁹

The Cinta memorandum similarly stated:

... Since 1977 there has been a reign of terror in the North unleashed by the armed forces. Instead of curbing violence, it has, on the contrary, escalated the incidence of violence, as was seen from the increasing number of killings of armed personnel. We need hardly state that the terrorism of the armed forces has been counter-productive. The conclusion is all too obvious that terrorism cannot be combatted by counter-terrorism or by state terrorism but only by a political solution. The reason is that the grievances of the people are far too deep-seated to be smothered by batons and bullets.

Police and Army Rampage in Jaffna

From 1979, because of the Sinhalese military occupation of Jaffna and the state terrorism let loose on the people, hostility began to grow and became deeply embedded in the Tamil people. A group of highly organized young Tamil militants, at first calling themselves the Eelam "Tigers", and then reorganized as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, became active in the northern Tamil areas. They began to kill Sinhalese policemen, attacked police stations and took away weapons. Consequently, the mainstream TULF politicians were forced to become more militant, both inside and outside parliament, in their demand for separation.

Jayewardene produced the artful antidote of an all-island system of District Development Councils (DDCs) – toothless bodies without specified powers, but with councillors to be elected by the people – in order to divert the growing militancy of the youth and the TULF. In fact, for quite some time, this tactic paid off handsomely for Jayewardene.

The UNP's strategy for the DDC elections was to win at least one of the six DDCs in the Tamil areas and at least one councillor in Jaffna, to show the TULF and the Sinhalese that the TULF was not in total control of the Tamil areas, and hence that the separatist demand was a spurious one. The UNP attempted to achieve this by hook or by crook.

By 1981 the Eelam Tamil Liberation Tigers had killed about 20 policemen. Innocent young Tamils who were detained, tortured and released without charges were driven to swell the Liberation Tiger movement.

In the run-up to the DDC elections in Jaffna, Thiagarajah, the former MP of the TC, who went over to Mrs Bandaranaike in 1971 and was appointed to the powerful Jaffna District Political Authority, and was now the UNP's leading candidate, was shot and killed. The TULF was seriously drawn into the DDC elections because the UNP had put up some Tamil candidates. Jayewardene was anxious to rally the people around the DDCs, to divert Tamil separatist nationalism, which was becoming increasingly unmanageable. He regarded the DDCs as the last peaceful means to counter Tamil separatism. In this context, the UNP was determined to win at least one seat in Jaffna, even if it involved rigging the election, hijacking ballot boxes or beating the Tamil people into voting for the UNP.

On the eve of the election, fixed for 4 June 1981, a contingent of 300 specially selected Sinhalese policemen were sent to Jaffna to supervise the operations. The 150 officials mandated by the commissioner of elections as presiding and counting officers were at the last minute replaced by Sinhalese loyalists hand-picked by the UNP high command and sent to Jaffna. To augment them and offer political counsel on the spot, Minister of Industries Cyril Mathew, the *bête noire* of the Tamils, Minister of Lands and Mahaweli Development Gamini Dissanayake, the secretary and additional secretary to the Ministry of Defence and the secretary to the cabinet, had all arrived in Jaffna by 30 May. For the first time, the government was planning to subvert the elections, in the very year in which it was celebrating 50 years of

universal suffrage.

On 31 May, at an election meeting in Jaffna, an unidentified gunman fired some shots and, at this, the Sinhalese police and army instigated a state-sponsored orgy of murder, mayhem, looting, arson and terror in the city until 8 June 1981. A statement issued by the opposition parties declared:

More than 100 shops have been broken, burnt, looted; market squares in Jaffna and Chunnakam look as if they have been bombed in war-time; several houses have been looted and badly damaged; the house of the MP for Jaffna has been reduced to ruins (the MP himself was lucky to escape being murdered); several deaths have occurred at the hands of the state armed personnel; the Headquarters of the TULF in the heart of Jaffna has been destroyed; the public library in Jaffna – the second largest library in the island with over 90,000 volumes – has been reduced to ashes. Even more reprehensible are the facts that these outrages should have taken place when cabinet ministers and several leaders of the security services were personally present in Jaffna directing affairs, and that a section of the security services, which had been sent there to maintain law and order, had been directly involved.¹⁰

Speaking in parliament on the rampage in Jaffna, Minister Gamini Disanayake stated:

We do not wish to minimise in any way the gravity of what has been done, the untold damage that has been done . . . I saw it and I was shocked . . . these police officers have run berserk . . . I am sorry for the violence that was perpetrated in the Jaffna peninsula. I think we are all responsible.¹¹

An emergency was declared in the Jaffna peninsula. Yet President Jayewardene was determined to go ahead with the elections to the DDC in Jaffna, as scheduled for 4 June 1981. Minister Gamini Disanayake, who was in Jaffna, stated in parliament:

And His Excellency the President decided to carry on with the poll. . . . I have been in Jaffna, having observed what took place in Jaffna, there was no atmosphere there for free polls. The atmosphere was one of terror; the police were not easily confined to the barracks, and I think many of us who were there were concerned with the situation. The Deputy Minister of Defence was there, and we were concerned. And if we made any errors according to you in what we have done, we are prepared to face the consequences and take full responsibility for our actions.

Despite the orgy of violence and bloodletting, the DDC elections were held in Jaffna on 4 June and the ballot boxes were taken to Colombo. The results

were announced on 16 June. Of the 315,999 votes polled, the TULF received 263,369 and retained all the seats and also the council. The UNP polled 23,302 votes and the TC 21,682. The TULF won all six DDCs in the Tamil areas. This was not what Jayewardene had wanted. In that setting, if any real power were given to the DDCs, the TULF would have become powerful and consolidated its hold on the Tamil people. Hence, even today, the powers of the DDCs have not been defined and they are mere empty shells.

Jayewardene had expected Sinhalese resettlement of the Tamil areas to result in victory for the Sinhalese and the UNP in Trincomalee. His disappointment was manifest:

President Jayewardene addressing the Executive Committee of the All-Ceylon UNP Women's Union, at Ramakrishna Hall, Wellawatte, said that in Trincomalee the TULF polled 2,304 votes more than the UNP at the DDC election. In 1977, the SLFP polled in the Trincomalee district 20,841 votes. If one-fourth of these votes had been given to the UNP in 1981, the Chairman would have been one "who did not advocate the division of the country".¹²

He would never refer to why the Tamil people wanted to divide the country. After accepting in the 1977 election manifesto that "there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people", and that the "lack of a solution to their problems had made the Tamil-speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate state", and after pledging that the UNP "feels that such problems should be solved without loss of time", he was now hoping to have a Sinhalese as the Chairman of the Trincomalee DDC. One can see why he wanted the rapid resettlement of these districts, particularly in the Trincomalee area, to claim them as Sinhalese areas.

The TULF MPs took their battle into parliament. They moved a vote of no confidence in the government, on the grounds that the May-June 1981 violence in Jaffna had been state-sponsored and carried out by Sinhalese ministers and high-ranking government officials present on the spot. The government responded by going on the offensive. What followed was the most racially poisonous verbal vendetta in Sri Lanka's parliamentary history. In the debate that ensued, one Sinhalese MP called for the return of the traditional death penalty which "tears the offender's body limb from limb".

No-Confidence Motion on the Leader of the Opposition

Unwilling and unable to understand Tamil separatist nationalism, the Sinhalese politicians regarded Amirthalingam, the TULF boss and leader of the opposition, as the principal villain in the demand for separation. He was accused of acting against the interests of the country during his foreign trips when he

had advocated separation. They sought to remove him as leader of the opposition. To general amazement, they brought in a motion of no confidence in him, on the grounds that he did not “enjoy the confidence of the Government”.

In the house, Amirthalingam was refused permission to make a personal explanation, and at this the TULF MPs walked out. The speaker overruled a point of order by the SLFP, that the motion was not within the powers of the House, and at this the SLFP walked out. The CP member (elected in 1979 at a by-election in Ratnapura) contended that the motion, even if passed, would lead to nothing and also walked out.

Amidst the empty opposition benches, the UNP government Sinhalese MPs vilified Amirthalingam in the most despicable terms and suggested that he be tied to the nearest post and whipped. They also wanted all the Eelam separatists to be skinned and their bodies torn up. All this was dutifully carried as headline news by the press and repeated several times over the state radio. It was argued that Sri Lanka belonged to the Sinhalese and that the Tamils and Muslims were aliens; the Tamils had no right to a separate state; the Tamils had been brought to Sri Lanka as slaves by high-caste Aryan Sinhalese; the Tamils would be sent back to India; the Sinhalese would be ready for war if the Eelam demand was not abandoned.

The no-confidence motion was passed on 24 July 1981 by 121 votes to nil, with two abstentions – S. Thondaman and Shelton Ranarajah, deputy minister of justice. When they found that even with such overwhelming majority they could not remove Amirthalingam as leader of the opposition, the Sinhalese MPs even sought to convert the parliament into a court to punish Amirthalingam, on the grounds that, according to the 1978 constitution, “the judicial power of the people may be directly exercised by parliament” in regard to “privileges, immunities and powers of parliament”. Perhaps Erskine May brought some sanity to them at last; for this course was abandoned. But these events were to have immediate repercussions in the country.

The 1981 Anti-Tamil Pogrom

Following the state-sponsored violence in Jaffna, for three months there was country-wide anti-Tamil fanaticism and rioting organized by influential figures in the UNP government. A statement issued by the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), comprising some of the opposition parties and a number of individuals, stated:

It is clear that the violence has been the work of organized gangs of thugs who have been used for sinister political purposes to stage these incidents. There is good reason to suspect that persons in powerful positions have been behind the instigation, organization and planning of this campaign of violence. We have therefore legitimate grounds

for fear that these events may provide a cover for new repressive moves and attacks on the democratic rights of all sections of the people, regardless of race, language or religion.

That this was true was confirmed by British journalist Brian Eads, who was in Sri Lanka and wrote in *The Observer* (London) of 20 September 1981, as follows:

It is clear that subsequent violence in July and August, which was directed against Sri Lanka Tamils in the east and south of the country, and Indian Tamil tea estate workers in the central region, was not random. It was stimulated, and in some cases organized, by members of the ruling UNP, among them intimates of the President. In all 25 people died, scores of women were raped, and thousands were made homeless, losing all their meagre belongings. But the summer madness, which served the dual purpose of quietening Tamil calls for Eelam, that is a separate state, and taking the minds of the Sinhalese electorate off a deepening economic crisis is only one of the blemishes on the face of the island. Since Jayewardene came to power four years ago, a system of what his critics call "State Terrorism" has brought an Ulster-style situation in the Tamil-majority areas of the north and the east Hundreds have been detained without charge or trial. This year at least 156 Tamil youths have been detained and tortured, then released. Thirty-five are still held at Colombo's Panagoda Army Camp. Human rights workers, Sinhalese as well as Tamil, told me that the most favoured tortures are hanging prisoners upside down on heaps of burning chillies, and inserting needles under their finger nails.

With the outbreak of state-sponsored violence in Jaffna, the Sinhalese trouble-makers resorted to violence against the Tamil peasants in the Batticaloa-Amparai border areas. Forty-three houses belonging to the Tamils were burnt down with the active connivance of the Sinhalese security forces. Large numbers of shops were burnt down in the eastern province, and over 500 Tamils took refuge in refugee camps. A Hindu temple in Amparai was set on fire and its priest attacked. Anti-Tamil violence then broke out against the Indian Tamil plantation workers, at first in Ratnapura, instigated by the local MP, who was also a deputy minister. He was later sacked by President Jayewardene. Anti-Tamil rioting then spread throughout the plantation areas, and workers in 43 estates were beaten and driven off. About 15,000 took refuge in temples and schools and later moved to the northern province for resettlement.

S. Thondaman, the leader of the plantation workers and a minister in Jayewardene's cabinet, met the president and voiced his protest:

We reiterated our position that the mob rule which seems to be the order of the day in many parts of the country should be brought to an

end. . . . In spite of the assurance given by the government, the law and order situation had deteriorated as mob rule seems to persist and the people are in a state of perpetual terror. . . . The very fact that even plantation workers, innocent of any political crimes, have been singled out for murder and mayhem, has created a feeling among the people that the thousands of hooligans covertly enjoy the patronage of powerful personalities.

A Tamil Hindu pilgrim and a DMK politician from Tamil Nadu, who was on his way to the Kathirkamam shrine in south Sri Lanka, was stabbed and killed by the Sinhalese mob. This led to protest by the Indian government and the Tamil Nadu government called an official one-day *Hartal* (strike) to condemn the Sri Lanka government's state terrorism and the Sinhalese violence against the Tamils. These led to Jayewardene's rhetorical outburst: "What sort of animals are these?" Speaking at the executive meeting of the UNP on 4 September, he said:

I speak more in sorrow than in anger. Recent events throughout the island, North, Center and South show that the religion we profess does not seem to influence for the good some of our people. I regret that some members of my party made speeches in parliament and outside that encourage violence and murders, rapes and arson that have been committed. . . . I must have reasons to be proud of the party of which I am the leader. If I cannot, it is better for me to retire from the leadership of this party and let those who believe that the harming of innocent people and property that has happened recently is the way to solve the problems that face this multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-caste society, take over the leadership of the party.

Jayewardene continued to preside over the UNP and over a government in which Cyril Mathew, the most extreme chauvinist anti-Tamil, was the important and influential minister of industries. In 1981, Mathew wrote a 352-page book in Sinhala entitled *Sinhala People – Awake, Arise and Safeguard Buddhism*. He declared that there had been Buddhist shrines in Jaffna in the earliest times and that therefore Sinhalese Buddhists should be settled in Jaffna district, the only Tamil area that Sinhalese colonization had not reached. The book contained anti-Tamil speeches by Jayewardene and others dating from the 1950s, and the author called for a *jihad* in the cause of Buddhism.

The Aftermath

Following the cruel summer of murder, arson, pillage and plunder, Jayewardene prepared a peace strategy since the Queen was due to visit the island in October for the government's celebrations of 50 years of universal franchise.

He invited the TULF to face-to-face talks. The TULF welcomed the idea and at the talks put forward six demands: (1) the appointment of an international commission of inquiry into the May-June police-army rampage in Jaffna; (2) home guards should be set up to prevent further violence and disturbances; (3) 75% of the police personnel in the north and east should be Tamils; (4) power should be given to the DDCs as effective decentralized units of administration; (5) the "standardization" system for university admissions should be reviewed; and (6) policemen responsible for the rampage in Jaffna should be prosecuted.

After protracted negotiations, Jayewardene accepted every demand except an international commission of inquiry. The TULF accepted and agreed to place a moratorium on the demand for a separate state, call off the boycott of parliament and take part in monthly meetings with the president to keep matters affecting inter-racial relations under continuous review.

This was the nadir of FP and TULF policies over the past 30 years. The TULF surrendered the goal to which the Tamil people had been driven by Sinhalese chauvinism and bourgeois Tamil policies. It was driven into this cul-de-sac because Amirthalingam was rattled by the no-confidence motion. Amirthalingam and the TULF MPs always felt that it was in the Colombo parliament that they must fight their battles, and not alongside the Tamil people. They never learnt anything about the nature of Sinhalese politics, or their opponents' strategies, and they never won a single victory.

During the week-long royal tour of Sri Lanka, the Queen was taken to see the oldest tree in the world (the bo tree at Anuradhapura), the casket supposed to contain the Buddha's tooth, the carnival of Sri Lanka's elephants and the Victoria Dam built with massive British aid. She was steered clear of the Tamil areas, Sri Lanka's Ulster, which was ruled by emergency law with the army on the streets and detention and torture without trial. She was also kept away from the stateless and voteless plantation Tamils, who had experienced 33 years of disfranchisement and half of whom were awaiting repatriation to a country they had never seen.

Embarrassed by bad publicity in the world media over the police-army atrocities, the Sri Lanka government signed an agreement in late 1981 with a London public-relations firm to undertake propaganda work in Britain, the US and Western Europe costing £94,000. Among the firm's previous clients were the late Shah of Iran and the government of South Africa. Shortly afterwards Prime Minister Premadasa visited London to open week-long celebrations of Sri Lanka's 50 years of universal franchise. He was promptly confronted by militant demonstrators calling for a separate Tamil Eelam state. Equally promptly, Premadasa summoned a meeting of Sinhalese UNP supporters in London and lambasted them for not organizing a counter-demonstration.

nationalism of the Tamils. The former was the servant of the latter. Such commentators never understood the reality of the Tamil people's demands: they did not need a bourgeois political formation like the TULF to tell them what was important. Their only goal was liberation and the establishment of an independent separate state of Eelam.

The commentator could not see that, by the nature of Jayewardene's politics, he was not going to give real power to the DDCs, for that would mean making the TULF strong in the Tamil areas. In fact, the objectives agreed with the TULF were never meant to be implemented. The TULF MPs were, as usual, living in a fool's paradise. Hence, in February 1982:

Mr Amirthalingam deplored the fact although seven months had elapsed after the inauguration of the DDCs, sufficient funds and authority were not yet granted to these Councils. This was indeed a disappointment. . . . Mr Amirthalingam referred to planned attempts being made to transform overnight ancient Hindu shrines and places of worship into places of another religious group [He does not even have the courage to say Buddhist] He also referred to the fact that of the 8,000 policemen serving in the Tamil areas, only 800 had been Tamil-speaking . . . and on representations being made the government was taking steps to implement the decision for the Home Guards.¹⁷

Amirthalingam and the TULF MPs never had the courage to tell the Sinhalese politicians that those who were resorting to armed struggle against the police were not "terrorists", as the government called them, but patriotic liberation fighters seeking to free the Tamil nation from Sinhalese tyranny.

It is appropriate to quote Dr Walter Rodney, a martyr of international proletarian struggle:

Few individuals want to willingly invite their own death. Yet many will be found who are prepared to fight fearlessly for their rights even if their lives are threatened. The human spirit has a remarkable capacity to rise above oppression; and only the fools who now misrule . . . imagine that our people lack such capacity.¹⁸

The Tigers came from among the students shut out from university by discriminatory anti-Tamil quotas. They were the victims of detention and torture. Yet Amirthalingam, who masqueraded as the leader of the Tamils, sought to disown them, as if he had solutions to their 25-year-old problems. Objectively speaking, it was for the good of the Tamil liberation struggle that the TULF adopted its policy of accord with the government, so that there were no ignorant politicians left to confuse the issue.

The TULF's position was in accord with its bourgeois character. They were so alienated from the people that Amirthalingam stated in May 1982:

A few armed youths or those conducting politics with "foreign aid" cannot stop our movement. . . . Years ago Tamil youths had connections with foreign countries; their aim had been to form a leftist government.¹⁹

The stance adopted by Amirthalingam was described by the militants, even within the TULF, as "betrayal of the mandate given by the Tamil people in the 1977 election". Hence they broke away and formed the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF) in May 1982. The TELF appeared to support the Eelam Liberation Tigers. But they could not do so for long, because they would be forced to disavow armed struggle and withdraw their support from the Tigers.

Although the Liberation Tigers were in the vanguard of the struggle for liberation and were at one with the people, precious little was known about them among outsiders. This was not surprising because of the degree of repression and "Tiger-hunting" and because of the path of the struggle they advanced in this context. David Selbourne, the first outsider to establish contact with them, wrote:

The Tigers are armed, the DIG of Jaffna, W.B. Rajaguru, told me, with Sterling sub-machine guns, self-loading rifles and 303s. Some of the weaponry had been seized in raids, but other items, he says darkly, "are not standard issues". Funds for them, he alleges, have been collected by Tamil expatriates in Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia. He calls the Tigers "pure terrorists of the urban guerrilla type . . ." The Army Chief of Staff in Colombo, Major-General Tissa Weeratunga, one of the many relatives of President Jayewardene in high places, was honest about the situation. "We are not on top," he told me. In Jaffna, they say, a whole truck-load of troops goes out to buy a tube of toothpaste or a box of matches. "The initiative is with the terrorists", he continued. "They choose the time and place. We can only be reactive." He also claims, as paranoia deepens, that the political training of the Tigers is being "coordinated from Britain", and that there is a "West Asian connection". Nine out of the 16 police stations in the Jaffna district have already been closed. The Mayor of Jaffna complains that the police are no longer carrying out their ordinary civic functions.

The Sinhalese government and the army see only what they want to see. There is a feeling of resentment when the unexpected happens. Everyone is blamed — Tamil expatriates, outside powers, Middle Eastern states. It was believed that if the Tamil freedom fighters were labelled "terrorists" then, with the army of occupation, the subjugation of the Tamils could be accomplished relatively easily. But this did not happen. To quote Selbourne again:

The Tigers seem better disciplined and less frightened than their police and military opponents. The trouble is that the police and the army are

up against an enemy which is being shielded by the community. . . . Bishop Wickremasinghe [a Sinhalese] angrily accuses those who help them of “fiddling with terrorism”. . . . Yet the Tiger numbers are growing, and the bitterness of the police and military is of men who are not winning. Ranatunge says he wants to “finish off this terrorism”. But he cannot. In the meantime, new para-military forces are being trained, and new levels of foreign assistance being sought by both sides. The Tigers, for their part, seem confident. They tell you that their membership is increasing daily and that detentions and brutality “are making us strong, increasing our momentum”. “We think very deeply into the question of violence,” a Tiger told me. “Our targets for assassination are the armed agents of the state, and we select them only after a careful study and full inquiry.” Even DIG Rajaguru . . . admits that the Tigers are “hard to pin down and are getting more skillful”. . . . The Tigers say, eyes laughing, that the police and the army are inefficient. The immediate prospect for both sides is a dire one – with neither a political nor a military solution in the offing.

It is important to remember that the real parties to the conflict are the Tamil people and the Sri Lanka Sinhalese government, using the army as its proxy. It is evident that, except as an engine of repression, the army is superfluous. There is no battle raging, nor are the people up in arms. The army cannot fight the Tamil people, who have, as a last resort, resolved to secede and establish a separate state for themselves in their own homelands. The Sinhalese army is in Tamil country as an occupying force. The situation is exactly the same as it was in Bangladesh before independence. The Sinhalese army has no army to fight. It exists in a vacuum and is there without a cause. The Tigers are not a mobilized force located in one place. Whereas the army is an easy target because it is easily identifiable, the Tigers, being ordinary people, are not.

Despite the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the use of the military with the mandate from Jayewardene to “wipe out” the libertarian separatists in July 1979, the army did not catch sight of a single Tiger (or “terrorist”). For fear of getting shot, the army confined itself to barracks or moved in convoy “to buy a tube of toothpaste or a box of matches”. Their role was to find a military solution to the political problem created by the Sinhalese politicians, or else to stay and get shot by the Tigers. The army was called to intervene in a matter in which it had no *locus standi*. The situation could not be more ridiculous. Brigadier Ranatunga’s bold claim that he wanted to “finish off this terrorism” was only words. He was doing exactly what General Tikka Khan had done in Bangladesh, before his army’s ignominious defeat and surrender to *Mukti Bahini* and the Indian forces in 1971. It is a pity that the government is willing to sacrifice the lives of its conscripted soldiers in vain and for a cause which is doomed to failure.

The army even mutinied in 1981. This is what Minister Gamini Dissanayake said in parliament in June 1981:

... there was a very serious situation in Jaffna because the Police Force was on the verge of a virtual mutiny. On the 2nd and 3rd, virtually 200 policemen had deserted their posts, and since they were responsible for some very serious events which needed an answer ...

Each time a soldier or a policeman was shot down by the Tigers, there was consternation; but nobody asked why the soldier or policeman was there in the first place.

The relationship of ruler and ruled made mutual understanding difficult. When the whole regime was based on racial oppression, inequality, injustice, discrimination in education and employment, economic stagnation, social subjugation and humiliation for the Tamil people and their children, did the government of Sri Lanka and its international allies expect the Tamil people to submit to the Sinhalese army of occupation and sit down with folded arms?

On the political front, having deprived Mrs Bandaranaike of her civic rights and domesticated the TULF, Jayewardene went for re-election as president, two years early, and won it in October 1982. The militant liberation groups, including the newly formed TELF, urged the Tamils to boycott the presidential election. This was a misguided decision which helped Jayewardene to get more than 50% of the vote on the first count. They should have put forward an acceptable Tamil candidate who genuinely stood for liberation and Eelam, in order to reduce the percentage the first contestant would get. But the TULF was non-committal and wished Jayewardene to be supported. Of the 24 districts in the island, Jayewardene got the lowest number of votes in Jaffna district.

The Liberation Tigers took their struggle to Tamil Nadu and established bases there. In June 1982 there was a shoot-out in Pondy Bazaar, Madras City, between two hitherto secret liberation factions, one led by Uma Maheswaran and the other by Prabakaran. They were arrested by the Madras police and taken to court. The Sri Lanka government declared that they were wanted for murder and pressed the Indian government to extradite them to face charges in Sri Lanka.

The TULF was caught in a quandary and remained silent. The TELF publicly proclaimed its support for them and urged the Indian government not to extradite them. M.G. Ramachandran, chief minister of the Tamil Nadu state government, and M. Karunanidhi, the leader of the opposition, met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at two separate meetings and told her of the policies of the Sri Lanka government, the atrocities committed against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the nature of the Tamil liberation struggle and the role of the arrested youths. They demanded that under no circumstances should they be extradited or handed over to the government of Sri Lanka.

The Indian government accordingly rejected the Sri Lanka government's request and they were allowed to operate in Tamil Nadu. The two groups were released from custody and were reunited. According to a news report in *Weekend*, it was revealed that they had considerable financial backing and

a well-organized network of bases and safe houses from which to operate. Both groups had extensive contacts with certain Tamil Nadu politicians and had bases in Salem and Pondicherry.²⁰

From July 1982 the Liberation Tigers came into their own in the Tamil areas of the north. On 2 July they ambushed a convoy of policemen from Point Pedro police station at Nelliaddy Junction, gunning down four of them and leaving the others seriously wounded. According to a news report, the liberation fighters wore battle dress and had automatic weapons.²¹ Following this incident, the army resorted to harassment of the ordinary people of Nelliaddy and detained 20 youths for the slaying of the policemen. The incident frightened the army and police. "Security precautions adopted after the slaying of four policemen at Nelliaddy have hampered police inquiring into conventional crime in the North, while shutters remain up on the several police stations that were closed up. The police officers in the remaining 16 do not venture out without adequate security cover."²²

In October 1982 it was reported that six militant liberation organizations had formed a revolutionary council advocating violent armed struggle to establish the state of Eelam. From that time, violence became a cult of its own and acquired legitimacy in advancing the struggle for liberation. Tamil liberation acquired a new momentum.

There is, of course, pain and turmoil for the Tamil people. But, as Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: "... disruption is inevitable during the transition period ... it is only through the pain and suffering that accompany such disruption that a people grow and learn the lessons of life and adapt themselves anew to changing conditions".²³ Nearly every Tamil became convinced that the TULF had let down the Tamil cause, and nothing had come out of its accord with the UNP government.

In June Amirthalingam was confronted by a group of angry youths:

The Opposition and TULF leader A. Amirthalingam was mobbed by hundreds of demonstrating students who surrounded the vehicle in which he and his wife were travelling in Jaffna; some of the students shouting slogans and denouncing the TULF and Amirthalingam were turning boisterous when several other students intervened to prevent any untoward incidents.²⁴

The need to create a separate state of Tamil Eelam had ceased to be a matter for the politicians. The idea of Eelam as the only solution to their enslaved position had sunk too deep in the political consciousness of the youth and the people. In July 1982 the first World Eelam Tamil Conference was held in New York, attended by the Liberation Tigers, the TULF and the TELF. The Eelam liberation struggle became internationalized. In October, a 12-member liberation group attacked the Chavakacheri police station killing three policemen and getting away with firearms and ammunition. The government offered "Rupees 250,000 reward payable in any part of the world for information regarding the assailants".

In November, Jayewardene extended the life of the parliament for six years, without holding an election. Thus the parliament in which the UNP held five-sixths majority, elected in July 1977 would continue until 1989. Jayewardene had publicly stated during the campaign for his presidential election: "I would not extend the term of the life of Parliament . . . I have always loved elections because the elections give us the opportunity to visit our towns and villages, to meet the people, sense their feelings and find out their ideas and their needs".

He well knew that the UNP would be decimated in a parliamentary election. The tradition of Sri Lanka voters from 1956 had been to defeat the ruling party. Despite his re-election, if the UNP were defeated in the parliamentary election he knew he would have to go. He also knew that his iron grip, for the benefit of the ultra-rich capitalists and the giant Western multinationals, could not be continued without a five-sixths majority in parliament – whose powers he had castrated without compunction.

The perennially sick economy had been kept afloat since 1977 by massive IMF standby loans and Western "development" aid. From 1978 to 1982, Sri Lanka was held up as an "IMF success", but today Sri Lanka's economic disaster, as Jayewardene himself admits, is because of the IMF. As a result of IMF and World Bank policies, Sri Lanka's net foreign debt rose from Rs. 4.9 billion in 1976 to 29.1 billion in 1981, 33.2 billion in November 1982 and around 40 billion in 1983 on account of the latest 16% devaluation, which the IMF demanded and got. The present debt-service ratio is over 28%.

Jayewardene was candid enough to confess to David Selbourne that he did not know what to do with the economy. Selbourne writes: "'We have been able to survive,' he told me frankly, 'because of the aid the World Bank is giving us. I really don't know what to do about the economy'." He comforted himself, however, by adding: "Nobody knows."

The country is totally bankrupt as the Rs. 29 billion record deficit in the 1983 budget shows. The country's reserves today cover only four weeks of imports. The government seeks to close this unbridgeable gap by further large-scale foreign borrowing and massive price increases of essential goods and by increasing customs duties. The economy is in the grip of the deepest crisis ever. After five years of "open economy" when the upper class and the capitalists became multi-millionaires and the country was bled white and the burdens were passed onto the poor, Jayewardene stated candidly:

the recent spate of price increases and the revision of the Rupee against the Dollar in Sri Lanka were the result of the requests by the IMF . . . the increased price of essential commodities including rice and bread as well as transport fares were necessary to obtain an Extended Fund Facility from the IMF to tide over the precarious balance of payments situation.

As the liberation struggle intensified, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam distributed a letter to the Sinhalese soldiers telling them how they were being used by the racist Sinhala ruling class to divide the people so that the rulers might prosper:

To the Sinhala Soldier,

From a Liberation Tiger . . .

You probably know that today, on the soil of Tamil Eelam, a desire for national liberation has been set aflame. It is an inevitable historic necessity that we win the freedom of our homeland. You have been an instrument of the racist state of Sri Lanka, in practising terrorism against the people of Tamil Eelam. You have also been an instrument in the manhunt, ordered by the state, on the liberation fighters of our nation.

We see you riding down the streets of Tamil Eelam, khaki clad and armed. The care of an old mother or father, or a sister, maybe, compels you to carry arms. While those in the seats of power in Sri Lanka flourish, you fall down as the victims. Very soon, you will stand, turned against your own people, your own class, ordered by this very same class in power. Those in power will use you to crush the revolt of your people.

We, motivated by an unceasing yearning for national liberation, are forced to oppose you, a puppet of the state. When we meet at the battlefield, you become the sacrificial lamb. As we walk the path of national liberation, our death will acquire dignity and meaning. But yours will become insignificant.

Even though a pawn in the hands of state terrorism, the atrocities and murders that you committed in Tamil Eelam have left permanent scars in the hearts of the Tamil people and will never be healed. Do not die labouring for the foul campaigns of the ruling class. Do not lose your integrity and your humanity, so that those who rule us may prosper. It is only when you take up arms on the side of the oppressed Sinhala workers and peasants, against the state of Sri Lanka, that we could speak the language of friendship. When and if you do that, you will understand the pulse of our own struggle.

Propaganda Unit, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The national oppression of the Tamils reached a grave and critical stage in November–December 1982, when the arm of repression was extended against Tamil intellectuals and the Catholic clergy.

Nirmala Nithiyanandan and her husband P. Nithiyanandan, both university lecturers, Dr Jayakularajah, Fr A. Singarayar, Fr P. Sinnarasa and Rev S.T. Jayatillakaraja were detained under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act, allegedly for withholding information about Tamil “terrorists”. Nirmala, a sociologist and a political scientist, is a well-known feminist and a

popular progressive writer, who has translated into Tamil a number of books on the national and socialist struggles of the Latin American and African people. All the priests detained are activists of MIRJE, a human-rights organization. Fr Singarayar, in a letter to Rt Rev Dr Frank Marcus Fernando, President of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, written from Welikade Jail on 8 May 1983, stated:

The CID officers . . . started torturing me. They went to the extent of making me naked and assaulted me. They extracted statements from me against my freedom. . . . I have become a "separatist" by accident. Our cause of separation is only part of a process of human liberation. I have to be with my Tamil people who decided in 1977 for separation when they became frustrated. The pacts and dialogues were not honoured by the majority . . . Now the Tamil people are POOR people of this country, deprived of many of their rights. As a Christian, I have to be with the poor, for Christ came to the poor . . . Who are the poor? Very Rev Fr Superior General in his Christmas letter 1982 replies: "The youth who have taken up drugs, the youth who have taken up arms." (*Saturday Review*, Jaffna, 28 May 1983)

As the situation escalated, the TULF demanded that the government repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act and release the detained intellectuals and clergy. Finding that army repression was not producing results, in December 1982 Jayewardene called for the setting up of a "national government" of all parties. Predictably, the TULF welcomed this step, and Amirthalingam referred to it "as providing an opportunity for negotiations to seek a 'permanent solution' to the fundamental problems of the Tamil people". This was simply one of the many red herrings used to divert the momentum of the liberation struggle.

In March 1983 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam documented their political position as one based on revolutionary socialist ideology and aimed at national emancipation and socialist reconstruction of Tamil society, and submitted it as a memorandum to the seventh summit meeting of the non-aligned nations, held at New Delhi from 7-15 March. The document was entitled *Tamils Fight for National Freedom*. Under the heading "Armed Resistance and the Tiger Movement", it declared:

The struggle for national freedom, having failed in its democratic popular agitations, having exhausted its moral power to mobilize the masses for peaceful campaigns, gave rise to the emergence of armed resistance movement in the Tamil Eelam in the early Seventies. Armed resistance as a mode of popular struggle arose when our people were presented with no alternative other than to resort to revolutionary resistance to defend themselves against a savage form of state terrorism. The armed struggle, therefore, is the historical product of intolerable national oppression; it is an extension, continuation and advancement

of the political struggle of our oppressed people. Our liberation movement, which spearheads the revolutionary armed struggle, was formulated by us after a careful and cautious appraisal of the specific concrete conditions of our struggle, with the fullest comprehension of the historical situation in which masses of our people have no choice other than to fight decisively to advance the cause of national freedom. Our total strategy integrates both national struggle and class struggle, interlinks the progressive patriotic feeling of the masses with the proletarian class consciousness to accelerate the process of socialist revolution and national liberation.

The armed struggle of our liberation movement is sustained and supported by wider sections of the Tamil masses, since our revolutionary political project expresses the profound aspirations of our people to gain political independence from the autocratic domination and repression of the Sri Lankan state. [This memorandum appears as an Appendix.]

July 1983: The Slaughter Escalates

In April, the police arrested and detained S.A. David and Dr Rajasunderam, the president and secretary respectively, of Gandhiyam, a registered society for community and social services. After the 1977 anti-Tamil riots, Gandhiyam was established by Tamil activists to resettle the Tamil refugees, mainly the plantation Tamils who fled the estates. With financial and material support from NOVIB (Holland), OXFAM (UK), Bread for the World (Germany), World Council of Churches, Christian Aid and many organizations of Tamil expatriates, Gandhiyam undertook the prodigious task of rehabilitating 40,000, and resettled 4,750, Tamil refugee families in Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. The government was not happy with Gandhiyam schemes to help the Tamil refugees being resettled, even in the Tamil homelands. While in detention, David and Rajasunderam were tortured at the Panagoda army headquarters and confessions were forcibly extracted of their complicity with the 'Tigers'. The army then destroyed the Gandhiyam offices and several villages, burnt down farm buildings, set fire to crops, harassed and tortured the resettled Tamils, and burnt three tractors and a truck given to Gandhiyam by NOVIB. David and Rajasunderam were still in detention without charge, even four months after.

On 18 May, the Tamil city of Jaffna went up in flames for the second time in two years. Marauding gangs of army personnel went on the rampage, setting ablaze houses, shops, petrol stations, vehicles, etc., and assaulting innocent people, under cover of emergency. This was the sequel to an open shoot-out between the army and the *Liberation Tiger youths at an election meeting*; this resulted in the death of an army corporal, and one soldier and two police constables injured. Later the same day, army helicopters landed about 600 soldiers at Kantharmadam, within Jaffna city; they burnt down

hundreds of houses, several shops and vehicles, looted the women's jewellery and terrorized the people in the area. In the local government elections of that day, the Liberation Tigers called for a boycott in the northern districts, to which the people responded by a 95% boycott. This constituted the first important victory for the Tiger movement and the worst defeat for the TULF.

Then, in early June, as the reprisal for the killing of two air force men, the army set fire to the Vavuniya town. This led to a chain of brutal atrocities by Sinhalese gangs, instigated and assisted by the army in Trincomalee and all over the south. In Trincomalee, the Sinhalese gangs went on the rampage killing 19 Tamils and burning more than 200 houses, 24 shops, a hotel and eight Hindu temples. The aim was to drive the Tamils out from Trincomalee, for the government was anxious to get a Sinhalese majority population in Trincomalee.

As violent killings of several Tamil youths by the army became public, by disclosures of post-mortem reports in judicial inquests (as with K. Navaratnarajah, who died in custody with five external injuries, and upon whom the Jaffna magistrate, on 31 May, returned a verdict of homicide) from 3 June, the government put Emergency Regulations into effect under which the army was empowered to shoot, kill and bury without post-mortem and judicial inquest. The reason given for this further measure by the Minister of State, Anandatissa de Alwis, was that "the morale of the services and police personnel in the north was low"! With this, the lives of the Tamil people were placed entirely in the hands of the Sinhalese army. Empowered in this manner, the army shot, killed, and refused to hand over the bodies of several innocent Tamil youths in Jaffna. One Sabaratnam Palanivel, who was dragged into Valvettiturai army camp was shot dead and an army truck was run over his body, smashing the skull and flattening the body. Arson and looting of Tamil homes and brutal killings of several Tamil people by Sinhalese gangs, with the active connivance of the security forces, occurred all over Sri Lanka throughout June.

Yet President Jayewardene spelt out the government's complicity in this programme of Tamil genocide unabashedly to Ian Ward, a British journalist, in these words:

I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people . . . Now we can't think of them. Not about their lives or of their opinion about us'. (*Daily Telegraph*, London, 11 July 1983.)

The government then banned publication of the Tamil press, the *Saturday Review*, an English weekly, and *Suthanthiran*, a Tamil bi-weekly, both published in Jaffna. Both of these had published information about army atrocities in the Tamil areas, and the former had been the medium through which news and views about Tamil politics and society have been transmitted to the Sinhalese people; it also had the largest circulation outside the country of any Sri Lanka journal.

Yet the economic interests and capitalist system of the West, which lives and prospers on the dependency and poverty of the Third World, have prompted no concern for these brutal violations of the human rights of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. The West's concern, as we know, is not with human rights or democracy but with economic exchanges favourable to them and guaranteed by dictatorial regimes, the world over. They are aware that any move in these countries towards real freedom and democracy would question the economic and political relations of dependency and exploitation.

The Tamil liberation struggle has, however, come to maturity as the revolutionary struggle of an oppressed nation. The government's branding of the freedom fighters as "terrorists", its adoption of repression as the answer to the democratic demand for justice, its glorification of chauvinism, its constitution of a racist state structure, etc., have all come home to roost. The die is cast and the oppressed people's struggle is now seeking to resolve the national question. Manipulation, irrational sectarian and racist postures, "majority-minority" mythicization to enslave, and repression to maintain the status quo cannot stand up against the people's struggle for national freedom. A connection has been established between Tamil national freedom and socialist reconstruction. Out of the womb of the historical process of national liberation, the freedom of the Tamil people will be born in the state of Eelam.

With the rulers proclaiming repression as the only solution, the army began to act as an occupying force, as if it were operating in an enemy country. The government imposed strict censorship on all news relating to the Tamil people and operations of the army. On 22 July, the army in Jaffna abducted three Tamil girls, took them to their camps, and news spread that they had been raped and one of the girls had committed suicide. The following day the Tamil militant youths retaliated by throwing bombs into an army truck, killing 13 soldiers. The army went on the rampage, shooting people at random. In Manipay, the army shot and killed nine people, including six school children. In all, over 30 persons were shot and killed in Jaffna that day.

News of the killing of soldiers reached Colombo, and from 24 July, the worst ever anti-Tamil rioting started. Hundreds of Tamils were killed, hundreds of Tamil homes and shops were looted and burnt. Despite the declaration of an all day and night curfew, looting and burning continued for several days following in the city, quite often in the presence of security forces. The area worst affected was Wellawatte, where Tamils lived in large numbers. The Tamil people fled from their homes to various refugee camps, some of which came under attack by the Sinhalese mobs. At the time of writing, there are over 75,000 Tamil refugees in several camps in Colombo. On 27 July, 37 Tamil political detainees, some held from 1981, were murdered in Colombo gaol by the Sinhalese prisoners. The following day, yet another 17 were massacred. Violence spread to Kandy, Gampola, and other up-country areas and large numbers of plantation Tamils have fled their line rooms as refugees.

Death and destruction have become the only things not denied to the

Tamils. The guilty political conscience of the ruling class has led to complete black-out of all news to the outside world. In the search for scapegoats, Jayewardene has stumbled upon some leftist parties who allegedly want to overthrow his government with the help of an outside power. Many tired and overworked clichés have been harnessed. Almost all Tamils are abandoning the south and fleeing as refugees to the north and east. A total *de facto* separation of the people, as existed before the colonial period, is coming about. The political order built and maintained for the wealthy few, with the support of their ethnic and caste allies, is in the process of disintegration. The prevention of political change taking place through constitutionalist and political channels, and the use of repressive force, not law, are the cause of the disintegration.

References

1. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1966, Vol. 33, p. 386.
2. Fr Tissa Balasuriya, "Our Crisis of National Unity", in *Race Relations in Sri Lanka*, *supra*, p. 115.
3. *Ibid*, p. 178. Fr Balasuriya also states: "As a result of all this, a fair number of those waiting for Sri Lanka citizenship and from among those who have already become citizens, want to leave for India. The first group is eager to have their repatriation expedited and the latter to renounce and seek Indian citizenship. Discussions with the Indian High Commissioner regarding the second, resulted in a 'No' from India." *Ibid*, p. 114.
4. David Selbourne, "Sinhalese Lions and Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka", in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, 17 October 1982.
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8. In *Tribune*, Colombo, 25 September 1982.
9. *Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka*, International Commission of Jurists, Geneva.
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20. *Weekend*, 30 May 1982.
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8. Conclusion

If we bring together the main strands of this survey, we arrive at the conclusion that, while the Sinhalese leadership groups — the political elite, the “aristocratic” and landlord classes — which usually sided with the colonial rulers, became the sole inheritors of national freedom at independence, the Tamils, who were at the forefront of the nationalist movement and were the first to demand independence and self-rule, who resorted to non-co-operation and boycott, displayed proletarian class solidarity and mass action to hasten the transfer of power, were soon deprived of citizenship, franchise, language rights, employment and educational opportunities, and the soul of their nation was enslaved.

This descent from freedom to subjugation created a permanent scar on the collective consciousness of the Tamil nation. As the wound beneath the scar remained sensitive, every pressure set it throbbing. When, finally, they were attacked in hearth and home, they struggled to defend it and to turn subjugation into freedom. The national mood became one of resistance, pride, defiance and clandestine revolutionary activism.

The Eelam Tigers came to conceive the expression of their political aspirations in socialist terms. The Tamil nation, which for a quarter-century had been in a state of self-doubt and disillusionment, found something to give it strength and comfort. The Tigers saw their task as one of resistance; no more subjection, resignation and self-pity. The minority psychosis of the past was effectively cast off when the struggle was one of defence of their homelands. The Eelam separate state became the overriding goal. All the propaganda of the Eelam Tigers has the frontispiece legend in Tamil: “The Thirst of the Tigers is the Tamil Eelam State”.

But before we proceed to our conclusion, it is necessary to make an abrupt movement backwards in time, to correct the historical falsehoods and mystifications on which the Sinhalese bourgeoisie has erected its chauvinist edifice.

Falsehoods and Mystifications

Professor James Jupp was right in stating:

The modern exposition of history in Sinhalese school texts has thus become a major element socializing the majority population into the belief that it is at once the inheritor of a more ancient culture than any of its invaders and, at the same time, is continually threatened. The whole tenor of Buddhist teaching for over a thousand years has been in this tradition. Both through formal education and transmitted legends, the Sinhalese-Buddhist believes himself to be the guardian of a social system which might have been the most advanced in the world had it not been for foreign intervention. What has been stressed less readily in recent years, is that there is no aspect of local culture which is not profoundly affected from elsewhere. This is true of Buddhism, which is totally permeated with Hindu practices and beliefs, including animal reincarnation, the intercession of many gods and the caste basis of the major Buddhist sects. It is true of the racial composition of the Sinhalese, who have been subjected to centuries of Tamil interbreeding such that the very term "race" . . . has very little meaning.¹

The truth is that there is no aspect of Sinhalese-Buddhist culture – ethnicity, religion and practices, language and script, customs and traditions – which is not foreign or borrowed. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's alleged "national costume" was invented by two Ceylonese educated in England.² And, the Buddhist flag is of American provenance, for it was invented by Colonel Olcott.³

We have seen that the Vijaya legend is nothing but a flight of fancy by the *bhikkhu* author of *Mahavamsa*. Yet, it must be noted that every book on Sri Lanka history, including the school textbooks, reiterate that Vijaya was the first occupant of the island and that the Sinhalese, the descendants of the founding father Vijaya and his 700 men, are "Aryans". Although the Aryan myth in regard to Indian culture, propagated by Western scholars of Indo-Aryan linguistics, had been exploded and exorcized, nevertheless, according to B.H. Farmer, the author of *Ceylon – A Divided Nation*, Sri Lanka continues to be the last bastion of the Aryan myth.

The early Sinhalese kingdoms were internally fragmented and covered only portions of the country known as Rajarata, Mayarata, Malayarata, or Pihiti, Ruhunu, Malaya. Hence the Sinhalese never possessed an all-island view and gave no Sinhala name to the island as a whole. Several Sinhalese dynasties and kingdoms rose and fell. Anuradhapura was founded by the Tamil kings and was then known as Anuradhapuram. Even after this kingdom passed into the hands of the Sinhalese kings, many Tamil kings reigned from Anuradhapura. Tamil kings such as Ellalan treated Buddhism and Hinduism equally and built many *vihares* for the *bhikkhus*. Even the so-called Anuradhapura civilization, which *Mahavamsa* seeks to date from 457 BC to AD 769, did not extend over the whole of Sri Lanka or cover Ruhunu and Malaya. This idea was merely an attempt to suggest that Anuradhapura was then the capital.

Following *Mahavamsa*'s effort to eulogize the Sinhalese-Buddhist kings, the Tamils came to be presented as invaders, vandals, marauders and

destroyers of Sinhalese civilization. From *Mahavamsa* itself one can see that, of the Sinhalese kings of the so-called Great Dynasty (543 BC – AD 275), all but a few were weak and inept. Of the 54 kings of this dynasty, 15 ruled less than a year, 30 less than four years, 11 were dethroned, six were assassinated, 13 were killed in battle and 22 were murdered by their successors. The dark and dismal record of the early Sinhalese kings was one of incessant struggle for the throne, fratricidal and parricidal slayings, conspiracies and internal strife.

To maintain themselves on the throne, the Sinhalese kings did not depend on the chiefs, who had no troops, or on the people, who had no military training, but sought the help and support of the south Indian Tamil rulers of the Pandya,⁴ Chola,⁵ and Chera⁶ kingdoms and raised Tamil armies there. They invited these Tamil armies to secure them on the throne, usually after they had usurped it. Dr G.C. Mendis states that Abhaya Naga (AD 291–300), “the younger brother of Vera Tissa (269–291), who was forced to flee to south India on account of a crime he had committed . . . was the first Sinhalese king who seized the throne with the help of the Tamil army”.⁷

Historians, following the author of *Mahavamsa*, have treated the island’s early history as 1,000 years of constant Tamil invasions and Sinhalese-Tamil wars. The historical fact, however, is that south Indian Tamil military help was always sought by the feuding Sinhalese kings and usurping aspirants to the throne.

It is also wrong to suggest that there was a “great and glorious Sinhalese-Buddhist civilization at Anuradhapura”. How could a great civilization develop amidst the anarchy that prevailed? The building of a few tanks (artificial lakes or reservoirs), with canals to take water to the fields, and a few *Dagabas* (Buddhist stupas) and *vihares* (Buddhist monasteries) does not make a civilization. These were the basic essentials of the economic and religious life of any settled community.

A civilization is judged in terms of social development. In regard to the Anuradhapura period of the Sinhalese kings, Dr Mendis states:

So far no traces have been discovered of buildings of this time used by laymen. The people probably lived in caves or dwellings made of destructible material. The only non-religious structure mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*, apart from the king’s palace which stood within the citadel, is the citadel wall built by Kutakanna Tissa (AD 16–28)⁸.

Mantai, near Mannar and close to southern India, was the port of the early Tamil kingdom. Around it were built the earliest tanks and canals, Akattimarippu and Giant’s tank; and at Vanni, the Pathavikulam (now named Padaviya, in Sinhala), Basavakulam (Abhayaweve in Sinhala), Tissavapi (Tissaweve in Sinhala), etc. Tank-fed irrigated cultivation of rice was started by the Tamils, as these early tanks with their Tamil names show. The tanks and *dagabas* were built under the Sinhalese kings by *rajakariya* (forced labour). The popular Sinhalese version of Sri Lankan history makes out that

these huge tanks were dug out of the bowels of the arid land, and hence were a monumental feat of the ancients; whereas the simple fact is that they were constructed by throwing earth bunds across shallow valleys to hold back the seasonal streams.

Many foreigners have been carried away by this falsified history. The assistant editor of the *National Geographic* magazine wrote in a flight of fancy:

The [Sinhalese] king's engineering feats survive as well. With his capital sited in an arid region, he dug huge tanks to store water, and canals for irrigation. The Mahaweli Project will tie into the old tanks and canals. In Sri Lanka, antiquity is always relative. A much older water system is still in use in the lowlands northwest of Polonnaruwa. It serves the people who live around the most ancient, greatest buried city of all: Anuradhapura, the island's first capital. Approaching, I could make out colossal shrines — dagobas — from miles away . . . Anuradhapura lived from about the 5th century BC to the 11th Century AD. At the peak of its glory it had an area greater than modern-day Chicago.⁹

Anuradhapura city, as shown by the Archaeological Survey Map, is a small area, comprising the present old town, which was declared a "sacred city". The idea of a "buried" city is yet another canard which foreign writers easily swallow. The building of tanks and canals became vitally necessary because the north-east monsoon rains were insufficient for food to be grown to sustain both the people and a large number of *bhikkhus*, who, as prescribed by the rules of the *Vinaya*, cannot participate in production but have to depend on alms. Because the earlier tanks and canals built by the Tamils fell into disuse owing to internal strife, four severe famines occurred during the Anuradhapura period.¹⁰

In the succeeding period, the *Culavamsa* refers to four further famines, which were due to continuous usurpations of the throne and internal strife and civil war between the Moriya and Lambakarna Sinhalese royal clans. As a result, the tanks and canals fell into disrepair and led to the eventual abandonment of Anuradhapura. The Buddhist *dagabas* and *vihares*, which represent the ancient Buddhist past of Sri Lanka, are much less splendid than the *Stupas* at Sanchi in India, or the temples and shrines such as the magnificent Borobudur in Central Java, still standing after more than 1,000 years, or the impressive Buddhist ruins of Angkor, which today stand as a memorial to the greatness of the Khmer people in Kampuchea. Since there were no buildings except the king's palace, there was no architecture or sculpture. Arts and crafts were altogether non-existent. Hence the Sinhalese-Buddhist Anuradhapura "civilization" is merely an exaggerated vision. It is modern-day propaganda, bolstering the claim for Sinhalese-Buddhist hegemonism in the island.

During the early medieval period (363–1017), the Polonnaruwa period (1017–1235) and the period preceding the arrival of the Portuguese, the

history of the Sinhalese kingdoms followed the same course as in the ancient period. The internecine struggle between the two clans led to further anarchy under the next 60 kings of the early medieval period.

Kasyapa I rebelled against his father, put him to death, left Anuradhapura in fear and occupied the Sigiriya rock. The rightful heir, Mugalan I, went to India, returned with Tamil troops and defeated the usurper. Then, according to Dr Mendis,

the change of dynasty was followed by a civil war which lasted some years and caused great suffering. The combatants at times plundered *vihares* and *dagabas*, and the people not only lost their foodstuffs but also found it difficult to cultivate their fields. During this war . . . a Senapati called Sirinaga went to South India, returned with Tamil troops and raised a rebellion. Agbo III, Dathopa Tissa I (676–641), Dathopa Tissa II (650–658) and Manavamma (676–711) also went to South India and brought Tamil forces to secure the throne.¹¹

Such was the general pattern of the usurpers' struggle for the throne and their dependence on Tamil military involvement to secure it. Because of the chaos, "Rajaraja the Great (984–1014), who was extending the Tamil Chola empire in every direction, did not fail to take advantage of the confusion that prevailed."¹² His troops invaded Sri Lanka, made Rajarata a part of the Chola empire and founded Polonnaruwa. With it, Sri Lanka for the first time came under south Indian, Tamil rule.

Rajaraja's son Rajendra I (1014–1044) further extended the Chola empire, so that in the 11th Century the Cholas ruled over Sri Lanka, Malaya, Kampuchea and large parts of Indonesia. This was a time when south India held command of the eastern seas and Tamil was the *lingua franca* of eastern commerce.¹³

Chola power in south India itself began to decline and in 1070 Vijayabahu successfully put an end to it and ascended the throne at Polonnaruwa. However, he had to face three internal rebellions by his brothers and fled to Vakirigala. The next king of any importance was Parakramabahu I (1153–1186), whose grandfather was a Hindu Tamil Pandya prince. He was a strong ruler who knit the island together and waged wars in south India and Burma. He is the hero of the *Culavamsa*, just as Dutugemunu is the hero of the *Mahavamsa*. Parakramabahu built temples for the Hindu priests and even prohibited the carving of bulls, sacred to the Hindus.

Since he had no son, on his death his sister's son, a prince from the Kalinga kingdom in central India, succeeded him as Vijayabahu II. This accession of a foreign prince led to political intrigues and another period of instability. In the next 25 years 15 kings, mostly from the Kalinga royal dynasty, ascended the throne. Because of further chaos and anarchy, Polonnaruwa was abandoned. The last of the Kalinga rulers was Magha, who ascended the throne in 1214. We shall see how *Rajavaliya*, a 17th-Century Sinhalese chronicle in the tradition of the *Mahavamsa* and the *Culavamsa*, treats

Magha's early 13th-Century accession with exaggerated hostility.

Subsequently the centres of Sinhalese rule shifted further to the south-west, to Dambadeniya, Kurunegala, Gampola, Raiyigama, and Kotte (near Colombo), the last centre of Sinhalese rule at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505.

Thus the account of 1,000 years of Tamil invasions and Sinhalese-Tamil wars, as presented by the chronicles and the modern historians, is false. Nor was there a glorious Sinhalese-Buddhist civilization of Anuradhapura-Polonnaruwa-Sigiriya.

We have already looked at the "civilization" of the Anuradhapura period. We have also seen how Kasyapa, the parricide, fled Anuradhapura and sought refuge in the inaccessible Sigiriya rock. Sigiriya is a solitary pillar of granite rising to a height of 1,144 feet. On the summit of this rock, there are six acres of ground in which Kasyapa built his abode. The map of Sigiriya from the *Ceylon Journal of Science* shows three caves and an audience hall. There are 21 oppressively sensuous half-figure portraits of celestial females, advancing singly and in pairs. One cannot conceive of any civilization in this rock and its maidens.

The Polonnaruwa period and its aftermath is one of internal strife, chaos and anarchy. There is nothing in the *Culavamsa* to show how the people organized their lives. The ruins of Polonnaruwa, around the beautiful Lake Topaweve, show combined Buddhist-Hindu artistic activity during the Chola occupation and under Parakramabahu I. The sculptural work is in the Pallava and Chola styles as in the Hindu Siva temples, the rock-cut figure of the Hindu sage Agasthiyar near Potgul *vihare* and the Nalanda temple built for use of the Tamil troops midway between Dambulla and Matale. One of the greatest Nataraja metal images (preserved at the Colombo Museum) and the splendid female statue of goddess Pattini Devi (British Museum) were found among the Hindu temples in ruin.

No castles were built by Sinhalese kings in order to protect themselves, as kings and nobles did in Europe In times of special danger they sometimes took refuge in rock fortresses, which gave them greater protection. . . . In the period of the drift to the south-west, "they could no longer live in open plains like their predecessors and protect their subjects, but had to reside in places which gave protection to themselves.

We have seen that both the ruling and the usurping Sinhalese kings depended on Tamil armies to secure the throne, and this continued until the beginning of the 16th Century. Generally, therefore, Sinhalese kingly rule prevailed only in name. The chroniclers and the modern Sinhalese historians have distorted the situation by depicting Tamil invaders and Sinhalese resisters. There is no evidence to show any ethnic conflict or attempt at ethnic conquest by the Tamils in the historic past.

Yet following the ahistorical presentation of the chronicles, many writers,

local and foreign, who attempt to interpret present-day Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism have been led into pitfalls by unquestioningly relying on this falsified history. Even Professor Gananath Obeyesekere, a discerning social anthropologist, falls into this trap when he writes:

I have just discussed the traditional Sinhalese identity in the early period of Sinhalese civilization. Let me now discuss it in relation to the decline of Sinhalese civilization, which roughly consists of two periods, one of systematic South Indian invasions which resulted in the abandonment of the old centres of civilization and the later period of colonial rule which brought about a radical change in the Sinhalese ethnic identity. The wars between the Sinhalese and the Tamils continued until the 16th Century. In the 10th Century the old capital of Anuradhapura had to be abandoned because of Tamil invasions, and the capital was moved eastward to Polonnaruwa. Sinhalese fortunes reached a low point in the late 10th Century, with systematic invasions from South India which were unlike the sporadic incursions of the earlier periods. Sri Lanka was the principality of the Tamil Chola kings until 1070, when the Sinhalese chieftain, Kirti, raised a standard of revolt successfully and assumed the crown as Vijayabahu I (1059–1114). Later under Parakramabahu, Sinhalese civilization reached new heights, and Polonnaruwa, the new capital, became a great city. But the respite was temporary. In 1214 Magha of Kalinga landed in Sri Lanka with a large army of South Indian mercenaries. *The Pali and Sinhalese chronicles mention* the devastation of the kingdom by Magha and the sorry plight of the Sinhalese. *Rajavaliya*, a 17th-Century Sinhalese chronicle, writes of the event:

“As moral duties were not practised by the people of Lanka, and the guardian deities of Lanka regarded them not, their sins were visited upon them and unjust deeds became prevalent. The king of Kalinga landed on the island of Lanka with an army of 20,000 men, fortified himself, took the city of Polonnaruwa, seized king Parakrama Pandi, plucked out his eyes, destroyed the religion and the people, and broke into Ruwanvali and other *dagabas*. He caused the Tamils to take and destroy the shrines which represented the embodied fame of many faithful kings, the pinnacles that were like their crowns He wrought confusion in castes by reducing to servitude people of high birth in Lanka, raising people of low birth and holding them in high esteem. He reduced to poverty people of rank, caused the people of Lanka to embrace a false faith turned Lanka into a house on fire, settled Tamils in every village and reigned 19 years in the commission of deeds of violence.”¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)

On the basis of this view of Sinhalese history, Obeyesekere attempts to interpret and vindicate the chauvinist fanaticism of Dharmapala on the

grounds that “the identity crisis of an individual has significance for the identity problems of a larger ethnic group”. This seemingly attractive conceptualization may be a useful anthropological academic device to interpret Luther and his Protestantism, or Gandhi and Indian nationalism. But in the case of Dharmapala’s bigoted chauvinism, it fails because Dharmapala’s exhortations are ahistorical and Sinhalese identity, if it is to be ethnic, has to be Sinhalese and not Sinhalese-Buddhist. Today’s Sinhalese identity embraces all the Sinhalese, be they Buddhists or Christians.

Dharmapala’s missionary zeal was based on total falsification of history and on the denial of the cardinal Buddhist “perfections” of compassion, tolerance and equality. Doctrinal Buddhism regards all men as equal because they are all subject to the same destiny of misery. It seeks to explain what causes misery and provides the means of liberation from it. Buddha promoted a solidarity that renders one happy by the happiness of others. It is in the practice of these that one sees the real Buddhism, for it is truly an ethical philosophy and not a religion.

The first of the Five Buddhist Precepts (*Pansil*), binding on all who call themselves Buddhist, is not to take life. The *bhikkhu* author of *Mahavamsa* departed from this fundamental tenet of Buddhism when in his eulogy of the Dutugemunu-Ellalan battle he explicitly justified war and killing. According to the chronicle, the former marched into battle with 500 ascetic monks. We have seen the ahistorical, “sons of the soil” exhortations of Dharmapala. Departing from doctrinal Buddhism, he was seeking to make it spiritually akin to modern bourgeois society.

In the colonial period, the Sinhalese and the Tamils began to convert to Christianity because of the obvious advantages in converting to the religion of the ruling power. The Catholic and Christian Sinhalese and Tamils, who allied with imperial and Western interests, became the local intermediaries and then the ruling elite. Dharmapala, born of a Buddhist merchant family, being the representative of the emerging comprador bourgeoisie, demanded the renunciation of this wordly asceticism, ordained by pristine Buddhism, in order to secure Sinhalese-Buddhist bourgeois ascendancy as the ruling class. He was employing religious rhetoric for political purposes. He speaks of the humiliation of Buddhists and the degradation of the Sinhalese, not because the Buddhists did not seek salvation, but because, compared to the Christians, they were politically powerless in the country.

What Dharmapala was clearly seeking was the political kingdom for the Sinhalese Buddhists and he came to be followed later by the *bhikkhus*, who generated religious pressure for political hegemonism. Because of his rhetoric many writers have been led to represent his efforts as being aimed at “Buddhist revival”. Held up to the mirror of history, there was nothing “revivalist” about Dharmapala’s pursuits. While eminent Buddhist statesmen, like U Nu and U Ba Swe of Burma and Buddhist leader of India Lakshmi Narasu *et al*, maintained that Buddha was anti-capitalist and that socialism was the corollary of the social and ethical principles of the Buddha, Dharmapala’s Buddhist Theosophical Society year after year underlined that

it was the business of the Sinhalese Buddhists to consider ways of accumulating capital. Dharmapala's chauvinism and racialism presaged not only Sinhalese-Buddhist rule but also the defeat of socialism and the perpetuation of dependent capitalism to benefit the class to which Dharmapala belonged and for which he was spokesman.

What of the "identity problems of the larger ethnic group"? As stated earlier, there is no aspect of the Sinhalese-Buddhist culture that is not foreign or borrowed. Hence the "identity problem" of the Sinhalese was really the absence of an identity. Therefore, what was being sought was a new identity. In the context of the presence of the ancient, primeval and indigenous identity of the Tamil people and their culture, the new identity of the Sinhalese Buddhists came to be one of domination and suppression. The only convergence between any "identity crisis" of Dharmapala and the "identity problems" of the Sinhalese was in the falsification of history and the search for a new dominant identity, vis-a-vis the Tamils, on the basis of an "ancient civilization", "past glories", the "triumphant record of victories" and so on.

Obeyesekere's thesis infers that the age-old rivalries of the Sinhalese and Tamils are now seeking to work themselves out to effect redress. This is totally untenable. At the level of the ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils, there was then, and is today, no conflict. The conflict, such as it was, was between the Tamil and the *Karava* Sinhalese petit bourgeoisie, at the instigation of the latter. The Sinhalese-Tamil conflict is a result of the ambitions of the latter and their accommodation by the upper-class rulers as a concession to the other Sinhalese classes and castes willing to allow them to retain power. These conflicts cannot, at any level, be traced back to historical memories and fears. However much bourgeois scholarship seeks to rely on such premises, they fail to carry conviction. This is clearly exemplified by the constant Sinhalese-Muslim conflicts, and Dr Michael Roberts is right when he states: "No such [memories] and fears influence the attitudes of Sinhalese to the Moors. Yet enmities are sharp."¹⁵

Buddhism, *Bhikkhus* and the *Sangha*

Budhha received enlightenment (spiritual understanding) and preached an ethical philosophy. In his first sermon preached to the monks, he said that a man who followed his eightfold path of moral and spiritual self-development could become free of the "wheel of life", and enter *Nibbana* (*Nirvana* in Sanskrit), a state of union with the supreme spirit. Then he no longer had to be reborn to a life of suffering. "Where nothing is, where nothing is grasped, this is the isle of No-Beyond. *Nibbana* I call it — the utter extinction of ageing and dying."

The eightfold path consisted of: (1) right view, (2) right motive, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right pursuits, (6) right livelihood, (7) right mindfulness, (8) right contemplation. *Nibbana*, therefore, is a state attainable in this life by living according to the noble eightfold path and is the supreme

goal of Buddhist endeavour. There are ten precepts in Buddhism, which bind Buddhists not to: (1) take life, (2) steal, (3) indulge in sensuality, (4) lie, (5) become intoxicated by drink or drugs, (6) eat at unreasonable times, (7) attend worldly amusements, (8) use perfumes or ornaments, (9) sleep on luxurious bed or (10) possess gold or silver.

The first five (*Pansil*) were originally binding on all who become *bhikkhus*; later the other five were added, the ten being binding on all *bhikkhus*. Later it became the custom for the pious Buddhist laity to take the five precepts, which are now considered the minimum moral code to be followed by all who call themselves Buddhists. The public recital of the “three refuges” — “I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the *Dhamma*, I take refuge in the *Sangha*” — and the “five precepts” is the outward form of becoming a Buddhist in Sri Lanka, as it is in Burma, Thailand and Kampuchea. The precepts are not commandments; they are aspirations or vows (to oneself).

The Buddha did not believe in gods, worshipping of gods or ceremonies in the Hindu temples performed by Brahmin priests. To follow Buddha, it was necessary to retire from the world completely. Buddha preached to the ascetic monks and not to the ordinary people. Buddhism changed after Buddha's death. Missionaries carried his teachings to Tibet, Burma, Sri Lanka, China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan and south-east Asia. The original teachings were changed a little in each of these countries to fit in with the existing religions or cultures. The Chinese mixed Buddhism with Confucianism, the Japanese mixed it with Shintoism, the Tibetans with Lamaism and the Sri Lankans with Hinduism. No one was content with only a “path of life”. In these places, there were temples with gods and goddesses and divinities as objects of worship. So, by 100 BC, Buddhists started to carve images of Buddha, which came to be worshipped, and in Sri Lanka they were worshipped along with the Hindu gods and goddesses.

There was never a Buddhist age in India, but, under Emperor Asoka's patronage, Buddhism spread and was a contender for the spiritual leadership of India. The Hindu India of old was ruled by Rajas, of the warrior caste. The Raja's court included ministers and advisers, who were Brahmin priests and pundits, who attended to the state ritual. Brahmin priestly influence was considerable in the king's court. The Raja was not absolute but was limited by the *Rajadharma*, which was designed to preserve society and promote the welfare of his subjects; its failure meant the subjects were under no duty of obedience.

In Sri Lanka during the period of the Sinhalese kings, there were no comparable relationships between the king and his subjects or between the king and the Buddhist *Sangha*. Although the Tamil-Hindu and the Sinhalese-Buddhist kings gave patronage to Buddhism and built *vihares* and *dagabas*, the *Sangha* was not closely associated with kingship. Buddhism was confined to the monasteries and, in accordance with the injunctions of the Buddha, the *bhikkhus* lived a life of asceticism in monastic seclusion. Buddhism was not a social or even a religious force at any time in the historic past. Dr Mendis states: “The Brahmin priests were maintained by the kings . . . and their chief

duties lay in carrying out for the people the domestic rites and sacraments which the *bhikkhus* did not consider it within their province to perform.”¹⁶

A new development began in 1739, with the accession of the Tamil Nayakkar kings of Madurai to the throne of the Sinhalese Kandyan kingdom. The *bhikkhus* from the ranks of the Kandyan “artistocratic” (*Rudala*) families sought to become important in the king’s court because of the alien origin of the dynasty. The leading *bhikkhu* litterateur, Velivita Saranankara, sponsored the Tamil Nayakkar royal accession, while the aristocratic faction opposed it. Then Saranankara and the tiny aristocratic faction, which was constantly divided, attempted to dominate the affairs of the king’s court. In 1760, in the reign of the second Tamil Nayakkar king Kirti Sri, there was a conspiracy by Saranankara and Tibbotuwawe, the chief prelate of the Malwatte temple, together with the aristocratic faction led by the second *Adigar* (minister) Samanakkodi, to replace king Kirti Sri with a prince from Siam (Thailand). The conspiracy was uncovered in time, Saranankara and others confessed, Samanakkodi was executed and the two *bhikkhus* were deported to remote villages.

In 1815, because the last Nayakkar king Sri Wickrema would not accord the aristocratic faction and the *bhikkhus* the privileged position they sought for themselves, they joined together, conspired against and deposed him and ceded the kingdom to the British. Thus, between the Nayakkar Tamil kings and the Kandyan Sinhalese aristocratic faction, there was historic conflict and hostility. A Kandyan Sinhalese friend of mine has suggested to me that this was the root cause of Mrs Bandaranaike’s hostility towards the Tamils from 1960. It is a point well worth further examination since relations between the ordinary Tamil people and the Kandyan Sinhalese peasants and lower middle classes have been good.

During the colonial period, the *Sangha* and the Buddhist propagandists did nothing to assert political liberation in the sense of national independence. Buddhism had no ideology apart from strictly monastic this-worldly asceticism. The propagandists’ attack on Christianity, with a call to return to a falsified and romanticized Buddhist past, failed to carry any conviction among the Western-oriented Buddhist elite. The English-educated Buddhist elite were no respecters of the Sinhala- and Pali-educated *bhikkhus*. This reached its height when Sir John Kotelawala was prime minister. Thus there was a conflict between the Sinhalese ruling upper class and the *bhikkhus*, mainly of the low-country Sinhalese Ramayana sect, the majority of whom were of the *Karava* caste. Consequently, when the *Karava* lower-middle-class agitators started the “Sinhala-only” cry, they came to be supported by the Ramayana-sect, *Karava*-caste *bhikkhus*. We have seen the role that they played in the 1956 election and thereafter. The conservative and wealthy Siam *Nikaya*, confined to the highest Sinhalese *Goyigama*-caste *bhikkhus*, played no part in the “Sinhala-only” agitation and became involved in politics only when their own interests were threatened.

Although, ostensibly, “Sinhala only” was made out to be an attack on privilege, in reality it was the route to secure privileges for the Sinhalese

Buddhists and to win *bhikkhu* dominance in affairs of state. The excessive demands of the *bhikkhus* could not be conceded and hence Bandaranaike was murdered. Then, with Mrs Bandaranaike, they secured their ascendancy, with Buddhism becoming the de facto state religion and Sinhalese-Buddhist culture being held out as the only national culture. Sinhalese and Buddhism, Tamils and Hinduism — each were placed at opposite and contrary poles. Religious, political and social pressures were exerted to produce a state structure beneficial only to the Sinhalese Buddhists. Buddhism was really a cloak for the material advancement of the Sinhalese Buddhists, at the expense of everyone else.

Yet the chauvinist Sinhalese politicians expected the Tamil people to owe loyalty to a “racist” theocratic state run solely for their own benefit. They were so myopic as not to realize that the political realm in a multi-nation state must be secular and must be the sphere of the people and not of the clergy. They harnessed the divisive loyalties of religion, not the integrative powers of democracy.

What is the relevance of Buddhism in politics? Does it have an ideology in the secular realm? Does it cater to a constituency other than its religious constituency? For the *bhikkhus* to dominate the state and for the Sinhalese Buddhists to advance materially and reap the benefits, the Tamils have to be subjugated, oppressed and kept down by torture, genocide and state terrorism. The Tamils were even told that they must accept the new status quo of subjugation and oppression.

Before we conclude this discussion, it may be instructive to see how in Turkey Kemal Atatürk proceeded to build a modern secular nation state by not only abandoning Islam but actively suppressing it. In 1924 he abolished the Caliphate, the supreme spiritual authority in Islam vested for centuries in the Sultan of Turkey. The following year, he forcibly dissolved the Muslim religious courts and the religious sects and orders and closed their meeting places. In 1937 the constitution was amended to include “laicism” (secularism) as one of the six cardinal principles of the state. In 1938 a law prohibited political parties from using religion for political propaganda. A 1949 law prescribed punishment for propaganda against the secular state. Atatürk’s revolutionary goal of a secular state inspired the Indian nationalists like Jawaharlal Nehru, who became passionately committed to the building up of the secular nation state of India.

Language, Culture, Nation

Because of capitalism and the economic prosperity which imperialist exploitation of colonies brought to the Western state system, today it is forgotten that the language-culture matrix and nationalism have been the most important factors in the organic development of each of the Western nation states. During the Middle Ages, Western civilization was regarded as being determined by religion — Christian or Muslim — and the respective

language-culture was Latin (or Greek) or Arabic (or Persian). The Renaissance continued this trend, for the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and their languages were treated as the universal norm.

From the end of the 18th Century, civilization came to be considered to be determined by nationality. The classical languages were abandoned and the language of each nationality became pre-eminent in education and public life. Cultural nationalism led to the development of nation states, which determined the territorial extent of the state and the political loyalties of the people according to ethnographic principles. The recognized principle was that each nationality should form its state and that each state should include all members of its nationality. John Stuart Mill wrote: "It is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of the nationalities." It was implied that all who possessed a common nationality shared a common loyalty to the state.

In England and France, where state-building preceded nation formation, a common nationalism developed out of different linguistic and culture groups; loyalty was to the British monarch or to *la France*.

Nationalism was not determined in racial terms, but was secular, libertarian and humanitarian, and founded upon the ancient principle of *jus cuique* (to each his own right). States became secular and centralized, to *promote, protect, and safeguard the interests of those who comprised them*. The nation state represented the public interest and from this jurists and political theorists developed the concept of popular sovereignty.

The old states so formed encapsulated and represented the language and culture of their people and evoked a singular loyalty to the state. In the USA, the product of great movements of mankind, the challenge was how to convert the different states and the different ethnic groups into a cohesive society, the American nation state. From independence, the task was seen as uniting the states and securing the loyalty of the people. This was done by the federation, the constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Supreme Court. The Declaration of Independence stated: "... all men are created equal ...". "*E pluribus unum*" (out of many, one) is the legend in the official seal of the USA. "Equal justice under the law" is the inscription over the portico of the US Supreme Court. The solitary star of the Supreme Court symbolized the granting of judicial power to one Supreme Court. It is the duty of the Supreme Court to protect the federation and the rights of the US citizen. The federation, the constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Supreme Court created unity out of diversity and engaged the loyalty of the American people to the state.

In Canada the task was even more formidable. Canada began as a collection of ten fragments and the objective, in Dicey's phrase, was "union but not unity". A country of truly heterogeneous people and cultures – English-speaking Christians wanting to remain under the British monarchy, and French-speaking Catholics of Quebec regarding themselves as a part of metropolitan France and nourishing French culture – came together in a

confederation in 1867. The constitution, similar in principle to that of the UK, vested a large range of functions in the Dominion parliament, with cultural autonomy in the provinces and enshrined bilingualism and bi-culturalism. The French-speaking Canadians form one nation, have a common heritage, speak the same language, have their own political and social institutions, live in Quebec — a reserve area for them — and above all possess *un vouloir vivre collectif* (a will to live as distinct people). From the time of the confederation to date, the French-speaking Canadians consistent demand has been: *notre langue, nos institutions et nos lois* (our language, our institutions and our laws). When the confederation was established, Lord Durham, its architect, optimistically believed that the French-speaking Canadians would gradually become bilingual and eventually adopt English, the language of North America. Today, three out of four French-speaking people of Quebec cannot read or write English.

In the 1960s, the French-speaking Canadians accused the federal government of using the immense economic powers granted to it by the constitution for the benefit of the English-speaking Canadians. They asserted that, socially, they were treated as second-class citizens, living in what Quebec separatists called “*ghetto confederatif*”. They contended that, while French had ceased to be an official language outside Quebec, they were expected to be bilingual. All these grievances exploded into French-Canadian separatist nationalism, which threatened the edifice of the confederation. In 1963 young French Canadians kidnapped the British Trade Commissioner and Quebec’s “collaborationist” labour minister, who was subsequently murdered. Lester Pearson’s federal government appointed a royal commission to recommend “the steps to be taken to develop the Canadian confederation on the basis of equal partnership between the two founding races”. The commission, in its preliminary report of 1965, stated that “Canada without being fully conscious of the fact is passing through the greatest crisis in its history. . . We believe that there is a crisis in the sense that Canada has come to a time when decisions must be taken and developments must occur which must lead to its break-up or set new conditions for its existence. The signs of danger are many and serious.”

Since confederation in 1867, the people of Quebec have possessed a perennial desire for their own state, as in a sense they had from 1791 to 1841. In the 1960s, the demand was for Quebec separation. The provincial government of Quebec even established quasi-diplomatic relations with France. President de Gaulle visited Quebec in 1967 and encouraged Quebec *separatisme*. In a speech in Montreal de Gaulle repeated the slogan of the separatists, “*Vive le Quebec Libre*”.

Though by the Act of Union of 1800 the Irish nation relinquished its nationhood and became an integral part of the UK, opposition to the union was there from the start and guerrilla war against the British military, to achieve independence and separation, was the main current of Irish history from the 19th Century until 1922, when it was finally achieved. Again, differences in language and religion were the basis of the assertion of Irish

self-determination. The Irish Republican Brotherhood and Sinn Féin (“Ourselves Alone”), both secret organizations, fought the Irish war of national liberation. In Eire 95% are Roman Catholics. The Gaelic language was replaced by English during the period of the union. On separation in 1922, Gaelic was made the first official language and its teaching was introduced in all Irish schools. “An arsenal of words was built with stunning revival of the ancient tongue, so that Irishmen could draw strength, hope and pride from their past.”¹⁷

Irish resistance was organized from the beginning by young Irishmen who escaped to the US or France. They formed the Fenian Brotherhood as a secret organization in the US in 1858. It soon extended to Great Britain and Ireland, while its central direction remained in America. At the end of the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points advocated the right to self-determination of nations. The Irish-Americans pressed Wilson, who in turn pressed Lloyd George, reluctantly to concede Irish separation. Karl Marx, from the 1860s, advocated the separation of Ireland. Lenin states:

It was from the standpoint of the revolutionary struggle of the English workers that Marx, in 1869, demanded the separation of Ireland from England. . . . Only by putting forward this demand was Marx really educating the English workers in the spirit of internationalism. Only in this way could he counterpose the opportunists and bourgeois reformism – which even to this day, half a century later, has not carried out the Irish “reform” – with a revolutionary solution of the given historical task Only in this way could Marx, in opposition to the merely verbal, and often hypocritical, recognition of the equality and self-determination of nations, advocate the revolutionary action of the masses in the settlement of the national question *as well*.¹⁸
(Emphasis in the original.)

In the colonial countries, many nations with multiple ties and loyalties to their own language, culture, ethnicity and nation existed. They were often brought together by the colonial rulers and a state structure was erected with new territorial boundaries. Political loyalty to the new nation state as the ultimate social group was demanded, and became possible under the common master, who was strong and impartial. There was, however, no nation-building, no free alliance of the different people to live under one central government, nor even a unified nation state whose citizens shared common patriotic values. The loyalties and boundaries of each nation continued to be defined by ascriptive ethnic, linguistic and cultural bonds.

In India the British brought about political unification and the nationalists aimed at freedom on the basis of that unification. Gandhi made the struggle for India’s freedom and sovereignty a struggle for national liberation. The Indian bourgeoisie rallied around him to gain control of the economic future. There was mass action, but it was not revolutionary. The free India that was

struggling to be born contained a great diversity of people; in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads".¹⁹ To the leaders of the Indian National Congress, freedom must come to India as a united nation; everything else was secondary. But M.A. Jinnah, the Muslim leader, propounded a new theory – that India consisted of two nations, Hindu and Muslim. He argued:

The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither intermarry nor interdine together and, indeed they belong to two different civilizations. . . .

To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state.²⁰

This was manifestly wrong, for Muslims in British India were not a nation but only the followers of a religion. India consisted of many other nations, but not Hindu and Muslim nations. What Jinnah was asserting was Muslim nationality on the basis of Muslim religious unity. Such a religious nationality did not exist, as the secession of Bangladesh in 1971 showed. Muslim religious unity could easily be preserved in a united India, as happened with the millions of Muslims who stayed in India. What was necessary to preserve religious unity and identity was a secular state, which India became.

Nationality cannot be founded on religious distinction and separation; nor even on religio-cultural unity. There must be a separate linguistic culture, separate territory as the exclusive homeland of the nation, and political consciousness of separate nationhood, if a people is to be recognized as possessing the right to self-determination. The Muslims, then and now, are spread throughout India, speak every Indian language and everywhere live near or among the Hindus. This is because the majority of the Muslims were converts from Hinduism during the period of the Moghul empire. The two-way mass transfer of Hindus and Muslims on partition attests to this fact. The Muslims had no separate homeland of their own; hence partition was not really the separation of a distinct part but a painful excision from an integral whole. Even after partition and the creation of Pakistan, India remained a country with the second largest Muslim population in the world.

It was not even clear which areas were to constitute Pakistan. From the 1940 Lahore resolution of the Muslim League, when the idea of "Muslim majority areas" was first ambiguously enunciated, to the eventual establishment of Pakistan, the principle of Muslim nationality, the basis on which partition was demanded, was never properly formulated. Rather, it was carefully avoided, and it became the root cause of the eventual disintegration of Pakistan. The Lahore resolution stated: "... the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India, should be grouped to constitute 'independent states' in which

the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign”.

In 1941 this resolution was amended to read: “. . . the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India shall be grouped *together* to constitute Independent States as Muslim Free National Homelands in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign”. At the Delhi convention in 1946, the Muslim League resolution demanded a sovereign state of Pakistan comprising the north-western areas and also Bengal. As originally conceived, “Pakistan” did not include Bengal, P stood for Punjab, A for Afghan province, K for Kashmir, S for Sind, and Tan for Baluchistan. On 14 August 1947 Pakistan came into existence, divided into two parts, as the expression of the religious nationality of the Muslims of India. A quarter-century later, the common faith on which it had been erected was found inadequate to sustain the nation state.

The “one-nation” unity in Islam, the theory on which Pakistan was erected, began to founder from the beginning for lack of common ethno-linguistic culture and national solidarity between west and east Pakistan. There were profound differences between the two in regard to language, culture, social structure and political legacies and traditions (somewhat resembling those between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka). The West Pakistani Muslims had their Urdu-language culture and a dominant feudal landowning upper class. The West Pakistanis were heirs to the old aristocratic Islamic traditions and later to a strong authoritarian government under the British Viceroy. Their society, in no way cohesive, comprised exploited peasants with martial fervour. The East Pakistan Muslims had a Bengali-language culture and had inherited a number of middle-class constitutional politicians from the former Province of Bengal under British India. Their society consisted mainly of peasants, traders and professional men. The Bengali Muslims were the descendants of Hindu converts to Islam, and shared their Bengali-language culture with the Bengali Hindus, as well as a shared Bengali nationalism and identity. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in 1946:

A Bengali Muslim is far nearer to a Bengali Hindu than he is to a Punjabi Muslim If a number of Hindu and Muslim Bengalis happen to meet anywhere, in India or elsewhere, they will immediately congregate together and feel at home with each other. Punjabis, whether Muslim or Hindu or Sikh, will do likewise.²¹

At independence, power was transferred to the Pakistan constituent assembly, which for years made a fruitless attempt to submerge or reconcile these differences in the cause of common loyalty to Islam. The West Pakistani politicians were bent on domination of the new state, and the protracted wrangling over power-sharing in the constituent assembly led to the somewhat muted assertion of Bengali national identity in East Pakistan. The West Pakistani politicians asserted that Urdu should be the official language of Pakistan, which led to the 1952 language riots in East Pakistan. In 1954 the East Pakistan Prime Minister went to Calcutta and called for the unity of the

Bengalis. This led to the dismissal of his cabinet and the imposition of Governor's rule. The seeds of the break-up of the nation had been sowed.

This sparked off a major constitutional crisis and the constituent assembly, which since 1947 had failed to produce a constitution, was dismissed. The hastily prepared 1956 constitution, which theoretically accorded parity between the two sides, was doomed to failure because of the West Pakistani politicians' desire for domination. No elections were held for fear of an East Pakistan majority. This constitution was abrogated in 1958, and General Ayub Khan took over the country and ruled by martial law. Ayub's 1962 constitution proclaimed that sovereignty belonged to Allah. East Pakistan, in effect, came under the rule of the president in West Pakistan. Ayub Khan stated that his objective was: "a blending of democracy with discipline, the true prerequisite to running a free society with stable government and sound administration" — the usual rhetorical recipe of army rulers.

Ayub Khan's "stable government", in which the people were a cipher, evoked great confidence among the Western capitalist countries²² and massive foreign aid flowed in. West Pakistan "prospered" in the 1960s and the Western world rated Pakistan as the model for developing countries.²³

These developments led to feelings of internal colonialism in East Pakistan. West Pakistan, in fact, became the metropolis, supplying industrial and consumer goods to the East and processing the East's raw materials of jute and tea for export. By the end of the 1960s, East Pakistan had truly become a colony of West Pakistan, ruled from Islamabad.

Yet constitutionalism and bourgeois politicking were the creed of the middle-class politicians of East Pakistan. Pakistan, West and East, lived from one constitutional crisis to the next. In the 1970 elections, the first ever held by universal franchise, Sheikh Mujib Rahman's Awami League won 167 of the 313 seats in the Pakistan National Assembly, all of them in East Pakistan.²⁴ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party won 85 seats, all in West Pakistan, mostly in Punjab and Sind. The Awami League's victory was the popular expression of Bengali nationalism, which, when threatened with military repression, exploded as Bangladeshi separatism. West Pakistan units of the army were increased to 40,000 in Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib Rahman and the Awami League politicians faltered at every stage towards Bangladesh's national liberation. They were bent on using their landslide electoral majority to secure a favourable constitutional arrangement. But, to the people, the only acceptable constitutional formula was secession. On 23 March 1971, the day celebrated since 1947 as Pakistan Day, the people hoisted Bangladesh flags everywhere in Dacca and Chittagong, and proclaimed their independence.

Independent India was launched with a constitution framed by the Indian constituent assembly, with a federation, with guaranteed individual and group fundamental rights, under a Nehru government committed to social justice. The real national problems arose only after independence. The constitution aimed at creating a strong centralized government, with Hindi as the official language of the centre, English as the "link" language for an interim period,

and 14 recognized state languages.

But pride in their historical, linguistic and cultural achievements led the Dravidians in the south to demand linguistic states defined on the basis of language, culture and regional consciousness. Nehru, who hated disunity, hesitated. The first militant movement for linguistic states arose among the Telugu people. Potti Sriramulu, an ascetic leader, fasted to death for an Andhra (Telugu-speaking) state. Nehru, in his pragmatism, realized that nation-building had yet to begin. He conceded the demand, and in 1953 Andhra Pradesh came into being as the state of the Telugu people of the south. Fourteen other linguistic states were soon created, and Indian unity on the basis of national diversity was established. Thereafter, political integration proceeded, making India a multi-cultural mosaic and not a monolithic ethnocentric state.

In Burma, for centuries a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Buddhist country, Aung San, the Burmese leader, realized that domination by the ethnically predominant Burmese over the smaller nations — the Karens, Kachins, Shans and Kaya would be contrary to the Buddhist ethic of equality. Aung San recognized that statehood was not a gift but had to be built with courage and vision. In view of his goal of establishing a united Burmese nation state on a basis of equality for the different nations, Aung San, the revolutionary socialist leader, declared to his people on the eve of independence from the British in 1946:

A nation is a collective term applied to a people, irrespective of their ethnic origin, living in close contact with one another, having common interests and joys and sorrows together, for such historic periods, as have acquired a sense of oneness. Though race, religion and language are important factors, it is only traditional desire and the will to live in unity through weal and woe that binds a people together, that makes them a nation and their spirit of patriotism.²⁵

Under the federal Union of Burma, the Kachins, Karens, Shans and Kaya people have four autonomous states, and the Chins, another ethnic people, have special status. In this way, the loyalty of all Burmese people to the new nation state was secured and national unity was preserved.

In Sri Lanka, as we have seen, the Sinhalese, both low-country and Kandyan, and the Tamils were brought together in a unified state by the British in 1833 for convenience of administration. Despite unification and a centralized administration, the separate ethnic and cultural loyalties of the people predominated. The nation state, in terms of political organization, was different from the two separate nations, in terms of loyalties and collective identities.

The first assertion of this came with the events leading to the break-up of the Ceylon National Congress in 1920, within a year of its formation. There was no free alliance of the Sinhalese and Tamil people to live under one government, nor did they share common patriotic values. As noted earlier,

they were held together by a common master who was strong and impartial. There was no Sri Lankan nationalism born of the common secular interests of the island's different ethnic and linguistic communities.

Even before independence, it was domination, and hence nation-breaking, that the Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinists wanted. We have seen that caste differences predominated at the beginning and that, in the competitive politics of acquiring wealth, power and domination, the emerging Sinhalese comprador bourgeoisie drew the battlelines on the basis of caste. Before the advent of electoral politics, some Sinhalese politicians displayed an inter-ethnic perspective. They acknowledged the Tamil people's share in the national patrimony and accepted their equal participation in the political process. But from 1920, the Sinhalese politicians defined themselves, first and foremost, as Sinhalese. In turn, their Tamil counterparts defined themselves in similar terms. These bourgeois politicians wanted representative self-government, in which they would be the principal actors and beneficiaries, but were opposed to an extended franchise which would have involved the participation of the people.

When the Kandyan Sinhalese elite sounded a discordant note of separate nationality and demanded federalism, Sinhalese unity became the objective. It was not asked: unity for what? The eventual objective was domination and subjugation of the Tamil people. To establish that unity, and appease the dissident Kandyans, marriage alliances were made, their economic and educational backwardness was quickly alleviated and many avenues for their upward mobility were devised. In 1939, Bandaranaike stated:

My Hon. Friends who represent the Kandyan Province will bear witness to what I say, that the differences that existed between the two sections of the Sinhalese — the low-country Sinhalese and the up-country Sinhalese — is now fast disappearing. Is it not a desirable thing that is being achieved? The other day it was my privilege to go to Rambukkana to attend . . . a large meeting that was attended by thousands of people . . . those who were present at that meeting would have seen there was a new hope of Sinhalese unity.²⁶

It was not a bid for national unity or nation-building, but a bid for Sinhalese unity to establish Sinhalese domination over the Tamil people. Then, when the nascent Marxist movement and the early class struggle showed its boundless energy and threatened the interests of the upper class, the Sinhalese politicians let the national-ethnic forces burst forth to divide the oppressed and the exploited.

We have seen that independence itself was hastened to save this collaborating upper class from political annihilation. Independence for whom? For all the people of Sri Lanka? The Sinhalese politicians converted it into independence for the Sinhalese and subjugation for the Tamils. Let us clearly understand that the new position is one of internal colonialism, no different from external colonialism; in fact, far more pernicious and vicious than the latter.

Sinhalese chauvinism set its eyes on conquest and assimilation, not on nation-building. There was no attempt, as in other countries, to evolve a culturally neutral, secular nation state to launch the new nation on the foundations of freedom, equal rights and social justice, embracing the various ethnic, linguistic and religious communities. It was believed that ability to control and dominate the legislature was what was important. Hence a plan was devised to reduce the electoral power and representational strength of the Tamils. This plan involved disfranchisement and electoral gerrymandering. A million Tamils of Indian origin were denied citizenship and deprived of the franchise. At a stroke, two objectives were achieved. The political strength of the Tamils was decimated, and working-class power was castrated. No redrawing of the electoral constituencies was undertaken, and hence eight additional Sinhalese MPs were returned from these electorates, which had earlier elected Tamil MPs.

Having thus bolstered their representational strength, the Sinhalese politicians reneged on the State Council resolution that Sinhala and Tamil should both be the official languages. It was this two-languages resolution that had been the bedrock of the constitutional settlement between the Sinhalese and Tamils prior to independence.

This breach of faith occurred not merely to deny the Tamils their language rights, but also to prevent their access to jobs, business opportunities and all other avenues of acquiring wealth and influence in the country. What the Sinhalese could not achieve by open competition was sought through a system closed to the Tamils. Having thus excluded the Tamils, the Sinhalese sought to formalize the new closed stratification and allocate national resources solely for the benefit of the Sinhalese people. The Tamil areas were on the one hand colonized, and on the other, by a policy of "benign neglect", turned into a backyard bantustan. Since nation states are established to promote and safeguard their citizens interests, the exclusion of the Tamils from the state, and their denial of citizenship, franchise, language and other basic rights, meant that there was no longer any *raison d'être* for the Tamils to remain in the Sri Lankan state.

We have seen that, at the level of propaganda, false positions were taken. Sinhalese and Sinhala were said to be in danger of "inevitable shrinkage" and "inexorable extinction", and Buddhism was said to be in peril. Sinhalese myths, legends and folklore were retailed as history. The simple myth of the Vijaya legend was developed into a form of Sinhalese national faith, and the 2nd Century BC Ellalan-Dutugemunu war was claimed as being "the beginning of Sinhalese nationalism". Buddhism was bourgeoisified; salvation through *nibbana* was jettisoned; instead, acquisition of wealth became the new tenet, and this aggressive Buddhism was held out as the new gospel of the rising Sinhalese bourgeoisie.

Eventually, the contorted claim came to be that Sri Lanka was the country of the Sinhalese and the 2,500-year-old home of the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *Sangha*. In the politics of manipulation, Buddha, gods and priests were pressed into service. The ordinary Sinhalese were given an overdose of

chauvinist fanaticism, which intoxicated their minds and anaesthetized their spirits.

The Tamils were murdered, butchered and beaten up; Tamil women were raped; Hindu Brahmin priests were even burnt alive; Tamil houses and shops were looted and set on fire. The Tamils assembled as refugees, not once but several times, and were driven to the north and east. All these disorders were planned and carried out by the Sinhalese politicians, who in the words of Professor Howard Wriggins, “found issues of language, religion, job, etc. the best ways of arousing a popular following, in brief as strategies to assist their own rise in influence”.

The Tamils were required to submit to Sinhalese rule. The aim was the destruction of the ethnic identity of the Sri Lanka Tamils, the repatriation of the Tamils of Indian origin, the emigration of the Burghers and the Sinhalization of the Muslims — so that Sri Lanka should become the country of the Sinhalese. Racism, therefore, was the acknowledged creed and was intensified by the fact that the Sinhalese “majority” had secured both political and economic power, Sri Lankan society has become one in which inequality, injustice, repression, violence, torture and genocide are pivotal instruments of the basic ideology of Tamil subjugation. These are what the Sri Lanka state and government offers the Tamil people.

The Tamil people are without a state and government to promote, protect and safeguard their interests of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. The situation is as Gramsci stated: “The old is dying, and the new is struggling to be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.” The old state must, therefore, be ended, and the new state of Tamil Eelam must be created so that the Tamil people can safeguard their interests of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”.

References

1. James Jupp, *supra*, p.27.
2. Sir Ivor Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations*, London, 1963, p.209.
3. Gananath Obeyesekere, *supra*, p.305.
4. The ancient Pandya included Madurai and Tinnavelly, and its early capital was Kolkai on the river Tamaraparani, and later Madurai.
5. The Chola kingdom extended along the east coast from Penner river to Cauvery river, and as far as Coorg in the west. Its early capital was Uraiyur (old Tirichinopoly) and later Kaveripattinam.
6. The Chera kingdom consisted of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Its early capital was Vanchi (now Thirukarur on the Periyar river) and later Thiruvanchikalam.
7. G.C. Mendis, *supra*, p.31.
8. *Ibid*, p.49.
9. Robert Paul Jordan, “Time of Testing for an Ancient Land — Sri Lanka”, in *National Geographic*, Vol. 155, No. 1, January 1979.

10. G.C. Mendis, *supra*, p.39.
11. *Ibid*, p.61.
12. *Ibid*, p.64.
13. An interesting Tamil inscription of 1088 refers to a "Corporation of the Fifteen Hundred". Jawaharlal Nehru refers to this and states: "This was apparently a union of traders who were described in it as "brave men, born to wander over many countries ever since the beginning of the Krita age, penetrating the regions of the six continents by land and water routes, and dealing in various articles such as horses, elephants, precious stones, perfumes, and drugs, either wholesale or in retail." *Discovery of India*, p.203.
14. Gananath Obeyesekere, *supra*, p.291.
15. Michael Roberts, *supra*, p.79.
16. *Supra*, p.75.
17. Jill and Leon Uris, *Ireland – A Terrible Beauty*, New York, 1978, p.67.
18. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1975, p.162.
19. *Discovery of India*, 1946, p.562.
20. Quoted in William T. de Barry (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York, p.285.
21. *Supra*, p.334.
22. Samuel Huntington, the US analyst of military regimes, wrote of Ayub Khan's military rule: "more than any other political leader in a modernizing country after World War II, Ayub Khan came close to filling the role of a Solon or Lycurgus or 'Great Legislator' on the Platonic or Rousseauian model".
23. Pakistan's Second Five-Year Plan (1960-65), produced by the Planning Commission with Gustav F. Papanek, a Harvard University adviser, stated that the government should allow "some initial growth in income inequalities to reach high levels of savings and investment". As a result of this policy, 22 families, including Bhutto's, came to control 66% of the industrial assets, 70% of insurance and 80% of banking.
24. It was expected that elections would give an inconclusive result. But the effects of East Pakistan flood and cyclone disasters and the last-minute withdrawal from the election of Maulana Bashani's National Awami Party – the principal rival party – brought about the Awami League's unexpected landslide victory.
25. *Burmese Way to Socialism*, Rangoon.
26. From a 1939 speech reproduced in S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, *Towards a New Era*, Colombo, 1961, pp.50-51.

Statistical and Documentary Appendix

Appendix 1

Population of Sri Lanka by Ethnic Communities

<i>Ethnic Community</i>	1901	% of Total	1946	% of Total	1953	% of Total	1963	% of Total	1971	% of Total
Low-country Sinhalese	1,458,320	40.9	2,902,509	43.6	3,469,512	42.8	4,472,340	42.4	5,445,706	42.8
Kandyan Sinhalese	872,487	24.5	1,718,998	25.6	2,147,193	26.5	3,045,410	28.8	3,700,973	29.1
Sri Lankan Tamils	951,740	26.7	733,731	11.0	844,703	10.9	1,170,310	11.1	1,415,567	11.1
Indian Tamils	n.a.	n.a.	780,589	11.7	974,098	12.0	1,122,850	10.6	1,196,368	9.4
Sri Lankan Muslims	228,034	6.4	373,559	5.6	463,963	5.7	661,590	6.3	824,291	6.5
Indian Muslims	n.a.	n.a.	35,264	0.6	47,462	0.6	27,290	0.3	29,416	0.2
Malays	11,902	0.3	22,508	0.3	25,404	0.3	24,130	0.2	41,615	0.3
Burgher & Eurasian	23,482	0.7	41,926	0.6	45,950	0.6	46,050	0.5	44,240	0.3
Other	19,989	0.5	53,814	0.8	39,550	0.5	20,090	0.2	13,957	0.1
Total	3,565,984		6,658,339		8,097,895		10,590,060		12,711,143	

Source: *Census of Ceylon 1901, 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971*

Appendix 2

Population of Sri Lanka by Religion

<i>Religion</i>	1901	1946	1953	1963	1971
Buddhists	2,141,404 (60.3)	4,294,932 (64.5)	5,209,439 (64.3)	7,020,780 (66.3)	8,567,570 (67.4)
Hindus	826,826 (23.8)	1,320,352 (19.8)	1,618,561 (20.0)	1,945,210 (18.4)	2,239,310 (17.6)
Christians	349,239 (9.8)	603,235 (9.1)	724,461 (8.9)	883,900 (8.3)	986,687 (7.7)
Muslims	246,118 (6.9)	436,556 (6.6)	541,506 (6.7)	730,840 (6.9)	909,941 (7.1)
Others	2,367 (0.0)	2,264 (0.0)	11,928 (0.1)	9,330 (0.1)	7,635 (0.1)
Total	3,565,984	6,657,339	8,097,895	10,590,060	12,711,143

Appendix 3

Bandaranaike's 1955 Statement on Tamil Language Recognition

1. Legislature

Tamil may also be used in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, and all laws will be promulgated in that language as well.

2. Administration

Sinhalese will be the language of administration in all courts, government offices and local bodies, provided that in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the language will be Tamil.

3. Education

The Medium of Instruction shall be Sinhala, provided that in the Northern and Eastern Provinces it shall be Tamil.

PROVISO 1:

Every pupil should be encouraged (but not compelled) to learn the other language as a second language and, if the parents of one-third of the pupils in any school desire to do so, the school shall be compelled to provide the necessary facilities.

PROVISO 2:

If in any school in the Northern and Eastern Provinces the parents of two-thirds of the pupils desire that the medium of instruction shall be Sinhalese or in the case of a school in any of the other seven Provinces that the medium of instruction should be Tamil, this shall be allowed. But in such a school Tamil or Sinhalese, as the case may be, shall be taught compulsorily as a second language to all the pupils in that school.

NB. A parent for this purpose shall be a registered voter for Parliamentary Elections.

4. General

All citizens shall have the right to transact official business in Sinhalese or Tamil in any part of the island.

Transitory Provisions

There should be an immediate declaration of the official language. But in the transition period, until the above policy can be implemented, English may continue to be used. A Commission shall be appointed forthwith to draw up a timetable setting out the dates for the change-over and to what extent, if any, English may continue to be utilised and also indicating, where necessary, the steps to be taken to give effect to this timetable.

Appendix 4

Bandaranaike's 1957 Proposals for "Reasonable Use of Tamil"

The following statement was made by Bandaranaike in the House:

The House and the Country know that it has always been the policy of the Government Party that, although the circumstances of the situation were such that the Sinhalese language had to be declared the official language of this country, there was no intention in fact to cause any undue hardship or injustice to those whose language is

other than Sinhalese in the implementation of that Act.

I wish also to point out that the Government Party prior to the elections in their manifesto gave the assurance that while it was their intention to make Sinhalese the official language of the country, reasonable use of Tamil too will be given. We had to wait till we saw what were the precise forms in which this recognition of the Tamil language could be given effect to.

I am in a position, on behalf of the Government, to make a statement, in general terms — of course. The details will have to be worked out and discussed and Members of the House and others will be given the opportunity of expressing their views in due course. There are certain matters that are already being done, for instance taking effective steps to see that this reasonable use is given its proper place. Administratively already certain things are being done. For instance, in the realm of education, it was always the position of the Government that they did not ban education in the medium of the Tamil language, naturally, they will have the right to go up to the very summit of education in that medium.

The House and public will also remember that in a discussion we had with the University authorities, it was decided that the Tamil medium should also be used in examinations, that is, so far as those facilities are concerned where Swabasha is used, that the Tamil medium should also be adopted. It is the policy of the Government that position should be preserved.

Following from that position, there is the question of the Public Service. For the present, the practice the Government is following is that those educated in a medium other than Sinhalese should be permitted to sit for examinations in the medium in which they have been taught with only the proviso that once they are appointed as probationers they will naturally be required to obtain that knowledge of the official language which may be considered necessary for carrying out duties before the probationary period eventuates in permanent employment.

It may be that after some years the better course for those who sit for these examinations would be to take some easy paper showing some knowledge of the official language rather than wait till they are appointed as probationers to acquire that knowledge. That is a matter that will receive the consideration of the Government.

The other question is that of correspondence and transaction of business. That also flows from the position that the Tamil language is recognised as the medium of instruction. Those who are educated in that language will have the opportunity of addressing letters, getting replies and so on in the same language. I am not going into details. I am merely expressing certain general lines on which the government will work out a scheme.

The fourth question is in regard to local authorities, Regional Councils and so on. The work of these bodies falls into two categories, namely proceedings at their meetings and the transaction of general business. Proceedings at meetings will be governed by the Standing Orders and Regulations in the same way as proceedings in this House are governed by our Standing Orders. With regard to the work of the local authority vis-a-vis the Central Government, we feel that at least in certain areas in the Northern and Eastern Provinces the local authority should have the option of doing the official part of their work in Tamil if they so wish.

These are the four main heads, and of course there are subsidiary matters that will arise. It is the view of the Government that a scheme in that way should be worked out.

In other words, the policy that the Government intends to follow is that while accepting Sinhalese as the official language, citizens who do not know Sinhalese should not suffer inconvenience, embarrassment or any trouble as a result of that.

Some of my Hon. Friends opposite who hold an extreme point of view will think differently. There are extremists on both sides. We cannot decide these issues on grounds of extremism, whether it be on this side of the House or on that side. We have to take a rational, reasonable attitude in these matters. Of course, Sinhalese has been declared the official language of the Country. The Government now proposed to take these steps and everybody will have an opportunity to make suggestions.

I have only given the broad outline of what we intend doing.

Appendix 5

The “Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact”, 26 July 1957

Statement on the general principles of the Agreement:

Representatives of the Federal Party have had a series of discussions with the Prime Minister in an effort to resolve the differences of opinion that had been growing and creating tension.

At an early stage of these conversations it became evident that it was not possible for the Prime Minister to accede to some of the demands of the Federal Party.

The Prime Minister stated that from the view of the Government he was not in a position to discuss the setting up of a federal constitution or regional autonomy or any steps which would abrogate the *Official Language Act*. The question then arose whether it was possible to explore the possibility of an adjustment without the Federal Party abandoning or surrendering any of its fundamental principles and objectives.

At this stage the Prime Minister suggested an examination of the Government's draft Regional Councils Bill to see whether provisions could be made under it to meet reasonably some of the matters in this regard which the Federal Party had in view.

The agreements so reached are embodied in a separate document. Regarding the language issue the Federal Party reiterated its stand for parity, but in view of the position of the Prime Minister in this matter they came to an agreement by way of an adjustment. They pointed out that it was important for them that there should be a recognition of Tamil as a national language and that the administrative work in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should be done in Tamil.

The Prime Minister stated that as mentioned by him earlier it was not possible for him to take any step which would abrogate the *Official Language Act*.

Use of Tamil

After discussions it was agreed that the proposed legislation should contain recognition of Tamil as the language of a national minority of Ceylon, and that four points mentioned by the Prime Minister should include provision that, without infringing on the position of the *Official Language Act*, the language of administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should be Tamil and that any necessary provision be made for the non-Tamil-speaking minorities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Regarding the question of Ceylon citizenship for people of Indian descent and revision of the *Citizenship Act*, the representatives of the Federal Party put forward their views to the Prime Minister and pressed for an early settlement.

The Prime Minister indicated that this problem would receive early consideration.

In view of these conclusions the Federal Party stated that they were withdrawing their proposed satyagraha.

Joint Statement by the Prime Minister and Representatives of the Federal Party on Regional Councils:

(A) Regional areas to be defined in the Bill itself by embodying them in a schedule thereto.

(B) That the Northern Province is to form one Regional area whilst the Eastern Province is to be divided into two or more Regional areas.

(C) Provision is to be made in the Bill to enable two or more regions to amalgamate even beyond provincial limits; and for one Region to divide itself subject to ratification by Parliament. Further provision is to be made in the Bill for two or more Regions to collaborate for specific purposes of common interest.

Direct Elections

(D) Provision is to be made for direct election of Regional Councillors. Provision is to

be made for a Delimitation Commission or Commissions for carving out electorates. The question of M.P.s representing Districts falling within Regional areas to be eligible to function as chairman is to be considered. The question of the Government Agents being Regional Commissioners is to be considered. The question of supervisory functions over larger towns, strategic towns and municipalities is to be looked into.

Special Powers

(E) Parliament is to delegate powers and to specify them in the Act. It was agreed that Regional Councils should have powers over specified subjects including agriculture, co-operatives, lands and land development, colonisation, education, health, industries and fisheries, housing and social services, electricity, water schemes and roads. Requisite definition of powers will be made in the Bill.

Colonisation Schemes

(F) It was agreed that in the matter of Colonisation Schemes, the powers of the Regional Councils shall include the powers to select allottees to whom lands within the area of authority shall be alienated and also power to select personnel to be employed for work on such schemes. The position regarding the area at present administered by the Gal Oya Board in this matter requires consideration.

Taxation and Borrowing

(G) The powers in regard to the Regional Councils vested in the Minister of Local Government in the draft Bill to be revised with a view to vesting control in Parliament where necessary.

(H) The Central Government will provide block grants to the Regional Councils. The principles on which the grants will be computed will be gone into. The Regional Councils shall have powers of taxation and borrowing.

Source: House of Representatives, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* Vol. 30 col. 1309-1311.

Appendix 6

The "Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact", March 1965

AGREEMENT

Mr Dudley Senanayake and Mr S.J.V. Chelvanayakam met on the 24th day of March 1965 and discussed matters relating to some problems over which the Tamil-speaking people were concerned, and Mr Senanayake agreed that action on the following lines would be taken by him to ensure a stable government.

1. Action will be taken early under the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act to make provision for the Tamil language to be the language of administration and of record in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Mr Senanayake also explained that it was the policy of the Party that a Tamil-speaking person should be entitled to transact business in Tamil throughout the island.
2. Mr Senanayake stated that it was the policy of his Party to amend the Language of the Courts Act to provide for legal proceedings in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to be conducted and recorded in Tamil.
3. Action will be taken to establish District Councils in Ceylon vested with powers over subjects to be mutually agreed upon between the two leaders. It was agreed however, that the Government should have power under the law to give directions to such Councils in the national interest.
4. The Land Development Ordinance will be amended to provide that Citizens of

Ceylon be entitled to the allotment of land under the Ordinance. Mr Senanayake further agreed that in the granting of land under Colonisation Schemes the following priorities to be observed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces:

- (a) Land in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should in the first instance be granted to landless persons in the District;
- (b) Secondly, to Tamil-speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and
- (c) Thirdly, to other citizens of Ceylon, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the island.

(Signed) Dudley Senanayake, 24.3.1965

(Signed) S.J.V. Chelvanayakam 24.3.1965

Appendix 7

The 1966 Tamil Language Regulation, published in Government Gazette 14653 of 2.3.1966.

1. Without prejudice to the operation of the Official Language Act 33 of 1956, which declared the Sinhala Language to be the one official language of Ceylon, the Tamil Language shall be used:
2. (a) In the Northern and Eastern Provinces for the transaction of all Government and public business and the maintenance of public records whether such business is conducted in or by a department or institution of the Government, a public Corporation or a Statutory Institution, and
(b) for all correspondence between persons other than officials in their official capacity, educated through the medium of the Tamil Language, and any official in his official capacity or between any local authority in the Northern and Eastern Provinces which conducts its business in the Tamil Language, and any official in his official capacity.
3. To give effect to the principles and provisions of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, and those Regulations, all Ordinances, and Acts, all Orders, Proclamations, Rules, By-laws, Regulations, Notifications, made or issued under any written law, the Government Gazette and all other official publications and circulars, and forms issued by Government, Corporations, Statutory Institutions shall be published in Tamil.

Appendix 8

Tamils Fight for National Freedom

(A Memorandum submitted by the Liberation Tigers to the Seventh Summit Meeting of Non-Aligned Nations held in New Delhi, India March 7-15 1983)

The Honourable Chairman,
Respected Leaders of the Third World,
Distinguished Delegates

We wish to submit for your kind attention and urgent consideration a very grave and potentially explosive situation in Sri Lanka. It is the plight of the Tamil nation of four million people and their legitimate struggle for political independence based on the democratic principle of national self-determination. The Tamil nation was forced into this political path as a consequence of nearly thirty five years of violent and brutal

oppression practised by successive Sri Lankan Governments aimed at the annihilation of the national entity of the Tamils. Decades of peaceful, non-violent, democratic political struggles to gain the very basic human rights were met with vicious forms of military suppression. The intensified military occupation of Tamil lands, the intolerable terrorism of the armed forces, the implementation of racist and repressive legislations, the mass arrest and detention of political activists – all these draconian methods were employed to stifle and subjugate the will of our people to live free, and stamp out their legitimate struggle for justice. This ever unfolding thrust of national oppression made unitary existence intolerable and finally led to the demand for secession by the oppressed Tamil people.

You are certainly aware that in the contemporary conjuncture national liberation struggles have assumed world historical significance. The right of nations to self-determination is the cardinal principle upon which many struggles for national emancipation are being fought today. It is the principle that upholds the sacred right of a nation to decide its own political destiny, a universal socialist principle that guarantees the right of a nation to political independence. The Tamil national independence struggle is fought on the very basis of our nation's right to political independence.

To the community of world nations Sri Lanka attempts to portray itself as a paradise island, cherishing the Buddhist ideals of peace and dharma, adhering to a noble political doctrine of socialist democracy and pursuing a neutral path of non-alignment. Paradoxically behind this political facade lies the factual reality, the reality of racial repression, of the blatant violation of basic human rights, of police and military brutality, of attempted genocide. Master-minding a totalitarian political system with the collusion of U.S. imperialism, the Sri Lankan ruling elite since 'independence' wielded their political power by invoking the ideology of national chauvinism and religious fanaticism and by actually practising a vicious and calculated policy of racial repression against the Tamil People. It is a tragic paradox that dictatorial regimes like Sri Lanka who stands indicted by world humanist movements for crimes against humanity could parade on a world forum with the mantle of democracy and dharma. Our objective is to expose this hypocrisy and place before you the authentic story, the story of the immense sufferings as well as the heroic struggles of our people who have no choice but to fight for dignity and freedom rather than reduced to slavery and slow death.

Historical background

The Tamils of the island of Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka) constitute themselves as a nation of people, forming into a coherent social entity with their own history, tradition, culture, language and economic life. The nation is popularly called Tamil Eelam. Tamils have been living in the island from pre-historic times before the arrival of the Sinhalese from northern India in the 6th century B.C. The Sinhalese people who constitute the majority nation of ten million have a distinct language, culture and history of their own. Historical chronicles document that the island was ruled by both Tamil and Sinhalese Kings. From the 13th century onwards, until the penetration of foreign colonialism Tamil Eelam lived as a stable national entity with a state structure and was ruled by its own kings. The Portuguese annexed the territory in 1619 yet ruled it as a separate national entity, as the traditional homelands of the Tamils. Dutch colonialism, which followed did not violate the national and territorial autonomy, until British imperialism in 1833 brought about a unified state structure amalgamating the Tamil and Sinhala kingdoms laying the foundation for the present national conflict. Another significant event in the British imperialist rule was the creation of an exploitative plantation economy for which a million Tamils from South India were brought as workers and settled in the island. Constituting a crucial part of the Tamil Eelam national totality, this huge mass of Tamil labourers who produce the wealth of the island yet subjected to most sinister form of racial repression.

Dimensions of National Oppression

The Sinhala chauvinistic oppression against the Tamil nation began to unfold its ugly

forms soon after national 'independence' in 1948 when the British handed over state power to the Sinhalese ruling elite. This oppression was not simply an expression of racial prejudice, but a well calculated genocidal plan aimed at the gradual and systematic destruction of the essential foundations of national community. The oppression, therefore assumed a multi-dimensional thrust, attacking simultaneously on the different structural levels of the national foundation, the levels of the conditions of existence of a nation, its language, education, culture, economy and territory. As part of this genocidal programme formed the state inspired communal riots, which led to the mass destruction of life and property of the Tamils.

Half a Million Workers Disenfranchised

The first major onslaught of this genocidal oppression was directed against the Tamil plantation workers, who as the only organised proletariat wielded immense political power which the Sinhalese ruling class wanted to castigate. By enacting notorious citizenship laws (Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949) the Sri Lankan Government disenfranchised more than half a million Tamil plantation workers. This repressive measure reduced these people to a condition of statelessness and dehumanised them without any basic human or civil rights.

Planned Annexation of Tamil Lands

The most vicious form of oppression calculated to destroy the national identity of the Tamils was the state aided aggressive colonisation which began soon after 'independence' and now swallowed nearly three thousand square miles of Tamil Eelam. This planned occupation of Tamil lands by hundreds of thousands of Sinhala people aided and abetted by the state was aimed to annihilate the geographical entity of the Tamil nation.

Repression on Language, Employment and Education

Sinhala chauvinism struck deeply into the spheres of language, education and employment of the Tamils. Championing the ideology of ultra-nationalism, Mr Bandaranayake came to political power in 1956 with the pledge to install Sinhala language and Buddhist religion as the only official language and state religion of the island. His first Act in Parliament, the Sinhala Only Act, put an end to the equality of status enjoyed by the Tamil language and made Sinhala the only state language. This infamous legislation had disastrous consequences. It forced the Tamil public servants to learn Sinhala language or leave employment. In the decades that followed all employment opportunities in the public service were practically closed to the Tamils. They were gradually rooted out from positions of power in the public sector as well as in the armed services.

Education was the crucial area in which the onslaught of racism deprived a vast population of Tamil youth from access to higher education. A notorious discriminatory selective device called "Standardisation" was introduced in 1970 which demanded higher merits of marks from Tamil students for university admissions whereas the Sinhalese students were admitted with lower grades. The present regime introduced a new scheme which turned out to be far more discriminatory than the earlier one denying thousands of deserving Tamil students the right to higher education, and created a huge army of unemployed youth.

Economic Deprivation

The thrust of national oppression that penetrated into the spheres of language, education and employment had far reaching consequences on the economic life of the Tamil speaking people as a whole. For more than three decades all successive Sri Lankan Governments pursued a deliberate policy of totally isolating Tamil areas from all the national development projects. While the state poured all the economic aid into the South, while the Sinhala nation flourished with massive development programmes, the nation of Tamil Eelam was isolated as an unwanted colony and left to suffer the worst form of economic deprivation.

Racial Riots and Massacre of Tamils

The racial riots that constantly plague the island should not be viewed as spontaneous outbursts of inter-communal hatred between the two communities. All major racial conflagrations that erupted violently against the Tamil speaking people were inspired and master-minded by the Sinhala ruling regimes as a part of the grand genocidal programme. Violent anti-Tamil racial riots exploded in the island in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1979 and in 1981. In these racial holocausts thousands of Tamils, including women and children were mercilessly massacred, millions worth of Tamil property destroyed and hundreds of thousands made refugees. The state and the armed forces colluded with hooligans in their barbaric acts of arson, rape and murder. Instead of containing the violence, the Sinhala Government leaders made inflammatory statements adding fuel to the fire. The violent riots of 1981 showed the genocidal character of this horrifying phenomenon. It was during these riots the Sinhala police went on a wild rampage burning down the Tamil City of Jaffna, destroying completely the public library with all its treasures of historical learning, set fire to a national newspaper office and burnt to ashes hundreds of shops. The alarming aspect of this state terrorism was that it aimed at the destruction of the cultural foundations of the Tamil nation.

The cumulative effect of this multi-dimensional oppression threatened the very survival of the Tamils. It aggravated the national conflict and the struggle for secession became the only and the inevitable choice.

Peaceful Campaigns for Federal Autonomy

Following the implementation of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956, the Tamil Parliamentary leadership organised mass agitational campaigns demanding a federal form of autonomy for the Tamil nation. The satyagraha (peaceful picketing) campaigns of 1961 was a great event in the history of the Tamil freedom struggle. This civil disobedience campaign unfolded into a massive national uprising, participated by hundreds of thousands of Tamil people, symbolising the collective resentment of the whole nation against the oppressive policies of the Sinhala rulers. Within a few months this successful satyagraha campaign paralysed the whole government administrative machinery in Tamil Eelam. Alarmed by the success of the Civil Disobedience Campaign the state oppressive machinery reacted swiftly. Under the guise of Emergency and Curfew, military terrorism was let loose on the peaceful satyagrahies. Hundreds of these non-violent agitators sustained serious injuries, and their leaders arrested. Thus, state violence finally succeeded in silencing the non-violent campaign of the oppressed; the armed terror ultimately crushed the ahimsa of the Tamils. The success of this violent repression encouraged the Sri Lankian state to utilise military terror against all forms of democratic political campaigns of the Tamils. Large contingents of armed forces were poured into Tamil areas and the Tamil nation was finally brought under military siege.

The Demand for Secession

In 1972, a new republican constitution was adopted which removed the fundamental rights and privileges accorded to national minorities. This infamous constitution created the conditions for the political alienation of the Tamils and cut a deep wedge between the two nations. Confronted with steadily mounting national oppression, frustrated with the failures of democratic political struggles demanding basic human rights, the Tamil nationalist parties converged into a single movement (The Tamil United Liberation Front) and resolved to fight for political independence on the basis of the nation's right to self-determination. At the general elections of 1977, the Front demanded a clear mandate from the people to launch a national struggle to establish sovereignty in the Tamil homeland. These elections took the character of a referendum and the Tamil speaking people voted overwhelmingly in favour of secession. Thus a new historical era in Tamil politics began, ushering a revolutionary struggle for a national independence.

Armed Resistance and the Tiger Movement

The struggle for national freedom having failed in its democratic popular agitations, having exhausted its moral power to mobilise the masses for peaceful campaigns, gave rise to the emergence of armed resistance movement in Tamil Eelam in the early seventies. Armed resistance as a mode of popular struggle arose when our people were presented with no alternative other than to resort to revolutionary resistance to defend themselves against a savage form of state terrorism. The armed struggle, therefore is the historical product of intolerable national oppression; it is an extension, continuation and advancement of the political struggle of our oppressed people. Our liberation movement which spearheads the revolutionary armed struggle in Tamil Eelam is the armed vanguard of the national struggle. The strategy of revolutionary armed struggle was formulated by us after a careful and cautious appraisal of the specific concrete conditions of our struggle, with the fullest comprehension of the historical situation in which masses of our people have no choice other than to fight decisively to advance the cause of national freedom. Our total strategy integrates both national struggle and class struggle, interlinks the progressive patriotic feeling of the masses with proletarian class consciousness to accelerate the process of socialist revolution and national liberation.

The armed struggle of our liberation movement is sustained and supported by wider sections of the Tamil masses, since our revolutionary political project expresses the profound aspirations of our people to gain political independence from the autocratic domination and repression of the Sri Lankan state. To achieve the revolutionary tasks of national emancipation and socialist revolution, our project aims at the extension and transformation of our protracted guerilla warfare into a people's popular war of national liberation.

World's Conscience Condemns Sri Lanka

The development of Tamil liberation struggle into a dimension of armed resistance of the people alarmed the Sri Lankan repressive state. The Government responded with extreme repressive measures against our people, using all means in its power to crush the freedom struggle. Draconian laws were rushed through Parliament to proscribe our movement, and the state controlled media is utilized to slander the freedom fighters and all the political activists as "terrorists". Mass arrests of innocent people, trials without jury, inhuman torture, death sentences have become the order of the day.

The most notorious law is the Prevention of Terrorism Act which denies trial by jury, enables the detention of people for a period of eighteen months and allows confessions extracted under torture as admissible in evidence. Hundreds of youths are being held behind bars and subjected to torture under this draconian law. In a recent wave of repression, the Sri Lankan armed forces have arrested several members of the Catholic and Methodist clergy and prominent Tamil educationists and charged them under the Terrorism Act. This oppressive measure has caused massive outcry in Tamil Eelam, Tamil Nadu, and all over the world. The Prevention of Terrorism Act has been universally condemned by the world human rights movements, particularly by the INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS and by AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL as violating fundamental human liberties. Amnesty International in an appeal to the Government of Sri Lanka has expressed grave concern about those who were arrested under this law and held incommunicado. The International Commission of Jurists, in a report, has condemned the state terrorism of the Sinhala armed forces unleashed against the Tamils and has denounced the Prevention of Terrorism Act as a piece of legislation that violates Sri Lanka's obligation under the international covenant on civil and political rights.

An appeal to the World Leaders

Our liberation struggle, as an oppressed nation fighting against the oppressor, constitutes an integral part of the international struggle, the struggle of the revolutionary forces against the forces of reaction, the forces of imperialism, neo-colonialism, zionism and racism. Though each liberation struggle has its own historical specificity and its unique conditions, in their essence they articulate a universal historical tendency of the human aspiration for freedom from all systems of oppression and exploitation. In this context, Tamil Eelam national struggle is similar in content to that of the Palestinian struggle or Namibian struggle or any national struggle of the oppressed people based on their right to national self-determination.

WE THEREFORE APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, WHO HOSTS THIS GREAT FORUM, AND TO THE LEADERS OF THE THIRD WORLD TO SYMPATHISE AND SUPPORT THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE OF THE EELAM TAMILS. IN THE NAME OF HUMANITY, LIBERTY AND JUSTICE, WE CALL UPON YOU TO CONDEMN THE GENOCIDAL OPPRESSIVE POLICIES OF THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT AND TO RECOGNISE OUR PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION.

We, the Liberation Tigers, wish to express our support and solidarity to all the revolutionary liberation struggle of the oppressed masses of the world.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE
LIBERATION TIGERS OF THAMIL EALAM

Appendix 9

Liberation Tigers of Thamil Ealam

20.7.1979

A LETTER OF PROTEST TO MR R. PREMADASA, THE PRIME MINISTER OF SRI LANKA FROM THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF THAMIL EALAM

Dear Sir,

A very grave and explosive situation has arisen in Thamil Ealam as a consequence of your Government's determination to stifle and stamp out, by violent means, the legitimate struggle of the oppressed Thamil nation for political independence. The intensified military occupation of Thamil lands, the increased terrorism of the State police against the innocent Thamil masses, the implementation of new repressive legislations that annuls the very freedom of political agitations — all such devious methods of totalitarian tyranny signify that your Government has mounted a massive scale oppression to strangle the will of a nation of people and silence their political aspirations. In view of the fact that your Government has embarked on a policy of eliminating, by brute force, a legitimate political struggle based on a democratic principle of national self-determination and that your Government has been using the name of our revolutionary movement as a pretext to invoke such repressive measures and to inflame the fires of Sinhala chauvinism, the Liberation Tigers are compelled to counter such vicious allegations and insinuations.

The most important factor that we wish to state clearly and emphatically is that we are not a group of amateur armed adventurers roaming in the jungles with romantic political illusions, nor are we a band of terrorists or vandals who kill and destroy at random for anarchic reasons. We are neither murderers nor criminals or violent fanatics as your Government often attempts to portray us. On the contrary, we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice. We represent the most powerful extra-parliamentary liberation movement in the Thamil nation. We represent the militant expression of the collective will of our people who are determined to fight for freedom, dignity and justice. We are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed. We are not in any way isolated and alienated from the popular masses but immersed and integrated with the popular will, with the collective soul of our nation. Our revolutionary organisation is built through revolutionary struggles based on a revolutionary theory. We hold a firm conviction that armed resistance to the Sinhala military occupation and repression is the only viable and effective means to achieve the national liberation of Thamil Ealam. Against the reactionary violence and terrorism perpetrated against our people by your Government we have the right of armed defence and decisive masses of people are behind our revolutionary struggle.

Why we are committed to Armed Struggle

The Thamil political history of recent times will certainly indicate to you that our people have exhausted all forms of peaceful struggles, all forms of parliamentary agitations, all forms of negotiations and pacts. For nearly a quarter of a century the Thamil nationalist movement fought decisively encompassing a variety of forms of struggles from peaceful picketings to mass hartals, from mass demonstrations to general strikes — all aspects of peaceful political practice have been expressed and exhausted. The more the Thamil masses sought non-violent methods to redress their grievances, the more the Sinhala ruling classes sought violent methods of military oppression and subjugation; the more they called for national emancipation the more the military invasion, occupation and repression. It is because of the heightened condition of this savage oppression, of the exhaustion and frustration of peaceful agitations that prompted our movement to engage in revolutionary armed resistance which we hold is a continuation of the political struggle of our oppressed people. The guerrilla warfare, the form of the popular struggle we are committed to is not borne out of blind militancy or adventurism

but arose out of the historical necessity, out of the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression. Our actions and operations, as your Government attempts to paint, are not indiscriminate bursts of irrational violence or terrorism; they are acts of revolutionary violence of the oppressed against the reactionary violence of the oppressor. We are waging a heroic struggle against the oppressive instruments of the state, against those who try to hunt us down, against those who plot to wipe us out, against those who betray us and against those traitors and opportunists who betray the noble cause of our national liberation struggle.

Who are the Terrorists?

The first piece of draconian legislation enacted by your Government was to proscribe the Tiger movement alleging that we are dangerous terrorists threatening the very foundation of the so-called national unity and territorial integrity. Such a legislation was, in actual fact, aimed not only to suppress the revolutionary armed struggle of the Tamils but also to consolidate an unpopular bourgeois dictatorship against the possible uprising of the oppressed Sinhala masses. The new Emergency Regulations aim to combat terrorism, but in reality it is primarily motivated to crush and destroy the Tamil national movement along with all forms of popular class struggle against the State. Such totalitarian legislations negate the very freedom of political expression and contravene the basic principles of human right and liberty.

In the deluded eyes of your Government our movement appears to be a spectre of terrorism and anarchy. In reality, who are these terrorists? We assert, and we hold that we are right in our assertion, that it is the State police and the armed forces and those who poison the minds of the innocent Sinhala masses with racial fanaticism and chauvinism are the real terrorists. There has been innumerable incidents of such acts of terrorism perpetrated against our people, incidents of mass murder, looting and arson by racist terrorists aided and abetted by the armed forces, incidents of shooting and killing of innocent Tamil people, incidents of sadistic murders and barbaric torture by the police. These violent acts certainly fall within the category of terrorism and these terrorists are none other than the instruments of State oppression and the reactionary forces of racism. It is upon these terrorist forces that your Government has bestowed extra-ordinary powers to ensure the peace and security of our people. Therefore, it is beyond reasonable doubt that your Government's objective is not to wipe out a non-existent terrorism but to unleash actual terrorism and violence to create panic among the Tamil masses. By such a high-handed act, the Sinhala ruling class aims to destroy the determined will of our nation to fight for political independence. But the Government has failed to comprehend the historical truth that the more a nation of people are oppressed the more they become determined to fight back the oppression. By intensifying oppression your Government will never be able to achieve its aims of enslaving our people but will certainly open the prospective of prolonged popular armed struggle, a strategic objective to which we are already committed to.

Civil Administration Partially Paralysed

Your Government has closed several banks and the airport in the North placing the blame on our liberation movement. A state of emergency has been declared claiming that criminal acts are on the increase in Tamil areas. The Government's motive behind such strategy is well known to our people. It is the calculated aim of your Government to place more hardship and inconvenience on our people hoping that the Tamil masses might feel the pinch and gradually turn critical of us and finally betray us. Such a devious strategy, we are certain, will never work. It simply exposes the impotency of your Government's civil administration which has been partially paralysed. The declaration of the State of Emergency bares ample testimony that your Government is totally incapable of exercising any form of civil authority in the Tamil nation other than by military occupation and repression.

Acts of violence emanating from the most oppressed and deprived sections of the

masses are not typical symptoms in the North alone. They are more pervasive in Sri Lanka signifying the socio-economic crisis your Government is confronted with. This fact is amply illustrated by a statement made in Parliament recently by the Minister of Justice that between January and April of 1978 there have been 474 homicides and 214 incidents of robberies and burglaries throughout the island. Your Government has been using the Tamil revolutionary youth as scape-goats for civil unrest that is boiling throughout Tamil Ealam and Sri Lanka. The truth is that your capitalist regime is faced with a major crisis and the down-trodden classes are becoming impatient and disgruntled. The increasing criminal violence is an external manifestation of the internal frustrations of the masses. Unable to resolve the national economic crisis and the mounting social problems, your Government is adopting the reactionary strategy of intensifying the national oppression of the Tamils and invoking the Tiger phobia. The Sinhala national bourgeoisie always descends to such dirty politics of racism and chauvinism as a desperate means to turn the tide of Sinhala mass resentment against the State, towards the Tamils. Such a strategy, we are certain, will not work in the long run since the revolutionary proletariat in Sri Lanka is becoming ideologically conscious of the dangers of chauvinism that divide and immobilise the Sinhala working class.

We are fighting for a noble cause, a right cause, the cause of national freedom of the oppressed nation – Tamil Ealam. The revolutionary process towards which we work to achieve national liberation and socialism will be long and arduous. Yet, we are certain that no force on earth, however repressive it may be, can stop us from the revolutionary struggle we are committed to.

LONG LIVE THAMIL EALAM

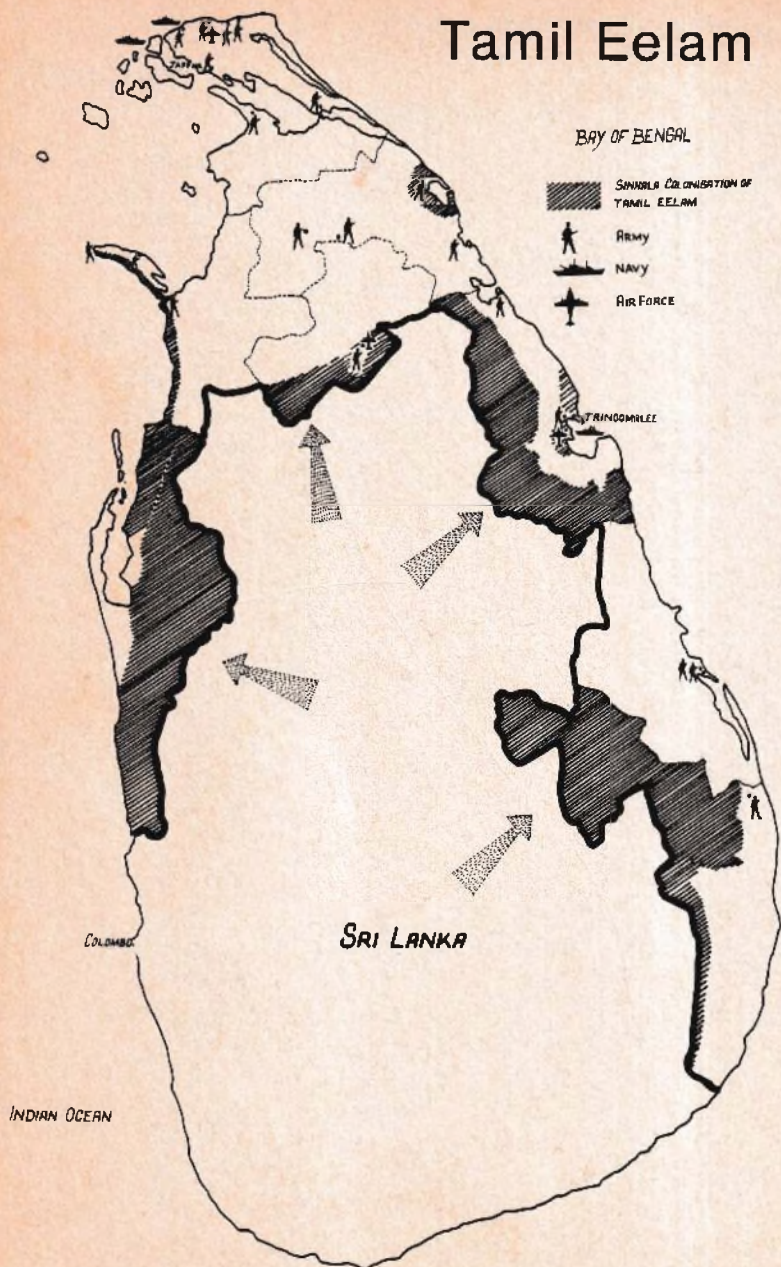
Chairman
Central Committee
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam

10. The World Tamil Diaspora (1979)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Tamil Population</i>	<i>% of population of country</i>
India Tamil Nadu	49,103,000	90.1
Kerala	1,064,000	5.0
Pondicherry	447,000	95.0
Rest of India including Karnataka and Andhra	600,000	
Total for India	51,214,000	7.5
Sri Lanka	3,598,000	30.0
Malaysia	1,045,000	10.0
South Africa	250,000	1.5
Burma	200,000	0.8
Singapore	145,000	7.0
Mauritius	60,000	7.2
Fiji	25,000	5.0
Guadelope	21,000	7.0
U.K.	15,000	—
Martinique	13,000	—
Guyana	10,000	2.0
U.S.A.	5,000	—
Canada	3,000	—
Trinidad	3,000	—
France	3,000	—
New Caledonia & Tahiti	1,000	—
Total	56,611,000	

Source: Tamil Times (London, November 1982)

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SRI LANKA

The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle

SATCHI PONNAMBALAM



Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle is the first book by a Sri Lankan on a conflict that has now escalated into wide-ranging violence and become the dominant issue facing the country. Its author, Satchi Ponnambalam, has written a scholarly but committed history of relations between the island's two distinct nations — Sinhalese and Tamils — which goes back over 2,000 years. He concentrates on the post-independence period, and provides a detailed record of the discriminatory measures successive governments have taken against the Tamil population. This hostility on the part of a section of the Sinhalese has arisen, he argues, not because of any inevitable antagonism. Rather, its roots lie in the determination of the Sinhalese ruling class to divert the struggle common to both the Sinhalese and Tamil oppressed classes, a struggle inherent in the nature of Sri Lanka's neo-colonial, capitalist economy (an economy which benefits only the ruling class itself). These upper-class Sinhalese politicians, the author argues, are manipulating a myth of Sinhalese Aryan supremacy — at the cost of abandoning true Buddhism — so as to keep power in their own hands.

Ponnambalam outlines the Tamil people's struggle over the past quarter of a century for equality, justice and dignity. With the failure of these demands, Tamil organizations are now fighting for national freedom from internal colonialism and oppression, and demanding a separate state of Tamil Eelam in the northern and eastern parts of the island. To contain this separatist ground-swell, the Government has subjected the Tamils to a state of emergency since 1979, unleashed the armed forces, imposed press censorship, and used its Prevention of Terrorism Act almost indiscriminately against its opponents.

This book provides a real understanding of Sri Lankan politics and social conflict. As the author makes clear, the refusal of the ruling class, supported by its ethnic middle class and caste allies, to recognize the just rights and national equality of the Tamil people, threatens the country's tenuous retention of the democratic process and civil liberties, as well as its social peace. Neither the class question nor the national question is now capable of solution by the present ruling class. It is this line of analysis that makes this book throw light more generally on the national question in the Third World, a question which is one of its most intractable and unrecognized political problems.

Satchi Ponnambalam is a Sri Lankan lawyer who was educated at the Universities of Ceylon and London. Now a judge, he is the author of *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy, 1948-80* (Zed Press, 1981) which was published simultaneously in Sri Lanka, India, and the United Kingdom.