

**Identity Politics  
and  
State-Building in Sri Lanka:**

Understanding Ethno-nationalist  
Mobilization in a Postcolonial  
State in Transition



# **Identity Politics and State-Building in Sri Lanka:**

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Mobilization in a Postcolonial  
State in Transition

Edited by  
**Sisira Pinnawala**

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**The Institute for the Study  
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**Identity Politics and State-Building in Sri Lanka:**  
Understanding Ethno-nationalist Mobilization in a  
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## Foreword

In 2011 the Pathfinder Foundation (PF) and the Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR) of Columbia University initiated a joint Project entitled “Historical Memory as a Tool for Conflict Resolution” with the objective of engaging scholarly and intellectual participation in the country’s post conflict peace building and reconciliation effort. The specific task identified by the Project was to get the scholars and intellectuals with different perspectives to work together in collaborative work to produce, through research, public debate and discussion, shared narratives of the conflict which would provide a strong and dependable basis for mutual understanding between the two main protagonists leading to sustainable peace and reconciliation.

The formal work of the Project commenced with a workshop jointly organized by the PF and ISHR in Colombo in July 2011, facilitated by Dr. Elazar Barkan, Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and Director of Columbia’s ISHR. The participants of the civil society representing academics and researchers from the Universities and other stakeholder groups, were invited to this workshop. A consensus that emerged from the workshop was that the lack of agreement on the nature of the postcolonial Sri Lanka state was one of the root causes of the conflict. Therefore it was decided to conduct a collaborative research project and produce a scholarly volume on the Sri Lanka state as focusing on Identities and State-Building with particular attention to the postcolonial state.

A Working Group (WG) consisting of university academics/ researchers and civil society intellectuals was formed to carry out the above activity. The Working Group (WG) on State-Building

was launched in October 2011 and identified the following three thematic concentrations for study.

1. The nature of the pre-colonial state focusing on state and collective identity formation
2. Identity and Political Mobilization in the Colonial Sri Lanka
3. Postcolonial State and nation building in Sri Lanka since 1948: Approaches, Attempts and Challenges

Each contributor was asked to develop a research paper that was subjected to peer review and open and critical stakeholder dialogue. Three stakeholder dialogues were conducted, two at the University of Colombo and one at the University of Jaffna. The papers were revised incorporating the comments and the work was completed in August 2013. This volume presents the outcome of their intellectual engagement in the form of six scholarly papers.

The papers trace the different stages in state formation in Sri Lanka from the pre-state chiefdoms and early state formations to its present form, the Postcolonial state. Particular emphasis of the authors is on understanding different approaches and attempts towards Postcolonial state-building by various stakeholders. There is also an examination of the reconstitution of ethnic identities within Sri Lanka, especially during the British period, and the consequences of this for state formation in Sri Lanka. Two other areas of focus are post independence ethnicization of the economic function of the state and the role of the minorities in a state which is characterized by a citizenry deeply divided on the basis of a whole range of deep-rooted identities with differential interests in managing the state. The Muslim factor which constitutes the third key dimension of the discourse has also been given attention in this volume with a detailed analysis of the dynamics associated with the politicization of the Muslim collective identity and its specific manifestations.

## *Foreword*

The above studies were independently prepared by the scholars commissioned to do the work with no influence on their values or judgments by the Pathfinder Foundation or any other parties associated with this project. The views expressed in the papers are those of the authors.

The Parthfinder Foundation is grateful to Dr. David Phillips, Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights for his support at various stages of the project cycle. We would also like to record our gratitude to Danielle Goldberg, Program Coordinator, Peace-building and Rights Program of Columbia University.

We are also thankful to Dr. Gamini Keerawella, Professor in History of the University of Peradeniya who coordinated this Project component. His contribution in conceptualizing the research theme on the Postcolonial State and leadership and input at the workshops and discussions were invaluable to the successful completion of the work and in bringing out this volume.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to Milinda Moragoda Institute for People's Empowerment (MMIPE) for funding and other assistance received from the inception of the PF that ensures continuation of work of this nature.

The Parthfinder Foundation believes that this volume of well researched papers by Sri Lanka's prominent academics and researchers in their respective fields, in addition to being a useful contribution to post war peace building and reconciliation effort which is its main objective, will be of value to scholars and students interested in history, sociology, ethnic studies, political science and conflict resolution.

**Luxman Siriwardena**  
Executive Director  
The Pathfinder Foundation  
01<sup>st</sup> of September 2014.

## INTRODUCTION

Sisira Pinnawala

The term postcolonial is understood in different ways in different discourses and given different meanings in different disciplinary contexts. In the broad sense, postcolonial refers to a time period and to a special group of countries with their own history of domination by an external power or powers. This makes postcolonial a temporally specific phenomenon: countries that have a colonial past, and a geopolitical space, societies that are part of the so called South. These two features, though necessary to understand the postcolonial, are in no way adequate. Postcolonial is also a socio-political type characterized by its own dynamics or specificities. One main ingredient is the colonial legacy (Alavi 1972). The others are country specific forces such as class formations and ideologies and loyalties based on identity. It is this context of shared historical experience of specific structural relations and ideological dynamics and post-independence political developments, within (Alavi 1972, Saul 1974) and outside, (Amin-Khan 2012) that are important to understand the postcolonial State-Building process.

There is also increasing recognition that the postcolonial is a state of affairs characterized by continuity, in terms of the effects of processes initiated during colonialism; as well as discontinuity, in terms of new processes unfolding subsequently (Pereira 2005). Postcolonial does not mean end of colonial domination it only ended the direct political control of the metropolis over the colony. Economic domination continued and that affected postcolonial developments including the state formation. Local

businesses and industry still remained under the control of the former colonial masters even after their formal departure. They continued to be economic masters though they abandoned their role of political control. The land reforms and nationalization that were to become defining features of the postcolonial state were a reaction to this continued domination and they influenced the postcolonial state, resulting in phenomenon such as centralized control and socialist leaning.

This makes postcolonial also a process of transformation, successful and otherwise, of former colonies in the context of changing conditions within and outside. The outside forces in the early days of the postcolonial era were those emanating from the respective colonial masters and the colonial system of domination. Today, however, the term postcolonial has acquired a new meaning with the addition of forces of influence associated with globalization (Amin-Khan 2012) where the so called North according to some analysts has emerged as the new colonial (Servon, 2002) with new forms of domination being added to those of the old neo-colonial era (see eco-imperialism of Lim and Steven 2009). While recognizing that postcolonial developments today cannot be understood without the wider and complex forces of influence, we contend here the two main dynamics guiding postcolonial societies, in general, and the postcolonial state, in particular, are the colonial legacy and the different socio-political interests within these societies (Alavi 1972, Saul 1974).

Postcolonial societies are complex social organizations characterized by socio-political forces operating in different permutations and combinations which are both legacies of their own colonial past and results of their own contemporary developments. The socio-political forces generated within the postcolonial society have their own operators, such as interests and identities of different class formations/communities

and their leadership. This makes the postcolonial context an amorphous category characterized by the interplay between the colonial legacy and postcolonial developments. The influence of this on the state and other apparatus of control (bureaucracy, the legal system etc.), is shared by all postcolonial societies. Therefore it is analytically possible to identify a distinct societal category called postcolonial. This view of postcolonial societies and their institutions goes beyond a mere historical, tinged with emotional, characterization of these societies that were a feature of early studies, especially in literary studies, of the postcolonial phenomenon.

## **The Postcolonial State**

Hamza Alavi coined the term postcolonial state in 1972 (Amin-Khan 2012) as part of the general debate on the relative autonomy of the state to distinguish between the new states in the countries emerging out of colonial domination and the western capitalist state. The postcolonial state, according to Alavi (1972), is located in the historical specificity of postcolonial societies caused by forces arising out of a). Structural changes brought about by the colonial experience and alignment of classes and by the superstructures of political and administrative institutions which were established in that context (colonial legacy), and b). From radical re-alignments of class forces which have been brought about in the postcolonial situation.

His view was that to understand the relative autonomy of the state, it is necessary to undertake a closer examination of the postcolonial state which according to him was an overdeveloped state. His argument is that the postcolonial state has assumed a new role of extracting the economic surplus produced by these countries and deploying it in directed economic activity in the name of economic development (Saul 1974). This has enabled

the postcolonial state to assume a relatively autonomous economic role which is not found in the classical bourgeois state. This, in turn, has enabled the civil/military/bureaucratic alliance to gain control over the state in these societies in order to exercise authority over the competing class groups and interests. Understanding this is necessary for comprehending the nature of the postcolonial state (Alavi 1972).

The postcolonial state, according to analysts, gained currency after independence in acknowledgement of the importance of new practices, routines and mentalities of the colonial state which served as a platform for a new form of political monopoly (Young 2004). The legitimating discourse of this new political monopoly, according to Young (2004), was developmentalism in Africa. Yet one could argue that it was a combination of developmentalism and anti-imperialism. In Sri Lanka, this discourse was driven by a combination of ideologies that included developmentalism, socialism and anti-imperialism from the mid-50s up to the late 70s. In Africa Young (2004) questions the use of the postcolonial state to describe the weak form, it came to assume. In Asia, such fragmentation and weakening did not happen to the same scale except perhaps in Pakistan and more recently in Afghanistan. It is also argued that, weakened by the actions of various actors both legitimate and illegitimate (Young 2004), the colonial legacy no longer defines the postcolonial state in Africa. This points to the relevance of an important defining feature of the postcolonial state, namely, the umbilical link with the colonial metropolitan centre.

A similar view is expressed by Saul who seeks to apply Alavi's postcolonial state to the African context adding a third element, namely, the state's role in creating conditions for it to establish its hegemonic position in order to work as ideological cement bringing together diverse interests within artificially

created boundaries (Saul 1974). Tariq Amin-Khan (2012) brings in a new dimension to the conceptualization by bringing in a third element, namely, the dependency induced external pressure and introduces the globalization process to the equation of postcolonial state dynamics. His two types of postcolonial state, namely, the proto-capitalist state exemplified by Pakistan, and the capitalist variant demonstrated by India help resolve major issues of explaining the substantial differences that exist with regard to the postcolonial state in different contexts (see Saul 1974 for an examination of these differences). Despite these differences, postcolonial states in both contexts converge in their attempt to subordinate their respective civil societies to their national elite (autonomy of the state) while in turn subordinating their countries to Northern imperial ones (operations of the global forces). The postcolonial state is historically post-imperial but it remains economically manacled by the Empire's latest forms.

Alavi's (1972) argument is that in the postcolonial societies the centrality of the state implies the centrality of the bureaucracy which he calls an oligarchy that controls the local/indigenous classes. Alavi's (1972) pioneering views have been considerably debated since then mainly from a Marxist structuralist perspective. This includes John Saul, who claims Alavi has neglected the importance of ideology which according to him is necessary for the state's function of holding together the capitalist system. Saul (1974) does not agree with Alavi's emphasis on an indigenous class playing a central role as being important to understand the situation in Africa where he says the local capitalist class not only lacked development but was mainly Asian. Colin Leys brings in class as the basis of analysis of the state and claims the role of the colonial state was to subordinate the pre-capitalist social formations to the imperatives of colonial capitalism (Leys 1976). Like Alavi, he also sees the relative

autonomy of state but it is due to balance of power between indigenous and external class forces. The absence of strong internal classes makes the bureaucracy subservient to external forces. But internally, the absence of strong classes makes the bureaucracy stronger. Whatever the case, the state bureaucracy remains very central (Leys 1976:40). Ley also questions the concept of an overdeveloped state inherited by the ex-colonies. He says the expansion was after independence and in terms of both population and size of the economy the colonial state was smaller than its counterpart in advanced capitalist countries (Leys 1976:42). He also rejects the excessive military power of the colonial state.

The historicity of the postcolonial state is at the center of Bayart's analysis (Bayart 1993). In his "Politics of the Belly" which is an attempt to further expand the nexus between the controlling state in postcolonial societies and the elites in control of the public and private sectors. He examines their strategies and the procedures of accumulation and the world of political make-believe, all of which contribute to social inequality and the excesses of the regime. Elites in the postcolonial state are integrated into a single dominant class based on its access to and control over state resources. The resources the state acquires through dealing with the external world. Bayart's claim is an expansion of Alavi's main argument that highlights the state's control over the security forces and bureaucrats who control the economic action of the country (through the ideology of developmentalism). Agreeing with Alavi, he also argues that African postcolonial states rely on indigenous social bases whilst simultaneously being connected to the international system. Here his argument connects with Amin-Khan's (2012) that came later.

## **Postcolonial State-Building**

The genesis of the postcolonial state dates back to security and administrative instruments established by the colonial rulers whose main interests were control and extraction. These early forms of administrative and security apparatus gradually evolved into fully developed states in the model of modern European states responding to local demands for more representation but without compromising its original objectives of control and extraction. By the time these countries gained their independence, they all had a fully developed state which according to analysts was both overdeveloped (Alavi 1972) and unrepresentative. The postcolonial state was over-developed because the original base of the apparatus of this state was in the colonial centre representing its class forces (Alavi 1972, see also Saul 1974) that were in a far advanced stage of development compared to the class forces in the newly independent countries it controlled. Further, there was no conscious attempt by colonial rulers to bring the colonial state, which they established for their convenience, in line with local realities as a representative state would have been detrimental to their main objectives of control and extraction. The postcolonial states, therefore, remained implants that they were though the controls now were in the hands of the local elites. The attempt of the leadership that took over the implanted state to reconfigure it to suit their class and communal interests shaped the nature of the postcolonial state and State-Building that followed.

The postcolonial leaders who inherited the state their colonial masters built were in no hurry to change it for a number of reasons. The state they inherited had its base in the class, forces in the metropolitan centre. Hence it was not representative of the local realities. However, this did not affect their expectations of the state as they themselves were an extension of the

metropolitan centre and were ideologically a part of it, though subordinate to the dominant class forces there. They were in every way replicas of the colonial masters who nurtured them and like their masters saw themselves as superior to the local masses and their natural leaders (Ade Ajayi 1982) of the masses who, being not adapted to the ways of the modern world, had to be looked after and guided. Further, the postcolonial leadership represented the local cosmopolitan social stratum unifying diverse ethnic and religious communities. They were not only a replica of their colonial masters ideologically and socially but also for the same reason were not representative of the local social structure. The state they inherited was in line with their outlook and ideology and they did not feel that it was an alien implant. What they wanted was to change the local reality to suit the state, namely, build a nation to suit their ideal of the state, not to build or rebuild the state to suit the nation. Therefore in the early days of postcolonial state-building the focus was on nation-building. The situation changed only later when a different group of leaders who were more aligned with the local realities came to power.

The second leadership group that has its roots in the local social organizations emerged and gradually took over the state apparatus. They, while claiming that they were indigenizing the administration, were embarking on their own project to consolidate their position and the hold on power by catering to their class and communal interests. Their state-building projects were also influenced by several other factors which can be broadly described as colonial legacies. One is the state itself which had already established its foothold with its institutional setup and the norms. The other which is also equally important is the westernized leadership that took over the control of the state. Having been nurtured by western values and ideologies,

the ideal state model for them was that of the nation state. Therefore all state-building attempts that began were designed in the image of the nation state in Europe. The major challenge they had to face in achieving their objective was the existence in these societies of conflicting interests and aspirations of a citizenry that was deeply divided on the basis of a whole range of identities. The experience in postcolonial state-building shows that no postcolonial country was fully successful in achieving the goal of building a representative state accommodating diverse groups in one polity similar to the nation state in Europe. Some countries like India, Malaysia and Singapore have succeeded in their attempt to some degree while others like Sri Lanka and many in Africa have failed miserably. The states that have emerged in these countries since independence, including those that have achieved some degree of accommodation among diverse groups within the state, are characterized by state structures that are under the control of a majority group defined by some ethno-nationalist identity.

Postcolonial state-building, therefore, can be seen as following two different paths depending on the leadership involved. The was the state-building project of the cosmopolitan and westernized leadership who initially took over the state and wanted to build a nation to suit the state they already had. Their state-building was based on the ideology of modernization theory which expected that with the monopolization of public authority by the state in modern state-building, forces such as religion and kinship, which were forms of public authority, would transform themselves into intermediate institutions. The broad objective of their state-building project, therefore, was to build a secular state based on core values of democracy in their emulation of the West. This meant rejection of identity based politics, i.e., rejection of ethno-nationalist and other parochial loyalties in the state's link

with its citizens. The second was the state-building project of the leadership that mobilized the forces that had remained inactive hitherto, namely, the indigenous class formations and communal loyalties. The leadership of the second project also most often came from the same elite and westernized social strata but their ideology was nationalistic and therefore was more in line with the local realities. This project unlike the former, which sought to build a nation out of the competing diverse forces, wanted to reconfigure the state to suit the local contexts.

## **Postcolonial Sri Lanka State**

Sri Lanka got independence from Britain through a process of negotiations and compromises between the colonial master and the indigenous elite. This makes Sri Lanka's independence exclusively an elite affair where there was no participation of the masses in a broad-based struggle for liberation. The indigenous local elites, who were the driving force of the anti-colonial struggle and heirs to the leadership of the postcolonial political process, were a Western educated liberal group who succeeded in establishing a broad-based coalition across ethnic and religious divisions. The masses, except the small group of predominantly urban labour force and the Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin, were overwhelmingly rural and were outside of the anti-colonial struggle. The colonial struggle and the early years of postcolonial politics were, therefore, dominated by an elite who were both cosmopolitan in their outlook and western in their ideology and values. Though there was unity across ethnic and religious lines in the elite leadership, ethnicity played a role in deciding coalitions and alignments, both during and after the independence struggle. However, ethnic mobilization for political ends was not a part of both pre-independence and early postcolonial Sri Lanka society.

The class formation of the ruling class that took over the control of the state, according to analysts, needs to be understood with reference to two subgroups, namely, the colonial bourgeoisie (colonial capitalist economy) and local (traditional high caste and land owners). The second group mainly comprised, according to Jayadeva Uyangoda (1982), medium plantation owners in the low country, agrarian landlords who were of the nature of urban gentry, bureaucrats and professionals that emerged from landowning and merchant classes. The elite group that actively took part in the colonial struggle came from the educated urban members of this class formation who were working in cooperation with the colonial capitalist bourgeoisie. Though they were a cosmopolitan group consisting of members of all communities the group was predominantly from the Sinhala community. In addition to westernized values inculcated through English education, the vested interests created during the British period such as positions in the administration, economic linkages and social networks cutting across community, especially ethnic, loyalty were features of this broad class formation. This was the group that was sponsoring the liberal democratic state-building project.

The two ethno-national state-building projects, namely, the Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil separatist, state-building Project also had their distinct class formations. The Sinhala Buddhist state-building project was promoted by a group predominantly engaged in middle-class and lower-middle-class economic activities. The majority of them came from rural peasant origins with the leadership, except the highest level coming from the secondary strata of the rural elite, who did not have extensive agrarian landholdings similar to the rural leaders who supported the cosmopolitan elite group represented by the United National Party (Uyangoda 1982). This distinct class character of the Sinhalese Buddhist state-building project, was associated with

Sinhala education, and local culture and ethos though its leader was S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who was a member of the westernized cosmopolitan elite. A similar class character was present in the Tamil separatist State-Building project whose membership also came from similar socio-economic backgrounds to that of the Sinhala Buddhist project. These two social formations were in the opposition to each other and to the conservative elites who were a distinct social formation themselves, yet predominantly Sinhalese again.

The Postcolonial Sri Lanka state broadly fits in with the description of the model developed by Alavi (1972) and the Marxist structuralist tradition (Bayart 1993, Saul 1974). While the military-bureaucratic oligarchy has been the leadership from the beginning in postcolonial Bangladesh and Pakistan, in many postcolonial societies like Sri Lanka, India and Malaysia the military was not part of the colonial ruling elite. In Sri Lanka, it was the Western educated upper middle-class civil elites, supported by plantation owners, landowners (agrarian) and bureaucrats and professionals (Uyangoda 1982) that took control over the postcolonial state. However, there is a similarity for two reasons. First, the early postcolonial Sri Lanka state was an overdeveloped and continued its links with the metropolitan bourgeois until the links were severed by the nationalist leadership that came into power in the mid-1950s. This group that belong to a class formation, which is different from the local cosmopolitan bourgeois, not only did not have any class links with the metropolitan centre but was also vehemently anti-colonial. Second, though the new class formation which took over, removed the colonial base of the state, its independence was sustained through its strong commitment to developmentalism based on socialist ideals that required it to have a strong control over the economy. As Sathiyaseelan and Pinnawala argue in their

analysis in this volume one of the features of the postcolonial state in Sri Lanka is the continuous expansion and control in order to strengthen the regime in power. This has resulted in creating an oligarchical structure consisting of politicians, civil servants and now the army that has the power to function as an independent entity.

This collection of essays is an examination of the postcolonial Sri Lanka state with a focus on identity politics and ethno-nationalist mobilization in the State-Building process. The 'pioneer' attempts to understand the postcolonial state, for example those of Alavi (1972) and the Marxist structuralism school, saw the postcolonial state as a metamorphosis of the colonial state brought about by two competing forces, namely, the colonial legacy (structures, institutions and ideologies) and indigenous forces (local class formations) working in tandem. While they are correct in situating their explanation of the postcolonial state in the confrontation between above two forces they have failed to recognize the role of identity politics and its natural extension ethno-nationalist mobilization, which have arguably become the defining features of postcolonial states today. This volume is an attempt to bring this aspect of postcolonial politics into the contemporary discourse of the postcolonial state by examining the role of identity politics aimed at re-structuring the postcolonial Sri Lanka state in a context of emerging new class alignments and associated forces within and outside. The first part of the title of this volume acknowledges the central role played by identity politics in postcolonial states in general. The second part of the title is a reference to the forces unleashed by identity politics resulting in the crisis the postcolonial states are facing today.

## **Collective Identities, Minorities and Postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka**

Though the main area of focus of this volume is postcolonial state-building in the context of identity politics and ethno-nationalist mobilization, an attempt is made to explain the genesis of these two phenomena by situating the analysis in the colonial and pre-colonial contexts as a precursor to understand the postcolonial dynamics. Of the six articles in the collection, three deal with various aspects of historical and socio-political dynamics determining structural configurations of the state in its postcolonial (Keerawella and Pinnawala and Sathiyaseelan) and pre-colonial forms (Karunatilake). The other three articles examine the identity dynamics in the postcolonial state and its predecessor colonial state focusing on the process (Jayawardena), actors (Ferozia) and functions (Dayaratne-Banda).

The first of the six studies presented in this book is an historical examination of pre-colonial state formation and emergence of collective identities. In this article by Bandula Karunatilake state formation is explained in a model consisting of two distinct processes of consolidation and segmentation driven by the interplay of centrifugal and centripetal forces operating within the state in a given historical period. His argument is that throughout the pre-colonial periods the Sri Lanka state formation fluctuated between consolidations promoted by the wealth coming from increased agricultural production (resulting from the construction of irrigation networks) and expanding trade that worked as centripetal forces, and segmentation resulting from centrifugal forces among which South Indian invasions and internal dissension played major role. State formation during the pre-colonial period is divided into three stages by the author as the early formative period of the state though consolidation of village-based administration followed by a period of segmentation

that saw invasions and internal dissension and later consolidation and attempts of unification that continued into the colonial period that finally reunited the island into one administration under imperialist domination.

The author's examination of collective identities, which he correctly identifies as religious and cultural in the beginning, is done in the context of the above state formation process. The author seems to support the view that the early identities did not have a clear form in spite of the presence of several religio-cultural groups in different parts of the island according to epigraphic evidence. With the consolidation of the state, there was the emergence of new forms of identities of which caste groups became the most prominent and numerous. The strengthening of the state enabled it to support a large officialdom that resulted in the positions in the state becoming important in assessing ranking among groups. The author in addition refers to the controversy associated with the presence of the early Tamil groups in the island in the light of the majoritarian historical view that the Sinhalese were the first group to settle in this island. While recognizing that Tamils have been present in the island from the very early days, the author sees the emergence of ethnic groups as being caused by later developments where invasions from South India have played a major role. The author also pays attention to the unique role played by the Kandyan Kingdom in the formation of the latter day majority Sinhala identity, and its sub-component, the Kandyan Sinhala identity. He also draws attention to the Kandy Kingdom's ability to maintain religious coexistence and cohesion.

Janaki Jayawardhana in her analysis of Identity and Political Mobilization examines the reconstitution of identities along ethnic lines in the colonial Sri Lanka. She supports the view that ethnicization of existing communities that were formed/divided

along religio-cultural lines and the emergence of the upcountry/low country division are developments in the colonial period. The attempt is to understand how and why these identities were reconstituted and how that had influenced the state formation during the period. The focus of the author is to explore the nexus between identity formation and state formation that had bearings on the present crisis. Her view is that reconstitution here is an indirect consequence of the process of knowledge formation in the colonial period promoted by the colonial rulers.

The author claims that due to reforms introduced by the colonial rulers the caste system lost its central role in the polity, economy and administration. Ethnic identity not only became the determinant in the space where caste played a main role earlier but also in becoming so (enabled by representative politics) a close association was established between ethnic identity and political positions of power. While the author accepts that caste was the foundation of administration and in social discourse during the pre-colonial period, she also recognizes the presence of ethnic identities. Her contention is that these other identities among which the caste was the most prominent, were more significant in terms of politics and economy in the pre-colonial era. The system of administration was caste based until changed by the British. Further, caste was the selected category to identify the Sinhalese and ethnicity to identify other groups.

The reconstitution of identities through knowledge formation receives detailed attention of the author who sees this as resulting from influence coming from both ideological and practical domains. In the ideological domain, the European colonials brought in the idea of race that had far reaching repercussions on the mindset of the locals. Historical knowledge formation which the author seems to be implicitly associating with this development, is another influencing development. In the practical domain, there were developments resulting from the application of European codes of conduct, (i.e., enforcement

of dress code and official classification of so called races) and their association with geographical areas which she describes as geographical mapping.

Gamini Keerawella, in his contribution *Postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka since 1948: Opportunities, Attempts and Challenges* sees state-formation as a never-ending phenomenon responding to historical situations and contexts. Reproduction of the modern state, which is intrinsically linked to the development of the modern capitalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie in different socio-historical contexts, has created many contradictions bringing to the fore the issue of how to solve the discrepancy between the form and content in the postcolonial state-formation process. The author holds that the post-independence Sri Lanka rulers faced the dual problem of guiding the postcolonial state-formation and the process of national integration. He attempts to explain how they responded to the challenge.

Keerawella bases his explanation of the postcolonial Sri Lanka state on Barry Busan's Marxist-structuralist model which views state as a composition of a three mutually interacting and reinforcing elements. The state-building process is explained in terms of the construction of the idea of the state which provides answers to important questions of why it exists and what its mission is. The ideology of the postcolonial state is a product and reflection of the particular historical period; particularly those of the forces that are in control of the state. His argument is that approaches, attempts and challenges faced by the postcolonial state-building process need to be understood in relation to those who are in control of the state.

Keerawella concludes that the idea of the state in postcolonial societies is limited to the nation which is in many instances a politico-legal abstract. In the modern ethno-nationalist

state, which the vast majority of postcolonial states are, the ideology of the state has the difficult problem of embracing numerous ethno-national and other deep-rooted identities and divisions. If these states cannot find suitable solutions to these problems within existing ethno-nationalist frameworks, they have to find an alternative basis for state ideology which is outside the nation and non-sectarian. The state ideology depends on the leadership that is in control of the state making state-building in reality an elite dominated /controlled project. Keerawella's argument is that for the state ideology to take root it needs to move out of the situation of elite domination if it wants real legitimacy.

Sisira Pinnawala and S. Sathiyaseelan, in their contribution *Evolution of Postcolonial Institutions of Power and Governance and the Issue of Political Representation of Minorities*, attempt to explain the forces and dynamics that shaped the postcolonial state-building in Sri Lanka and the impact on the political representation of minorities, especially the Tamil community. It starts with the premise that that the major challenge faced by the leaders who took over (postcolonial leadership) tried to make the state they inherited representative, an interest their predecessor did not have. In this exercise they were confronted by deep and long surviving divisions that stood in the way and also their ideologies and interests to retain and increase their control of the state. Accepting the generally held view that postcolonial leaders followed several different models of state-building, the authors proceed to claim that of these only two have been put into practice. Of these the liberal democratic model was abandoned after a few years and the Tamil restructure/autonomy model never received serious consideration. The result was establishment of the Sinhala Buddhist model which dominates State-Building today.

The authors propose to re-examine some commonly held beliefs /views of state-building in Sri Lanka. One is the link between Sinhala Buddhist ideology and state-building. The article argues that the failure of the postcolonial Sri Lankan state to incorporate minorities into a common polity and create an inclusive state cannot be reduced to ethnic factors alone. The failure needs to be understood as a complex process in which ethnic and class forces were interacting and feeding into each other. In addition to competing ethnicities, there was also a power struggle between competing class formations that played a crucial and defining role. The paper, therefore, challenges the popular explanation that reduces state-building in Sri Lanka to the domain of ethnicity. It argues that even the Sinhala Buddhist state-building Project that has dominated state-building in the country since the mid-1950s is a class-based project in its core. Bandaranaike, who is considered the founder of Sinhala Buddhist state-building, according to the authors was the head of a class formation the dominant component of which was Sinhala Buddhist. The only real ethnic state-building project is the now defunct Tamil state-building project that has never become a reality

The Muslims and the Postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka by S.A.C. Feroziya is an attempt to understand the participation of the Muslim community in the postcolonial state-building in Sri Lanka. Unlike the Tamil minority whose reactions to postcolonial state-building by the island nation was negative and confrontational resulting in the latter's gradual withdrawal from the process, the Muslims took a conciliatory and positive approach. They, through their urban elites, actively participated in national politics enabling the community to turn their disadvantaged position as a minority to their advantage. The Colombo-based elite leadership had a good rapport with the Muslims in other provinces, including those in the East who

constitute the powerbase of Muslims. In addition, the relationship was not one founded on a dependency that constrained the hand of the elites. This enabled them to take decisions without being influenced by parochial loyalties. Feroziya argues that even the language policy that favoured the majority community was seen in a positive light by the Muslims.

However, the author accepts that the relationship of Muslims with the majority controlled state was not without problems. There has been occasional resistance to the mainstream state-building as in the case of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress opposing the devolution framework (while supporting the concept of devolution). Despite this, their response to mainstream state-building was positive and that of cooperation. But what is important is the cooperation which was extended by taking part in the process and using the participation as a means for political bargaining within the national political party framework. The Implication is that since this bargaining was not conducted on the basis of a separately organized political force (Sri Lanka Muslim Congress of Mr. Ashraff came very much later and was a response to completely different circumstances), it was acceptable to the majority and helped, in turn, the interests of the Muslims.

In explaining the argument that Muslims turned their disadvantaged position of being a minority into an advantage, Feroziya presents three reasons. The first is the basis that defines their ethnicity, namely, that they are a religious group. This makes the Muslims a separate entity located outside of the main conflict based on language. The Muslim community, not being an ethno-linguist group unlike the main protagonists in the conflict and also having a substantial Sinhala speakers, do not have the same emotional attachments to the Tamil language and no antipathy like the Tamils towards the Sinhala language.

Therefore, language policy did not affect them to the extent it affected Tamils. Secondly, she argues that some other policies of the majority leaders actually benefitted the Muslim community. One example she cites is the open market policies introduced by the new government that came into power in 1977 that benefitted both big and small Muslim traders. The Middle East job market resulting from the oil boom in the mid-1970s that has become a major source of employment for the poor also helped the Muslims for obvious reasons. Thirdly, the Muslim political leaders are also dependent on the majority community for their access to power as the Muslims do not have the same levels of regional concentration. The leaders, especially those living in majority Sinhala areas, have to represent the general socio-economic interests of the voters not merely the communal interests of their own people. The proportional representation adopted after 1977 makes this dependence on non-Muslims even more crucial for the political survival of Muslim leaders she contends.

Identification of Ethnicity with the Economic Functions of the Postcolonial State in Sri Lanka by O.G. Dayaratne-Banda focuses on the lack of due attention to economic functions of the state in state reform projects. The author is critical of the failure of modern states to consider the relevance of this aspect in state-building projects in spite of the fact that the material wellbeing of citizens has an ethnic dimension (with different ethnic groups being affected differently by economic development). The objective of the author is to examine as to what extent and how the postcolonial Sri Lanka state attempted to identify ethnicity with the economic functions of the state. One of the key questions that needs attention in state reforms, according to Dayaratne-Banda, is the way in which ethnicity should be treated in determining economic functions of the state. He points to two different policy options available to the state in this regard. The

first being differential treatment for different ethnic groups to correct imbalances and injustices along ethnic lines, for example affirmative action. The other policy alternative available for the state is to disregard ethnicity altogether and treat everyone as citizens which is promoted by the neoliberal ideology which the author appears to prefer.

The author uses Snodgrass' classification (Snodgrass 1998) of six postcolonial policy regimes in Sri Lanka and evaluates the impact they have had on minority groups (majority group as well) with regard to selected economic functions of the state, namely, land utilization, industrial development, employment and housing. He compares the impact of the state's economic policy in each area on minority groups. He sees a relationship between the degree of state intervention in policy-making and the negative impact policies have on the minorities, a view that supports his preference for a state-building model promoted by a development strategy formulated based on sound economic principles.

## **Afterthought**

Identity politics and related ethno-nationalist mobilization are the two defining features of the postcolonial Sri Lanka state. The volume demonstrates that while the emergence of identity politics is a postcolonial development, it is, however, associated with the different State-Building projects whose socio-economic bases are found in both colonial and pre-colonial Sri Lanka society. The multifaceted identity structure of caste and ethnicity that gradually started to emerge as part of the pre-colonial state formation process consequent to the actions of the external powers, of which South Indian invasions were the major player, and internal dynamics, namely, expanding economic activities and growing political strife (Karunatilake) was redefined and

given new forms and power during the colonial era, particularly under the British rule (Jayawardhana). These were brought to the centre of electoral politics by the postcolonial leadership groups and coalitions who were looking for support to strengthen their respective power bases in the fight against each other and the vestiges of colonial domination that remained, and legitimize their claim to the state (Keerawella, and Sathiyaseelan and Pinnawala). The minorities, who were drawn into this quagmire of conflicts, confrontations and political maneuvering by the workings of their leadership, either benefitted or became victims depending on the policies of the majority controlled state (Dayaratne-Banda) and how their leadership reacted to the realities of the situation (Ferozia). The postcolonial Sri Lanka state and the challenges it is confronting today are a reflection of this complex and unfortunate reality.

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# PRE-COLONIAL STATE AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

P.V.B. Karunatilaka

## Introduction

The present study comprises two main themes, namely, the state formation of Sri Lanka and the collective identities during the pre colonial times. Additionally, the Kandyan kingdom will be dealt with under a separate heading, but here too, the focus will be on state formation and collective identities. An attempt will be made in the first part of the paper to trace and understand the evolution of the state paying special attention to the interplay of various factors, first, under the headings the pre state, the early state, centralized state and the mature state. The next stage is identified as the period where the working of the centrifugal forces through which the state showed clear signs of segmentation. The re-emergence of the centripetal forces is traced along with elements of centrifugal forces acting within the Sri Lankan state formation process in the final stages of the Rajarata civilization. The effects of foreign relations on the process of state formation are also discussed and then move on to the stage where the rise of multiple centres of authority in which situation the fragmentation of the state was clearly discernible.

The emergence of a strong northern kingdom and the relatively weak southern kingdom and the impact that this symbiotic relationship had on the state formation process is discussed next. Followed by this is a discussion on the re-surfacing of the centripetal forces for a brief period when the island experienced unification after a long lapse a little while before the arrival of the Portuguese, the first colonial power.

Attention will also be paid to the working of the socio-economic and political forces that underlay the evolution of the state formation process. In this regard a special emphasis will be laid on hydraulic civilization and trade and their impact on the evolution of the state. Under the theme collective identities an attempt will be made to study the ethnic identities and the nature of relations among different communities along with the religious and social factors that lay beneath these relationships. Along with this, the growth of different ethnic identities and their antiquity will be briefly dealt with while identifying the various factors that contributed to the emergence of these groups. In this, relationships with the outside world, particularly the Indian sub continent which played a vital role in the island's history. This will be highlighted paying attention to human migrations and religious-cultural contacts, and above all, the political interventions.

The subject of the Kandyan kingdom is discussed with a view to understanding its uniqueness in state formation drawing attention to the besieged nature of the state. Its survival attempts are briefly outlined while the changing patterns of its state formation are considered. The foreign relations and trade of the Kandyan kingdom are treated as a background to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the state and also attempts at breaking shackles of encirclement. The functioning of the general economy and social institutions along with the administrative system will be briefly studied with the role of caste, in order to

place the Kandyan state in its proper historical perspective. The collective identities in the Kandyan society are given a special consideration in that they present a unique situation with regard to ethno religious co-existence and tolerance.

## **Sri Lanka's Early History and the Pre-state Politics**

The legends found in the early Pali chronicles, the Deepavamsa and the Mahavamsa, give the impression that from the time of the mythical ruler Vijaya who is said to have arrived in the island in the sixth century B.C held sway over the entire island. (Deepavamsa IX, 21-22: Mahavamsa VII: 24), and some modern scholars too, have been influenced by this legend who also thought that the island had a uniform political system from the sixth century B.C, but the historicity of the *Vijaya* legend and other legends in the chronicles have come under severe scrutiny in the last few decades. (Gunawardana 1979, 36 and 2000, 83-86)

The early Brahmi records seem to depict a totally different picture of the socio political condition of the island than what is portrayed in the chronicles. They reveal that there were a number of principalities or chiefdoms in different parts of the island and that at least 31 such polities have been identified. The data from these records clearly counter the impressions given by the chronicle that the island was under one single political authority from a very early period. Most of these independent polities were headed by leaders known by different titles such as *raja, aya, gamani* etc. perhaps the parumakas too were at some level of the political leadership. Yet, it is difficult to distinguish between their areas of authority or even their political strength.

The Pali chronicles that begin to base their narratives more on the Buddhist traditions from about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. tend to provide relatively authentic information about the

island's history from that time onwards. The chronicles state that Tissa, the leader of the Anuradhapura principality held a proper consecration with the required paraphernalia provided by the contemporary Mauryan emperor Asoka of India. Tissa also assumed the title of *Devanampiya* obviously following Asoka. He also took the title Maharaja and by doing so he was perhaps attempting to elevate his position above that of the leaders of the chiefdoms. It is also possible that Anuradhapura polity was by far the largest and the most powerful of the contemporary chiefdoms and was important enough to attract the attention and recognition of the Mauryan emperor.

The leaders of some of the chiefdoms had held the title '*raja*' which has been translated as 'king', but as Gunawardana has pointed out some of their polities did not possess even a rudimentary form of administrative set-up and hence such political units even cannot be called kingdoms (Gunawardana, 1979: 262-63). Meanwhile, the chronicles, contain some information on certain polities in other parts of the island in the third century B.C. The two polities of *Chandanagama* and *Kajaragama* headed by ksatriya clan leaders who are said to have attended the ceremony to plant the sacred Bo-sapling at Anuradhapura. Kelaniya was another independent polity. (Ray, 1959: 147) The introduction of Buddhism to the Anuradhapura polity probably with the blessing of emperor Asoka was a significant milestone in the political history of the island, as it not only gave a new importance to *Devanampiya Tissa* as the leader recognized by the Mauryan emperor, but it afforded a new respectability to the Anuradhapura kingdom as well as being the island's religious centre of Buddhism. It is possible that Devanampiya Tissa could have used this new found religious clout to expect at least a nominal allegiance of the other polities, as some scholars surmised, but the sources do not make any direct reference to such an attempt.

It is evident from the early inscriptions that a common language and a common script were known throughout the island by the third century B.C. All early Brahmi inscriptions were written using a form of Prakrit language which had close affinity to the contemporary Indian Brahmi, and the script was virtually the same as the Indian Brahmi. The use of a common language and a common script throughout the island presupposes a useful setting for a common cultural identity and the acceptance of Buddhism as the majority religion most certainly bringing in a coercive effect on the heterogeneous groups which comprised the early population. Buddhism made rapid strides across the island drawing patronage and converts across a wide spectrum of the Sri Lankan society.

### **Economic Background of the Pre-state Polities**

The rise of the Anuradhapura polity into prominence over others need special attention in that it was perhaps the largest of all polities by the third century B.C., and was the first to emerge as the foremost politico-cultural centre. If one goes by the narratives in the chronicles, the first settlement of the North Indian immigrants sprang up along the Malvatu-Oya basin and Anuradhapura was only one of these settlements. Even if the credibility of the Mahavamsa narrative may be questioned, the Malvatu basin was the area with irrigation activities from a fairly early period. It is likely that the earliest irrigation works were small village reservoirs which could store rain-water but soon the settlers must have learnt to tap the streams and channel water through canals and storage reservoirs which helped create a substantial economic value for the community. It made possible the opening of new lands for cultivation and did not have to depend solely on swidden or rain-fed agriculture.

As the Brahmi inscriptions reveal, an early form of craft specialization was already well known in the island in the pre-

chieftain centuries as many professions and crafts were referred to in the lithic records. Coupled with it was the development of trading activity and even overseas trade and commerce was on the rise. All these were essential pre-requisites for the emergence of statehood and by the time of Devanampiya Tissa, the Anuradhapura kingdom was advancing towards these goals. This ruler's foreign relations too, presuppose trade with the Indian Sub-continent as different commodities suitable to meet overseas demand were available in the island. The craft specialization along with a developing exchange mechanism was in existence thereby creating an environment conducive to the acceleration of this process. The large number of inscriptions recording donations to the Buddhist Sangha also points to a surplus production sufficient even for the sustenance of a group of non-producers.

### **Social Groups and Ranking in the Early Phase**

As Skalinik and Classen have argued, the stratification of society is an essential pre-requisite for the development of an administrative structure in the state formation process. (Skalinik and Classen, 1978: 545-546) Morten Fried too, has identified social stratification as an essential element in an emerging state, (Fried, 1967: 235) The early Brahmi inscriptions again, provide the most useful data in understanding the early phase of Sri Lankan society. The chronicles seem to indicate that a society based on the Brahmanic varna system was prevalent from the most ancient times, and some modern scholars, too, seem to believe so. (Ellawala, 1963, 11) According to Brahmi inscriptions there seem to have existed not only the representative groups of the varna ideology like Brahmanas, there were certain other social groups that find no mention at all in the chronicles. Among them special mention may be made of, in addition to the Brahmanas, the *aya*,

*parumaka*, *gamika*, *kutumbika* and *gahapati* groups pointing to two parallel systems of ranking and the social status of the latter being determined by political and economic considerations. The *parumakas* appear to have held a social status even above that of the Brahmanas (Karunatilaka, 1983: 110 -124). These two parallel systems of ranking appear to have lasted for a fairly long time, until at least about the first century A.D.

## **Towards an Integrated Kingdom: Emergence of Early State**

### ***The Rise of Rohana***

The main stages of the expansion of the Anuradhapura polity and its rise into prominence cannot be traced with any degree of certainty but more dependable data are available from the early inscriptions and useful literary sources on the rise of another region into political dominance. This time it was Rohana in the South. Of the few polities in the Rohana region it was the Magama polity under its leader Gothabhaya, having destroyed the clan leaders of Kajaragama, through warfare may have forced the other clan leaders in the adjoining regions, too, to subjugation. Yet, it was Gothabhaya's son and successor Kakavanna Tissa who strengthened the power of the polity through a discreet but aggressive policy. While amassing troops and developing agriculture he saw Rohana into a force to reckon with. Additionally, having entered into matrimonial alliances with the polities in outlying areas, *Kakavanna* fortified his position and used religious pressure and military muscle to expand his authority over a vast area extending as far as the North-Eastern region near present day Trincomalee (Ray, 1959: 145-155).

Meanwhile, the changing political climate in the Anuradhapura kingdom with the successful attempts of some

South Indian political adventurers ousting the members of the ruling family ultimately led to the weakening of its political power. This gave another adventurer one *Elara* or *Ellala*, described as a 'nobleman' from Chola country to capture power at Anuradhapura. Elara (205 -161 B. C.) is described in the chronicles as a 'just ruler', but Buddhism is said to have suffered under his rule. Yet, he managed to secure the allegiance of at least some local leaders irrespective of the ethnic differences. Nevertheless, the reverses suffered by Buddhism under *Elara* were used to the maximum political advantage by the rulers of Rohana in their campaign against the Anuradhapura ruler, and it was in this setting that Rohana was poised to rise into prominence under Kakavanna-Tissa and his son Dutthagamani (Ray, 1959: 145).

### ***Dutthagamani's Tour de Force***

The military and economic strength built up by Kakavanna-Tissa undoubtedly helped Dutthagamani (161 -131 B.C.) to begin his military campaign against Elara, soon after becoming the ruler of Rohana. The primary target of Dutthagamani's long drawn military campaign was the capture of the Anuradhapura kingdom, but before that, he had to wage many battles to conquer a number of local rulers whose territories lay in between the main rival regions. Dutthagamani's success thus marked the culmination of the long drawn competition among the pre-state polities for domination. The most significant achievement of Dutthagamani was undoubtedly the unification of the island for the first time.

Duttahagamani's next focus of attention was the construction of Buddhist religious edifices in his new capital which had already become the foremost Buddhist centre in the island. He is credited with the construction of the Lohapāsāda and the Mariccavatti stupa and began the construction work

of Mahāthūpa that became famous as Ruvanveli-sāya. While discussing Dutthagamani's success R.A.L.H. Gunawardana thinks that *Duttagamani* was making a deliberate attempt to transform his political centre into the foremost place of pilgrimage for all the Buddhists (Gunawardana, 1981: 140). Yet, it must be remembered that Dutthagamani was not the first to make such an attempt. In fact, it was Devanampiya Tissa who built the first *stupa*, the *Thūparama* at Anuradhapura, and encouraging the worship of the sacred Bodhi-Tree and setting apart the Mahameghavana especially for religious purposes. By doing so, he no doubt expected his capital to be the foremost Buddhist religious centre. What took place under Duttagamani was a continuation of the steps taken by Devanampiya-Tissa on a grand scale.

### ***The Early State***

The state that came into being with the unification of the island has been described by Gunawardana as 'early state' arguing that during this phase of the state formation there was no proper administrative apparatus to help rulers in the exercise of their authority and that it was Dutthagamani who took steps to develop one for the first time. However, what cannot be ignored is the fact that in the Anuradhapura principality, at least by the time of Devanampiya-Tissa, there had been some form of an administrative machinery without which the kingdom could not have had the recognition of the Mauryan Empire. In order to secure the prestige goods that were offered to the Mauryan court and also to perform even the basic diplomatic rituals and courtesies, there must have been experienced functionaries in the service of the Anuradhapura ruler. Thus, the state taking shape under Duttagamani was only a continuation of the previous system which prevailed in Anuradhapura. What is significant in the unification of the island under Duttagamani was bringing

the entire country under one authority thus paving way for the strengthening of the early state.

### ***Evolution of the State***

It is possible to identify the evolution of a rudimentary administrative set up in the two centuries subsequent to the unification of the island under *Duttagamani*. The Brahmi inscriptions belonging to the second and first centuries B.C. refer to a number of functionaries who may be identified as those associated with administrative functions. Among them were *amacca* (courtier), *senapati* (troop-leader), *badagarika* (treasurer) *kotagarika* (store-keeper or person in-charge of state coffers), *adeka* (functionary in-charge of or managing a branch of establishment). One inscription refers to mahamata which Paranavitana equates with *māhāmātra* of Asokan inscriptions suggesting a Mauryan influence (Paranavitana, 1970: XCVI -CI). All titles of these functionaries indicate a close resemblance to the contemporary Indian terminology suggesting the influence of the Indian political ideas and concepts in the growth of the early Sri Lankan administrative structure. As most of the inscriptions referring to functionaries of the state are found in and around Anuradhapura, it has been argued that, the administrative structure was essentially centred around the capital. As such the government apparatus was not an element that contributed to the integration of the state in the period immediately after Duttagamani. Therefore, the state functioned through the coercion of the lineages in the distant areas (Gunawardana, 1981: 141). In such a situation, Gunawardana argues, that several myths that were in circulation found in the chronicles, suggesting that the unity of the island had been endorsed by the Buddha himself and that the dynasty at Anuradhapura were relatives of the Buddha, may have been useful for rulers to strengthen their

hold over the whole country. However, it is not certain when these stories originated or whether they were in circulation at all in the most ancient times. As such, it is difficult to argue that these myths helped in any considerable way to strengthen the political power of Duttagamani or his successors. Their control over the Anuradhapura and Rohana kingdoms must have been sufficient to exercise political control over the rest of the island as well. Through military power and coercion the allegiance of the regional potentates and lineages could have been secured by the centre.

### ***Towards a Centralized State***

Though Duttagamani was able to unify the country no irrigation work is reported to have been constructed by him. The chronicle reports of a severe drought and a famine in his region (Mahavamsa, XXXII: 29-30) and a worst one during the time of Vattagamani Abhaya, a few decades later (Sammohavinodani, 1923: 445-451 also see, Siriweera, 1989: 81-82). These make it clear that the existing irrigation facilities were ruefully inadequate to meet the challenge. These droughts and famines no doubt served as a wake-up call for the Anuradhapura rulers to get involved in constructing larger irrigation works since anything beyond village reservoirs was not within the capacity of the village committees or individuals.

Since Anuradhapura was the centre of administration and the place where the political leadership dwelt, it is natural to expect all major public work to be constructed in or around the capital. Thus, all the early irrigation works, too, came up in this core-region watered by the Malvatu-Oya. By the first century A.D., larger reservoirs surpassing the size of the village reservoirs began to appear in the Malvatu basin and beyond. Vasabha (A.D, 67-111) is said to have constructed twelve reservoirs and a canal (Ray, 1959, 222). Inscriptional evidence from about the

second century A.D. testify to the existence of village reservoirs (*gamika-vavi*) as well as large reservoirs (*Maha vavi*) and service or feeder reservoirs (Epigraphia Zeylanica, I, 252-259) suggesting the beginning of an interlinked irrigation system. The invention of the cistern –sluice (*bisokotuva*) towards the end of the first century A.D., which is hailed as a technological marvel, helped regulate the water outflow of reservoirs, preventing any damage to the bund. This invention came to be used in the later reservoirs with further sophistication and was useful in water management of the larger reservoirs to come. Accordingly, Vasabha's reign marked the initial step of the construction of large reservoirs and the interlinked irrigation systems which in the following centuries became the foundation for the massive irrigation systems that were going to be built.

King Mahasena in the next century is credited with the construction of a number of large reservoirs and canals and most importantly he was successful in tapping the Mahaveli Ganga, the largest waterway in the country and its tributaries. Thus, Mahasena opened up a vast area to the South and East of Anuradhapura region for agriculture and as such he was able to expand his direct political control and consolidate his power firmly in the rest of the Rajarata beyond the core-region around Anuradhapura. King Dhatusena in the next century is credited with two major irrigation works in the area to the west of Anuradhapura irrigating the land between the *Malvatu* basin and the main port Mahatitha (Ray, 1959, 353). His irrigation canal conveying water from Kalaveva to *Tisavava* was to augment the water supply to the capital. By this time, the population in and around Anuradhapura must have grown creating a demand for better water supply. These irrigation works set the trend for further development and technological advancements for the reservoirs to come.

The construction of larger reservoirs continued down to the ninth century A.D., but what is significant is the canal system that inter-connected different reservoirs spreading over a vast area in the Rajarata thus making it a massive irrigation network, the maintenance of which could not have been carried out without the participation and the intervention of the royal authority. These systems ensured regular and uninterrupted water supply to the irrigable lands and also helped opening up a massive new area for agriculture enhancing the crop production. The reaping of two harvests was the norm but a third or a middle crop (*mada-hasa*) is reported by the fourth century A.D. (Epigraphia Zylanica III: 172-78, also see Siriweera, 2000: 395).

The increase in the agricultural production as an obvious outcome of the highly developed irrigation systems most certainly attracted people from, other 'less developed' areas to the 'dry zone'. As C.W. Nicholas has pointed out, inscriptions become rarer in the so called 'wet zone', particularly the lower montane region after the first century A.D., pointing to a market drop in the settlements in the region. Nicholas attributes it to a large-scale internal migration towards the 'dry zone' which was now becoming attractive through development of irrigation and opening up of new lands for agriculture (Nicholas, 1956: 123).

It is however, interesting that the Rohana region which possessed an extensive area of land and a number of perennial waterways with immense agricultural potential did not receive adequate attention of the Anuradhapura rulers as much as the Rajarata did. This may be because, for the Anuradhapura rulers, developing their core-region around the capital was always a priority and a political necessity. Rohana on the other hand, situated far away from the capital gradually becoming the 'trouble region' for the Anuradhapura rulers and thus it became burdensome for them to keep it under control, particularly in the

latter part of the Anuradhapura kingdom. These considerations may have discouraged Anuradhapura leaders from developing the Rohana region.

The construction of large-scale reservoirs led to the enhancement of income to the state through taxation. A large number of inscriptions from the first century A.D., record several types of taxes levied on those who used irrigation facilities for agriculture and other purposes. Inscriptions refer to two main taxes, i.e., *dakapati*, a water tax and *bojakapati* a land tax. An additional *Majibika* probably was a tax on those who were engaged in fishing in the reservoirs and canals (Epigraphia Zeylanica, III: 116, IV: 123 and I: 69, and Ray, 1959: 67 and 237).

With irrigation becoming a prime source of income to the state, rules and regulations pertaining to their management became a pressing need. It seems that by the early centuries of the Christian era a set of laws had come into operation. It is also important to note that the irrigation works were not the sole monopoly of the state. In fact, many small and medium scale reservoirs remained in the private and community ownership and religious institutions too, owned irrigation works donated by successive rulers and the gentry. These donations often carried with them many privileges and immunities (Gunawardana, 1979, 53ff).

### ***Trade and Commerce***

Another important area of the economy that had a direct bearing on the latter phase of the state formation was trade and commerce. Trading activities in the island can be traced back to a fairly early period perhaps going back as far as the fourth century B.C., as revealed by some Greek writers (Weerakkody, 1997: 104). Early inscriptions too, refer to traders and seafaring envoys travelling to the Indian Subcontinent (Ray, 1959: 224,

XVIII). However, it was not until the growth of the Roman trade with the East, at least from about the first century A.D., that Sri Lanka began getting heavily involved in overseas trade. Sri Lanka's first involvement in western trade must have been through India, but they lost no time in establishing direct trade links with the Roman world. The first Sri Lankan embassy reached Rome during the time of Claudius in the first century A.D., (Weerakkody, 1997: 51-52) and from that time onwards direct trade links between the two countries must have improved. According to Greek and Roman sources, Sri Lanka was famous for its pearls, precious stones, elephants and elephant tasks, turtle shells and muslins (Ray, 1959: 224ff).

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's trade relations with China also seem to have begun around the first century A.D., as the first Sri Lankan embassy is reported to have reached China in 97 A.D. Two other embassies had followed in 120 A.D. and 131 A.D. (Werake, 1990: 221-231). These references in the Chinese sources show the keen interest taken by the Sri Lankan rulers to develop their trade links with powers in the west and the east as well as those in the Indian region.

A very significant development in Sri Lanka's overseas trade is reported in the sixth century work *Topographia Christiana*, prepared by one Cosmos Indicopleustus a Greek of possible Egyptian origin. According to Cosmos, Sri Lanka, because of the island's central position in its location, was much frequented by "ships from all ports of India, from Persia and Ethiopia and likewise sends out many ships of its own". He also states that from "China and other places east of Cape Comorin the island received silk, aloes, clove-wood, sandle-wood and other products, and these were again passed on to the western markets such as Male, Caliana and Sindhu as well as to Persia the Homerite Country and

Adulis (Weerakkody, 138). It is abundantly clear that by the sixth century A.D., Sri Lanka was firmly established as a major player in the Indian Ocean entreport trade and additionally, Sri Lanka was a major exporter of its own produce. The fifth century Chinese traveler Fa-shien also testifies to the existence of ship-routes to and from Sri Lanka which were used by traders and of the sea-faring activities of the Sri Lankans as well (Giles, 1923: 54). The island developed trade with Southeast Asia also fairly early probably as it was situated on the sea-route to China. Though the Roman trade suffered with the collapse of the empire affecting economies of many regions of the East, Sri Lanka's trade thrived throughout the period down to the medieval times, though there was a lull from the seventh to ninth century A.D. The growing trading activities obviously led to the expansion of the functions of the state as collection of custom duties and other taxes became essential. It led to the expansion of the functions of the state thereby strengthening its power and authority further. The profits obtained and the dues collected from trade no doubt helped fatten the state coffers and it provided the rulers with ample funds to invest more in public works like irrigation activities.

Certain tendencies that were discernible from about the first century A.D., also ultimately led to the consolidation and strengthening of the royal power. The *aya-parumaka-gamika* groups that held high positions in the administration of the previous period began to disappear and a new set of royal officials began to appear from about the first century A.D. One of the striking features of the administration under *Vasabha* was his appointment of royal officials like *amaccas* and *ratiyas* to be in charge of the administration of regions ranging from the Jaffna peninsula to the eastern sea-board, thus apparently replacing the lineages that controlled those areas. The *amaccas*

and *ratikas* appear to have enjoyed enormous power, wealth and prestige in time to come (Karunatilaka, 1988: 3-5). In fact, as T. Hettiarachchi has shown they were becoming “a class by themselves” (Hettiarachchi, 1972: 91ff). At least by the fourth century, there appear to have been a ‘Council of Ministers’ (*ameti-paheja*). However, many important positions were kept within the royal family itself.

The practice of appointing royal officials in-charge of areas like tax collection and running of the affairs of the royal court come into being only after the first century A.D. Titles like *nagara-gutiya* or the functionary in charge of city affairs and *dovarika*, *doratana*, and *maha-doratana* indicate officers controlling access to the city and the royal court. As T Hettiarachchi has shown, the control of access to court and the city obviously led to, on one hand, the creation of a degree of social distance between the ruler and the ruled (Hettiarachchi, 1973: 106.107). Even the members of the ruling elite in which the rulers had their origins were expected to pay homage to the ruling monarchs as a mark of subjugation and respect. It no doubt contributed to the elevation of the status of the ruler far above even that of the highest royal officials.

The formalization of the legal process is an essential component in the process of state formation in that it provides for the strengthening and formalization of the royal authority. The earliest reference to the persons involved in the legal work is probably found again in one of the early Brahmi inscriptions which refers to a certain *vohara* which Paranavitana considers as a person versed in the law (Paranavitana, ins. No. 1122). More details about the dispensation of justice are available in an inscription datable to the time of Gajabahu I (112-34 A.D.). By that time, there were provisions for appeals through a hierarchical court system. The Mahavamsa, too, makes its first reference to

the codification of law under King Vohara Tissa (Tissa the legal expert) (214 - 236 A.D.). The development of the legal system and a judiciary which was regulated through royal intervention and operated through royal officials was another factor that contributed to the legitimization of the central authority.

The taxation system that became formalized by the first and second centuries A.D., began to proliferate in the following centuries with the growing economy and due to the need to maintain an increasingly expanding band of royal officials, and also to meet the expenses of the public work of the rulers. The inscriptions, particularly from about the seventh century onwards mention many dues and imposts. By the ninth and tenth centuries the taxes and other imposts proliferated as inscriptions begin to mention a plethora of taxes from villages. These inscriptions also mention the titles of a number of different officials tasked to collect taxes and dues and in performing other functions of the state. Many inscriptions of the eighth to tenth centuries show the degree of expansion of the officialdom covering every aspect of the state function. As shown above, the royal officials were gradually growing in strength and power mainly due to the wealth and prestige that carried along with its positions. They were steadily growing into a class by themselves known as the *kulinas* and thus holding the highest positions next to the royalty in the social organization and at times, even aspiring to the position of the kingship. Thus the system of ranking that prevailed in the pre-Christian times that took a different turn in the early Christian centuries ultimately led to a social hierarchy that the status was primarily determined by the positions in government, in addition to the traditional groups like the Brahmanas, the royalty too, making bold claims to the ksatriya status while at the same time trying to connect themselves to the Buddha through claims to being descendents of the Okkaka dynasty of India to which the

Buddha is said to have belonged. They also made claims to be *bodhisattas* (aspirant to Buddhahood) (Karunatilaka 1988, 20ff and Gunawardana, 1979: 172ff). These ideological positions taken by the kings also must have gone a long way in further strengthening of the Mature State.

## **Cracks in the Mature State**

### ***Emergence of Segmentary Tendencies***

The unitary state that was taking shape from about the first century A.D., was further strengthened in the next few centuries with the decisive intervention of the rulers in public works like the construction of large scale irrigation canals and reservoirs and also through the expanding political authority which definitely bolstered the power of the centre. This was further strengthened by the increasing agricultural production and benefits accrued through trade. The gradual decline in trade in the Mediterranean region and its disappearance in the seventh century A.D., had its effect on trade in the Indian Ocean as well. The emergence of competitors like the Pandyas on the one hand and the Sri Vijaya kingdom of Southeast Asia on the other, deprived Sri Lanka of the dominant position it enjoyed in overseas trade in the previous century. The Sri Vijaya rulers were able to win the favors of the Chinese rulers and the Persians began to bypass Sri Lanka and sail direct to the Malacca region which was under the Sri Vijaya kingdom. Thus, Malacca gradually replaced Sri Lanka as the centre of the Indian Ocean trade by the seventh century A.D. (Gunawardana, 1980/81, 83). The weakening of the overseas trade links seems to have had its toll on irrigation as well, since only a few large scale irrigations were undertaken in the period after the seventh century A.D.

The seventh century also witnessed the aggravation of internecine political rivalry in the island that began after

Moggallana I which Paranavitana describes as a period of 'dynastic instability' (Ray, 1959, 300ff). These internal discords in most part, took the form of internal wars which ultimately contributed to the weakening of the mature state, paving way for the segmentary tendencies to emerge. After the death of Aggabodhi II (604-614 A.D.), several powerful lineages began to carve out niches for themselves in different parts of the country, the Rohana region in particular. The Anuradhapura rulers took several measures to win back the allegiance of these potentates; sometimes the kings treated them as their representatives, a step seen as the best option.

The emergence of a special band of functionaries known as *mandalikas* alongside the above mentioned tendencies was an important development. As Gunawardana has rightly pointed out, the *mandalikas* behaved like feudatories of the Anuradhapura ruler from about the seventh century onwards and gradually their growing power became a serious threat to the centre over the next few centuries (Gunawardana, 1980/81: 95). This tendency clearly marks the beginning of the fragmentation of the political authority, leading to the emergence of the segmentary characteristics as Southall believed typical of Asia and Africa (A.W. Southall, 1953, 254ff). Thus, the fragmentation of the state power characterized the political scene though several rulers made vain attempts to arrest it.

With the rising power of Rohana as a rebel territory there was a political need for a new strategy. It may be this need coupled with the necessity to control the ports in the East coast that compelled the Anuradhapura rulers from about eight century A.D., to maintain Polonnaruwa as a military outpost (kandavuru-pura) and also as an alternative capital. However, these measures were not very useful in stemming the tide of the segmentary tendencies. The rise in the ferocity of the South

Indian invasions from about the ninth century onwards may also have led to the weakening of the central authority. The internal dissension and the inability of the Anuradhapura rulers to control the power seekers, and also the rising strength of the South Indian mercenaries who had now become a force to reckon with were showing their muscle even making attempts at changing the rulers at the centre. By the end of the tenth century A.D, they had become uncontrollable, and their rebellion and the refusal of the peasantry to pay taxes to the centre, ultimately paved way for the Chola invasion forcing the last ruler of Anuradhapura, Mahinda V to abandon his capital(Ray, 1959: 348ff).

### ***Ethnic Identities in the Pre-state and the Early State Periods***

The several legends in the Pali chronicles mention the Sinhalese as the early migrants and the *Yakkas* and the *Nagas* as two aboriginal groups. The vaddhas are also mentioned but describe them as decedents of the children of Vijaya and his aboriginer consort. The Pandukabhaya legend too, refers to some aboriginal leaders who supported him, but much weightage cannot be given to those myths though there may be some form of historical truth ingrained in them (Ray, 1959: 84ff).

However, some definite data on certain ethnic groups that lived in Sri Lanka during the pre-Christian times can be gleaned from the early Brahmi inscriptions. S. Paranavitana who carried a thorough study of these records, has identified some of the ethnic groups that were resident in the island in the period third century B.C. through the first century A.D. He cited four inscriptions that refer to the term *Damedas* and translates it as Tamils. One of the Tamils is described as a mariner (*navika*) while some others identify themselves as traders (*Dameda-vanija*). Three of those inscriptions are from the Anuradhapura city and its environs while one is from Kuduvil in the Eastern Province. The Tamil trader

mentioned in this inscription identifies himself as a resident of *Dighavapi*, which was the second most important political centre of the Rohana polity in the second century B.C. (Paranavitana, 1970, and inscription nos. 94, 356, 357 and 480). Paranavitana has also drawn attention to the personal names of those individuals (eg. *Nasata*, *Kubira*, *Visakha* and *Tisa*) which betray a clear North Indian, or to be precise, the Sanskrit influence in these names and shown that there was no difference at all from the other names in the inscriptions. It is also noteworthy that these Tamils were patrons of Buddhism and one of those persons mentioned in an inscription was a Buddhist monk (*Damedamhamana*). The chronicles, too, refer to Tamils who lived in the early historical period. For instance, Sena and Guttika and Elara who held power at Anuradhapura are described as Tamils.

Paranavitana drawing attention to some other early inscriptions (Paranavitana 1970, inscription nos. 622, 623) which mention the term *kaboja* and another one referring to a *kabojiyana mahapugiyana*, identifies this term as the name of a separate ethnic group named *kaboja* which he considers the same as *Kamboja*, a native group of North-Western India. The phrase *mahapugiyana* can be identified as a guild of *Kambojas* as the term *pugi* denoted a guild usually of traders or artisans. Another inscription (no. 990) speaks of *parumaka* of a *gota-kabojiyana* which may be translated as the ghosti or corporation or guild of the *Kambojas*. The mention of the title *parumaka* is significant in that as it clearly shows that he apparently belonged to one of the most powerful social groups at the time. This North Indian ethnic group must have migrated to Sri Lanka and was involved in trade and other economic activities having organized themselves into their own guilds. While some of the *Kamboja* inscriptions are from the Anuradhapura area, others are from the Bovattegala region in the Rohana polity. The *Sahassavatthupparakara* a collection

of stories compiled in the fourth century A.D., but probably containing stories of about the second century B.C., also speaks of a certain *Kamboja* village in the *Rohana-janapada* suggesting the existence of a settlement of *Kamboja* people (Buddhadatta, 1959).

There may have been many such ethnic groups like the Tamils and the *Kambojas* in early Sri Lanka, and Paranavitana prefers to take the term *milaka* found in several early Brahmi inscriptions as indicating another such ethnic group. This name appears similar to the Sanskrit word *mleccha* or Pali *milakkha* (Paranavitana 1970: LXXXVI). Another such name is *Murada*, which Paranavitana treats as the same as *Murunda* a group of people who initially lived in North-Western India in the pre-Christian era. W Geiger, too, has shown that there were many totemistic groups like the *Balibohjakas*, *Lambakannas* etc., and seems to think that the Sinhala, too may have been one such group (Geiger, 1960: 183).

Paranavitana, while discussing the various ethnic groups poses the very valid question as to why there was no reference at all in the early inscriptions to the Sinhala people, though the chronicles very emphatically assert that the majority of the Sri Lankan people were Sinhala. Paranavitana himself providing the answer says that there was no need for the majority people to state their ethnic identity specifically (Paranavitana, 1970, XC).

Several terms in the early Brahmi inscriptions have led some scholars to believe that they had Tamil origins. One such term is *parumaka* that denoted a group of persons who held high positions in pre-state and early state polities, having marriage links with the ruling class and owning property including land and reservoirs. They held a position just below that of the ruling class (Karunatilaka, 1983: 124ff). They also were one of the largest groups to patronize Buddhism.

S.K. Sittampalam and S. Seneviratne thought that the term *parumuka* derived from the Tamil word *perumakan* and Sittampalam has further argued that the term *parumakalu* the feminine form found in a few early inscriptions, too, derived from Tamil (Sittampalam, 1986/87: 13-17). S Seneviratne also believes the Tamil origin of the word and brings forth several other arguments to suggest that the *parumaka* group in Sri Lanka was of South Indian origin. He cites some similarities in certain Megalithic finds in South India and Sri Lanka. There, he compared certain symbols in South Indian potsherds and those found in the *parumaka* inscriptions in Sri Lanka to fortify his arguments (Seneviratne, 1989). The assertion that the term *parumaka* had derived from Tamil *perumakan*, though appear plausible on the face of it, the main difficulty of accepting this idea is the wide time gap between the *parumaka* inscriptions in Sri Lanka and the post-Sangam works that mention the term *perumakan* for the first time in a Tamil source. The two Tamil post-Sangam works *Cilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai* have been dated to a period between the first and the third century A.D., while the Sri Lankan inscriptions belong to the pre-Christian centuries. The term *parumaka* disappears from inscriptions by the first century A.D.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the term *perumakan* or even any similar term does not appear in the early South Indian inscriptions either.

Even the dates of the Megalithic finds, the post Sangam literature and the Sri Lankan early Brahmi inscriptions belong to three different time brackets and stand as a formidable obstacle in accepting Seneviratna's arguments. Moreover, even the reading of the term *parumakalu*, the feminine form of *parumaka* is tentative, for Paranavitana himself has presented two other variant readings for it. They are *parumakala* and *parumakali* (Paranavitana, 1970, inscription nos. 1096 and 910 also see XXIII).

1. Some scholars prefer to place it in the Sixth Century A.D. See S. Pathmanathan, 2006, 9

Thus it is not at all certain whether *parumakalu* was the only term used to denote the feminine form.

Similarly, *aya* is another term in the early Brahmi inscriptions that has been cited as an example for a word with Tamil origin. Though Paranavitana and some of his predecessors have considered this term as having derived from the Sanskrit *aya* or Pali *ariya* (Paranavitana 1970: 103) there are suggestions that *aya* is comparable with the Dravidian term *ayya* (Gunawardana, 2000, 88). Gunawardana argues that in certain Tamil literary works of later periods use this term to mean 'lord' or king and therefore, in ancient Sri Lanka, too, it may have been used in the same sense. However, it should be noted here that in addition to the term *ariya* the Pali language also has the term *ayya* as a variant (Davis and Stede, 1919). The term *arya* also has the meaning nobleman in addition to its religious- ethnic connotations. (Williams, 2002).

Although, there is some doubt about the possibility of the Tamil origin of the terms discussed above, the term *marumanake* or *marumakanake* (ins. Nos. 83, 643, 744, 1142 of Paranavitana 1970), which meant grandson or descendent has been identified as a term related to the Tamil word *marumakan* and its variants. The Tamil term *marukan* also has the meaning of descendent (Gunawardana, 2000, 88). This is a clear instance where a Tamil term has come directly into the Proto-Sinhala usage. Its significance is not the influence that it had on the Proto-Sinhala language, more importantly, it is a term used to denote a kin-relationship. It is a clear indication of the degree of the Tamil influence in the shaping of the early Sri Lankan social relationships as well, at a time even the state formation process was in its incipient stage.

## **Relations with South India**

### ***South Indian Invasions and Local Responses***

The possibility of early human migration between the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka even in pre-Christian times, cannot be discounted not only because of the geographical proximity of the two lands but also because of the very narrow stretch of sea that separated them could be crossed using even the most primitive sea-going craft. The earliest recorded instances of contacts between South India and Sri Lanka can be traced back to the pre-Christian times. They are the invasions by some South Indian political adventurers like Sena and Guttika and *Elara* who succeeded in capturing political power in the Northern part of the island. Even after, *Elara*, there had been several military incursions by some South Indian strongmen and the first such invasion is reported to have taken place in the time of Vattagamani Abhaya (89-77 B.C.). Then during the reign of Vankanasika Tissa (109-112 A.D.) an invasion led by a Chola ruler, probably Karikala Chola, is reported, but the invasion appears to be a short-lived one. Most of these invasions had been taking place in a background where the Sri Lankan state was still in its formative stage where even the administrative apparatus was still developing. In such a situation the Sri Lankan military strength or even the administrative structure was too brittle to withstand the military might of even a solitary invader who could muster a sizable band of troops.

The next recorded South Indian invasion took place in the fifth century A.D., in the time of Mittasena whose position as ruler was extremely unstable. This invasion happened three hundred years after Karikala's intrusion. The six Pandyan captured power from Mittasena were well entrenched and they carried on for twenty five years before being vanquished by Dhatusena (459-77 A.D.) after a series of difficult battles. It is difficult to believe

that those invasions by individual fortune seekers or adventurers had any lasting impact upon the pattern of state formation in the island as they mostly acted in conformity with the traditional culture and religion using the local languages in Sri Lanka. Some of them even were patrons of Buddhism<sup>2</sup>.

Although, all the invasions cited above originated in South India, there is no information either in the chronicle Chulavamsa or in the inscriptions on any counter invasion by Sri Lankan rulers. Nevertheless, the thirteenth century Sinhalese Literary work *Pūjvaliya* which represents a tradition different from Culavansa, informs that Gajabahu I invaded the Chola country in retaliation for the invasion during his father Vankanasika Tissa's time to bring back the 12,000 men taken away by the Chola invader, and that the Sri Lankan ruler returned home victoriously. According to the Post-Sangam literary work *Manimekalai*, Gajabahu was present in Kerala as a friend of its ruler and most probably Gajabahu and the Kerala ruler got together to invade the Chola country. Though these successive South Indian inroads took place over a long period of time with fairly wide time gaps in between they may have still remained in the Sri Lankan memory. As a result awareness may have been created among them of the need to take necessary measures to meet the possible threat. Perhaps, it was this concern that compelled Kūtakanna Tissa (44-22 B.C.) to build a moat and a wall seven cubits in height around his capital city. Vasabha, too strengthened the fortifications of the capital having added fortress towers.

One striking feature of all the South Indian invasions cited above is that they were led by individual adventurers and not by any political power in South India and accordingly, they can

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2. Moreover, all the above invasions were carried out by political adventurers who had no apparent connection to any political power in the Indian Sub-continent. As Liyanagamage has rightly pointed out, these adventurers appear more as intruders rather than invaders in the true sense of the term (Liyanagamage, 1993, 9).

be considered as mere passing episodes than ones that had any lasting impact upon the course of history of the island. The main reason for this is that until about the seventh century A.D., no major power emerged in South India. The first such kingdom to rise into prominence was that of the Pallavas, and they maintained a close friendly relationship with Sri Lanka right throughout, particularly beginning with the reign of *Manavamma* (684-718) who was strongly backed by the Pallava ruler Narasingharaman to secure the Sri Lankan throne. *Manavamma* was not the only Sri Lankan leader to receive South Indian backing to gain power. In fact, there were many before him<sup>3</sup>. This practice of employing South Indian troops to gain power back home ultimately led to the practice of including them as a regular component of the royal armies of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's relations with South India entered a new phase from about the ninth century A.D., with the rise of the two political powers, the Pandyas and the Cholas. The Pandyas were the first to achieve independence from the Pallavas and soon began to flex their political muscle in South India, but soon Sri Lanka too, was destined to bear the brunt of their military might. When the Pandyan ruler *Sri Mara Sri Vallabha* (815 – 862 A.D) invaded Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese ruler *Sena I* was totally unprepared to face the enemy. The invaders plundered the capital city and Buddhist shrines and returned home with a huge booty (Chulavamsa I; 33-36). This is the first recorded invasion led by a major South Indian kingdom and in that sense it differs from the previous invasions.

Sri Mara's invasion forced the Sri Lankan rulers to have a new approach towards the rising power of the South Indian

3. The first Sri Lankan leader to get the assistance of South Indian mercenaries was *Ilanaga* (35-44 A.D), and several others followed suit. *Abhyanāga* (236-244 A.D.) and *Moggallana I* (495 -512 A.D.) were two other such prominent Sri Lankan leaders. These armies in most instances belonged to military guilds or similar organizations whose services were available for wages.

kingdoms. The next Sri Lankan ruler Sena II (853 -887 A.D.), made use of an invitation for military assistance from Sri Mara's son who was bent on ousting his father. Sena II grabbed the opportunity and invaded the country and killed Sri Mara. The Sinhalese troops having installed Varaguna II on the Pandyan throne returned home with a large booty including what had earlier been taken away by Sri Mara. From the time of Varaguna's accession to the throne, Sri Lanka's friendship with the Pandyan appears to have been well established. As Liyanagamage has opined the Pandya-Sinhala alliance thus formed, constituted an important corner-stone of the foreign policy "adopted by the Sinhalese rulers towards South India" (Liyanagamage, 1993, 30). This relationship was further buttressed with matrimonial alliances and the successors of Sena II continued the military assistance to the Pandyan when required. Kassapa V (914 -923 A.D.) also dispatched Sri Lankan troops to help the Pandyan against the Cholas who were now becoming a formidable force in the South Indian political arena. However, even the combined forces of the Pandyan and the Sinhalese lacked the strength to stand against the powerful Cholas.

The Cholas emerged into prominence in South India under Parantaka I (907-055 A.D.) who was determined to make his country an imperial power and having conquered the Pandya and Kerala regions embarked on a campaign to subjugate Sri Lanka as well. His initial step was a success and the Cholas conquered the Northern part of the island, but a massive *Rastrakuta* intervention forced the Chola troops to return home without completing the Sri Lankan campaign. The *Rastrakutas* routed the Cholas, and the Chola power fell into oblivion, until they resurfaced under Rajaraja I, towards the end of the tenth century A.D. (Liyanagamage, 1993: 32-33).

### ***The Chola Conquest and its Aftermath***

The Cholas re-emerged as a political force in South India, under the able leadership of Rajaraja I (985 – 1016 A.D.) more than three decades after the ignominious defeat they suffered during the time of Parantaka I. Rajaraja, gradually but steadily recaptured all the areas that were once under Parantaka. He even went further by capturing Northern Sri Lanka, the Maldives and many other islands nearby, making the Cholas the most powerful kingdom in South India once again. When Rajendra captured Anuradhapura, Mahinda V fled to Rohana seeking refuge there but in 1017 Rajendra captured the Sinhala royal family. Even then the Cholas could not control the entire island since several local leaders including king Mahinda's son began resistance to the Chola rule in several parts of the country. Therefore, only Rajarattha was in firm control of the Cholas (Ray, 1959, 344 ff).

As far as the Cholas were concerned the conquest of Sri Lanka served two main purposes. In the first place, they could eliminate a potential enemy who had the ability, as they did in the past, to intervene in South Indian politics. Secondly, they were able to remove a formidable contender in the competition to control the Indian Ocean trade. In fact, the Chola empire has been described as a "sea-born empire", because they were able to control South India and the Bay of Bengal rim area with the backing of their powerful army and the large naval force. Though the Cholas failed to take control of entire Sri Lanka they were successful in taking charge of almost all vital seaports in the island thereby building a monopoly in the Bay of Bengal trade.

The Cholas, having annexed the major part of the island to their empire named it *Mummadi-Sola- Mandalam*, and established Polonnaruva as its capital. Several reasons may have been behind the decision to shift the capital. On the one hand,

Polonnaruwa is better located than Anuradhapura as a strategic point to keep a watch on Rohana to check possible rebel attacks on the territory under their control. While on the other hand, the new capital was ideally located to supervise the main seaports in the east coast, especially Gokarna (near Trincomalee), by now had been increasingly gaining importance in the Bay of Bengal trade.

The Chola rule under successive emperors after Rajendra I, managed to keep the Northern part of Sri Lanka under their firm control until a formidable resistance campaign under prince Kittu (later Vijayabahu I) from Rohana gave a new impetus to the liberation struggle. He ascended the throne (in Rohana) in 1055, having Kataragama as his capital. When the Chola power in the mainland began to weaken due to internal trouble, Vijayabahu grabbed the opportunity and captured the entire Northern Sri Lanka and unified the island under him in 1070 A.D.(Ray, 1960: 417-426).

### ***Hinduism and Tamil Influence in Sri Lanka***

The influence of the Brahmanic religion in Sri Lanka can be traced back to a fairly early time. Apart from the chronicles that speak of Brahmans in the island from a very early period a fairly good number of early Brahmi inscription too, refer to Brahmanas who patronaged Buddhism (Paranavitana, 1970, LXVII) However, there is no doubt that not all Brahmanas were supporters of Buddhism. They carried on with their religious practices and even served as advisors and teachers in the royal courts and the society in general. There were instances where they openly opposed Buddhism (Karunatilaka, 1988: 13-14). The Mahavamsa mentions of some devayatanas or shrines of gods in the time of Mahasena (Mahavamsa XXXVII; 41), but the all pervading influence of Buddhism does not appear to have provided much room for Hinduism to thrive. It is from about the seventh/eighth

century period that Hindu concepts and practices seem to have made some clear appearance in the island (Ray, 1959: 313). It is also the period that Hindu ideas under *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism* which brought in a religious revival. These two religions became very popular in the Tamil country, the *Alvars* and *Nāyanars* gave a new impetus to *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism*. The spirit of the new religious movements may have come to the island through traders and mercenaries from South India. The *Saiva* Tamil *tevarām* of about the seventh century A.D, contain eulogies of *Saiva* shrines existed at Mahatittha and Gokarna. These two places being two important seaports of the island there must have been a sizable Tamil population with Hindu affiliations (Ray 1959: 386). Hinduism and Tamil influence in the island got a big boost during the Chola occupation that lasted nearly eighty years. Polonnaruwa, as the capital of the Cholas. come to the island through traders and mercenaries from South India. The *Saiva* Tamil *tevarām* of about the seventh century A.D, contain eulogies of *Saiva* shrines existed at Mahatittha and Gokarna. These two places being two important seaports of the island there must have been a sizable Tamil population with Hindu affiliations (Ray, 1959: 386). Many South Indian traders in several parts of the territory under Chola rule are reported in inscriptions. They were involved in internal and international trade. Most of them were living near seaports in the North and the Northeast. A fairly large number of South Indian combatants must have been stationed in several parts of the Chola territory in addition to the substantial Tamil population living at many outposts. Hindu religious institutions seem to have been established to serve this South Indian population (Pathmanathan, 1989: 53-54).

In addition to the Konesvaram temple in Gokarna which has a fairly long antiquity, inscriptions and archeological remains reveal the existence of many Hindu shrines in places like Polonnaruwa, Padaviya, Trincomalee, Manthai etc., a good

number of which were named after Rajaraja, However several others that were built after Rajaraja's time also have been found. Hindu shrines belonging to the Chola times were well endowed with by the royalty and other dignitaries, traders and the military leaders and therefore possessed adequate resources for their sustenance. At least, some of the Hindu edifices have survived down to later times. The increasing popularity of Hindu rituals and practices in the country seem to have continued even into later times (Pathmanathan, 1989: 53ff).

Though, the chronicles lament the destruction and plunder of Buddhist shrines at Anuradhapura and elsewhere during the Chola invasion the invaders do not appear to have followed destruction as a policy during their rule in Sri Lanka. Many invading armies of the Indian Sub-continent were also in the habit of plundering the religious establishments of the Hindus though plunderers themselves were Hindus. This happened invariably in the Chola times as well, and it was a part of their military policy. The Cholas, once established, seem to have followed a policy of religious tolerance, and one such example comes from the famous Velgam vihara, one of the most ancient of Buddhist shrines situated near Trincomalee. The Cholas extended their patronage and protection to it, renovated the buildings and renamed it Rajarajaperumpulli. Several donations to the vihara are recorded in inscriptions of the time of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. Paranavitana recognized clear Chola architectural traits in the image-house of the vihara and stated that it was the 'only example of a Tamil vihara in the island' (Ray, 1960: 434-435).

### ***Polonnaruva in Ascendance***

Vijayabahu I having held his consecration ceremony in Anuradhapura returned to Polonnaruva and made it his capital. He is said to have built fortifications at Polonnaruva, with the construction of a strong wall, with bastions and parapets,

and surrounded by a moat. Thus he was determined to make Polonnaruva a real capital city that suited a unified kingdom. Political and economic considerations may have led Vijayabahu to decide on Polonnaruva as capital. However, he does not seem to have continued with the system of administration introduced by the Cholas, instead, followed the system inherited from the last days of Anuradhapura. The king, having appointed close family members to vital positions like *yuvaraja* and *adipada* were given the responsibility of the administration of the *Dakkhina-desa* and Rohana. Having reorganized the judicial system, the king appointed a head of Court of Justice and a head of financiers, probably as courtiers. He also appointed officers in-charge of tax-collection. Thus, his aim was to strengthen the central authority and keep a close tab on rebel regions like Malaya and Rohana while introducing a more centralized system of administration (Ray, 1960: 428).

The king's primary concerns were the internal and external security of the country, mainly because the Cholas still remained a formidable force in the region. Vijayabahu strengthened his friendly relations with the rulers of the Pandyas, Kannadas and Kalinga through matrimonial alliances and sending of emissaries. His main aim was to strengthen his ties with the forces in India that were opposed to the Cholas. Vijayabahu also followed a policy of winning the popular support. He took steps to restore higher order of *bikkhus* in the country with the help of monks brought in from Burma and lavished the three *nikayas* with wealth and repaired several Buddhist shrines at Anuradhapura and many other sites across the country. He also constructed a new shrine to house the Tooth Relic and carried out many other acts of religious benevolence.

Vijayabahu's death was followed by a period of court intrigue and inheritance struggles for power among the

immediate family members of the former ruler. These clashes ultimately led to a protracted internal war which ended with the island being divided into several kingdoms paving way for another period of segmentary politics. This situation came to an end only when Parakramabahu I (1153- 1186 A.D.) became the ruler in Polonnaruwa. He, too, had to wage a series of battles against the rivals in his endeavour to unify the country again but once established himself at the helm, he wielded total power over the entire island stamping out the segmentary tendencies (Ray, 1960, 438ff).

Parakramabahu reorganized the administrative system concentrating on both central and regional sectors. He appointed a council of ministers, established several departments of state and overhauled the revenue system. The *mandalikas* and *samantas* who were acting virtually independently and posing a threat to the centre in the previous times, were also made use of to strengthen the king's authority. He appointed the *mandalikas* and the *samantas* as regional leaders with military responsibilities and used them in the king's many wars. Therefore, this unprecedented practice of giving prominence to the military leadership in the administrative system became a striking feature of Parakramabahu's time (Ray, 1960, 538 – 539). The unification of the island placed at his disposal a massive workforce which could be employed for public work. Religious edifices and irrigation works were the main enterprises undertaken but the number of secular buildings perhaps surpassed all previous such projects in any one particular reign. He is credited with the construction of a number of Buddhist shrines, including many edifices in the capital itself (Ray, 1960: 463 -465 and Chulavamsa LXXVII: 92 ff).

The irrigation works of Parakramabahu can be divided into two phases, the first phase being the days when he was the ruler of *Dakkhinadesa* and the second coming after ascending to

the Polonnaruva throne. He is credited with the construction or effecting repairs to 16 dams, 3910 canals, 103 major reservoirs and 2376 minor tanks 'a prodigious achievement unparalleled in history' (Paranavitana, 1960: 555 – 560). What is significant about his irrigation works was that they were not restricted to the 'dry zone'. In fact, he was the first ruler to develop the *Panca-yojana* region (in the present Kalutara district) for agriculture. According to Paranavitana, the king's greatest architectural undertaking was the rebuilding of Polonnaruva with palaces, monasteries, parks and ponds to make it a worthy royal city (Ray, 1960: 461). One notable landmark in the reign of Parakramabahu I was the bold step he took to purify the sangha and unifying the three nikayas having banished the monks who acted contravening the laws of dhamma. This indicates the absolute power enjoyed by the monarch over all aspects of society.

Parakramabahu made the conditions in the country so secure that he was able to prevent any possible foreign invasion. The hallmark of his foreign policy was ensuring of the security of the country and to defend its economic interests. His military expedition to Burma was also aimed at protecting the commercial interest while the South Indian campaign was to keep the Cholas at bay and support the independence and political integrity of the Pandya kingdom (Liyanagamage, 1993, 54-58). It may also have been led by commercial interests. The island's trade benefits must have contributed in a big way to invest in the king's public works of varying nature. The ruler's administrative and military policies contributed to the growth of a new power block in the country, the military. As Parakramabahu had to depend heavily on the military in his internal wars and the overseas campaigns, it was unavoidable that such a situation arose. Paranavitana had identified not less than fifty military leaders who served Parakramabahu (Ray, 1960: 487 – 494), and they were to play a leading role in politics in time to come.

## **Dissolution of the Rajarata Civilization**

### ***Emergence of the Southwest: Civilization in the Wet Zone***

The departure of Parakramabahu without an issue to succeed him, paved way for many other players to come to the forefront. The vacuum thus created was initially filled by Nissankamalla who had been brought in from Kalinga during the time of Parakramabahu, but the rise of many military leaders into prominence is noteworthy. Only Nissankamalla (1187 – 1196 A.D.) was able to resist the rising power of military leadership much of which must have come from the govikula gentry. Nissankamalla, apparently having realized the threat posed by the local gentry ridiculed and despised them as persons unfit to become rulers. He made bold attempts to keep the general population informed of his qualifications to the throne through a series of long inscriptions mostly in panegyric form established in many parts of the country. All these attempts may have been useful to some extent during his reign but soon after him the military rulers took the upper hand and began to install on the throne, persons of their choice. Both Kalyanavati and Leelawati, the widowed queens of Parakramabahu I were installed on the throne backed by powerful military leaders. This ultimately led to a situation in which Pandyan and Kalinga factions of the court vying for power with military strongmen always behind both parties. This competition that lasted for about three decades, much of which was dominated by the Kalinga faction, where rulers were removed at will in quick succession, resulted in the weakening of the political authority, a development that climaxed with the invasion of the island by Kalinga Magha, another political adventurer, in 1215 A.D., with devastating effect on every aspect of society. Buddhism suffered most with the destruction of shrines and harming the monks. Many works of religious value were destroyed. Moreover, forcible conversions

of Buddhist to possibly a militant Saivite sect went on creating a situation unparalleled in Sri Lanka's history. Many dignitaries and monks who suffered humiliation and harm at the hands of the invaders, either left the country or fled to Rohana and Malaya, seeking refuge. Magha thus, dealt the death-blow to the Rajarata civilization which never recovered from the devastation (Liyanagamage, 1993). Having captured Polonnaruva Magha held sway over Rajaratha for four decades and meanwhile, the Sinhala leaders backed a new ruler, Vijayabahu III who made his capital at Dambadeniya, a fair distance away from Polonnaruva, in the 'wet zone'. Henceforth, Dambadeniya became the centre of resistance to Magha creating two parallel centres of power in the island.

Meanwhile, another invader, one Chandrabhanu, a ruler from the Malay peninsula on the pretext of securing Buddhist relics for Sri Lanka led an expedition to Sri Lanka. This expedition avoided the well fortified areas under Magha but led into the areas under Parakramabahu II, the Sinhala ruler at Dambadeniya, but was defeated. He led another invasion probably to the areas held under Magha. Meanwhile, Magha later on suffered defeat at the hands of Parakramabahu II (1235 -1270 A.D.), but the Northern region came under Chandrabhanu. Chandrabhanu was eliminated by the Pandyan army that came at the invitation of the Sinhala ruler but the, Pandyans allowed Chandrabhanu's successor to continue in power in the Northern area of the island and the separate centre of authority continued even though Parakramabahu II was victorious in battles. So the Sinhala kingdom was restricted to the areas of the Southwest and a large part of the Rajarata and it appears that the descendents of Chandrabhanu continued to exercise power in the North. As Paranavitana mentions, "instead of a strong Sinhala state, the Pandyans no doubt wanted both the contending parties in the island to be subordinate allies of theirs". The presence of a separate kingdom

in the North may have prevented Parakramabahu II from re-establishing his Kingdom at the Rajarata even if he wanted to return to Polonnaruva (Paranavitana, 1960: 628). The Pandyans exerted further pressure on the Dambadeniya rulers, the successor of Parakramabahu II had to survive at the mercy of the Pandyans while the northern kingdom continued to strengthen itself presumably under Pandyan backing. The weakening of the (second) Pandyan empire and the rise of Vijanagara, its replacement, in South India appear to be more concerned about its neighbours to the North, the Muslim kingdoms, and was less attentive to the affairs in Sri Lanka and this gave an opportunity to the kingdoms in the island to act free of South Indian interference.

### ***The Northern Kingdom in Dominance***

The birth of a separate kingdom in the North is generally attributed to Magha, but more probably the earliest ruler of Jaffna was the son or a descendent of Chandrabahu who was known in the Tamil sources as *Chavakan* (Ray, 1960, 685). The backing and military support that came from South Indian Pandya kingdom helped the survival and the growth of the kingdom of Jaffna. The political chaos that marred the last days of Vijayabahu IV and accession of Bhuvanekabahu I to the Sinhalese throne led the Aryacakravartti ruler of Jaffna to attack some areas under the Southern kingdom particularly to take over the pearl banks off Mannar. The Aryacakravarttis, gradually but steadily strengthened their power and by the fourteenth century Jaffna grew into the position of the most powerful kingdom in the island, and Ibn-Batuta who visited the island in 1344 testifies to this. The Sinhala rulers meanwhile, were withdrawing from one capital to another ultimately seeking refuge at Gampola in the hill country which was relatively a secure place. The Gampola rulers were so weak that they were finding it increasingly difficult to withstand the

pressure of the Aryacakravattis. In order to make full use of the opportunity, Aryacakravattis led an invasion to the South but was defeated, not by the Gampola rulers but by Alagakkonara who was now establishing himself as a powerful potentate at Kotte. However, the Northern kingdom was later subjugated during the time of Parakramabahu VI, who unified the country (Ray, 1960: 697).

The survival and the growth of the Northern kingdom was largely due to the continued support its rulers received from the Pandya rulers of Madurai, but once well established, this kingdom could stand on its own even without the South Indian backing. It appears that there were several migrations, some fairly large, from South India and began settlements in the regions under the Jaffna kingdom (Indrapala, 2000, 31). However, the Aryachakravattis were not without their own share of troubles. The Sinhalese residents of the North rose in revolt several times against the Tamil rulers but those were ruthlessly suppressed. The Sinhalese were ably backed by some Vanniyars and the Vanniyars themselves created problems by rising against the Jaffna rulers (Ray, 1960: 692ff). The birth of the kingdom of Jaffna marks the beginning of a period of the existence of two parallel states that were antagonistic to each other. The Vanni principalities that had come up in the intermediary region between the Sinhala kingdom and that of Jaffna, in a sense acted like a buffer zone though it was not always effective.

### ***A Fragmentary State: Rise of the Vanni Chieftains***

The areas between the Northern and the Dambadeniya kingdoms in the South do not appear to have been under the direct control of either kingdom. The presence of a group of local leaders known as Vanni Chieftains (Tamil Vanniyar) is reported to have been functioning at least from about the thirteenth

century, and they were controlling small principalities strewn over much of the intermediary regions. Vijayabahu III, the first ruler of Damadeniya is said to have subjugated a number of Vanni chieftains and most probably he himself was one of them. When his son Parakramabahu II (1236 -1270 A.D.), vanquished Magha the Vanni chiefs of Rajarata expressed their allegiance to the new ruler and obtained the king's blessings and approval to keep their principalities under their own control (Chulavamsa, LXXXVIII: 87 -89).

Thus, it is apparent that the Dambadeniya rulers were satisfied with just the expression of their allegiance and the periodic offering of tribute by the vanni chiefs to the king. The areas beyond the realm of the Dambadeniya rulers were allied to the Northern kingdom and particularly during the time of the Aryacakravattis, the vanni chiefs were under their firm control. Yet, the relationship of the vanni chiefs with the two main kingdoms does not appear to have been always that smooth. When an opportunity arose they did not fail to uphold their independence. For instance, even during the time of powerful Aryachkravartis some vanni chiefs revolted against the Northern rulers. Similarly, when Dambadeniya kingdom came under a Pandyan invasion during the reign of Vijayabahu IV (1271-1284 A.D.) the Sinhalese vanni chiefs rose in revolt. Though the Chulavamsa states that the king defeated the rebels, the relationship between the two parties always remained tenuous (Chulavamsa, XL: 31 -33).

When the Aryachkravartis gradually became powerful many Sinhalese vanni chiefs changed their allegiance to them. This situation became apparent during the time of the Gampola kings whose area of political authority was very much limited and the Jaffna kingdom was spreading fast, southwards. From this time until about the time of Parakramabahu VI (1412 - 1267AD)

of Kotte, who subjugated all vanni chiefs and unified the island this situation remained the same. Although S. Pathmanathan (2000:207ff) prefers to describe the nature of the state formation at the time as that of a 'segmentary state' the rising power of the vanni chieftains who had a fairly large area under their control and the manner in which they exercised their authority one can only say that the political situation may be best described as 'fragmentary state', instead.

### ***Working of the Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces Kotte under Parakramabahu VI and Later***

When the Jaffna kingdom was at the zenith of its power, the Southern kingdom at Gampola was at its lowest ebb. Evidently, Bhuvanekabahu IV was not in full control of the affairs of his kingdom as Parakramabahu V was ruling from Dadigama concurrently. When the capital was shifted to Gampola, the main reason behind that may have been its safe location. The Gampola politics were largely controlled by some political 'big men' like Alagakkonara and Senalankadhikara families. Alagakkonara, according to Ibn Batuta, the Arab traveler, was acting like a power unto himself and Senalankadhikara too, was a powerful force behind the throne. In fact, the Gampola rulers were so weak that they could not even face up to the challenge posed by the invading forces of Jaffna who had come up to Panadura in the South and the invaders were successfully dealt with by Alagakkonara who probably operated from Raigama. Scheming and intrigue had become the order of the day in the Gampola politics. Both Alagakkonaras and Senalankadhikaras were families possessing great wealth, who were involved in many acts of benevolence like the construction of grand religious edifices at important locations giving wide publicity to their benefactors. There was an obvious competition between these families for recognition and legitimization through popular religious

programs. The situation in Gampola was deteriorating rapidly and several centres of power controlled by different potentates were emerging. The literary and epigraphic records of the period speak of several potentates like *Prabhurajas* who had carved out niches for themselves in many parts of the Gampola kingdom and had shown only nominal allegiance to the centre, thereby contributing further to the rapidly shrinking authority of the Southern kingdom (Ray, 1960, 735).

This situation apparently encouraged Cheng-Ho, the Chinese admiral who led several naval expeditions to the western seas, to invade Sri Lanka. Cheng-Ho captured the royal family and took them to China. According to Paranavitana, Parakramabahu VI who was a scion of the ruling family, captured power at Raigama and then moved to Kotte which he made his capital in 1415 A.D. Whether he had the backing of the Chinese in his endeavor or not what is significant is that he used to send emissaries to the Chinese court periodically (Ray, 1960, 560 -565). In the first part of his long reign of 52 years Parakramabahu VI (1415 -1467), took time to consolidate his power in the Kotte kingdom which apparently included Southwest and the up-country (*uda-rata*). He also built up a powerful army and a naval force apparently preparing for an attack on Jaffna. As a preliminary measure Parakramabahu invaded the intermediary areas that were under vanni chiefs. After several tough battles some vanni chiefs were killed and others offered their allegiance to the king of Kotte. The invasion of Jaffna was led by prince Sapumal or Sembagapperumal, an adopted son of Parakramabahu. Both naval and land forces were used in the battle for the Northern kingdom. Thus, the island was re-united for the time after the collapse of Polonnaruva (Ray, 1960, 673-675). Towards the end of Parakramabahu's reign, Jotiya-situ the regional ruler of Kandy, raised a rebellion against the court of Kotte but was defeated (Ray, 1960: 676). What is significant about the

rebellion is that even a loyal regional ruler like Jotiya could turn against the centre the moment he thought the time was ripe to seek independence as the king was reaching the end of his reign. It also shows how tenuous the relationship between the centre and the regions. This is further proved by the changing situations in the North. Soon after the strong personality of Parakramabahu VI was removed even a person like Sembagapperumal who later became the ruler of Kotte, could not keep the Northern region much longer. Meanwhile, the vanni chiefs, too, withdrew their allegiance to Kotte and became independent, and Kandy too broke away from Kotte under one Sena-Sammata-Vikramabahu. Soon, the Kotte kingdom itself broke up into three independent kingdoms (Ray, 1969: 677 – 683), thus the country returning to a situation where a number of parallel centres of authority characterized the state formation.

### ***The Economy Changes: a Clear Shift of Emphasis***

The shift of the centre of power from the Rajarata where an intricate hydraulic system formed the basis of civilization to the Southwest of the country brought about a series of fundamental changes in the island's civilization. A clear shift of emphasis in the economic sphere is evident and the less dependence on irrigation based agriculture, as the irrigation system never recovered from the devastation and the neglect that followed the abandonment of Rajarata. As shown above, neither the Sinhala rulers of the South nor the Tamil rulers of the North had any firm control over most of the North-central plain where the majority of the reservoirs were located. With the diminution of the dependence on irrigation based agriculture, the rulers of the post Rajarata period had to move on to trade for state income. The emphasis on trade does not mean that it eclipsed the importance of agriculture in the 'wet zone' where most of the usual food crops could be grown. The rain fed agriculture was known to cultivators even

in the previous periods, and they only had to adapt themselves to the new climate and soil conditions: yet the area suitable for agriculture was relatively limited compared to the dry-zone. However, land taxes and other imposts and a share of its produce still remained a major portion of the income of the state.

Nevertheless, the shift of emphasis in the economy was accompanied by attention on the cultivation of commercial crops such as coconut, *jak*, cotton and some spices like cinnamon (Kiribamune, 1989: 74). Along with this new group of land-holders who owned land yielding commercial crops gained importance. The background to these changes cannot be explained merely in terms of the abandonment of the hydraulic civilization for a certain aspect of it has to be understood only when the rapid changes that were taking place in the Indian Ocean trade patterns are recognized. The Chinese who were hitherto relatively less involved in overseas trade had, by the end of the thirteenth century A.D., made a concerted effort to enter into the Indian Ocean trade in a big way, virtually wiping out the intermediaries as their vessels travelled direct to India and Iran (Kiribamune, 1989: 74) .

Meanwhile, the Muslim kingdoms in West Asia and Egypt too, were vying for a share in the East-west trade (7ff. Werake, 1989, 91ff) and as a consequence, the western coast of India and the Persian gulf assumed greater significance as major trading emporia. The Sri Lankan rulers of the post Polonnaruva era lost no time in making attempts to reap the benefits of the thriving overseas trade. The demand for Sri Lankan commodities like spices, gems, pearls, elephants ivory etc., never ceased. In fact, rulers like Buvanekabahu I of Yapahuva were keen to avoid the intermediaries and do trade with Egypt direct (Karunatilaka, 2001: 206).

The trading activity between the Southern kingdom of Sri Lanka and the Muslim world developed rapidly and dues collected at ports constituted an important segment of the ruler's income, and accordingly, the contest for the control of ports and trade centres as well as areas that provided many commodities too, became a deciding factor in the political fortunes of the country. It has been suggested that trade was apparently a prime consideration in the re-location of capital to the Western sea-board (Ray, 1960: 708). The significance that trade had assumed in the island's economy is also reflected in the political situation of the Post Rajarata period. As shown above the kingdom of North and the Southern kingdoms, were competing most of the time, first for the control of the pearl fisheries, then for the trading centres in the west coast. This situation helped regional potentates to carve out domains for themselves and exercise political control over them. Thus, although, the economy of the island in the medieval period still remained primarily agrarian based, a clear orientation towards mercantilism was evident, in that, traders and trading communities were assuming greater significance in society and the administrative system.

## **Social Formation: Religious and Cultural Trends in the Post Mature State Period**

### ***System of Ranking Caste System and Social Change***

As was pointed out earlier, the system of ranking in the early phase of Sri Lankan history depicted two parallel systems of ranking, one based on the traditional varna ideology and the other based on the economic and political status. By about the first century A.D., a clear re-alignment of social groups, in which certain sections of the old social order were no longer found mentioned in the inscriptions or literary sources. From this time onwards the frequently mentioned social division was that of

high birth (*ucca kula*) and low birth (*hina kula*). Thus, one's status of birth was the main criterion. The first group consisted of the *ksatriya*, *Brahmana* and the *gahapathis* – who were known in the previous period too, and the *hina-kula* consisted of service castes. Meanwhile, a *kulina* gentry too was emerging at least by about the fifth century A.D., if not earlier (Karunatilaka, 1988).

The shift of the centre of the civilization to the Southwest brought about a series of changes in the social formation too, and the caste system and ranking in particular, underwent significant structural changes, virtually assuming a totally new character. It is striking that caste becomes a subject frequently mentioned in both literary and epigraphic sources, an unprecedented phenomenon. One important development in late Anuradhapura times is the elevation of the royalty to a *ksatriya* status and this situation continued even down to the later periods. Thus, the royalty was moving far above the others in the social hierarchy. Another important development is the rise of several other social groups which hardly found mentioned in the previous periods. One is *govikula* which for the first time, referred to in the time of Nissankamalla. At that time, they were so powerful that even Nissankamalla felt his position threatened by them. Most probably, even most of the military leaders of Parakramabahu's time later belonged to the *govi-kula*.

However, an important development in the period under review was the rise of a new caste group known as *velanda-kula* or merchant caste from about the Dambadeniya times. Many literary works and inscriptions from that time onwards begin to enumerate the four *varnas* as *raja*, *bamunu*, *velanda* and *govi* and the *hina-jati* or those of low birth is mentioned as a group outside the pale of the four *varnas*. This division is somewhat different from the four *varnas* of the Brahmanic system where *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* are the component groups.

In the Sri Lankan scheme, what is noteworthy is the relegation of the *govi-kula* that was the same as the *gahapati* in the previous period to the fourth place and the rise of a new group known as *velandakula* or merchant caste, taking the former's position in the hierarchical order. In fact, it is very likely that the merchant groups too, belonged initially to the *gahapati* group whose title underwent a structural change possibly towards the end of the Anuradhapura period or slightly later to *govi-kula* (Karunatilaka, 2001: 201) and they were a powerful group in the Polonnaruva period and evidently were a prominent section of the elite who could even aspire to be rulers.

Why was such a powerful group like the *govikula* relegated to the fourth place and the *velandakula* emerged as the next in line after *raja* and *bamunu*? This can be attributed to the importance that trade began to achieve in the post Polonnaruva times. Many of the grand religious benefactions of the period were constructed by the people of the *velandakula* gentry. They were only second to the royalty in lavish donations to religious institutions. Later, in the Gampola period some members of the merchant caste were even elevated to the positions in regional leadership and others like Alagakkonaras even assumed rulership. The changes in the trade pattern and Sri Lanka depending heavily on trade as delineated above, may have benefitted the merchant caste to amass wealth and then seek political powers as well.

Another important aspect of the caste system of this period is its petrification. This trend could be seen even from the time of Polonnaruva rulers when military leaders like Ayasmata who held a high position in the power structure, during the time of queen Kalyanavati (1202-1208 A.D.) is said to have separated the four castes that had become impure through mixing and had a text book on law prepared (Chulavamsa LXXX:41). This clearly shows that there was a concerted effort

on the part of the ruling class to ensure that caste rules and ethos were properly adhered to, and that it also points to petrification of caste (Karunatilaka, 1994: 123). The fact that there was a coded law relating to caste even in the earlier times is proved by a reference in a twelfth century inscriptions which mentions that when a dispute arose between a washermen and a goldsmiths about their cast duties, a committee consisting of five most senior members of the royal court looked into the matter and gave their ruling having studied the prevailing laws and customs (Epigraphia Zeylanica III: 32). This also demonstrates how deep-rooted the caste consciousness in the society was and, that even those groups that were treated as being outside the main four castes were contesting each other to ensure their ritual status was properly recognized.

### ***Buddhist Relations between Sri Lanka and South India***

Though, Buddhism achieved quick success in Sri Lanka as a new religion making a rapid expansion in the first few centuries, the same cannot be said about its condition in South India. In fact, Buddhism does not appear to have made a considerable presence in many parts of South India. In certain parts of the Andhra region it had been flourishing in the early centuries of the Christian era, but in Tamil country it could not make much headway until about the third and fourth centuries A.D. Sri Lankan Buddhist monks appear to have maintained a close relationship with the South Indian Buddhist Centres in Andhra and monastic centres like Kaveripattinam and Kanchi in Tamil Nadu. Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka travelled through these regions while on their way on pilgrimage to North India as early as the pre-Christian times. Sri Lankan monks could always find refuge in South Indian monasteries in times of distress and some South Indian monks, too, travelled to Sri Lanka (Liyanagamage, 1993:

74 also see Mahavamsa XXVI, 11:3) strengthening their religious contacts.

In Tamil Nadu, in addition Kaveripattinam, Kanchipuram and Vanci were among the major Buddhist centres that came into prominence from about the third/fourth centuries A.D. A Prakrit inscription at Nagarjunikonda in Eastern Andhra refers to a Buddhist vihara complex with many monasteries belonging to different Buddhist Nikayas. It also refers to Theravada monks from Thambapanni (Sri Lanka) living there and also to a Sihala vihara. This clearly shows that Sri Lankan monks had permanent presence there and that they were also involved in the propagation of the Dhamma (Gunawardana, 2005, 56-61). The relations between the Buddhists of Andhra and Sri Lanka were further strengthened with some Andhra scholar monks visiting Sri Lanka for studying and translating Buddhist commentaries into Pali, and among them Buddhagosa was the most famous. Another commentator Buddhappiya a contemporary of Buddhagosa was a resident of the Tamil country and is described as belonging to the Tambapanni Nikaya (Sect). Dhammapla, a monk of Sri Lankan origin is described as a resident of Badarattha in the modern Kaddalur in Tamil Nadu (Ray, 1959: 391). Accordingly, there appear to have been a close co-operation between monks of Sri Lanka and those of different parts of South India involving themselves not only in the propagation of the Dhamma, but also in scholarly activities like translating and writing of Buddhist texts. Importantly, Pali remained as a common language among them, and of course Theravada was the common bond.

Paranavitana identified two distinct stages of Buddhist history in Tamil Nadu, the early phase being the pre-Pallava period (400-650 A.D.) and the second which coincided with the peak period of the Chola imperial power. The Tamil work *Manimekalai* which Pathmanathan prefers to place in the sixth century A.D.,

refers to the island of *Manipallavan* located between Northern Sri Lanka and Tamil country which was a sacred site where monks and lay devotees from Tamilakam and Ilam assembled and experienced the removal of obstacles against the goal of enlightenment (Pathmanathan, 2006: 9). The *Manimekalai* also mentions of the wandering Sri Lankan monks in Kanci while Hiuen-Tsang, the seventh century Chinese traveler states that when he visited Kanci, there were 300 Sri Lankan Buddhist monks at a monastery in the Southern parts of the city (Pathmanathan, 2006: 9-10).

Under the Pallavas Buddhism came under severe competition first from Jainism and then from Visnavism and Saivism which came up with a new vigour. The Vaisnavas and Saivas behaved even violently against Buddhists who were unable to withstand the onslaught of the Hindus and could not pose a challenge to the new threat. Even the rulers took the side of the Hindus. Buddhism was thus rapidly disappearing from the Pallava kingdom and the major Buddhist centres like Kanci and Kaveripattanam lost their vitality (Gunawardana, 1979, 262).

However, Buddhism regained its popularity under the imperial Cholas. During this time Nagapatnam on the Coromandal Coast became the foremost Buddhist centre. This vihara established by a Sailendra ruler of the Sri Vijaya kingdom, received patronage of successive Chola rulers and grew in reputation not only in South Asia but also in South-East Asia. Nagapatnam situated fairly close to Sri Lanka continued as a major Buddhist centre of South India where scholars from many regions including Sri Lanka visited. (Paranavitana, 1944: 17-25).

One important aspect that needs to be looked into is whether the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils has always been one that was rivalry and antagonism towards each other throughout history. This seems to be the impression

one gets from the manner in which some traditional local histories particularly, those written after about the end of the Rajarata civilization. However, the early Pali chronicles do not have such an attitude towards the Tamils and in fact, the Mahavamsa in particular referring to the early Tamil rulers like Sena and Guttika and Elara describes them in very complementary terms and pays tribute to them as just and concerned rulers.

This conciliatory attitude takes a different tone when describing the Chola invasion of Rajendra I in 1017 AD. This invasion is described using some harsh language in the Chulavamsa. It states “from the spot where they disembarked oppressing the mass of inhabitants, the Chola army advanced to Rohana... and they violently destroyed here and there all the monasteries like blood sucking *yakkhas*, they took all the treasures of Lanka for themselves” (Chulavamsa LV: 15-22). This tone and language of the author of Chulavamsa is understandable in that he describes the suffering inflicted upon the people and the religion and the destruction that befell the country.

Yet, the language used in the description of the invasion of Kalinga Magha who invaded Sri Lanka in 1215 is unprecedented in the entire Sri Lankan literature of the pre-Colonial times. The Chulavamsa describing the invasion mentions that Magha arrived in the island along with an army of 24,000 Kerala soldiers – later raised to 40,000 – having joined by Tamil soldiers too. The Chulavamsa as well as the other Sinhala chronicles report on the cruelty unleashed by the invaders on the entire Sri Lankan society. They destroyed monasteries and stupas and molested the sangha; many books were strewn all over. They are accused of all sorts of atrocities committed even on ordinary people. They are accused of robbing people of their garments, ornaments and corrupted the good morals of family, cutoff heads and feet of people and destroyed many houses and took away many

animals. Further they put *fetters* on the wealthy and tortured them and took their possessions. Moreover they forced people to adopt a false faith and brought great confusion into the four castes. (Chulavamsa, 1925 LXXX: 60 – 79, Pujavaliya, 1961: 108 – 109, also see, Liyanagamage, 1993: 60 – 61)

The language used in both the Chulavamsa and Pujavaliya is extremely harsh and impregnated with emotion. Another literary work of the 13<sup>th</sup> century *Upasaka – Janalankara* calls Magha's invasion "Tamil conflagration" that compelled the monks to seek refuge in South India (Liyanagamage, 2000, 1 – 9). The hostile attitude of the Sri Lankan authors is not surprising when considering the unprecedented catastrophe that befell the Sri Lankan society. What is notable about these accounts is that they bring into focus only the political aspect of the Sri Lanka South India relations and little attention is paid to other aspects. However, this lacuna is somewhat compensated for by some other literary works of the period. A. Liyanagamage, in his detailed study of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Pali work *Upasaka – Janalankara* draws attention to many areas of religio-cultural relations between Sri Lanka and South India. He draws attention to the accounts on some monks who sought refuge in the monasteries of South India during Magha's invasion. These monks maintained close contacts with their Sri Lankan counterparts back home even after their departure and when Parakramabahu II had decided to reform the Order of the sangha he invited many respected Chola bhikkus "who had moral discipline and versed in the Three *Pitakas* and established harmony between the two Orders" (Chulavamsa, 1925, LXXXIV: 9 – 10).

The Chola kingdom had experienced a revival of Buddhism under the imperial Cholas. The Chola *mahatheras* like Dipankara and Kassapa were held in high regard in Sri Lanka too, the Sinhalese monks were proud of their Tamil counterparts. Thus the author

of the Jinalankara, thera Buddharakkhita refers to himself as one who received consecration at the hands of eminent scholars of Sri Lanka and in the Choliya (country) Tambarattha (Liyanagamage, 2000: 332 – 333). The intimate relationship between the Sri Lankan and South Indian monks continued down to the later times. There were several Theravada monasteries flourishing in the Chola Pandya countries in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and beyond. Their significance lies mainly in their contribution to the study and the propagation of the Dhamma at a time Theravada was almost extinct in almost all parts of Northern India and the Deccan. Their contribution to Pali literature was considerable. They compiled treatises like *Mohavicchedani*, *Vimativinodani*, *Rupasiddhi* and *Pajjamadhu*.

It is noteworthy that several of those monks who were living in the Chola country were from Sri Lanka. A certain Ananda Mahathera who hailed from Sri Lanka is described as a monk with immense influence in the South Indian Buddhist fraternity. Pathmanathan basing his assumption on a fragmentary inscription of South India belonging to the twelfth century thinks that this monk was the leading figure in the purification of the sangha in the Chola country. This intimate relationship between the Sri Lankan and South Indian monks was further strengthened during the time of Parakramabahu IV (1302 – 1326 AD) who ruled from Kurunegala. He appointed an outstanding Chola monk as his royal preceptor who is described in the Chulavamsa as a self controlled person versed in various tongues and familiar philosophic works (Chulavamsa LXXXIX, 67 – 68). The contribution of the Tamil Buddhist monks to Buddhist literature was considerable as is evident from the fairly large body of Pali literature attributed to them. In the same manner their contribution to general Tamil literature too, is significant. Among the works produced by Tamil Buddhist writers mention may be made of the *Kundalakesi*

which was meant for the propagation of the dhamma. The *Pimpicarakkatai* was another such work. The *Virasoliyam*, a treatise on Tamil grammar and poetics written by a Buddhist author is believed to have influenced the composition of the famous Sinhalese grammar *Sidat-sangarava* (Pathmanathan, 2006: 19). It is important that a fairly large number of South Indian words and phrases began to get into the Sinhala language from about the seventh century onwards and this became widespread from about the eleventh century contributing in a considerable way to the growth of the Sinhala language (Dhammaratana 2001, 46ff).

An important inscription dated in the reign of Kulottunga III (1178 – 1216 AD) of the Chola dynasty and two other inscriptions belonging to the time of Maravarman Sundara Pandaya (circa 1236 AD) and another of the time of Jatavarman Vira Pandaya (circa 1253) to a certain trader guild named *Tennilankai – valancaiyar* operating in those two countries. Apparently this trader guild belonged to Sri Lankans or of Sri Lankan origin as its name reveals. What is interesting is that this trader guild has been operating for a fairly long time perhaps with several branches in two of the main rival countries in South India. They have been carrying out their operations across the borders without any let or hindrance. What is more significant is the periods in which they were operating in South India. On the one hand the Cholas and the Sinhalese were not at all in good terms in the thirteenth century and even the Pandayan behavior towards Sri Lanka in the thirteenth century was that of confrontation.

Thus it is clear that, in spite of the invasions and counter invasions and the destruction caused by the invaders of the island, the religious and trade relations between the two countries of South India and Sri Lanka went on undisturbed. There was no animosity towards the Tamils on the part of the Sri Lankans and

similarly no untoward feelings against the Sri Lankans who were living and doing trade in South India. The close relationship that existed between the Buddhist Orders of the two regions which drew patronage and reverence of the rulers and the gentry on both sides needs special mention. Though some Sri Lankan chroniclers were critical of the Tamils when describing their invasions and atrocities which is quite understandable in the context they compiled their works, the same is not true about the religious and trade relations between the two regions.

### ***Immigrations and New Ethnic Groups***

Immigration to the island from different parts of the neighboring regions has been a continuous process in the history of Sri Lanka. Even the first colonists are said to be immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent. Sri Lanka's central location was an attraction for the migrants from both east and west; some came as traders while others were religious personalities or members of invading forces. Some others were brought in as mercenaries. Many others were refugees fleeing from political turmoil or simply coming as ordinary migrants looking for better prospects. As a result, a sizable South Indian population was living in the island even at the time of the Chola invasion. Many religious shrines stand clear testimony to the presence of a large Tamil population particularly around ports and townships. The presence of different mercantile communities too in the last days of Polonnaruva was also reported. They included corporations like *Valanjiyars* and *Nanadesis* originating in the Subcontinent. It is noteworthy that some Aryacakravartti rulers of Jaffna carried out a deliberate policy of bringing in South Indian migrant groups to start settlements in the areas under their control (Indrapala, 2000: 30-31).

There was also a strong Kalinga population in the Polonnaruva kingdom who were closely connected to the royal

court. The Kalingas ultimately became a powerful force in later times of the Polonnaruva kingdom (Ray, 1960, 521). Meanwhile, many Indian dignitaries who came to the island were well received by the local leaders and got assimilated into the society as preceptors, administrators or as religious leaders but certain sections like some Tamil groups remained separate entities maintaining their ethnic and cultural identity.

Although the traditional histories only have an occasional reference to the immigrant groups, the *Kadaim-Pot* or boundary books some of which were prepared as early as the fourteenth century contain valuable information in regard to such immigrant groups in the medieval times. Most of these references are to those immigrants from different parts of India, especially to those from Eastern India, who came after about the fourteenth century and those migrations coincided with the Muslim invasions to that part of the Sub-continent. The *Kadaim Pot* also refer to the migrants from the *Malala* country which may be recognized as the Malay Peninsula or some other part of Southeast Asia (Abewardhana, 1978: 21 and 137). One of the main reasons for these migrations must have been either the population pressure or pressures brought in by invasions. One example is the migration from Bengal and Orissa where many were affected and displaced as a consequence of the Muslim invasions in the thirteenth century.

### ***The Muslims***

One of the most important migrant groups in the island during the post-Polonnaruva period was the Muslims. Though the Arabs gave the leadership to the expansion of Islam, the movement was well contributed by many ethnic groups of different countries and they were all known as Muslims. The Arabs were in this part of the world as traders even before the birth of Islam

and however, the Arabs were the first Muslim group to establish contacts with Sri Lanka even as early as the ninth century A.D. The Arabs were aware of the island, its location and the importance in its trade. By the tenth century, the Arab traders and pilgrims began to arrive in Sri Lanka and the earliest Arab settlement in the island must have begun around the same time, as is evident from some tomb-stones erected over Muslim burials at several sites such as Colombo, Mannar and Anuradhapura (Shukri, 2000: 377-378). The trade links between the Arabs and Sri Lankans began to grow rapidly, and by the thirteenth century A.D., it began to flourish as is evident from a letter sent by Bhuvanekabahu I to the ruler of Cairo soliciting his agreement to develop direct trade relations between the two countries (Codrington, 1919).

The traders were not the only Arab travelers to Sri Lanka. Many pilgrims too, arrived in the island along with their clergy. The Fourteenth century traveler Ibn Batuta gives a detailed account of the island, its rulers and Arab traders. By this time Muslim traders were involved in the gem trade. He also speaks of some Muslim settlements in Sri Lanka. He visited Devinuvara and Beruvala where he found many Muslim traders. Batuta, adding further, states that Colombo was a main port which was controlled by a certain *Jalasti* who was most probably a Muslim. As this was a period of political turmoil in Sri Lanka, this was a possibility. Batuta also gives a good description of the Jaffna kingdom. He says that 'Sultan of Jaffna' the Aryacakravartti ruler, had ships of his own and was involved in sea piracy. The pearl fishing was under him and he controlled some cinnamon land as well. He adds that the Muslim traders carried a lucrative trade with Jaffna too (Hussain 1934: 219ff).

The Muslim traders and their settlements around main seaports find references in the fifteenth century Sinhala literary works as well. The Sandesa poems of the Kotte period speak

of Muslim women and men at Beruwala and other places (Gira Sandesa - vivaranaya, verse 74). It is quite evident that the relations between the Muslim communities and the local population of the island were fairly cordial. As the Muslim traders did not bring in their woman-folk here, they espoused local women and settled down. It is likely that some of them learnt the local languages while others stuck to Arabic or Persian, but an important question arises as to why the Muslim population adopted Tamil language as their mother tongue. A possible answer lies again in the Indian Ocean trade at a time the Muslim traders were heavily involved. As is also evident from the Trilingual inscription of Galle which was written in the Chinese, Tamil and Persian, all being the languages prominently used by traders. Tamil being a common language in the Bay of Bengal region trade from the time of the Cholas, the traders who came to Sri Lanka too must have used it as their trading language and later it was adopted as their mother tongue.

## **The Kandyan Kingdom**

### ***A Besieged State: The Beginnings***

The Kingdom of Kandy or the *Udarata* kingdom first came into the forefront as a regional kingdom under Parakramabahu VI (1412 – 1467 A.D.) whose ruler was Jotiya situ who rebelled against the centre seeking independence from Kotte, but the rebellion was crushed. However, Kandy got its opportunity, during the reign of Vijayabahu (1467 - 1478) when there were widespread revolts in many parts of the island. One Senasammata Vikramabahu emerged as an independent ruler probably by 1474 A. D. The Kandyan kingdom initially consisted of the Four Korales, Uva and the Eastern low lands between Trincomalee and *Menik-ganga* in the south in addition to the *Kandauda-pasrata*, the last being the core-region of the kingdom. It has been argued that the

military leadership described as feudal levies, was the true force behind the kingdom and its ruler Senasammata Vikramabahu. He may have been chosen by those military leaders known as the *Bandaras*. Perhaps Vikramabahu sought legitimation of his power through his close relationship with the *Bandaras* of whom the military leadership must have consisted (Abeyasinghe, 1995: 141 - 142).

The Kotte kingdom always looked at Kandy with suspicion and made attempts to regain control. Its attempts at times were successful but the Kandyan ruler always escaped total subjugation by Kotte with renouncing its claims to sovereignty. However, Kotte with its rich resources and manpower always remained the main threat to the survival of the free Kandyan kingdom. The internal conflicts in the Kotte kingdom after 1521 A.D., gave Kandy a breathing space, but soon, Sitavaka having captured most of the territory of former Kotte, posed a serious threat to Kandy in the 1560s. Mayadunne, the ruler of Sitavaka though led several invasions to Kandy with limited success. However, his son Rajasingha I with the support of some Kandyan leaders invaded Udarata and conquered it in 1581. From that time up to 1591 Kandy lost its status as an independent kingdom. Nevertheless, Vimaladharmasuriya who came to power in Kandy with the backing of the Portuguese defended his territory against Rajasingha in battle and made Kandy a free country again 1591. Having married Dona Catherina the daughter of the former King of Kandy, Karalliyedde Bandara, he legitimized his claim to kingship.

### ***A State of Siege: Kandy, Kotte and the Portuguese***

Though the threat to Kandy from Sitavaka diminished with its disintegration subsequent to the death of Rajasingha I in 1593, the Portuguese who had become the new overlords of Kotte emerged as the new threat. The Portuguese always treated

Vimaladharmasuriya as a rebel and a traitor who deprived their moment of opportunity to bring Kandy too, under their wings. So the threat to the survival of Kandy remained unchanged though the source changed. The Portuguese also made several attempts to conquer Kandy but failed and this proved to the Kandyan ruler that he alone was unable to ensure the safety of his kingdom and hence, decided to turn towards the Dutch to counter the Portuguese. Yet it did not materialize during his life time.

Vimaladharmasuriya's successor Senarat too, was unable to resist the pressures of the Portuguese and their invasions caused severe destruction and mayhem in the Kandyan territories. However, the real strength of the Sinhalese was demonstrated by those who carried out incessant revolts in the Portuguese held territories. The main objective of both Vimaladharmasuriya and Senarat was safeguarding the territories in their control, but made no attempt to dislodge the Portuguese from the low country (Abeyasinghe, 1966, Chapter 2). Therefore, the Kandyan kingdom always remained in a stage of siege as it was surrounded from almost every direction and the Portuguese could invade it at will. Senarat's overt and covert support for the rebels in the littoral made the Portuguese rule there a near impossibility. The success of the rebels even shook Senarat's resolve as they threatened his own rule. Therefore, he withdrew his support to them signed a peace treaty with the Portuguese. Senarat went a long way to obtain the Portuguese recognition of the right of the Kandyan kingdom to function as a free state.

### ***Kandy Becomes Aggressive: Rajasingha I***

Senarat's son, and successor, Rajasingha I deviating from the path taken by his predecessors who directed their external policy only to safeguard the security interests of the Kandyan territory. Rajasingha made a bold attempt from the inception to oust the

Portuguese from the island. He took steps to expand his kingdom to the east and north east covering areas up to Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Having realized that without the backing of a naval power it was impossible to remove the Portuguese he ventured to approach the Dutch. Thus Rajasingha added a new dimension to the Kandyan policy towards the Portuguese (Goonewardena 1958: 18 – 19 and 25 – 36). He acted with a new vigor after defeating the Portuguese invasion of his territories in 1630 and Kandy, for the first time, was on the offensive. The Kandyan troops attacked and captured many Portuguese fortresses but failed to take Colombo. This again proved to Rajasingha that without the support of a foreign naval power it would not be possible for him to get rid of the Portuguese completely. So he approached the Dutch who were willing to support him and the two sides signed a treaty in 1637 with the objective of the expulsion of the Portuguese from the entire island. This paved the way for the ultimate removal of the Portuguese from Sri Lanka in 1658 (Abeysinghe, 1995, 161 – 165). The Dutch having replaced the Portuguese in their former territories, contrary to the wishes of Rajasingha I they continued to occupy their captured territories ignoring Rajasingha's objections. Though Rajasingha contested the Dutch occupation as illegal, the latter were determined to consolidate their power in the littoral and continue to control those areas. Towards the latter part of Rajasingha's rule there was public displeasure and revolt in his kingdom over his conduct of the affairs of the state. The Dutch made use of this opportunity to annex several areas under the Kandyan kingdom in 1665. Again it seemed as if the Dutch were surrounding the Kandyan kingdom from all fronts. Yet the king in 1670 counter attacked and captured all the territories he had lost. Rajasingha's many wars were fought for a purpose and he was successful in preserving the independence and integrity of his kingdom. He was also able

to get rid of the Portuguese though the Dutch stepped into their place.

The cessation of hostilities and the dawn of a period of relative calm that prevailed in the Kandyan region continued even under Rajasingha's son and successor Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687 – 1707). Neither the new ruler nor the Dutch preferred war over peace and as a result, the Kandyan boundaries became fixed. The peaceful atmosphere in the country offered an ideal opportunity for Vimaladharmasuriya to consolidate the royal authority over his territories, but he made no serious effort to do so. Therefore, the power always remained in the hands of a few members of the aristocracy. The king was able to obtain the Dutch help to bring in monks from Burma to restore the upasampada or the Buddhist Order in the country. He also effected repairs to the Kelaniya temple which was in the heart of the Dutch territory to the annoyance of the foreign rulers. Yet, it was a very popular move among the Buddhists of the entire Sri Lanka. Though this was a severe embarrassment to the Dutch they tolerated it in favor of uninterrupted trade with Kandy. However, all the king's dealings with the outside world had to be channeled through the Dutch as the latter did not permit the use of the island's sea ports freely, thus reviving another stage of the besieged state though in a milder form. Narendrasingha (1707-1739 AD) ascended the throne at a tender age of nineteen but his reign was marred by popular discontent. Two rebellions that erupted during his rule were ruthlessly put down. The king's playful behavior and general lack of support among the populace did not permit him to formulate a clear-cut foreign policy. Narendrasingha was the last of the Sinhala rulers of the Kandyan dynasty and after him the throne passed on to his brother-in-law Vijayarajasingha (1639 -1647 AD) who began the Nayakkar dynasty (Devaraja, 1995: 188 -209).

The Nayakkars being foreigners had little popular support initially among the Kandyan people but their lavish benevolence to Buddhism helped strengthen their power base. Except Srivickramarajasingha, all the other rulers of the dynasty were generally popular among their subjects. The Kandyan Sinhalese aristocracy was always divided over supporting the Nayakkars, and there were several attempts at removing them from power. The Kandyan aristocracy was also divided over the country's approach to the Dutch. While there was a faction that supported peace with them others wanted to get rid of the Dutch (Devaraja, 1995, 296).

The relations between Kandy and the Dutch under Nayakkars were, generally one of appeasement but on a few occasions there was open confrontation. During the time of Kirti Sri Rajasingha in 1760, when there was discontent and open rebellion in the Dutch areas, the king sent in his troops to back the rebels. They achieved many initial successes and managed to drive the Dutch out of many of their fortresses and outposts. At one point the Kandyans looked as if they were going to restrict the Dutch to Colombo, but with fresh reinforcements coming from India, and the general discontent among the Sinhalese troops led to the abandonment of the campaign. The Dutch ultimately recovered all their lost territory. This was the last attempt by the Kandyans to expel the Dutch from the island. It was once again proved that without the naval support, the total defeat of the foreigners was impossible. From that point onwards, the relations between the two parties never returned to normalcy. In 1766, the Dutch invaded the Kandyan territory and forced a treaty upon the Nayakkar ruler. As a result, Kandy had to cede a fairly large territory to the Dutch. Especially a strip of land with four miles width around the entire island had to be handed over to the Dutch, effectively encircling the Kandyan territory depriving the Kandyans having access to sea at any point. Yet the four mile rule

never effected in actual practice, but at least in theory it made the Kandyan kingdom completely landlocked and the siege was complete.

### ***Kandyan Administration and Social Structure***

For Robert Knox, the seventeenth century English prisoner in Kandy the king of the Sinhalese enjoyed absolute power, “he ruled as he wished and his own head was his only councilor (Knox, 1911: 98). Not only Knox but for many writers on Kandy the power of the king seemed beyond challenge. The theoretical position of the Kandyan monarch may have been something closer to this. The king was the highest judicial officer of the state, he alone had the power to appoint, promote or dismiss state officials. He was the guardian of Buddhism and by extension was the patron of the sangha. Such was the theoretical position of the king but in actual practice the king of Kandy was far from being an all powerful despot. Though the king could exercise supreme power that power was not personal to an individual; the authority of the king was controlled by several checks and balances embedded in the Kandyan system to check abuse.

The ruler was bound by conventions, and customary laws that came down the ages. Another limitation upon the king was the royal court which consisted of the highest officials of the state. The king was expected to listen to the advice of his ministers. The highest ranking officers of the state were the two adigars, the disaves, the mohottala of the palace and the rate-ralas who were treated as ministers. Important matters were often referred to the ministers and they conveyed their decision back to the ruler. The unanimous decisions of the ministers were hardly disregarded by the ruler. The sangha was another pressure-group that wielded immense power in society and they too, could act as a check on the king’s conduct (Dewaraja, 1995: 321 – 322).

As was pointed out earlier, one of the most powerful groups in the Kandyan kingdom from its inception were the *Bandaras* from amongst whom the high officials of the state were recruited. They were often related to each other through marriage and blood-relationship. In fact the *Bandaras* who later came to be known as *radala* or the aristocracy, were basically an endogamous group that gradually grew into a class by themselves. The highest officials of the state were appointed by the king but usually they came from a select band of *radalas*. All lower offices were normally appointed by the *adigars* and the *disaves*. This system was almost duplicated in the army as well, where the highest ranks were held by the highest officials of the state. The state officials were normally remunerated in land on *paraveni*, *pamunu* or *nindagam* tenure. Usually the military service was remunerated through the granting of land allotments. In return, all subjects were expected to serve the king. The military service was essential for all able-bodied adult males. The *rajakariya* or compulsory service to the state was also closely bonded to the armed service (Dewaraja, 1995: 320).

The caste system and the positions in the state had an inextricable connection. The highest positions always went to the *radala* caste or to those of the *govikula*, but the king had the right to promote or dismiss any official. Only the lowest in the administrative structure were held by the 'low caste' people. One important element in the Kandyan administration was the number of departments known as *badda*. As Dewaraja has pointed out 'authority of the *badda* over the caste groups and its services were all embracing and penetrated into the *disavani*'s (Dewaraja, 1995: 322 and 335).

The Kandyan caste structure was primarily occupation based and geared to provide various services to the state and society. An individual's caste was decided at birth and

endogamous, and there was no room for mobility (Peiris, 1956). All artisan and service groups had been organized under different baddas or departments and the caste system ensured the proper functioning of the administrative system as every caste group or sub-caste was entrusted with a particular task.

All officials were expected to pay their tribute to the ruler as decided, the high officials also paid their tribute in kind or money. Trade, first, with South India and then with the Portuguese and later with the Dutch and the English developed as a main source of income for the state, officials and the producers alike though it was considered a state monopoly. The involvement of the royal officials in trade with the foreigners was a lucrative business for them and it was so much the case with the Nayakkar relatives of the king. They were heavily involved in trade with the Dutch earning large profits. Thus, the wealth, power and the influence of the Kandyan nobility were immense and the administrative system remained highly bureaucratic right down to the lowest level (Dewaraja, 1995: 333 – 338).

It has been argued that the Kandyan society had been 'organized in principles closely resembling those of European feudalism' (Leach, 1959: 11–17). The outside appearance of the Kandyan society may create the impression that there was a resemblance to the European feudal system in certain respects. For instance, the pyramidal nature of the organizational structure of the administration and the army and the granting of land in lieu of services to the state may look like the characteristics resembling those prevailed in Europe. Yet the administrative structure of the Kandyan state was highly centralized unlike in the feudal Europe and the king always appointed officials up to the regional level. The adigars and the disaves made the middle and lower level appointments but in theory the king could always intervene in any appointment (Dewaraja, 1995: 321). With regard

to land, as much as the king had the power to grant it he also had the power to withdraw it and transfer it to another if necessary. Though the paraveni land was for perpetual enjoyment of the donee, in extreme cases, the king had the right to withdraw that too.

Another important aspect of the Kandyan economy was trade and the use of money. Normally, in a feudal society, trade becomes minimal and money circulation is virtually non-existent. Once trade gets re-activated the feudal system begins to crumble. In the Kandyan society, as pointed out earlier, major additional source of income to the aristocracy. The stimulation first came from the Portuguese and trade got accelerated with the Dutch. In fact, when compared with the rest of the country, the Kandyan region was at a disadvantage in regard to the cultivation of food crops especially paddy. The farmer would have had to bear enormous hardship in preparing suitable land for paddy cultivation mainly because of the physical features of the Kandyan landscape. On the one hand, the paddy growing areas of the north central plain, especially the Nuvara-Kalaviya, a region that was under Kandy from the seventeenth century onwards also may not have been able to put out a big surplus in agriculture because of its limited availability of irrigation facilities. On the other hand, the increasing demand for cash crops like cinnamon, pepper, aricanut, etc which could bring a considerable income were grown in many parts of the Kandyan kingdom. Therefore, trade being of special significant to the state, the aristocracy and the producers, grew as a steady means of earning cash. Therefore, as S.B.D. de Silva has argued 'it may be unwise to underestimate the levels of trade and money circulation in Kandyan society' (de Silva, 1983: 211 – 212). Above all, the Kandyan caste system was extremely rigid and well regulated, remained a main factor that could stand against any feudal tendencies.

## **Ethnic Identities, Religious Tolerance and Social Harmony: Multi-Ethnic Characters in Vogue**

### ***Ethnic Identities***

The Kandyan kingdom at its inception must have been a fairly homogeneous society consisting mainly of the Sinhalese with a few Tamils and Muslims living in the townships. Nevertheless, the situation changed gradually and Kandy had to absorb several different ethnic and religious groups whose cultural background was different from that of the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese rulers of Kandy at least from the time of Rajasingha II, were in the habit of bringing in wives from South Indian royal houses, but there is no evidence to believe that a large number of South Indian nationals accompanied brides to Kandy. Yet, from the time of Viraparkrama Narendrasingha a sizeable South Indian community began to live in Kandy and some close relatives of the queens were beginning to hold important positions in administration. Under the Nayakkar dynasty the number of relatives of the kings and queens also increased substantially and some could not even speak Sinhala. Tamil was increasingly used in the royal court as well. By the time of Vijayarajasingha South Indian Tamils were holding important positions in the royal court and they developed into an organized and powerful group who even dared to challenge the Sinhala aristocracy. They also increased their power by amassing more wealth through trade (Dewaraja, 1995: 284 – 288).

Tamil language was also getting importance not only in the court circles but also in society in general. The change of attitude of society towards people of South Indian Tamil origin could be seen in the interest shown in Tamil literature by the Sinhala literati, and their commitment to translate some Tamil works into Sinhala. Among the major literary figures in translating Tamil works were persons like Kirimetiya mudali, Abhayakon Vijayasundara mudali, and Sali-ele Maniratana a Buddhist monk.

The main themes for the translation came primarily from Tamil Buddhist literature. Kirimetiya translated the *Maha Padaranga Jataka* a Buddhist story not found in the *jataka* collection. He also translated the *Vetalankata* into Sinhala. Sali-ele Maniratana's Amarasaya was the Sinhala translation of a Tamil literary work on the life of a South Indian king. The famous *Mahadanamutta* stories were adaptations of some stories in a Tamil work known as *Paramartakuruvin-kata* (Sannasgala, 1964: 364 – 365 and Dhammaratana, 1963: 113 – 115).

The Muslims in Kandy must have arrived as traders and gradually settled down in townships and near important entry points to the kingdom. When the fairly large Muslim community in the Kotte kingdom was threatened with expulsion by the Portuguese in the mid sixteenth century, they must have thought it safer to move to the interior. However, mass migration of the Muslim groups to the Kandyan territory first took place during the time of king Senarat when a group of 4000 Muslims who had been expelled from Kotte arrived there. They were accommodated in the Batticaloa area and some others may have settled down in the strategically important hilly areas of the Kandyan kingdom (de Silva, 1966: 114 – 116). Most probably many of them married local women and settled down in the Kandyan territories. It appears that a fair number of Muslims joined the king's army in different capacities while some others served in different departments of state like, *madige*, *kottal*, *kuruve*, etc (Dewaraja, 1995: 306 – 307). The Sinhalese allowed the Muslims to follow their religious and cultural practices but also made an attempt at paving way for their absorption into the Kandyan society. The kings gave them positions in the administration and bestowed upon them some *govi-kula* family titles or *vasagam*. But they wished to preserve their cultural and religious identity and to some extent the ethnic identity as well.

## **Religious Tolerance**

As much as the Muslims and the Tamils in the Kandyan territories enjoyed the freedom to follow their religion and carry on their religio-cultural practices the followers of other religions like the Roman Catholicism were permitted not only to follow their religion but also to propagate and convert others into their religion, sometimes, with the full backing of the ruler. As Dona Catherina had been brought up in a Christian environment from her childhood, her children like Rajasingha II were also tutored by some Christians. This must have conditioned his mind not to oppose the Christians. Rajasingha adopted a tolerant attitude towards all faiths. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians of all denominations were allowed to freely practice their religion in his realm' (Knox quoted in Dewaraja, 1995: 190). Even later rulers like Viraparakma Narendrasingha allowed Catholic missionaries to propagate their religion in his territory. The famous South Indian Catholic religious leader Goncalves enjoyed the king's hospitality to the dismay of the Buddhist sangha. During the time of Kirttisri Rajasingha, too Catholic missionaries were permitted to enter the Kandyan kingdom and administer the sacraments though they were later asked to leave on the insistence of the Buddhist sangha. What is important is that in spite of the fact that all Kandyan rulers were Buddhists their attitude towards other religionists was one of tolerance and conciliation.

## **Conclusion**

The above delineations would have revealed that the state formation in Sri Lanka underwent several phases in its evolutionary process. The pre-state phase was characterized by a number of chiefdoms in many parts of the country and no exact date for their beginnings can be suggested due to the paucity of evidence. The chiefdoms do not appear to have had even a

rudimentary form of administration and kinship among lineages was a key factor in its political integrity. Even in the historical period which is generally considered as begun in the third century BC, chiefdoms were the main feature of the political system in the island, although the Anuradhapura polity was fast developing to achieve the status of a kingdom particularly with the introduction of Buddhism. Buddhism along with a common language and a common script throughout the island provided the conditions conducive to a unified state, and the leadership for this process came from the Rohana polity. Duttagamani, after a long drawn military tour de force, captured Anuradhapura kingdom and unified the island for the first time. This marked the culmination of a long process of competition.

The relations with the Indian Subcontinent through migrations, invasions and trade introduced to the island different ethnic groups other than the Sinhalese. Basic knowledge of irrigation technology, ideas of state craft and different religious beliefs and cultural traits that might have come from the Subcontinent even in the pre-state period provided the basis for civilization growth in the island. Even in the social formation the Indian Brahmanic influence, too played a significant role in the social setup which led to the existence of two parallel systems of ranking. The irrigation activities played a pivotal role in the process of state formation from the very beginning of the civilization. The initial irrigation works were small and primarily village-based and mostly collectively owned. However by the first century AD the Sri Lankans developed new technologies which helped construct larger reservoirs and canals. This contributed immensely to an increased agricultural production. The large scale irrigation works thus reached its climax in the fifth to seventh century period and helped opening up new lands mainly in the rest of the North Central region.

This on the one hand strengthened the hold of the ruler's position as the one who gave leadership to these public works, and on the other, increased agricultural production meant that the state income through land and water taxes and other dues also increased. This also influenced the evolution of an administrative system in which the ruler appointed officials who gained importance and prestige over the lineages. This also went a long way in strengthening the central administrative system. The power of the monarchy thus grew steadily consolidating the mature state.

From about the fifth century onwards, Sri Lanka's foreign trade increased rapidly and the island became a vital point in the Indian Ocean commerce serving as a centre in entrepot trade. The large scale irrigation works up to the seventh century AD were made possible, it has been argued, because of the profits coming from the lucrative foreign trade. The decline of trade after the seventh century had its effects on irrigation too, as there was only one major irrigation work constructed under the Anuradhapura regime. Thus the mature state phase was strengthened by the ninth century in which the segmentary tendencies began to set in within the political system. The Anuradhapura rulers, however powerful they were found it difficult to arrest those trends.

The South Indian invasions also had their effect on the state formation process mainly from about the seventh century AD. These invasions in most instances, contributed to the weakening of the Sri Lankan state though at times the local leaders were able to counter attack, thereby drawing the island into the vortex of South Indian politics. The ultimate result of these developments was that Sri Lanka became part of the Chola Empire, and the country was liberated only after nearly eight decades of Chola rule. The effects of South Indian invasions and occupation were all pervading. It marked its influence in state craft, social formation,

language and literature and religion and cultural life of the people. The presence of a large permanent Tamil population in the island and an increasing Hindu influence were also significant effects of the South Indian relations. The revival of trade after the ninth century brought Sri Lanka into the politics and trading competition of South and South-East Asia in which the country played a crucial role. However these engagements were short lived and new trends in commercial activity emerged coinciding with the dissolution of the hydraulic civilization.

The segmentary tendencies that were evident from about the ninth century became real after the abandonment of Anuradhapura as the political centre, and two separate centres of power was the main feature of politics for most of the time. Though Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I would maintain the unitary character of the state they could do it only after suppressing the centripetal forces. The dissolution of the hydraulic civilization and the shift of the capital to the South-West brought about another long period of segmentary tendencies in action. In the medieval period there emerged multiple centres of authority and the rise of two main centres of power, in the North and the South. In between them there were the principalities of Vanni chiefs who represented multiple centres of authority. This process was broken and the country was united only once after that in the sixteenth century under Parakramabahu VI and that too was for a short period. The dissolution of the hydraulic civilization resulted in most fundamental changes in the economy where emphasis on trade and commerce was clearly discernible. The demand for Sri Lankan spices and other goods led to the cultivation of cash crops for which the climatic and other conditions were most suitable in the wet zone. The shift of emphasis towards trade made it one of the most important sources of income of the state.

In spite of the political rivalry and conflict between the Sri

Lankan states and the South Indian rulers, the relations between the Buddhist communities of these two regions were most cordial during the entire medieval period. Buddhist dignitaries in South India were held in high regard in Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan monks were honored and respected by their South Indian counterparts. Both sides got stimulation from the other in scholarly and religious matters.

The relationship between different ethnic and religious groups in the island was generally cordial always helping the minorities to maintain their identities. Though many ethnic and religious groups from different parts of the Indian Subcontinent gradually got assimilated into the Sri Lankan society, the majority of Muslims were able to preserve their religious and cultural identity avoiding assimilation.

The kingdom of Kandy from its inception down to its loss of independence in 1815 remained besieged by hostile forces, both local and foreign. Most of the time, their access to the sea was either restricted or completely blocked by the foreign powers that controlled the islands littoral. Though the attempts at breaching the siege were successful at times, the Kandyan rulers were unable to maintain their relations with the outside world free of interference. The aristocracy played a vital role in the administrative system of Kandy which was highly centralized. Though the king in theory was in full control of the affairs of the state he could not act like a despot as there were checks and balances. The traditional laws, the power of the aristocracy and the sangha were the main forces that had a restrictive effect on the monarch. The administrative system at ground level had been organized under several departments known as badda. The economy was largely based on the traditional agriculture but cash crops were increasingly gaining importance as they were in great demand from foreign buyers. The trade was limited but

at times brisk and many sections of the society benefited from it. Money was used in trade but its use in internal transactions was limited. Both the military and other services were paid by land allotments some of which were given by perpetual tenure. The Kandyan socio-political and economic system though displayed some resemblance the core of the system in Kandy was essentially non-feudal. The Kandyan society was tolerant towards the minority ethnic and religious communities though Buddhism was considered the religion of the state. This conciliatory attitude towards other groups has been in the Kandyan system during most parts of its existence.

The absence of any references to ethnic clashes of any sort during the entire pre-colonial period is noteworthy. Though some literary works attempt to portray some military clashes between South Indian rulers and the Sri Lankans as emanating from ethnic enmities a careful study of the available information does not point to the existence of such a situation.

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# IDENTITY AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN THE COLONIAL SRI LANKA

Janaki Jayawardhana

## Introduction

Sri Lanka had its share of being a colony of European powers from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, it was under three colonial powers, i.e. the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. By integrating to a world system in an unprecedented manner, Sri Lanka went through significant structural changes during this period. Even though the Portuguese and Dutch rule was confined to the coastal areas of Sri Lanka, being exposed to new elements of European civilisation such as Christianity, schools, and Roman Dutch law had a significant influence on shaping the lives of Sri Lankans who lived under the colonial rule. However, it was the British rule that had a profound impact upon the structural changes in Sri Lanka as the longest foreign rule and as a power that unified Sri Lanka.

By the time the British consolidated its power all over Sri Lanka, the indigenous population was forming into communities with a new sense of identity. Of those, most prominent were the religious communities while the Sinhalese living in the coastal

areas, which had been under the colonial rule for more than a century, were identified as low country people, separating them from those who were identified as upcountry Sinhalese, from the central region of the Sri Lanka.

Moreover, and with far greater consequence, the British rule also brought forth, as many historians have pointed out, clearly demarcated identities reconstituted along strong ethnic lines.

This chapter is organized around the questions of how and why these local identities were reconstituted in Sri Lanka as a direct result of the colonial experience and in what ways that had impacted the state formation during British colonial period. As I have said earlier, the indigenous communities have undergone a significant change during the colonial period, and as a result, the identities that local people adhered to were changing. With the introduction of reforms to caste practices, caste as an identity that shaped the political and economic patterns of Sri Lanka began to lose the central role it had played even if it held its validity in society. Ethnic identity, instead, was becoming the determinant in the spheres where caste identity had had its influence. What is important is that the convergence of ethnic identities with different positions in the political spectrum when the British introduced the representative politics and democratic political system as the legitimate political system to govern its colony.

Parallel to the changing patterns of identity formation, a process that can be broadly identified as that of an anthropological nature, was activated by the colonial powers, especially by the British colonialists in their attempt to understand their native subjects. This was, of course, not just an innocent measure to learn about the local people but rather motivated by administrative, political and economic goals. This active attempt of counting by the colonial state further strengthened and reinforced the newly

reconstituted identities along the ethnic communities of Tamils, Muslims Sinhalese and Burgers.

One may question whether some of these identities were not visible in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. The early chronicles such as Mahavamsa refer to *Damela* and Sinhala in identifying certain individuals and groups but at the same time, closer analysis reveals that other identities are also mentioned and that they bear more significance in terms of politics and economy of Sri Lanka than these 'ethnic' identities. However, it is during the British colonial period that these ethnic identities connoted wider political significance as it was directly connected with representative politics of Sri Lanka. Simultaneously, when the Sri Lankans demanded political rights and freedom from the imperial rule, the revivalist and nationalist sentiments of the locals were also divided along this constructed ethnic division instead of what may have been that of a common origin and roots that pointed towards difference from each other were welcomed and propagated by the leadership of these movements. As a result, the demand for independence from the colonial rule too strengthened the process of reconstitution of ethnic identities during the colonial period and the profound impact it had in shaping the lives of the people of colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka.

In this context, it is important to explore the nexus between identity formation and state formation of the British colonial period in order to grasp the political and social crisis that engulfed Sri Lanka and led to a three decades of a violent civil war. In order to do that this chapter hypothesises that ethnic identities in the present day sense were reconstituted during the colonial period as an indirect consequence of the process of knowledge formation in the colonial period by the colonial rulers and cultural nationalistic forces.

In this chapter I will be exploring the reconstitution of ethnic identities through the techniques used by the British to understand the other, i.e. the native and how that led to the construction of national identities as it is understood in the present day. Nation and Nationalism, highly valorous concepts by the early twentieth century nationalist movements of the colonized world as concepts that connote unity and homogeneity have become, instead, the centre of highly contested debates with the rapidly changing connotations derived from the very same concepts when internal struggles began to solidify ethnocentric claims to postcolonial state formations. The same energy that was used to unite the indigenous against the imperialist power is turned against each other in order to decide who has the power to rule, and, the power to make decisions based on the claims of origin and heritage of each ethnic collective. This was the case for most South Asian countries in the twentieth century and in this struggle to lay claims for power sharing in the postcolonial state, culture and history played a crucial role in interpreting the concepts of nation and national state based on ethnic claims.

In recent times, in the academia, various theoretical debates sprang up to explain and analyse the notions of 'nation' and 'nationalism', which tried to put into contention the widely accepted interpretations of these notions, especially in the context of changes they have undergone during the colonial period as mentioned above. One of the most influential of these arguments was concerned with questioning the often repeated claims of the unavoidable and indestructible nature of the idea of the nation, as it has been put into use in consolidating the political form of the nation state, and to understand it as a category of the imagination that solidify the claims for fixed national and ethnic identities. Benedict Anderson (1991), for instance, contested the primal idea of nation as an entity composed of a collective

of people bound by common language, culture, religion and history. In his powerful thesis, Anderson suggests that nation is an imagined community and thus is a discursive construction. A large body of literature has been produced, since then, on the discursive nature of nationalism and imagined status of nations (Bhabha, 1994). One of the consequences of all these developments is that the idea of the nation as a well-defined totality with a clear-cut origin, endowed with its own historical destiny, has increasingly been supplanted by approaches that attempt to trace the complex political and ideological contexts as well as the processes of subjectification they give rise to in the living experience of the individual, encapsulated in the modern idea of the nation. Roberto Esposito's (1990) argument that community is not based on a 'common' property of the individuals but rather is created out of its very lack, is especially illuminating in this regard. In other words, communities are constructed because of lack of the commonalty and modern societies are constantly engaged in constructing collective consciousness in order to appear as communities.

It is also useful, in this context, to pay attention to feminists who argue that social construction of gender plays a very important role in the discourse of imagining and constructing collectivises such as nations and ethnic communities. In her very influential book *Gender and Nation* Yuval- Davis (1997) argued that in the creation and production of nationalist ideologies, especially at situations where oppressed collectives deprived of access to state apparatuses reconstitute identities through 'discovering collective memories' of a 'national golden age' in the distant mythical or historical past that becomes the basis for nationalist apparatuses. In this book and elsewhere she argues that women have been included in national arena as cultural and biological reproducers of nations and as transmitters of its

values, redefining the content and boundaries of ethnicity and the nation.

When juxtaposed with this theoretical grounding, the historical explanations I provide in what follows offer a strong understanding for the key question addressed in this chapter. I will explore the emergence of new communities in the colonial era, colonial mapping of Sri Lanka, gendering the society, historical knowledge formation, cultural nationalism and politics of representation in order to understand how identities of the indigenous were reconstituted and politically mobilised within the frame of colonial state formation.

### **State Formation During the Early Colonial Period**

According to K.M. De Silva (1995), by the time the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan rulers had developed a complex system of administration: an absolute monarchy, a ruling official nobility chosen largely on the grounds of caste and a bureaucracy maintained by land grants. This administrative system provided the stability to governance more than the fragmented state and its political structures. According to K.M. De Silva (1995) administrative systems of the sixteenth century Sri Lanka resonated the basic elements of the system of government that had prevailed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries where caste played a central role as an identity.

According to Codrington (1994) the Portuguese government of Ceylon was under the Viceroy in Goa and areas under their control were divided into four provinces. The provinces were under the local officials called Disawas and each province had subdivisions as pattu and villages, all under the local officers' supervision and control. The provinces possessed civil, military and judicial control over the inhabitants of the area. The Dutch also retained this system of governance following the

Portuguese. During the rule of Governor Flack a modification was done by amalgamating offices of Mudaliyar and Korala due to the disputes between two sets of headmen (Codrington, 1994). Thus, both the Portuguese and the Dutch did not change the system followed by the native Kings of Sri Lanka and local officers were appointed for lower rungs of the administrative system and were paid by land grants. In this system caste played a very significant role in selecting local chieftains.

### **Emergence of New Communities**

In the formation of new communities, I would explore some important identities that emerged through the period of colonialism from the Portuguese to the British that had an important influence on local people, namely religious identity, regional identity and the creation of a Eurasian community.

Even before the British intervention, sense of belonging to certain 'homogenized' communities was emerging in Sri Lanka with certain changes brought about by the Dutch and the Portuguese. The most obvious of these was, as Nira Wickramasinghe (2006) points out, the emergence of religious communities. With the first two colonisers, the Portuguese and the Dutch, Christianity was introduced to Sri Lanka. These colonial powers used coercion and coaxing to convert people into Christianity. Even though their rule was confined to the coastal areas, by the time of the arrival of the British, a sizable Christian community had emerged in Sri Lanka among both Tamils and Sinhalese.

Both the Portuguese and the Dutch followed a non tolerant policy towards the religions that were already established in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese followed a harsher policy against other religions than the Dutch and as a result many monks in the southern coastal area defected to the Kandyan Kingdom. The Dutch in contrast, followed a policy of being hostile

and patronising especially towards Buddhism. The Catholic and protestant ideologies introduced by the Portuguese and the Dutch had impacted how the newly converted saw the world and their ways of living from the non-converted people and their identities were thus configured anew with Christianity.

Indigenous communities responded to this new phenomenon by resisting against the conversion to, and the spread of, Christianity resulting in the forming of religious revivalist movements that attempted to define, as Wickramasinghe has shown, what it means to be a Buddhist or a Hindu through various rituals and norms. In other words, religious communities were defined in relation to each other giving rise to a renewed sense of religious identity among the indigenous population. The same colonial rulers treated the native or migrant Muslims in an ever harsher a manner by setting up rules to limit their movements into the inner parts of the country, to stop intermarriages between them and Sinhala women. The reason was to curb the increase of Muslim population as it was hard to convert them into Christianity. (Kotelewela, 1984).

Another important division created with the colonial encounter was the regional identity of upcountry and low-country Sinhalese. It was widely believed that after living under the colonial rule for about two centuries, Sinhalese in the coastal areas had considerably changed in their habits, mannerism, and religious practices. These hybrid people were considered as 'westernised' and 'corrupted' compared to the Sinhalese in the central highlands, who were under the rulers of Kandyan kingdom until the British conquered and brought them under unitary rule in 1815. Therefore, the British regarded the Kandyans as primitive, backward and authentic Sinhalese and at least the Kandyan aristocracy themselves believed that they are different from the low country Sinhalese whom they called 'foreigners

who have no understanding of the ways of upcountry Sinhalese nation' (Government of Ceylon, 1929). This understanding played a crucial role in the demand for more seats in the Council for up country than the low- country Sinhalese and for demanding a separate state for the people of the upcountry.

In addition to the changing patterns of identity formations within the indigenous community, the intermarriages between the Europeans and the local communities created a new community of Eurasians, generally known as the Burgers in Sri Lanka. Though small in number, it was one of the most influential and privileged communities in Sri Lanka during the colonial times. Their first language was English and with the education they received in English and the privileges granted by the British Colonial rule they enjoyed higher social status in the social rungs of Sri Lanka during this time.

History of Sri Lanka was shaped by the migrations to the island at various time periods, yet only a few of these mass migrations have been identified as historically important. Arrival of prince Vijaya and the founding of Sinhala kingdom in Rajarata, Arrival of Bikkuni Sangamitta and retinue with the Bo tree and king Gajaba bringing back 12,000 Chola's from India as prisoners and settling them in Sri Lanka are some of the migrant stories that have been highlighted in dominant chronicles such as Mahavamsa. Another set of important chronicles known as '*Vanni kadaim poth*' or vanni chronicles, mention a mass migration from South India to Sri Lanka in the twelfth century and settling these people in north western areas of Sri Lanka. They identified themselves as Vannies even though they were given Sinhala names and titles by the king and adopted Sinhala language and customs. Nira wickramasinghe (2006) mentions that it was a practice of the kandyan kings to bring people from Madurai and settle them on the land in between Dutch controlled areas and kandyan

kingdom in order to populate the area. These people also later on assimilated into Sinhalese. Nevertheless, there was one very significant mass migration that took place with the beginning of plantations for commercial crops in the nineteenth century as the British brought South Indians as plantation labourers and settled them in the central areas of Sri Lanka. Known as the Indian Tamils, they formed another new community in Sri Lanka by the mid twentieth century.

It is in this context that the British began using European techniques and technology to map the Sri Lankans to classify and categorise people for their administrative and governing purposes.

## **Mapping the Colonial**

By the end of nineteenth century, Britain consolidated its power in Sri Lanka and adopted various methods to ensure the subjugation and loyalty of natives to the imperialist power and to introduce economic and political reforms. In this backdrop, it was required to have a clear mapping of the economy, society and population of the country. Naturally this meant, as many historians such as Nira Wickramasinghe (2006) have shown, that European methods and techniques such as censuses and maps were adopted to classify and categorise the people and society of Ceylon and to locate the population corresponding to these classifications and categorisations. One of the significant consequences of this exercise is the emergence of identity politics along ethnic or communal lines and the divisions between the majority and the minority, in the early twentieth century. By the early twentieth century, British official records had established that there were three main races [with internal divisions] - Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils - in the island and they could easily

be located geographically as people living in North-eastern area and South and Central highlands according to racial differences.

This is of course not to say that prior to the British period certain identities such as Tamils, Sinhalese and Moors did not exist as such but what concerns me is the fact that it had played a less significant role in the overall politico-economical and social formation when compared to that of the caste. Historical records that have been named the *Lekam Miti* is an important source of information in this regard. Following the practice of the rulers of the Kandian kingdom, the British continued to use *Lekam miti*, similar to *Tombos* maintained by the Dutch, to figure out land ownership. Reading through these *Lekam mititis*, it becomes apparent that caste was the selected category for identifying Sinhalese while ethnicity was the category used to identify non Sinhala communities (Abhayawardena,2009). Nevertheless, after 1832 reforms, the ethnic identities were slowly taking up the place of caste identities. The attempts of the British to classify and categorize people into races endorsed these ethnic identities as the authentic and official identities of people of Sri Lanka. This systemic classification of identities was used by the British colonial rule to grant entitlements in the administrative system and most significantly to appoint people's representatives to legislative council.

According to Nira Wickramasinghe (2006), this process was based on the way natives represented themselves to the British, whatever information the British gathered from their native informants and from the perceptions they inherited from the Portuguese and Dutch rule. In this regard according to her census reports are an outstanding evidence of categorising people of the colony.

The British needed labels that served to locate the strange in a frame of reference that they were familiar with. This entailed arranging groups with neat diagrams, or by alphabetical order, simplifying them, and finding equivalents in language. (Wickramasinghe, 2006: 47)

As she points out census reports produced from 1814 onwards experimented with various categories. The 1814 and 1824 censuses used castes and religions to differentiate people. Nevertheless the category of caste was used in a very ambiguous manner and groups such as Europeans, Portuguese, Malays, washermen, potters and moors and Malabars were also categorized as caste groups. According to her, until at least 1824 Sinhalese and Tamils were not perceived as clear cut ethnic groups but as members of number of caste groups. The 1835 census was based on colour: whites, free blacks, slaves, aliens, and resident strangers were the categories mentioned in this census. All the people of Sri Lanka were encompassed in the term blacks. In 1871 census for the first time the term race appears along with the category of nationalities. According to this census, seventy eight nationalities and twenty four races were identified in Sri Lanka. Sinhalese and Tamils were categorized under both race and nationalities. The communities such as west Indies that were numerically small to call a race were categorized as nationalities. According to Nira Wickramasinghe, the 1881 census mentioned only seven races, i.e. Europeans, Sinhalese, Tamils, Moormen, Malays, *Veddas* and others. The number of nationalities mentioned were decreased to seventy one. However, the term nationality, which was in usage in the nineteenth century Europe was dropped by the 1911 census giving way to the new term race. In the 1921 census, ten races were mentioned in Sri Lanka, namely Low country and Kandyan Sinhalese, the Ceylon

and Indian Tamils, and the Ceylon moors and Indian moors. The other races were Burghers, Eurasians, *Veddas* and Malays. (Wickramasinghe, 2006: 47-50)

Wickramasinghe (2006) also mentions a very significant factor that endorsed the identities, reconstituted along the line of race. In the ceremonial sphere British constructs were precise in what the appropriate dress for different social groups of different ranks. In 1935 a gazette notification instructed the number of appointments for each ethnic group to offices of importance such as village headmen and bestowing honorary ranks such as Muhandiram or Mudaliyar. The British demanded that a Tamil Muhandiram should wear a white turban with a silver lace and Muslim Muhandiram should wear a white Turkish turban. The up country Sinhalese were regarded as 'authentic' Sinhalese and were supposed to wear what the British perceived to be the traditional dress and low country Sinhalese were allowed to hybridise their dress by adding elements from the west, for example dark colour coat and cuffs with 'Austrian knot' and black boots or shoes while up country Sinhalese had to wear Juta, Kandyan shoe that appeared during the Nayakkar reign. The 1935 gazette recommend it as a shoe for Tamils and Muslim officers if they choose to wear sarong instead of trousers. It may be the case that, as Wickramasinghe (2006) argues, the British did this to maintain the gap between the orient and the occident. However, as a result of this official policy the locals grasped these dresses as their 'authentic ethnic dresses'.



*European officer*



*Kandyan Sinhalese*



*low country Sinhalese*



*Moors*

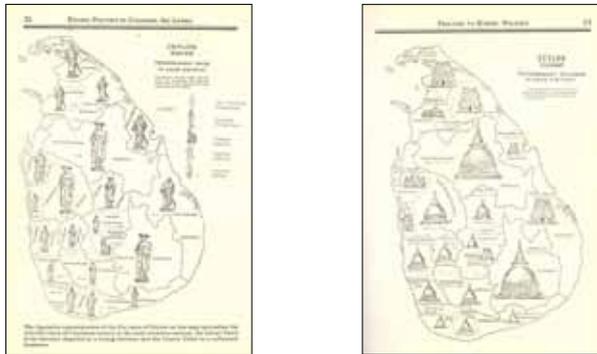


*Native Tamils*

Source: [www.imagesofceylon.com](http://www.imagesofceylon.com)

Apart from Wickramasinghe herself other historians such as Bernard Cohn (1996) have also clearly demonstrated how the British colonial practice of categorizing and classifying people according to European concepts played a vital role in reconstituting and giving a fixity to identities that had remained, at best, fluid and flexible. It is not difficult to see the significant and central role played by indications given by the official census records for the indigenous population under the colonial rule in accepting their ethnic and racial identities as fixed and stable. The colonial state's intervention in registering births and marriages was a step that consolidated this 'permanency' of identities.

This official classifications were grasped by the indigenous people as ‘correct’ knowledge of their own identity, and when the political reforms were introduced based on representative democracy it had become essential to authenticate these constructed racial identities to consolidate the origins and the heritage of the communities lived in Sri Lanka in their demand for political power. The nationalists from all communities used this knowledge to demarcate ethnic boundaries.



Source: Wickramasinghe, 1995: 22-23

In addition to the classification systems in the process of census, geographical mapping of people also was largely imagined in accordance with the major racial categories and their religions. The above maps produced in Nira Wickramasinghe’s book titled *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka* (1995) clearly demonstrate the colonial imagery of geographical spread of population of Sri Lanka. These maps ironed out the fact that people belonging to all races lived in these geographical localities and only highlighted the numerically large groups and their religions paving the way to the widely held belief that the Ceylon Tamils live in the north and Indian Tamils live in the Central parts, Low country Sinhalese live in the western and southern coastal area while central area and north central area inhabited by the upcountry Sinhalese

or 'Authentic' Sinhalese. Muslims were depicted only in the Puttalam area.

Thus historical knowledge formation was also based on this ideology and instead of being critical of the knowledge provided in the main historical source, chronicle Mahavamsa, both European and nationalist historians accepted it as the written history of Sri Lanka and history writing in the colonial period and archaeological studies were geared towards finding more evidence that confirms the Mahavamsa historical narrative. Any evidence that contradicted or did not support the accounts in the chronicle was either overlooked or ignored by the historians.

### **Historical Knowledge Formation**

The European can only stand and marvel at the achievements of the great Aryan race centuries before there was any civilization in Europe. The wonderful hydraulic engineering, represented by the irrigation tanks of Ceylon, makes our work on the Panama Canal seem like child's play to ancient Sinhalese engineers [P. Bigelow, 1910 quoted in Walisinghe Harischandra, 1927:196]

When reading the sentences included in the pages 104, 131, 196 and 199, written by his Excellency William Gregory the Governor, his Excellency Tenant the Deputy Governor, the American scholar Bigelow and ..., which Sinhalese emotions will not stir and cause goose bumps? (Walisinghe Harischandra, 1927:02) [my translation]

The above statement is made by Walisinghe Harischandra (1927) in his introduction to the book titled *Sitiyam Sahita Pura Vidyawa* (Archaeology with maps). This book provides directions to the people who go on pilgrimage to the ancient monuments of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. It extols the works of ancient kings of Lanka and glorifies the history of the Sinhalese. It also

laments that the Korale officer of the Madapattu Korale (where Polonnaruwa is situated) is a Tamil, and makes an appeal to a Sinhalese to come forward and take over the position and do a rightful duty.

It is a well-established fact by now that restoring ancient monuments of ruined cities of Sri Lanka was a colonial project. Similarly, writing the history of Ceylon was also a colonial enterprise. Discovering the ancient chronicles such as Mahawansa and translating them into English language gave the European scholars an avenue to write the History of Ceylon. They relied on the dominant narratives of Mahavamsa when building the history of pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Based on the myth of the Vijaya story in chronicles and based on language similarities, it was the European scholars who propagated the myth that Sinhalese were Aryans. As Walisinghe Harischandra (1927) says in the above quotation, various comments made by these European scholars and the manner in which they wrote history provided a powerful tool for the Sinhala nationalists to demarcate ethnic boundaries. In the footsteps of the colonial historians, the Sinhala nationalists also started writing History in a similar fashion.

The researched literature produced on politics of Sri Lanka strongly points that it was during the British colonial period that the indigenous people began to have a collective consciousness of belonging to one particular ethnic group and identifying that ethnic collective as a nation became explicit. It was in the intellectual milieu of the colonial period that the natives of Sri Lanka idealized and imagined what we understand as 'nations' coterminous with the boundaries of the national state of Sri Lanka. Though the nationalist political leadership of Sri Lanka encompassed national state as it was defined in the theories and concepts of the west, it did not correspond to their imagination of nation and postcolonial nation state. Nation was imagined in

a multiple sense, as supreme and sub nations (Sinhala, Demala, Muslim etc.) and claims were made upon who the original settlers and who were the late comers through the process of reconstituting national identities in the early twentieth century.

It is in this above mentioned context that the Sinhala nationalist movement emerges as the strongest movement against the imperialist power and work to establish that it is the Sinhalese alone that can lead the postcolonial state of Sri Lanka because they were the 'original settlers'. The social reformists of the nationalist movement have understood that it was essential to construct a collective identity to distinguish the Sinhalese from the ruling English and the rest of the natives residing in the island in order to consolidate their claims. Hence, to construct a collective psychology it was needed to explain who and what the Sinhalese were.

The religious revivalist movements that arose in the late nineteenth century provided a basis for the thinking of community identities based on ethnic and religious ideologies. The course of events that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries somewhat erased a shared cultural aspects of the past and identities were reconfigured in clear cut ethnic and religious boundaries. According to contemporary historians this was consolidated by the new religious practices adopted by the local people and their way of configuring what the religious space is. Both the Hindu and Buddhist revivalist movements were assisted and led by a new elite that formed the middle class and it was this elite that challenged the Christian way of life and Europeanisation in Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, it was the Buddhist revivalist movement that challenged Christianity and its way of life most prominently in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Nirmal Dewasiri (2000) argues that using the term 'revival' to describe the developments

in this period is problematic because the movement that sprang up had not revived a religion that had been lost due to colonial encounters by the Sri Lankans but had acquired a newness with the new religious practises. He points to the fact that there was no word to be found in the language of the pre-colonial times that signifies the religious life of ordinary people. He mentions the fact that pointed out by other researches such as Malalgoda (1976) the term *Bauddhagama* that signifies the life of the masses of today, was not given the same meaning in the pre colonial times. Dewasiri argues that the 'revived Buddhism' that emerged in the British colonial period was not a rebirth of an old tradition but a modernized form of Buddhism as a reaction of certain sections of Buddhists to encounter Christianity. This has laid the foundation to form a new alliance between the Sangha and local elite during the British colonial period and the newly emerged elite provided the finance and ways to 'restore' Buddhism among Sinhalese to challenge the dominancy of Christianity. According to Dewasiri (2000), the revivalist movement of the nineteenth century consolidated Buddhism as a modern mass religion and became an inseparable part of the ideology of the Sinhala nationalism.

## **Locating the Origins of the Sinhalese**

It [invention of tradition] was both practiced officially and unofficially, the former- we may loosely call it 'political' – primarily in or by states or organized social and political movements, the latter – we may loosely call it 'social' – mainly by social groups not formally organized as such, or those whose objects were not specifically or consciously political such as clubs and fraternities, whether or not these also had political functions. The distinction is one of convenience rather than principle. It is designed to

draw attention to two main forms of the creation of tradition in the nineteenth century, both of which reflect the profound and rapid social transformations of the period. Quite new or old but dramatically transformed, social groups, environments, and social contexts called for new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations (Hobsbawm,1983:263).

In my view, what Eric Hobsbawm (1983) speaks about on mass-producing traditions in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is applicable when discussing the political and social transformation that took place in Sri Lanka in the same time period. With the advent of industrial capitalism and transformation of political power from the monarch's hand to citizens, and forming empires for wealth and power, Western Europe also experienced rapid social transformation as well. This in turn, as Hobsbawm expressed, created a need for inventing new devices to express national cohesion and identity, and one main way of achieving it was the inventing of traditions. Similarly, having been subjected to colonialism and the resulting structural changes, especially by the British rule, created a need in Sri Lanka for national cohesion and identity in order to fight against imperialism and to claim the legitimacy for leadership in postcolonial Sri Lankan state.

“Today there is a need for intelligent, educated, selfless, tolerant self-sacrificing laymen and *Buddhist monks<sup>1</sup> to lead the helpless uneducated Sinhala people*. In ten years of time pure Buddhism will be extinct from this Island” (Dharmapala, 1891:261, emphasis mine)

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1. My emphasis to show that who Dharmapala saw as the section of society that can lead Sri Lanka.

Mainly two debates originated within the Sinhalese reformist leadership regarding the heritage and origins of the Sinhalese. The two key figures that led the debate were Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887-1944). While rejecting imperialism and calling for a 'Swaraj (an independent country)', Dharmapāla as a prominent leader, had a vision of ideal 'Sinhala Buddhist society'. According to H. L. Seneviratna (1999), his image of the past of the Sinhalese was based on the historical knowledge constructed about pre colonial Sri Lanka based on discovered chronicle Mahavamsa. It was the European scholars such as Tennent, Geiger, Muller who interpreted the past of Sri Lanka centring the Sinhala race, language, and religion and culture as the main contours of the pre-colonial civilisation of Sri Lanka. Hence what Mahavamsa said about the origins of the Sinhalese, that they are descendants of Prince Vijaya from North India, was connected with the interpretation of European scholars that Sinhalese are 'Aryans' as their origins are traced to North India. Buddhism as the religion of the Sinhalese provided the social basis for the civilisation in the pre-colonial period. According to Seneviratna (1999), Dharmapala believed that the central political feature of that ideal past society was righteous and paternalistic kingship. The basis of social order was Buddhist morality or righteousness. Being subjected to foreign powers eroded this social base and as a result, Sinhalese have become weak and no longer able to develop as a great nation as it once was. The task of the Sinhala race was thus to restore the righteous society by living according to Buddhist morality.

By the time Cumaratunga engaged in nationalistic politics, fears were already established that the foreign ways would destroy the indigenous culture because there was a feeling among the natives that the English government had civilised Sri Lankans.

When white men being criticised for doing wrong, many seem to misunderstand it as being critical of the English government. When our monarchy was gone, we would not have a government that allow us to act independently as is now. English government is a good government because it is a fair and democratic<sup>2</sup> government. Therefore, it is our duty to be loyal to that government (NA, 1912: 143-146)

This was an open letter written to Dharmapala appealing him not be critical of the non-Buddhist elites who work for bettering Sri Lanka. Many such instances where similar sentiments were expressed can be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature. However, by the early twentieth century this opinion seemed to be eroding and anti English and anti Tamil/Muslim sentiments were gaining currency in people's opinions. The majority who wrote to newspapers believed the Sinhalese have become a weak nation and their civility based on Buddhist values declined due to embracing English ways and customs. It was believed that in the advancement of western culture Sinhala language might be extinct soon (Dharmadasa, 1972). Cumaratunga believed that purifying the Sinhala language by eliminating the existing use of mixed Sinhala (language constituted by borrowing from Pali and Sanskrit use by the twelfth century as standard medium for writing) and ascribing to pure Hela language of the pre twelfth century will restore the Sinhala tradition. He rejected the Indo Aryan origins of the Sinhala language and believed Sinhala language is 'older than the oldest Indian languages'(NA:1912:). In this context he had rejected the historical knowledge that emerged in the colonial times on the origins of the Sinhalese and believed Sinhalese were descendants

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2. The term used by the writer was 'Jana Sammata' it denotes 'ruled by peoples consent'.

of mighty king Ravana who ruled Sri Lanka long before Vijaya. He thus rejected the Mahavamsa legend as a 'concoction of the monks of Maha Vihare'(NA:1912:) and the Indian influence destroyed the Hela culture including the language.

Thus, two points of views were presented on the origins of the Sinhalese by the early twentieth century. Both viewpoints were two different manifestations of constructing ethnic identity of Sinhalese against their subordination to the British colonial rule and were based on the slogans adopted by nationalist leaders like Dharmapala '*Rata/daya/samaya*' (Country/nation/religion) and '*desa/basa/rasa*' (Country/language/nation) of Cumaratunga faction. However, according to writers such as K.N.O. Dharmadasa (1972) and Nira Wickramasinghe (2006), though it was very influential, the ideology presented by Cumaratunga did not attract the public as much as the ideology embedded in Dharmapala's viewpoint. Dharmadasa(1972) attributes this to his nature of antagonising the established elite section in Sri Lanka by being critical of their ready acceptance of English language and promoting a Sinhala language that was 'largely unintelligible to the masses and was more distant from the spoken idiom than the accepted standard of *Misra Sinhala* (Mixed Sinhala) (143). According to Wickramasinghe (2006), Cumaratunga could not dominate the discourse of the origins of the Sinhalese because societal un-acceptance of him for belonging to a low caste and because unlike the story of Vijaya, the story of King Ravana did not appeal to Sinhala community as Ravana was defeated by prince Rama.

However, as Dharmadasa (1972) points, Ravana story is merely a legend and historical evidence, except folk stories, have not been found yet to establish the credibility of the narration. Whereas, the story of Vijaya was recorded in chronicles as an encounter that established the ascendancy of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and historical evidence found in Rajarata area point to a

culture and politics nurtured by strong influence of Buddhism. This has led to writing the history of Sri Lanka as one endowed with a glorious past of the Sinhalese Buddhists, by both European scholars and the Sinhala nationalist historians.

The social reformists of the nationalist movement had understood that it was essential to construct a collective identity to distinguish the Sinhalese from the ruling English and the rest of the natives residing in the island in order to consolidate their claims. Hence, to construct a collective psychology it was needed to explain who and what the Sinhalese were.

### **Appealing for Unity**

When reading the newspapers and other publications of the early twentieth century one can find many instances appealing to Sinhalese to forget caste differences and unite. Especial references were made to the devotion of Muslims to their religion and not adopting foreign ways and being united as a race. Sinhalese were told that the Muslims had been able to exploit the economy and corrupt Sinhala nation by sexually harassing Sinhala women due to divisions between Sinhalese over religion and caste differences.

The publications from the early twentieth century I read show a significant contrast from the tolerance towards English government and rest of the natives as it was depicted in publications of the late nineteenth century. They clearly manifest the struggle of the people of Ceylon to assert certain identities as authentic identities in order to claim legitimacy for living in this island. The anti imperialist and anti English sentiments emerged strongly and the Europeans were regarded as the culprits for corrupting indigenous culture. In the process of nation making, national identity was given a prominent place, and a clear attempt was made to steer the Sinhalese away from other natives and legitimise Sinhalese as the authentic natives

of Ceylon. Tolerance towards other natives was waning and the Tamils were generally described as 'Para Demalu' and Muslims were disdainfully regarded as recent immigrants who rob the wealth and opportunities of the Sinhalese.

In a publication called *Sinhalayata wechchade* [what happened to the Sinhalese], J. Ratnayaka (1921) of Matara composed a set of verses to say how a Muslim who lived in Sri Lanka went back to his own country and told his relatives there that the Sinhalese can be easily deceived because they are corrupted by adopting English ways and living a vulgar life. Therefore, the old man advised young Muslims to travel to Ceylon and feign respect to Sinhalese and exploit them. With this prompting young *Hambas*, *Kochchis* and *Paravar* of Bengal walked to Tuticorin harbour to arrive in Lanka. The kind Sinhalese took care of these people who were weakened by their walk to the harbour, but later on they took over all the occupations and trade of the Sinhalese. Since they were a nation that sought to safeguard their language and religion and did not drink liquor, unlike the Sinhalese, they are united and have been able to grab the opportunities of the Sinhalese, and make fools out of the Sinhalese (Ratnayaka, 1921). It is apparent that such publications not only stirred the anti Muslim sentiments but also inculcated in Sinhala speaking people that Muslims have no legitimacy for making claims as 'natives'.

While attempting to portray non-Sinhalese as non-natives, these publications attempt to reconcile the differences between Sinhalese and iron out the other competing identities in order to create a collective memory of a united Sinhala identity. As it emerges from the literature, caste identity and religious identity of the Sinhalese were the main constraints for a united Sinhala identity. It appears that by the beginning of the twentieth century, castes like Karawa and Durawa were in competition

with the Govigama caste. In 1915, G.K. Mihindukulasooriya wrote a book titled *Kaurawa Dynasty*: a collection of very useful information concerning Karawas in Ceylon. This book traces the origins of the Karawa caste people to the story of Kuru dynasty in India. Mihindukulasooriya claims that it is difficult to distinguish the descendants of Prince Vijaya and his retinue (the first group of migrants from Lata country), the descendants of the second group of migrants of ten thousand castes sent by King Pandu of Matura, or the third migrant group of Prince Sumitra and thirty two ministers. Mihindukulasooriya claims that it is certain that apart from these migrants, people from various other countries have migrated to Lanka during various times for various purposes and have become Sinhalese. Some people who have migrated like this are called Tamils. Among these Tamils there are migrants of ancient people who belonged to important castes such as Kshatris, and a few Tamil people were also regarded as Kshatris. The text combines the myths of Wannu documents with the history of the Kuru dynasty in India to construct the identity of people of Karawa caste living in the coastal areas and claims them to be bearers of the Rawana and the Sun/Moon flags. In short, the book attempts to legitimise the rights of the Karawa people to the land in coastal areas.

Similarly, a book titled *Neeti Ratnavali* written by James Bastian Perera and published by Don Perumal in 1914 constructs the identity of the Durawa caste by referring to various Purana stories, several English publications of authors like Hugh Nevil, and to various ancient Tamil and Sinhala documents. James Bastian Perera claims that Durawas are descendants of both the Prince Vijaya and his retinue from the Maurya dynasty, and the ancient Tamil migrants to the island, and that they were the rightful owners and bearers of the Royal lion flag at important ceremonies.

It seems to be correct to assume that constructing such myths about caste groups created disunity among the Sinhalese along with religious differences and regional divisions. The publications I have read very strongly portray the Sinhalese as a defeated nation because of such differences, and that made it easy for the imperialists to overpower them. They also make a strong appeal to Sinhalese to forget these differences and unite against the common enemy. It is in this respect that one should argue that the social reformists of the national movement played a significant role in shaping a collective Sinhalese mentality along ethnic boundaries that are at play in the post independent Sri Lanka.

In 1916 writing a letter to *Arya Sinhala Tarunaya* (Aryan Sinhala Youth) magazine a Buddhist monk called Dammananda Tissa claimed that Sri Lanka lost its greatness due to the idleness of the youth as they have adopted foreign ways and given priority to English. According to him ancient texts indicate that ancient Sri Lankans knew how to generate electricity, invented a vehicle in the shape of an elephant where about 60 people could be seated, ships were in use and king Pandukabhaya travelled in an airship. He laments the fact that such innovations are not to be found anymore. In order to restore these glories of the past, he advises the Sinhala youth to engage in paddy cultivation, commerce, cotton cultivation and to send children to Japan to be educated. He also emphasised that it is important to adhere to *Lanka sirith* (Lanka customs) such as being religious, not making noises when eating, walking on the right side of the roads, not to urinate on the roadside, and not to wear dirty clothes.

Such writings are very common in the early twentieth century literature I have consulted. It is interesting to see how and why such ideas were established in this particular time and context. What Dharmapala propagated as Arya Sinhala Buddhist

nation and its culture and traditions had had a strong impact upon constructing Sinhala Buddhist ideology of the majority and was reproduced by those who were attracted to it. As H. L. Senaviratne (1999) states, the nationalist leadership wanted the postcolonial state to be progressive and modernist, like a developed western country but at the same time they needed symbols, values and norms, which would distinguish and separate the Sinhalese and Sri Lanka from the others: the western imperial power, and the rest of the natives of Ceylon. Since it was believed that adopting European ways corrupted the Sinhalese and made them a defeated nation, the nationalist leadership believed that 'reviving' the Sinhala way of life is a must and society should be an Aryan Sinhala society.

However, the Aryan Buddhist society imagined by Dharmapala was not the actual pre-colonial or colonial society of Sri Lanka. Though Dharmapāla accepted that society should develop benefiting from western scientific knowledge and technologies, he believed social structures should be based on the imagined 'Aryan, Buddhist tradition and culture'. Dharmapala wrote his extremely influential pamphlet of *Gihi Vinaya* (daily code for laity) in the late nineteenth century (1898) based on this ideology.

## **Gender and Nation Building**

In her book Yuval-Davis (1997) says that 'gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivises. She and many other scholars pointed that the cultural difference has been related to notions of otherness and boundary management. Gender is significant in constructing social identities and demarcating collectives and understanding masculinity and femininity. Gendered roles and behaviour of men and women play a significant role in constructing national and

ethnic ideologies. As Yuval- Davis points gender relations often come to be seen as constituting the 'essence' of cultures as ways of life to be passed from generation to generation (1997:43). However, cultural identities are not fixed and influenced by the spatial changes and external influences and ethnic identities based on 'cultural essence' are no exception to this and changes according to time, space and structure. Nevertheless as Hobsbawm (1983) expressed, rapid social transformations create a need for inventing new devices to express national cohesion and identity.

We have seen, in the preceding sections, why it is reasonable to argue that the nationalist reformist leadership of the early twentieth century grafted an invented cultural identity in order to demarcate Sinhalese from the English and the rest of the indigenous communities in Sri Lanka. To justify their claim that it was the Sinhalese who should be at the forefront of building postcolonial nation state it was essential to separate them from the other: the colonists and 'sub natives' and it seems gender played a vital role in their project of constructing the Sinhala nation .

According to writers such as Kumari Jayawardena (1986) and Malathi de Alwis (1994), *Gihī Vinaya* pamphlet invented an Aryan Sinhala Buddhist woman by assigning a specific role for women within the Sinhala nation. In his pamphlet *Gihī Vinaya*, Dharmapāla clearly spells out how Sinhala people should behave in their day-to-day life, when eating, using the toilet, going in vehicles, walking on the road, what sanitary practices they should adhere to and so on. He also mentions the duties of the Sinhalese for their family and society in different roles such as men, women, children and teachers.

Apart from that, he also suggests what the appropriate dress is for the Sinhala people. This pamphlet advises people to

discard their European names and adopt Sinhala names<sup>3</sup>.

The longest section of the pamphlet was allocated to advising women on how to dress, how to behave and what role they have to perform for the Sinhala nation. When reading the pamphlet, it is clear that Dharmapala believed that Sinhala women should be modest, chaste housewives who should be obedient to their husbands and their role should be maintaining a clean house and bringing up children to be patriotic Sinhalese. He believed that the development and progress of the country is in the hands of men, and women should be educated in household work, sewing, gardening and of the heroic women in the past. Elsewhere, describing women of ancient India, he says that the Aryan husband trains his wife to take care of parents, to attend to holy men, relatives and friends. He claims that glory of women depends on their chastity, performing household work and being obedient to her husband. Ideal Aryan wife is extolled for these virtues. In the same letter, he says that both husband and wife should be equal in understanding each other and should be equally wise. Both should be chaste. However, much emphasis was given to women's role as an Aryan wife (Dharmapala, 1891: 170).

When reading *Gihi Vinaya* pamphlet, what is striking is that most of these practices were not coming from the pre-colonial society. For example, when he advises on eating habits, he elaborates on how to set the table, how to use fork and knives if one likes to. Because the toilets in use at the time were with open pits he instructs people to take measures not to inhale the air that rises from the waste in the pit and that they should wipe their backs before washing. Vehicles were a novel introduction

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3. Though he suggests cloth and tunic as the Sinhala dress for men and encourage them to drop wearing trousers, in a letter dated Jan 19<sup>th</sup> 1927 to his ardent disciple Devapriya Walsinghe he requests him to tailor a full suit as it is useful to wear a coat, trousers and a shirt when travelling a long distance.

to the society and he advises people to walk on the right side of the road. It seems that Dharmapāla could not totally discard the European values, ethics and norms he had internalised through Christianisation and Westernisation. It is highly likely that, for him, these values and norms were part of being progressive and modern. Apart from that, it is correct to assume that some of the traditions he invented were actually taken from the Hindu Brahmin culture of India. When inventing tradition, these different knowledge bases were assimilated into one compatible ideology by the nationalists of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless these ideas were deep rooted and reproduced in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth literature I have consulted and they all pointed towards the common assumption that these traditions are part and parcel of the two thousand five hundred years old Sinhala Buddhist culture.

A woman writing to a paper called *Mahajana Handa*, under the title of *Stri Pakshaya saha Veradi Matha Nirakaranaya* [Womankind and Correcting Wrong Ideas] pointed out:

The security of our nation is in the hands of our sisters, and it is true that safeguarding our honour also depends on our women. Our good customs (guna dharma) declined and our national dress disappeared during the unfortunate time of the last few centuries. ... Certainly now it is time for us to pay special attention to what we wear. Women should wear Osariya but no other dresses. It is a very sad thing that especially women teachers (acharya pakshaye kantawo) are reluctant to give up wearing gowns.

*“Nabiya nodakva,  
Salu anda bolata dakva,  
Nopava tana sakva,  
Sina nomasen dasan dakva”<sup>4</sup>*

According to *Kavayashekaraya*, a cloth that covers from navel to ankles, a blouse that is made to cover the breasts properly and covering that blouse by the fold of the sari is the Aryan Sinhala Osary dress (Amarasinghe, 1921a. Translated).

The same writer expressed these ideas in another newspaper article as the following:

Some mothers and fathers think educating girls is unsuitable. This is unwise. No one in the world today, even if they have a minimal education, would say so. There are women who have earned doctorates and honorary places in very great, developed European countries. Also there are associations in Europe, lead by women, which work for the welfare of the public. We have heard about the English ladies who boldly agitated to gain power to select MPs to the House of Commons.

Though it is considered that education is unsuitable for women, the ladies of the ancient times were clever in not only reading and learning religion but also in minor strategies. Women such as Vihāramaha Devi, Leelāwathi, Kalyānawathi, Ratnāwali, Ulakudaya Devi, Meniksāmi are examples.

Therefore we affectionately remind our Sinhala

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4. Do not dress to reveal your navel  
cover up to your ankle  
do not your show your breasts  
do not reveal your teeth when laughing

parents to act enthusiastically to teach our contemporary sisters as much as possible the following things: reading and mother tongue, religion, Sinhala history and the things that should be learned by women: the arts of cooking and sewing, modesty, *nirahankāarakama*<sup>5</sup>, obedience, respecting elders, tidying and cleaning the home, taking care of patients, bringing up and disciplining children.

Women should boldly come forward to talk about the ancient ladies, the progress of other women in the world and to explain the situation of the women of our race. (Amarasinghe, 1921b.Translated.)

The “correct” role of women in a nation was emphasised as being good mothers and housewives to raise patriotic children. Women were not portrayed as leaders of society but as obedient followers of Sinhala men. Their main role as it was emphasised in the literature mentioned above was to serve the nation by being cultural repositories. She was supposed to symbolise the Sinhala nation by adopting above mentioned ways and habits.

Nowhere else was this role more evident than in the discourse around the dress codes of the Sinhalese man and the Sinhalese woman. Yuval-Davis (1998) states that women as signifiers of the collectivity’s boundaries are supposed to be attiring in ‘proper clothing’ and behaving in ‘proper manner’. In the case of the Sinhalese, it clearly suggests that traditions were invented to demarcate ethnic boundaries for Sinhala nation and established in society with a suitable historic past as Hobsbawm and Ranger point out. These invented cultural traditions were recognised as coming from the pre colonial history.

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5. This term means the opposite of vanity. However it has multiple meanings such as not being self-aware, not to look down upon people because of one’s status and not to be proud in front of relations.

*Identity and Political Mobilization in the Colonial Sri Lanka*



*An advertisement in women's magazine in early twentieth century to Sell saree to Sinhala Women*



*Women wore European shoes and socks with osari as there was no suitable footwear*



*These two pictures of early twentieth century shows how the artists saw the dress in contemporary times.*

*(By Courtesy of ( D.E. Hettiarachchi Collection) University of Peradeniya.)*

While defining women as bearers of the culture, Sinhala men were regarded as signifiers of the change and progress of the country. They were often advised to be honest, hard working and engage in trade, agriculture and industries. Sinhala men were also cautioned of their women being corrupted (Tissa, 1916 NA 1912). However, the number of publications that defined women's sexuality and role in society far exceeds the number of publications that defined men's role and sexuality, giving further evidence to the claim that the gendered identities played a significant role in shaping the ethno-national identities during the colonial times.

### **The Tamils and Muslims**

By the mid nineteenth century a Hindu religious revival was started in Jaffna by Arumuga Navalar and Thamothersampillai. Both Navalar and Thamothersampillai were interested in reviving the Tamil language and collected ola leaf writings and published them. They were anti Christian and worked to revive Saivism. Discovering of Sangam literature by Thamothersampillai and publishing such work stirred nationalistic sentiments in people of Jaffna. However, this linguistic nationalism did not mature into a fully fledged movement that encompassed various social strata of the Tamil community in Jaffna. The reason given by many scholars is that these leaders, especially Navalar, focus on essentially Saivite revivalism and excluded non Vellala castes.

Nalavar was different in the choice of platform, which was the Vellala supremacy. For him, the non-Vellalas, particularly the untouchables, were like the drum (*Parai*), meant to be beaten! That was the ethos that guided the later 20th century Tamil political leadership like the Sittampalams, Sundaralingams and Ponnambalms, who were not only in the forefront of Tamil politics, but also in the Vellala supremacist movement preventing

temple entry and the use of wells by 'low caste' Tamils. (Jeyaraj, 2011)

These have played a role not recognizing him as a social reformer and, consequently, he cannot be compared to the Sinhala Buddhist cultural nationalist leadership, which was engaging with the lower rungs of society in order to rejuvenate and to reform them to safeguard Sinhalaness. However, what these leaders started has given impetus for stirring nationalistic sentiments as is evident from the various societies that were started in Jaffna and the South Indian publications that were reproduced by the press in Jaffna. Most significant aspect of this revivalism was to look towards India as the protector of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

In the case of the Muslims no such sentiments were stirred even though they were most mercilessly oppressed during the Portuguese and the Dutch period. According to many historians (Kotelewela, 1984, De Silva, 1984) they were restricted to main towns such as Matara and Galle and were not allowed to do business in the interior of the country. The fear of them getting married to Sinhala women and propagating their population led to impose various restrictions on them by both Dutch and the Portuguese.

During the British colonial period strong anti Muslim feelings were growing among the Sinhalese as I have shown above in this chapter. The culmination of this caused the pogrom of the 1915. According to K. M. De Silva (1984), this was directed towards the coast moors who were engaged in retail trade and who were recent migrants from South India. The commercial rivalry between the low country Sinhalese traders and the Muslim traders was manifested in religious terms as the Sinhalese traders were a powerful driving force within the Buddhist revivalist movement. The Sinhalese were unhappy with the way the riots were quashed

and the legislative measures taken to punish the culprits. The Tamil leaders like Ramanathan supported the Sinhalese in this regard and made attempts to gain the attention of the British for a decade or more. As a result, Muslims were in close ranks with the British during this time period. However, they were under the Tamil political leadership for safeguarding minority political rights until mid twentieth century and the turning point for the Muslims to claim they were a nation distinguished from the Tamils was G. G. Ponnambalam's statement that Muslims are not a separate nation but part of the Tamils as they spoke the same language of the Tamils.

However, the Muslims were concerned about their backwardness compared to the other communities in Sri Lanka and concentrated much on establishing schools to promote education among the Muslims. The enthusiasm for education among the Muslims was promoted by Siddi Lebbe, an exiled Egyptian, who was a social worker and a lawyer. Later on leaders like T. B. Jayah and Razik emphasised the need for Muslim national education. It was not until much later Muslims were interested in forming political parties based on ethnicity as they felt they were discriminated by both Sinhalese and Tamils.

In the years to come, the nationalistic sentiments of the three communities played a vital role in shaping the state formation and political representations of Sri Lanka.

### **Cultural Nationalism**

The emergence of revivalist and nationalist movements in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century gave rise to an anti-English sentiment. This anti-English sentiment then took a turn against the natives that did not belong to one's own community, and this 'us' verses 'them' politics intensified the desire for authenticating the identities

that were constructed on racial lines. As Nira Wickramasinghe (2006) points out, various spaces were used to authenticate the identities that were reconstituted in the process of classifying and categorising people of Sri Lanka into clear-cut ethnic groups. The colonial and nationalist writings of history of Sri Lanka from its antiquity through 'discovered' chronicles and archaeological evidence strongly manifested the constructed imaginaries of the people and their past in this period and erased the evidences of synchronic and shared cultural aspects of the people of the pre colonial Sri Lanka.

As I have discussed earlier, through the religious and revivalist movements an attempt was made to distinguish each ethnic group from the other and demarcate ethnic and cultural boundaries. Invented symbols and traditions, for instance, on dress forms and religious practices were projected onto the bodies in order to display the cultural and ethnic divisions. As Wickramasinghe demonstrates, spaces such as schools, theatre, religious spaces and museums were arranged and operated in a manner to endorse the diversity and difference of ethnicity and nationalism.

The ideological imageries of the past and the people of Sri Lanka were very strongly presented in the various publications such as novels and newspapers. With the introduction of both English and vernacular education, a wide spread literati developed in Sri Lanka. The publications done for popular reading in Sinhala language in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Sri Lanka are, in this respect, extremely interesting. In that period, it seems to be a popular practice to get some person to write a small booklet on a theme that was considered as of public interest and to bear the cost of publication, most possibly by an individual of a well to do family. Both men and women have adhered to this practice and they were not seeking to make a

profit out of it. It also should be noted that many of these booklets were composed in the form of verses so as to make it easy to read, remember and recite. The purpose was to disseminate knowledge that was considered as important to the public, and the number of copies printed was, in some instances, as large as to be in the range of 2,000 to 5,000 copies, indicating a mass readership. Some booklets were reprinted several times based on their popularity. These booklets were printed mainly on the themes such as religion, history of the country, characteristics of Ceylonese people and how they should behave, and on sexuality.

Nevertheless, there is a noticeable difference between the literature published in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The late nineteenth century publications I have read seem more liberal when it comes to matters relating to sex and in identifying who are the natives. The publications I have read depict a tolerance towards the English government and the other natives of Ceylon. For example, in many instances Sir Arunachelam was praised as an authentic native of Ceylon. English government was praised for introducing equality and civility to Ceylon. Another common theme is the worthiness of living in a civilisation and being civilised in day to day to living. Some publications implicitly suggest that certain practices of people of Ceylon, for example practices relating to marriage, are uncivil and need to be discarded. However, as I have mentioned before, the early twentieth century sees a considerable turn around in this tendency and literature published in this period takes a very strong anti-English as well as anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim stance.

Similar sentiments were growing among the Tamils and the Muslims, and the colonial constructions of the past and writing of history of Sri Lanka, depicting these communities as late comers to Sri Lanka and as communities that have not

contributed much to develop its economic, social, political and cultural structures, were an understandable impetus for these sentiments. Marginalised in history they also needed to construct a suitable past to claim the right to participate in the affairs of the country. Even though, they may have not had strong nationalist cultural movement as the Sinhalese, at least in the politics these communities also laid strong claims to cultural differences in order to defend themselves as different nations that need to be represented not as Ceylonese but as Tamils and Muslims.

It is in this context that political representation and people's right to participate in the State-Building process introduced by the British colonial administration has to be located and explained.

### **State-Building and Identity Politics**

As it is well known, when the British possessed the Dutch controlled areas in Sri Lanka, the British East India Company had the economic and governing powers until Sri Lanka became a crown colony in 1802. When the British captured the Kandyan kingdom in the 1815, the whole island was under the crown and its dual system of governing. This was suitable for the mercantilist system that was in practice then and for maintaining monopolistic policies of the British.

However, with the development of the capitalist socio-economic relations, the political and social ideologies and practices were also changing. Mercantilist system gave way for liberal capitalism and the emerging theories and concepts relating to politics and power strongly emphasized the individualism, freedom, liberty and right to equality of citizens. The power transfer through social contract was the accepted political norm and politics of representation was regarded as the way for including the mass in the processes of governing. Freedom and equality of citizens were the principles that emphasised and

valued under the changing economic and politics of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It was within this background that the question of the usefulness of Sri Lanka as a colony of the British Empire was raised in the British parliament. Once the British was able to secure the Indian ocean by throwing out competing European nations Sri Lanka lost its strategic value for the British to prevent India being conquered by another European power. Sri Lanka was not producing a high profit in its commercial activities and the administrative system was a financial burden. The criticism to monopolistic economic and governing practices led to the decision of appointing a commission to Sri Lanka to inquire into matters of governing and inquire into how to develop resources of Sri Lanka for economic prosperity and wellbeing of the general public.

Colebrooke and Cameron, the appointed commissioners were regarded as having the necessary experience to understand the situation of Sri Lanka as both of them had served in the orient. They have arrived in Sri Lanka in 1829. The commissioners had to work with an uncooperative administration and their main way of gathering information was channels provided by the government and yet they travelled through Sri Lanka and listened to various parties of natives. Finally a detailed report with drastic proposals for economic, political and administrative changes was presented, that came to be known as 1832 Colebrooke- Cameron reforms (Mendis 1956).

The political reforms suggested by the Commission generated several consequences. First, by suggesting a uniform administrative system to the whole country based on newly demarcated five provinces, the commission put an end to the traditional administrative divisions based on up country – low country division and Jaffna area. The administrative unification

Colebrooke assumed would eradicate cultural or social divisions. Weakening the strength of the Kandyan kingdom was also a main idea and parts of its territory was allocated to the all provinces. This measure has paved the way for the notion of unitary state.

Secondly, the proposal suggested a radical transformation of the system of government. Colebrooke was not in favour of establishing a separate system of government for Sri Lanka. The commissioners also believed that power being concentrated on a single position, in this instance the governor, was a threat to the personal liberty of the people in the colony. In place of a governor with a powerless advisory council, the Commission suggested a government with executive and legislative councils to assist the governor. The executive council was to be concerned with revenue and disbursement.

In suggesting to establish the legislative council, Colebrooke emphasized the fact that the legislative council should be the place to listen to desires and needs of the colonised people since the majority of them lived in a deprived status. Therefore, he suggested, the governor should not take part in the legislative council meetings. (Mendis, 1957)

The other important factor he emphasized was that the colonized could play a decisive role in the progress of the colony and their participation in the governing matters is necessary for the advancement of the colony. Colebrooke's view was in sharp contrast to the belief held by the colonial officers that the natives are incapable of participating in governing matters.

In these suggestions, for a complete change of political system in Sri Lanka, one finds embedded his utilitarian and liberal values as well as his sensitiveness to the opinions of the natives who presented opinions to him. With this, the 1832 Colebrooke-Cameron reforms paved the way for a representative, procedural

democratic political system in Sri Lanka, hitherto alien to its inhabitants, and, changed the relation between ruler and the ruled in an irrevocable manner. In K.M. De Silva's words.

'The chief significance of the Colebrooke- Cameron reforms lies in the fact that they not only reversed the trend towards concentrate of authority in the governor, but as a measure of constitutional reform was far ahead of anything prevalent at the time in India or the non-white colonies' (De Silva, 1973:227)

The political and administrative changes that the 1832 Commission suggested laid the foundation for a unitary state based on a political system that supported the majoritarian rule even though the governing body was subordinated to the rule of the crown. The model was the European nation state. By creating a homogenized population [Ceylonese] instead of pragmatic communities based on race and regional divisions and giving them a voice in the decision-making processes, he believed that the aim of the Commission, i.e. developing the resources of the colony and wellbeing of its people, could be achieved.

Even though, it was not a representative assembly in complete essence, Colebrooke-Cameron proposals established a legislative council with sixteen members appointed by the governor - ten were official members, and six of them were unofficial members. The official members were colonial officers.

The colonial office was not responsive to natives' request to be appointed to the most important body, the Executive council. The unofficial representation was nominated representation because it was felt that the people of the Ceylon are not matured to elect their representatives. It was suggested that persons who are recognised by the public as socially important figures should be nominated as unofficial members.

The nomination of the unofficial members to the Council was on the communal basis. K.M. De Silva suggests this was 'natural' because the purpose was to elicit knowledge of local conditions at the legislative council (De Silva 1973:235). The selected representatives however, were the elites of society who the British conceived as leaders of their communities.

However, as Nira Wickramasinghe points out, we do not have enough evidence to explore how the non-elite groups perceived their 'representatives' (2006:51). The British believed that the knowledge constructed through censuses provided an 'accurate knowledge' of the people of the country, that communities with fixed racial identities comprise the society and the best way to represent the people is race based representation. This was the view of some local elite leaders too as Nira Wickramasinghe shows (Ibid:51) The natives were represented by low country Sinhalese, Tamils and Burghers with three other Europeans as unofficial members of the legislative council. During the next seventy years, the only change that was made was to appoint two unofficial members to represent Kandyan Sinhalese and the Moor/Muslim community.

The governor was in the habit of consulting the unofficial members when nominating unofficial members. The native representatives also began to send petitions to governor recommending individuals for nomination and as a result, members of the same elite families were appointed as unofficial members to the legislative council.(De Silva, 1973: 236) Even though there was a demand from the Ceylonese to introduce elective representation, the attitude of the governor and the colonial rule was that people of Sri Lanka were not adequately equipped until they achieve a higher literary rate.

Undoubtedly, this has strengthened the arguments for racial representation and paved the way for family based

political leadership in Sri Lanka. Many of them were from high caste elite Tamil and Sinhala families whose primary interests were safeguarding interests of their own social groups. The politics of this period also shows that there was competition and challenge from the emerging non-high caste elite, especially the low country Sinhalese, for political representation. As K. M. De Silva (1973) points, they were the driving force behind the demand for elective representation since 1905. They strongly agitated for constitutional reforms in the coming decades of the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the sentiments created by counting and classifying people into clear cut ethnic categories played a major role in claims for political representation. Thus the reforms for State-Building during the first half of the twentieth century were embedded by the conflicting claims of the Up country/ low country Sinhalese and Tamil and Muslim communities based on the 'authentic' national identities constructed and imagined during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is the popular notion that the British manipulated communal identities to divide and rule the colonised. However, historians such as K. M. De Silva and Nira Wickramasinghe have shown that this was not the case at every instance and it was governor Manning who encouraged minority politics of the Kandyans and the Ceylon Tamils in the need of weakening the Ceylon National Congress, formed in 1919.

The Ceylon National Congress, though comprised every ethnic community of Sri Lanka, was dominated by the English educated low country Sinhalese. This was seen by the kandyan political leadership as a threat to their interests. Therefore, they promoted the idea that the Kandyans are a separate nation and cannot be represented by the foreigners who are alien to their ways. The foreigners they indicated were the low country

Sinhalese political leaders. The political leaders of the upcountry Sinhalese demanded that *'the Kandyan race should be separately represented in our Legislative Assembly, and that our entity as a separate and distinct community should otherwise too be recognised and maintained'* (Ceylon independent, 1925, quoted in De silva :402) The colonial rulers were also convinced that the Kandyans were an oppressed minority that needed to be represented separately.

In the case of the Ceylon Tamils until 1920s they maintained the fact that they are a majority ethnic group on par with the low country and up country Sinhalese.(Wickramasinghe, 2006:58) The Tamils actively engaged with the activities of the Ceylon National Congress agitating for more political rights for natives. However, cracks began to appear after the decision to do away with communal representation and introduction of the elective principle on territorial basis to appoint unofficial representatives on a very restricted basis. In the 1921 election, thirteen Sinhalese were appointed against three Tamils. There onwards, the Tamil political leadership demanded restoration of representation based on ratio of race. Political organisations were formed by the Tamils to voice their concerns as a minority community. With the decision of Arunachalam to move away from the National Congress and join his brother Ponnambalam Ramanathan to voice the concerns of the Tamils as a minority, the Ceylon National Congress ceased to represent national politics.

The Muslims who faced the threat of communal violence in the hands of the Sinhalese were apprehensive about Sinhala nationalistic politics. Thus, they favoured alliance with the British as protectors of their rights especially after governor Manning's success in manipulating minority politics against Ceylon National Congress. When the 1921 election resulted in appointing Sinhalese to the Legislative Council, Muslims accepted the Tamil

minority politics and worked with Ponnambalam Ramanathan to ensure minority political rights. However, as mentioned elsewhere in this chapter Ponnambalam's claim that Muslims are not a distinct community from the Tamils as they speak the same language as Tamils created rifts with the Tamils and in the campaign for 50-50 rights for minorities vs. majority Sinhalese, the Muslims backed Sinhala politicians.

Thus, by the end of 1924 the politics based on imagined ethnic identities created rifts among the Sinhalese and between Sinhalese and Tamils and Muslims, between Muslims and Tamils. By 1925 the colonial administration, which was aware of communal politics that was at play took the view that a commission of inquiry should be appointed before the next election. The Ceylon National Congress, hearing the news about the appointment of a special commission on constitutional reforms, increased their agitation for self-government, claiming that the responsibility of governing should be handed over to the indigenous population of the country. However, with lack of support from the Tamil political leadership, the CNC was not in a position to represent the interests of all communities of Sri Lanka. The news also gave way to increase the attention on minority political rights and created a tension within communities that claimed they should be represented according to ethnic and regional based identities.

Another issue that divided the CNC itself and the minority communities was the claim that universal suffrage would be granted to Ceylonese. A section of the CNC leadership believed that the public is not ready for such responsibility and a further period of education is necessary for people to take up the responsibility self-government.

For the non Sinhala communities that meant the permanent domination of Sinhalese politics and for the Kandyans it meant being ruled by the low country Sinhalese.

The sense of deprivation of the Kandyans has been well recorded: *'...fundamental error of British statesmanship has been to treat the subject of political advancement of the people's of Ceylon as one of a homogeneous race'* (Kandyan National Assembly, 1927, quoted in De Silvab: 494) The Kandyans agitated for being ruled separately and demanded a federal government while the rest of the minorities demanded 50- 50 rights and devolution of power within a federal system.

Sir Hugh Clifford, successor of Manning, sending a dispatch to the Colonial Office claimed that the constitution devised in 1924 need substantial modification and in that despatch he was critical of the politicians and communal groups of Ceylonese. As a consequence of the discussion generated by this the Colonial Office decided to appoint a Commission to review the constitution of Ceylon (De Silva,1973). The Donoughmore Commission (The Government press, 1929), after listening to the various and varied sentiments expressed by all parties, declared that the British colonial rule's experiment in giving voices to represent the desires and need of the public in governing assemblies based on ethnic identities failed in the colonies and especially in Ceylon as it created dissent and tension between communities. They ruled out a system that would pave the way for devolution of power among communities. They also rejected the plea for not granting universal suffrage and declared that the majority of the people of Sri Lanka live in poverty, without work rights and live in destitute and therefore needed to be represented adequately.

Despite the strong protests from both sections of Sinhalese and Tamils, this commission paved the way for participatory democracy. The State Council proposed by the commission was comprised of seven executive committees. The leaders of the executive committees were appointed as board of ministers.

This however, did not create an environment for growth of national political parties. Instead, the communal unrest and the resentment that the minority groups are being side-lined by the Sinhala dominated political system was rapidly increased especially among the Tamils due to the election results of 1931. Nevertheless in the 1930s the Sinhala cultural nationalism experienced its triumph with Sinhala Buddhist ideology becoming the main frame for eradicating differences between Sinhalese and uniting them as the majority ethnic group against rest of the communities in Sri Lanka.

The cultural nationalists were also vociferous in demanding Swaraj or self government for Sri Lanka. Leaders like Dharmapala believed that the self government is the solution for restoring Sinhala Buddhist hegemony and that the Sinhalese had lost as a result of embracing English ways and habits. In this regard, their vision was that of establishing the postcolonial state based on Buddhist righteousness and Sinhala dominancy. They rejected the rights of the Tamils and Muslims adequate political representation and power sharing by constructing an image that portrayed the latter as late comers to Sri Lanka and destroyers of Buddhism. Herein lies the origin of the Sinhalese dominated political establishment geared towards establishing Sinhala hegemony and excluding other communities participating in post colonial State-Building at an equal level.

Thus in summarizing it can be stated that political reforms of the colonial administration for State-Building in Sri Lanka based on unitary principle and majoritarian participation did not bring expected results as communal representation was adopted as the base for representing the voice of the majority in decision making institutions. Even though the British colonial state accommodated natives in governing processes to a limited extent, it did not

attempt to do away with the subordinate position of the colonial government to the British Crown.

The notions of nationalism and the nation were inseparably bound to the gradual and consequential process of the colonial experience. In their attempt to think through the experience of being colonised by a culture and a politic that they found alien to them, and in their need to address the related concepts of independence, self-governance, and resistance, they were, both consciously and unconsciously, forced to redefine their identities in tune with, and in opposition to, their colonial masters. They found solace in the ideas of race, religion, language and culture as indicators for demarcating ethnic and national boundaries, thus paving the way, in a certain sense, for an even more devastating division in their very midst. By ignoring the shared cultural and historical aspects of their past, the colonized became the colonizer by initiating the politics of exclusion. When elective representation was suggested as the mechanism for selecting representatives in governing bodies, what ultimately remained was, with the unanimous support of the political leadership of all communities, the concept of race as the unsurpassable horizon of postcolonial State-Building.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the process of categorization and classification initiated by the British for administrative purposes led to the sedimentation of this official knowledge leading the way to reconstitute community identities. By embracing these reconstituted identities as historically given and politically salient facts, the indigenous population sought in them a key for the success of their struggle for political independence. Paradoxically, though, this emergence of the nationalistic ideology that helped shape

the nationalistic imagination, was also marked by internal splits and ethnic tensions. The British colonial state reforms and representative politics of the colony were experimented along these reconstituted 'authentic' ethnic identities and this only emphasised and highlighted the overall process and the irrecoverable path it had started to take. Constructing a collective psychology of communities through cultural nationalism in the colonial period has profoundly influenced mobilization of society and politics of representation and created divisions among natives. As a result of this, the demand for political rights for natives did not create a space for politics of inclusion and the democratization of the political system in Sri Lanka. The failure of the State-Building to base its reform and restructuring process on the principles of freedom and equality, as Colebrooke –Cameron Commission expected, laid the foundation, during the colonial period, for the crisis of postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka.

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## POSTCOLONIAL STATE–BUILDING IN SRI LANKA SINCE 1948: APPROACHES, ATTEMPTS AND CHALLENGES

Gamini Keerawella

*“The state has seen an unprecedented expansion in the twentieth century. But the fascination, mingled with fear, that it exerts is very old, and the ‘monstrous progeny of power and law’, as Paul Valéry called it, has produced throughout the ages a number of metaphors evoking mythical monsters, and deities such as Leviathan and Moloch. For the present time, the Mexican poet, Octavio Paz, has given us the metaphor of the ‘philanthropic ogre’, which exactly conveys the contradictory feelings aroused by the modern state, seen as a dominating force with totalitarian ambitions, but also as a guardian, which protects and regulates society.”*

(Ali Kazancigil 1986)

The concept of state and State-Building has always been at the centre of political discourse since its emergence as an organized political community. The state in its long historical evolution from the tribal federation to the modern state acquired various forms and contents in different historical spaces and geographical regions. As state formation dynamics are quite different from one historical situation to the other, the forms and formations of the state must be understood by placing them in their particular historical context. The same society may have experienced different processes of state formation in different historical phases giving birth to variety of state models depending on the course of historical development that that very society has undergone. In that sense state-formation is a never ending phenomenon. As far as the social content of the state is concerned, orders, castes, nations and classes are forms of social hierarchy often associated with distinct forms of state (Godelier, 1998: 12-15). The present form of 'modern state had its birth first in Western Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century after the disintegration of the medieval political order. It is also identified as the 'modern nation state' and the two components of the term (nation and state), according to Habermas, "refers to convergent but different historical processes – the formation of modern state and the building of modern nations" (Habermas, 1996: 283). Even in Western Europe the formation of the modern nation state proceeded in various phases and stages stretching from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In many non-European societies, the pre-colonial state was replaced by the colonial state that was superimposed under the aegis of Western colonialism. With the onset of decolonization another historical phase in state formation has taken place in the societies of the former colonial world. The modern state that evolved in Western Europe accompanied a particular historical situation and a specific cultural context. It is intimately linked to the development of modern capitalism and

the rise of the bourgeoisie (Poggi, 1978). The reproduction of the modern state in countries of different socio-historical context and development has created many forms of contradictions and has brought forward the issue of how to resolve the discrepancy between form and content in the process of postcolonial state-formation. Different trajectories and contexts of postcolonial state formation in non-Western societies have been subjected to considerable scholarship. Today, the Archimedean screw of postcolonial historical development is the issue of postcolonial state-building. Many other key issues such as nation-building and national integration are also closely involved with postcolonial state formation.

When Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, one of the key tasks that the rulers of the new state had before them was to guide and direct the postcolonial state formation and the related national integration processes. This paper intends to examine different approaches and attempts taken since independence towards postcolonial state-building by various stake-holders and the challenges confronted by the rulers of post-independent Sri Lanka. As the analytical point of departure to the examination of the postcolonial state-building process in Sri Lanka, the paper will attempt to clarify certain terms and concepts associated with the process very briefly. After this brief theoretical exposition, the paper proceeds in four parts. The first part will cover the initial phase of post-independence state-building stretching from 1948 to 1956. It will begin with the analysis of the form and institutional content of the state that Sri Lanka inherited with the transfer of power. The different state-building projects promoted by different political forces and the evolving social and political dynamics in the period 1948-56 will be traced. The second part will cover the period from the MEP election victory in 1956 to the second Republican Constitution of 1977. The approaches and attempts

relating to state-building with the entry of the new social forces into the corridor of power after 1956 will be dealt with in this section. After the 1977 Constitution, the competing Sinhala and Tamil State-Building projects clashed head-on. Various attempts made in state reforms and constraints faced in the context of the war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan State will be covered in the third section. The final section will cover new trends in the postcolonial State-Building process in the changing historical environment, domestically after the military defeat of the LTTE and, externally, in the context of globalization.

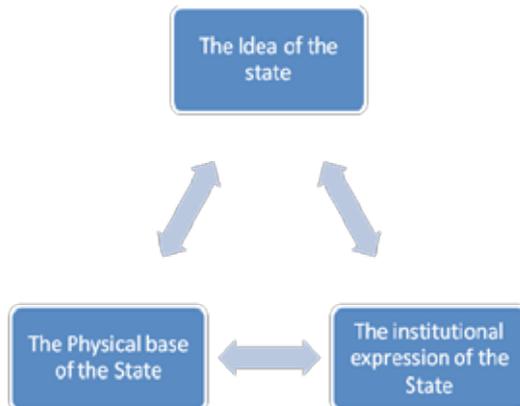
### **The State and State-building: Some Analytical/Theoretical Contours**

The state is a structure and also a mechanism. State-building is a process. The 'postcolonial' is a historical condition relevant to the societies that had once come under colonialism. What is really meant by 'postcolonial State-Building'? In order to answer this question from a broader analytical perspective it is necessary to pay attention to some of the heuristic constructs associated with the state and state formation. Presently, various aspects of the modern state and its dynamics have been subjected to extensive scholarly investigation from diverse perspectives. These theoretical approaches to the concept of state in general can broadly be divided into three broad categories: class-analytic approaches which pay attention to the structural relationship of the state with capitalism as a system of class relations; organization-analytic approaches which view the state as an autonomous source of power which operates on the basis of institutional logics and dynamics; and micro-foundational approaches which emphasize the ways in which the actions of the state are analyzed in terms of the interests, motivations, and strategic dilemmas of the people who occupy positions in the state. The state and state formation in non-western societies,

with due attention to their specific historical development, have been studied from diverse perspectives such as the theory of dependencia (Cardoso and Faletto 1978, Gunder Frank, 1998), World Systems perspective (Wallerstein 1979), the long cycle of world leadership theory (Modelski 1978), the Centre- Periphery theory (Amin 1976) the neo-Marxist approaches (Anderson 1974), and developmentalist approaches. Furthermore, recently, with the ethnic resurgence in many parts of the world and the increase of ethno-political conflict, the issue of the state and problems of postcolonial state-formation are analyzed from an approach of national integration. However, it is not intended here to engage in a theoretical discussion on these theories and perspectives, but as an analytical point of departure the paper intends to define the state in order to understand the process of state-building.

From conceptualizing the state from a Structural Realist perspective, Barry Buzan identifies three interrelated components of the state: 1) the idea of the state; 2) the institutional expressions of the state; 3) and the physical base of the state. According to Buzan “The physical base of the state comprises its population and territory, including all of the natural and man-made wealth contained within its boundaries. It is the most concrete of the three components” (Buzan 1991: 62). The institutional expressions of the state comprise the entire machinery of the government. It includes not only legislative, administrative and judicial bodies but also laws, procedures and norms by which they operate. The most central among the three components of the state is the idea of the state. Buzan further writes that “The State exists, or has its essence, primarily in the socio-political rather than on the physical plane. In some important senses, state is more an idea held in common by a group of people, than a physical organism” (Buzan 1991: 63).

**Fig 1: Component Parts of the State**



The conceptualizing the state in terms of three interrelated components (Fig 1) is helpful to understand the state-building process. The symbiotic links between the three components of the state should be taken into account. The ideology of the state determines the posture and the vision and mission of the ideological expressions of the state, including its constitution and also laws, procedures and norms by which legislative, administrative and judicial systems operate. This in turn reinforces the ideology of the state. The physical base of the state, mainly citizenship and the territory are given their legitimacy by the institutional expressions of the state. In the final analyses, the citizens and how they relate to the institutions of power and authority are determined by the ideology of the state. At the same time the particular definition of the citizen and citizenry strengthens the ideology of the state. The state-building process encompasses all these three elements of the state. However, in this line of analysis, the key element of the State-Building process is the construction of the idea of the state as it provides the answer to two key questions: why does the state exist and what is the mission of the state? Hence, a key dimension of state-building

is developing the ideology for the state. The colonial state had its own rationale and ideology determined in a particular historical context in line with the interests of the colonial power. The main challenge involved with the postcolonial State-Building process is the forging of the idea of the state to suit new historical conditions. It is important to note that the state system left behind by colonialism in Asia, unlike in Americas and Africa, more or less reflected the pre-colonial pattern of states and their political history. Many postcolonial states in Asia anchor their legitimacy in their own history and try to find the ideology of the state in terms of their readings of history. As Buzan observed that, “while this synergy helped a system of modern state to take root in Asia, it also carried pre-colonial history forward into postcolonial international relations” (Buzan 2002: 2). The postcolonial states often tend to find its idea of state through its link to the nation. However, the state-denoted nation is in many instances only a politico-legal abstract. In a multi-ethnic context, the ideology of the state, if based on the state-nation link, should embrace all the ethno-national identities of the territory or find another form of ideology based on non-sectarian political ideologies such as democracy, welfare or development. What is commonly evident in many postcolonial states is that organizing ideologies come and go with different political leadership, even in the same regime, without taking deeper root among the population. In order to take firm root, the ideology of the state must appear as something more than the ruling elites’ definition its self-interest.

It is true that the key element in the building of institutional expressions of the state is the making of the constitution as it is considered ‘the grammar’ of politics. But, it is also a broader process that goes beyond the making of a new constitution to include the judiciary and the legal system and, more importantly, education and many other mechanisms linked

with the service delivery system. Education is a key instrument in constructing and legitimizing the rationale of the three elements of the state. Hence, education reforms constitute a key dimension in the postcolonial State-Building process. Building the physical base of the state is something more than the demarcation of territory and the identification of its citizens. The creation of the perception of territory of the state and its link to the citizens is far more important than deciding the boundary of the territory. The key issue is how the relationship between the perception of territory and the idea of the state constitutes can be decided in the postcolonial State-Building process. In building the human base of the state, how to decide the relationship between the state and the nation is crucial because the strength or vulnerability of the postcolonial state depends on the relationship between the state and the nation.

The postcolonial state-building process often takes place in the context of decolonization. Decolonization is now defined as a broader process with political, economic and cultural dimensions. It is not simply the transfer of power from the colonial Raj to the leaders of the colonized societies. It is rather a continuous process aimed at restructuring and remodeling the political and economic structures, socio-cultural value systems and norms inherited from the colonial past to suit the postcolonial environment and also to represent the interests of the broader masses. It is not a smooth process at all. It is often impregnated with many contradictions and diverse indigenous interests. It is from this analytical backdrop, that the approaches, attempts and challenges in the postcolonial State-Building process in Sri Lanka could be analyzed.

## **The Genesis of the Postcolonial State and its Political Anatomy**

In 1948, with the grant of independence, Sri Lanka inherited the state that evolved during the British colonial period. There was no absolute break between the colonial and the postcolonial state after Independence. It was the same old extractive state which needed a wide array of operators with new masters.

In the changed historical environment that ensued as a result of the structural changes that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under British rule, the Sinhala and Tamil national leaderships redefined their 'national self', as a part of redefining collective identities, in terms of a new political order associated with the phenomenon of the nation state. The re-reading of history in terms of the 'nation state' began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a part of the religious and cultural revival movements. The re-reading of ancient Pali chronicles in line with 'modern' political formations provided ideological substance to the nationalist political project of the Sinhalese. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Tamils also came to 'recover' their history as a part of their nationalist projects (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994). Accordingly, by the time of independence both the Sinhalese and Tamils redefined their national self in terms of a 'modern nation' ready to claim their 'due' share in the postcolonial state.

When the transfer of power to Sri Lanka was in sight, after 'the 1943 Declaration' by the British colonial authorities, the issue of how to reconcile the competing claims in the proposed constitutional arrangement came to the forefront. The Board of Ministers was requested to proceed with the framing of its own constitutional proposals by the 1943 Declaration. It emphasized that the proposals should obtain a three-fourth majority. One of the key issues that cropped up in this process was the basis of representation. Both, the purely population basis as well

as communal representation were considered inappropriate. Accordingly, the formula of one seat for every 75,000 of the population and one seat for every 1,000 square miles of territory in each province was worked out. It was at this point that the British Government appointed the Soulbury Commission. The Tamil Congress under G.G. Ponnambalam was not prepared to go with the Ministers' Proposals and presented their own to the Commission. After the experience under the Donoughmore Constitution, the main Tamil leadership insisted on balanced representation, i.e. fifty percent of the seats for minorities including 'Ceylon Indians' – the term used then to identify the Tamils of Indian origin. As I.D.S. Weerawardena pointed out when the ministers drafted their proposals they pledged to give some weightage to all the minorities. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike offered a scheme of 60:40 as a basis of representation. The proposals of the BOM were accepted by the Soulbury Commission and incorporated into the new constitution. In I.D.S. Weerawardena's words, "From the point of view of the minorities, the new Constitution of Ceylon was the point of balance among the various conflicting communal claims" (Weerawardena 1951: 244). Ultimately, the Tamil Congress of G.G. Ponnambalam agreed to settle for the unitary form of constitution with balanced representation based on 60:40 formula negotiated by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike on behalf of the Ceylon National Congress.

D.S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka wanted to build a stable multi-ethnic state by hegemonic accommodation of the leadership of ethnic groups in the government through a leadership-level alliance. In order to form a broader ethno-political alliance, he dissolved the Ceylon National Congress and formed a new party under his leadership, the United National Party (UNP). The early attempt of the UNP to establish its political hegemony over the Tamils by co-opting

Arunachalam Mahadeva failed due to the defeat of Mahadeva in the 1948 elections at the hands of G.G. Ponnambalam of the Tamil Congress. D.S Senanayake's continuous attempts to forge an elitist accommodation of Tamil and Muslim leaders were reflected in the formation of his cabinet. In addition to the two cabinet portfolios given to the Tamil independents and one to the Muslims, the Tamil Congress, the main Tamil party was incorporated as an alliance partner. However, the co-option of a leader cannot be equated as an organic incorporation of ethnic groups to build a strong multi-ethnic polity (Keerawella and Samarajiva 1987).

The main elements of the political structure inherited with the independence settlement were the unitary constitution and 'Westminster model' democracy with the first-past-the post electoral system. It was a highly centralized state with a Colombo-centred administration. The social base of power and authority was confined to a very thin layer of the elite of society, which was essentially a multi-ethnic cluster closely linked with common interests and orientation. The new ruling class whose political vehicle was the UNP which mainly comprised , according to Jayadeva Uyangoda, "(1) small and medium plantation owners in the low country, (2) agrarian landlords who were of the nature of urban gentry, (3) bureaucrats and professionals that emerged from landowning and merchant classes" Uyangoda 1982: 182). It was the elitist bureaucracy trained under colonial rule that maintained the continuity from the colonial to the postcolonial state. The medium of administration continued to be English which 92 percent of the population could neither read nor write at the time. As A.J. Wilson observed vividly, "Government came to be looked upon by the masses as a distant object, awesome, and its members as persons to be approached with fear and reverence. It was not 'their government' but the process

turned over by their British ‘masters’ to the local version of this masterdom” (Wilson 1975:4). At the same time, the new Raj also continued the ‘welfare state’ that it inherited from the colonial state. These welfare structures included free health, free primary and secondary education, and a weekly minimum ration of rice distributed at a highly subsidized price<sup>1</sup>.

Partly due to his sharp political expediency in the context of the political challenges that emanated from the Left and other centrist political forces and partly with the intention of expediting the grant of independence, D.S Senanayake co-opted the leaders of the Tamil political forces through a leadership-level alliance and hoped to build a stable multi-ethnic state. His modus operandi later revealed, however, that he did not have a clear vision as to national integration in the postcolonial state. The ‘new state’ had to determine its human base. Under colonial rule there were only ‘subjects’ of the empire, not ‘citizens’. The transition from a colonial to a postcolonial state compelled a necessary shift of the human base from ‘colonial subject’ to citizens of the Sri Lankan state. The very first acts of the rulers of Independent Sri Lanka in deciding the citizenship of the postcolonial state disrupted the balance set up earlier in the Soulbury Constitution ‘among the various conflicting communal claims’. The Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949 changed the political scenarios. This move not only made the earlier formula of distributing seats to provinces meaningless but also created an unresolved issue between Sri Lanka and India, leaving a room for India to intervene. I.D.S. Weerawardena writes, “The Soulbury Constitution received minority support (without which it could not have been implemented) because it arranged to enable the minorities to win a certain number of seats. The Ceylon Indians were among these minorities. To deny them the

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1. In 1947 the total expenditure on welfare services absorbed 56.1 percent of the total government revenue.

vote is to deny them the seats. One moral undertaken has been done away with. To deny the vote to Ceylon Indians is also to reduce the total number of seats available to all minorities. That is a broken pledge to all minorities.... The moral basis of the Soulbury Constitution has been wiped away. To attempt to prove the constitutionality of the position is not to attempt to prove its justice.” (Weerawardena 1951: 244) He further asked: “Even if they were constitutional, on which honest men can disagree, the basic question has not been answered. Is it right that a moral undertaking given to the minority communities be broken soon after constitutional power to break it has been obtained?”

The parliamentary opposition in 1948 was constituted mainly of the Left parties and other independent socialists and some other noted independent political personalities. The Left Parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) led by Dr. N.M. Perera, The Communist Party (C.P.) led by Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary) led by Philip Gunawardena, enjoyed considerable support from the working class and the urban and rural poor. However, they were divided and engaged in an ideological battle among themselves.

Sri Lankan economy in 1948 was a classic example of a colonial plantation economy. Within the general *laissez faire* policy framework, the market forces were allowed to regulate the economy with only minimum direct government intervention. The plantation sector was allowed to remain as it was prior to 1948. British capital continued to maintain its hold on the tea industry through Agency Houses and controlled the financing, shipping, marketing and insurance of ‘Ceylon tea’. Four British multinationals<sup>2</sup> continued to maintain its grip on the

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2. The four Multinationals that controlled tea industry included (1) Brook Bond, (2) Liebig, (3) Unilever who controlled Lipton and James Finley and (4) House of Twinning who controlled Harrisons and Crossfield

plantation economy through their many tentacles and a system of interlocking directorates. In view of the favourable balance of trade and foreign exchange reserves at the time, there was no compulsion to initiate any substantial change in the economic order in 1948.

The appropriate administrative structure of the state had been on the agenda of discussion since 1931. The Donoughmore Commission proposed to establish Provincial Councils to delegate certain administrative functions of the Central Government. What is more important is the rationale presented by the Donoughmore Commission for Provincial Councils in 1928<sup>3</sup>. The Commission recommended that the full possibility of establishing Provincial councils should be explored by the new Department without delay. Further it proposed that “an experiment with a Council of this nature may be made in a more highly developed province within the next few years, and if that should prove successful, the system rapidly extended throughout the Island” (Report of the Special Commission 1928). The State Council did not take any concrete steps to implement this recommendation. The Issue of Provincial Councils came to be discussed at the State Council in 1940 when R.S.S. Gunawardena proposed a motion on 10 July 1940. The Motion declared “This Council is of the opinion that immediate effects should be given to the recommendation of the Donoughmore Commission with regard to the establishment of

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3. The Commission reported that “The argument in favour of the establishment of a Provincial Council in each Province is that such a scheme might result in a large part of administrative work now carried out in the Legislative Council coming into the hands of persons permanently resided in the country districts and thus more directly in contact with their needs; in the relief of the departments of the central government of much detailed work and in their being thereby set free to consider and advise on the larger affairs of the country: in the special views of the different races predominant in the different part of the Island having effects in the administration of these parts; in members of growing body of politically-minded persons in the country being placed in an honourable position to render real assistance in administration. Ceylon”, Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution, Colombo: Government press, 1928, p118.

Provincial Councils". Following the Motion, a detailed report of the Executive Committee of Local Administration on Provincial Councils was placed before the State Council by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike as the Minister of Local Administration. It identified functions of proposed Provincial Councils in three main classes: supervisory, direct executive and advisory. The proposal was soon overtaken by other developments relating to the transfer of power and the issue of representation. Referring to the Provincial Councils, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike stated in December 1947 during the Budget Debate that: "I do not think I shall be able to introduce the Bill relating to Provincial Councils before January next year. The Bill is ready, but as it impinges on the functions of my colleagues in the Cabinet, I have to obtain their consent to all the implications of the Bill before I can introduce it in this House." It is important to note that even in the 1940s the Tamil leadership had not taken the issue of Regional Councils and devolution of power to regions into their hands.

The political and social order when Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948 appeared to be stable. The main challenge before the rulers of the new state was to guide and direct the postcolonial state-formation and nation-building processes to embrace the multi-ethnic social order. There was a strong belief that political democracy and liberal norms would provide the necessary institutional and ideological basis for the postcolonial state. The rulers of the new state defined independence and state power in terms of peoples' sovereignty and territorial integrity. Closely related to postcolonial state-building was the building of national self to the postcolonial state. Hence, postcolonial State-Building and nation building remained as interrelated processes. How to develop a viable Sri Lankan national self transcending other national identities was not considered a serious issue. The liberal political project of the ruling elites believed that, in

addition to elitist accommodation, some constitutional safeguards embedded into the constitution would allay the concerns of the Tamil. They were of the opinion that with the progress of political modernization the importance of the ethnic factor in politics would diminish. The Marxist Left in the opposition was confident that development of class consciousness and class politics would replace ethnic politics with the passage of time. But continued ethno-political mobilization among both Sinhalese and Tamils threatened the political stability forged in 1948.

### **Evolving Discourse on State-Building: 1948-1956**

The evolving discourse of postcolonial State-Building in the period 1948-1956 centred on the four different State-Building perspectives and political programmes. They should be understood in the context of the political dynamics involved with the rapid pace of ethno-political mobilization in the country. These four perspectives and programmes included the elitist liberal nationalist hybrid state-building project of the ruling regime, the Marxist perspective of alternative state-building programme, the state-building perspective of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement and the Tamil ethno-nationalist state-building perspective. The elitist liberal-nationalist state-building project of the UNP regime had many contradictions from the very beginning. The Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949 revealed the limitations of the constitutional safeguards instituted in the Soulbury Constitution for the protection of minority rights. The experiment of a harmonious multi-ethnic polity by the formation of a political alliance only at the leadership level without addressing the issues and contradictions relating to the political dynamics of the multi-ethnic social content gradually failed in the period 1948-56. The erosion of the thin foundation of political hegemony of the ruling coalition began before long.

The first resignation from the Cabinet was of a Tamil Cabinet Minister, C. Sunderalingam, to protest over government policy relating to recruitment to the public sector and the distribution of lands. The division of the Tamil Congress over the Citizenship Acts and the formation of the Federal Party by those who left the Tamil Congress in 1949 had deeper political implications. Further, the resignation of S.W.R.D Bandaranaike from the cabinet and the ruling UNP in 1951 created serious fissures in the grand political coalition created in 1948.

The political hegemony established by the ruling elites of the postcolonial state in 1948 was threatened in the period 1948-56 on two grounds – ethnic and class. The social base of state power that rested on a thin layer of society comprised, in the main, of indigenous planters, bureaucrats and English educated professionals that emerged from landowning and merchant social groups. The contradiction between the narrow band of elites who held the monopoly of power and authority taking the reins of state power with independence and the new social forces that emerged from the political mobilization of the masses, which took place at a rapid pace after independence, was growing. With the rapid expansion of educational facilities and the resultant social change, new social groups constantly came forward to demand a place in the political sun. The electoral process linked with parliamentary democracy and universal suffrage compelled the national political elites to count on a large number of local political operators and power brokers. It contributed to politically mobilizing a section of intermediary layers who were not involved in political power play at the centre directly. In the post-independence historical context these politically mobilized activists of intermediary layers were not ready to play only a marginal role as political attendants of national political leaders, as they came to realize that they were excluded from

real political power and the decision-making process. There were many differences between the national-level political leadership and their intermediary political agents who operated at ground level. The language, dress, attitudes and value orientation of those who wielded political power after independence separated them from these intermediary social layers generally identified as the petty bourgeoisie. It is important to note that the demand for swabasha in administration first emerged as a class movement. It was a reaction to the situation where opportunities for the upper rungs of employment were restricted to the small segment of the English educated population.

The state craft of the ruling regime associated with postcolonial state-building in the period 1948-56 revealed their vacillation between liberal and nationalist State-Building projects without a clear perspective. The political perspective of the ruling regime can be considered broadly liberal-democratic but it was highly conditioned by their perception of the historical legacy of the Sri Lanka state and the Sinhala nation's link to it. At the same time, the top leadership of the regime was mainly conservative in political perspective and they wanted to continue the colonial legacy without a sudden rupture. As a result what the ruling regime pursued was a liberal-nationalist hybrid state-building project. The agency of this state-building project was the mainly English educated, multi-ethnic, multi-religious upper crust of Sri Lankan society. The ruling regime had to decide the actual and symbolic paraphernalia of the state. The official language, the national anthem and the national flag were among them. As Subashini Hewawasam pointed out, "presentation and representation of collective identities often take place in the form of symbols..... When the state becomes the supreme political manifestation of the community on which it is based, the general tendency is to transform the symbols of

the community into the symbols of the state. In a situation where different collective identities which reside within a single state compete for power, the symbols of the state become a source of conflict and also a manifestation of competition for power and recognition” (Hewawasam 2008: 78). It was clearly revealed in the case of the national flag and of the national anthem<sup>4</sup>. The issue of identifying the national anthem is interesting. In 1950 Prime Minister D.S Senanayake appointed a select committee headed by the Home Affairs and Rural Development Minister E.A.P. Wijeratne. The Committee recommended a popular song (Namo Namo Matha) of Ananda Samarakoon instead of the one selected by the Lanka Gandarva saba after a competition held for this purpose (Jeyaraj 2010). Pundit M. Nallathamby who was entrusted with the task of Tamil transliteration presented the Tamil version of the national anthem. In the period prior to 1956 the Tamil version of the national anthem was extensively used in official functions in the Northern and Eastern provinces. As D.B.S. Jeyaraj traced, “on February 4th 1952, “Namo Namo Matha” was sung at Independence day ceremonies as the official national anthem. The Tamil version “Namo Namo Thaye” was sung in related independence day functions at the Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa Kachcheries. When Sir John Kotelawela visited Jaffna in 1954 the Tamil version of the national anthem was sung at functions felicitating the Prime minister” (Jayaraj 2010).

Examination of political debate associated with the official language is very useful to understand the contradictions of the liberal nationalist project as class dynamics. The issue of the official language and language policy had been on the

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4. In order to decide the national flag a committee representing three ethnic groups was appointed and the proceedings of the Committee, the final report presented in 1950 with the dissenting views expressed by S. Nadesan revealed the ethno-political dynamics of the time.

political agenda since the early 1940s. It was none other than J.R. Jayewardena who moved in the State Council in 1944 that Sinhala be made the official language. In this occasion S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike joined V. Nallaiah to propose an amendment for providing both Sinhala and Tamil the status as Official Languages, which was seconded by R.S.S. Gunawardena. In presenting the amendment, Bandaranaike stated in the State Council that “What is the object of having Sinhalese alone as the official language?.....I do not see that there would be any harm at all in recognizing the Tamil Language also as an official language. It is necessary to bring about that amity, that confidence among the various communities which we are all striving to achieve within reasonable limits...I have no personal objection to both these languages being considered official languages, nor do I see any particular harm or danger or real difficulty arising from it” (State Council 1944). However, the first Prime Minister D.S Senanayake did not want to formally address the issue of the official language. The main thrust of the State-Building project of the ruling elites was the preservation of the status quo and continuation of the Westminster form of parliamentary democracy.

In contesting the dominant liberal-nationalist State-Building project of the ruling elites, a number of alternative State-Building perspectives existed in correspondent with the related Socio-political forces in motion. As far as future political repercussions are concerned the most important among them was the Sinhala Buddhist movement. Even though it had a Sinhala-Buddhist basis, the class (anti-elitist) element and anti-colonial political factors were important at the beginning. In the early 1940s a new generation of Buddhist monks came forward to play a prominent role challenging the policies and attitudes of D.S. Senanayake and the leadership of the Ceylon National Congress. The centre of Buddhist movement was the Vidyalandara

Pirivena. The swabasha language demand first emerged in this background. The sharp conflicts between D.S Senanayake and the Bhikku activists were developed as D.S. Senanayake was strongly against the Bhikku's intervention in politics. The legacy of a Bhikku (*Bhikshuwakage Urumaya*) by Rev. Walpola Rahula, an erudite critique of the views of D.S. Senanayake, had a profound impact on certain sections of society. Among other leading Bhikkus of the Vidyalkara movement were Rev. Yakkaduwe Sri Pragnarama, Rev. Bambarende Siri Seevali. The famous Vidyalkara Declaration issued on 13th February, 1948 under the signature of Rev. Kiriwattuduwe Pragnasara stated that "the duty of the Bhikku is to work for the benefit of the citizens of the country and at the same time to oppose any measures, which hinder the progress and development of the country". It was an open invitation for the Bhikkus to get actively involved in the politics of the country. In the 1947 general elections some of these Bhikkus such as Rev. Kotahena Pannakitti, Rev. Walpola Rahula, Rev. Kalalle Ananda Sagara and Rev. Naththandiye Pannakara went around the country supporting the candidates of the left wing political parties.

It is important to emphasize that the language and Buddhist movement emerged not as a communal/sectarian movement. The grievances of the Buddhists were presented in a broader political framework. It was originally a movement against the privileged, English-educated, westernized upper class who were poised to take the reins of power with the transfer of power. In the context of the rapidly changing political environment after 1948 with ethno-political mobilization, the direction of the language movement changed and took an anti Tamil communal line. In the early 1950s the Sinhala Buddhists forces were politically more vocal in presenting the case of past injustices to Sinhala Buddhists

under the colonial rule<sup>5</sup>. In April 1994 the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress established a commission to probe into the ‘continuing grievances of the Buddhists who were denied their rightful place’. It held public meetings soliciting public views which contributed to further political mobilization of Buddhists and provided a platform for a local-level leadership to emerge

When S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike resigned from the ruling UNP and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) the intermediary layers of the society found a political vehicle in it for them. It does not mean that the SLFP was founded on sectarian agenda. The SLFP manifesto claimed that “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”. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike wanted to articulate the interests and grievances of the so-called ‘neglected majority’. The neglected majority was defined not on ethnic lines but broadly on elite versus non-elite lines. The mass political mobilization in the years before 1956 took the form of a nationalistic assertion against the westernized upper class, identified as the ‘Brown Sahibs’. Bandaranaike addressed these nationalistic forces to wrest political power from the UNP. A new state-building project alternative to the Liberal-nationalist State-Building project began to take concrete shape with this political tendency. They emphasized the need to use the postcolonial state as a tool to rectify the past injustices the Sinhalese Buddhist had undergone during colonial rule. The state and the state power were viewed by them as the only instrument of sovereignty and autonomy that can bring about economic liberation from colonial/imperial economic forces. At the same time, the state was viewed as a social leveler that should be actively involved in ensuring social justice. They wanted to see the close identification of the state

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5. More forceful presentation of this position was found in *The Revolt of the Temple of D.C Wijewardena* published in 1953

with the interests of the majority Sinhala Buddhist community. They did not want a radical structural change in the state inherited from colonial rule. They believed that with their numerical majority they can get hold of the state through an election victory and reorient it with more power and strength to serve their own interests.

In the period 1948-56, parallel formations of Tamil ethno-nationalist perspectives relating to the building of the postcolonial state also evolved. In 1948, the Ceylon Tamil Congress, the main political force representing Tamils was ready to enter into a political compromise on a power sharing arrangement at the centre and accepted the unitary state structure with some constitutional safeguards. As Kristian Stokke observes “the political project favoured by the ruling elite and their All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ATCT) at the time of independence was expressed as ‘responsive collaboration’. This strategy reflected the shared economic interests of the elite across the ethnic divide” (Stokke 9). The balance representation at the centre based on the agreement of 60-40 formula drawn up earlier was breached with the Citizenship Acts. Even after that the Tamil Congress remained in the government. However, a group led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam left the Ceylon Tamil Congress party to form the Federal Party on a regional agenda in 1949<sup>6</sup>. In contrast to the ACTC approach, the basis of political mobilization of the Federal Party was Tamil Nationalism “constructed around “the notion of national unity among the Tamil speaking people, the associated notion of a Tamil homeland and majoritarian oppression and colonization” (Stokke).

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6. The Federal Party was originally concerned with four basic Issues: 1, *Establishment of one or more Tamil linguistic states as a federating unit or units enjoying wide autonomous and residuary powers within a federal state in Sri Lanka*; 2, *Restoration of the Tamil language to its ‘rightful place’ enjoying absolutely parity of status with Sinhala as an official language of Sri Lanka*; 3, *Conferment of full civic rights to all Tamil-Speaking people (i.e., to all persons of recent Indian origin in Sri Lanka)*; and 4, *Cessation of colonization of traditionally Tamil speaking areas with Sinhalese people.*

Accordingly, as far as Tamil perspective towards postcolonial State-Building is concerned, two approaches emerged. At first, however, the political project of the Federal party failed to break the hegemony of the Tamil Congress in the North which was reflected in the General Elections in 1952. As Godfrey Gunatilleke traced “The FP agenda was clearly rejected at the 1952 elections. Chelvanayagam the FP leader himself who had been returned by a large majority in 1947 as the Tamil Congress candidate was defeated in 1952 by a substantial margin. The message that came from the Tamil electorate at this point of time was abundantly clear. The agenda for political negotiations still continued to focus on sharing power at the centre and equality of citizenship in a united Sri Lanka” (Gunatilleke 2001: 5). This situation rapidly changed in the period 1952-1956. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Federal Party addressed the political and cultural grievances of the same constituency of the ethnic divide. With the entry of the new political forces of intermediary layers into the direct power play, the competition for state power reached a qualitatively different level. State power became more crucial for the intermediary layers as their fortunes depended to a large extent on the political power and state resources. Thanks to the unitary state structure and the majoritarian electoral system, the Sinhalese intermediary layers could get close to state power without deviating from the constitutional order established in 1948. As far as the Tamil counterparts in the North and the East were concerned, it became essential to deviate from the unitary state structure to share state power at least at the regional levels where the Tamils and other minorities were the majority, namely in the North and East.

As far as political ideology is concerned, the main alternative to both ethno-nationalist and liberal nationalist state projects was the political project presented by the Left Parties.

The Left rejected both Sinhalese and Tamil ethno nationalism, emanated from the ruling party as well as from the political forces in the opposition. The Left rejected the Independence Settlement as a fake deal between the Sri Lankan upper class and their colonial masters. They wanted a secular state and both indigenous languages to be recognized as official languages. During this period the Left firmly stood for parity of status. Their political objective was to establish a workers and peasants' state and "the abolition of social and economic inequalities and oppression arising from differences of class, caste, race creed or sex" (Lerski 1968: 27). They wanted to establish a socialist state by revolutionary means<sup>7</sup>. However, in practice they remained faithful adherents of the parliamentary system and democratic political practices. Their main concern was with the continuation of the constitutional link with the United Kingdom which was viewed as a vestige of colonialism. The Left wanted a constitutional change to make Sri Lanka a republic. The Left, mainly the LSSP, often clashed with the ethno-nationalist sectarian forces in the South. The pertinent question to be asked in this context is why the Left political project was not successful in checking the ethno-political mobilizations on communal lines and in working out a harmonious multi-ethnic policy.

## **The 1956 Political Change and Postcolonial State-Building**

The MEP victory in 1956 heralded a new phase in the evolution of the postcolonial state in Sri Lanka. Prior to the

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7. The resolution adopted at the annual LSSP conference held in 1950 stated that "The road to the objective of establishing a workers and peasants government lies along that of a direct mass struggles alone, and not through parliamentary devices and maneuvers. The scrapping of the capitalist administrative apparatus, building of mass organizations in all spheres to defend the interest of masses against their enemies and the arming of the people are some objectives of such a workers and peasants - "Sama Samaja government". Ceylon Daily News, February 8th 1951.

general elections of 1956 S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike formed a broad political alliance in the form of a common front against the UNP. After the resounding election victory, the new regime identified itself as the 'peoples' government'. A large section of intermediary social layers who enjoyed some regional, in some cases caste-based, influence in their respective areas came closer to state power through political authority. They were the people who were reaping more benefits from the expansion of free education. The establishment of a 'people's government' did not mean that the political power of the upper class came to an end. What really happened was the reconstitution of the ruling bloc by incorporating Sinhala intermediary sections that had hitherto remained outside state power to the centre of power. At the same time, there were some symbolic gestures where the leaders of some 'subaltern' social layers, to use the Gramscian term, were appointed to the Senate, the second chamber established under the Soulbury Constitution. As a result, the social base of the state was definitely broadened. It must be noted, however, that in the 1956 cabinet, eight out of fourteen ministers were from five leading schools of the island<sup>8</sup>. Further more, the widening of the ruling bloc in 1956 took place on an anti-colonial flank; not on a national integration framework. As a result, the Tamil intermediary layers in the north and East still remained outside state power. The issue of the role of the state and state-building came to the centre of the political discourse more forcefully with the entry of new political forces into the corridors of state power.

The form of the state and the manner in which state power was exercised became a crucial factor in the political discourse after 1956. In the light of the economic background of these intermediary social layers, particularly their limited capability

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8. These five schools include St. Thomas College, Royal College, Trinity College, Ananda College and St. Joseph College.

of capital accumulation through involvement in the production process, and their thirst to earn social recognition in the social matrix in which they operated, the access to state power was crucial. It is the way for them to obtain a place in the sun, to get their political, social and economic needs and requirements attended to. Thanks to the unitary state structure and majoritarian electoral system, the Sinhalese intermediary layers was able to get close to state power after 1956, without deviating from the constitutional order established in 1948. The demand for more and more expansion of the interventionist role of the state after 1956 should be understood in this backdrop. As far as the Tamil counterparts in the North and the East were concerned, it became essential to deviate from the unitary state structure to share state power at least at the regional level where the Tamils and other minorities were the majority. The Federal political project of the Federal party established its political hegemony in the North in 1956. As a result, the Federal political agenda came to the centre of Tamil politics after 1956. The competition to gain access to state power and to control the distribution of state resources assumed an ethnic form.

The MEP regime of 1956 initiated a series of changes in the cultural and economic spheres to satisfy the social elements from which it received its support. In June 1956, Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 made Sinhala the 'official language'. The ethnicization of the language issue prior to 1956 changed the tenor of the Language Movement. The Sinhala Basha Movement that campaigned for the Sinhala only policy had gained momentum by mid 1950s<sup>9</sup> and S.W.R.D Bandaranaike wanted it also in his

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9. In addition to the K. M. P. Rajaratne of the Jatika Vimukthi Peramuna and W. Dahanayake of Basha Permina, a constituent partners in the MEP coalition, Rev. Henpitagegala Gnanasiha, Rev. Baddegama Wimalawansa, L. H. Mettananda and F. R. Jayasuriya were some of the leading personalities in the forefront of the Sinhala only campaign.

hotchpotch of a political bandwagon prior to the 1956 elections. The Official Language Act did not make any drastic or sudden changes in administration but the manner and the haste in which the Sinhala only Act was introduced highlighted that fact that the new regime is ready to identify the state with the interests of the majority community without due consideration to the interests of the minority. A Ministry of Cultural Affairs was established to promote indigenous cultures. The state was assigned a new role in the spheres of economic development and the allocation of resources. As a result, the state came forward to intervene more directly in important aspects of the economic life of the country. To start with, the Colombo port and passenger transport companies were nationalized. The thrust of the nationalization policy was the expansion of the state sector which was identified as socialism. The contradictions within the diverse political forces within the government itself reflected in the controversy over the Paddy Lands Act proposed by Minister Phillip Gunawardena to initiate far-reaching changes in agrarian relations in the countryside. Due to internal pressure within the Cabinet what came out ultimately was a very watered down version.

Many of new state corporations established after 1956 were in Sinhala majority areas and the recruitment from top to bottom was done through political patronage. This practice mainly benefited the intermediate layers in the South who now got the opportunity to rub shoulders with those in the corridors of power. The Tamil counterparts who were equally anxious to gain access to the allocation of state resources were not benefited in the same manner with the expansion of the public sector. As a result the fissure between the ruling historic bloc, to use the Gramscian term, in the South and the leaders of the Tamil bloc in the North and East began to widen. According to Jayadeva Uyangoda, “Paradoxically, broadening of the social

bases of political power has been paralleled with the narrowing down of the ethnic foundations of the Sri Lankan postcolonial state. This is the 'conservative' side of the Sri Lankan postcolonial passive revolution...The weakening of the pluralist possibilities of postcolonial state formation in Sri Lanka is an outcome of these developments. The Tamil minority, in turn, felt itself excluded from the domain of state power"<sup>10</sup>.

The 1956 change of government had a profound impact on the postcolonial State-Building perspectives and projects of different socio-political forces in the country. The liberal nationalist hybrid project pursued by the pre-1956 UNP regime lost its earlier vigor and support base in the face of the ethno-nationalist tide in the South and the North after 1956. The social forces identified earlier with the liberal-nationalist project had to come to terms with the post-1956 political developments. The many elements associated with the Sinhala-Buddhist state-building project were now embodied by the MEP regime of 1956. Some of the social forces, especially the intermediary layers who were identified with the Sinhala-Buddhist State-Building project wanted direct access to state power. In the process, their character and politics also underwent a transformation. Now they wanted to maintain the status quo as owners of the state.

The Tamil political agenda that power sharing at the centre as governing coalition partners, presented by the Tamil Congress gradually lost its political ground after 1956. The Sinhala people tend to view the federal demand as the 'other' to their state-building and also a threatening possibility of a separate state for

10. Uyangoda, "Politics of Political Reform – a key theme in the cotemporary conflict", p.33. "Passive Revolution is a concept that has been employed by European and Indian Marxists to refer to the specific manner in which classes engage in re-organizing and restructuring state power and its relationship with society. It is a mode of restructuring and consolidating state-society relations without going through a process that leads to a sudden and revolutionary transition of state power".

the Tamils. The postcolonial state-building project of the Left also underwent a profound transformation after 1956. They gradually changed their strategies to attain state power and entered into coalition politics. They saw some progressive elements in the 'passive revolution' began in 1956, especially the anti-imperialist stance compared to the UNP. They were in favour of a strong centre and the expansion of the interventionist role of the state. They were prepared to underplay some of the policy stands that appeared to have cost votes. The radical and avowedly secular state-building projects of the Left parties were absorbed into the populist State-Building project that came forward after the 1956 political change. The postcolonial state-building project that came to the forefront with the expansion of the social base of the state by the entry of the Sinhala intermediary layers after 1956 was not simply the Sinhala Buddhist project evolved prior to 1956. It was an amalgam of some elements of the Sinhala-Buddhist project with some elements of anti-imperial/colonial, statist/socialist projects of the Left. With this development, the Left state-building programme was absorbed into the State-Building project presented by the SLFP which could broadly be identified as populist but with many contradictions.

The 1956 regime under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike actually attempted to accommodate all four projects of postcolonial state-building. His attempt to integrate the demand for regional autonomy by the Federal Party in a restructured state was reflected in his agreement with the Federal Party. The first attempt to restructure the state to give recognition to the multi-ethnic political reality was the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1958. It attempted to address the issue in a practical way and delineated a space for the Tamils, proposing a regional council for the north and east and Tamil as a language of administration in the North and the East. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact

(B-C.Pact) consisted of two parts. Part –B contained the Joint Statement on Regional Councils. According to the provisions of the agreement regional areas were to be defined in the Bill and the Northern Province was to form a regional area but the Eastern Province was to be divided into two or more regional areas. Provision was to be made in the Bill to enable two or more regions to amalgamate beyond the provincial limits and for one region to divide itself subject to ratification by Parliament. Parliament was to delegate powers and specify them in the Act. The Central government would provide block grants to the Regional Councils. At the same time, the Regional Councils would have powers of taxation and borrowing.

The unilateral abrogation of the B-C Pact in the face of an articulated small group of political activists belied an early opportunity of accommodating the interests of the Tamils in postcolonial state- building. Bandaranaike did not address the broader constituency over the heads of these elements using his mass appeal to save the B.C. pact. In the face of a lack of support within the government quarters itself, Bandaranaike did not have courage to confront the anti- B-C Pact forces. What happened to the B-C Pact is now well known.

## **Evolving of Postcolonial State After 1956**

The clash between the two perspectives held by the post-1956 regimes and the Tamil political forces about the character and the structure of the postcolonial state on the one hand and also intermittent attempts made by both parties to reach a compromise through state reforms on the other set the pattern of politics in Sri Lanka in the post-1956 phase. The political forces identified with state-power wanted to maintain and strengthen further the existing order; the Tamil political forces that remained outside state power wanted state reforms. Accordingly, the

federal state-building project of the Tamil political forces became the 'other' to the main state-building project in the South. The period following the 1956 change witnessed political calamities in tandem. The passage of the 'Reasonable use of Tamil Act (Tamil Language special provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958)' could not alleviate fears and suspicion created by the Official Language Act among the non-Sinhala speaking people, the Tamils and the Burgers. Communal clashes between Sinhalese and Tamils, unprecedented in modern times, were reported in 1958. The regimes while attempting to reach a compromise through agreements with the Federal party used state coercion to suppress the peaceful political agitations associated with their political project.

The Federal Party who won 15 seats in the hung Parliament emerged after the General Elections held in March 1960 got some bargaining power as it had the leverage for making or unmaking the government. Both the UNP and the SLFP solicited the support of the Federal party. S.J.V. Chelvanayagam had discussions with both parties and presented the four demands/conditions for his support: Regional Councils as envisaged by the BC pact be set up with powers over land alienation and development: the parity of status for Tamil as a language of administration and courts; amendments to the Ceylon citizenship act no 18 of 1948 enabling speedier, enhanced registration of disenfranchised Up Country Tamils; four of the six appointed MP slots be given to Up Country Tamil representatives. Both parties did not agree to Regional councils. But the SLFP proposed "the setting up of District Councils for each administrative or revenue district. There were 22 then. Each district council would in essence have the powers and functions as envisaged for the Regional council" (Jeyaraj 2001). The SLFP was not prepared for parity of status. However, in line with The Tamil Language (Special Provisions)

Act presented by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, SLFP agreed to introduce and implement measures enabling Tamil to be used for administrative purposes and in courts in the North and East. The FP swayed towards the SLFP but no formal agreement was signed. In the General Elections held in July 1960, the SLFP under the leadership of Mrs. Bandaranaike reaped absolute majority and now they did not need the support of the Federal Party to form a government. The SLFP was in no mood or decency to honour the unwritten understanding reached earlier with the Federal Party. In the Throne Speech of the new government declared its intention of full implementation of Sinhala as the sole official language from January 1st 1961 and it wanted Sinhala to be the sole language of courts. The reaction on the part of the Federal Party was first the hartal on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1961 and later the Sathyagraha campaign commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1961 which paralyzed the administration in the North and the East for nearly two months. The government used the Emergency Regulations and the police force to suppress the Sathyagraha campaign.

Once again an attempt was made to reform the structure of the state by the Coalition Government led by the UNP that assumed office in 1965. It is twist of history that the UNP who went to streets in opposing the B-C Pact was forced to come to terms with the Federal Party in 1965. The Federal Party joined the government as a coalition partner and signed a pact (the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact) in March 1965. It covered three issues: the language rights of the Tamil people, granting of land in colonization schemes and regional devolution of power. It agreed to make provision for Tamil to be the language of administration and of record in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Strengthening the language rights further it was agreed 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

and also to the entitlement of the Tamil speaking people to transact business in Tamil throughout the Island. The language provisions of the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact went further than the B-C Pact. It also addressed the controversial issue of the granting of land under colonization schemes. According to agreement, land in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should in the first instance be granted to landless persons in the District; secondly - to Tamil speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern Provinces; and thirdly - to other citizens in the country. According to the article 3 of the agreement, "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". The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act was passed in Parliament in January 1966 amid strong protests by the opposition. The main Left parties (the CP and the LSSP) who were the champions of equal language rights in their good old days now joined hands with the SLFP to oppose the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulations. In the light of the antipathy created by the opposition in the country, the UNP led coalition government was faltering in presenting District Councils provisions to Parliament. Ultimately a White Paper on proposals for the establishment of District Councils under the control of the central government was presented to Parliament in 1968. The SLFP boycotted the debate in parliament and campaigned against it outside. In view of a possible backlash on the part of the Government caucus itself, Prime Minister Senanayake decided not to go ahead with the White Paper. As a result it also went to history as another failed attempt.

At the same time, the process of strengthening the state and its majoritarian character with the Sinhalanization of administration continued unabated. Increased pace of social

change and political mobilization and more and more involvement of party politics in administration made some members of the intermediary social layers new political elites. A new class of rentiers based on state power and resources emerged. A large cohort of politically powerful but economically dependent parasite groups, ranging from chairmen and managers of public sector corporations and other state ventures, came forward to assume leadership. In the changed economic and political context, authority and hegemony of the traditional elites had rapidly contracted. "The decline of the Bamunu Kulaya gave way to a new clan of power brokers and political operators" (Keerawella 1995: 85). This process contributed to widen the fissure between the state and the Tamils

The interventionist role of the state in economic affairs reached its peak under the United Front Government of 1970. Those who came to grips with the command of political power wanted to utilize it to gain access to allocation/utilization of resources of the state. The state was accorded a crucial role in economic and social life. The thrust of the government policy of nationalization was the expansion of the public sector under the guise of 'Socialism'. The nationalization policy and the creation of state corporations addressed mainly, not exclusively, the interests of the Sinhalese intermediary layers. Many of them were located in the Sinhala majority areas and recruitment from top to bottom was done on the basis of political patronage. This process benefitted primarily those who had access to political power. The competition for power became more and more fierce. The Tamil counterparts in the North and the East who were also eagerly anxious to gain access to the allocation of state resources were not benefitted from this process which was viewed by them as another facet of the Sinhalanization of the polity. The development strategy linked with import substitution and export

promotion policy package backed by state intervention and regulations was at its peak during 1970-77. Under the land reform package, implemented in the period 1972-75, plantations were taken over and a number of state institutions and boards were established for their management. There was a phenomenal expansion of state corporations in the service sector. In trade alone there were twelve public corporations. In 1973 the total number of public enterprises rose to eighty four. With access to state power the state-building project associated with the Sinhala Buddhist movements had changed. Prior to 1956 it was mainly anti-establishment. Now, with the perception that they owned the state, the forces associated with it came forward to play the perceived role as the protectors of the state.

The socio-political crisis of the postcolonial state and the limitations of the 'passive revolution' of 1956 was highlighted by the 1971 youth uprising led by the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna. The social and economic frustration of the rural Sinhalese youths in the face of slow economic growth in the late 1960s set the ground for the 1971 uprising. It was also an outcome of the failure in fulfilling the aspirations of the youth generation of intermediary layers whose order generation came forward to play an assertive role in politics with the expansion of the social base of the state after 1956. The Sinhalese youths who took up arms in 1971 not only challenged the entire system but also rejected the existing means and avenues to lodge their protests. It is important to note that the Tamil youths in the North who faced similar issues did not get involved with the 1971 uprising. The 1971 insurrection led to the enhanced role of the armed forces and the police. In response to the armed challenge regional military coordinating officers were appointed and regions were placed under their control using the provisions of the Emergency Regulations. The challenge posed by the 1971 uprising was read by the regime

to take more steps towards socialism in the form of more state intervention and further expansion of the public sector.

The Republican Constitution in 1972, the first autochthonous constitution in Sri Lanka, provided the constitutional and legal justification for the political process set in motion since 1956. It established the supremacy of the unicameral parliament firmly removing any restrictions to political power. The new constitution did away with the limited state available for judicial review of legislation under the Soulbury Constitution. The safeguards of the earlier Constitution embodied in article 29(2) were removed as they were considered inimical to the sovereignty of the people. The content of the first Republican Constitution as well as the constitution-making discourse and procedure alienated the Tamil leaders from the decision-making process. With the strength of the numerical majority and the Socialist conviction of the perception that, to quote the Minister of Constitutional Affairs Dr. Colvin R. de Silva, "The time has long passed where anybody believes that the question of race relations can be solved by question of political structure. It is the social structure and base that count" (Constitution Assembly), the constitution-making process brushed aside draft proposals prepared by the Federal party<sup>11</sup>. In response to the proposal of devolving power to regional units in a Federal framework, the Constitution formally declared that Sri Lanka is a Unitary State. In the clauses relating to language and religion the aspirations of the majority community were taken due care of but it failed to grant due recognition to the interests of the minority communities. Accordingly, the 1972 constitution contributed to accelerate the political alienation of the Tamils from the political centre.

As a result of all these developments 'the institutional expressions of the state' had undergone a series of changes. It is

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11. The Federal Party presented its own draft of Federal Union of five states-three Sinhala and other two for Tamils and Muslims.

reflected in the reforms of public administration. Corollary to the promulgation of the 1972 Constitution, the Ceylon Civil Service was abolished and the Sri Lanka Administrative Service was introduced. In this process the public service was brought directly under the political control of Cabinet Ministers and political leadership. At the same time, the social base of recruitment to the public service underwent a visible change. As Uyangoda traced “The government initiated a new policy to recruit members of the SLAS from among vernacular-educated university graduates with rural social backgrounds. This policy move resulted in a clear shift in the social background of the officers in the administrative service” (Uyangoda 2010: 47). The underlying assumption was the rectification of injustices in the past.

The tide of frustration and alienation of the Tamils in the mid 1970s changed the political climate in the north. This frustration crystallized over key issues – devolution of power to regional-level units, the recognition of Tamil language rights, allocation of state resources and educational and employment opportunities. Especially, the introduction of the language-based standardization and the district quota system in the selection of students to the universities fueled the fire which was already burning over other issues. It was in this context that new forces in the North and East came to the political forefront and began to decide the direction of politics in that region. The militarization of politics in the North and East was paralleled to the entry of new forces into the political arena in the region. The assassination of Alfred Duraippa, the Mayor of Jaffna who collaborated with the UF government by youth militants indicated the order of things that were to come in the near future along with the new forces in motion in the Jaffna political theatre. The change of name, the Tamil United Front (TUF) to the Tamil United Liberation Front in 1976 was indicative of this shift.

## **New Paradigm after 1977**

In the context of the constitutional baptism of the unitary state by the 1972 Constitution and other socio-political developments, the Tamil state-building project associated with federal formula under went a paradigm shift. Under the changed political conditions secession and a separate state [Elam] replaced federal option. In line with this shift, the political strategy was also changed from negotiation and peaceful protest to the armed struggle. The assertion of new political forces in the political domain in the North was highlighted by the emergence of militant Tamil youth groups. As a result the agency of the Tamil state project changed to the hands of the youth groups. This is the process that can be seen in the period the post-1977 phase.

Another phase in postcolonial building unfolded after the 1977. The economic hardships generally attributed to the controlled economic policy swept the UNP under the leadership of J.R. Jayewardene into power in 1977. The SLFP fared very poorly and the TLUF became the second largest part in the Parliament and its leader A. Amirthlingam became the Leader of Opposition. The third phase in the evolution of post-Independence political and administrative structures unfolded after 1977. J.R. Jayewardena wanted a strong executive that can take bold decisions without being swayed by the whims and fancies of the electorate. Under the Second Republican constitution in 1978 an all powerful Executive Presidency was established as the central element of the entire governing order. The executive president, elected by island-wide separate vote, became the centre of gravity of the entire political order. Another key element of the new constitution was the introduction of proportional representation to legislative council. The new UNP regime wanted to break away from the earlier policy framework

and to open up the economy, to dismantle the elaborate mechanism of direct government controls. De-regulation of the economy became the catch-word of the economic policy. Accordingly, a new direction in development strategy, the policy framework and economic environment was evolved after 1977.

At the 1977 General Elections, J.R. Jayawardena admitted in the Election Manifesto of the United National Party that “There are numerous problems confronting the Tamil speaking people. The lack of 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” (United National Party 1977) Further, he promised to summon an All Party Conference to take all possible steps to remedy the grievances of the Tamil speaking people. Despite the election pledges J.R. Jayewardene first offered the District Development Councils (DDCs) unilaterally without summoning an all party conference as promised. It is important to note that, in spite of strong pressure on the part of the militant youth groups not to contest, the TULF participated in the DDCs. The DDC experiment of the TULF proved to be disastrous. On the one hand it faced the antipathy of the youth who advocated direct armed struggle. On the other, the Central government was not prepared to tolerate even decentralization of administration. “The institution of District Minister ensured that all decisions of the Council will be subjected to strict control by the representative of the central government” (Gunatilleke 2001).

The 1977 election victory of UNP followed a series of anti-Tamil riots in the South. On 12 August 1977, in less than a month

of the new government assumed office anti-Tamil riots started<sup>12</sup>. There were anti-Tamil riots again in 1981. Tamil Nadu politics was rocked again due to the ethnic riots in Sri Lanka. The leaders of the 20 political parties urged the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to grant the Tamil youths seeking refuge in Tamil Nadu political asylum. This time the Indian official reaction was clearly different. For the first time, the Indian Government made representation to the Government of Sri Lanka regarding the violence against Tamils during the ethnic riots.

In the period 1977-1983, the power and influence of the Tamil militant groups increased very rapidly<sup>13</sup>. Their actions also became more violent and intensified. On the very day of the Second Republican Constitution was promulgated (7<sup>th</sup> September 1978) an Air Lanka Avro passenger aircraft was blasted by a time bomb while grounded unoccupied. The government decided to enforce 'law and order' in the North with a heavy hand in the face of growing violence in the North and a state of emergency was declared in the Northern Province and the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) law was enacted. Simultaneously, Brigadier Tissa Weeratunga of the Sri Lankan Army was commissioned by the President, as commander of the security forces in Jaffna and ordered "to eliminate in accordance

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12. On 24th August 1977 the Tamil Nadu Assembly adopted a resolution urging the Government of India to "depute a representative of the status of a Cabinet Minister to Sri Lanka to find out the true status of the affairs and have direct talks with that government by way of assuring the feelings of the Tamils there". At this time, however, the Prime Minister Moraji Desai dismissed the Tamil Nadu request and stated that the Government of India did not propose to send a Cabinet Minister to Sri Lanka since the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo had been doing every thing possible and the two governments were also in close touch with each other. *Asian Reorder*, 17-23 September 1977, p.13944.

13. The most powerful and extremely ruthless among the militant the all group that advocated armed struggle was The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led by Pirabakaran. An addition, the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) were also active at the time.

with the laws of the land the menace of terrorism in all its forms in the island, and more specifically from the Jaffna District, ‘Using all the resources of the state’ before 31 December 1979” (Siriweera 1980). Heavy handed action on the part of the state further fuelled already burning Jaffna. The power and influence of that the LTTE yielded by now in Jaffna society was reflected in the Jaffna municipal elections held in 19 May 1983. The LTTE was able to implement a boycott of the elections successfully and the turn-out of the Jaffna polls was only 14.5 percent. Parallel to the increasing activities of the Tamil armed groups, the anti-Tamil tension in the South also increased. In this context ambushing of 13 soldiers in Jaffna by the LTTE spurred an anti-Tamil program in the South. The failure on the part of the government to take necessary steps to control the situation and active involvement of some key personnel of the regime in organizing the riots were well documented. The accurate death toll of the 1983 July riots has not yet been figured out. The destruction of property and business owned by the Tamils was enormous. Further more, the political implications of 1983 July internally and internationally are far reaching. The political environment of the country changed drastically after July 1983. Using the July riots as a pretext, the JVP was proscribed and pushed into jungles. The elected leaders of the TULF, the Tamil opposition party at the time, left the Parliament in August 1983 after the 6<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution.

The 1983 July riots generated a very strong protest in Tamil Nadu in the form of bandhs and demonstrations. A delegation from Tamil Nadu made representation to The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on this situation and she assured the delegation that New Delhi “was dealing with the Tamil question in Sri Lanka as a national issue affecting the whole country, not merely as a problem concerning Tamil Nadu alone” (Sivarajah 1990: 143). Just

two days after the outbreak of riots, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi contacted President Jayewardene by telephone to discuss the Sri Lankan situation. As K.M.de Silva reveals, 'The upshot of that fateful conversation was that Jayewardene found it necessary to invite Mrs. Gandhi to send an official representative to observe the situation in the island on the spot and report back to her' (De Silva 1996: 10) When Minister V.P. Narasinghe Rao, visited Sri Lanka as a special envoy of the Indian Prime Minister on 29<sup>th</sup> July, parts of Colombo was still burning. After 1983 India increasingly entered into the political domain and negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil political groups commenced with Indian mediation.

## **The State Reform Initiatives under the Indian Mediation**

After the 1983 July riots India entered swiftly as a self-appointed mediator in the peace process in Sri Lanka and Indira Gandhi selected G. Parathasarathy as the mediator. His declared mission was to create an atmosphere for a negotiated settlement and to act as intermediary between the Sri Lankan Government and the Sri Lankan Tamil political parties to formulate new proposals for devolution of power to the regions as a political solution to the ethnic conflict<sup>14</sup>. The discussions between Sri Lankan and Indian governments continued from August to November 1983 and both were parties able to agree on an acceptable plan, based on regional councils. This plan is known as annexure 'C' .

In January, President Jayewardene convened the all Party

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14. As Godfrey Gunatilleke traced, at this point there were four inter-related but separate components to the negotiating process- "(1) the negotiation between the government of India and the government of Sri Lanka, (2) the talks between the Indian government and the Tamil Parties (3) the consultation in the conferences of the Sri Lankan political parties, and (4) the negotiation between the Tamil Parties and the Sri Lankan government". op.cit. p.3.

conference (APC) to discuss the proposals that emerged from the first layer of negotiations. The polarization was very clear. The TULF and Tamil parties firmly stuck to ‘regional councils and no less’ while the Sinhala political parties to ‘district councils no more’. Jayewardene’s vacillation was demonstrated very clearly at the APC as he did not come forward to defend Annexure–C that he jointly fathered. The deadlock over the two positions made Jayewardene to suspend the APC on 30 September 1984. Meantime, the Government prepared the Tenth Amendment Proposals and the Draft District and Regional Council Bill<sup>15</sup>. On 21 December the Jayewardene Government decided to terminate the APC and stated that he would meet the TULF separately in early January to discuss the proposals. At first, the TULF agreed to go along with the Tenth Amendment. Late in December Amirthalingam stated that the proposals were totally unacceptable to the Tamils and left Sri Lanka. It was a real blunder on the part of the TULF leadership. Thereafter, President Jayewardene announced that he was withdrawing the proposals.

In the early 1985, there were noticeable developments in the Indian policy towards Sri Lanka under the new leadership of Rajiv Gandhi. “First, India gradually withdrew its unconditional support to the Tamil militants and started to apply some pressure on them too. Second, in contrast to the facilitator role of the earlier phase, India more directly participated in the negotiating table and the agenda and hosted the dialogue under aegis of Indian diplomatic manoeuvring. Third, more emphasis was given to state-to-state level discussions in search of a solution to the crisis” (Keerawella 1995). In February 1985 Lalith Athulathmudali and Esmond Wichramasinghe visited New Delhi with Rajiv Gandhi. The mission seemed successful in setting

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15. The main provisions of the include provision for regional councils if the district councils of the province wish to join and the Second Chamber of 75 members: 50 were already chairman or vice chairman of DDCs and 25 were to be appointed by the President.

a cordial environment.<sup>16</sup> In June 1985, President Jayewardene and Minister Athulathmudali met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi for direct discussions on the ethnic issue and reached “agreement on using India’s good office in finding a solution to the ethnic problem”. This paved the way for the direct dialogue between Tamil armed groups and the Sri Lankan Government in Thimpu in August 1985. At the discussions at Thimpu, the six Tamil groups enunciated ‘four principles’ from which they would not waver<sup>17</sup>. The Sri Lankan delegation also presented an outline of structure for devolution of power and affirmed that beyond which they could not proceed. In this context, what happened in Thimpu is well known. After the breakdown of the Thimpu talks, the emphasis was now on state-to state level discussions.<sup>18</sup>

In June 1986 President Jayewardene decided to embark on a new political initiative and convened a Round Table Conference of all political parties. He declared the Provincial Councils as the basis for devolution of power at the Conference. The SLFP did not attend the PPC but Mrs. Bandaranaike agreed to consult President Jayewardene separately. The negotiations between GOSL and the TULF as well as discussions within the PPC continued over three

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16. Soon after Athulathmudali’s return, Jayewardene wrote a personal letter to Rajiv Gandhi. In his letter he expressed his desire to continue discussions with the TULF. Further, Jayewrdena wrote that “I ask you very little. Let us forget the issue of training camps: the existence of Sri Lankan terrorist in South India; their plotting and planning. I ask you to help me to prevent from coming here with arms”.This letter is reproduced in K.M.de Silva, op.cit, pp.149-150.

17. Tamil delegation was united position in presenting 4 principles for the bases for discussion. They were identified as the Thimbu principles: 1. the Sri Lankan Tamils be recognized as a distinct nationality; 2. an identified Tamil homeland and the guarantee of its territorial integrity be recognized; 3. the right of the Sri Lankan Tamils to self-determination be acknowledged; and 4. the citizenship rights of the Tamil plantation workers be recognized.

18. As a result of shuttle diplomacy of Romesh Bhandari between the two capitals, Indian Minister P. Chidambaram came to Sri Lanka as a special envoy of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to revive the stalled discussions between the Sri Lankan Government and the TULF on 30th April 1986.

months. The basic draft of the Provincial Councils emerged out of these deliberations. As K.M.de Silva who had access to the official documents traced “consisting of fifty pages in all, they included draft constitutional amendments, a draft Provincial Council Bill, schedules setting out ‘Reserved, Concurrent and Provincial Lists’, as well as detailed memoranda dealing with law and order, land and land settlement and education”. President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi met at the Bangalore Summit of SAARC in November 1986 and further discussed the proposals known as ‘19 December Proposals’. It was really an incorporation of the agreements reached at the Bangalore summit into the Draft Provincial Council Bill of the PPC. The main issue remained unsettled was the merger of the Northern and the Eastern Provinces. There were many proposals in this regard but no agreement was reached.

The situation began to change rapidly from January 1987. In response to the increased pace of LTTE armed activities, the Sri Lankan government imposed economic and communication blockade on the Jaffna peninsula. In the face of India’s grave concern about the situation in Jaffna, Colombo declared a unilateral ceasefire for ten days in April. However, after a bomb explosion in Colombo which claimed over 200 deaths, the government decided to commence military offence in the North once again. In spite of Indian warnings, Sri Lanka completed Operation Liberation taking the entire Vadamarachchi area under Government control. On June 1<sup>st</sup> 1987, India informed Sri Lanka of its decision to send relief supplies to Jaffna by Sea. Sri Lankan Navy intercepted the Indian flotilla carrying relief supplies in its territorial waters and the Indian Navy complied. On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1987, five Indian Air Force AN-32 transport aircraft escorted by four Mirage 2000 fighter planes violated Sri Lankan air space and para-dropped food supplies to the Jaffna peninsula. This was

the culmination of India's coercive diplomacy against Sri Lanka. On 29 July 1987, the Indo-Sri Lanka peace Accord was signed by the leaders of both countries in Colombo. Within 24 hours of signing the Peace Accord, Indian Peace-Keeping forces landed in Sri Lanka. By October 1987, the open war between the IPKF and the LTTE flared up in the North and East. Eventually, the IPKF was pushed in to a situation of fighting a war without frontiers on an unfriendly soil. The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord not only failed to putdown the fire in the north; it also ignited the south.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution was passed on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1987. The Ministry of Provincial Councils was established. The violence-ridden first set of Provincial Council Elections was held in April 1988<sup>19</sup>. The recognition of the need for the restructuring of the centralized state, as a political solution to the ethnic conflict, was the most significant outcome of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. Ensuring Provincial Councils did not go far enough and were not properly implemented to have a serious impact on the armed conflict. From the very outset the Provincial Councils had to carry a certificate of illegitimate birth due to Indian intervention. However, the Indian role was really a midwifery role. The fact that politically and ideologically the weak ruling class of the country failed to give it a natural birth created the circumstances for a midwifery role for India. Further, the Provincial Councils had to toddle at the beginning on an unceremonious note as both the LTTE in the North and the JVP in the South violently denounced the Provincial Councils.

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19. After the violence ridden first Provincial Council elections, Varadaraja Perumal of the EPRLF formed the provincial administration for the merged North and the East. In the face of the ferocious opposition of the LTTE and the absence of required cooperation from the Colombo administration, the Provincial Council administration of Varadaraja Perumal had to depend more and more on the IPKF at the expense of the legitimacy and credibility of the new PC administration. It ended with the farcical pronouncement of UDI by Perumal before seeking refuge in India.

The SLFP boycotted the Provincial Council elections. In addition, there were many inherent structural weaknesses. As President J.R. Jayewardene had not yet deviated from the unitary mindset, the devolution package under the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was a half-baked product. What was offered by one hand to the provincial councils was taken back by the other.

The first attempt of the Sri Lankan Government to talk to the LTTE directly was under President Premadasa in the last phase of IPKF operations in May 1989. These talks trailed till June 1990 and collapsed with the IPKF leaving Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the Parliamentary initiative during his period led to the appointment of Select Committee chaired by Mangala Munasinghe unanimously in August 1991 'to arrive at a political solution involving the devolution of power to the Northern and Eastern Provinces'. The Committee held 43 meetings, received 253 memoranda. The Mangala Munasinghe Committee report presented in December 1992 stated that it reached agreement 'to adopt a scheme of devolution on lines similar to those obtaining in the Indian Constitution and to adopt more subjects that are in list II (Concurrent List) or to dispense with the List'. No action had been taken to proceed with this line of thinking after submitting of the report.

### **State Reform Initiatives of the Chandrika Kumaratunga Regime**

The structure of the Sri Lankan postcolonial state and its relationship with the ethnic groups in the country entered directly into the centre of political discourse once again after the Peoples' Alliance (P.A.) came to power under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1994. After a decade of continuous political and social turmoil and an unprecedented degree of violence that had engulfed the entire society, Sri Lanka was weary and in need of a true breakthrough for a new beginning by 1994. The PA

regime that promised a new approach to the ethnic problem and emphasized the need for a negotiated political settlement kindled hope for a new beginning. Immediately after the assumption of power following the Peoples' Alliance victory at the Parliamentary Elections in August 1994, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga invited the LTTE for negotiations. Correspondence with the LTTE commenced in October and the first round of talks was held in October. The PA's initiatives for a dialogue with the LTTE to reach a negotiated settlement to the ethnic problem faced many obstacles from the very outset<sup>20</sup>. Despite these difficulties, the determination of the new regime to have a dialogue with the LTTE to prepare the ground for a negotiated political settlement was reflected in the exchange of 43 letters between the President and Pirabakaran.

On 8 January 1995 an Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The P.A. Government's position was that a parallel negotiation process should be initiated where both rehabilitation issues as well as the political issues relating to constitutional reforms as a sustainable solution to the ethnic problem must be discussed. But the LTTE first wanted to discuss rehabilitation issues only. The Task Force was established on 13 February 1995 in order to coordinate rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the North and East. All together, six rounds of talks were held until 11 April 1995. During these negotiations and also in the exchange of letters, the LTTE carefully avoided discussing any political issues directly related to a sustainable solution to the ethnic problem.

The LTTE demand during this period of dialogue that the Sri Lankan army should vacate key military positions indicated

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20. The assassination of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake, the presidential candidate of the United National Party (UNP), by the LTTE on 25th October indicated that the LTTE was not ready to abandon its terror tactics even if they agreed to have a dialogue with the Government.

that they were not yet ready to think of a negotiated settlement. On 19 April 1995, the LTTE informed the Sri Lankan government that the ceasefire was over by attacking and sinking two naval gun boats in the Trincomalee harbour. The euphoria of a quick peace based on a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict was shattered after the collapse of direct talks with the LTTE in April 1995. The renewed armed conflict surpassed in violence the one that preceded the talks<sup>21</sup>.

At the same time, the P.A. Government initiated a discourse on a new constitution, presented as a part of a political solution to the ethnic crisis. It is important to note that the initiatives came directly from the President. In July 1995 the concept paper on constitutional reforms embodying extensive devolution of power within a united Sri Lanka was published. The Concept Paper on constitutional reforms proposed to deviate from the unitary character and the majoritarian decision making process to have an appropriate constitutional order required for a stable multi-ethnic social fabric. The main feature of the constitutional proposals is the widespread distribution of political power among the people. The Proposals ensured clarity and consistency in the distribution of power between the centre and the regions within a scheme which is capable of effective implementation. After presenting the Concept Paper the Government launched a public awareness programme to prepare the country for a negotiated political settlement on the one hand and initiated a dialogue

21. With the commencement of the Elam War III, the Government forces launched a military operation, code-named 'Riviresa', to get the Jaffna peninsula under its control. The objective was achieved in October 1995 at a heavy price—600-700 soldiers were killed and 3000 wounded. The LTTE reacted to the loss of Jaffna by bringing the war into Colombo and the main oil installation in Sapugaskanda near Colombo was attacked in the same month. After that the Government forces launched the Operation Sath Jaya which was only partly successful. In late 1998 the Government tried to open a land route to Jaffna to open a land route (A-9) to Jaffna but it failed at severe human and material cost. In late 1998 Kilinochchi, Mullaiteive, Elephant Pass camps collapsed in the face of LTTE military manoeuvres.

with the main opposition party on the devolution package on the other.

The original Concept Paper on the Devolution of power presented in July 1995 is significant as for the first time it proposed that Sri Lanka should be 'United Sovereign Republic and the Republic would be an indivisible 'Union of states'. It wanted to do away with the concurrent list of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. It was a basic document with only three chapters and a commentary. Later a comprehensive document for constitutional reforms was presented in October 1997. Most important as far as postcolonial State-Building is concerned is that the constitutional proposal offered a new idea of the state. At the inauguration of a new session of Parliament on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1995, President Kumaratunga stated that "We have a vision of Sri Lanka where all communities can live in safety and security, where human dignity is valued, and equality of treatment is an accepted norm of public life. We believe that all communities must be given the space to express their identity and to participate fully in the life of the nation, whether it be at the national, provincial or local level." Introduction to the Concept paper titled 'Draft Provisions of the Constitution Containing the Proposals of the Government of Sri Lanka Relating to Devolution of Power' outlined the principles upon which the Proposals were presented. It included, inter alia, "promoting a vision of Sri Lanka where all communities can live in safety and security and their human dignity is valued and equality of treatment is an accepted norm of public life: ensuring all communities be given the space to express their distinct identity and promote that identity, including the right to enjoy their own culture, profession and practice their own religion, and nurture and promote their own language" (Draft of Constitution 2000). There are two remarkable features of the new constitutional discourse initiated by PA under President Chandrika Kumaratunga's leadership in the period 1995-2001.

Firstly, a more comprehensive and flexible set of constitutional proposals embodying extensive devolution of power within a united Sri Lanka was presented without any external pressures.. Secondly, the way it was presented to the people for broader discussion at different levels was very unique. The consequent dialogue based on the proposals presented by the Government evolved at three levels: among the people at large, among political parties and at the Parliamentary Select Committee. It is also significant in the constitution-making process that it be followed in order to implement the proposals that had been stated: “The procedure to be followed may be briefly indicated as: Presentation of the proposals to the public and generating public awareness: Submission of the proposals in legislative form - as a draft Chapter of the Constitution- to the Parliamentary Select Committee; Obtaining Parliamentary assent with 2/3 majority; and Seeking the public’s approval at a referendum”.

To begin with, President Kumaratunga paid attention to her own party and her Parliamentary group. A series of workshops and seminars were conducted, starting from a two day residential workshop for the parliamentary group and party organizers at the Tangerine Hotel in 1996, to provide an open forum for them to discuss her vision and policy direction. As a result, the entire SLFP was mobilized to prepare the people to embrace a new vision for a harmonious and stable multi-ethnic polity and a nationhood involving all the ethnic identities on the basis of equality and partnership. The Government launched various public awareness programmes to prepare the ground situation conducive for a negotiated political settlement to the protracted conflict. The Sudu Nelum movement, National Integration Programme Unit and the Peace Education programmes launched these public awareness programmes with the help of various NGOs and CBOs to promote peace and the devolution package. The Sudu Nelum movement did a yeomen task in preparing the country

for a political solution to the ethnic conflict. Both, the strength as well as the weakness of the Sudu Nelum movement was that it remained as a state-sponsored movement.

However, the LTTE did not want to consider the constitutional proposals as they were deemed insufficient. More importantly, they were seen as an attempt to isolate the LTTE politically. The stark reality is that it was the most far-reaching devolution arrangement that Sri Lanka ever offered.

Despite the reluctance of the LTTE to consider the Constitutional Proposals, the consultation process in Parliament continued and it was meant to reach a consensus. In these consultations the PA agreed to compromise as long as they do not kill the spirit of the lofty principles of the Proposals for the sake of consensus. The political parties represented in parliament were able to contribute further to mould the proposals by their participation in the parliamentary select committee established specifically for this purpose. The fact that the select committee met on 77 occasions indicates the degree and depth of the consultation process that went to formulate the proposals. In view of the importance of enlisting the main opposition party in this process, the representatives of the PA met with the UNP delegation on 17 occasions and some of the demands and suggestions that emanated from the political and civil society were accommodated in revising the original concept paper within the broad parameters set by the PA. However, the new constitution initiative of the PA government saw a dismal end when 'A Bill to repeal and replace the Constitution' was finally rejected by the opposition in August 2000. Another Important development in the constitution-making process that took place during this period was the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. It is significant as it was brought forward by the political dynamism associated with the expressed need to promote democracy, rule of law and good governance. In the face of loosing its parliamentary majority the

P.A. signed an MOU with the JVP who had 10 seats in Parliament on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2001. It is important to note that Clause 20 of the PA-JVP agreement relating to negotiations with the LTTE prevented for one year any move by the Government to make unilateral offers of devolution to the LTTE. Among the terms of the MOU was an undertaking given by the PA to bring about a constitutional change to enable a Constitutional Council (C.C.). The proposed Constitutional Council recommends persons to independent commissions: (a) The Election Commission, (b) The Public Service Commission, (c) The National Police Commission, (d) The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, (e) The Permanent Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, (f) the Finance Commission, (g) The Delimitation Commission. In addition, the C.C. recommends persons to the posts of the Attorney-General, the Auditor-General, the Inspector-General of Police, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman) and the Secretary-General of Parliament. Within less than a month the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed with the support of all the parties.

Section 41A of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment states that the Constitutional Council shall consist of the Prime Minister, the Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, a person appointed by the President, five persons appointed by the President on the nomination of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, one person nominated upon agreement by the majority of the members of Parliament belonging to political parties or independent groups other than the respective political parties or independent groups to which the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition belong and appointed by the President.

It was a bizarre mixture of the features of Westminster model with constitutional dispensations of the Executive

Presidency. The hurried preparation of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment contained many structural shortcomings that hampered its working from its beginning. In making their recommendations, the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition have to consult leaders of political parties and independent groups in Parliament, and three of the five should be nominated to represent 'minority interests', after consultation of Members of Parliament (not leaders of parties in this case) belonging to 'the respective minority communities'. Nothing is said about what should happen if there is no agreement in this regard.

## **The Ceasefire and the ISGA**

A new phase in finding a solution to the crisis in Sri Lanka began with the initiatives of the United National Front (UNF) government under Ranil Wickremasinghe that came to power in the 2001 Parliamentary Elections. Soon after the new government assumed power the LTTE unilaterally declared a ceasefire. The government reciprocated by removing street check points and cancelling authorization permits for the movement of people and goods to the North and the East. Agreement on a ceasefire that was arranged by Norwegian facilitators between the government and the LTTE was signed on 22 February 2002. As a part of the Ceasefire Agreement a team of international monitors from Nordic countries came to the island to monitor the ceasefire.

The peace process initiated by the UNF regime had three components. The main element of the peace process was the Ceasefire (CF) Agreement<sup>22</sup>. Direct 'peace talk' with the LTTE

22. It contained a preamble and five articles. Article I referred to modalities of ceasefire. In clause 1.4, the GOSL and the LTTE agreed to maintain "a zone of operation" where "forward defense localities" were established. In clause 1.8, the GOSL agreed to disarm Tamil paramilitary groups. Article 2 of the Agreement covered a series of measures to be taken to restore normalcy. Article 3 covered the role and powers of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM). Article 4 dealt with matters relating to amendments and termination of the Agreement. It remains in force until notice of termination is served by either Party to the Royal Norwegian Government.

constituted the second element of the peace process. The first round of talks was held between 17 and 22 of September 2002 in Sattahip, Thailand, seven months after signing the CF agreement. Altogether six rounds of talks were held in this process. The third element of the peace process was the Sub-Committee activities covering, not exclusively, but mainly rehabilitation and reconstruction<sup>23</sup>.

The main focus of the peace process was the ceasefire, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The issue of state reforms was not discussed directly. At first the attention of the UNF Government was on the process but not the substantive issues relating to state-reforms. For the first time since the commencement of the talks substantive political issues relating to a political solution to the ethnic problem were discussed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of talks held in Oslo, Norway on 2-5, December 2002 in Oslo. In the communiqué after the Oslo round of talks the LTTE 'agreed to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking people, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka.

The atmosphere created by the peace initiatives began to change after the Oslo round of talks. It was reflected in the 4<sup>th</sup> round of talks held in Thailand during 6-9 January 2003, where the LTTE announced its decision to withdraw from the Sub-committee on De-escalation and Normalization. The talks appeared to have been bogged down over the issue of HSZ- resettlement of IDPs and refugees in areas within the HSZs. In the Berlin round of talks held on 7-8 February, the LTTE and the GOSL expressed their intention to commence a discussion on fiscal aspects of a

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23. After the first round of talks, the Subcommittee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) was established. In addition, the Sub-Committee on De-escalation and normalization (SDN), Committees on Political Matters (CPM) and Women (CW) were established. Further, it was decided to establish the North-East Reconstruction Fund (NERF) with the World Bank as the custodian of funds.

federal structure at the next session. The LTTE reported that the action it has taken to set up a Political Affairs Committee with a view to addressing in depth issues pertaining to alternative structure of power sharing. In the 6<sup>th</sup> round of talks, held in Hakone, Japan, during 18-21 March 2003, once again, the GOSL and the LTTE reiterated their commitment to develop a federal system based on internal self-determination within a united Sri Lanka and decided to invite the Forum of Federalism, a Canadian-based international organization to participate as consultants at the next session of talks. In the meantime, an international conference on the Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka was planned to be held in Tokyo in June 2003. In April 21<sup>st</sup> Anton Balasingham informed the Prime Minister of the decision of the LTTE to suspend its participation in the negotiations for the time being. He further stated that the LTTE leadership has decided not to participate in the international donor conference to be held in Japan in June. It appeared that the peace process was frozen with this decision. It was in this context that the LTTE brought the issue of an interim administration to the forefront of the agenda<sup>24</sup>.

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24. The issue of an 'interim administrative structure was brought to the fore by Pirabakaran on 15 May 2003 when he met Norwegian Foreign Minister Jan Peterson when he visited the Wannai to persuade the LTTE to attend the Tokyo aid confab. The UNF governments responded to the LTTE demand by proposing a North East Development and Reconstruction Council. In his letter dated 21st May 2003, Balasingham rejected the UNF government's proposal and urged the Prime Minister to respond to the LTTE proposal for an interim administration and urged 'to establish a new innovative structure for the reconstruction and development in the North and East'. In response to the LTTE request, the UNF government presented another set of proposals on 27th May 2003. In this proposal the Government offered a three layered structure. Just 48 hours later the LTTE rejected the second set of proposals claiming that it was far short of expectations. In this context, on 17 July 2003, the UNF government presented its third proposal. The government claimed that the new proposals were a basic 'discussion document' aimed at drawing an LTTE response. As it was presented as a 'discussion document' the LTTE agreed to offer its responses. Legal and constitutional advisors of LTTE met in Paris in mid-September and again in the Northern Ireland to chart out their responses. The LTTE response was the presentation of its desired version of an interim administration- ISGA. See, Gamini Keerawella, *The Lrte Proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority and Future of the Peace Process in Sri Lanka*, Discussion paper No. 3, Chiba; Institute of Developing Economies, 2004.

The political brinkmanship of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was illustrated vividly by the way in which it brought forward its proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) by exploiting the vulnerabilities of the United National Front Government. In the proposals the LTTE articulated its political intentions in concrete constitutional terms for the first time. The Proposals rationalized the armed struggle and a contractual agreement outside the Constitution. The plenary powers of the ISGA exceeded the federal formula.

The peace process initiated by the UNF government with the signing of the CF Agreement had reached an impasse by November 2003. After the LTTE withdrawal from the peace talks, it appeared that the peace process had been frozen on the brink. All the attempts by the facilitators and other international players to bring the LTTE back to the negotiating table failed. At this stage President Kumaratunga decided to use her executive powers to take political moves to topple the UNF government.

In the period 1994-2004, the LTTE was offered a number of opportunities to enter into a peaceful political settlement within a united Sri Lanka. The LTTE failed to use these opportunities to change its character and behavior. It ultimately contributed to its political doom. The trajectory of LTTE should be viewed in the light of the Life Cycle Theory. According to the life cycle theory, five successive phases--emergence (birth), growth (development), peak (pinnacle), decline (crisis) and collapse (disintegration) --are identified in the trajectory of armed struggles. In order to avoid decline and collapse it is necessary to transform military gains during the peak phase into concrete political accomplishments. Such a move would result in a change of political paradigm. However, the definite outcome of the failure to shift the political paradigm by transforming military gains into concrete political gains would entail internal crises, decline and ultimate collapse.

The collapse of the LTTE once again proved the validity of the life cycle theory<sup>25</sup>.

### **State-Building in the Post-War Context**

At the time when the United Peoples' Freedom Alliance (UPFA) assumed office once again after the general elections in 2004, the earlier vigor for state reforms and a constitutional revision was visibly at a low ebb. However, the election manifesto of the Freedom Alliance, *Rata Perata*, sought a mandate from the people to convene a Constituent Council to promulgate a new constitution<sup>26</sup>. In a rapidly changing political environment, a new polarization of political forces in the South was in the making. The Sinhala Buddhist forces were gaining momentum and this was reflected in the intense opposition, mobilized by these forces within and outside the ruling coalition, against the Post-Tsunami Operational Management System (P-TOMS). The 2005 presidential elections were held in this context. The UPFA presidential candidate, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa expressed his intention to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict within an 'undivided' Sri Lanka. In his Election Manifesto-*Mahinda Chintanaya*, he stated "It is my intention to critically examine the merits and demerits of the steps taken so far to deal with this complex problem and consider a fresh approach. In doing so, the fundamental platform that I would base my initiative

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25. The trajectory of the LTTE insurgency in this framework can be identified as follows: from the early 1972/3 to 1983 the emergence; 1983- 1992/3 the growth; 1992/3-2002 the peak; 2002-2006 the decline; 2006-200 the final collapse. During the peak phase, the LTTE miserably failed to transform its military gains into political gains and moved from military front to the democratic political sphere. The African national Congress and the Irish Republican Army were able to make this shift at the correct time with necessary adjustment to their political agenda

26. The first chapter of the manifesto titled 'Constitutional Reforms. It states "The Freedom Alliance therefore seeks a mandate from the people of Sri Lanka to convene a Constituent Assembly consisting members of the Parliament, to promulgate a new constitution that will derive its form and validity from the expression of the political will of the people".

on would be an undivided country, a national consciousness and an honorable peace”.

When Mahinda Rajapaksa assumed the Presidency in November 2005 the situation that prevailed in the country was one of ‘no-war and no-peace’. In February 2006 another attempt was taken to revive the direct dialogue between the GOSL and the LTTE with the help of Norwegian mediation. This paved the way for peace talks in Geneva. It was clear at Geneva that either party was not ready to politically invest in talks any more. Intermittent military clashes between the Sri Lankan Forces and the LTTE led the way to the full scale war in July 2006 after the Mavil Aru incident. It was the formal beginning of Eelam War IV. In the face of the military offensive of the Sri Lankan Government forces, the LTTE strongholds fell one after another. The total annihilation of the top LTTE leadership in the final battle at the Nanathiikadal lagoon in the Mullaittivu District in May 2009 marked the dramatic end of nearly three decades of armed struggle associated with the demand for a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka.

Parallel to the commencement of Eelam War-IV, the government initiated some action to establish the All Party Representative Committee chaired by Minister Tissa Witharana in July 2006 to formulate a draft proposal for constitutional reform. It was mandated to “evolve a ‘home grown new constitution’ which will provide a comprehensive approach to the resolution of the national question”<sup>27</sup>. The Committee met 126 times over three years and after exhaustive discussions it presented a mere one page interim proposal to President Mahinda Rajapaksa in February 2009. However, its final report, presented to the President in July 2010, proposed to adopt a Parliamentary form of government at the Centre, a mixed electoral system which

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27. Proposals made by the All Party Representative Committee to form the Basis of a new Constitution –APRC final Report

combines the first past the post on an electorate basis and proportional representation on a party basis, and a three-tier (Central, provincial and Local) power sharing structure. After two years, in June 2012, the Government decided to convene a Parliamentary Select Committee ostensibly to reach a consensus among the main political parties.

The ending of the war resulted in the emergence of a new historical environment. The LTTE was the most serious challenge to the territorial integrity and sovereignty that the Sri Lankan state faced since Independence. Considering the enormous pain and destruction caused by the protracted armed conflict, the ending of the war generated a sigh of relief and created a hope that peace had come to this fractured land at last. The end of the war does not necessarily mean the end of the ethno-political conflict. What really happened was that the unresolved ethno-political crisis has been redefined and reconfigured in a 'no-war' space. By redefining conditions of ethno-political conflict in a no-war context, the military defeat of the LTTE has opened a new historical space to find a durable solution to the ethno-political conflict. Simultaneously it has created many constraints on that path in the context of post-war 'triumphalism' and the majoritarian mindset of the ethno-political clientele of the regime.

Today, Sri Lanka stands at a critical historical juncture. The end of a long war is definitely a turning point. In history, however, there are many potential turning points that did not turn history. The military defeat of the LTTE has true potential to be a turning point in ethno-political dynamics and in postcolonial state-building, but, whether the history will actually turn or not depends on how various stake-holders of peace utilize the new historical space to promote sustainable peace through national reconciliation and social cohesion. The victorious regime in

Colombo has earned enormous political capital by ending the war and the way in which V-day celebrations are held indicates that the present regime is eager to use it as a political capital. In his ascent to power, President Mahinda Rajapaksa was very successful in forging a broad rainbow coalition of political and ideological forces, comprising hard-line Sinhalese nationalist parties, groups and movements. Some of these forces who are constituent elements of the ruling regime reject the very concept of a 'political solution' as being a misnomer because they do not believe that there is an ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. For them there are no special grievances for minorities in the country simply because they are simply minorities. If there are any grievances, they are related to economic underdevelopment. Hence, economic progress is the only solution to these grievances and not devolution. Economic development requires a strong centre and any attempt at devolution weakens the centre. In the context of pervasive war triumphalism, any attempt at state reforms with the objective of widening the democratic political space through devolution is viewed by the ethno-political clientele of the regime as an instance of presenting on a platter what the LTTE failed to achieve on the battle front.

This is only one side of the coin. The Government cannot afford to ignore the issue of state reforms also. The government is compelled to address the issue of political reforms as it cannot proceed from the post-war to the post conflict environment without addressing the political factors that generated the conflict. At the same time, the government cannot ignore national and international pressure for political reforms. The LLRC Commission emphasized that a political solution is imperative and the Commission was of the view that "the root cause of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka lies in the failure of successive Governments to address the genuine grievances of the Tamil people. A political

solution is imperative to address the causes of the conflict. Everybody speaks about it, though there is no agreement about the diagnosis and the prescription” (LLRC 2011: 369).

Another related constitutional issue that cropped up in the post-war context is the need for the full implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment. It should be noted that the Sri Lankan government has repeatedly assured the international community that “Sri Lanka will take measures for the effective implementation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution” (HRC 2008). The joint press release issued after the visit to India by External Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris on 17 May 2011 states that “the External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka affirmed his Government’s commitment to ensuring expeditious and concrete progress in the ongoing dialogue between the Government of Sri Lanka and representatives of Tamil parties. A devolution package, building upon the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, would contribute towards creating the necessary conditions for such reconciliation”<sup>28</sup>. Before that, in the India-Sri Lanka Joint Declaration on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2010, after President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s visit to New Delhi, “the President [Mahinda Rajapaksa] expressed his resolve to continue to implement in particular the relevant provisions of the Constitution designed to strengthen national amity and reconciliation through empowerment. In this context, he shared his ideas on conducting a broader dialogue with all parties involved. The Prime Minister of India expressed India’s constructive support for efforts that build peace and reconciliation among all communities in Sri Lanka” (New Delhi Mission 2011). In this context, it is not possible to avoid the issue of political reforms anymore as the credibility and legitimacy of the government is closely linked with its willingness to go forward with the devolution of power and widespread distribution of political power.

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28. [www.newdelhi.mission.govt.lk/index.php/india-srilankarelations/474-joint-press-statement-may-17-2011](http://www.newdelhi.mission.govt.lk/index.php/india-srilankarelations/474-joint-press-statement-may-17-2011).

Post-war reconstruction and rebuilding is at the centre of policy priorities of the government<sup>29</sup>. It is indeed a formidable challenge to be addressed with broad political foresight as to the State-Building and national integration. The main emphasis of the Government in post-war rebuilding and reconstruction is on physical infrastructure developments, mainly roads and bridges. As a result of these large-scale infra-structure development projects, the appearance of the region has been changing rapidly since the end of the war. The post-war rebuilding process in the real sense of the term should invariably be a multi-dimensional one and physical infra-structure development is only one element of the process. The central element of post-war rebuilding is rebuilding society. Therefore, the true success of post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction cannot be measured only in terms of the construction of new roads, bridges and buildings. The economic and political empowerment of the people is the crucial aspect of rebuilding society. Conceptualizing from a broader political perspective, post-war rebuilding must address not only the effects of the long war but also the socio-political causes that generated the war. Therefore, without addressing the ethnic problem, post-war rebuilding would be incomplete and also ineffective in the long run.

The ultimate outcome of post-war rebuilding would be reconstructing the life of the people in the region and a more cohesive society. As far as national cohesion is concerned, the feeling of belonging constitutes the key element in that people should feel that they are a part of the same country. It comes as

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29. The government launched two integrated initiatives Negenahira Navodaya and Uthuru Wasanthaya. Uthuru Wasanthaya has two phases. First, a 180 day programme, focused on de-mining, resettlement of IDPs, energy grid, telecommunication reconstruction of damaged Socio-economic infra-structure, and livelihood recovery. The second phase focused on infrastructure development, electricity, transport, water supply, health, education, cultural affairs and livelihood development programmes. Approximately 64% of funds for Northern developments came from the international donors.

a result of political, social and economic inclusion. In contrast, a feeling of exclusion from the decision-making process constitutes a key element of the ethnic crisis. The feeling of exclusion pushes communities into isolation which would manifest at different levels. Therefore, space should be created and widened for the people in the North and East to participate in the political, social-cultural and economic life, nationally and regionally. Post-war development projects should be designed as participatory development projects so that people in the region would be a party to the decision making process. The recognition of group specific values along with shared values is the key to social cohesion. The recognition of group-specific values bestows them with a high degree of legitimacy. All these aspects are ultimately linked to the post-war state-building process.

In the post-war context, the state-building process needs to address very carefully the issue of militarization. The military is an important institution of the state. It has a precise role. In contrast, militarization is a process. Arresting militarization is by no means opposing the legitimate functions of the military. Militarization is not simply the expansion of the numbers of military forces. In militarization, the military infiltrates other 'non-military' spheres and expands its role into other branches of governance which should be under civil administration. Another aspect of militarization is the acquisition of the policing function by the military and the utilization of military forces to maintain civil law and order. As a result, the military comes forward to play a crucial role in day to day affairs of the people even after the war. In the process, the military has infiltrated into other spheres of civil administration such as trade, city planning and local administration and even higher education bringing the civil administrative organs under their authority. As a result, the military comes forward to wield substantial political and

economic power<sup>30</sup>. A heavy and visible military presence in every nook and corner of the north is practically counter-productive as far as peace and security interests are concerned. The security interests of the state can be taken well care of by well trained, strong but not heavy and smartly less-visible military presence. According to Dayan Jayatilleka, “Today, the state must deploy the armed forces in the North and East in a manner that deters and prevents future conflict, rather than sows the seeds for it, either in the forms of terrorism, guerrilla cells or unarmed civic resistance. The establishment of permanent military bases strictly within state ‘Crown’ land is doubtless imperative to guarantee the first objective, but the acquisition of private land and the settlement of military families could trigger the latter....The wrong kind of security policy for the postwar North and East in which Sri Lankan armed forces cantonments become interlinked oases embedded in a hostile local population may turn the entire area into a high insecurity zone” (Jayatilake 2010). Closely related to militarization is moving towards a national security state. The concept of national security came into political discussions in a Latin American context after the connection with military regimes. The rationale for the existence of the regime in national security states derives from the need to ensure national security. In a national security state, as Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer identified, the state maintains an appearance of democracy but ultimate power rests with the military establishment (Nelson-Pallmeyer 1992). The systematic creation of ‘enemy images’ constitutes a key social element of militarization. In this mind-set, there are enemies of the state everywhere. There are conspiracies against the state in every nook and corner. The main task of the state is to identify and counter internal and external enemies who are waiting for an opportunity to destroy the country.

30. Lanka Business Online (LBO) quoted military spokesman Nihal Hapuarachchi saying “we are now engaged in five hotel projects in Nilaweli, Arugam Bay and Yala,”

An analysis of approaches, attempts and challenges in the postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka since 1948 teaches us one important lesson: in order to achieve sustainable peace, based on national cohesion, the driving force in post-war State-Building must be democratization, not the centralization and militarization. The devolution of power to regions should be framed in the context of democratic political space. However, the devolution of power is not simply a panacea for all the political ills of the country. In the light of the present political culture and majoritarian practices, appropriate measures are essential to check the manipulation of the organs of devolution of power as another tier to expand the 'power industry'- developing mechanisms to siphon state resources through political power. Therefore, the revitalization of mechanisms of devolution should accompany broader democratic political reforms in order for them to be viable and effective. Therefore, the issues of post-war State-Building should be addressed as a part of broader democratic political reforms to ensure key elements of good governance such as accountability, transparency and the rule of law necessary to achieve the objectives of post-war peace and stability.

The LLRC observations in this regard are very useful: "Many persons who made representations before the Commission stated that a large number of persons having political patronage had committed offences, but the long arm of the law had not reached them because of the political pressure exerted on law enforcement authorities. Along with an independent Judiciary and a transparent legal process a strict adherence to the Rule of Law is a sine qua non for peace and stability, if there is to be any meaningful reconciliation. It was stated that lack of good governance, and non-observance of the Rule of Law coupled with a lack of meaningful devolution were causes for creating tension between communities" (LLRC). The importance of bringing

democracy, human rights and good-governance to the centre of post-war state craft becomes critical in this background.

Now it is high time to deviate from the old mind set associated with the state structure that we inherited from the colonial past. President Mahinda Rajapaksa stated in his *Mahinda Chinthanaya* that , ‘We need to think from a fresh perspective and devise a new approach if we are to find a sustainable solution” (*Mahinda Chintana* 2005). What is required today is a new concept of the state and citizenship to suit postcolonial conditions. The notion of ‘radical democratic citizenship’ conceptualized by Chantal Mouffe is very useful here. She writes ‘The creation of political identities as radical democratic citizens depends therefore on collective form of identification among the democratic demands found in a variety of movements.....the ideal of citizenship could greatly contribute to such an extension of the principles of liberty and equality. By combining the ideal of rights and pluralism with the ideas of public spiritedness and ethno-political concern, a new modern democratic conception of citizenship could restore dignity to the political and provide the vehicle for the construction of a radical democratic hegemony”. The notion of radical democratic citizenship which compels us to redefine the role, mission and vision of the postcolonial state should be the basis of a fresh perspective and a new approach.

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# **EVOLUTION OF POSTCOLONIAL INSTITUTIONS OF POWER AND GOVERNANCE AND THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES**

Sisira Pinnawala and S. Sathiaseelan

## **Introduction**

The state in its modern form has historical origin in Western Europe and is a product of a series of socio-political and economic transformations Europe was going through then. In postcolonial countries, the state as it exists today began as an implantation of this modern European phenomenon by their colonial rulers for administration of government hence as an instrument of colonial rule. Though the implanted state in these countries did undergo changes during colonial rule these changes were designed and effected by the colonial rulers for their benefit, namely, for efficient extraction, effective control and administrative convenience. There was no conscious attempt by colonial rulers to bring the implanted state in line with local realities by making it representative of the societies it meant to govern. The state structures that were inherited by the newly independent countries, not being a product of their own historical forces, were not therefore in agreement with the realities of

the social organization of these societies, which was defined by strong divisions based on deep-rooted identities of various types. These divisions stood in the way of citizenship-based allegiance to state, which is the foundation of the western nation state. This non-congruence between the implanted state and the social organization of postcolonial societies is important to understand State-Building in postcolonial countries. Minority representation in the state, which is central to the legitimacy and effective governance of postcolonial states, becomes a crucial issue in the State-Building efforts in these countries in this context.

Creating a representative state bringing together diverse socio-cultural groups under one polity was therefore one of the major challenges confronting State-Building attempts of the postcolonial leadership that took over from the colonial masters. It also became a major concern for the nation building discourse, which in broad sense is the academic counterpart of State-Building in these countries<sup>1</sup>. For the postcolonial political leadership and the intelligentsia that had received their training under the western system of education and had been nurtured by western values and ideologies, the ideal state model was that of the nation state. It was therefore only natural that when they took over the control of the newly independent countries they wanted to build their own state in the image of the state in Europe from where their colonial masters came. The major challenge they had to face in achieving their objective was the existence in these societies of conflicting interests and aspirations of a citizenry that was deeply divided on the basis of a whole range of identities. The experience in postcolonial State-Building shows that no postcolonial country was fully successful in achieving the goal

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<sup>1</sup> postcolonial countries inherited a relatively stable state formed during the colonial rule therefore in the academic discourse State-Building was not seen as a major issue. Civic nationalism, which is the essential foundation of nation state, was alien to these countries and the intellectual discourse naturally focused on building a nation so that there would be stable basis for long term survival of the state.

of building a representative state accommodating these diverse groups in one polity similar to the nation state in Europe<sup>2</sup>. Some countries like India, Malaysia and Singapore have succeeded in their attempt to some degree while others like Sri Lanka and many in Africa have failed miserably<sup>3</sup>. The states that have emerged in these countries since their independence, including those that have achieved some degree of accommodation among diverse groups within the state, are characterized by state structures that are under the control of a majority group defined by some ethno-nationalist identity.

This article is an attempt to understand the forces that shaped State-Building in postcolonial Sri Lanka, with a focus on minority representation in the state. It examines the evolution of postcolonial state institutions that execute the state's power to govern which for the purpose of this essay are called institutions of power and governance. The article does not attempt to evaluate the levels of representation of minorities in the state, namely, the numbers of representatives of different ethnic communities in state institutions and their proportionality to respective population figures, and the amount of influence they carried in different state institutions. It will only attempt to explain the factors and forces that have shaped State-Building in postcolonial Sri Lanka to understand the evolution of postcolonial state structures and minority representation in them.

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2 It is not claimed here that nation state is completely an inclusive state in the sense that it represents interests of all different identity groups or that the west has been successful in building the ideal nation state. The only premise here is that in nation state such divisions are subordinate to "civic nation" hence identity groups do not pose a challenge either to the state or to the nation.

3 It is interesting to note that India and Malaysia that have achieved some level of representation of minorities in their state were the ones that had experienced worst divisive tendencies immediately after their independence. Sri Lanka that experienced worst levels of separatist violence recently was relatively peaceful among the newly independent nations in Asia during the independence, in spite deep ethno-nationalist divisions separating the two major groups, namely, the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.

This analysis adopts a new terminology, namely, institutions of power and governance, to describe the operations of the state. The reason for this is the inadequacy of the traditional conceptualization of the state in terms of the three branches of the states, namely, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary to understand the execution of power of the state. The author's argument is founded on two premises. The first is that the execution of power of the state goes beyond the domain of the above three branches that are traditionally considered as the core of state power. In the state there are two support institutions, namely, the bureaucracy and the armed forces that play a relatively autonomous role in the execution of the power of the state. While the three branches of government are the core organs of the state the survival of the state depends on the ability of it to manage its affairs through extraction of resources and provision of services through the bureaucracy and defend itself and provide for the security of its subjects with the use of the armed forces and police. Further, the bureaucracy and the security forces, while deriving their power through the state, operate on the basis of clearly defined roles and governed by their own norms. Most importantly, these institutions are, or at least supposed to be, apolitical institutions of power like the judiciary. The second is that the above conceptualization of the three branches of government excludes one important institution of state power in modern society, namely, political parties that play a very important role in the execution of state power. The operation of the modern state, unless it is a dictatorship of an individual, cannot be understood without understanding the organization and operation of the political party system. Though in true democracies the role of political parties is limited to setting overall policy framework of the government in power in almost all postcolonial societies the entire operations of the state, and as a result all aspects of the life of the citizens, is determined by the

party system. The organization of power relations and operations that are part of the political party system in these countries make them arguably the most important player of power of the modern state in postcolonial societies<sup>4</sup>.

The postcolonial State-Building is a complex process that goes beyond mere reshaping of the state inherited from the colonial rulers for the sake of the indigenization of the western political model and creating an alternative governance structures to be in line with the needs of the locals. It also is a process driven by postcolonial socio-political realities that are affecting the rulers and the masses, and is characterized by twin phenomena, namely, attempts to strengthen the state and attempts to strengthen the grip of the ruling group of the state. Strengthening the state is necessary as these states are characterized by powerful divisive forces, namely, competing deep rooted identities such as ethnic and religious divisions, threatening the stability of the state. This combined with the lack of a mature political culture of consensus make it necessary for the rulers to take measures to strengthen their position in power<sup>5</sup>. The restructuring and remodeling state structures, redefining norms of governance inherited from the colonial past to suit the postcolonial environment needs to be seen in this light.

The generally accepted argument is that Sri Lanka's State-Building during the postcolonial period evolved into an ethnic majoritarian democracy due to the actions of the rising force of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. The ideology behind the emerging nationalist forces was founded on a political vision of a section of the leaders of postcolonial Sri Lanka who believed

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4. This situation is not very different from the dominant role of the party over all branches of government, hence state, in communist societies. In them all branches of the government and other support institutions are rubber stamps of the party

5. Coup d'états insurgencies and revolutions that plague the post colonials countries threatening their stability and that of the government in power are examples.

that the post-independence state institutions should serve the interests of the majority Sinhalese community (Uyangoda n.d.). The emergence of this majoritarian state needed significant changes to state institutions and their operations, which were introduced by postcolonial rulers either by means of constitutional reforms or brought in through political maneuvering. The argument therefore is that the postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka is driven primarily by the desire of the majority community to take control of the state and the resistance to it by the minority, namely, the Tamil community<sup>6</sup>. The essence of this argument is that ethnic factor and forces mobilized by it is at the centre of postcolonial State-Building projects in Sri Lanka. While agreeing with the interactive role of nationalism of both the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils in directing postcolonial State-Building, this article argues that the failure of the postcolonial Sri Lanka state to incorporate minorities into a unified nation and create an inclusive state cannot be reduced to ethnic factor alone. The failure needs to be understood as a complex process in which ethnic and class forces were interacting and feeding into each other. In addition to competing ethnicities, there was also a power struggle between competing class formations that played a crucial and defining role. The paper therefore challenges the traditional explanation that reduces State-Building in Sri Lanka to the domain of ethnicity. It claims that postcolonial State-Building in Sri Lanka is not an ethnic project only and there is also a class project operating in parallel and in interaction.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part is a critique of the concept of the state focusing on the relationship between the abstract conceptualization of the state and its

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6. Communal party based Muslim mobilization emerged in the late 1970s with the formation of the Muslim United Liberation Front in 1977. However, until Mr. M. H.M Ashraff formed the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress in 1981 there was no coordinated resistance to majority dominated State-Building from minority Muslim community which is the other politically relevant minority in the country.

practical operation through institutions in order to establish the theoretical relevance and explanatory validity of the author's conceptualization of the state in terms of the institutions of power and governance over the traditional conceptualization in terms of the three branches of the government. The second part is a discussion of state formation in general and also an examination of socio-historical forces that were operating in the colonial and postcolonial society. The third part examines the competitive State-Building projects that determined the evolution of the institutions of power and governance in the postcolonial Sri Lanka state and explains how these competitive State-Building projects were shaped by the interaction between the forces serving the interests of class formations and ethnic mobilization, namely, the political mobilization, Tamil ethno-nationalism and Sinhala ethno-nationalism to determine the nature of minority representation in the postcolonial Sri Lanka state.

### **State, State Power and Institutions of Power and Governance**

The academic discourse on the state has come a long way since the classical theories of Hobbs, Locke and Rousseau that attempted to explain its origins. The explanations of state prevalent today can be broadly categorized into two groups, namely, the one that is part of various strands of Marxist analysis and the other rooted in the liberal intellectual tradition and representing different versions of the theory of industrial society. Max Weber is one who has contributed to bridge the divide between Marxist class theories of capitalist coercive state and the liberal intellectual explanation of normative order based state. According to Weber the central feature of modern statehood is 'the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, 1991: 78). His view was that state's monopoly of physical force was a result of 'political expropriation' in which

all political communities other than the state had gradually been deprived of the means of coercion (Weber, 1991: 83). While Weber did not accept the Marxist view of state power as class power his claim that state has the monopoly of violence shares with Marx the central issue of state's sole ownership of power.

The focus on the monopoly of violence by Weber as the foundation of state has come into question recently. The question raised by those who challenge Weber's view is whether the state has the monopoly of violence as claimed. Giddens for example argues that the monopoly of violence is a property only of the modern state as the pre-modern state did not have the same capability of influencing the day-to-day life activities of its subjects in spite of the fact that they had the complete control over the subjects (Giddens 1987:10). His argument is based on the distinction between scope and intensity of control the state has on its citizens. He claims that the complete control (intensity of control) of the pre-modern state over its subjects did not mean that it had the mastery over the conduct of all segments (scope of control) of the subject population (Giddens 1987). In today's discourse of the state even the scope of control Giddens refers to is considered problematic. The view here is that state violence has limits as the state's right to violence is not always accepted as legitimate by its subjects (Painter 2006:756) and also not acceptable under the emerging new value system governing modern statecraft. Further, it is also claimed that some non-state violence can achieve a degree of legitimacy when, for example, paramilitary organizations operate in quasi-judicial capacities in areas under their control<sup>7</sup>.

7. Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces during the latter part of the civil war can be considered a good example of this situation. From about the late 1990s the liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ran what analysts called a de facto state in these parts which even had some recognition by international actors. See Stokke (2006) and Sarvanathan (2007) for a detailed analysis.

Another question that is raised with regard to state's monopoly of violence is whether the control state achieves over its subjects by having that monopoly of violence is the only means available to it to establish authority. To understand this aspect of state power we need to examine power in its different dimensions, and also the application of control by state through various means available to it. The early debate on power with its focus only on control power viewed power as one-dimensional phenomenon. When Weber who is an early proponent of this view for example says power is the probability that one actor in a relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance (Weber 1978:53) he was referring this controlling aspects of power. Subsequently the analysis of power has been expanded by others by introducing covert power (Dahl 1989) and latent power (Lukes 2005) thus bringing in different aspects of power into focus. Bourdieu's contention that Ideologies make men to believe that there is no control or suppression and that the order of things is natural, a state of affairs he describes as doxa (Bourdieu1977), is also an attempt in this direction. Further, surveillance is also an important mechanism of control available to state in modern society<sup>8</sup>.

The control exerted by the modern state through surveillance is outside the domain of direct force (violence) and as Giddens says takes two forms, namely, coded information (collection and storage of information) and supervision (Giddens 1987:10). In the pre-modern state surveillance in the form of supervision was a primary means of control and was carried out through spies and the church (local priest) but today surveillance is subtle and the states are in possession of a range of mechanisms

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8. Michel Foucault's use of panopticon in his analysis of modern intuitions of incarceration (Foucault 1979) provides an insightful analysis of this phenomenon.

to keep an eye on its citizens<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, power of the state neither in its modern form nor in its pre-modern types is raw power coming out of its right to the monopoly of violence.

The above makes the monopoly of violence, as the principal property that defines the state is problematic. The establishment of state's monopoly of physical force should not be conceptualized merely in terms of power relations through which the state carries out its will despite any resistance from by its subjects. The factual monopoly of the use of physical force needs to be accepted as legitimate by the ruled as well. Legitimacy of state derived through the acceptance of its right to use violence is therefore a necessary condition for state's existence. Persuasion and surveillance thus are two means that state employs to control its subjects hence are aspects of power it has though it cannot claim to sole ownership of these two. However, persuasion is a requirement for legitimacy and long-term survival of the state (citizens should feel that they are not forced to comply with the commands of the state). Surveillance on the other hand is not only an effective control mechanism but also at the level of national polity a sole right of the state. This means that the power of the state as defined by its ability and acceptance of that ability by citizens needs to be mediated in order to become legitimate power, i.e. legitimate use of violence. Norms and practices that guide political conduct of the rulers and institutions that carry out the functions of the state become crucial players in this context for the legitimacy of state. Giddens accepts this when he says "all types of rule, then, rest upon the institutional mediation of power, but channel this through the use of definite strategies of control (Giddens 1987:10). Strategies of control when taken as

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9. The social security number in the US for example gives access to US government to keep track on activities of its citizens. The "Big Brother is watching Syndrome" is one of the root causes for the vehement opposition against citizen Identity Cards in many western countries like the UK whose recent increasing ability of the modern states to employ subtle measure of surveillance .

norms, rules and practices<sup>10</sup> (Hughes 1936, and Hodgson 2006) mean that state exercises its power in its various forms through institutions. The operational dimensions of power of the state, which in other words is state in action, therefore needs to be understood in terms of institutions that exercise power of the state in order to enable the state to be the power it is and perform the core functions of the state and govern. The institutions that are part of execution of power of state can be described as the institutions of power and governance of the state.

Thus in addition to the abstract conceptualization of state as the ultimate source of power it is also necessary to view it as a structure that enforces power in order to achieve certain goals/objectives for and of the human element for the state in the broad sense exists to serve certain functions that no other social construction can provide. The classical theories of Hobbs and Locke and those of Marx and others agree on this basic truth. State conceptualized in this manner enables us to bring in our main focus, i.e., institutions of power and governance, as one of the core components of the state. State viewed from this means ends perspective is a mechanism hence a structure enabling citizens to achieve certain goals and receive certain services they otherwise cannot receive. In this sense state's most valuable properties are a). the power it claims to own by virtue of being state and, b). the apparatus that enables it to exercise this power. This makes institutional dimension the operational core of the state as the state in its operations is dependent on these institutions that exercise power they derive from the state on behalf of the state.

The relevance of institutions to understand the state can

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10. Hodgson (2006:2) defines institutions as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions. Language, money, law, systems of weights and measures, table manners, and firms (and other organizations – emphasis mine) are thus all institutions. For Hughes (1936) they are enduring patterns of social practice

be further explained by taking Buzan's (1991) explanation of state in which he identifies three interrelated components of the state, namely the idea of the state, the institutional expressions of the state and the physical base of the state. For him the institutional expressions of the state comprise the entire machinery of the government. Similar views are expressed by others too who define state in institutional terms in the contemporary discourse. For example Papagianni (2008:51) brings in institutions when he considers the administrative capacity of governance as the principal criterion defining the state. Abrahams (1988) views the state as a system, a nexus of practices and institutional structure centred in government, an idea that is helpful to further understand the institutions of the state that execute the power of the state. He claims that state comes into being as a structuration within political practice. By doing that he highlights the essential relation between practice and structure that is important to understand not only state formation but also essential relationship between state formation and emergence of institutional expression of state power.

The essential relationship between state and institutions can be further illustrated by taking views of Norbert Elias (1994) on the emergence of the state. Elias differentiates between two distinct phases in the emergence of the modern state's monopoly of physical force. He says that in the first phase, a factual monopoly of physical force is established which results in people in general losing direct access to the means of force. This is a result of a process that makes force becoming centralized in the hands of a few individuals and families. In the second phase, this monopoly of physical force in the hands of a few tends to become public (Elias, 1994: 345-55), i.e. it moves from the hands of individual rulers or ruling families into a political setting of legal institutions. While the first phase is associated

with absolutist and authoritarian forms of rule, the second phase is associated with modern state founded on structures of legal political authority, namely, what are called institutions of power and governance in this essay. The institutional basis of state power comes with this second phase when state power shifts from persons to institutions. State formation process thus is closely associated with institutionalization of the authority of the state. A similar view comes from Sørensen (2004) who says that viewed from institutional perspective statehood can be defined as a centralized form of (representative) government/control system over citizens consisting of a set of administrative, policing and military organizations. These agencies/institutions are the modern state's apparatus for legitimate monopoly of physical force over a certain territory and a community of citizens (Sørensen 2004: 14). Institutions therefore are the means that ensure that countries are governed by rules and not by rulers

The power of the modern state as the above goes is located in institutions as the control of modern state is in the public domain not in the hand of a few individuals, i.e., monopoly of violence is not in the hands of one or a few individuals. Modern state exercises its control over citizens through the government or more specifically through the three branches of the government and the institutional setup available to them. This institutional form of statehood is the core of the modern state, which in the majority of cases today exists in the form of a representative government. These institutions consist of agencies and apparatus of the government that are responsible for administration (bureaucracy) and security and defense (armed forces and agencies of civil defense such as police). The modern state claims to the legitimate monopoly of physical force which the state agencies exert over a territory and a population within it (Sørensen 2004: 14) through these institutions. In this sense the three branches of the government, namely, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary are, by

being the final authority of exercise of power and control in their respective domains of power, are the core agencies of power and governance of the state. The principal role of the three branches of government is in the area of defining the power that the state possesses by virtue of being state. The institutional setup available to the three branches of government in the exercise of state power and have direct control of the life of citizens in their everyday life are the support institutions that deal with the matters that are part of the state's direct responsibility towards subjects i.e., defense and security (armed forces and police) and administration (bureaucracy). These institutions are in the business of implementing power of the three core institutions and hence are dealing with concrete situations of power.

The power of the state is represented by not only the three branches of the government and the support institutions described above. Institutionalization of power of the state, i.e., state power shifting from individuals to institutions, has resulted in the emergence another important component of modern statecraft, which is the political party system. Political parties are the medium through which the citizens connect with the decision making operations of state thereby making the state representative of its citizens. The state to be a true representative and earn legitimacy has to have a truly representative political party system based on the modern democratic values of which inclusive participation (representativeness and equality) and secularism are the foundation stones. This means that all segments and interests of a country should be able to participate in the running of the state (participate in the democratic decision-making process). Then only state power can be effectively combined with popular will so that sovereignty of people becomes a reality. The political parties therefore are important institutions of power as they, at least theoretically, are the means

by which the modern state derives its power from people making the citizens of a country the ultimate source of power of the state. In this sense political parties are as important as traditional three branches of the government and other support institutions of the state.

The state in this sense is a collection of institutions that runs the affairs of the state. Of these all except political parties, being the instruments of state inherit their power from the power of the state the root of which is monopoly of violence. Political parties on the other hand are the medium through which people's power is transferred to the state thus making the state representative and in turn legitimate. In theory therefore they do not derive power from the state like the other institutions of the state as the state power is power of the people. However, in practice in postcolonial societies and also in societies where ideologies control the state, for example communist states and Nazi state, political parties can become power bases deriving power from the state. In many postcolonial states political parties in power have effectively become the state by situating themselves above the government and thereby superseding all other state institutions.

In postcolonial societies political parties have, going beyond their legitimate role as representatives of the people (voters), acquired a new role as the agents of the group in control of the state. They have become more than the source of power of the state and means through which citizens participate in the affairs of the government. They instead have become structures of unique power relations by placing themselves above the government and thereby controlling and manipulating the general life situations of citizens. The emergence of political party based patronage system through which political parties have created channels of commands and control by manipulating

state resources is an example of this situation which is common place in postcolonial societies. Political parties in these societies instead of being guided by the will of the voters have become controllers of their will through this system of command and control established and reinforced by distribution of favours through a political party based system of patronage<sup>11</sup>. The political parties also have become agents of surveillance for the regime in power that controls the state through the same system of patronage. The patron client relationship established through party affiliation is a means through which information about citizens is transmitted to the regime so that the regime knows who the enemies and friends are and this information is used by the regime in power when delivering services to friends and also to take action against the enemies<sup>12</sup>. This enables the state through the regime to use that information in turn to control life chances of the voter. If one is not a supporter of the political party in power he/she is in a disadvantaged position in all life situations ranging from getting employment to receiving justice. Minorities who are politically mobilized by communal loyalties are the most disadvantages in this situation as they being away from mainstream national politics have no representation in the regime in power through the political party of the group in power. This effectively cuts them out from taking part in the state making them unrepresentative in both running the state and getting benefits from it.

The state has the ultimate controls over society and it executes this through government as defined by the three core

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11. Misuse of state resources and power and all forms of corruption that have become normal features of these societies are part and parcel of this patronage system and one cannot survive without the other.

12. In these societies government services are delivered through political parties and the average citizen needs political support to benefit from state service. Sri Lanka is an extreme example of this situation where nothing works if one has no links to the regime in power.

branches and the institutional setup under them which in turn perform the essential role of assisting the state in governing society. Governing society in this context needs to be understood not only in its narrow sense of control of affairs for what the government does when governing is more than mere control. The government is in the business of governance, which is “a condition of ordered rule or the manner, method or system by which a particular society is governed” (Finer 1970). Though governance is not necessarily a matter for a political unit only<sup>13</sup>, when the above definition of governance is applied to the running of the government operations governance broadly means the rule of law. In the specific context of execution of state power it is the combination of rules and laws made by the government that are sought to be implemented through a system of administration and by other means available to the state. Government therefore governs in the sense that it is ensuring governance in the control of society and state provides power to government to govern. The institutions of power and governance are the instruments of the state that carry out this responsibility of the state.

### **State-Building and State Formation**

Since the classical theories of state of Hobbs, Locke and Rousseau there have been interest in studying the actual process of state formation and the phenomenon (evolution of state and the nature and causes of it) has been studied from different directions. For some of these studies state formation is a process culminating in the monopolization of violence in a political body (Weber 1991) and for others (Elias 1994, Tilly 1985) it is a civilizing process leading to institutionalization of power once located in the private domain. There are also explanations that view state formation as a long-term negotiation process and legalization

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13. Corporate governance is also an accepted usage and comes under the broad act of governance defined as a system of ordered rules and controls of a corporate body

of state society relations and expansion of state capacity<sup>14</sup>. All these explanations of state formation attempt to understand the emergence of the control mechanisms of state and their power over the polity it controls and the nature and the emergence of institutions that contains within the state.

State formation can be broadly defined as a process leading to centralization of political power in a governing entity and involves creation of coercive, extractive and regulatory institutions. Such an entity can be a dynastic body or a systemic operation consisting of a set of institutions or a combination of both with the monopoly of the means of coercion over inhabitants living in a well-defined territory. This takes place in a given socio-historical context and is a part of an evolutionary process in which the state power moves from private domain (ruler or royal families) to public domain as in the case of a systemic operation characterized by the modern state<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, analysts agree that state formation needs to be understood in its historical context. Like the nation state which was a response to the social forces of the times (capitalism and new political ideologies) the postcolonial state was a response to the dynamics of its own historical period, among which ethno-nationalist sentiments and socio-economic formations were major players.

While state formation and State-Building share much in common for both concepts attempt to understand evolutionary development of the state there is an important difference that makes it necessary to see them as two analytically different

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14. Jürgen Habermas similar to Elias (1994) described state formations as a process involving four distinct stages beginning from the establishment and consolidation of the monopolies of physical force, personal monopoly of power changing to institutional power, emergence of nation state and formation of the modern welfare state (Habermas 1986: 356-63).

15. Tilly (1985) compares the early European state-builder with criminal racketeers for their primary interest was not in building states but in acquiring material resources through coercive action for their private use.

phenomena. Unlike state formation, which is part of a socio-historical process and is evolutionary in broad terms, State-Building is a guided and directed process aimed at achieving a pre-determined goal in the short-term and medium term. Its broad objective is a strong and efficient state conforming to the ideals of the modern state, i.e., the nation state. In this process due to intervention of the local forces the process may take its own course and the final outcome may not be as planned. On the other hand being part of a broad process of social progress state formation has no predetermined goals. There is no target to reach and no standards to follow. Therefore historically and analytically state formation is emergence of a new phenomenon and State-Building is reaching/achieving an already existing one. Where the state formation is heading is determined by the process itself there was no way of determining whether the process is off the track or not. State-Building on the other hand being an attempt to create a phenomenon in line with an already established phenomenon there is a clear idea where it is directed.

State-Building in postcolonial societies from the beginning adopted a perspective based on the modernization theory. The general expectations of the modernization theory from Max Weber onwards have been that with the monopolization of public authority the State-Building process would lead to a redefinition of the relationship between the state and intermediate institutions such as religion and kinship. In the postcolonial context this was to be achieved through deliberate action if they failed to transform on their own with modernization. The broad objective of modern State-Building, which is a task mainly of the so-called new states (Shils 1960) that are modernizing and postcolonial, therefore was to build a secular state based on core values of democracy by emulating the west. In modern State-Building the public authority (state) was expected to establish a direct and

exclusive relationship with the individual for effective and efficient execution of its functions and there should not be interference of other significant social and political forces (Huang 2006:6). This means rejection of identity based politics, i.e., rejection of ethno-nationalist and other parochial loyalties in state's link with its citizens. This was broadly achieved in state formation in Europe with the secularization (religion being marginalized as a force and making it strictly part of the private sphere) of society in general and the state in particular.

### **Postcolonial State-Building**

Postcolonial countries inherited a relatively stable state formed during the colonial rule but this state was not a representative one of the local population. There was no need to build a state representative of the local social organization when the ruler was an alien power whose primary concern was extraction. Therefore the colonial state was formed by the colonial master who modeled it in the image of the state of the mother country. The postcolonial state in the beginning was a continuation of this colonial state and only the ownership changed to the local elites who were in every bit replicas of the colonial masters who nurtured them<sup>16</sup>. They like their colonial masters saw themselves as superior to the locals and as the natural leaders (Ade Ajayi 1982) of the masses who were not adapted to the ways of the modern world hence needed to be looked after and guided. Analysts who have studied the continuity of the postcolonial state have employed different conceptualizations to explain this continuity of the colonial state after the end of colonial rule in these countries. Bayart (1993) for example sees the continuity between the colonial state and postcolonial state in his conceptualization of rhizome state, which he saw as

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16. These are often described the brown sahibs (brown gentlemen) for their imitation of the white master.

postcolonial adjustment to old colonial state. Mamdani (1996) in a similar analysis of South African state bifurcated by apartheid ideology places colonial developments at the core of his theory claiming that colonial rule, like South Africa's apartheid regime, was based on institutional segregation, a regime of differentiation (Mamdani 1996:p 7) which independence failed to abolish.

Hamza Alavi (1972) in his analysis of postcolonial state in Pakistan and Bangladesh departs from the above continuity and adjustment thesis to explain the link between the colonial state and the postcolonial state. He argues that the task of the metropolitan bourgeoisie in the colony was not merely to replicate the superstructure of the state which it had established in the metropolitan country. Additionally, it had to create a state apparatus through which it could exercise dominion over all the indigenous social classes in the colony. According to him in these countries experienced re-alignments of class forces that have been brought about by the postcolonial situation that brought together military and bureaucracy creating what he calls military bureaucratic oligarchy<sup>17</sup>, came to play a semiautonomous role in the situation created by the lifting of direct metropolitan control. While the military-bureaucratic oligarchy has been in the leadership from the beginning in postcolonial Bangladesh and Pakistan in many postcolonial societies like Sri Lanka, India and Malaysia military was not part of the colonial ruling elite. In Sri Lanka it was the western educated upper middle class civil elites supported by plantation owners, landowners (agrarian) and bureaucrats and professionals (Uyangoda 1982) that took control over the postcolonial state. While they were a product of the colonial rule subsequent developments brought about a realignment of class forces in this country too and the group that

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17. Some even claim that postcolonial bureaucrats can be considered a class (state bourgeoisie) as it established a specific place in the existing relations of production through the state (Poulantzas 1973).

took over had a different agenda as reflected in the postcolonial State-Building that ensued.

Though the core ideology, sans its overly racial overtones, and structures of the colonial state continued into postcolonial society it also had to adjust to new challenges resulting from the state coming under the control of the indigenous leadership. In all postcolonial countries the local leadership that took over was an elite group of various configurations (Alavi 1972, Poulantzas 1973) and there was very little participation of the masses in the state machinery. In order to legitimize their control of the state and also to expand their power base it was necessary to bring in the masses and make the state more representative of the local society. Further, the new countries that became independent were very often the creation of the colonial masters who had captured regions inhabited by a number of autonomous communities as in the case of Africa (Akintoye 1976) or a group of kingdoms or principalities as in the case of Sri Lanka and India rather than countries united under one flag in the European sense. It was the colonials who decided the borders for administrative and ownership purposes. Therefore, the borders decided which colonial power owned which piece of land rather than reflecting political and cultural unity of these “countries”. A major challenge confronting postcolonial rulers therefore was to bring in different ethno-nationalist factions artificially united by the colonial powers made into one polity and handed over as “countries” to the local leadership with the independence. While these factions maintained the demand that they be given adequate representation in the post independence state even during the colonial struggle<sup>18</sup> these demands became more intense politically after these countries became independent. This latter

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18. In Sri Lanka Tamils demand for a state structure that gives them equal rights existed in the pre-independence days and their participation in the freedom struggle was conditional to an implicit understanding that this would be achieved.

demand was the most politically powerful challenge facing the postcolonial leadership. Representative state in the postcolonial context was therefore a major challenge from the beginning as these were societies that were deeply divided both in terms of class and social position and by deep-rooted identities. The result of these political undercurrents was nation building becoming an integral part of State-Building and a major responsibility of postcolonial elite who took over the leadership<sup>19</sup>.

In addition to their agenda for national unity through nation building the postcolonial rulers were engaged in other activities that affected the nature of the postcolonial state in a fundamental way. The postcolonial rulers expanded the scope and the mission of the state (Young 2004) as well. These expansions included incorporation of development work into the responsibilities of the state which had already begun in the terminal colonial state<sup>20</sup>. However, it must be also noted that expansion of state to become an agent of development by the colonial rulers was for an entirely different reason. Theirs was aimed at expanding their power base and strengthening their control over the colony. Establishment of universities in addition to expansion of education supported by missionaries etc. that characterized the terminal colonial state was part of this developmental thrust. In doing so the colonial masters had abandoned (paid less attention at least) fiscal self-sufficiency which was the foundation of their extraction based colonial rule. Employment opportunities expanded as a result of

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19. State-Building and nation building go very closely together yet as two different projects in postcolonial societies the fact that the two were part of the same project in state formation in Europe is important to understand State-Building in postcolonial societies. Today many postcolonial societies have abandoned nation building aimed at creating a nation incorporating all communities and have adopted a new model that recognized the ground realities of their countries. Postcolonial states have moved from nation building to national integration paradigm that looks at minorities and their rights from a new direction.

20. Discussing Africa Young (2004) says that the scope of colonial terminal state expanded to include development which came to part of state discourse in the 1920s

these developments during the terminal days of colonial rule and that too benefitted the locals. Expansion of social services and education that resulted from these developments can be said to have laid the foundation for the welfare state that was to become the model of service provision in several postcolonial states of which Sri Lanka is a good example.

Thus gradually the doctrine of nationalism and nationalization too came to be integral part of the postcolonial State-Building process. As Young (2004) says nationalization for the postcolonial rulers who belonged to various shades of socialism, was not just a matter of socialist ideology and social justice. It was also an anti-imperialist measure that established their credentials as nationalist and pro-local leaders. It was therefore the basis of their legitimacy as leaders and played on the strong anti-imperial sentiments among the masses that were increasingly becoming mobilized making nationalization led economic development synonymous with symbol of anti-imperialism and nationalism. Nationalization adopted by the postcolonial rulers was therefore not only an economic paradigm but also political paradigm and colonial economy became the target (Young 2004:31) of the postcolonial rulers as a result. This received ideological support from socialism that had become the preferred political ideology of postcolonial rulers in the sixties. In Africa for example there was nationalization movement to get rid of metropolitan corporations and indigenization to chase out foreign entrepreneurs (Young 2004:32) who were mainly of Asian (Indian) origin. Nationalization of Petroleum distribution in Sri Lanka, taking over of control of National Petroleum Corporation of Nigeria, move to the left movement of Milton Obote of Uganda in the late 1960s are examples of this nationalization led anti imperialist cum nationalist drive. This also is indicative of an expansion of resource extraction by the

postcolonial state. The expansion of state in this manner resulted in the emergence of parastatal bodies such as state corporations and authorities established to manage state run enterprises that were established to take over expanding responsibilities of the state. The proliferation of state enterprises and ventures in Sri Lanka in the sixties and seventies is an example of this situation.

State expansion grew as a result of state functioning as surrogate capitalist (Young 2004) which was an inevitable result of nationalization of economic ventures that was at the centre of postcolonial economic approach to development. Nationalization did make the state the major player in the economy and this new role of the state was supported also by rapid development effort and the need to achieve development targets in quick time. The latter in turn resulted in handing over the control of the economy to the state giving it more responsibilities. The state thus came to be recognized the driving force of growth. Tendency towards one party system and intolerance of criticism and opposition that stand in the way of the rulers, which is a characteristic of postcolonial societies, is also a result of these developments. The single party system became the norm in Africa and even in Asia as seen from the formation of grand coalitions like UNNO in Malaysia and many other postcolonial countries including Sri Lanka. These coalitions were often aimed at strengthening the ruling block by getting them the majority support required in the parliament in order to have a stable government rather than to create the necessary conditions for an inclusive state by bringing minorities into government. This resulted in centralization of power and monopolization of political space by one group/class formation of an ethnic community. This in turn led to problematic situations of ethnic representativeness in the state.

There are several differences between European state formation and postcolonial State-Building that needs conceptual

clarity. The European state was a product of evolutionary formation of state and what started as State-Building in postcolonial societies was a planned project and an attempt to implant the European model. In contrast to the West where there were no conscious State-Building attempts aimed at creating a state based on legitimacy founded on representation of different national minorities, as nation was understood in terms of civic bonds of allegiance to state under the ideal nation state in Europe. In contrast the postcolonial state took upon itself the task of nation building as part of State-Building. This makes the two phenomena, namely, state and nation, synonymous and indistinguishable in the European state formation, while in the postcolonial context they are, though went on in parallel, two distinct processes each with its own separate objective. There is a valid reason for this difference. In postcolonial societies the state had been already formed as part of colonial administration and State-Building was required therefore only to make the already formed state a viable and local phenomenon.

Nation building was a requirement in the postcolonial context as in the colonies there was no attempt by the colonial master to build a coherent state based on nation but an administrative unit for the purpose of extraction. As stated earlier state was a vehicle for managing the region's resources with minimal cost and trouble. In the colonies the introduction of colonial rule meant a break in the existing indigenous state of their own and introduction of an administrative state in the model of the state in the mother country. The new state implanted by the colonial rulers did not create the political community within as it happened in the west with state formation. The nation state, which was an amalgamation of civic nation with the state, was a western phenomenon and similar form did not emerge in the colonial context under colonial rule. No citizenship based nation

was created in the colonies partly because such entity was not necessary for the colonials to achieve their main objective of extraction of resources and partly because such a development was even detrimental to their control<sup>21</sup>. The colonies had only subjects not citizens and therefore in the eyes of the colonial master the need of a coherent citizenship based nation did not arise. The responsibility of building a state proper in the sense of an integrated political community fell in the hands of postcolonial rulers.

Goerg Sørensen's argument that Third World states have often been fighting the 'wrong kind of war' to promote state-formation (Sorensøn 2001) gives an insightful explanation of what has been taking place with regard to State-Building in postcolonial societies. The argument is that state-creating wars in Europe were largely territorial, waged either to defend existing territory or to add new territory through invasion. In both cases the enemy the European states were fighting as part of their state formation was an external enemy. In the postcolonial state the territory on the other hand was given i.e., inherited from the colonial rulers, and as a result borders did not require defending by force except in the case of a very few situations like the Kashmir border dispute between India and Pakistan. The territory of the postcolonial state is defended not by the states themselves but largely by the international order that upholds existing boundaries and existing regimes against internal threats and challenges (Finer 1974). In postcolonial states territorial wars exist but they are primarily to defend the territory from the enemies within. Therefore, one cannot compare the European state formation with that of the postcolonial societies in this respect too. The wars in postcolonial

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21. As long as the colonies were divided within on the lines of communal loyalties especially, it was good for the colonial master who could use divide and rule policy that was one of the core strategies they practiced to keep the colonial resistance at bay.

societies have been fights against minorities who have their own State-Building projects. Therefore these wars instead of helping internal unity against an external enemy as in the case of European state formation have the opposite effect. For example, the Tamil minority has its own separatist State-Building project and the war waged by the Sri Lanka state was to defeat that. This distinction between the two types of wars and the two types enemies against which the war to defend the territory is fought is important to understand State-Building in postcolonial societies.

Francois Médar's analysis of African statesmen as political entrepreneurs is an insightful attempt to understand unique features of non-European state formation and in postcolonial setup (Médar 1992 in Jung 2008). He claims that in accumulating economic, political and social resources, the political big men in these countries act through a system of personalized power in the name of the abstract institution of the state. They in this way play the role of both the patriarchal chief of an extended network of personal ties (traditional authority) and the head of a formally institutionalized system of rule (legal authority). Médar claims that this is a contradictory process (they are in contradictory positions) but such contradictory role play is necessary for their political survival. In order to extract resources from international and transnational donors (on which they and their states depend) they have to pretend that they are acting according to the standards of modern statehood that is, following the rules of good governance which emanate from the normative image of the state. As political entrepreneurs, however, they apply strategies of personal enrichment in accumulating external and internal resources within their networks of personal ties. This balancing act can be considered as defining the state and state formation in many postcolonial countries and is helpful

in understanding the changing role of political parties and their primacy over other institutions of power of the state. The networks, being personal, are more or less ethnically exclusive (members are from leader's own community). Thus political parties in such situations being ethnically based patronage networks effectively exclude the minorities in participating in the state as in the case of Sri Lanka.

### **State-Building Projects and Minorities in Postcolonial Sri Lanka State**

Sri Lanka received independence from Britain through a process of negotiations and compromises between the colonial master and the local. This makes Sri Lanka independence exclusively an elite affair where there was no participation of the masses. The local elites who were the driving force of the anti-colonial struggle and heir to the leadership of the postcolonial political process was a western educated liberal group that had established a broad based coalition across ethnic and religious divisions. The masses, except the small group of predominantly urban labour force and the Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin who were with leftist political parties<sup>22</sup>, the majority of that were overwhelmingly rural were outside of the anti-colonial struggle and also during the period immediately after the independence were not actively taking part in the postcolonial political process. Though the elite leadership consisted of members of all major ethnic and religious communities who worked together in the anti-colonial struggle, ethnicity played a role in political action in deciding coalitions and alignments, both during and after

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22. Plantation workers played a leadership role in the hartal (mass agitation by workers) of 1953 that resulted in the resignation of the Prime Minister. Yet the overall leadership of the agitation and also the working class movement was led by urban workers.

the independence struggle<sup>23</sup>. However, ethnic mobilization for political ends was not a part of both pre-independence and early postcolonial Sri Lanka society.

National ideologies based on loyalty to one's own community were not therefore completely irrelevant to political alignments of both Sinhalese and Tamil leadership during the anti-colonial struggle, and some Tamil leaders made pronouncements on the need to rally around a broad national formations<sup>24</sup>. Yet it is not correct to say that the two communities had their own separate State-Building projects at the time. That emerged later in the postcolonial context and according to analysts consist of four broad State-Building perspectives. These four perspectives are the liberal nationalist state-building perspective promoted by the westernized ruling elites that took over from the British, the Marxist state-building perspective that advocated an alternative state-building project founded on socialist ideals, the state-building project of a broad coalition of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and its counterpart promoted by Tamil ethno-nationalists. The first advocated assimilation of different ethnic groups into a common civic nationalist identity of Ceylonese as the Anglicized name of Sri Lanka then was Ceylon. The Marxist perspective also carried a similar view with regard to

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23. Jaffna Association was in existence since early 1900 and was instrumental in bring in 50-50 formula of ethnic representation which was considered as the forerunner to early minority (Tamil) political demands for ethnic representation. Sir Ponnambalam Arunasalam who was a founder member of Ceylon National Congress in 1919 left it in 1921 due to a controversy over the Western (Colombo) Seat for the Tamils to form Tamil Mahajan Sabhai in August same year.

24. Sir P. Ramanathan claimed in a controversial presentation before the Royal Asiatic Society (CB) in 1890 that the Tamil speaking Muslims are Tamils which was fiercely rejected by the Muslim community. Further, the Jaffna Association at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced the 50-50 representation formula for the Legislative Council in a memo. This was followed by P. Arunachalam's assurance to Count Milner that all Ceylonese desire 'territorial representation' and none 'group representation' in 1920 (Hellmann-Rajanayagam n.d.).

the nation but it wanted to build a state based on socialist ideals and equality of national/ethnic groups. The third that came into prominence a few years after the independence with the arrival of Bandaranaike into power demanded primacy for the majority Sinhalese. The fourth which was an exclusively minority project promoted by the Tamil community advocated regional autonomy based arrangement for minority participation in the state.

A close examination reveals that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive and there are similarities in aims and ideologies. The westernized conservative elite leaders who subscribed to the liberal State-Building project saw Sri Lanka state as a nation state and wanted to build a postcolonial state in the mould of the mother country of the master in which civic loyalties would define the citizenship and polity. Yet there was an element of hegemony of the majority in its practice and also in composition of its leadership which was overwhelmingly Sinhalese. Similarly the Marxist leadership in promoting their State-Building perspective also wanted a state that is founded on civic loyalties that would rise above communalism and castism. It however differed from the liberal State-Building project of the conservative elites on the issues of social justice and the role of the state in managing the economy which again is part of their view of social justice. The Tamil leadership though differed in the specifics, namely the place and the role of the country's minorities in running the state, shared the fundamentals of the liberal perspective, namely, liberal democratic values and equality of citizens<sup>25</sup>. Further, Marxist State-Building project though advocated a classless society and state to go with it, strongly subscribed to the idea that minorities have the right to manage

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25. Advocating a political arrangement such as autonomy for minorities to manage their affairs within a united polity (state) for minorities does not contradict with the notion of civic nation on which nation state is founded.

their own affairs<sup>26</sup>. It also argued that Tamil and Sinhala language (nations) should have parity status in the Sri Lanka state, a major demand of the Tamils. At the time there was only one group that held a diametrically opposing paradigm and that was the Sinhala nationalist leadership that promoted the Sinhala Buddhist State-Building perspective, which was to become the central force of Sri Lanka's State-Building process later. Yet Mr. Bandaranaike who advocated primacy of Sinhala language and Buddhist religion was not a communal politician but a social democrat who being part the same western educated upper class that shared all the values of the liberal west<sup>27</sup>. He was only promoting a State-Building ideology that was Sinhalese hegemonic in its orientation but not very different from the liberal State-Building perspective in ideology. The circumstances made the movement that he created and the group that he mobilized to become the centre of Sinhala Buddhist State-Building project and the communalist politics later.

Sri Lanka's ruling class that took over from the British was predominantly Sinhala bourgeoisie and falls into two sub groups as colonial bourgeoisie whose economic base was colonial capitalist economy and local who came from traditional high caste and land owner background. Still vested interests created during the British period characterized by newly emerged caste formations, ethnic divisions and socio-economic groups (educated middle class) were important in the formation of political alignments. Further, informal networks of power did cut across ethnic lines more than caste lines. This ruling class mainly comprised small

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26. The Communist Party of Ceylon convened an All-Party Conference on 15th October 1944 to discuss the right of self-determination and independence for the two nationalities of Ceylon, Sinhalese and Tamils. This was attended by nearly all parties except Tamil Congress, Kandyan Assembly and European Association (Hellmann-Rajanayagam n.d)

27. Bandaranaike was the first Sinhala politician to offer autonomy for Tamils in his Regional Council Bill in 1958 which he withdrew due to strong objections from his hard-line supporters. Ironically the western educated elites who promoted liberal state project and were supporting the UNP opposed Bandaranaike.

and medium plantation owners in the low country, agrarian landlords, bureaucrats and professionals that emerged from landowning and merchant classes (Uyangoda 1982). This was the group that was sponsoring the liberal state project.

The above elite unity that had brought together leaders from the majority community and the minority communities, mainly Sinhalese and Tamil leaders, into a working coalition was destined to be shattered soon. The first government of the post independence Ceylon introduced three Parliamentary Acts, namely, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 and the Parliamentary Election (Amendment) Act of 1949. They resulted in the disfranchisement of the plantation workers of Indian origin and that had a far reaching impact on minority representation in the postcolonial Sri Lankan state. These acts by disfranchising the above group effectively increased the share of the Sinhalese vote and by that made it possible for the majority Sinhalese to strengthen their electoral position vis-à-vis the minorities<sup>28</sup>. The increased electoral power of the Sinhalese resulting from this enabled the new emerging class formation of the so called *pancha maha balavegaya* (five great forces) of Buddhist priests, native physicians, Sinhala educated teachers, peasants and workers among the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to assert its authority. At the elections held in 1956 Mr. Bandaranaike led coalition captured power bringing the Sinhala Buddhist State-Building Project into the centre of State-Building in Sri Lanka.

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28. It is claimed by many Sri Lanka analysts that above disfranchisement is a Sinhala Project as it targeted the Tamil community. However, it also is argued that the then ruling class which was capitalist in its orientation was targeting the left as plantation Tamils supported left parties. At the first post independent election there were 7 members contesting under the Ceylon Workers Congress which was the Plantation Workers' Party. Further, there were several other members from national left parties who got elected with the support of the vote of plantation workers. MPs elected with the support from the plantation vote. It must be remembered that the above Acts received support by some Tamil leaders including GG Ponnambalam.

The leftist alternative state-building was socialist in its ideology and liberal in its outlook. Though elitist in the composition of the leadership it commanded a support base of workers and the poor, mainly the urban poor. The Marxist project shared much in common with the early State-Building perspective of the Tamils in the treatment of minorities, namely, in the demand for equality of races (Lerski 1968) and parity between the languages. It though differed in the political objective of the state as they preferred an arrangement for minority accommodation within the centre as against regional autonomy advocated by the Tamil State-Building perspective. Their views on minority accommodation had widespread appeal in the minority areas, which was reflected at the elections where they managed to win substantial support in the north and the east. The left was therefore the main threat to Tamil political leadership in their traditional constituency and its State-Building project remained a viable alternative to the Tamil masses until the left changed its accommodative policies and adopted a separatist stand in the 70s.

Bandaranaike's Sinhala Buddhist national project that came into being in the 50s and confronted the liberal nationalist paradigm and the Marxist paradigm is not just an ethnic project as commonly believed. It is a class project as well as it was aimed at mobilizing a social class formation that was attempting to come to power in the context of emerging ethnic dissention. Existing ethnic unity was already being challenged by the disfranchisement of plantation Tamil community and by the formation of the Federal Party advocating regional autonomy for the Tamil community. Therefore it is difficult to accept the arguments that Bandaranaike was the first politician to use the ethnic platform and the Tamil State-Building Project is a reaction to the Sinhala State-Building Project. Tamil Project had already begun when Bandaranaike's Sinhala hegemonic perspective was being formed

though the former was a mild and diffused demand for autonomy then. The petit bourgeoisie supporting Bandaranaike was a broad and loosely organized class formation and included the *Pancha Maha Balavegaya*, (five great forces) which was an emerging class formation as well. Further, Bandaranaike commanded substantial support of the Muslim minority, especially those living in Sinhala majority areas. They played a key role in getting Bandaranaike into power in 1956 and got the most benefits of Bandaranaike policies since then<sup>29</sup>. One cannot understand the Sinhalese Buddhist Project initiated by Bandaranaike in the 50s and its later developments without understanding the role of this class formation.

The Tamil State-Building perspective founded on an agenda of rights of national communities is arguably the most controversial of the four and rejects the Sinhalese hegemony that is either promoted or implied in the other three State-Building perspectives. It not only argues that minority communities in Sri Lanka should have the right to manage their own affairs but also proposes that it can be done only through restructuring of the state. The demand for restructuring of the postcolonial state in the Tamil State-Building perspective is seen as secessionist by the Sinhala majority that vehemently opposes it. Though the Tamil demand for national rights evolved into a secessionist political struggle in the mid 70s resulting in a violent conflict aimed at creating a separate country in the predominantly minority regions in the north and the east a few years later, it was not secessionist in the beginning. In the beginning it was not even separatist as the Tamils leaders only demanded equal participation in running the affairs of the state during the pre-independence period and even at independence. Further, their original demand was

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29. Though Centre of the left and the so called five great forces were to be part of SLFP led coalition the policies of this coalition are known as Bandaranaike policies.

balanced representation in the state for all minorities (not just Tamils) which was promoted by the Jaffna Association first and by Mr. G.G. Ponnambalam later<sup>30</sup>. Even Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam who broke away from the Tamil Congress protesting latter's support for the disfranchisement of Tamils of Indian origin was not demanding separation though the political party he formed carried the name *Ilankai Tamil Arusu Katchi* (Tamil State Party). He was only asking for region based autonomy.

The Tamil State-Building perspective which was founded on rights of national minorities, was willing to work with the centre given that there was some arrangement for regional autonomy in the beginning. It initially advocated a state model that required reconfiguring state structures to include regional autonomy only. The leaders who promoted this seem to have felt that such arrangement would address their grievances which in their view needed both national level solutions, for example the language issue and problems of access to education and employment, and regional level solutions, for example socio-economic development of Tamil majority areas and issues of state sponsored colonization. It was only later with the emergence of Eelam demand based on national self-determination (not grievances) in the 80s that the Tamil State-Building transformed into the present Secessionist state Project. Therefore, it is not correct to say that Tamil State-Building project began as a separatist project with the ultimate aim of seceding from the country and remained the same throughout. It is more accurate to say that there were, and still are, two Tamil State-Building perspectives,

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30. Sinhalese wrongly accuse Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam for demanding 50% representation, which is known as 50:50 demand, in the parliament for Tamils. He did not demand 50% representation for Tamils, he only demanded 50% representation for all minorities which was a demand based on a well known democratic principle of consociationalism. Neither was he the originator of this demand. It was first proposed by the Jaffna Association in 1918 (Hellman-Rajanayagam, n.d.).

namely, the original Tamil State-Building perspective that was mobilized by Mr. Chelvanayakam which was based on grievances (regional autonomy based state restructuring) and the other that advocates secession on the basis of national self determination (Eelam State Project). The latter emerged later as a result of the failure of the former to deliver what the Tamil minority wanted.

The Marxist State-Building perspective advocated a postcolonial state built on socialist ideals of income equality and also parity to minorities with the majority. Until the Sinhala nationalist State-Building perspective emerged in the early 50s it was the major alternative to the liberal nationalist State-Building perspective of the conservative elites who took over the leadership. Its stand on the minorities, which was parity between the Sinhalese majority and the minorities, made it an acceptable proposition for the Tamils. The socialist state it advocated attracted the majority of the urban working class, and also a substantial proportion of poor voters in rural electorates. However, this attraction was not destined to last long. When the two main left parties, namely, the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Ceylon (CPC) joined in a coalition in the sixties with the SLFP which was the promoter of Sinhala nationalist State-Building perspective the traditional left lost the support it enjoyed among Tamils. Bandaranaike's democratic socialist platform took away the majority of its urban worker and rural support base among the Sinhalese by offering them socialist ideals similar to that of the left parties but wrapped in more attractive package of Sinhala nationalism. The eroding voter support ultimately resulted in the left joining the SLFP in a coalition, which saw the end of Marxist State-Building perspective.

The Marxist state perspective eventually merged with the Sinhala nationalist perspective with leftist parties joining with the SLFP led Centre left government in the 60s. The signs of traditional

left leaders moving into the fold of nationalist ideology however first appeared in the mid 1950s with an influential leader of the left then, Mr. Philip Gunawardena, joining Mr. Bandaranaike whose electoral victory in 1956 brought the Sinhala nationalists into power. The coalition between Mr. Gunawardhana's leftist party and Mr. Bandaranaike's centre left group was on the basis of the anti-imperialist stand and social justice views the two held in common. With this development the Sinhala nationalist State-Building project began to expand dominating and subsuming eventually the liberal State-Building perspective. This dominant position the Sinhalese nationalists State-Building perspective began to acquire with events that began with Bandaranaike coming into power saw the Tamil State-Building moving further into a hard-line separatist stand. With the formal declaration for secession from Sri Lanka polity by adopting the Vaddukkodei Resolution in 1976 and subsequent taking over of Tamil Nationalist State-Building by militants in the 80s, polarization of State-Building projects of postcolonial Sri Lanka was complete. The country no longer had a genuine representative and multi ethnic state- building model to offer.

### **Class and Ethnicity in the Majoritarian State-Building of Bandaranaike**

The year 1956 is considered by Sri Lanka analysts as heralding a new chapter in minority majority relations in the country for the rise of the first political movement championing the rights of the majority. The formal beginning of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as an electoral force is in "1956 Peoples' Revolution" that brought Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike into power that year. However, as stated earlier it would be simplifying a complex phenomenon to consider the political forces mobilized by Mr. Bandaranaike only in terms of ethnic mobilization of the

Sinhala community. Unlike Mr. Chelvanayakam who found the Federal Party of Ceylon to lead the political struggle of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka Bandaranaike was only giving leadership to a section of the Sinhalese community that was without a voice in running the country. In other words he was leading the fight of the five great forces (*Pancha Maha Balavegaya*) that consisted mainly of Sinhalese against the elites (*bamunu kulaya*<sup>31</sup>) who were also predominantly Sinhalese. Even though the main victims of the controversial Sinhala Only Policy and also the economic and social policies which are viewed as socialist and anti-imperialist, were the Tamil minority, they also affected the Sinhalese elites as Sinhalese were in the majority of the country's conservative upper class.

The class character of Bandaranaike's support base is therefore rooted in the common denominator namely petit bourgeoisie that brought together into one 'force' the *Pancha Maha Balavegaya* (five great forces). Though it is generally considered that Sinhala ethnicity is the binding factor of this coalition, there were several other important features that made this group a distinct socio-economic entity. The first is the social base, which was broadly petite bourgeoisie, from which all different segments of this coalition came. This broad alliance mainly consisted of rural voters with its leadership coming from the secondary strata of the rural elite who did not have extensive agrarian landholdings similar to the rural leaders who supported the United National Party and the urban lower middle class (Uyangoda 1982). This distinct class character of

31. *Bamunu Kulaya* (literarily means the Brahmin Caste to mean that they are upper, exclusive and closed to the outside) was a term coined by the illustrious Sinhala writer Mr. Martin Wickramasinghe who attributed the "peoples' victory" in 1956 to the collapse of the elitist class. For Wickramasinghe the elite leaders who took over from the British were the Brahmins for they considered themselves superior to the ordinary people and natural leaders.

Bandaranaike supporters was associated with Sinhala education, and local culture and ethos which were its second distinctive feature. Both these made this group the political and cultural opposition to the conservative elites who, being wealthy upper class and English educated, were a distinct social formation itself yet predominantly Sinhalese again. Therefore, it is not correct to argue that Sinhala ethnicity was the foundational feature of the social group mobilized by Bandaranaike. It is a distinct class formation united also by Sinhala education and Sinhala cultural ethos.

Further, Bandaranaike was mobilizing his loose coalition of diverse social forces against the conservative elites and not against Tamils. The fact that during Bandaranaike's electoral campaigns in 1951 and 1956 there were no anti-Tamil pronouncements but attacks only against imperialism and on the western educated elite leadership shows that the struggle was not driven by ethnicity and against Tamils but by socio-economic interests against a class formation. Bandaranaike was mobilizing his supporters who wanted to take over from the western educated conservative elites which they saw as their enemy. Tamils were never an enemy for Bandaranaike and his support base though they did not include Tamils in the coalition as an active group. This, Bandaranaike could not do as he had by 1956 changed from his earlier stand of swabasha to Sinhala language policy<sup>32</sup>. It was only later after his hard line supporters led by his widow Sirima Bandaranaike took over the leadership of the SLFP the movement got a clear pro- Sinhala and anti-Tamil stand. It is necessary to

32. Bandaranaike's initial stand was swabasha (vernacular languages) against the domination of English and English educated class. Further, it was not Mr. Bandaranaike who formally proposed adoption of Sinhala as the official language in the country. In 1946 Mr. J. R. Jayawardene introduced a bill to the State Council in which he proposed that Sinhala be the official language. It was passed by the Sinhala dominated State Council by 27 votes to 2 after it accepted an amendment by V. Nalliah (a Tamil Leader) to include Tamil language too (Perera 2011)

understand this class dynamic if one is to understand the Sinhala Buddhist State-Building project that would become a dominant State-Building perspective a decade later

Unlike the postcolonial elite that became the leaders of the early period of the postcolonial society who were from the wealthy strata of society and had economic power before they became politically powerful the group that came into power in 1956 was not in possession of economic power before it acquired political power. Therefore, they had to acquire wealth and establish their economic dominance in order for their political survival. This meant that they had to use their political power to gain economic power and that required using the state which is the main resource available to them. This made it necessary for the rulers to adopt policies to transform the state into both an instrument and a source of their economic power. This situation was not unique to Sri Lanka. In Kenya this was done by eliminating Asians from the economy (Saul 1974) and Malaysia by restricting the role of Chinese Malaysians. In Sri Lanka the effort began with the Sinhala only policy that gave the members of pancha maha balavegaya priority in state employment. Expansion of state into economic activities also was part of this process. This began with the nationalization of transport services and harbor services in the 50s, and expanded into other areas in 60s and 70s.

Exploitation of the state power for social position in general and economic power in particular required control of the public service institutions and the armed forces. The first step in this direction was the Sinhala Only Policy introduced immediately after Mr. Bandaranaike came into power in 1956. Sinhalization of armed forces, which began in 1956, intensified after the failed military coup of 1962 in which a group of officers, all belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, attempted to take over the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike. The control of the public service began

with the centre left United Front led by Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike that came to power at the election held in 1970 introducing programmes of positive discrimination favouring the majority in the police, diplomatic and civil services. The escalation of ethnic conflict in the 80 onwards further increased Sinhala domination of the armed forces and police for practical reasons. Though there have been pronouncements by politicians of the need to correct the adverse impact of these measures the imbalances created remain even today with a police and armed forces that is almost exclusively Sinhalese and a predominantly Sinhalese controlled administration. For example the Sri Lanka Administrative Service still is dominated by Sinhalese with 87.2% of positions of the Service belonging to Sinhalese and 9.5% to Tamils and 3.3% to Muslims<sup>33</sup>.

From 1956 onwards the country saw a rapid expansion of state sponsored economic activities and a marked increase in the state control of the economy. By expanding state control of the economy the rulers were responding to the demands of the emerging new class formation of the five great forces that depended on state power. State control of the economy is cited by analysts as being part of Mr. Bandaranaike's socialist vision but it also was a policy that he had to adopt as part of his attempt to cater to the needs of the new class formation that backed him. This policy was pursued with new vigor by his widow and continues even today in spite of the fact that the state after 1977 open economic policies has accepted in principle to reduce both the role and control of the state of the economy. The expansion of the state though affected all it affected the minorities, especially the Tamil minority, more. Nationalization

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33. Even the recruitment of new carders to the service has remained predominantly Sinhalese until recently. From 1978 to 1990 there had been 7 intakes to the service (1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1990) and among the recruits of over 550 there have been only 10 Tamils; 5 in 1984 and 5 in 1990.

of several private businesses including the bus service and the harbor first and then several others and also the land reforms and even the infamous Sinhala Only Policy therefore cannot be understood only in terms of their nationalist and anti imperialist content. There was a class undertone in every policy. Controlling the economy was especially critical to use state power to support the class formation that brought Mr. Bandaranaike into power.

The expansion of state control of the economy kept its momentum in the 60s and 70s during the SLFP-Left led governments of Mr. Bandaranaike's widow Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. In the 70s the import-export sector came to be under severe controls through a regime of regulatory measures that included, permits, licenses and quotas. The adverse impact of these measure is particularly relevant considering the fact that import-export sector of the country since the colonial period had been dominated by business houses owned by members of minority communities, especially Tamil businessmen and those of Indian origin. Further, they being both supporters of the conservative United National Party (UNP) and also not being able to claim local roots to cultivate relationship with nationalist new regime were at a severe disadvantage. They simply did not have the patronage links to the new leadership in the Sinhala dominated government and could not cultivate these either. In addition to political patronage, links to the state bureaucracy were also important to obtain licenses and the newly emerging Sinhala educated bureaucracy was beyond the reach of minority owned businesses. Add to this was the state's decision to enter into import-export business on its own in the 70s. All these affected Tamil minority businesses which in turn severely restricted their role in postcolonial Sri Lanka economy.

It was not only businessmen from minority communities who lost their position and power in the postcolonial Sri Lanka

society. While they were effectively shut out of the economic operations they were running prior to independence the average minority man also was adversely affected by measures that came to be part of postcolonial Sri Lanka economy, especially during the 60s and onwards. The state's entry into the economy that began in the mid 50s expanded and by the late sixties the state was more or less controlling the economy. This coupled with a contracting economy during the same period had adverse impacts on employment opportunities of the minority groups. The expansion of the state's role in the economy made it the principal provider of jobs. The contracting economy made it harder for those who are waiting for employment to get gainful employment. Further, with the expanding state the majority of even the limited number of jobs that were available was in the state sector. In getting state sector employment the new restrictive rules of language affected the non-Sinhala speakers, mainly Tamils, that increased the grievances of the Tamil community. Those who were employed had already been facing difficulties in getting ahead in their jobs. This not only limited the participation of the minorities in the economy but also was a blow to a the Tamil population whose opportunities for social mobility depended on the access to education and employment.

The exchange controls and other restrictive economic measures affected the participation of minorities, particularly the Tamil minority in the state in some other ways too. One of the unique features of the Sri Lankan Tamil segment of the Tamil minority is their dependence on education to acquire economic security and gain social position. That was also one of the ways that they participated in the state decision making process as administrators and influential functionaries in crucial professions. Their entry into education and government employment began during the colonial days and continued into postcolonial Sri Lanka society. One of the avenues that was available for the Tamils to

education was getting into Universities in Tamilnadu as private students. Restrictive exchange controls effectively closed the door for prospective Tamil students going to Tamilnadu for higher education. This coupled with the policies introduced by Mrs. Bandaranaike's government through Standardization of University Education in 1972 was a double blow to Tamils as it further restricted the already limited opportunities for Tamil youth. Therefore these measures imposed restrictions, either directly or indirectly, on Tamils' access to higher education which was one of their principal means of economic security. It also severely limited one of the remaining means available for them to participate in the decision making process in the government and effectively shut them out of the institutions of power.

The forces that came into power in 1956 thus transformed the accommodative policies and politics that characterized postcolonial Sri Lanka up to then. Mr. Bandaranaike had no alternative there because of the voter base that brought him into power did not want accommodation. Mr. Bandaranaike came from the same westernized social class (elites) and as previously mentioned he was the first Sinhala politician to offer regional autonomy to Tamil community. But for the Sinhala Buddhist group which was his constituency accommodation with the Tamil minority who they saw as economically and socially privileged was not in their class interests. Neither such accommodation agreed with their nationalist ideology. He was promoting Sinhala Buddhist position not perhaps because he was a strong believer but he wanted to have a slogan that his constituency could understand. The relationship between Tamils and Sinhalese at the time though was not strictly Sinhala nationalism v. Tamil nationalism. A better description of the situation would be to say that there was a loosely connected class group of broadly similar interest among the Sinhalese that saw themselves in a

serious disadvantaged position both economically, socially and professionally and wanted a solution to that. This may be the reason that this Sinhalese class formation after coming to power could work with the Muslims who they did not see as a similar threat<sup>34</sup>.

Mr. Bandaranaike's alternative State-Building project therefore began as an attempt to mobilize the grievances of a section of the non-elite segment of society that shared class interests and had not been given a political voice till then. Though it acquired ethnic undertones later in the course of time it was not a sectarian movement originally. It was broadly a class alignment united also by ethnicity and led by a true-blooded member of the elite. As an alternative to liberal State-Building project that articulated the needs and beliefs of the elites Mr. Bandaranaike who himself an elite led a State-Building project articulating the needs of the non-elites.

Mr. Bandaranaike's platform was anti-colonial but his support base came from groups that did not have much real experience of the colonial administration like the members of the westernized elite group they replaced. It was the liberal upper class that directly faced the brunt of discrimination during the colonial times, being leaders of locally owned businesses and industries and the educated. The real animosity towards the

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34. This appears to be changing with Muslims increasingly coming under threat from Sinhala community. The *Bodu Bala Sena* (Buddhist-Power Brigade) which has come into prominence recently is targeting the Muslim community. The reasons for this also are in the changing class formations in the country and may be explained by two developments. First is the perceived increase of Muslims coming into professional occupations, which is a treat to Sinhalese who have been dominating these occupations since they began replacing Tamils from these occupations in the 70s. Second is the increasing entry of Sinhalese into a segment of the business sector, namely, urban retail trade, that traditionally has been dominated by Muslims. For the new Sinhala business class Muslims are an economic threat, which was not there before. Some urban communities declaring "Muslim business free areas" and movement to remove 'halal certification' from food products are part of this confrontation.

colonials was therefore not in the class formation that belonged to the periphery and supported Mr. Bandaranaike. They were attracted by Mr. Bandaranaike's message of indigenization of state power, for that was what they wanted as they expected a state controlled by them would to serve their socio-economic interests. It is true that they were attracted by the anti imperialist message given by nationalizations and the demand for the return of Katunayake Air Base and Trincomalee Naval Base but it was the other tangible benefits, especially better opportunities for Sinhala educated by making Sinhala the official language that produced results. It produced results in the sense that it got the Sinhala support for his party but it also resulted in drawing away the Tamils, primarily those who belong to the class formation that supported him among the Sinhalese, from Sri Lanka polity and radicalized them. This has had a long term impact on the participation of Tamils in Sri Lanka polity as the unfolding events would reveal later. Therefore the participation of the Tamil minority in the emerging Sri Lanka state needs to be seen in the light of these developments too.

Mr. Bandaranaike's rule not only heralded arrival of Sinhala nationalists in the state but also marked the establishment of a new leadership representing a new hitherto politically unengaged social formation and a new form of statecraft to suit it. It is therefore a beginning of a new path in the State-Building ventures in Sri Lanka containing a new nation building ideology and a new State-Building agenda. It was a blend of Sinhala nationalism and socialism promoted by identity needs and class needs respectively. The latter was instrumental in moving Sri Lanka into a new brand of economic ideology that facilitated the coalition between the left and the nationalists which marked a new era in Sri Lanka politics in general and State-Building in particular. The ensuing developments though had serious ethnic repercussions

and affected minority participation in the institutions of power they cannot be explained in terms of ethnic ideology alone. In fact ethnicity is not the reason for this coalition. Ethnic ideology that started to crystallize since the new coalition is a result of socio-economic alignment of new class formations that existed separately till then. It closed one alternative avenue available thus far to minorities to get into institutions of power.

### **Minority Representation and Institutions of Power**

Sri Lanka inherited a unitary and centralized model of government from the colonials. Though there have been suggestions during the colonial period about alternative models of government enabling adequate representation for minorities there were no serious discussions about changing the unitary model that was introduced by the British. One solution that was floated during the colonial period by the Tamils was the consociational model proposed by Jaffna Association in the early 1900 first and later by G.G. Ponnambalam whose name unjustly has become synonymous with the proposal. The separatist solution that is being debated today came to be part of Tamil minority politics only after the Tamil nationalist struggle became militant and Tamil State-Building project adopting separation and self determination in the 70s. As there were no forceful demands coming at the time the Soulbury Commission that prepared a proposal for the first constitution of independent Sri Lanka did not pay attention to minority representation and had only some vague measure such as appointed MPs and the Second Chamber and Article 29 to the Constitution. The Commission was more concerned about safeguarding minority rights through the Constitution than ensuring representation. The action was left therefore to the leaders themselves expecting these issues to be decided through negotiations and compromises which unfortunately did not happen.

The first constitution of independent Ceylon was designed to provide safeguards to minorities and their rights in the new country rather than to ensure their representation in the state. The main minority safeguard in the Constitution was one specific provision (Article 29) which made it unconstitutional to 'confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions'. Another provision stipulating multi-member constituencies where there was substantial presence of voters from different communities was not a measure ensuring minority representation as it benefitted the majority Sinhalese in areas where an ethnic minority was the majority voter group. The upper house (the Senate) and the appointed MPs to the lower house were not provisions specifically addressing the issue of representation of minorities. Though there was a demand for regional administration based representative mechanism for minority Tamils that was not considered favourably by the makers of the Constitution.

The minority representation in the postcolonial government, until the establishment of Provincial Council in 1987, took a regional character due to demographics of the distribution of population by ethnicity. Tamil MPs came predominantly from the North and East and Tamil Congress and the Federal Party were the two Tamil political parties that dominated Tamil representation in these regions. In the case of Muslims such concentration was not electorally important except for in a few areas in the Eastern Province. During the period Muslims mainly benefitted from appointed MPs and from multi-member electorates, which also benefitted others including Sinhalese. Until 1987, when SLMC came into being with Ashroff with his power base in the Eastern Province, the Muslim leaders got their share in the government by working within the two main national yet Sinhalese dominated

political parties, the United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Though there were satisfactory levels of representation for plantation Tamils in Sri Lanka's first parliament that changed with the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949<sup>35</sup>. It was only in the late 70s with the introduction of Proportional Representation and after the changes to the citizenship laws that the upcountry Tamils got back their representation in the parliament.

The impact of the above legislations on citizenship and voting rights on the Tamil representation in general and that of the Upcountry Tamils was substantial. In the first parliament of independent Sri Lanka (Ceylon then) out of 95 MPs, 68 were Sinhalese (71.6), 23 were Tamils, which included 10 plantation Tamils, who lost their representation later due to the above Acts, 6 were Muslims and 1 Burgher. In the second parliament in 1952, the number of Sinhalese MPs rose to 75 (78.9) and Tamils came down to 13 (as now Tamils of Indian origin have been deprived of vote) while the numbers of Muslims and Burghers remained same. In 1960, the number of MPs was increased to 151 and of them 122 members were Sinhalese, 18 were Ceylon Tamils, 11 were Muslims, 1 were Burgher and none from the Plantation Tamil community. After the introduction of Proportional Representation the Tamils in the Upcountry (Plantation Tamils) got some representation and since then the Ceylon Workers Congress has been in coalition agreements with whomever in power. Coalition politics has become a useful strategy for the

35. These two Acts are criticized by some as Sinhalese led discrimination of Tamils. But it must be remembered that both Acts were supported by a section of the Tamil leadership. Further, the latter act was in line with the similar measures operative in the West. When some Tamil leaders challenged the Act of 1949 that disfranchised non-citizens (those who were made non-citizens by the previous Act of 1948) the vast majority of them were Tamils, at the Privy Council their argument was rejected and the Act was upheld (Shastri 1997)

Plantation Tamil leadership to secure not only parliamentary representation, but also places in the Cabinet as well as a role in the Provincial Councils in the Provinces where they have a substantial electoral presence.

The central parliament and local government institutions which were the two arenas for minority representation in Sri Lanka till 1987 was added to by Provincial Councils in 1987. It was a direct constitutional measure created to bring minorities, especially the Tamil minority, into decision-making structures of the state. Abolition of first-past-the post election system in 1978 and introduction of proportional representation was a significant change in minority representation in the government. Yet Proportional Representation did not have any positive impact on parliamentary representation of Sri Lanka Tamils due to the demographics of their voter base which is concentrated in the North and East of the country; though they are a minority in the country, in the districts they live they are the majority. It, as stated earlier, improved representation of the Plantation Tamil community in the Central Hills.

The real grievance of minorities concerning governance was not about the lack of representation in the legislature but about the fact that the system of governance in Sri Lanka has been responsible in keeping the minorities out of the sphere of state power, namely, executive power (Uyangoda n.d). This is evident from their representation in the executive branch of the government (in the Cabinet). It however is a fact that before Sri Lanka adopted the Presidential System of government the Prime Ministers had been mindful about having minorities in the cabinet as token representation. The coalitions with Tamils further required the inclusion of Tamils in the Cabinet as in 1965 UNP government. In these appointments, there was no demographic proportionality or any such formula for ethnic

equilibrium as in the case of MPs (Uyangoda n.d.) Therefore the representation of Tamils and other minorities in the executive branch has been negligible. For example in the first Cabinet of the post independent government there were only three minority members (2 Tamils and 1 Muslim) in a Cabinet of 15. Situation has not changed since then. Though the Cabinet has been growing in numbers to address political power realities in recent years minorities have not benefitted from that. Since the assassination of Mr. Laxman Kadiragamer the powerful and internationally respected Foreign Minister in the government of Mrs. Chanadrika Kumaranatunge and also in the first term cabinet of the President Mahinda Rajapaksa no Tamil political leader has held a responsible position in the executive branch of the government.

The representation of minorities in the support institutions of power, namely, the judiciary, bureaucracy and the armed forces has been different. In these institutions the lack of representation was a problem for the majority not the minorities in the early postcolonial society. In the 1960 Hindus (exclusively Tamils) and Christians (both Tamils and Sinhalese who are predominantly urban and English educated) were dominating the state sector occupations (National Education Commission 1961) and this situation gradually changed with positive discrimination favouring Sinhalese by late 1970. The situation was even more in favour of minority Tamils in the armed forces. In the early years of independence the officer corps of the Armed Forces were dominated by Tamils and Burghers. Sinhalese who are 70% of the population had only 20% officer positions though the rank and file of the forces were overwhelmingly Sinhalese. It was the Sinhalese, especially the Kandyan Sinhalese, who complained about lack of representation in these institutions then. Representation in the state institutions became an issue for the minorities only after the

effects of aggressive policies supporting the Sinhala dominated class formation began to be felt.

## **Political Party based Governance and Minority Representation**

The participation of minorities in the state was affected adversely by the emerging political culture roots of which can be traced back to the 60s when the SLFP led socialist coalition adopted measures to implement its socialist manifesto and strengthen the regime by expanding the role of elected representatives of the party in power in running the affairs of the country. Two new institutions, one to oversee affairs of the country in general called Janatha Committee (Peoples Committee) and another called *Kamkaru* Committee (Worker Committee) to oversee affairs of work place were created by the SLFP based centre left coalition headed by Mrs. Bandaranaike. Through these measures for the first time in Sri Lanka MPs of the government party were given a wide range of power to the run affairs of the country which till then were the purview of the bureaucracy. These new powers given to peoples' representatives included recommending candidates for jobs in the public sector and also to make recommendations on promotions and transfers in the public service. A letter issued by a government party MP became part of recruitment procedures of public service jobs such as clerical positions<sup>36</sup>. Appointments in the newly created corporations and other state agencies became officially the responsibility of the political leadership. Judiciary also came to be indirectly under the political leadership. Abolition of the Public Service Commission and the Judicial Service Commission by the First Republican Constitution of 1972 accelerated this politicization of social life in the country. In addition to the damages in general to the institutional setup

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36. Today appointments to almost all positions in the state sector need the approval of the relevant politician

and governance these developments had a direct impact on the representation of Tamils in the affairs of the state.

By replacing the regular institutions from running the affairs of the country by parliamentarians in this manner gave on the one hand unprecedented powers to elected politicians belonging to the ruling party. Those who are in the opposition on the other hand were not privy to these powers. In their place the defeated members who contested the election from the government party were accorded the responsibility of political supervision of the electorate. The result of these developments therefore was the politician in the opposition becoming ineffective and powerless. This meant that candidates who had political backing were at an advantage over others who did not, in receiving routine services of the state<sup>37</sup>. Tamil leadership that withdrew their support collectively from the government in the 70s claiming the government (both UNP and SLFP) was looking after only the Sinhala interests were the most disadvantaged as a result. They could not get any work done in their electorates and also could not serve their community in other ways as they have no access to government.

These developments have resulted in a new and harmful system of governance that operates outside of the rule of law. This new form of governance is based on political loyalty and a system of patronage built upon it. Regular institutions and the rule of law do not matter under this system of governance and rules are set by the political leadership. To be effective under this system of governance one has to belong to the political party in

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37. The process that started requiring a letter from a ruling party politician to get into minor positions in the government services or to get a transfer in the job in the beginning has now expanded into all levels and all activities in the government., Even to receive justice one needs to know someone who matters politically. Even justice cannot be received if there is no prior sanctioning by political authority. It is common to hear the President of the country say that he has ordered the police to arrest culprits of crimes "irrespective of their position"

power. Political party in power through its patronage network, which operates as a system of surveillance too, knows who the friends and enemies are. This in turn has created two categories of citizens, namely, privileged citizens, who are loyal to regime in power and those who are not privileged (second class) who are the supporters of the opposition parties. Former are the insiders and the latter outsiders. This situation severely limits the power of the Tamil leadership who has only limited access to the regime in power and Tamils remain outsiders and the less privileged (second class) citizens not only because they are Tamils but also because they are in the opposition.

In postcolonial societies, political parties instead of being representative of people have developed into instruments of manipulation of voters by leaders. In many postcolonial societies they also have become agents of exclusion promoting communal and other segmentary interests. The organization of the political party system in postcolonial societies in terms of membership and power relations has become adverse to functioning of an effective democratic state that is representative of the people. The political culture that is associated with the operation of the party system in many postcolonial societies is dominated by the above patronage system that survives on corrupt practices and violence. This patronage system was given an extra boost by the above mentioned expansion of the domain of power of politicians.

The change of minority political party behaviour which in the beginning was accommodative and centre based to confrontational and away from centre politics later significantly affected minority participation in the state. Political activism of the minorities in the early days of postcolonial Sri Lanka was to work with the national parties either as coalition partners or as individual members. The main national party the UNP therefore

had a large following of Tamils including many prominent Tamil leaders as members. Even the Tamil community based parties worked in cooperation with the national parties in forming governments of coalition a practice that began with the first parliament. This trend continued even with increasing tension between the Tamil leadership and the Sinhala leadership on the issues of power sharing. In the mid 70s however this cooperation and accommodation ceased to exist and the Tamils of the north and east moved completely away from the centre based national politics and politics of accommodation. This affected their representation in the executive branch of the government and other positions of power.

However, the above development did not have the same adverse impact on Upcountry Tamils and the Muslims as it did with Sri Lanka Tamils. Muslims from the beginning and Upcountry Tamils since 1977 have been able to remain active in the mainstream power positions in the state. Muslims even after the establishment of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) did not abandon accommodative politics like Sri Lanka Tamils and maintained collaborative political dialogue with the Sinhala majority at the national level. Upcountry Tamils whose disfranchisement led to the establishment of the Federal Party of Ceylon, which was the first minority ethnic mobilization, were not interested in separatist politics and continued to maintain a constructive dialogue with the majority community. They through their pragmatic and charismatic leader Mr. S. Thondaman who came to be known as the kingmaker in the 80s for his role in making and breaking governments at the national level, continued their close cooperation with the government at the centre. This helped both Upcountry Tamils and Muslims in their presence in the institutions of power in the postcolonial state. In a context where political loyalties and power alignments determine most

life situations and opportunities this has resulted in the increase of power position of these two groups in the state.

## **Conclusions**

Minority representation in the postcolonial Sri Lankan society can be seen as being driven by two forces. First, there is the exclusionary forces behind the regime dominated by a class formation of suburban and rural middle class that is Sinhala educated. This class formation was mobilized by Mr. Bandaranaike on the basis of a deep rooted identity (Sinhala Buddhist) but not all Sinhala Buddhists in the country supported his political platform at the time<sup>38</sup>. Further, the elite conservative leadership he opposed also commanded substantial support among the Sinhalese including Sinhala Buddhists. Second, opposing them is the counter force of a similar class formation among Tamils which is overwhelmingly Sri Lankan Tamils versed only in their mother tongue and from the middle classes and below. This is the group that directly faced the challenged posed by the emerging power of the new Sinhalese class formation. Ethnicity was the rallying point but class was the driving force of both movements. Interactions and confrontation between these two forces determine the nature and strategies of the State-Building projects in postcolonial Sri Lanka.

The relationship between these two forces that has taken an increasingly confrontational form in the recent years has led to two significant developments in the core institutions of the state. They adversely affect the minority representation in the institutions of power. One is direct changes to the core institutions of power and governance introduced by the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist regimes in power in order to use the state for their

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38. Today however there is increasing support for the forces mobilized by Mr. Bandaranaike with new groups, for example urban professionals and the new rich joining the movement.

benefit and to assert their group's political dominance. The other which is an indirect result, is a new political culture characterized by extreme politicization of the institutions of power by the expanding role of political parties. None of these developments can be fully understood by ethnic factors alone. It is necessary to understand the developments in State-Building in Sri Lanka in relation to complex combination of class and ethnic forces operating in postcolonial environment. Ethnic mobilization is only one factor in the process and it does not operate alone. The developments in minority participation in the state evolved from early inclusive but competing State-Building paradigm to two distinct opposing paradigms founded on ethnicity and nation.

The state ideology of the postcolonial Sri Lanka state was European model nation state and was defined by the colonial power and institutions established by them. This ideology was challenged in the mid 50s by Bandaranaike and was discarded in the 70s by both major parties. This required the state and support institutions to adjust. The instrumental force behind ideological transformation is the new class coalition among the majority that grabbed power and remained in power since 1956. Both the UNP and the SLFP (later UPA) is part of this class alignment today UNP having to adopt the nationalist ideology in the post J. R. Jayewardene era. There was a parallel emergence of Tamil state project, which became more and more confrontational and separatist. Confrontation between these two forces is presently expressed in ethnic terms but underneath is a class formation and there lies the power struggle. Sinhalese new emerging class formation of rural and sub-urban people who are Sinhala educated at the centre and Tamils who are similar in their class formation but speaking only Tamil not being able to share that even in the regions that they were majority. The evolution of state and institutions that are part of it is a result of adaptation to this new social reality.

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## THE MUSLIMS AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE-BUILDING IN SRI LANKA

S.A.C. Feroziya

### Introduction

In the multi-ethnic social fabric, Muslims in Sri Lanka represent the third collective identity, constituting 7.6 percent (2001 census) of the total population. The history of the Muslims in Sri Lanka goes back to the pre-colonial era and the presence of Muslim communities in Sri Lanka for centuries and their shared and particular experiences along with other communities contradict the uni-lineal narration based on a single historical text. The redefining of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity by themselves in the changed historical context and its gradual political mobilization in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20 centuries made it a factor to be noted in the political sphere. After Independence, with the on set of the crisis in the postcolonial state of Sri Lanka, the Muslim factor emerged as the third dimension of the Ethnic conflict. What is really meant by the 'Muslim factor' is a vexed issue. The term 'Muslim factor' is open to multiple interpretations. Therefore, the answer to this question depends on who is addressing it. Muslims and Tamils share a common language. Hence, Tamil leaders were keen to claim that Muslims were co-ethnics of Tamils and Muslim leaders

always resisted it and asserted their own separate identity. These historical experiences of the Muslims of Sri Lanka, the Ramanathan and LTTE episodes created new pressures which made them turn to searching their historical roots and the establishment of a separate identity. In the postcolonial period the Muslims were forced to redefine their collective identity in terms of the religious factor and this new emphasis helped to create a separate Muslim national party (the SLMC). This paper intends to examine the process of political mobilization of Muslims since independence from a historical perspective. It begins with the historical context and the demographic aspects of Muslims who are scattered all over the island with some regional concentrations. The paper consists of four parts. The first part covers the period from 1948 to 1956, the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial state and the responses of Muslims to the different state-building projects. The period from the MEP victory in 1956 to the 1977 regime change is covered in the second part. The attention of the third part will be on post-1977 developments. Finally, the paper will discuss issues relating to the Muslims in post-war scenarios.

Certain considerations are significant in explaining Muslims' role in the postcolonial State-Building process in Sri Lanka. After Independence, the Muslims converted their disadvantages into positive advantages, in their struggle to strengthen their position in the Sri Lankan political system. Since 1956 the Muslims have played an important role in Sri Lankan politics. They have contributed to the development of the country in areas such as education, welfare, foreign relations (specially in relation to middle-east countries), Ethnic conflict/Peace negotiations, administration, trade and commerce. In every Cabinet since 1947 there have been Muslims holding Ministerial positions. They have joined both major national parties the UNP & SLFP, for the language policy and ethnic conflict. The response of the Muslims with regard to the Sri Lankan government Language policy was

a positive one. Similarly during the ethnic conflict they did not share the separatist politics of Tamils but were loyal to the Sri Lankan government. Regarding the devolution proposal the Muslim politicians had different ideas but since the SLMC was part of the Peoples' Alliance Government they had no choice. This paper it is intended to discuss the role and issues of Muslims in the postcolonial State-Building process in Sri Lanka in this background.

### **Historical context**

Sri Lanka is a plural society that consists of three major ethnic groups namely Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Muslims in Sri Lanka are divided into five different subgroups namely Ceylon Moors<sup>1</sup>, Costal Moors<sup>2</sup>, Malays<sup>3</sup>, Memons<sup>4</sup> and Borahs<sup>5</sup>. Muslims are the second largest political minority in Sri Lanka. During the colonial and postcolonial periods, the elite of the Muslim community who were English educated, interchangeably used the terms Moors or Mohammedans because they wanted to distinguish themselves from the rest of the Indian Muslims. When they wrote in Tamil they used the word 'Sonahar' while referring to the Muslims. But in later days they dropped the term Moors which was used by non-Muslims in reference to Muslims. Since the 1950s the community has constantly used the term

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1. The Ceylon Moors are the largest /majority Muslim community in Sri Lanka. They constitute around 8% of the total population in the island.

2. Cost Moors or Indian Moors came and settled down in the urban areas, especially Colombo, during the British rule. Most of them are from Tamil Nadu who were returned to India due to the citizenship problems and others gradually assimilated into the Sri Lankan Muslim community.

3. Malays settled down in Sri Lanka mostly during the Dutch rule. They were brought from Java and the Malay Peninsula by the Dutch. They constitute about 4% of the total Muslim population.

4. Memons are a business community settled in Sri Lanka during the British rule .Their original homeland was Kathyavar in the Gujarat province of India. At first they arrived in Sri Lanka in 1870 as small scale textile traders However they became one of the leading trading communities in early 20th century and were centred mainly in Colombo.

5. Borahs, also a north Indian business community are mostly traders.

Ceylon or Sri Lankan Muslims while referring to themselves.

The word Moors was used by the colonial rulers especially the Portuguese and then by the Dutch and the British. During British rule, the term Moors was broadly used in colonial administration and other fields. A group of the Muslim elite borrowed the word 'Moor' to represent their ethnic identity. In 1900 this group took the initiative in forming a Moor union to strengthen their identity. I.L.M.Abdul Azeez was the founder President of the Union. They also established two institutions to encourage their 'Moor' identity: namely the Ceylon Moor Association (early 1920s) and the Moor Islamic Cultural Home (early 1940s). There was another group of Muslims who did not need the 'Moor' identity. They needed a Muslim identity and they established an organization called the Ceylon Muslim League (which was earlier known as the Young Muslim League).

In the 1920s there was an argument over the Moor and Malay identity problem. A prominent political leader T.B.Jayah came from the Malay community and he realized that this term 'Moor' was used to include religious identity 'Muslim'<sup>6</sup> Jayah also argued that the Muslim identity has been transformed from an ethnic one to a religious one over the past decades (Ali 2001:5). However Muslim scholars such as Qadri Ismail and Ameer Ali have argued that the Sri Lankan Muslim identity has transformed from an ethnic to a religious one over the past few decades (Qadri 1995: 11) Shukri also agrees that "the term 'Muslim', denotes a religious denomination and not an ethnic one, and not necessarily an ethno-cultural one, but an ethno-religious one." (Shukri 1986)

Language and Religion also have played a major role in

6. The word 'Moor' is supposed to be of Phoenician origin and was borrowed by the Europeans to denote Muslims of mixed Arab origin found in western Spain and in North Africa.

the ethnic formation of Muslims in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Language and Religion have played a major role in the Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu identities of Sri Lanka as well. But the Sri Lankan Muslims used their religion only as an Ethnic marker. However linguistically they are Tamils and their home language is Tamil. In the Sinhala dominated villages in the south when they don't need to be identified as Tamils, they reject the linguistic identity and choose religion as their ethnic marker. The term Muslims indicates both religion and ethnicity.

Ethnicity and identity are not things that are given by any other community. They are established by the community itself as conditions for their socio-political existence. The Sri Lankan Muslim identity depended on religion, not on language. "The Sri Lankan Muslim elite rejected Ponnambalam Ramanathan's claim that the Sri Lankan Muslims were ethnologically Tamils in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century". They also rejected a similar claim by the LTTE in 1987 that the Muslims are Tamils who embraced Islam and that they are an inseparable part of the Tamil nation<sup>7</sup>.

Historically Sri Lankan Muslims and Tamils are different communities, yet they speak the same language. But the Tamil Nadu Muslims, unlike the Sri Lankan Muslims, have a label of 'Islamiyat Tamilar' and they do not reject the above concept. However the Sri Lankan Muslims categorically deny it; they say Sri Lankan Muslims are not Tamils (Nurrulhaq 2006). When compared with Tamil Nadu, the Sri Lankan context is different. Sri Lankan Muslims are not identified by language. They have given prominence to the religious factor. Therefore, the distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims is based on religion only and language does not play a significant role there.

7. Islamiyat Tamilarum Elaviduthuthlaip Pooraaddamum (Islamic Tamils and the Liberation struggle of Elam), A Pamphlet published by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, 1987, cited from M.A.Nuhman, 2007, Sri Lankan Muslims Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity, Colombo: ICES, p.13

## **Some Demographical Aspects**

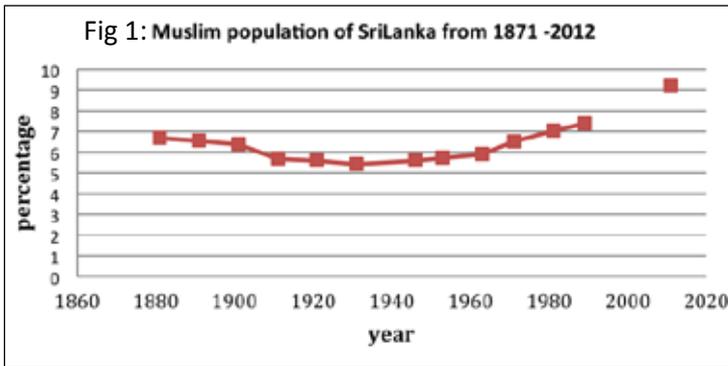
The demographic distribution patterns of Sri Lankan Muslims have influenced their political behavior in the post-independence period. Muslim settlements in the coastal areas of the country established in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, continued till the arrival of the European traders. Trade was the main economic activity of the Muslims. In the colonial period, with the large demand for spices, this trading class of Muslims moved into the central hills and, further explored the agricultural possibilities. The Muslim population is scattered all over the country. Throughout the country, Muslim settlements have been mixed with different ethnic, religious, and regional communities. These characteristics are advantageous from a cultural perspective but disadvantageous from the view of political power (Ameerdeen 2006: 28).

In early British times it is established that the Muslim population would have been around 7500 (Van Sanden 1926). Nevertheless Prof. K.W.Goonewardena estimated that it would have been as much as 50,000, at the close of Dutch rule (Goonewardena 1976: 128). However the first census carried out in 1814 revealed that there were 31,618 Muslims in the maritime provinces of Ceylon. The next census which was carried out in 1824 and the results published in 1827, revealed the Muslim population to be around 58,270<sup>8</sup> in the maritime districts only.

According to the census reports, the percentage of the Muslim Population in Sri Lanka fluctuated from time to time as the following graph indicates. (Fig 1)

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8. Return of the Population of the maritime districts of Ceylon, 27.01.1824 (1827)



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics>

The Muslim community is known as a business community, although it is a questionable matter after the British conquest. The British recognized the Muslims as a separate political group and removed the irritating civil and economic restrictions imposed by the early rulers. Thereafter the Muslims began to participate actively in the new economic environment that was ushered in during the plantation era. They also had a share in the plantation industry, but their share in this field was quite insignificant. In the 1950s the Muslims owned only about 60,000 acres of plantation land out of a total of nearly 1.5 million<sup>9</sup>. They were coffee land owners and rubber and tea dealers. Broadly speaking the Muslims were more interested in the trading aspect of commercial agriculture than in the cultivation and processing of crops (Ali 1986). The leading Muslim personalities of this era invested part of their capital in coconut plantations and also in the gem trade. The gem trade was entirely in the hands of the Muslims (Bertolacci 1817: 194). The Muslims were the best gem merchants at that time, and the gem and jewellery business was almost the monopoly of this community (Ali 1976). They had a prominent share in the trade of textile imports as well.

9. Ferguson's Ceylon Directory, 1952

When the building trade prospered, the Muslims with their 'special aptitude' for masonry were quick to make use of the opportunity. For example, buildings such as the Customs, Old Town Hall in Paettah, the Museum, Galle Face Hotel, the Victoria Arcade, the Memorial Building, the Clock Tower, the Maligakanda Reservoir, Batten Burgh Battery and the General Post Office were under taken by them (Hassan 1968).

When the Government cinnamon plantations were sold to private individuals some passed into the hands of wealthy Muslims. The Muslims were engaged in pearl fishing (Ali 1986: 239) and, as renters, they were described as the 'back bone of the fishery' The Muslims were mainly engaged in business rather than in other activities of the economic sector. The Eastern Province Muslims were engaged in agriculture. The Muslims did not feel the importance of the necessity for English education. However, wealthy Muslims slowly realized the need for education with in the interest of their business activities and for dealing with the English Government agents. Therefore they sent their children to the Government English schools. Muslims who belonged to the lower income category also started to feel the importance of education. Yet they had no courage to push their children towards an education. As a result a large part of the community remained educationally backward in this period.

The participation of the Muslims in the administrative service was also strikingly low. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new generation of Muslims entered the education field. However the growth of Muslim awareness of the importance of secular education as a means of achieving social mobility was clearly slow. The Eastern Province Muslims were mainly agriculturists and they were an economically backward group compared to the Muslims of the western province.

## **Political Mobilization of the Muslims on the Eve of Independence**

After the riots of 1915, Muslims played a pivotal role in the evolution of a Muslim identity in Ceylon (Kearney 1970). Several Muslim Associations, which had been formed for social and cultural reasons, adopted political objectives to achieve their demands. However in the first Legislative Council, a Tamil member was chosen to represent the Muslim community. In the Legislative council established in 1833 the different communities had only nominal representation. When the Legislative Council was expanded in 1885, it consisted of nine official members and six non-official members<sup>10</sup>. Until 1889, the Tamil non-official member represented the Muslims as well. But in the year 1889 the number of members in the Legislative council was increased to include a Muslim representative and a Kandyan Sinhalese to represent their respective communities. In 1889 the nomination of Mohamed Cassim Abdul Rahman, was succeeded by A.L.M. Sheriff in 1899, Wapitchi Marikar Abdul Rahman in 1900 and N.H.M. Abdul Cader in 1917. When he vacated the seat in 1900, W.M.Abdul Rahman replaced him<sup>11</sup>. In 1917 N.H.M.Abdul Cader succeeded him and remained a member until 1923. A very limited number of Ceylonese was granted voting rights at the beginning of the 20th Century to elect representatives to the Legislative Council on the basis of Island-wide 'communal electorates'. An election to a Mohemadan electorate was held for the first time in 1924. Three members were elected to represent the Muslims, H.M. Macan Markar, N.H.M. Abdul Cader, T.B. Jayah.

After 1924 when those ethnically appointed members commenced looking after the interests of the Muslim community

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10. Three Europeans, one Burgher , one Sinhalese and one Tamil.

11. Son of Vapici Marrikar and Father of Sir Razik Fareed and Abdul Rahman was reappointed as member of Legislative council in 1908,1912,1916.

under the chairmanship of Justice M.T.Akbar a Muslim committee of Islamic Law was established and laws were passed concerning Muslim marriage, divorce, , heritance, the Waqf<sup>12</sup> ordinance; with this, branches of the Muslim league were founded throughout the country. In the Legislative Council Sinhalese members were nominated, from the wealthy families of Govigama, Salagama and Karava castes. The same family members represented the Tamil community for around a century. At the time the Muslim community had no such interest in politics the Muslim members of the Legislative council were land owners or they were engaged in trade. A few Muslim families from the elite were involved in politics. However these Muslim members were not as powerful as the members of other communities, although they served their community by using their own funds. N.H.M.Abdul Cader was the first active member in the Legislative Council to represent the Muslim community. He was able to give voice to the needs of the Muslim community, and to present their problems in the Legislative Council. He had the ability to engage in debate with Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Ponnambalam Arunasalam.

In 1927, the British government appointed the Doughnmore Commission to consider constitutional reforms. Even before the arrival of the Doughnamore Commission in Sri Lanka, each community in the country prepared their proposals for perusal by the Commission. There were differences among the members of the national congress. The Congress was strongly of the view that only limited self government must be permitted and voting rights should not be given to all. But A.E.Gunasinghe and his colleagues supported the view that everyone who attained the eligible age should be given the franchise because of this diversion. They left the congress in 1927 an account of this disagreement. The

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12. Waqf is an Islamic endowment of property to be held in trust and used for a charitable or religious purpose.

Kandyan Sinhalese along with other minority communities such as Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims submitted their own proposals. However the Kandyan National Assembly which consisted of Sinhalese and Tamil leaders, did not support the proposal for self government.

Information of the arrival of the Doughnamore Commission caused ripples among the Muslim movement. There were two key movements. One was the Muslim Youth League and the other the Muslim Socialist Union under the leadership of N.H.M. Abdul Cader. Both these movements had as their goal the bringing in of unity among the Muslims and worked towards achieving that. They were ethnically different to a certain degree. While the movement under T.B.Jayah worked for the welfare of the Malay community, the other under Abdul Cader worked for the welfare of the Moor community. Both these movements demanded separate representation for their communities. The Muslim leaders looked at the Sinhala National Congress with suspicion whereas T.B. Jayah supported the National Congress. Mr. Jaya highlighted the following points when he spoke in the legislative council.

The national congress is a common movement established for all communities. Its doors are open to every community. It did not shun any community. The future of the country should be built up by everyone Muslims, Sinhalese, and Tamils, Malay, Burghers and others" (Hansard 1838).

With the arrival of the Doughnamore Commission there appeared many political parties among Muslims. The Muslim Political Association, under M.I.M. Riyal 'the Moors Political association', the Galle Muslim Association under M.M.Ismail, the Galle Muslim Youth Association under the leadership of N.H.M. Abdul Cader and Colombo Muslim Youth Association under S.A.Marikkar were formed. All these movements and associations

submitted their proposals separately. However the main demand of all these associations was to increase Muslim representation in the Legislative Council (Asad 1993) .

Political opportunities for the Muslims were widened under the Donoughmore Constitution (Kearney 1967). The system of communal representation was finally abandoned. The Donoughmore Constitution provided adult franchise to all above 21 years. It also recommended the establishment of territorials of electorates. The Legislative Council was replaced by the State Council. The Commission considered that communal representation was harmful for Sri Lanka, and that it was a barrier to communal harmony and to national unity (Asad 1993). When the Donoughmore proposals came up for debate in the Legislative Council, all the minority representatives voted against their adoption, although the proposals were passed by a narrow margin of 19 votes to 17. In the election held in May/ June 1931, only one Muslim member (Mohammed Macan Markar of Colombo) was elected to the State Council to represent the Batticalo South electorate in 1936. Not a single member from the Muslim community was elected to the state council. But, A.R.A. Razik and T.B.Jayah were nominated as members by the Governor.

The Muslims, under the Donoughmore Constitution, got fewer seats than what they could have obtained had the representation been a communal one. The minorities were dissatisfied about this situation. The Muslims and Tamils jointly sent a memorandum (1935) to the Colonial Secretary, against the system of territorial representation and demanded constitutional reforms more favorable to them, by giving political representation that was in consonance with their percentage of the population; Muslim Leaders came together at the All Ceylon Muslim Political Conference on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1939.

When the State Council presented the “Dominion Status Bill”, three Muslim members gave their support. The speech delivered by T.B. Jayah was appreciated by S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake who expressed his gratitude to the Muslim members. In 1944 when the Constitutional Commission with the chairmanship Lord Soulbury arrived in Ceylon, a new constitution was drafted. It had important clauses for safeguarding the rights of minorities in section 29(2) which prohibited or restricted the enactment of any law which would make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities to which persons of other communities or religions were not made liable, or the conferral of advantages or privileges on persons of other communities or religion. But this section proved to be totally ineffective in terms of individual discrimination or outright deprivation of existing collective rights of franchise, citizenship, language etc. The Muslim groups put together a representative group and that group was made on behalf of the entire Muslim community of Sri Lanka, including Indian Muslims, Malays and Ceylon Moors. It is to be noted at this juncture that religious attachment was stronger than racial attachment.

In the second State Council (1936-42) there was not even a single Muslim member. Therefore two Muslim members were nominated by the Governor. They were T.B. Jayah and A.R.A. Razik. The Muslims of Batticaloa too asked for separate representation. In 1943 no member of the minority voted for the memorandum of the Board of Ministers in the State Council. This included the two ministers belonging to the minority ethnic groups, Makan Markar and Peri Sunderam (Ameerdeen 2006). In 1939, the Muslim leaders of all shades of opinion got-together at the All Ceylon Muslim Political Conference (Ameerdeen 2006). In 1942, when A.E. Goonasinhe passed away Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel was elected at the interim election for the Colombo Central seat but there was no Muslim minister in that council.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November 1945 the Ceylon Moors' Association gave its evidence before the Soulbury Commission and requested the colonial government to consider their demands sympathetically. They were not very keen to secure communal representation, but they requested that at least 12 seats be provided for the Muslims (Phadnis 1979). In 1945 with the adoption of the Soulbury Commission proposals A.R.A. Razik complained that the Muslims have been treated as a “down-trodden” community and as a people who had never been adequately represented in the national legislature. To “wipe off for good the grave injustice which the Moors have suffered politically” he pleaded for the provision of 12 seats for the Moors- as he persisted in calling the Muslim community (Hansard 1945). The Soulbury Commissioners devised the electoral scheme and provided six elected seats for the Muslim community.

On the eve of Independence, Muslim political leaders, with a few exceptions, hailed from wealthy business families of elite Colombo circles and were successfully engaged in trading with the Colonial rulers. The role of the Colombo based Muslim Leadership in Sri Lanka at the time of Independence has had an important bearing on the history of Sri Lankan Muslims. Dr. T.B Jayah, Dr. M.C.M Kaleel, Sir Razik Fareed, S.H.Ismail, H.M Macan Markar and M.T.Akbar were among the most popular leaders of the Muslim community. A majority of these Muslim leaders came from wealthy business families in Colombo. They were educated at famous schools in Colombo and many had obtained their degrees from London Universities. When they returned to the island, some joined the civil service while others joined their respective professions. After some time, they entered politics, entered the Legislative Council, and subsequently became members of the Ceylon National Congress.

It is true that the Soulbury Commission recommended several minority rights guarantees. These included instructions

to delimitation commissions to be mindful of adequate minority representation in the delimitation of electoral districts, and clauses forbidding favouritism on religious or ethnic basis. However, as Farzana Haniffa emphasizes, state making in the aftermath of independence was done very much in line with a Sinhala nationalist agenda, and the marginalisation of the minorities who were seen to have benefited under the previous colonial administration (Hanifa 1999).

The Soulbury Commission rejected communal representation as well as the 50:50 proposal of G.G. Ponnambalam. At the same time the Commission recommended distributing representation of the minority communities in Parliament to the electoral districts, thinking that Muslims would be able elect their members to parliament on the newly carved out district and provincial basis. All Muslim associations got together under the umbrella of the All Ceylon Muslim conference, met the Soulbury Commission and made a request to withdraw their earlier demand to provide representation on an ethnic basis. Thus the Soulbury commission in its new constitution expressed deep concern regarding minority issues and expressed their confidence that the electoral system could be adjusted to make multi member seats in areas where minority strength is low by drawing electoral boundaries, so that sufficient representation could be provided to the minorities. This can be regarded as a safeguard for the minorities. Accordingly, at the first parliamentary election in Sri Lanka held in 1947. T.B.Jayah, A.R.M. Aboobucker, A.C.Sinna Lebbe, M.S.Kariyappar, M.M. Ibrahim, H.L. Ismail were elected as members of parliament T.B. Jayah was appointed as the Minister of Employment and Social Service while H.L. Ismail was appointed as parliamentary secretary to the Department of Food and Cooperative Societies (Cader 1999).

**Fig 2: Muslim Candidates who were successful at the first General Elections-August-September, 1947**

Constituency	Province	Candidate elected	Party affiliation
Colombo-Central	Western	T.B.Jayah(2 <sup>nd</sup> MP	UNP
Puttalm	North Western	H.S.Ismail	UNP
Mutur	Eastern	A.R.A.M.Abubuker	UNP
Kalmunai	do	M.S.Kariapper	Ind.
Batticaloa	do	A.L.Sinna lebbe	UNP
Pottuvil	do	M.M. Ebrahim	Ind.

Six Muslims were elected to Parliament at this Election in 1947 (Fig 2). Abdul Aziz was elected from Maskeliya in the Central Province in the by-election held in March 1950 and Dr.M.C.M.Kaleel (UNP) from Colombo-Central (2<sup>nd</sup> MP) in the May, 1950 by-election apart from the above candidates. When in early 1950 T.B.Jayah resigned his cabinet post Kaleel was appointed to replace him.

### **The First Phase of Transition: 1948-56**

The story of the Muslims in post-independence Sri Lanka is the story of how they converted their disadvantages to positive advantage and how their role was strengthened in the Sri Lankan political system. According to K.M.de Silva, from 1956 the ruling party was defeated on several occasions. In this background the Muslims obtained opportunities for political bargaining which they used to the great advantage of their community (De Silva 1986: 445).

Before Independence, the Muslim political leaders, with a few exceptions, the elite group based in Colombo had been trading with the Colonial rulers successfully. In the post-independent era these leaders and others from similar elitist

backgrounds remained dominant, almost completely controlling the political schedule for the entire community. Organized in the main along the lines of social service bodies such as, The All Ceylon Muslim League, The All Ceylon Moors Association, the Moors' Islamic Cultural Home. These elites courted the support of the local Muslim leaders in the Muslim majority areas of the Eastern Province who provided them with finance, social services and sources of patronage which allowed them to succeed in being elected to parliament.

With the recommendations of the Soulbury Commission, the Senate was established in 1947 as the upper house of the Parliament of Ceylon. The Senate consisted of 30 members. 15 elected by the lower chamber, the House of Representatives, using the proportional representation system, and each MP having a single transferable vote. The other 15 members were appointed by the Governor-General of Ceylon on the advice of the Prime Minister and generally consisted of distinguished individuals. The Senators were known as "Elected Senators" and "Appointed Senators". Ten Muslims senators were in the Senate at different times.

After Independence, the All Ceylon Muslim League and the All Ceylon Moors Association became Muslim political parties. In the year after independence Muslims had obtained membership, and achieved positions of influence in all the major national political parties. The Muslim elite groups, were, in the twentieth century more aligned with the capitalist styled United National Party (UNP) rather than with the vociferous, radical and vehement socialist parties that were emerging during the post independent period. Being traders and businessmen it was more so to their benefit to tag along with a party that was supposed to have stood for free market economics and less regulatory restrictions. The Muslim League joined it. A.R.M.Razik was the

first Treasurer of the (UNP when it was formed) in 1946. The UNP obtained the majority Muslim vote at every election since 1947.

Whatever their associations, the Muslim elite groups were always forced to align themselves to one or more of the national Sinhala parties in order to be part and parcel of the governing elite during and after the General Elections. In many cases these elite Muslim groups were, in some ways, required to support national policies which largely contradicted the interests and aspirations of many of their people. Most notably many of the Muslim elite leaders supported the “Sinhala Only” policy that obtained in the fifties even though a large majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka were Tamil speaking. No doubt the close ties that the Muslim elite leadership had with the then rulers of the nation gave them any advantages in seeking to fulfill their religious and social needs.

**Fig 3: Elected Muslim Members: 1952 General Election**

Dr.M.C.M.Kaleel	Colombo-Central	UNP(2 <sup>nd</sup> place)
Sir.Razik Fareed	Colombo-Central	Ind.(3 <sup>rd</sup> place)
C.A.S.Marikkar	Kaduganawa	SLFP(2 <sup>nd</sup> place)
H.S.Ismail	Puttalam	UNP
M.E.H.Muhammed Ali	Mutur	Ind.
A.M. Mersa	Kalmunai	Ind.
M.M.Ibrahim	Pottuvil	UNP

It is remarkable that the Sinhala community was ready to elect Muslims as their representatives in parliament (Fig 3) . It is very clear that the Muslims are integrated into the Sri Lankan political community. In this background C.A.S.Marikkar won and held for the SLFP the (Kadugannawa seat,1952-59) and Abdul Jabbar for the same party. While Marikkar won easily in a double member constituency, Jabbar won in a single member constituency in which Muslims formed only 4% of the voters.

A.C.S.Hameed (former Foreign minister) was regularly the first of two MPs for the Harispattuva seat in which the Muslims were only 17% of the voting strength , M.H.Mohamed won Borella, an urban constituency in Colombo with less than 5% Muslim votes . Most notable of all the cases was of M.L.M. Abusally MP for Balangoda, a seat he won against the powerful Ratwatte family, although the Muslims formed a mere 2.75% of the percentage of voters constituted in this seat. The Sinhalese community voted for him on the baies of party against Sinhalese opponents.

### **The Evolution of the Postcolonial State and the Muslims (1956-1977)**

The MEP started a new era in the postcolonial state in Sri Lanka after their victory of 1956. Before the general election, Bandaranaike formed a broad political alliance, the MEP, with the support of the four nationalist-Social parties against the UNP. After the victory of the new Government, they identified themselves as the ‘people’s Government’.

In 1956, the Parliament had 8 Muslim members 7 on an electoral basis and one nominated by the Governor General. The SLFP put up only one Muslim candidate, and he won a seat. When the MEP won a landslide victory, four other Muslim candidates also entered parliament. They were:

**Fig 4: Elected Muslim Members: 1956 General Election**

Sir. RasikFareed	Colombo Central (2)	UNP
M.S. Kariyappar	Kalmunai	Federal Party
M.H. Ismail	Puttalam	Independence
A.H. MacanMakkar	Kalkuda	Independence
C.A.S. Marikkar	Kadugannawa	SLFP
M.E.H. Muhammadali	Mutur	Independence
M.M. Musthafa	Pottuvil	Federal Party
Dr. M.P. D.Rahman	Appointed MP	

In 1947 when the UNP was formed, the Muslims began politically identified with it. The UNP got the majority of the Muslim votes at all election since 1947. When UNP was defeated in 1956 the Muslims who were generally identified with the UNP faced some difficulties. However, once in power, the SLFP was also able to attract substantial Muslim support. C.A.S.Marikkar was appointed as the first Muslim cabinet minister by the SLFP Government. In addition Baddiudddin Mahmud played a key role from the inception of the party.

### **New Muslim Leadership Pattern in the Early Phase**

Baddiudddin Mahmud and Razik Fareed were the two other political figures from the Muslim community who played a key role in the first phase in the post-Independence Sri Lankan politics. Razik Fareed hailed from a wealthy Colombo Muslim family and entered politics in 1930. He is famous for vociferously advocating a 'standing by the majority' position for Muslims. He held important positions and served in the supreme administrative institutions in the country. He had been a City Father in the Colombo Municipal Council, State Councillor, Member of the War Council, Senator, Parliamentarian and Minister. He had been in the forefront from 1913 when he inaugurated the Central Muslim Youth Conference, served and worked relentlessly for the emancipation of the downtrodden Moors who had hitherto been given step motherly treatment by the then colonial masters. He was appointed as the member of the Local Administration Committee headed by late S. W. R. D Bandaranaike and in 1942 as a Member of the Education Committee with the late C. W. W. Kannangara, who was the first Minister of Education of Independent Ceylon, as Chairman. He also held the Ministerial Portfolio of Trade under the Prime Minister Dahanayake in the Caretaker Government in 1960. In addition to these achievements, he had the distinction

of being conferred imperial honors a Member of the British Empire (M.B.E.) in 1948 and as Knight Bachelor (K.B.E) in 1951. An example of his contributions to the community was the establishment of a Training college in Aluthgama, the first training school for the Moors, followed by another at Addlachchenai and many more island wide. He pioneered the establishment of educational institutions for Moor girls, the introduction of Arabic as a subject in the curriculum, the appointment of Moulavis in Muslim schools, Inspectors of Schools for Arabic, the approval of English as a medium of instruction for Moor students, founded of a Chair for Arabic at the University of Peradeniya, the retention of the Unani system of medicine for the benefit of Moors and the setting up of Municipal dispensaries and maternity homes in Colombo and many other places.

Razik Fareed always stood for building up the unity among Sinhala and Muslim communities people under the slogan *Sinhala Yonaka Ekamuthukama* and said that Muslims should identify themselves with the national parties and stand by the majority community in resolving common matters. Former Prime Minister, late Dr. W. Dahanayake remarked Sir Razik without doubt is the uncrowned king of the Moors and he is more concerned about the next generation than the next election. He gave political leadership to the Moors by founding the All Ceylon Moors Association with over 200 branches throughout the country and was the Life President till his demise in the year 1984. The establishment of the Moors Islamic Cultural Home in year 1944 is another landmark in his cultural and social activities and he was President of MICH. He spent his wealth on education and donated a building for the Muslim Ladies College at Bambalapitiya, Colombo

Dr. Baddiudddin Mahmud (1904-1997)<sup>13</sup>, a leading politician in the 1940s and 50s would become a powerful Muslim politician among the southern Muslims in the 1960s and 1970s . He had considerable influence within the party. He was an appointed MP not an elected one. He skillfully demonstrated that the cabinet was an excellent substitute for an elected political base, and played an excellent leadership role in the affairs of the Muslim community” (de Silva 1986: 445). Mahmud was appointed MP twice in, 1960-65, 1970-77.

Baddiudddin Mahmud, probably derived motivation from his prominent ancestors Siddie Lebbe and T. B. Jayah, and he, as an equally qualified educationist with a radical background, recognized the usefulness of education for both political and social change in a given country. He was one of the main political figures in the SLFP. To strengthen his political base he set up another political organization, the Islamic Socialist Front and linked the SLFP with this group. Dr. Baddiudddin Mahmud became the Minister of Broadcasting in July 1960. He served 3½ years as Minister of Education and broadcasting and then (from 1970 to 1977) as Education Minister. The credit goes to Dr. Baddiudddin for being a twice appointed and long- serving Education Minister. It was as Minister of Health that he barred doctors from engaging in private practice (Feroziya 2001).

They were followed later by M.H. Mohammed who was elected to Parliament from the Borella electorate became the Minister of Labour, Employment and Housing implemented several progressive labor laws in the country. Being the Minister of Housing, he inaugurated the Maligawatte housing scheme.

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13. He was a founder, Vice Secretary and deputy Chairman of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. He was a long time friend of S.W.R.D.Bandaranayake and his family .He was deeply involved in the election campaign and worked for the landslide victory of the SLFP. Although he did not accept the repeated request from Bandaranayke to be a member in his 1956 cabinet as a nominated member.

The scheme started by M.H. Mohammed was later completed by R. Premadasa. During this period, M.H. Mohammed was Minister of Transport in J.R. Jayawardana's cabinet.

It is worth noting here that the wise approach the Muslims have followed in the political arena by joining and working with major parties to achieve their goal without forming a party of their own is commendable. Although Muslims have started to form their own parties, those who were elected from major parties have done excellent service in Sri Lankan politics. They have tried to get Muslims their rights and privileges, joining major parties without giving up their own party, and functioning as a separate entity. The Indian Tamils too had followed the same policy of working with major political parties not to achieve benefits for their community. Thus, we can see the Sri Lanka Tamil workers congress joining the UNP at first but at the election in 2000, they were with the SLFP. We can see other up country Tamil political parties too joining the UNP.

A.C.S.Hameed was another prominent Muslim political leader in the postcolonial State-Building project. Dr. Hameed was a teacher by profession and a man of humble beginnings. In 1956 he joined the UNP contested in 1960 and won and since then had been returned without a break for 39 years. He was the representative of the UNP for one electoral division namely Harispattuwa. He once served as the chairman of the UNP during the period. In 1977 he became a cabinet minister under J.R. Jayewardene and held many portfolios amongst which the most illustrious was that of Foreign Minister. Apart from being in the foreign ministry, he has been in Higher Education, Justice and Science and Technology (Hashim 2007).

Dr. Hameed cut across ethnic lines and racial borders in serving Mother Lanka and her people without favor or discrimination to anyone. In return, he was loved, honored

respected and even revered by people of all communities. He tried building Sri Lanka's image in the international community, negotiating with the LTTE and even risking his life by visiting Jaffna on behalf of the Government. Other such contributions were strengthening the Higher Education system, paving the way for reforms in the legal system, contributing to social and economic reforms in the country and most of all forging racial amity amongst all communities. Hameed was the leader of the foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement countries in the period (1977-1979). He had a very good general knowledge, according to a newspaper article, and contributed in solving many international problems. Ranil Wickramasinghe once said that "late Minister A.C.S. Hameed, who was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was the creator of the present Foreign Policy in Sri Lanka. Hameed placed Sri Lanka at the forefront of the Non-aligned Movement and as a result of his international connections, funds flowed into Sri Lanka to implement projects such as the Mahaveli and the Sri Jayawardenapura Hospital"<sup>14</sup>.

Bakeer Makar (May 12, 1917 - September 10, 1997) was the first Member of Parliament to represent the Beruwala electoral division, (from March 1960 to April 1960) the Member of Parliament for Beruwala from April 1965 to March 1970, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament from August 4, 1977 to September 7, 1978, the Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka from September 21, 1978 to August 30, 1983, the Cabinet Minister Without Portfolio from 1983 to 1988 and the Governor of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka from June 13, 1988 to December 1993.

Bakeer Markar's greatest achievements were establishing the All Ceylon Union of the Muslim League Youth Fronts. This is

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14. <http://ns2.asianmirror.lk/english/index.php/news/5189-acs-hameed-implemented-present-foreign-policy>, Monday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2011

a coordinating body and the leading Muslim youth organization representing Muslim youth in all parts of Sri Lanka. He was the founder president of this union. During his lifetime he formed more than 500 Muslim youth fronts throughout the island. He visited almost every Muslim village and familiarized himself with Muslim youths to achieve his goal. He excelled in International relations as well. His close connections with the Iraqi government enabled him to build a village in Eravur, an area in the Eastern part of the island. He was the founder President of the Iraq-Sri Lanka Friendship Association and remained in this position until his demise.

### **Some Issues Relating to the State-Building and the Muslims: Language, Education and Administration**

As already discussed the Muslims based their identity in terms of religion, not on the basis of language (Suryanarayan 1998: 142). When for the first time, a language policy was introduced by J.R.Jayawardene in 1943, there was a big conflict. By the time the motion came up for debate in 1944, he had agreed to revise it to include Tamil along with Sinhala as the national languages. The amendment was debated and put to a vote on 25 May 1944. It was carried by 29 votes to 8. While T.B. Jayah voted for the amendment Razik joined four Sinhalese in voting against it. They wanted Sinhala as the only national language. A.R.A. Razik stated:

I feel that in the best interest of Lanka, my mother country, I must stand up for the motion of the honorable member from Kalaniya (J.R.Jayawardene); that is that Sinhalese should be the official language of the country. However, there is not the slightest doubt that this cannot be done in a hurry, in a year or two, or even in 10 years. I certainly feel that it is in the best interests of Lanka and her people.

We are really divided at the present moment. Each community has its own language. But if we all take to one language, then we will not think in terms of Tamils, Moors, Sinhalese, Burghers, Malays, and so on (de Silva 1998: 258).

When that amendment was debated in Parliament in June 1956, the Colombo based southern Muslim Political leaders supported it while the Northern and Eastern Muslims opposed it. The Muslim members of parliament such as Markan Markar who was a politician from the south with his electorate in Kalkuda, Eastern province, voted against the Bill. His argument was exceptional for a southern Muslim leader. He stated that,

I would support this Bill for Sinhala only if sufficient provision were made to give due recognition to the reasonable use of the Tamil language in the Northern and Eastern Provinces; but in the absence of provision for such recognition I cannot be a party to an injustice to the Tamil speaking community who have made this island their home from time immemorial and who have in ample measure contributed towards the prosperity and political advancement of this country (Hansard 1956).

In 1956 Razik Fareed voted for the Sinhala only Bill. M.E. Mohamed Ali, (Muthur), M.M. Mustafa (Poththvill), and M.S. Kariyappar (Kalmunai), who were elected from the Eastern province by the Muslim and Tamil voters, voted against. The last two were Federal Party candidates and were obviously against the Sinhala only Bill. Dr. Baddiudddin Mahmud was the first Sri Lankan who wanted Sinhala as the official language of independent Sri Lanka. He said in a meeting at Galle,

If the Muslims learn Sinhala, all the misunderstandings between the Muslims and Sinhalese will disappear and Peace and goodwill flourish. Muslims did not get any benefit by accepting Tamil language; on the contrary it has been an obstacle to their progress. Today or tomorrow, we will definitely get independence and Sinhala should be the official language (Hanseer 1956)

A.M.A.Azeez, was a senator representing the UNP. He made a long speech in the Senate on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1956. He wanted to have Sinhala and Tamil as the official languages as otherwise the Muslim community will definitely divide into two linguistic groups (Hansard Senate 1956). The Muslims have long been an educationally backward society. Due to various reasons for several decades Muslims had neglected education, especially in the Colonial period. Baddiudddin Mahmud said in his speech,

The educational facilities are available in both primary and post-primary education for young Muslims and much less than those available to other communities. According to the survey of Sri Lanka's Consumer Finances 1973, published by the Central Bank of Ceylon, illiteracy among the Muslims is second only to that of the Indian Tamils<sup>15</sup>.

The number of Muslim students entering the national universities at that time was very small. They were only half of the national ethnic ratio of the Muslims who had entered Universities, and that too mostly to the Arts Faculties. The SLFP Government with Mrs. Bandaranayake as the Prime minister encouraged the Muslim community mainly through its educational policies. Dr. Baddiudddin Mahmud a teacher by profession and a Principal was

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15. Dr. Badi-ud-din Mahmud (read by), The Statement of The Council of Muslims of Sri Lanka made at the All Party Conference, p.4

the Education Minister. As the Education Minister He was greatly responsible for developing Muslim Education. In this background, during Baddiudddin Mahmud's period, Muslim Schools were opened in every Muslim village and elementary schools were up graded to the level of senior-secondary Schools. A large number of Muslims was recruited to the teaching profession and Baddiudddin Mahmud also opened the way for Muslim women to enter the teaching profession. Special Government training colleges were set up for Muslims. Arabic was taught to Muslim students as an optional language in government schools. It was taught by maulavis appointed by the Ministry of Education and paid by the government. Muslim students had the right to their studies and sit exams in one of the three languages. They were successful in securing legislation for the Muslims Mosques and Charitable Trusts or Wakfs Act of 1956, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act 13 of 1951, specifically aimed at safeguarding the religious and cultural life of the Muslims. Other provisions, such as the Declaration of Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) birthday as a public holiday were also introduced.

After the political change in 1956 the new MEP government gave prominence to the state sector and established state enterprises. The government pursued a policy of active state intervention in the economic affairs of the country. A substantial section of the Muslim community had been engaged in trade in the past. The position had been completely altered due to the economic policies of the MEP, the setting up of several state corporations and co-operatives not only to handle the import and export trade, but also the internal distribution of consumer products both wholesale and retail. As a result in the 1960's and for much of the 1970's, there was a challenge to the Muslims' traditional economic trading and privileges which they had enjoyed since Colonial rule. The SLFP, and the several governments it led

from 1956 to 1965 and 1970 to 1977, shifted economic policy away from the private sector to a system of industrialization involving a significant public sector involvement. This affected the economy of the Muslim community setting in this island.

## **The 1977 Regime Change and the Muslims**

At the 1977 election, the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Government witnessed a humiliating defeat. The unemployment problem and the progressive control of trade and commerce created concern among Muslims engaged in this pursuit. Therefore the Muslims too joined the mainstream in establishing a UNP government. The 1978 constitution made the process of constitution drafting a legislative function, by a two-thirds majority of the parliament. It declared the official language to be Sinhala but in the next article, stated that Sinhala and Tamil shall be national languages. Another key aspect of this new constitution was the introduction of the system of proportional representation in the legislature. The new government tried to break away from the earlier government's policy framework and by introducing the open economy, and by bringing direct government control to an end. A new economic environment was developed according to the new policy framework. Muslims desired an economic environment helpful to the conduct of their trade activities.

After 1977, the policy of economic liberalization expanded the sphere of economic activities available at the open market and the business oriented Muslim community benefitted. The UNP Government discarded exchange control regulations and public sector industrialization and, instead, sought to encourage growth through the development of both the private and state sectors. The resulting new business opportunities in import-export trade benefitted not only large Muslim businessmen who

had weathered the storms in the earlier decades, but also smaller Muslim entrepreneurs breaking into trade and commerce for the very first time. The 1970s was a turning point in the history of the Middle-East. The rising wealth of OAPEC<sup>16</sup> and the OPEC<sup>17</sup>, the Yom Kippur victory in Egypt and the Oil embargo of 1973 brought the Muslim nations to the centre stage of international affairs more assertively (Ali 2001: 7). There was a sudden rise of Islamic fervor. A sudden surge of enthusiasm in constructing mosques, organizing Islamic conferences and seminars, studying Islamic sciences, adopting Islamic dress codes, strict adherence to halal food, and above all the increasing publicity which Islam received in the international media, all combined to point a new wave of Islamic resurgence ( Ali 2001: 7).

The liberalization environment led more Sri Lankans to look for employment in the new oil rich Middle East. Not surprisingly the Muslim community got more immediate advantage from this opportunity than other communities in Sri Lanka, mainly because they were not scared or discouraged by the lack of western- style freedom of movement and the inter mingling of sexes in many of these Arab countries , based on their religion and culture. Other communities of Sri Lanka, when offered profitable employment in the Middle Eastern region, had some reservations in accepting these jobs, on account of the restrictive nature of the lifestyle in this region.

The 1977 general elections were a turning point for the minority communities of Sri Lanka. In this election, of the 11 Muslim candidates on the UNP ticket 10 were returned. Haleem Ishaque was elected from the SLFP (Jupp 1948: 156-57). The Muslims received some cabinet posts from the UNP, who were successful in the election, but this did not mean the UNP was

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16. Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries

17. Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

favoring the Muslim community. These Muslim leaders were not interested in either the needs or complaints of the community and with the powerful presidential system. They were not in a position to raise their voice against the injustices meted out to the community (Mohan 1987: 57).

The UNP introduced a new constitution, which brought into being the presidential and proportional representative systems. According to the proportional representation system, if a candidate of a recognized political party or an independent group won less than one-eighth of the votes polled in any election at any electoral district that party would be disqualified from fielding a candidate from that electoral district<sup>18</sup>.

But there are several unanswered questions. When a Muslim MP is elected from a major party, can he effectively handle the problems faced by Muslims in other parts of the country? Do the system of proportional representation party discipline and rules allow Muslim MPs to act independently regarding the problem? Can they use the allocation by the government to serve Muslims in other parts of the country outside their electorate? Have they got authority to help in overcoming problems faced by Muslims in their own electorates and ethnic differences if any? These are some of the questions that beg answers when Muslim MPs are elected from majority political parties.

Serving the Muslim community always depends on the controls the party has on them. In such a dilemma they had to work for their community entrapped in the controls and limitations the party had imposed on them. The fact remains that they were not elected by Muslim voters alone but by the votes of other communities as well. The history of past political events in the country shows that it is impossible for Muslim MPs to address

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18. The constitution of the Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka-1978, Colombo: Government Publication, p.64.

Muslim voters who were from the minority. “Those who wish to leave the party can leave. But I’m going to keep the office of the Israeli Interests Section open.” When J.R.Jayawardena said this, neither M.C.M. Kaleel nor A.C.S.Hameed, the Muslim leaders in the party had the strength to disagree with him. This was because they depended solely on the major parties for their survival and therefore they were unable to muster the strength of the Muslim population and find solutions to the issues faced by Muslims. Therefore it was felt that the time had come for Muslim leaders to realize the necessity to come together as a minority group.

The system of proportional representation introduced by the new constitution had the potential of making the Muslim community politically insignificant. The Muslims were faced with a difficult situation; they did not have large contiguous territorial areas as in the case of the up country Tamils or Sri Lankan Tamils. They were unable to organize their own grouping under the list system provided for by proportional representation with the high cut off point fixed at 12.5 % in 18 out of the 22 electoral districts. Therefore representatives found places in the lists of one or the other of the major parties.

## **The Ethnic Conflict and the Muslims**

The ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka was a conflict mainly between Sinhalese and Tamils in the 70s and the 80s, but at the end of the 80s it took a different turn and it expanded into a Sinhala-Tamil, and a Tamil-Muslim conflict. The Muslims were 9.2 per cent of the population. One third of the Muslims lived in the conflict affected Northern and Eastern areas. They often suffered seriously, especially at the hands of the LTTE. In the 1990, Muslims were the victims of ethnic cleansing, massacres and forced displacement at the hands of the Tamil rebels.

1983 is considered a turning point in the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. Black July was the Sinhalese response to the killing of 13 army soldiers in Jaffna. Some innocent Tamils were attacked and some of their properties were destroyed. The Sinhalese living in the main Tamil areas had to shift to other parts of the island, The Tamils in the Sinhalese majority areas migrated to areas where their people were concentrated (Hasbullah 2000). The Muslims have never resorted to armed rebellion to assert their political position. The civil war lasted from 1983 to 2009. In 2009 the Sri Lankan army defeated the LTTE to end the civil war.

Even after the civil war, there were conflicts between different ethnic groups. The Tamil terrorist organization the LTTE destroyed more than two hundred mosques in the Eastern Province. The expulsion of more than 90,000 Muslim men, women and children was one of the largest human displacements in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and caused great anguish among all Muslims in the country and brought the plight of the Sri Lankan Muslims into sharp focus nationally and internationally.

In the north and east of Sri Lanka the Tamils and Muslims had lived peacefully since Independence. Sri Lankan Muslims, especially those of the north and east in the 1960s and 1970s, proudly identified themselves as Tamil-Speaking Muslims. At the beginning of the conflict the Tamil Tigers enjoyed support from Muslim villages, and there was peaceful coexistence between the Tamil and Muslim communities until the late 1980s, when the Muslims began to be directly affected by the violence associated with the ethnic conflict (Peiris 2000: 356).

The displacement began in 1987 in the course of operations by the Indian Peace-Keeping Forces (IPKF) in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu when several hundreds of Muslims who fled from

these areas were housed in welfare centres in Anuradhapura and Mannar (Peiris 2000). Then when the government armed forces resumed their control over parts of the eastern lowlands, they attempted, to establish a system of civilian 'home guards' to provide security to Muslim and Sinhala villages. It was against this backdrop that the Muslim-LTTE hostilities culminated in August 1990 in the massacre by the LTTE of about 103 Muslims engaged in prayers at a mosque in Kattankudi, Batticaloa (Peiris 2000). The emergence of a new political party, the SLMC during this period was considered a challenge to the Tamil demand for Elam. .In two incidents in the mid 90s, 280 Muslims were massacred and several hundreds were injured by Tamil military groups in the Batticaloa district. These incidents created a conflict between Tamils and Muslims in the Eastern Province (Husbullah 1996: 5).

When considering the impact of the ethnic conflict on Muslims, the result of Government and LTTE negotiations was that the LTTE turned against both the Government and the SLMC. The LTTE massacred hundreds of Muslims in the east (more than 150 Muslims at the Kathankudi mosque). In October 1990 the LTTE issued a 'quit or be killed' decree on all Muslims of the Northern Province. This literally meant the overnight expulsion of more than 75,000 Muslims from that part of the country (a large number of people were from the Mannar district) (Husbullah 1996: 5) Muslim houses were looted and cash, jewellery and other valuables were taken forcibly at gun point by the LTTE. They ventured out overland destinations unknown, with most of them ending up at one or another of several hundreds hurriedly established welfare centres in the border districts of Anuradhapura, Kurunegala and Puttalam.

The largest concentration of settlements consisting of displaced Muslims is found in Puttalam. There are 12,568 families living in different types of settlements, most of them

being located in the environmentally harsh and economically backward Kalpitiya peninsula. There was competition between the indigenous people of Puttalm and the displaced people for physical resources employment opportunities, food supply, shelter, public utilities, health care, education and employment. The disappearance of the Haj pilgrims from Kurukkalmadam the same year was a pivotal episode for Muslims in recounting their victimization due to the conflict. Additionally inhabitants of 33 Muslim villages in the Batticaloa district were displaced during the conflict. Most of these people moved to the densely populated town of Kattankudi further swelling the population of that town (Haniffa n.d.).

### **The Emergence of the Muslim Congress as a Political Force and its Role**

Social and political mobility that was set in motion after the Independence also affected the Muslims. Owing to the social consciousness of leaders like C.W.W. Kannangara, free education was introduced. In the same way, because of the standardization in education introduced by Dr. Baddiudddin Mahmud there was a tremendous growth in education among Muslims in the Eastern province. Farmers, labourers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and literary personalities appeared from among the lower range of society. They started to question the low status they were in realizing that they were suppressed by a few of the ruling elite.

When we consider the emergence of the SLMC as a Muslim political party, one of the reasons for it was that the National parties had an ethnic agenda that favored the majority community. As a minority community the Muslims got very little space in the national parties. Those who joined the majority parties had achieved their political goals. But not all Muslims

were satisfied with this set up. Most of them wanted a party not dominated by national parties, to achieve some of the goals of Muslims in terms of Islamic ideology (Hussain 1981).

When Sinhala became the official language the Muslims of the North and East faced discrimination by Sinhala bureaucrats. Transport facilities, health aspects water distribution were also neglected along with education in Muslim areas. The political representatives from the national parties were not powerful enough to fulfil the objectives of the Muslim community. In the postcolonial period large-scale irrigation projects were started in the eastern province. In the so called Dry Zone Colonization and Green Revolution projects, the traditional lands of the Muslims were handed to the Sinhala colonizers (Ameerdeen 2006: 99). State aid to Sinhala colonization under the major irrigation projects was phenomenal. As a result, there was considerable resentment among the Tamils and Muslims of the Eastern province regarding what they perceived as discrimination by the government in the allocation of land under the major settlement schemes and the consequent increase in the Sinhalese population in certain parts of the province (Ameerdeen 2006: 100). The land settlement policy also adversely affected the Muslims in terms of their electoral strength and created a fear of identity erosion among them and threatened their distinct culture (Ameerdeen 2006: 331).

Neither the UNP nor the SLFP expected the constant support of Muslim for their parties. It was the UNP that had more support than the SLFP until 1994. Both these parties knew that the Muslims in 15 electorates in the whole country were in a position to influence the final decision in forming the government, especially under the PR system. Muslims have witnessed it many a time. When governments failed to address Muslim interests, they tended to vote against it in the next election. To cite an

example, in 1965, as the then government failed to act on the law discrepancies in the Quazy court, pointed out by the Supreme Court, more Muslims voted against the government.

The violence carried out by the majority community on Muslims in many areas during SLFP rule contributed heavily for the Muslims to vote against the SLFP. The charge that Muslims enjoyed more privileges in the educational field than the others caused enmity in the minds of the Sinhalese towards Muslims. From 1974 – 1975, in many parts of Sri Lanka there were riots and violent uprisings and attacks on the Muslim community by Sinhala extremists including the attack on Zahira College and its former principal Dr. Baddiudddin Mahmud. A more serious clash occurred in Puttalam in 1976. An ethnic clash between Muslim and Sinhalese took place in 1976. The Puttalam incident caused fear and suspicion in the minds of the majority community. This fear and suspicion were based mainly on their economic position. There was some loss of lives and loss of property in these clashes. This incident caused Muslim support for the SLFP to decline. These developments paved the way for some Muslims to implement the idea of starting an exclusive Muslim party. It is in this background that the birth of the Muslim Congress took place. If the proportional representative system had not been introduced in the 1978 constitutional amendment, the Muslim congress would not have secured the significant place it enjoys today.

The birth of the Muslim Congress provided necessary spur to Muslim scattered here and there to unite. This party held its first meeting in Pottuvil in the year 1980. The late Mr. A.H.M Ashraf guided this party through 1984 to 2000. The birth of the SLMC shifted the Muslim Political leadership from commercial Colombo and the urban South to the rural East (Ali 2001). The Muslim congress that secured 3 seats in the 1989 election, got 7

seats in 1994 and joined the UPF to help form the government. Mr A.H.M Ashraf the former leader of the Muslim congress had the political wisdom to win the rights of Muslims. In the 2000 election the party entered parliament with eleven seats. Today it is the support of this party that helps maintain the stability of the government.

M.H.M.Ashraff, the founding leader of the SLMC, was a person with leadership qualities. In 1977, A.H.M.Ashraff together with a few educationists and politically interested people of the east formed the 'Muslim United Liberation Front'. Ashraff started his political career as a Legal Advisor to the Muslim United Liberation Front which formed an alliance with the Tamil United Liberation Front for the 1977 general election. He contested unsuccessfully at this election. After his defeat he left the MULF and formed his own party. On 11<sup>th</sup> September 1981 the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress was established at Kathankudy in the Batticaloa district under the Chairmanship of A. L. Ahmed. M H M Ashraff was elected its Founder President. This Party was formed by a small group of Eastern province political leaders. In November 1986 the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress was formally inaugurated as a political party at the "badsha" festival held in Colombo with Ashraff, as its Leader. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress is the first political party in Sri Lanka that sought to give a voice to the Muslims of Sri Lanka in terms of political representation.

Under the dynamic leadership of Mr.Ashraff 2 parliamentary seats were won by the SLMC at the 1989 parliamentary election. At the general Election of August 1994. 7 members of the SLMC were elected to Parliament while 2 members were placed on the National List. Ashraff was elected a Member of Parliament in 1989 and in 1994 received the Portfolio of Minister of Ports Development/Rehabilitation/Reconstruction. During his tenure as Minister he proposed to set up the South-Eastern University

and the Port in Oluvil. It was his desire to see these two projects materialize. He attempted to provide international standards to the South Eastern University and wanted to change its name to “Scientific and Technological University” (Ameerdeen 2006). Ashraff realised the need to join hands with the Sinhalese majority and at the same time to preserve the identity of the Muslim community and started his journey towards that end. In most of his speeches in the Parliament Ashraff emphasized the necessity for the Muslims to send a representative to the parliament Under the Muslim Congress ticket. The SLMC was organized on the basis of religion not on language and that was different from other political parties. The SLMC promised to follow the Quran and the Sunnah(the way of the Prophet)<sup>19</sup>. Elaborating on the SLMC’s emphasis on Islam, Ashraff stated in Parliament,

Sir, we believe that Islam is a complete way of life, Islam should not be confined to the four walls of a mosque. As Muslims, it is our belief, Sir, that we must guide the ignorant. The difference of Islam, with respect to other religions, is that Islam shows to us how an orderly and a disciplined society can be built up, in fact, that is one of the major problems that we are facing today<sup>20</sup>.

Whether religious identity is strong enough to keep the community united amidst ethnic and political pressures is a point to be examined. Ashraff had discussions with Neelam Tiruchelvam and other Thamil Arasu Katchi leaders from time to time. He spoke about the grievances of his people with them. He also spoke with the late Thondaman and got an agreement, signed by him.

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19. Daily News, 22 July 1994, cited by Ameerdeen, V, Op.cit, p.132

20. M.H.M.Ashraff, 1989, “Parliamentary Debate”, Volume 55, No.7, p.1440.

The recognition of the Muslims of Sri Lanka as a minority group that needed representation in governance occurred long before the advent of the postcolonial nation state. The greatest challenge faced by the Muslim community in Sri Lanka was that it had to steer clear of the conflicts in society while preserving its own identity and safeguarding its interest. The SLMC represents the voice only of a section of the Muslims and that, too mainly from the Eastern Province. The party headquarters being in Colombo is an indication that the SLMC does not wish to remain a provincial party. But the party is still mainly based in the East, though that could change in the future. After the death of Ashraff, the leadership of the party was held jointly by his wife Ferial Ashraff and the former secretary of the party Rauf Hakeem. Both of them are not from the East and come from the Central hills. Ferial took up the leadership of the NUA(National Unity Alliance ). Ferial had been elected from the Digamadulla electorate, the fortress of her late husband but she is not a native of Digamadulla, which may weaken her clout as a representative of those people. Another factor that she has to confront is Male chauvinism among the Muslims.. At the moment the NUA functions as a Muslim- led National party in the Eastern Province. Recently, there have been more divisions in the party with M. Athallah, Rishard Bathiuddeen, and several others leaving to form their own breakaway parties. Before the death of the founder leader, there was a power competition among the SLMC's leaders. After the death of Ashraff, with the splintering of the party into several groups and the formation of the NUA as a separate party, there are different opinions among the factions.

Another weak point of the SLMC was the failure to encourage the socio-economic interest of the Muslim community. The Hakeem faction had been holding the top posts of the party and the appointment of MPs to parliament through the national

list had gone to persons who were rejected by voters. Therefore most of the founder members left the SLMC. SLMC's supporters were dwindling in number, because of the branch established by the UNP among the Muslims of Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. Further SLMC 's central ideology was not powerful enough to prevent problems arising within the party. Some Muslim activists think that the SLMC leadership has shifted from the East to the hills .The majority of Muslims live in the north and East, and they were unable to carry on their daily pursuits because of the LTTE terrorists. This is a major challenge facing the SLMC and it has to resolve their problems and settle them.

### **The Devolution of Power Discourse and the 'Eastern Question'**

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the constitution came about after the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. On 14 November 1987 the Parliament of Sri Lanka passed the 13th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka and the Provincial Councils Act No 42 of 1987. The Amendment was passed by a 2/3 majority in parliament. The Ministry of Provincial councils was established and the first Provincial council election was held in April 1988. In terms of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Sri Lanka would devolve some powers to the provinces. It was similar to the Indian set-up. It had three lists which detail power sharing between the central Government and the provinces. The Indo-Lanka Accord also required the merger of the Eastern and Northern provinces into one administrative Unit, for certain financial necessities in the provinces. The provinces would have an elected council, a Chief Minister and Ministers and a Provincial Governor.

Generally, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment has several weaknesses. President J.R.Jayawardene had not deviated from the unitary mindset. The devolution package under the amendment was a

half-baked product what was seemingly given with one hand was taken away by the other. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment has been a part of the political solution for Tamils in Sri Lanka Therefore India has been pushing post war Sri Lanka towards a devolution package building upon the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, under the current regime remains the only permitted option on power sharing. The Indo- Sri Lanka agreement contained three core elements. The 3<sup>rd</sup> element was deciding on the merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces by means of a referendum. Muslims opposed this. After the merger the percentage of the Muslim population in the Eastern Province would decline from 33 % to 17% in the combined North-East (Ameerdeen 2006: 198-199). Ashraff said that,

The Eastern province where the Muslims were 33per cent, were brought down to 17 per cent and they were made political slaves. That was reflected within twenty -four hours of the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord when the Tamil terrorists armed with weapons played hell right across the length and breadth of the Northern and Eastern provinces where the Muslims could not do anything.<sup>21</sup>

The Council of Muslims of Sri Lanka emphasized, “In the creation of the units of devolution of power, the interest of the Muslims ethnic community has been completely disregarded and no opportunity has been given to enable this community to work out and ensure its own safeguards in terms for the principles enunciated above”<sup>22</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution and the Provincial Council Act putting forward the provincial

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21. Parliamentary Debate, 20 June 1991, p.1829.

22. Memorandum sent to President J.R.Jayawardene by the Council of Muslims of Sri Lanka, “Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement and Sri Lanka Muslims in the Northern and Eastern Provinces”, Colombo, 9th September 1987.

council framework, have failed to meet the reasonable demands of the Muslims and to recognize their political and ethnic ambitions. The Muslim political organizations believe that the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment proposed for the North-East regions has made Muslims an insignificant minority.

The Muslim population is scattered throughout the country, two-thirds of them are outside the Eastern province. Therefore, the political strength of the Eastern Province would be the political strength of the entire Muslim community of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, Asraff stressed the need for a “community-oriented devolution of power” instead of a regional devolution<sup>23</sup>. This Amendment was imposed without any consultation with the political associations. Then Asraff felt that the government was trying to create a dissension between the Tamils and the Muslims by turning the referendum into a political issue.

In 1994, the People’s Alliance’ (PA) under the leadership of Mrs. Kumarathunga came to power. The PA government promised a new approach to the ethnic problem and a negotiated political settlement. At that time she promised to publish the PA’s “devolution proposals” in her election manifesto. Then Mrs. Chandrika Kumarathunga invited the LTTE for negotiations. Six rounds of discussions were held until 11<sup>th</sup> April 1995. However after four months the peace negotiations collapsed, because two Sri Lankan naval craft and two Sri Lankan air force planes (Ameerdeen 2006) were destroyed in the space of one week. Then the Government reined in the warmongers and started to formulate a constitutional frame work to offer the minority communities their due place and invited the three communities to attempt a consensual solution. The main feature of the constitutional proposals is the widespread distribution of political power among the people. The SLMC submitted the proposal on

23. Economic Review, vol.15, No.18, cited from Ameerdeen, V., Op.cit, p.200

establishing a particular Muslim unit in the Tamil speaking area of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The original concept paper for the Devolution of Power was presented in July 1995. It was a basic document with only three chapters and a commentary. After that a comprehensive document for constitutional reforms was presented in October 1997. This constitutional proposal offered a new idea on the in postcolonial State-Building process. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1995, Sri Lankan President Mrs. Kumarathunga at the inauguration of a new session of Parliament stated that “We have a vision of Sri Lanka where all communities can live safely and securely, where human dignity is valued, and equality of treatment is an accepted norm of public life. We believe that all communities must be given the space to express their identity and to participate fully in the life of the nation, whether it be at the national, provincial or local level”. The President first paid attention to her party, organized workshops and discussed the vision and policy. On the other hand, she organized some public awareness programmes such as the Sudu Nalum movement, the National Integration Programme unit and the Peace Education Programmes to promote the peace and devolution package. In August 2000, A Bill to repeal and replace the Constitution was finally rejected by the opposition.

According to that proposal a regional council will be established for every province. One of the regions would be constituted by re-demarcating the existing boundaries of the present North-East Province in full consultation with Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim interests. A South Eastern unit was mentioned in this proposal. The South Eastern unit included the Klmunai, Sammanthurai and Pottuvil areas. The Sinhalese people living in Ampara will decide by vote to join either a separate region or the Uva region. M.I.Mohedeen presented the concept of the South Eastern regional unit. Athaullah proposed that the north and East

should be separated. But the prominent Muslim political party SLMC did not present any opinion regarding this issue. However, in 2006, the SLMC put forward a proposal requesting a regional unit like Pondicherry in India.

### **Post-War State-Building and the Muslim Issue**

Sri Lanka's civil war that lasted 25 years produced a militarized country, political fragmentation, deep ethnic division, poor governance and a weak economy. Reconciliation, peace building and transformation of politics are essential for Sri Lanka to recover. The responsibility of the Sri Lankan government and the international community to ensure the processes of reconciliation, reintegration and rehabilitation are based upon principles of justice and humanity. This is the only way forward to heal the scars of war.

The LTTE discriminated against Muslims and in 1990 expelled some 75,000 Muslims from their areas. Most of them have since lived in government welfare centres. The UNHCR estimate gives the number of internally displaced to be 73,000. Further 917,000 Sri Lankans had sought asylum in 50 countries. 115,000 were in India.<sup>24</sup> The northern Muslims have been languishing in welfare centres for over twenty years. While the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict was one that centred on the two main ethnic groups, the Tamils and Sinhalese, the Northern Muslims who were displaced are a people who have been badly affected by it.

With the resettlement of Muslim IDPS it was not possible to get back their previous professions and properties. The latter were occupied by squatters or other illegal owners. In this situation, Sri Lanka has to bring in special property laws to protect the rights of thousands of people displaced by war. Existing Sri Lankan laws give squatters rights to claim ownership of a

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24. <http://www.idpproject.org>, accessed 26th December 2012.

property after occupying it for ten years without legal challenge, but the government has revoked such power by introducing legal reforms. The government has also made a policy statement on the resettlement of displaced people who were displaced by war and live in Puttalam and other places. Then at present most of the displaced people have migrated from Puttalam to Mannar and other places in the north. A few of them have already settled down in Puttalam and other parts of the country. They are not interested in moving to their homes for several reasons. They lost their professions (most of them are fisherman- from Mannar), properties in the north and they are established as professionals in peaceful other areas. The government has plans for economic development zones in those areas. The government is also engaged in infrastructure development projects in the region.

In the post war period the plight of women is a very important issue. The displaced women's experience is different from that of men, according to Farzana Haniffa's research. She says the displaced men speak about the resettlement process, cost of clearing the jungle, re-establishing agriculture, accessing state funds for temporary structures whereas the women speak of proper roofs over their heads, schools, hospitals, roads and the security of their girls.<sup>25</sup> Around 58% of the displaced population are women, who are affected by domestic violence. In welfare centres, women have been subjected to sexual harassment, abuse and rape by the security forces and paramilitary groups as well as by other men.

In Puttalam, problems are due to competition for resources between the displaced and the host community. There is also a social-religious dimension to the situation as many displaced people are Muslims. Generally, there were several problems

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25. <http://www.cmb.ac.lk/annual-research-symposium/annual-research-symposium-graduate-studies/minorities-and-the-peace-dividend-the-case-of-the-northern-muslims>

affecting the displaced people in welfare centres, such as the lack of employment opportunities, the inculcation of a “dependency syndrome” among the recipients of food support and other forms of humanitarian aid, and the propensity for anti- social behavior and crime produced by unemployment. These have been observed within, and outside, welfare centres (Peiris 2000: 356). There was communal discrimination in the services provided at welfare centres, especially those located in the Eastern province where there are IDPs belonging to all three ethnic groups (Peiris 2000: 356)

The Sri Lankan defence secretary and powerful members of the government maintained that the problem is a terrorist problem and not a political one. The war has been fought with little regard to human rights norms, and the law and order situation has steadily deteriorated in keeping with the systematic terror tactics adopted by the state. There is a deeply entrenched culture of impunity for human rights violations in Sri Lanka. The international organizations and donors’ prospects are not good as they record (Samarasinhe 2009). Many of the powerful in this regime have gone on record making anti minority sentiments. The Muslim parties too won a considerable amount of seats in the provincial council elections (2008/2009). The government had struck parallel deals with the TMVP and the Muslim parties with the promise of the chief minister position for the winner. Although the Muslim parties claim to have won the largest number of seats the government gave the position to Pillayan and placated the Muslim Hisbullah with the position of provincial health minister.

A significant political development in post-war Sri Lanka is that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has explicitly rejected secessionism and violent means of struggle without jettisoning self determination and articulated the demand of the Tamils of

the North & East for a negotiable federal solution within a united country. The TNA has also said that it respected the rights of the Muslims in the North & East. The federal idea is not new and the TNA has actually returned to the original position of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi – known as the Federal Party. However, the context has changed dramatically and the TNA's position is a response to the changed circumstances (Shanmugaratnam 2010).

Muslim community leaders who were interviewed recently claimed that there is a JHU (Jathika Hela Urumaya) driven campaign to undermine Muslims' economic activities in Colombo and the government has openly set in motion the Sinhalsation process of the East (Haniffa n.d.). Under such a dispensation, basing one's arguments on human rights norms and calling for preservation of minority rights have no hope of success. The All Ceylon Muslim Congress and the National congress that currently consist of a section of powerful Muslim MPs are close to the regime and seem willing to support the regime for certain compromised gains for the Muslim community. Risharth Bathiyuddeen and Hisbulla are members of the party and maintain good relations with the regime<sup>26</sup>

After becoming Independent, the Muslim factor played an important part in the postcolonial State-Building scenario. The Muslims tried to identify themselves by ethnicity and not by language and they joined both major political parties during the subsequent period. The Muslims and Tamils pursue different goals and have adopted different strategies in the Sri Lankan political process. The main political figures from the Muslim community adopted a different approach to that of the Tamils, working with the respective major political parties that controlled the state. Muslim parliamentarians were able to forge with respective

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26. <http://www.cmb.ac.lk/annual-research-symposium/annual-research-symposium-graduate-studies/minorities-and-the-peace-dividend-the-case-of-the-northern-muslims>

national parties of which they were a part. At the beginning of the 1980s Muslim politics took a different turn and the Colombo based leadership shifted to the rural east. But both these groups had supported the majority parties during the postcolonial era. Muslim parties have joined the majority ruling parties in order to contribute to the postcolonial State-Building process. They also managed to get notable achievements related to political, economic and social development. On the other hand the ethnic conflict severely affected the Muslim - Tamil relationship and the Muslims have lost their rights, lives and properties during the ethnic conflict.(ethnic cleansing, demand of ransom by Tamil militants and issue of traditional homeland). In the post-war period the Muslim role in the State-Building process has been less important for the Government. A meaningful political solution to the ethnic conflict should not be restricted only to the North and East but it should be extended to the south as well. Furthermore in a democratic country any minority group whether they are territorially or non-territorially based should not feel that they are discriminated against or marginalized. They should enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

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# IDENTIFICATION OF ETHNICITY WITH ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS OF THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE IN SRI LANKA

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## Introduction

Economic functions of the state have seemingly been given a negligible attention in state reform projects, even though the structure, policies and actions of the state influence, to a great extent, on the material wellbeing of different ethnic and religious groups in diverse ways. However, postcolonial State-Building projects in Sri Lanka have considered ethnicity as the focal point. In order to determine a feasible basis for the post-war state in Sri Lanka, examining the identification of ethnicity with functions of the state is essential for identifying the principles on which the state should be built. As Sugiyama exposted in 2000, ethnicity is a very contentious term which has been defined to signify self-consciousness of a group of people united or closely related by shared experience such as language, religious belief, and common heritage. While race usually denotes the attributes of a group, ethnic identity signifies responses of a group. The identity of a group is defined versus another group and how this identity becomes psychologically and socially important for a member or

members of a group. Ethnicity is seemingly a group consciousness originating from imaginations of a group of people based on certain linguistic, cultural, religious and social concerns and aspirations. When the existing state is ethnicized and religionized, the aspirations for secessionism based on ethnicity and religion tend to emerge or intensify. In such a situation, 'nation' is defined in terms of ethnicity and/or religion, which includes some element of descent from previous generations so that historical evidence is sought to justify the 'perceived collective identity' of the group. According to this conceptualization, there is an implied claim of ethnic and religious essentialism in the functions of the state, which recognizes ethnicity and religion as an essence assumed to remain constant overtime. (Sugiyama 2000) This distinction between 'race' and 'ethnicity' is crucial for our discussion in this paper, because only Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils seemingly have been making the case for two different ethnicities by citing historical evidence for their unique heritages, while all the other racial groups in Sri Lanka chose to remain non-committal to an assertion of a heritage-based identification of their existence.

Postcolonial political discourse appears to have been dominated by debates over ethnicity in the functions of the state. Ethnic concerns or interests as they are perceived by different groups have been taken as the dominant focus of attention in struggles and discourses of state reformation in Sri Lanka (de Silva 1991, Dharmadasa 1992a, 1992b, Seneviratne 1999, Wilson 2000, Mankenthiran 2003). Ethnic politics have also seemingly played a central role in defining and establishing economic functions of the state during the postcolonial period. However, ethno-religious implications of economic functions of the postcolonial state have been given a negligible attention by the ruling class.

As census reports indicate, a several racial groups existed at the time of independence from British in 1948 in Sri Lanka.

Racial groups included Sinhalese, Indian Tamils, Sri Lankan Tamils, Burghers, Malays, Chettiers (or Kochchi), Moors, Jahs, Kaffirs, Malayalis, and Veddas.<sup>1</sup> While Sinhalese constituted the largest majority, all the other racial groups formed the minority. All these racial groups appear to exist in Sri Lanka even at present in different proportions.

From a number of racial groups existed in Sri Lanka, only have Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils been asserting their ethnicities. These two racial groups have claimed that they are two different ethnic groups by citing their historical pasts based on socio-cultural heritages. A large number of studies have traced the historical pasts of Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils, and thereby making cases for Sinhalese ethnicity and Sinhala ethno-nationalism, and Tamil ethnicity and Tamil ethno-nationalism (de Silva 1991, Dharmadasa 1992a, 1992b, de Silva 1986, Seneviratne 1999, Balasingham 2003). Identification of heritage in terms of religions has been an integral part of the identification of ethnicities by Sinhalese and Tamils. The other races either assimilated or integrated into these two groups or continued their social, political, and economic existence without asserting their 'ethnicity'. Sinhalese who were the majority of the population made up the majority in the state. It also appears that all other racial groups have chosen to develop various partnerships with the state either by becoming a part of the government or by actively participating in the governing process from outside within the democratic framework. However, Sri Lankan Tamils chose to be delinked from the state during the postcolonial period by asserting an ethnicity-based federal state or separate Tamil state. Ethnicization of economic functions of the state could have happened either towards Sinhala ethno-nationalism or Tamil ethno-nationalism or both during the

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1. <http://www.mongabay.com>

postcolonial period. The other racial groups have asserted their collective identities in the ethnicity-based State-Building projects or conflicts on the state in Sri Lanka.

According to Milikowski (2000) 'ethnicization refers to the formation of social boundaries aiming to protect the integrity of (presumed) ethnic-cultural heritages, while de-ethnicization refers to the 'undoing' of such boundaries'. Ethnicization of the functions of the state appears to take place in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies in the State-Building process. In fact, ethnicization could ensue through diverse efforts of the state by recognizing either of presumed ethnic-cultural heritages of a single ethnic group or those of multiple ethnicities or religions.

Ethno-religious implications of the postcolonial state have not been thought of or in most cases neglected in the postcolonial State-Building process. The 'economic functions' of the state appear to have dominated human civilizations throughout history. Economic functions of the state have been the focal point of economic thought since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. First, according to the liberal view in 1700s, the state was considered to function as a 'guardian'. (Smith 1904) Second, since 1930s, Keynesians identified more economic functions of the state in addition to what was emphasized by classical liberals. (Keynes 1936) Third, the whole of political, economic and social changes of the 20th century has become an inspiration to search for an answer to new questions mainly connected with directions and range of economic functions of the state. Finally, in the face of unreliability of the market mechanism and the state at the same time, every well-functioning economy is thought to require economic functions of the state to constitute a certain balance between the state and the market (Stiglitz 2006). In addition, contemporary economies function in thoroughly different conditions shaped by globalization, internationalization, integration, liberalization,

infomatization and technitization. Therefore, there is a case for complementarily bigger roles for the state and markets. However, the greater economic function of the state in contemporary societies is limited to facilitating and protecting a fully-fledged market economy.

In contemporary societies, one of the key questions, which needs due regard in state reform projects, is as to how should the ethnicity be treated in defining the nature, the structure, and the character of the economic function of the state. One possible way of dealing with ethnicity in founding the state is to identify it with the functions of the state by treating different groups, who tend to identify themselves belonging to different ethnic groups, in specific ways. In this approach to State-Building, collective ethnic identities are given the fundamental emphasis. Under this project, power sharing arrangements and ethnicity based and religion-based quota arrangements are proposed through affirmative actions. An alternative way of dealing with ethnicity and religion in regard to economic function of the state is to eliminate the identification of it with the economic function, or with all functions, of the state by recognizing the rights and the freedoms of the 'citizen' irrespective of one's ethnicity, religion or caste. The objectives of the paper are to examine as to what and how the postcolonial state in Sri Lanka attempted to identify ethnicity with economic function of the state by focusing on selected functions including land entitlements, state-sponsored industrial development, public employment, and public housing. This paper uses a thematic approach in structuring the paper rather than trying to examine how state's functions change overtime in a chronological order during the postcolonial period.

The paper is structured as follows. Section two briefly summarizes the economic policy context within which economic functions of the postcolonial state have been designed and

implemented. Section 3 will examine ethnic implications of land entitlement schemes. Fourth section will discuss ethnic implications of industrial development efforts. Fifth section will discuss ethnicization of employment in the public sector during the postcolonial period. Sixth section discusses ethnic implications of home-ownership schemes implemented by the state since 1980s. Seventh section will discuss how Tamils ethnicized their economic grievances through an ethnicity-based federal state project and an ethnicity-based separate state project. Final section will present concluding remarks and policy implications.

## **Postcolonial Economic Policy Context**

Since this paper focuses on the question as to whether there was a process of ethnicization of economic functions of the state during the postcolonial period, we will briefly discuss the main features of the postcolonial economic policy context. In 1998, Donald Snodgrass classified postcolonial policy regimes into 6 important categories including; (a) economic populism with an open economy (1948-1956), (b) economic populism with economic controls (1956-1965), (c) partial liberalization of the economy (1965-1970), (d) resumption of controlled economy (1970-1977), (e) policy reforms for creating a market economy (1977-1983), and (f) strengthening and consolidation of market economy alongside Tamil ethno-nationalists' armed struggle. Let's briefly see what constituted these policy regimes (Snodgrass 1998).

First, the state adopted economic populism with an open economy during the initial postcolonial period (1948-1956). Free economy inherited from the British based on certain industries, private plantation sector, private retail and wholesale industries, and private banking systems were in place. A wide range of welfare measures were implemented to a large segment of population.

Free education and free healthcare system strengthened and continued. Land settlements and agricultural development in the dry zone was a major focus (Karunatilake 1987). These policies and actions were implemented by the state giving emphasis to economic and social problems at the time by not considering racial, religious or ethnic implications of the actions. Economic development gradually slowed and external instability increased (Snodgrass 1998). The economic policy during this period did not directly affect the minorities, who were mainly engaged in non-agricultural occupations, negatively.

Second, the state switched to economic controls with economic populism (1956-1965) under left-supported Sinhalese-dominated state. In 1956, a wave of accumulated cultural, political, social and material grievances helped Bandaranaike led government to change the direction, the nature and the extent of the economic function of the state (Wriggns 1960). During this period, building of certain institutions such as Cooperative Wholesale Corporation (CWC) affected the main livelihoods of minorities who were engaged in retail and wholesale trading as their one of the main occupations in addition to the state jobs. The state interventions into financial system increased. Import substituting industrialization was adopted with various restrictions on foreign trade and investment. Foreign exchange was severely controlled. The size of the state expanded which paved the way for recruitment to the state sector creating employment opportunities for many. Capital account came under severe restraint Snodgrass 1998). All markets seriously shrunk and private economic activity tended to seriously weaken as a result of dominating presence of the state in the economy which significantly changed the livelihood choices and opportunities available to people, especially minorities. Individual economic rights and freedoms were significantly suppressed while the state

became the provider of almost all economic wants of the people.

Third, during 1965-1970, partial liberalization of the economy was adopted with the assistance of the multilateral financial institutes. Welfare expenditure was significantly reduced. Exchange Entitlement Certificate Scheme together with devaluation of currency was adopted. Import substituting industrialization was continued through state corporations and state sponsored small and medium industries, while massive agricultural and settlement schemes were implemented (Snodgrass 1998). The state sector was further expanded during this period irrespective of liberalization. The state attempted to improve economic rights and freedoms of individuals, families and firms. But, these policies short lived and, in 1970, new regime shifted to a fully-fledged controlled economy.

Fourth, a fully-fledged controlled economy along with various populist economic measures was introduced in 1970 (1970-1977). The economy operated within a very volatile external environment as a result of oil price hike, balance of payment instabilities, and foreign exchange problems. The state tilted more towards the communist bloc irrespective of non-aligned rhetoric. Through cooperatives and CWC, the whole trading sector was taken over by the state for its control. Plantation sector was nationalized. Stringent price controls were introduced for almost all products and services. Financial repression was strengthened. State sector was further expanded which resulted in people finding employment in the state sector. Agricultural development was spearheaded while land ownership restrictions were also introduced. As a result of these, private economic activity was reduced to a negligible level. People had to depend on the state for almost all their needs (Snodgrass 1998). Individuals belonging to all ethnicities/races had to engage in their economic functions under economically repressive regimes which had the power to determine who should do what and how

as the state effectively eliminated individual economic rights and freedoms. All citizens had to maintain their livelihoods at the mercy of politicians and bureaucrats. The restrictive trade regime and controlled economy were seemingly beneficial to Sinhalese as the state allocated resources, jobs, and benefits on its discretion. Livelihood opportunities of the minorities were seriously threatened. It has been observed that economic functions of the state during the postcolonial period were highly favourable to Sinhalese while livelihoods of minorities were severely endangered. As Bruton 'et al.' states,

“Undoubtedly, the general philosophy of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party fit well with most Sinhalese, as indeed it had in the years from 1955 to 1965 . . .”  
(Bruton 1998)

Fifth, Sri Lanka abandoned the controlled economy and graced a market-oriented economy in 1977 through a series of policy reforms aimed at creating a fully-fledged market economy (1977-1983). Unilateral liberalization efforts of the state included removal or reduction of import controls and export licensing, provision of various tax incentives for foreign investors to start industries and services sector firms in industrial enclaves created by the state, creation of an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Katunayake, removal of price controls for most products, provision of food subsidies, introduction of a series of incentives and subsidies for agriculture and industries, implementation of Accelerated Mahaweli Development programme which alienated a large amount of state land by giving entitlements to peasantry, introduction of state sponsored one million public housing scheme, liberalization of exchange rates and capital account, establishment of Greater Colombo Economic Commission to promote and facilitate private investment, establishment of Export Development Board to stimulate industrial exports

under export-oriented industrialization and introduction of various other subsidies in the social sector (Snodgrass 1998). The policy switches towards market economy accompanied by stringent interventions into the economy in new ways resulted in increasing public spending financed by foreign aid and debt. Large amounts of foreign finances flew into the economy through aid for non-governmental organizations. Even though a market oriented economy was introduced, the state's role, though different, increased remarkably in agriculture, industries, public housing and public employment. Initial gains from liberalization of economy, especially trade liberalization, appeared to have gone to the minorities, especially Sri Lankan Tamils, as their main occupations were in trading sector. This might have created racial hatred on the basis of material grievances as economic benefits and opportunities of the new economy were basically derived by the minorities including Sri Lankan Tamils. This might be the reason as to why racial riots in 1983 existed only among urban populations. Racial riots in 1983 virtually eliminated the possibility of Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil racial mixing under a single state.<sup>2</sup> After 1983, the presence of Sri Lankan Tamils in trading sector significantly reduced.

Finally, the period starting from 1983 marked further liberalization of the economy along with state's economic interventions in various fields while armed struggle aimed at Tamil ethno-nationalist separate state intensified into a fully-fledged non-conventional war. During this period, more EPZs and industrial parks (IPs) were established. A massive infrastructure development project was implemented through foreign aid and

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2. It can be hypothesized that racial violence against Sri Lankan Tamils in 1983 was caused by conflicts over economic resources, benefits, and opportunities that were generated from trade liberalization because liberalization offered greater benefits to minorities, especially Sri Lankan Tamils, in initial years. The fact that racial violence basically existed in urban areas and not in the rural areas in Sri Lanka testifies to this effect.

debt to develop communication, transport, roads, seaports, and airports. Financial sector and capital account of the balance of payments were further liberalized. Various subsidized credit schemes were introduced targeting agriculture and industries, most of which were later written off. Settlements-oriented agricultural development functions of the state further intensified with the Accelerated Mahaweli Development programme. Mahapola higher education scholarship scheme for all university entrants were introduced while free school textbooks and uniforms were introduced for all students (Snodgrass 1998). The services sector was further expanded. The size of the state was expanded rather than shrinking during the market-oriented policy regime creating employment opportunities in the state.

The postcolonial economic functions of the state were practiced within these policy frameworks. State's influence in the economy has remained very high during the postcolonial period even though the functional role went through an evolutionary process abandoning old functions and adding new functions. However, there is a dearth of studies on ethnicization of economic functions of the state in Sri Lanka, though some have examined as to how economic factors contributed to armed struggles. In an in-depth study of the case of twin armed conflicts in Sri Lanka, Sirimal Abeyratne concluded that fundamental contradictions in the national development policy in the restrictive trade regime of Sri Lanka were at the heart of the country's twin political conflict (Abeyratne 2004). Nithiyanandan examined economic factors that contributed to the Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, in which he has explained how economic problems stimulated Tamil nationalism (Nithiyanandan 1987). However, ethnicization of economic functions of the state has not been researched in Sri Lanka. This paper examines selected economic functions of the state during the postcolonial period which were designed and implemented

under these broader policy frameworks to understand as to how the state treated ethnicity with its functions. We will examine as to whether and how these economic functions of the state contributed to ethnicization of the functions of the state, and material grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

## **Land Entitlements and Settler Farmers**

Sri Lanka has placed its main thrust on non-plantation agricultural development in its development efforts during the postcolonial period. The state has functioned as the investor in land, labour, capital and technology in developing agricultural sector. Much of the state investment was devoted to building irrigation systems and settlement schemes. Since agricultural development programmes of the state became the most significant factor in addressing economic problems of the citizens, ethnic impacts of these programmes are vital. It is, therefore, imperative to examine as to whether there has been a process of ethnicization of land entitlements programmes of the country during the postcolonial period. The paper basically focuses on the period from 1948 to late 1980s.

Endowment and entitlements are crucial for any person or family to maintain livelihoods and thereby economic wellbeing in an agriculture dominated economy. Land distribution schemes of Sri Lanka should, therefore, be understood as means of empowering people with endowments and entitlements. Two different schools in economics have emphasized the importance of endowments in human wellbeing. The efficiency school emphasizes the efficiency considerations arising from endowments (Eggertsson 1990, Furubotn and Richter 1997), while the distribution school emphasizes equality considerations of endowments and entitlements in wellbeing of a person and a family (Demsetz 1967, Barzel 1997). As Korf explained

“Viewed in the light of the new institutional economics, property rights are viewed as social institutions, including formal legal codes and informal social norms which define and enforce the range of privileges available to individuals with respect to specific economic resources....” (Korf 2003)

Korf also states that entitlements play a crucial role in generating benefits for humans. He states that

“... the question is who ultimately gets the effective command over making actual economic use of a resource and its products. These entitlements are influenced by the interplay of institutions (e.g. customary rules, division of labor, power). Local institutions can either promote or hinder the mobilization of some endowments (e.g. social capital) that are necessary to make effective use of others (e.g. natural capital). The entitlements which are derived from endowments in turn enhance people’s capabilities, i.e., what people can do or be with their entitlements” (Korf 2003).

Postcolonial agricultural development efforts have been characterized by distribution of re-irrigated ancient agricultural lands and newly irrigated agricultural lands to peasantry. The objective was to create a rural landowning class through a well planned process of establishing human settlements across the dry zone as well as other regions of the country. The settlements-oriented agricultural development schemes included a large number of settlement schemes. These schemes were peculiarly dubbed by politicians, bureaucrats and academics as ‘colonization schemes’ (Peiris 1996) which gave an implicit meaning that the state is grabbing somebody else’s land and transferring them for

others to own. In addition to these large settlement schemes, a number of other land distribution schemes were also implemented including village expansion schemes, highland settlements, youth settlement schemes, regularisation of encroachments, middle class allotments, land grants (special provisions), and rainfed farming settlements (Peiris 1996).

Table 1 and 2 provide data on the number of families settled under various land distributing schemes in the Dry Zone, and the amount of land alienated by the state. A large volume of land area was also alienated by the state among these families. A total of 210,405 families had been settled by 1996 under these schemes. Each family was given entitlements ranging from 3 to 5 acres of land, along with various other subsidies. A total of 830,833 hectares of land were distributed under various different schemes.

**Table 1: Land Alienation in Settlement Schemes of the Dry Zones, up to the end of 1991**

Number of Families settled on farm land			
Period	Average per year	Total for period	Cumulative total at end of period
Up to the end of 1938	-	5,596	5,596
1939-1948	526	5,528	10,854
1949-1958	4,617	46,165	57,019
1959-1968	2,747	27,474	84,498
1969-1978	2,293	22,399	106,892
1979-1988w	8,011	80,113	187,005
1989-1991	7,800	23,400	210,405

Source: Peiris, G.H. *Development and Change in Sri Lanka: Geographical Perspectives*. Kandy: ICES, 1996, p189

One needs to look at the ethnic dimensions of state sponsored land entitlement programmes to identify as to whether ethnicity has been identified with economic functions of

the state. Existing data and estimates indicate that 81 percent of the cumulative total was distributed among Sinhalese peasantry (Peiris 1996). The rest was distributed among the Muslims and the Sri Lankan Tamils. There are no records that either the Indian Tamils, or the Burgher or any other minority got any land entitlements. Sinhalese received an 81 percent of the total which is quite higher than their share in the population.

There has been a large amount of investment in agricultural related areas. These include building of large number of tanks and irrigation canals to supply irrigation water (Peiris 1996). A number of permanent state institutions were also created to maintain these irrigation systems and to provide various subsidies. A number of R&D institutions were also built and maintained from the tax-payers money. Tax money generated from other sectors of the economy has been diverted to maintain these irrigation systems. In addition to providing free irrigated land entitlements, settlers in Sri Lanka's agricultural sector were given a number of government subsidies. These include fertilizer subsidy, subsidized credits schemes, buying of paddy under higher than market determined prices, infrastructure development, research and development subsidies and subsidies on environmental protection (Peiris 1996). Economic surplus generated in other productive sectors of the economy has continuously been diverted to provide subsidized credits and various other subsidies to agriculture which became the destroyer of much of the surplus of the economy to generate net negative surplus. Agriculture received a supreme position in policy and investment actions of Sri Lanka during the postcolonial period.

**Table 2: Land Alienation by the State 1953-1985**

Scheme	Amount Alienated (ha)
Major colonization	175,941
Village expansion	357,239
Highland settlements	13,565
Youth settlement	7,964
Regularization of encroachments	205,562
Middle class allotments	55,019
Land grants	9,980
Rainfed farming settlements	5,363
Total	830,833

Source: Madduma Bandara, C.M. 'Land use and land settlements: The last fifty years and some thoughts on the future policy', in A.D.V.de S. Indraratne (ed) *Fifty years of Sri Lanka's Independence: A Socio-Economic Review*, Colombo: Sri Lanka Institute of Social and Economic Studies, 1998.

Since Sri Lankan Tamils have been a negligible minority in the non-plantation agricultural sector, one would interpret that these massive investments and subsidies were beneficial to Sinhalese peasantry and not to the Sri Lankan Tamils. For instance, agricultural subsidies have also been interpreted by Tamil Diaspora as implicit ethnic preference policies created for Sinhalese peasantry. With reference to financial subsidies given to various sectors, the Tamil Guardian reported in 2011 that,

“Eighteen months after the end of the war, while Sri Lanka's government is today providing cheap finance to Sinhala recipients and protecting them from non-repayment, Tamil entrepreneurs' efforts to set up industries in the Northeast is being actively hampered. The Sinhala population also benefits from the services of state owned agencies such as the Sri Lanka Mortgage and Investment Bank (SMIB), which provides cheap, long term loans for housing to middle and low income customers. 37% of SMIB's total lending is non-performing, the LBO reported.

In other words, over a third of borrowers are not making repayments. . .”<sup>3</sup>

As Sunil Bastion asserted, land reforms and settlement schemes in Sri Lanka have had a special link with the postcolonial State-Building project in Sri Lanka (Bastion n.d.). Since 1950s, various state sponsored studies emphasized distribution of land among the Sinhalese peasantry as means of giving back their lost land during the colonial period. Establishment of the Department of Upcountry Peasant Rehabilitation testifies to this effect. Through the settlement schemes, the postcolonial state has positively contributed to ethnicizing the land entitlements. An implicit ethnic preference policy appears to have been adopted in implementing these settlement schemes. As Bastion explains:

“Probably the decision to give a greater weightage to areas defined as rural was the first idea that contributed to the special relationship with rural Sinhalese in the project of State-Building in Sri Lanka. This idea was legitimized with the notion that rural areas had suffered a greater degree of disadvantages during the colonial period, and they should be given a priority in the future development of the country. The greater weightage given to the rural electorates was expected to ensure greater rural representation in parliament. It was argued that this would ensure that rural areas, where majority of Sinhala people lived, would not be forgotten in formulating development plans. From this point onwards the political elite—from whatever background they came from—could not ignore this Sinhala rural electoral power.” (Bastion n.d.)

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3. Tamil Guardian 2011, p 2

According to Bastion, providing land entitlements to Sinhalese peasantry was justified on a number of grounds (Bastion n.d.). The policy objective of making the country self sufficient in rice while creating a self esteemed rural landowning class mainly benefitted the Sinhalese peasantry. Distribution of land entitlements among Sinhalese peasantry was also justified on the notion of rural-urban divide, or perceived dichotomy between urban and rural areas. The main argument was that rural areas were exploited by urban population and there was a transfer of resources from the former to the latter. This perceived rural urban transfer of resources was identified to be unfair for the rural masses so that distribution of land entitlements was justified. The idea of decentralized development during the postcolonial period is also seemingly serving the interests of the Sinhalese peasantry. Bastion further state that “this is based on a belief that answers to development problems are found far away from the centres of power which are normally found in urban centres”. These land settlement schemes together with various rural agricultural development programmes were catalytic in ideological construction of Sinhala ethno-nationalism that occupies a privileged position in rural areas.

Distribution of land entitlements through various projects throughout the postcolonial period also fostered ethnicization of the Northern and the Eastern regions which were left to be dominated by Tamils and Muslims. As Peiris states,

“... In response to a demand by Tamil political parties that the land allocated to Tamil settlers should be from Systems A and B that are located in proximity to the present population concentrations of that ethnic group in the Eastern Province, the Right Bank Channel segment of System B in its entirety and approximately 90% of the land to be developed in

System A have been set apart for Tamil and Muslim settlers” (Peiris n.d).

This makes it clear that the demand of the Tamil political parties were based on their belief of a traditional homeland, and the state has given into that demand by allocating land entitlements in the System A and B of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme to Tamil speaking people.

The fact that the land entitlement policy of the postcolonial state significantly contributed for ethnicization of the Northern and the Eastern regions of the country is evident from the modalities designed by the postcolonial state to provide land entitlements. In providing land entitlements in the northern and the eastern regions, the following priorities were to be observed: (i) land in two provinces to be granted in the first instance to landless in the district; (ii) to Tamil speaking persons resident in the Northern and the Eastern regions; and (iii) to other citizens of Sri Lanka, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the Island (Ponnambalam 1994). The state appears to have determined that the Northern and the Eastern regions are traditional habitats of the Tamil speaking people. The state policy of identifying the Northern and the Eastern provinces with traditional habitats of the Tamil speaking people has stimulated ethnicized separatism.

However, the number of Tamil settlers was very small compared to their share in population. One would argue that Tamils were not willing to be settled in farms, so that there were no takers of agricultural land during these settlement schemes, though offered. There is a fundamental socio-economic reason for this preference by the Sri Lankan Tamils. Since the Northern part of Sri Lanka is not highly amenable to paddy farming due to geographical and climatic reasons, majority of Tamils have been engaged in non-farm employment so that the preferred

occupations of Tamil speaking people were not in agriculture. Sri Lankan Tamils were basically concentrated in state employment, trading sector and other services sectors, albeit their presence to a little extent is in agriculture, fisheries and industries. Therefore, paddy-targeted settlement schemes were not meant to be mainly for the Sri Lankan Tamils who lived in the Northern region.

In defense of the amount of land alienated to Sinhalese peasantry and to counter the claims by other ethnic groups that Sinhalese received an unfairly big chunk of land from the total alienated, Peiris attempts to justify with various arguments that the percentage of land given to Sinhalese was fair (Peiris 1996). However, the fact that the distribution of land entitlements positively contributed to ethnicization of land entitlements and thereby paved the way for Sinhala ethno-nationalism, and ethnicized secessionist demand by the Tamils as they have been settled along the areas that they claim their traditional homeland cannot be ruled out. The most important aspect of this is that Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils were settled in different locations rather than allowing them to choose. It was the state which decided where to settle people from each ethnicity. This mechanism paved the way for separate areas to be dominated by different ethnicities. The choice of settlement locations for each ethnicity by the state has seemingly been implicitly determined by presuming traditional habitats of each ethnicity. Ethnic segregation has been adopted in creating settlements through 'ethnic enclaves' in which Sinhala Settlements, Tamil Settlements and Muslim Settlements were built.

It is a well-established fact that spatial distribution of ethnicities/racial groups tend to determine secessionist aspirations. So, creation of racial or ethnic enclaves through settlement schemes leads to separatist agendas. By analyzing the State-Building process of Singapore, Huat argues that,

“Spatial distribution of racial groups is a crucial determinant in the race relations of a nation. For example, the new establishment or historical presence of a racial enclave provides the particular demographic minority group with a geographically bounded space, a physical territory, which enables the group to segregate itself from others and which can be ideologically transformed into a ‘homeland’ that needs to be defended and a base to launch attacks on other groups in the event of racial violence” (Huat 2005).

Sri Lanka is seemingly a classic case of creating state-sponsored spatial ethnic/racial enclaves through an intensive and a large number of settlements. In an article titled “Ethnicized Entitlements”, Korf has provided empirical evidence based on case studies for the process of ethnicization of land entitlements through various projects in Sri Lanka. Korf argues that,

“... The capture of colonization schemes by politicians and the politicization of land issues is thus not confined to the areas subject to ethnicised disputes but are a general feature of the political system in Sri Lanka.... In the long term, the cycle of reproduction of perceived grievances associated with ethnic inequality can only be overcome if credible, effective state institutions are recreated that operate in an ethnically neutral manner” (Korf 2003).

This evidence suggests that the state has identified ethnicity with economic functions of the state. The postcolonial state has seemingly aimed to engineer a process of reverse discrimination to create the expected parity between Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils. Through the design and the mechanism, land entitlement

schemes significantly contributed to Sinhala ethno-nationalism and Tamil ethno-nationalism.

## **Ethnic Implications of Industrial Development**

This section basically discusses ethnic implications of industrial development actions of the state until late 1990s. The second major development function of the postcolonial state was industrial development that gained prominence during the market economy regime. Industrial development in Sri Lanka began with the establishment of some industries by the British during the Second World War. During 1956 to 1977, industrial development took place under the import substitution industrial strategy. The basic focus was on using local raw materials and intermediate technology thereby creating labour intensive industries. Industries were established as state corporations whereby the ownership and the control were done through a process of state interventions. Since Sinhala became the functional language in the state corporations, most of the Tamils were not able to get employment in these corporations. Industrial development efforts through state corporations under import substitution have also seemingly contributed to the process of ethnicization as most employment opportunities created were given to Sinhalese peasantry through political patronage as a result of the electoral realities of the Sri Lanka's model of parliamentary democracy.

Industrial development under the export promotion strategy after 1977 has also taken place through an intense intervention process of the state which operated as the facilitator rather than the doer. In order to facilitate industrial development, the state created either export processing zones in which quota hopping foreign direct investment was promoted while industrial parks were established to facilitate local development. The state also developed road networks, seaports, telecommunications;

provided tax exemptions, tax holidays, various industrial and export subsidies; simplified business start-up requirements; and provided other basic amenities in these enclave areas to facilitate private investment. The Greater Colombo Economic Commission which facilitated industrial development was confined to Greater Colombo area until 1991. To facilitate industrial development, the country's trade regime was liberalized which initially benefitted mostly the minorities. The initial advantage created for the minorities gradually receded as a result of escalation of armed conflict. The Sri Lankan elite of the upper income strata belonging to all ethnicities became a part of the employers among foreign investors, albeit many of the business elites in the Sri Lankan Tamils migrated to other countries, while Sinhalese peasantry basically became the employees by providing cheap labour.

Post-1977 industrial development appears to have been driven by a number of factors. Location decisions of Export Processing Zones and/or Special Economic Zones were based on access to seaports, essential other services to the investors, and labour. As a result, EPZs and IPs were established in the Western province and adjacent areas to the Western province. As shown in Map 1, all EPZs and IPs have been established in the heartland of the areas dominated by Sinhalese. EPZs and IPs were located in Gampaha, Mahanuwara, Kurunegala, Galla, Kalutara, Kegalla and Hambanthota. These industrial zones were seemingly targeting the Sinhalese peasantry in the wet zone that made it possible for enterprises to find cheap labour and politicians to accumulate Sinhalese votes.

Tamil-nationalists could have easily interpreted these industrial zones as projects aimed at supporting Sinhalese. Prior to 1985, apart from 3 state industrial corporations established in the Northern and the Eastern regions, no other industrial activity took place. The government that was in power from 1965 to

1970 wanted to create a bi-polar industrial zone linking Colombo and Trincomalee which never materialized. In 1970s, there were talks about starting an industrial zone in Trincomalee. However, during 1977 to 1983, the government was not sensitive to ethnic implications of industrial locations. Tamils could have found off-farm employment that they lost due to ethnicization of public employment, creation of cooperative retail shops and CWE for eliminating private wholesale and retail trade, and restrictive trade regime if significant access and opportunities could have been created in the services and industrial sector by linking Jaffna/Trincomalee-Colombo through a bi-polar industrial zone.

### **Map 1: Locations of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and Industrial Parks (IPs) in Sri Lanka**



Source: [www.investsrilanka.com](http://www.investsrilanka.com)

One could argue that rather than burning the public library and creating riots in Jaffna in the early 1980s, the state could have established an export processing zone or an industrial park in Jaffna or Trincomalee. There were necessary human resources, access to seaports and other logistics for such an enterprise. Peace was not a serious issue at that time. However, the state never considered during 1977 to 1982 to establish an export processing zone in Jaffna or in Trincomalee, which can be

interpreted to mean that the state was not concerned about the ethnic implications of these industrial zones.

State sponsored 'industrial enclaves' have been created through a well-designed policy framework since 1977 (Athukorala 1997). Industrial zones are, usually, set up in underdeveloped parts of the country; the rationale is that the zones will attract employers and thus reduce poverty and unemployment, and stimulate the area's economy. These zones are often used by multinational corporations to set up factories to produce goods (such as clothing or shoes). A large amount of state funds are invested to create infrastructure and other facilities, subsidies including foregone income due to tax breaks.

**Table 3: Geographical Distribution of Garment Establishments and Number of Employees, 1991**

Province	Establishments		Employment	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Western	638	72	181,329	65
Southern	51	6	19,488	7
Central	54	6	17,036	6
Eastern	8	1	3,512	1
North Western	6	7	22,398	8
North Central	21	2	10,426	5
Uva	20	2	6,559	2
Sabaragamuwa	36	4	15,419	6
Northern	3	< 1	634	< 1
Total	891	100	276,821	100

TVEC. Sector Profile – Garment Industry, Industry Sector Profile Series, Issue No. 1, November 1999, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission, Labour Market Information Unit, Colombo, 1999

Table 3 provides data on the distribution of industrial establishments and employment across geographical regions. The choice of location of industrial establishments tells a clear story. Out of total establishments, 72 percent were located in the

Western province. Northern and the Eastern provinces only far less than 2 percent of total industrial establishments. The Western province dominated industrial development actions of the postcolonial state. Facilitating the investors with infrastructure, and easy access to airports and seaports were the target rather than the beneficiaries, so that most provinces were neglected which had ethnic implications.

Ethnic consequences of these locations and other policy decisions are also clear. Table 4 shows the distribution of employment in different sectors. The data makes it clear that the employment opportunities created outside of the Northern and the Eastern regions of the country were basically beneficial to the Sinhalese. The fact that industrial development efforts since mid 1980 were rationalized on the basis of Sinhala uprising in 1980s in the South would be interpreted to argue that these projects addressed the material grievances of Sinhalese.

**Table 4: Percentage of Workers in each Industry by Ethnicity relative to Total Working Population**

Sector	Sinhala (%)	Tamil (%)	Moor (%)	Other (%)
Manufacturing	2	0	0	0
Agriculture	27	1	0	0
Mining	2	0	0	0
Construction	1	0	0	0
Utility	5	1	1	1
Trade/hotel	8	0	0	0
Transport and Communication	7	1	0	0
Finance	30	1	2	0
Public Administration	5	0	0	0

Source: Ajwad Mohamed Ihsan and Pradeep Kurukulasuriya. Ethnic and Gender Wage Disparities in Sri Lanka. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2859, 2002, p 20. Estimates based on Sri Lanka Integrated Survey 1999/2000, excluding North and East regions of Sri Lanka

Some appears to interpret that ethnic minorities are adequately represented in the industry by citing the ownership of some companies. The fact that the two largest apparel companies in Sri Lanka, the Brandix and MAS Holdings, were owned by a Muslim and a Tamil family is misinterpreted. The middle and the lower social and economic strata of the Moors and Tamils were not adequately and equally represented in industrial sector in Sri Lanka. For instance, though 85 percent of total working population of the garment industry is women, only does a negligible percentage represent Tamils and Moors. The Lankanewspapers website reported that “the Tamil women workers are a minuscule and negligible minority in the Sri Lankan garment industry”.<sup>4</sup>

Underlying premises of industrial development could have therefore been driven by electoral realities generated by the first pass the post system of parliamentary democracy prior to 1977 and proportional representative system after 1977. Expansion of industrial locations to various sub regions in 1980s and early 1990s were driven by the political compulsions resulted from uprising of Sinhalese youth against the state. There was an implicit ethnic preference policy in choosing locations of EPZs and IPs, which resulted in ethnicizing the industrial development efforts in post 1977 era. So, one could interpret that there has been a process of ethnicization of industrial policies and actions of the state during the postcolonial period.

## **Employment in the State Sector**

State has been responsible for creating and providing jobs to educated youth in Sri Lanka since independence up to 1980s under the controlled economy despite a significant growth of private sector during the market economy helped create jobs

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4. [www.lankanewspapers.com](http://www.lankanewspapers.com)

in industrial and services sectors. Therefore, ethno-religious implication of public sector employment is important when considering the equity and justice considerations on ethnic lines. More importantly, equal rights to public employment are required in a culturally diverse society. We focus on the period until mid 1980s in this section.

During the postcolonial period, there has been a conscious process of ethnicization of the operations of the public services delivery. The language of public service delivery and operations became Sinhala in regions outside of the Northern region and some parts of the Eastern region. Converting the medium of instruction into Sinhala and Tamil media also resulted in gradually converting public offices into the Sinhala-Buddhist workplaces and Tamil national workplaces. The working environment in the public offices became Sinhala-Buddhist in most cases while the same became Tamil national in the Northern and Eastern regions. The Sinhala-only legislation resulted in increased Sinhalese recruitment to state employment, and there was a natural shift in the make-up of the public service.

Table 5 and Chart 1, 2 and 3 show the process of ethnicization of public employment since independence. Chart 1, 2, and 3 indicate the fact that the state has reallocated public employment from Tamils to Sinhalese during the postcolonial period. The percentage recruited to the Sri Lanka Administrative Service from Sinhala has increased from 54 percent in 1948 to 85 percent in 1979. The percentage of Tamils recruited has declined from 44 percent in 1948 to 13 percent in 1979. The percentage recruited to Government Accountant Service from Sinhala increased from 44 percent in 1948 to 61 percent in 1979. The percentage recruited from Tamils decreased from 51 percent in 1948 to 39 percent in 1979. The percentage recruited to the general clerical service from Sinhala increased from 54 percent

in 1948 to 94 percent in 1979. While increase of the share of Sinhalese can be interpreted as a corrective measure by way of reverse discrimination, this data clearly shows that there was a process of ethnicization of recruitment to the public employment during the postcolonial period. This situation has even become worse during the period of armed conflict as ethnic tensions, distrust, and hatred resulted in Tamils not receiving or not preferring state jobs outside of the Northern and the Eastern regions.

**Table 5: Central Government Recruitment, Selected Categories and Years (percentages in brackets)**

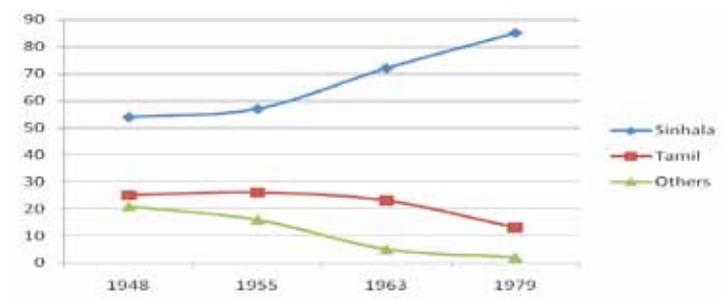
Ceylon Civil Service (Later SLAS)	1948	1955	1963	1979
Sinhala	83 (54%)	104 (57%)	506 (72%)	131 (85%)
Tamil	38 (25%)	47 (26%)	165 (23%)	203 (13%)
Others	33 (21%)	30 (16%)	35 (5%)	26 (2%)
Sinhala	27 (44%)	30 (45%)	72 (43%)	233 (61%)
Tamil	31 (51%)	32 (49%)	95 (56%)	148 (39%)
Others	3 (5%)	4 (6%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
Sinhala	805 (54%)	422 (66%)	703 (92%)	4870 (94%)
Tamil	650 (41%)	191 (30%)	52 (7%)	279 (5%)
Others	84 (6%)	27 (27%)	9 (1%)	53 (1%)

Source: Samarasinghe, 1984

As it is well known, the size of the armed forces has grown rapidly during the postcolonial period while changing their racial composition. At the time of independence, Sri Lanka's military establishment was neither ethnically nor religiously representative of the population. Minorities were heavily overrepresented in the officer corps. Christians, who comprised about 8 percent of the population, accounted for about 50 percent of all officers. Ethnically, Tamils and Burghers, who together comprised less than 20 percent of the population, accounted for 40 percent

of the officer corps. Starting in the mid-1950s, the share of Sinhalese in the armed forces increased. Recruitment at all levels became increasingly dominated by Sinhalese, and by 1983 Tamils accounted for less than 5 percent of all military personnel. The ethnicization of the armed forces continued under the United National Party government of President Jayewardene. By 1985 almost all enlisted personnel in the armed services were Sinhalese.<sup>5</sup> The growth of the armed forces and changing of the ethnic composition basically favoured the Sinhalese peasantry in terms of material wellbeing since armed forces created permanent employment opportunities to peasantry.

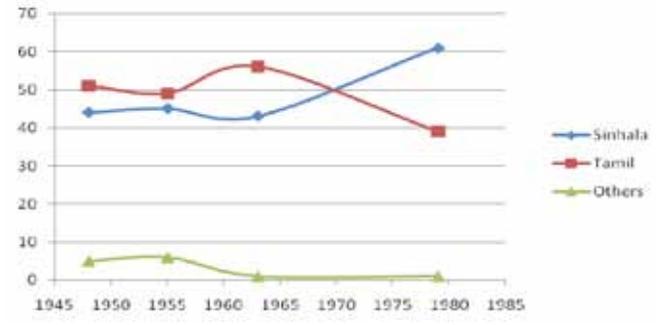
**Chart 1: Recruitment in Ceylon Civil Service (Later, Sri Lanka Administrative Service) - Percentage of the Total**



Source: Data in table 5 was used to construct this graph.

5. <http://www.mongabay.com> 1988

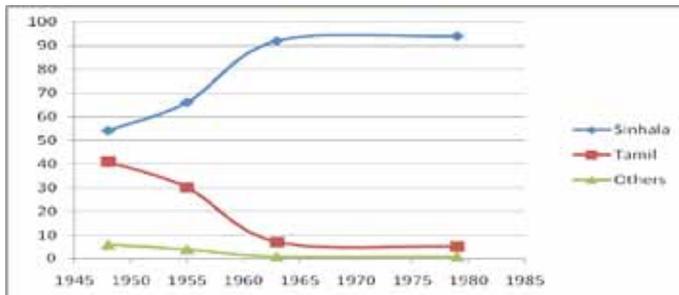
**Chart 2: Recruitment in Government Accountants Service - Percentage of the total**



Source: Data in table 5 was used to construct this graph.

During a period of three decades from the independence, state interventions to solve unemployment problems have resulted in reducing the representation of Tamils and other minorities, in state employment especially outside of the Northern and the Eastern regions, and Sinhala representation in employment in the Northern and the Eastern regions. Also, interventions by the state to rectify economic inequalities among different ethnicities through economic functions have transformed relatively small inter-ethnic inequalities into highly divisive issues.

**Chart 3: Recruitment in General Clerical Service - Percentage of the total**



Source: Data in table 5 was used to construct this graph.

The state policy on employment has adversely impacted on the Tamils living in the Northern and the Eastern regions. Srikandarajah exposts it with empirical evidence that

“... Resource allocation (e.g. state employment) was seen as subject to political interference made it easy to lay blame on the state and Sinhalese leaders. At another level, the overt deployment of ethnic categories and ethnically-biased objectives in formulating state policy, and in the way that leaders articulated these policies, made the state both the locus and focus of inter-ethnic rivalry. Tamil self determination became increasingly about liberation from a discriminatory, majoritarian state and no longer simply about agitation for greater rights...” (Srikandarajah 2005).

Public employment along with the operating language of the public offices made it impossible for Tamil speaking people to work in public offices outside of the Northern and the Eastern regions. Parliamentary democracy maintained through Sri Lanka's kind of electoral politics played a role in allocation of state employment during the postcolonial period. Non-participation of Tamils in the government created conditions for Sinhala politicians to satisfy Sinhala peasantry. Ethnic tensions, distrust, and hatred arising from armed uprising also alienated Tamils from employment in public offices outside of the Northern and the Eastern regions, and Sinhalese being employed in the Northern and the Eastern regions. There has been an explicit as well as an implicit ethnicization process of public employment in Sri Lanka which has contributed to Sinhala ethno-nationalism as well as Tamil ethno-nationalism.

## **Public Home-Ownership Schemes**

Since 1980s, the state has undertaken several public housing development schemes in order to provide home entitlements to homeless citizens. In 1980s, granting of home entitlements was implemented through a 1 million housing development project in which *Gam Udawa* (re-awakening of villages) and *Udakala Gammama* (re-awakened villages) were built (Redman 2005). At present, a state sponsored housing development scheme is implemented by the name of Janasewana (shelter to people). Since the state has devoted a large amount of state capital for building these homes, the principles of justice and equality are paramount in understanding the implications of those programmes.

Due to unavailability of data, we focus on the Home-Ownership Scheme implemented by the state from 1977 to 1989 as a case. Two strategies were adopted in building houses under these projects. The first is building houses bearing the full cost by the government and transferring the ownership to citizens. The second is financially supporting citizens to get their poor quality houses upgraded. In addition to transferring homes built by the state to the poor and low income families, permanent state institutions – Urban Development Authority and National Housing Development Authority (NHDA)- were built to provide various subsidies to low income and middle class families. The NHDA extended efforts towards five main areas, including loans for middle and lower middle-income housing, loans for upgrading houses, construction of urban flats, land supply to building societies, and administration of regulatory laws. As Redman states “The central premise of the programme was to enable a million low income people to build their own houses, and for the government to participate in the ‘people’s process’ by taking on a supportive role in regard to technical expertise, facilitative

skills and financing” (Redman 2005). During 1980 to 1993, Gam Udawa and Udakala Gammana resulted in providing shelter to more than 1,500,000 rural poor families which won President Premadasa an international award.<sup>6</sup>

A salient feature of these public housing schemes is the treatment of ethnicity and caste in providing the entitlements. While the state sponsored home-ownership schemes targeted the Sri Lankan peasantry neither the Indian origin Tamils nor the Sri Lankan Tamils received a significant share of the houses built and transferred (Chang 2008). Most homes went to Sinhalese peasantry. The state policy was to settle different ethnicities in different locations in the homes built under the Gam Udawa and Udakala Gammana schemes. Ethnicity-based settlements have been developed in various parts of the country in which there were Sinhala Settlements, Tamil Settlements, and Moor Settlements, while the largest share being the Sinhala Settlements. Caste-based settlements were also built (Silva and Thanges 2009). Gam Udawa appeared to have had all ingredients for it to be considered as a Sinhala-Buddhist project as it show-cased Sinhala Buddhist social and cultural practices (Hennayake 2006).

It is also important to examine as to how Tamil nationalists interpreted these home-ownership programmes. Based on housing data of the Department of Census and Statistics, Srikandarajah states that

“... By the 1970s, state control of the economy was so substantial that opportunities for political patronage extended to land, housing, industrial licenses, school admissions, credit, foreign exchange and jobs. During this time, the frequent change of government may have meant that the fortunes of supporters of the two major Sinhalese-dominated

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6. [http://www.sangam.org/2008/08/Indo\\_LTTE\\_War\\_X.php](http://www.sangam.org/2008/08/Indo_LTTE_War_X.php)

political parties changed periodically but, for Tamils, permanent exclusion from government also meant permanent exclusion from opportunities for political patronage” (Srikandarajah 2005).

By own choice, the postcolonial state in Sri Lanka adopted practices and policies to ethnicize the home-entitlement schemes thereby creating ‘ethnic enclaves’ in the country. The state appears to have determined the locations of state sponsored home-ownership schemes along ethnic lines. It can be inferred that public housing schemes in Sri Lanka reassured ethnic/racial divisions and thereby created spatial ethnic/racial enclaves throughout the country, which became stimuli for ethnicity-based separatism in Sri Lanka as ‘ethnic enclaves’ becomes a basis for separatist sentiments (Huat 2005: 7-8).

Even if Sri Lanka used public housing schemes to create racial/ethnic enclaves thereby contributing to spatial ethnic segregation by creating conditions for ethnic/racial divisions, there are countries which have used public housing schemes as a devise of ethnic integration. Specialized public housing schemes have been introduced to encourage greater racial and economic mixing in the United States (Goering 2000). Cities in the Netherlands have also tried to use housing as a strategy to prevent spatial segregation of races/ethnicities (Van Kempen and Priemus 1999). In 1950s and early 1960s, various immigrant ethnic groups were concentrated in different parts of Singapore, forming ethnic enclaves, distinguishable by their ethnic origin. However, in late 1960s and 1970s, Singapore started State-Building process in which public housing was used as an instrument of racial/ethnic integration.<sup>7</sup> The founders of the current state of

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7. The four main goals of Singapore’s public housing programmes are the provision of shelter, stakeholderhip (home ownership), community bonding, and building a vibrant community. See for more evidence and analysis, Tay, K. P. Building vibrant communities through effective public housing policies. Paper presented at the international housing conference—housing in the new millennium, Singapore, 2000

Singapore recognized that spatial segregation of races/ethnicities in ethnic enclaves would be detrimental to building a sustainable and secular state so that the state-builders wanted to prevent a particular ethnic group dominating in a particular geographical area. Public housing has been used as a strategy for building ethnically and religiously neutral state and an integrated society and polity in Singapore (Yu, Han and sim 2003).

## **Ethnicization of Material Grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamils**

While there has been a process of ethnicization of economic functions of the state, Tamil ethno-nationalists have ethnicized the material grievances faced by Tamils. However, there is a misperception among many that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam started an armed struggle to create Tamil Eelam in response to oppressive actions of the Sri Lankan state. The arrival of Protestant missionaries on a large scale to Sri Lanka, beginning in 1814, was a primary contributor to the development of political awareness among Tamils of a Tamil ethnicity and Tamil ethno-nationalism (Gunasingam 1999). Based on historical anecdotes of a socio-cultural heritage for the existence of a Tamil kingdom prior to the occupation of Sri Lanka by the British in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Tamil Eelam was conceptualized by C. Suntheralingham in 1958 in his address at the State Assembly.<sup>8</sup> By citing historical anecdotes of the existence of a separate Tamil nation for millennia, Suntheralingham pronounced in 1963 that,

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8. C. Suntheralingham was the first politician to talk about Tamil Eelam in the state assembly in 1958 in the recorded history. He started Unity Front of Eelam Tamils in 1959. In 1963, Suntheralingham published 'Eylom: Beginning of the Freedom Struggle; Dozens Documents' in which he became one of the first Sri Lankan Tamils to call for an independent Tamil state, which he called Eylom [Eelam]. (C. Suntheralingham, Eylom: Beginning of the Freedom Struggle; Dozens Documents, 1963, pp 72-73, www.sangam.org)

“I propose to invite Eylom [Eelam] Thamils who accept the policy that the time has come for the partition of Ceylon and for the restoration of the Tamil state that existed before the Treaty of Amiens of 1802, to come forward and join the fight for the Freedom and Independence of Eylom Tamil nation”<sup>9</sup>

By taking this line of thought forward, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) appears to have founded their ideology on a perceived collective identity of a Tamil nation by citing historical anecdotes on the basis of language and cultural aspects. Suntheralingham’s conceptualization was restated by the theoretician of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1983. By making the case for an ethnicity-based separate state for Tamils, Balasingham argued that,

“The Island ... is the traditional homeland of two distinct nations – Tamil Eelam [Tamils] and Sri Lanka [Sinhalese], two distinct social formations with distinct cultures and languages having their own unique historical past” (Balasinghm 1983).

A careful reading of a plethora of speeches and writings of Tamil ethno-nationalists during the postcolonial period makes

9. See Suntheralingham, C, *ibid*, 1963. The Treaty of Amiens was signed by France, Spain, and Batavian Republic [Holland] on the one hand and Great Britain on the other in the city of Amiens in France on 25 March 1802 by Joseph Bonaparte and the Marquess Cornwallis as a 'Definitive Treaty of Peace'. According to the Treaty of Amiens, Britain retained Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Trinidad, but abandoned its claim to the French throne. Sri Lanka became the first crown colony of Britain. However, the Treaty of Amiens does not indicate two nations (countries) in Ceylon, albeit it refers to Ceylon as one country. The Section V of the Treaty of Amiens states that “The Batavian republic cedes and guarantees, in full right and sovereignty to his Britannic Majesty, all the possessions and establishments in the island of Ceylon, which belonged, before the war, to the republic or the United Provinces, or to their East India Company” (The Treaty of Amiens, [www.end-of-empires-south-east-asia.wikispaces.com](http://www.end-of-empires-south-east-asia.wikispaces.com), retrieved on 25th June 2012)

it clear that LTTE did not begin an armed struggle for a separate state because of material grievances faced by the Tamils or discrimination meted out at them by the Sri Lanka state. Their armed struggle was based on the belief that there was a separate Tamil nation in the Northern and the Eastern regions of Sri Lanka prior to British occupation for millennia, and that they have a legitimate right to establish a separate state based on 'perceived collective ethnic identities' (Suntheralingham 1963, Gunasingham 1999, Balasingham 1983).

However, there has been a process of ethnicization of economic functions of the postcolonial state through an 'implicit ethnic preference' policy, which has significantly contributed for the Tamil nationalists to ethnicize material grievances faced by the Tamils and thereby advance their claim for a separate state based on Tamil ethno-nationalism. Ethnicization of economic functions of the state has made it difficult, if not impossible, to build a Sri Lankan state that is founded on the rights and the freedoms of 'citizen' irrespective of his/her ethnicity or religion. Ethnicization of economic functions of the state has also helped Tamil nationalists to galvanize widespread support, which did not exist during the initial period of the postcolonial Sri Lanka, from the Tamil masses for their claim of a separate state. The actions of the state and the counteractions of the Tamil ethno-nationalists have evolved through mutually-reinforcing feedback between Sinhala majoritarian state and the Tamil nationalists.

During the postcolonial period, two groups of Tamil ethno-nationalists asserted and promoted two State-Building projects based on perceived collective identities derived from historical pasts (Stokke and Ryntveit 2000). The first State-Building project that emerged from Tamil ethno-nationalism is the federalism founded and promoted by the Federal Party and later owned and advocated by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and

current Tamil National Alliance. The other project that emerged from Tamil ethno-nationalism is the Tamil Eelam which was conceptualized by Suntheralingham and founded by the TULF in 1970s and later captured and brutally promoted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

It is well known that the Sinhalese peasantry had enough economic grievances during the postcolonial period, which were transformed into intermittent armed struggles in 1971 and 1988-1990. The same economic problems and grievances faced by the Tamil speaking people have stimulated the Tamil nationalists to resume their assertion of a Tamil kingdom through either an ethnicity-based federalism or ethnicity-based secessionism. The course of actions chosen by the Tamil nationalists during the postcolonial period was not only self-destructive but also resulted in destroying more than 60,000 innocent lives, destruction of accumulated wealth of that community for millennia, and the rich civilizations of the Northern and the Eastern regions while Sri Lanka's economic, social and political progress was irreversibly hampered. Tamil nationalists ethnicized the material grievances in order to promote ethnicity based federalism or separatism. Srikandarajah concluded that:

“What stands out in the Sri Lankan case is the nexus between material grievances and political conflict. Sections of both the Tamil and Sinhalese leadership were able to deploy grievances strategically in their quest to mobilize support. Real and existing inequalities—even about issues that were the direct concern of a very few—were increasingly articulated as wider ethnic issues in a mutually reinforcing spiral of worsening ethno-political conflict” (Srikandarajah 2005).

During the postcolonial period, however, material grievances arising from lack of progress of the economy, misguided actions and policies of the postcolonial state, and ethnicization of economic functions of the state have been exploited by the Tamil ethno-nationalists to advance their claim for a separate state through a brutal armed struggle. It has been argued by the proponents of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka that the postcolonial state has systematically violated the economic freedoms and rights of Tamil ethnicity through systematic economic actions. Making a submission to the UN Human Rights Commission in 2000, the Society for Threatened People argued that 'Ever since independence in 1948, government policies have systematically violated the social, economic and cultural rights of Tamils'. Tamil ethno-nationalists emphasized that 'positive discrimination was undertaken through the disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamils, state sponsored colonization of the North-East by Sinhalese settlers, a discriminatory language, education and recruitment policy'.<sup>10</sup> They have viewed that the postcolonial state has used politics of 'positive discrimination' of the state as an exclusionary mechanism. Tamil ethno-nationalists have also interpreted the postcolonial economic functions of the state through a number of premises for justifying the ethnicity-based federalism or separate state.

First, the most important factor that Tamil ethno-nationalists have considered in arguing for an ethnicity-based state for the Tamils is the 'official language policy' of the postcolonial state. While the Citizenship Act of 1948 initiated a formal process of asserting an ethnicity-based federalism, the Sinhala Only Official Language Act of 1956 became the 'turning point' of the ethnicity-based separatism as it gave a turbo-booster for Tamil ethno-nationalists to resume the idea of a Tamil

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10. <http://www.gfbv.de/inhaltsDok.php?id=383>, 2000

kingdom in the Northern and the Eastern regions of Sri Lanka that they claimed to have existed for millennia. Tamil ethno-nationalists interpreted that the 'Sinhala Only' Act was designed by the ruling class to create a Sinhala ethnicity based state aimed to curtail economic rights and freedoms of Tamil speaking people (chattopadhaya 1994).

Second, the Section 29 of Ceylon (Constitution) Order in Council 1946 had the following safeguards against discrimination on any basis: (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) (a) no such law shall prohibit or restrict the free exercise of any religion, (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, (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 of that body. However, not only did the Republican Constitution of 1972 give Buddhism the supreme place, it did away with the safeguards for minorities enshrined in the original section 29 (Mankenthiran 2003). Though, affirmative action could have been taken by using Section 29 to address material grievances of the minorities, or against deprivation on any basis, the Sinhalese-dominated ruling class repealed Section 29 when establishing the 1972 Republican Constitution.<sup>11</sup>

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11. Sri Lanka was a multiracial and multi-religious society at the time of establishing the Republican Constitution in 1972. However, leftist political parties who were part of the United Front government lead by Sirimavo Bandaranaike were pivotal in giving Buddhism the supreme position in the state and repealing the Section 29 of the Constitution in 1946. This is a testimony to the proposition that leftist political parties in Sri Lanka have not practiced what they have been preaching on safeguarding of equity and justice of all citizens.

Third, in 1972, the state introduced a system of standardization of science-based courses in Sri Lanka. This required a Tamil to get a higher score than that of a Sinhalese to enter into a University. The shortage of supply of higher education opportunities as a result of free university education compelled the state to ration the demand for bachelor degrees in science-based courses, so an ethnicized rationing mechanism was adopted. This was seen as a step of positive discrimination of Tamils. Tamil ethno-nationalists exploited this to assert ethnicity based autonomy by arguing that Tamils were hindered higher education opportunities and skilled employment because of this policy. They believed that this also negatively contributed to the employment of Tamils in the state and state corporations (de Silva 1984). Tamils interpreted this as a policy that Sinhalezes the functions of the state so that Tamils must resume their assertion of the Tamil kingdom through an ethnicity-based federalism or secessionism.

Fourth, as discussed earlier, there has been a process of ethnicization of state employment during the postcolonial period. For justifying the policies and actions of the state, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who became the Prime Minister by providing leadership to Sinhala-nationalists and anti-liberal economic autocratic forces of the left, alleged that 90 percent of the government employment went to the privileged English speaking minority which constituted less than 10 percent of the population, and constituted mostly persons belonging to Tamil ethnicity (Nithyanandana 1983). Therefore, the state adopted a process of reverse discrimination and thereby ethnicizing the economic functions of the state by reducing the share of minorities in public employment to negligible levels during the postcolonial period. Rather than taking measures to get the majority into English-proficient by initiating a trilingual (Sinhala, Tamil, English) system, Bandaranaike's Sinhala-only policy

effectively made majority in Sri Lanka mono-lingual while an English-speaking privileged minority continued to exist. In the present context, it was reported that employment in the state sector can be adduced to explain the surplus of 14 000 Sinhala teachers as against a shortage of 10 000 Tamil medium teachers in the Sri Lankan school system. Tamil nationalists viewed the state employment policy and trends as discriminatory which was thought to be significantly curtailing the economic freedom and the rights of the Tamil speaking people.

Fifth, land entitlement schemes ethnicized the postcolonial state while creating stimuli to the Tamil nationalists to advance their ethnicity-based federalism and separatism as the Northern and the Eastern provinces were identified to be allocated to Tamil speaking people implicitly assuming that those areas are traditional habitats of Tamil ethnicity and Muslims. Tamils viewed that a big chunk of land entitlements were distributed among Sinhalese peasantry, while Sri Lankan Tamils were deprived of their livelihood opportunities (Nithyanandana 1983). Creation of 'racial enclaves' by ethnic segregation appears to have been the implicit policy of the state in implementing land entitlement schemes.

Finally, Tamil nationalists viewed that most of the state's capital including subsidies have been devoted to benefit the Sinhalese while giving a discriminatory treatment to Tamil speaking people. It was reported that distribution of state resources, the lack of the most elementary school equipment in schools in the Northern and the Eastern regions, the lack of physical infrastructure, the lack of common amenities were viewed as discriminatory treatments. To assert for an ethnicity-based secessionism, Tamil Diaspora argued that "...the results of this outright violation of rights manifest themselves: in the competitive examinations for the Sri Lanka Accountant and the

Administrative Service at most two Tamils were selected each year since the early 1990s” (Stokke and Ryntveit 2000).

Ethnicity-based federalists and separatists of the Tamil community advocated autonomy to areas dominated by the Tamil population on the basis of ethnic or racial premises to address not only the socio-cultural problems but also to solve material grievances. However, the economic inequality between ethnic groups has significantly reduced during the past few decades. As Srikandarajah explains,

“Despite relative equality between Northeastern Tamils and Sinhalese, debates around key inter-ethnic disparities shaped political discourse. By evoking past unfairness (e.g. British favouritism towards Tamils in employment) and disparities at the upper echelons (e.g. tertiary admission), public debates did not reflect the current or wider empirical situation of general inter-ethnic equality... Meanwhile, wider frustrations about the stagnation in the number senior secondary school places and the poor quality of Sri Lanka’s education facilities were, at least at times in the 1970s, superseded by and sometimes channeled through an overtly ethnicized debate about university places” (Srikandarajah 2005).

Srikandarajah further argues that ‘when inequality did become politicized, the patterns that received the most popular attention were not necessarily those identified by social scientists as being the most significant’. Even marginal differences between groups, especially at the top end of the socio-economic spectrum, have been exploited to fuel armed conflict and separatism.

As it stands at present after the tragic end to the armed struggle for a separate state by the Tamils, the Sinhala-Buddhist

State-Building project based on ethnicized and religionized functions of the state has failed. Ethnicity-based federal State-Building project that has been promoted by the TULF and currently by the Tamil National Alliance has also failed. Ethnicized secessionist State-Building project of the LTTE carried out through a brutal armed struggle has also come to an end. What stands out by these lessons is that ethnicized State-Building projects have no strong foundation to succeed. Neither Sinhala Buddhist state, nor an ethnicity-based federal structure or secessionist state are viable or achievable. These most prominent three State-Building projects appear to have no grounding on creating a just and a fair state that represents and protects aspirations, rights, and freedoms of all citizens in Sri Lanka.

### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

Economic functions of the state during the postcolonial period have been defined and implemented through a process of ethnicization and religionization of the state. The historical experience shows that 'ethnic and religious preference policy' has been adopted either intentionally or unintentionally by the ruling class. This has been evident from the economic functions of the state including land entitlements, agricultural development, industrial development, state employment policies, and public housing. The state reform projects in the postcolonial Sri Lanka have failed not only because of the ethnicization of the functions but also because of the attempts to identify 'ethnicity' with the functions of the state. Postcolonial ethnicized economic functions of the state have significantly contributed to Sinhala ethno-nationalism and Tamil ethno-nationalism. The state should be founded by eliminating the identification of ethnicity and religiosity with the economic functions of the state. This would ensure that no particular region of Sri Lanka and no economic function of the state being identified with any specific ethnicity.

Affirmative action is implemented to eliminate discrimination on any basis. Affirmative action refers to policies and actions that take factors including race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or national origin into consideration in order to benefit an underrepresented group(s) in areas of business, industry, subsidies, education, and employment (Sowell 2004). One way to adopt affirmative action is to identify ethnicity and religion by a rationing system through ethnicity and/or religion based quota arrangement; in which ethnicity-based equity ownership in public corporations, jobs, housing, education, and loans. The other way is to eliminate the identification of ethnicity and religion by implementing affirmative action on the basis of deprivation on any grounds. Examples of countries that adopted different types of affirmative actions include Malaysia and United States.

In the case of Malaysia, ethnicity has been identified with the economic functions of the state through a conscious process of ethnicization (Chin 2009, Hui 1988, Snodgrass 1995, Jomo 1990). The increasing pressure from Malays on an ethnic preference policy in late 1960s compelled the Malay dominated Malaysian state to introduce a New Economic Policy (NEP) based on affirmative action in early 1970s. One of the main objectives of the NEP was to 'restructure Malaysian society to achieve inter-ethnic economic parity between the predominantly Malay Bumiputra and the predominantly Chinese non-Bumiputra'. The parity was expected to create through ethnicity based equity entitlement mechanisms (Drabble 2000, Jomo 1987). This approach along with market economy has been the focal point of Malaysian economic success for the last 40 years (Snodgrass 1995).

Malaysia's "Bhumi Puthra quota regime" has either gradually collapsed or is under serious crisis. A new affluent Bumiputra class which emerged as a result of ethnic preference

policy was severely criticized for undertaking socially undesirable and economically unsustainable methods of wealth accumulation (Chin 2009). Gomez and Jomo argue that Bumiputras accumulated wealth by engaging in short-term renting activities rather than productive economic activities (Gomez and Jomo 1997). Jesudason conjectures that Malays used rents allocated through ethnic preference policy to a classy consumption life-style rather than engaging in economic activities to contribute to growth and development (Jesudason 1990). Malays were accused of doing very little to increase the competitiveness of the economy, engaging in productive economic activities, and developing new opportunities for further economic growth. The ethnic preference policy is criticized for not dealing directly with issues of wealth distribution and economic inequality. The ethnic preference policy has also been criticized on the basis that there was no planned assistance for Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians to achieve their 40 percent goal during the actual implementation of the NEP (Chin 2009). It has come under attack as being an inefficient system that promotes a laid-back attitude among the Bumiputras since it is ethnicity-based and not deprivation-based. The consensus now is that the ethnic preference policy in Malaysia has not created the expected parity between different perceived ethnic groups. Thomas Sowell concluded that nearly 5 percent of Malays “have been estimated to have actually benefited from these affirmative action programs and those people who were initially more fortunate were the most benefited” (Sowell 2004). Najib Razak, Malaysia’s Prime Minister, who considers himself Malay, announced in 2009 a major rollback in the system of ethnic preferences asserting that “they want to be fair to all communities . . . no one must feel marginalized”.<sup>12</sup> Since Malaysia has surpassed the initial level of growth and has reached higher income levels, the ‘ethnicity-based quota’ regime

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12. New York Times 2009

can now be converted into 'deprivation-based' quota regime to have safeguards against any possible discrimination.

In the case of United States of America, the identification of ethnicity and religion with the functions of the state has been eliminated. Ethnicity and religiosity did not provide the basic foundation of the American state. The contemporary functions and the structure of the state permit any individual belonging to any perceived ethnicity or religion to choose and live in the United States enjoying equal economic rights and freedoms. As a result, in the United States, no individual appears to have incentives to identify, and fight for, economic rights and freedoms on the basis of collective ethnic or religious identities. To ensure and foster individual economic and political rights as well as freedoms, the founders of the contemporary state in the United States envisioned a very limited role for the state in economic affairs. In a free economy, such as the one established by the constitution of the United States, most economic decisions are made by individuals, families or firms. In the United States, economic functions of the state are limited to equity, efficiency, and stability aspects of the market economy. Over time, as the American society and economy have evolved, the activities of the state within each of these functions have also expanded and evolved.

Affirmative action policies have, however, been in place under 'deprivation' basis. Affirmative action was first established in Executive Order 10925 by President John F Kennedy in 1961 which required government contractors to 'not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin' as well as to 'take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin'. However,

in a comprehensive and an in depth empirical study, Thomas Sowell found that affirmative action policies have not resulted in eliminating inequalities between different groups. According to Sowell, affirmative action has, in fact, resulted in 'reverse discrimination' and 'unwarranted preferences' (Sowell 2004).

Until 1972, Sri Lanka could have implemented affirmative action on ethnicity or deprivation basis by using the Section 29 of the Ceylon Order (the constitution) of 1946 because it provided the required legal basis for the state to implement affirmative action. But, the state did not implement any affirmative action during 1948 to 1972, albeit the ruling class repealed the Section 29 by the 1972 Republican Constitution which was the greatest political blunder in the postcolonial period that eliminated any hope of racial mixing and ethnic integration within a single state. Sri Lanka's affirmative action policies were designed and implemented by considering deprivation on the basis of geographical areas and ethnicity in relation to free education, which was implemented in 1972 (de Silva 1997). However, our discussion in this paper suggests that the manner in which land entitlements, state sector employment, industrial development, public housing schemes, and various subsidies were designed and implemented by the state, there has been an 'implicit ethnic preference policy' during the postcolonial period. The development efforts of the state have contributed to gradually ethnicizing the economic functions of the postcolonial state.

The ongoing ethnicity-based State-Building project should be abandoned, and those who are responsible for building a new Sri Lankan state should embark on a project that is founded on socio-economic principles which are devoid of ethnicity and religion. Ways of de-ethnicization and de-religionization of the state need to be developed to make ethnicity and religion

more private considerations than public considerations. The pillars of the state: the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, all other institutions, and laws should be de-ethnicized and de-religionized. Separation of religion and ethnicity from the state will be a significant achievement. This becomes clearer, as Sri Lanka has been witnessing the inroads religion and ethnicity have been making in her society. Religion and ethnicity try to dominate all aspects of the lives and society. The people of Sri Lanka need to push religion and ethnicity back to the sphere of private life. Not only Sri Lanka needs to make the religion and ethnicity a private matter, she needs to build stronger barriers to stop religion and ethnicity interfering in the state's functions. That's the way to build a free society which protects free thinking and rights of all citizens in a just and equal manner irrespective of one's ethnicity and religion.

In defining and structuring the economic function of the state, the principles that might be considered include, protecting individual economic rights and security (in every means) and protecting and providing collective rights and security in terms of public goods, common pool resources, improving efficiency and equality of market outcomes by addressing externalities of individual actions. The economic functions of the state should be limited to areas where market mechanism failed. The state must let the individuals, families and firms to dominate in the economy. Creating a fully-fledged market economy supported by a de-ethnicized and de-religionized state is the way to go.

The proper stake-holders for state reform process should be identified. It includes different occupational categories, different genders, intellectuals, politicians, bureaucrats, farmers, civil society activists. There is a dire need to peoplize the state reform process in Sri Lanka by abandoning the ongoing politically elitist ethnicity-oriented State-Building project.

De-ethnicization of the state and the public sphere of the society do not nullify the need for regionalization of the governance structure of the state by way of federalism or other feasible ways. Devolving power to the regions is essential for effective, fair, just and efficient delivery of public goods and services, and other functions of the government. Devolution of power is also required to facilitate and protect the fully-fledged market economy. Such a structure would also ensure a mechanism for the markets to function efficiently and fairly.

Even though, de-ethnicization and de-religionization of the Sri Lankan state and the public sphere of the society are daunting tasks, it is going to be a revolutionary project for creating a sustainable state and a prosperous society based on equality and justice in which all peoples will have secured lives. While establishing an ethnically and religiously neutral state, quota arrangements on the basis of 'deprivation' or safeguards should be enacted to prevent any kind of discrimination. Since ethnic and religious neutrality of the state ensure equality, credibility and effectiveness of the state for all citizens, the need for ethnicity-based and religion-based federalism or secessionism in Sri Lanka will cease to exist. Therefore, eliminating the identification of ethnicity and religion with the functions of the state provides the strongest foundation to establish an ethnically and religiously unchallenged sustainable state in Sri Lanka.

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