Monograph - 5

SRI LANKA AFTER INDEPENDENCE - NATIONALISM, COMMUNALISM AND NATION BUILDING

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FOREWORD

When Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon) became an independent country on 4 February 1948, it was relatively a peaceful country in contrast to the orgy and violence that accompanied the birth of its northern neighbours, India and Pakistan. D. S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister, was not only the leader of the majority Sinhalese community, he had also the tacit support of other minority groups. Many political commentators felt that the country was well on the way to attain political stability and the major ethnic groups would get integrated into one nation.

Thirty eight years later, the political system has undergone a fundamental transformation. During the last few years, not only the bridges have been burnt, the chasm dividing the Sinhalese and the Tamils has widened. Sri Lanka today is at the cross-roads. The Tamils and the Sinhalese are sitting on the top of a volcano which can erupt at any moment. The coming days would unfold whether President Jayawardene and the Tamil groups would rise to the occasion and make necessary accommodation to arrive at an amicable settlement with justice and fair play to all or whether the Republic would plunge into a state of continuing civil war like Lebanon and Ulster or it might end up dividing itself into two states either by consent or surgery.

This monograph by Prof. Sinnappah Arasaratnam attempts an analysis of the inter-play of nationalism and communalism in post-independent Sri Lanka. Prof. Arasaratnam is eminently qualified to undertake this study. Over the last three decades, he has been specialising in South

Asian history, especially in the history of Sri Lanka. The publication is based on the lectures that he gave to the faculty and students of the Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies in January-February 1982. I am sure this publication will be of interest to not only the students of South Asian politics, but to all those interested in international affairs.

I would like to add that the responsibility for the facts and opinions mentioned in this publication rests exclusively with the author.

V. SURYANARAYAN

1

SRI LANKA AFTER INDEPENDENCE: NATIONALISM, COMMUNALISM AND NATION-BUILDING

Independence and its immediate aftermath (to 1956)

The nature of the movement towards independence, the leaders who brought this about, the tactics they adopted and the ideologies that moved them, all these are seen to have a marked impact on every nation. The signs at its birth must be carefully read by the political astrologer in an attempt to chart its political horoscope and by the historian in the search to explain its future progress. Ceylon, as the island was then known, had what may be termed 'a good war'. After a period of tense anxiety in April 1942, when Japanese Admiral Nagumo's fleet sought in vain to annihilate the Royal Navy's Eastern Fleet, there were two bombing attacks on the ports of Colombo and Trincomalee when the Japanese sustained heavy losses. The island was never directly threatened by the Japanese after this and became in 1943 the headquarters of the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Lord Mountbatten. What was remarkable from the British point of view was that, unlike in India, all was quiet on the domestic front and indeed much of the internal governance of the country and its mobilization towards the war effort continued in the hands of a docile Ceylonese leadership.

The legislature, whose term had expired in 1941, was extended indefinitely for the duration of the war, for which

the elected members were grateful. The Executive Committee system, under the Donoughmore Constitution governing the country, continued to operate, with seven Ceylonese Ministers who formed themselves into a Board of Ministers. These Ministers were in charge of internal affairs under their jurisdiction, broader questions of Finance, Defence, External Affairs and imperial interests being in the exclusive hands of the colonial executive headed by the Governor. This amicable relationship contrasts itself with the situation in India where the provincial ministries of the Indian National Congress holding power in a number of provinces resigned in 1939 after a conflict with the Imperial Government over its right to declare war on behalf of India without consulting its elected representatives. No such doubts seized hold of the Ceylonese politicians, a factor for which the British were ever so grateful.

While efforts were being made to meet Indian demands for political freedom, the British Government realised that some moves should be made in this direction in Ceylon as well. In May 1943 the Government issued a Declaration promising a reform of the Constitution at the end of the war in the direction of fully responsible civil administration. The Ministers started framing a Constitution on the basis of this declaration and accepting the limitations to total independence it undoubtedly imposed. The work of drafting was undertaken by the Board of Ministers where now D. S. Senanayake had emerged as the dominant figure, taking under his personal charge the task of constitutional reform and the conduct of delicate negotiations with officials of the Colonial Government.

By early 1944, the Board of Ministers had produced a draft constitution. It was done with speed and secrecy in private consultation with such special interests as were necessary. The one solitary minority member of the Board of Ministers, A. Mahadeva, presumably represented the interests of minority communities in the drafting of the constitution. The Ministers' draft was presented to the

British Government which announced, in July 1944, the appointment of a Constitutional Commission with terms considerably wider than the examination of the Ministers' draft. Clearly Whitehall felt that such an important issue as the future constitutional status of the island could not be placed solely in the hands of a few politicians who had been elected some seven or eight years back and without a broad participation of sections of the community in open discussion. The British announcement specifically mentioned consultation with minority interests, showing thereby that it was particularly concerned with the participation of the various minority groups in the country in the formation of a constitution.

The Commission of three under the chairmanship of Lord Soulbury was announced in September 1944. The Commission was in Ceylon from December 1944 to April 1945, receiving representations, hearing evidence and visiting different parts of the island. The Board of Ministers officially boycotted the Commission but D. S. Senanayake and the Ministers met with it privately. The Commission recommended a constitution conferring responsible government, with the reservation to the Governor-General of powers relating to External Affairs, Defence and Currency.[1] The constitution fell short of conferring Dominion Status but was consistent with the promised status in the 1943 Declaration and the Ministers' Draft. At this stage, with the war coming to a speedy conclusion and steps on the way for the conferring of independence on India, the Ministers decided to expand their claims to Dominion Status. Again this was to be done by personal negotiations between D. S. Senanayake and the British Government in a mission he undertook in August-September 1945. To smooth this process, Senanayake was prepared to sign treaties guaranteeing the interests of imperial defence under the new dispensation. The British government was not to be hurried and decided on an unspecified period of transition to eventual Dominion Status under the restricted powers of the Soulbury constitution. The Ministers took

this in good part and decided to work out the new constitution which passed through the State Council by an overwhelming majority.

The final steps of this controlled and even secretive move, which pushed Ceylon into independence, were taken in the first months of 1947. The chief negotiator for Ceylon was O. E. Goonetilleke, a public servant, with no political mandate except the confidence of Senanayake. The increase in the political temperature in the island, spurred by the forthcoming elections to the House of Representatives, the signs of the growth of left-wing radicalism, both in politics and in trade unionism, moved a reluctant Colonial Office on. With assurances forthcoming on defence and investment interests and with an increasing realization of the need to bolster pro-British political groups and individuals, it appeared that long-term British interests could only lose out if the ultimate step to Dominion Status was not taken. In the event Dominon Status came in such bland fashion, almost when no-one was looking. This was the confusion over whether Ceylon had really been granted independence or whether there was some snag, some catch in what was being granted. Political groups hostile to the ministerial party accused them and the British government of hoodwinking the people. The air was not cleared when, in an important speech in the State Council, in reply to the Governor's proclamation of the Declaration of June 1947 on Ceylon's constitutional status, Senanayake proceeded to give it his own interpretation based on the text of a telex he had received from O.E. Goonetilleke. It was only when the legislation to give effect to these changes was drafted that the unambiguous term 'independence' was used, leaving the constitutional position in no doubt and changing the debate to reality vs. form in Ceylon's freedom.[2]

This was the stark contrast between the paths to freedom of Britain's South Asian empire. This peacefully negotiated independence was praised as a model of relations

between colony and metropolitan power both by British politicians and analysts and by the recipients of power in Ceylon. On a short-term perspective, this appeared a plausible view to take. Why undergo the trauma of violence, why let loose forces that cannot be controlled, why bring in the masses into affairs they cannot understand nor have informed views? As the history of post-independence Ceylon and Sri Lanka unfolded, this complacency was upset and a number of new questions are beginning to be asked. These questions relate to the fundamental issues of nationhood, power, political participation, political institutions and national ideologies.

As the people at large were neither consulted nor involved in however rudimentary a fashion in the goings-on of the period 1943-47, it could be argued that the significance of the transfer of power and the new political status by-passed them. More significantly, in the absence of prolonged public discussion of the various problems associated with independence, the issues actual and potential which divided communities and sections, their hopes and aspirations, their fears and forebodings were not given opportunity to be articulated. It was clear to observers of these years that a sense of patriotism did not develop in the nation at mass level, certainly not a patriotic love of this new political entity called the free dominion of Ceylon. Quite the contrary, there was a good deal of cynicism and disparagement of what had been achieved, a feature compounded by the argument as to whether the independence was 'real' or 'fake', whether there was a hidden agenda behind the defence treaties for a perpetuation of British control.

Such reflection on where the country was heading was not even prevalent among the prominent leaders who were supposedly taking the country towards independence. They did not all belong to one political party. The Ceylon National Congress had long ceased to be effective and, in any case, Senanayake had resigned from it in 1943. Other

Ministers led parties and groupings of varying effectiveness. None of them addressed themselves to national political questions as parties. So there was not even an informed and articulated consensus among the leaders in the forefront on important political issues. The United National Party (U.N.P.), which was to dominate the first seven years of post-independence politics, was hastily put together in 1946.

It is true that the communal question, particularly the Sinhala-Tamil problem, was aired from 1944 with intensity by G.G. Ponnambalam and his All-Ceylon Tamil Congress. But here too, the debate was in the age-old terms of constitutional weightage and representation, a continuation of a dispute that began in 1921 over elections to the Legislative Council. Ponnambalam directed his attention to an unrealistic demand for balanced representation between majority and minorities (the so-called 'fifty-fifty' scheme) and both he and other minority leaders failed to explore other possible avenues for safe-guarding minority rights. The minority problem was never posed in a form that would bring to the national arena an important concern for the future of the new nation. Both the Ministers and the Soulbury Commission dealt with it in cursory fashion.[3] The potential dangers in a political system where there was a permanent ethnic majority and permanent ethnic minorities with a Westminster type parliament with almost unlimited powers of legislation were not addressed.

In retrospect, the claim of a British civil servant in the Colonial Office who participated in the negotiations leading to the transfer of power that the constitution entrenched in it "all the protective provisions for minorities that the wit of man could devise" seems beyond belief.[4] Apart from some weightage in the drawing up of constituencies that tended to favour some of the minorities, the only effective protection consisted in Section 29 sub-section (2) which limited the power of the legislature in legislation affecting minorities. Viscount (as he later became) Soulbury, writing years later, admitted with greater honesty

that the Commission was not fully conversant with the depth of communal feeling in the island. If it had had a better knowledge it would have entrenched greater guarantees of fundamental rights.[5] That these issues did not surface and were not extensively canvassed is due to the elitist and secretive nature of political evolution in Ceylon.

Another line of argument put forward by political analysts with the benefit of hindsight was whether the type of cabinet government of the Westminster model adopted by independent Ceylon was suitable and whether the Executive Committee system of the Donoughmore Constitution was not a better instrument of political participation and political power-sharing. This is a rather more open question. Critics of the Soulbury Constitution point to a maldevelopment of the party system, to the growth of a virtual Cabinet dictatorship, and the alienation alike of the Government backbencher and the Opposition as the sources of tensions within society. On the other hand, there are those who see the growth of the party system from the 1950s as a positive development with the possibility of widening political participation including the participation of minorities. That is, that the ills of Ceylon's democracy that appeared in the 1960s cannot solely be fathered on the Westminster-type constitution.

Attempts have been made to explain Ceylonese post-independence politics in terms of two waves of nationalism. A first wave that began in the early decades of the 20th century saw Ceylon through independence and held sway into the first eight years after independence. This was then overcome and succeeded by a second wave with a dramatic suddenness from 1956.[6] At one time this seemed an attractive framework to explain apparently fundamental changes that swept Ceylon after 1956 after a relatively quiescent period of steady progress in 1948 to 1956. There is no doubt that this period forms a distinct entity in Ceylon's experience after independence but can it be dignified with the term 'a nationalist phase'? There were a number

of phenomena at work which cannot be subsumed under one ideological umbrella. They had a social cohesion, being derived from some common economic origin.

Rather than look for ideologies of nationalism of one form or another, this period of the island's history should be seen as a series of pragmatic reactions to opportunities which had been thrust in the hands of a small, increasingly tightly-knit elite. This elite was quickly schooled in the art of acquiring and keeping power and it was power—political, economic and socio-cultural—that welded it into a cohesive group. Gradually, there emerged some guiding ideas and concepts, philosophies even, which enable the period to pass off as one of liberal nationalism. The capitalist, bourgeoise core of the groups that held power had evolved as junior partners in the colonial capitalist system that had grown in Ceylon from the 19th century. They controlled the less lucrative sectors of the plantation economy, the medium scale mining into which British capital had not gone, transport, haulage, servicing and retailing. There had never been an overt conflict between British and indigenous capital, and after independence some withdrawal of British capital from certain enterprises enabled Ceylonese entrepreneurs to expand and consolidate. The commanding heights of the economy — large-scale plantations, banking, export-import — continued in the hands of the British. Expanding indigenous capitalism admitted into its ranks new entrepreneurs from successful professional and land-owning classes. The UNP was the party, par excellence, of the indigenous bourgeoise.

Another vehicle of entry into this elite was the acquisition of an English education and the power of varying sorts that went with it. The level at which this education was acquired corresponded with the position held in the hierarchy of power. The University-educated, and especially those in the independent professions with potential to amass wealth, went far in the positions they held and could be recruited into the political elite and joined the

rulers of the country. Others fitted into levels which their education qualified them. The English-educated was thus a highly segmented group with quite important internal gradations. But they thought of themselves as differentiated from those without English education in a number of respects. They dressed differently, spoke differently, lived in better surroundings and would not marry outside their group. Above all, they held the power, whether it be political, bureaucratic, professional, cultural or economic.

This elite was by no means a closed elite and therein lay its strength. The vast expansion of education from the 1940s, particularly in English education, had made them into a substantial number, at 7% of the population and growing. While a vast majority was a self-perpetuating oligarchy, providing for itself the opportunity through admission to excellent schools, favourable home environment and the power of nepotism and preferment, there was some scope for recruitment from outside, from families that had not yet had the access to English education, from rural and poorer sectors of society and from non-prestigous castes. There was thus some upward mobility through education.[1] The expanded opportunities thrown up by the sudden achievement of independence both in bureaucratic and private sector emplopment as well as recruitment to the ranks of the political masters made such movement possible without threatening existing class structures. But once recruited to this magic circle, the new recruit became indoctrinated with the attitudes, the assumptions and indeed the way of life of the elite.

True to the values it had imbibed through western education, one section of this elite controlled the opposition to government within and outside Parliament. Large sections of the elite did not openly identify with the UNP but chose alternative ideas of political and economic development. In the first Parliament, the only opposition parties of any consequence were Marxist parties, splintered

in three on the basis of their ideological position *vis a vis* world communism. The strength of elitist domination is reflected in the fact that all these three parties in their leadership, financing and cadres were very much in the control of the English-educated. This was one of the reasons why, when there were important cleavages over trade union rights, wages of white-collar and blue-collar workers, strategies of economic development, these were all reduced to a respectable parliamentary game of government and opposition for most of this phase of UNP rule.

In the second Parliament elected in 1952, there was some further fission in the political segment of the elite. A prominent leader of the UNP, one of its original founders and a senior minister, left the government, resigned from the party and walked over to the opposition, forming his own party the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's defection from the UNP, epoch-making though it was later to become, must at that moment be judged to be as much for reasons of personal ambition as from differences of policy. In so far as there were differences of policy, these were to become significant later, as, in a climate of intensifying competition for political power between the UNP and the SLFP, policies were important for mass mobilization. Up till that time, the UNP appealed to the masses out there through a network of patron-client relationships and an open exercise of pork barrel politics. It had no serious competition in this as the Marxist parties, where they did not rely on traditional ties, spoke the language of working class revolution, incomprehensible to the vast rural people. They did have some following, though, among the organised and class-conscious working class of Colombo and the western seaboard. Bandaranaike, himself drawn from the highest echelons of elite, had around him other members of the elite and for a time played the game according to the accepted rules.

In this nine years of rule of the UNP Mark 1, some broad policies, concepts and even philosophies emerged and

it is these that made later analysts call it the period of liberal nationalism. There was the commitment to liberalism and constitutionalism, a commitment that came easily out of entrenched power, though when challenged its leaders showed they could be very authoritarian indeed. When the Marxist opposition showed an inclination and even a desire to play the parliamentary game, this constitutionalism became more entrenched and an end in itself. The state was seen as an instrument to preserve law and order and to encourage the unrestricted growth of free enterprise. Under a friendly government, the indigenous bourgeoise expanded rapidly, filling in areas vacated by British enterprise, though the latter was given every assurance of protection. Thus the upper reaches of the economy continued in the control of British capital. Whenever there was conflict between individual rights and the interests of capital, the government came down heavily on the side of capitalism. It was a typical example of bourgeoise democracy at work, with the forms and appearance of democratic freedom but with the state power and policies directed very much in the interests of the propertied class.

The elite in all its sections — the political, economic, bureaucratic and professional — was multi-ethnic and this is the one feature that gave it a national integrative character. Not that it deliberately and overtly cultivated a Ceylonese nationalism, but it was constituted out of every one of the linguistic and religious communities in the island's population. Each of these linguistic groups submerged its individual cultural identity and interacted horizontally on the basis of a typically Ceylonese Anglicized elite culture. The language spoken was English, the social life, cultural entertainment, recreation were all a product of the continued shared experience of English public school education. Territorially the elite was drawn from all parts of the island but with the environs of Colombo predominating and other areas such as the south-western seaboard, the Jaffna peninsula and Kandy providing recruits. The

high echelons were all drawn to Colombo which gained a great ascendancy in national affairs, even greater than it had under colonial rule.

Secularism was a predominant feature of the elite of all categories. This was an ideology which it had imbibed from its western education and adhered to closely. Individual members of the elite were persons of piety and devotion but they separated their religious life from their political and social lfe. As with language, they downplayed their individual religious faith and did not allow it to dictate their political policies or their social relationships. For the first half of this period of UNP rule, the slowly emerging Buddhist movement was on the fringe of political life, receiving no quarter from the political leadership. D.S. Senanayake's magisterial dismissal of some Buddhist claims for political recognition were quoted with acclaim.[8] The consistent refusal of political patronage to religious movements runs through a large part of this period and is breached only in the very last years when the political elite panicked in the face of rampant Buddhism.

These features, noted above, made this period of UNP rule one of the most quiescent years of ethnic and inter-religious relations in Ceylon. The Tamils, who had shown their dissatisfaction at the safeguards enacted under the Soulbury Constitution, soon forgot their fears. Senanyake exuded communal harmony and it seemed ungracious to refuse a hand extended in sincerity and friendship. Ponnambalam, the leader of the Tamil Congress, the representative party of the older domiciled Ceylon Tamils, crossed the floor with his party and joined the government in 1949. This left only the Indian Tamils, recent migrants and mainly inhabiting the plantations of the central highlands, out of the UNP inter-communal consensus. They were represented by seven M.Ps of the Ceylon Indian Congress in the first Parliament. The U.N.P. sought to solve this problem by disfranchising the Indian Tamils by the draconian laws passed in 1948 and 1949. The laws

Sri Lanka after independence
Nationalism, Communalism &
Nation Building – Sinnappah Arasa
Centre for S. S. & Asian Studies, Uni. of Madras, I

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deprived about 900,000 Indian Tamils of their citizenship and their right to vote. This was a blot on a government and a party which, as discussed above, did not think and act in sectional communal interests. There is dispute as to whether the government acted in this manner out of political expediency or out of anti-Indian communalism. The C. I. C. M.Ps representing the Indian Tamil constituencies sat in opposition and generally voted with the Marxist left on matters of political and economic policy. Disfranchising them would get rid of seven valuable votes for the opposition in Parliament at a time when the UNP was not yet feeling secure. It was also widely known that the Indian vote usually went to candidates of the left. On the other hand, Sinhalese from the Kandyan districts in and adjoining plantation estates were hostile to a migrant community dominating parliamentary representation in these electorates. Some Sinhala sections of the elite have generally been anti-Indian and unsympathetic to the brand of nationalism that had been the vogue in India throughout most of the 20th centry and to the drift of policy in the Indian republic.

The disfranchisement of the Indian Tamils was, whether unintended or not, the first step in the political hegemony of the Sinhalese in the parliamentary system. Its immediate effect, in the 1952 elections, was to distort the balance in representation between communities and areas. In seven electorates, the number of voters dropped by between 40% to 80%, leaving the Sinhalese voter grossly over-represented. This distortion continued without correction into many subsequent elections, giving an extra weightage to the majority community and set it on the road to achieving hegemony over other communities.

Economically this period of rule was one of continuing growth but also of missed opportunity and the beginnings of the malaise of future years. A healthy sterling balance had been accummulated during the war. The plantation industry had not suffered as compared with other

producers in the theatre of war. After initial fluctuations immediately after the war it was able to pick up from 1950 and take advantage of post-war demand in the west. Tea and rubber provided good export earnings till after 1955. True to the adherence to free enterprise and the interests of the local bourgeoise, an open market was maintained in trade and this encouraged a consumption among the elite and even spread downwards. The economy grew at an average annual rate of 4.6% in the 1950s compared with an annual average population growth of 2.7%. The healthy balance enabled capital expenditure on a variety of public works neglected under colonial rule.

There was no co-ordinated plan of economic development as any such concept conflicted with prevailing *laissez faire* economic doctrines. Yet in one area, largely due to the particular predilections of the prime minister, there was a massive investment. This was in the area of agricultural colonization which Senanayake set his heart on. It evoked echoes of the past, when Sinhalese kings underlined their greatness by creating vast irrigation schemes. This was one instance of recalling the past, in a political milieu which generally repudiated the past and very much reflected the present. It was important to increase the food-growing capacity of the country, as rice imports were consuming valuable foreign exchange. Also it was desirable to disperse population from the dense south-western and southern coastal regions to the sparsely-populated north-central and eastern areas. At a vast capital expenditure, dams were built, reservoirs extended and jungle cleared and made ready for colonization. The biggest of these schemes was in the Gal Oya Valley in the eastern province where a multi-purpose project was implemented. It consisted of irrigated paddy land settlement, the generation of hydroelectric power, cotton and sugar plantations and a number of small industries. Land allotments were made in these schemes to enable peasant families to have a reasonable standard of living. Though successful colonies

of satisfied peasants were then built up in these parts of the country, the returns were not commensurate with the vast outlays made.[9]

These were also the years when the foundations of a welfare state were laid. Some beginnings in this direction had been already made under the Donoughmore Constitution when individual ministers were able to push their own pet schemes without overall planning or general consideration. Thus tuition fees were removed in all education institutions from primary level to University in 1943. Expenditure on health services was considerably increased in the years after independence and a network of government hospitals and dispensaries provided free medical treatment. The malaria eradication scheme begun during the war, was continued and showed excellent results. State subsidies to keep food prices low also begun during the war, were continued and extended. All this contributed to raising the levels of health and welfare, and maintaining a reasonable standard and level of life in the island that was an envy to its neighbours and the pride of the elite. But the cost of the welfare state was also mounting. In political terms, it was locking the country into a state of expectation and an escalation of cost that it would be very difficult for any government to even contemplate its dismantling. By 1955 social and welfare services consumed 35% of the budget.

Amidst all this, the time-bomb that was ticking on was the rate of growth of population. Immediately after the war, there was a rapidly declining mortality rate but the birth rate continued at a relatively high level. The annual rate of population increase between the two censuses of 1946 and 1953 at 2.8% is the highest on record. This increased population added to the strain on the welfare budget in every age group. The growing schooling population, provided with free education, vastly increased the education budget. The food subsidies increased with more

mouths to feed. The increased life expectancy pushed up the cost of providing free medical and health services.

Though the elections of 1952 and the second post-independence parliament produced the first division within the government elite that had formed the UNP, yet this party felt more entrenched and secure. The inter-communal consensus was in place, with only the Indian Tamils excised from the body politic. The left-wing parties and their influence in Parliament had been substantially reduced, leaving only their influence in the trade union movement to be contended with. Even here the existence of three sets of unions affiliated to three Marxist parties detracted from their effectiveness. And yet it was clear that the UNP did not really have the capacity to provide leadership or to change course. They were at best the custodians of a situation and a pace of events which they could not control as they did not have the moral authority or the levers of leadership to bring about change. This was seen when the government in 1954, under D. S. Senanayake's son Dudley, the second prime minister of independent Ceylon, tried to do something about the mounting food subsidy bill. A World Bank economic mission to the island in 1952 had drawn attention to the long term effects of accelerated population growth and lagging productivity. The government's economic advisers proposed the reduction in the food subsidy and the prime minister accepted this and increased the consumer's price of rice. A civil disobedience movement, led by left-wing parties, attracted popular support. Government repressive measures led to violence and the prime minister, a man of compassion and not prone to authoritarianism, resigned. Sir John Kotelawala succeeded to the prime ministership and the tone of government and its perception by people were changed.

In foreign policy, as in domestic policy, the ruling elite had no concept of a long-term goal or for an individual role for the new nation in world affairs. The Defence Agreements with Britain had ensured the continuance of

British bases and a British military and naval presence in the island. This had the advantage of Ceylon itself not having to spend large sums of money on the development of its armed forces. But it also meant a perceived and real dependence on British and western military and foreign policy interests. As the cold war between western powers and the communist powers intensified, Ceylon identified itself with the west and took an increasingly anti-communist stance in its foreign policy. This raised important questions about Ceylon's regional role and more specifically about its relations with its nearest neighbour, India.

It was noted above that important sections of the ruling elite in Ceylon had had a streak of anti-Indianism in their thinking. Their political thought and their political perceptions were nor infused with eastern religious ideas. A large proportion of this elite was Christian and those who were Buddhist or Hindu had no great knowledge of their traditional faiths and did not let it intrude into their political actions. One of the consequences of three and a half centuries of colonial rule was to sever any cultural links with India and to weaken any feelings of cultural unity that had survived from the centuries of interchange that had gone on in the pre-colonial period. On the contrary, opposite feelings of contempt and even hostility were developing. The English-educated Ceylonese accepted more than English education from the West. They accepted, far more than India, western ways of life and attitudes and began to take pride in this. The large labour migration and the steady trickle of peddling traders and low level white-collar worker migration that continued up to the end of the war helped in giving this poor perception of India as a large neighbour disgorging its poor and unwanted on an economically developed island. There was thus a suspicion of Indian influence in the region and the British alliance was cultivated as a solution to this. For this reason, also, the disfranchisement of under a million Indians was done without any qualms of conscience. For

this reason the association with Britain was retained as close as was possible and there was not the whisper of a suggestion to adopt republican status when India became a republic in 1950.

The Electoral 'Revolution' of 1956

It was something of a paradox that Sir John Kotelawala, the archetype leader of the westernised, secular and power-conscious elite, became prime minister at a time when the country was being stirred into activity by forces and ideologies that were a challenge to everything this elite held sacred. Among leaders of the ruling elite, he was least equipped to cope with these new ideas. Rapid economic and social progress of the 1940s and 1950s had unleashed new forces and realigned and revivified old ones. The educational expansion had embraced not only English education but a broader layer of *swabasha* or indigenous language education. Sinhala education had benefitted by the infusion of massive funds and schools had penetrated every town and village in the remotest areas. These schools graduated enormous numbers of pupils every year but without an opportunity to go beyond the secondary level, as all tertiary education, with the exception of teacher training, was in the English medium. Youths educated in *swabasha* could only secure employment at a low level, whether it be in the public service or in the private sector, while their colleague who had the same number of years in an English school could be employed at a higher level. As the quality of *swabasha* education improved and the number of school graduates increased, so did their expectations and their resentment of the permanent inferiority attached to them. There was a growing consciousness among them and increasing articulation of their grievances.

A much more potent political force was also simmering and surfacing gradualy. This was the Buddhist movement. It would not be totally accurate to call it a revivalist movement as this would imply that it had been quiescent or

non-existent before this time. On the contrary, the Buddhist movement has always been an important feature of the Sinhalese social scene. It has taken different forms at different stages of Sinhalese history, depending on its contemporary needs and the contemporary political structure. The early beginnings of modern Buddhist organised activity dates from the last quarter of the 19th century, interestingly initiated and spearheaded by western intellectuals who had converted to Buddhism. A series of movements which started then operated with varying levels of intensity in different parts of the country, leadership passing on to national elites, mainly from the commercial and entrepreneurial groups. It is seen as a lever by these upwardly mobile groups to secure recognition in the local community. It did not occupy the national scene, except very occasionally, such as after the 1915 riots. The Buddhist movement never became political under colonial rule, mainly because it was led by the propertied classes and vented its wrath against Christian missions, never challenging the authority of the colonial government.

Under the partial self-government of the Donoughmore Constitution, the movement achieved some measures in its favour through pressurising ministers, but mainly remained dormant as a political movement. At the time of independence, there was activity by some radical elements among the clergy in sympathy with left-wing groups. This merely served to underline the hostility of the ruling elite to politicising Buddhism. The absence of any change to the governing ethos of the nation after independence, the absence of any over support to Buddhism and the continuing influence of Christian groups and institutions created an unease among clerical and lay Buddhist persons and organizations. The clergy were also major custodians of Sinhala learning and the second-class status of this learning put them in the ranks of those discontented with the status of English, together with the large army of lay Sinhala-educated.

The pressure was building up, already under D. S. Senanayake, for positive discrimination to rehabilitate Buddhism. After 1952, when Kotelawala gained power, this pressure was intense with elements of the elite themselves spearheading it. Here was seen an important fission in the ideological and socio-cultural attitudes of the English-educated elite. A major stage in the political evolution was reached with the psychological conversion of large and influential segments of the Buddhist English-educated elite to the Buddhist cause. Without that support the Buddhist movement would not have taken the form it did in subsequent years. It represents an important alignment of the perceptions and goals of the Buddhist elite, a withdrawal from the multi-ethnic, secular ideal which they had so far adhered to. It is the first signs of a search in identity among the Sinhalese, to find answer to questions of nationalism and national goals as pertaining to the Sinhala people who saw themselves the recipients of power with a suddenness which took them aback. Sir John Kotelawala, who had neither understanding of, nor sympathy with, the aims of the Buddhist movement needlessly antagonised it, more by his insensitive stance than by any of his political acts.

It was in this context of an apparent hardening of state policies in the direction of secularism and western values that the Buddhist movement penetrated downwards in the direction of populism. It should not be thought of as a grass-roots movement spreading upwards to challenge the elite. It is rather another and contrary strand of elitist thinking and now began to seep downwards with all the techniques of political mobilization the elite was capable of. The clergy began to organize itself across *nikayas* into larger regional and national associations as pressure groups. Lay Buddhist organizations which had so far restricted themselves to educational and cultural activities also enlarged their scope and embraced political functions. In all this, the clergy and the Sinhala school masters, physicians and other Sinhala-educated were vital to the political mobili-

zation attempted by the elite. It was no coincidence that the organization and mobilization of these groups was taking place immediately after Bandaranaike had left the government and formed his own party. At the beginning he and his party were hesitant in accepting the embrace of the Buddhist movement. But in the climate of inter-elite political competition that intensified after 1954 he found himself driven, willy-nilly, into its arms, or at least to be seen to ride in harness with them.

A concrete political issue which crystallised and sharpened the divisions and concentrated people's minds was that of national language, language of administration and higher education. The national language question had been one of low priority among political leaders. It had never evoked great enthusiasm among them whenever it was raised. On the last occasion the previous legislature, the State Council, had discussed it and passed a resolution that eventually Sinhala and Tamil should replace English as the official language of the country. After independence there was no great hurry or enthusiasm to replace English as the official language. Enthusiasts for education in the indigenous languages had secured the compulsory instruction of the medium of the mother language of the child, through in many urban schools English continued as the effective medium of instruction. It was easier for the Sinhala-Buddhist movement to target itself on the removal of English from its pedestal than it was for it to push the more problematic claim of recognisation of Buddhism. To underline the Sinhala character of this resurgence, the claim now was that English should be replaced, not by the two indigenous languages, Sinhala and Tamil, as had so far been universally accepted, but by Sinhala alone. This was the first step in the assertion of the claim for the hegemony of the Sinhalese over all other minority groups. With this twist, a *swabasha* movement that had so far been a genuine nationalist movement with the support of the two linguistic groups, now became a divisive communal movement. With

one stroke the protagonists of *swabasha* aimed not only at English but also more importantly at the Tamils at a time when the Tamils least expected it and were not prepared to face it.

The Sinhala-only issue and the claim for support of Buddhism converged in 1954 and became a communal avalanche that rolled down the political scene. Proponents of the Buddhist movement also now began to put forward concrete proposals for government action on their behalf. The major Buddhist organizations came together and appointed a Committee of Inquiry into the present state of Buddhism. The Committee reported in 1954, reviewing the history of Buddhism under the colonial powers and putting forward recommendations for its rehabilitation.[10] It was able to point to a number of areas in which the Buddhists had lagged behind under colonial rule. It was able to document discriminatory practices, the effects of the loss of state support and the unequal competition with Christian missions under a secular ruling power, a feature which was being continued into the years after independence. An aspect of its criticism that touched a sensitive spot was the control of education by religious bodies. Under the grants-in-aid system operating under the British and now continued after independence, Christian missions had a control over educational institutions far in excess of their population ratio. Thousands of Buddhist children had to enrol in Christian schools which were the best in the island. As a consequence, the Committee was able to show, Christian literati held positions in public service, judiciary, the armed forces and other major services vastly out of proportion to their numbers. The key to this dominance, it was argued, was the control of education.

The Committee proposed a number of measures to reduce this imbalance by state action. These measures were wide-ranging and extended from the removal of obviously discriminatory provisions such as the nature of education

funding to positive measure to reverse the effect of previous actions and measures of active discrimination in favour of Buddhists. At the extreme was the demand that Buddhism be made the state religion and be returned to the place it held under the Sinhalese monarchies of the pre-colonial period. This emphasis on recapturing a past that had been usually used by nationalist movements in fighting colonial governments had a different implication when used in an independent democratic state by an ethnic majority. The language pull reinforced by religion was too strong for political parties to ignore in a democratic polity. Both the major political parties — the UNP and the SLFP—panicked and made overtures to the movement.

Bandaranaike was the first to give in, initially to the Sinhala - only movement. He did this with some contorted arguments about Sinhala being a 'less developed' language than Tamil, which was being spoken by several millions in India, therefore needing special protection. When he conceded, the UNP followed less graciously and obviously without conviction. Support to Buddhist claims was a different matter. It raised far more complicated issues of relationship between state and society and a commitment to a legislative programme that was bound to create more problems than it solved. Bandaranaike got out of the situation by giving a vague commitment to support the recommendations of the Buddhist Committee in principle. The UNP was opposed to them and decided to confront the Buddhist movement. It was in this context that the 1956 elections were fought. Bandaranaike had succeeded in welding a coalition of elements discontented with 9 years of UNP rule. The dissident members of the ruling elite formed the hard core of his support. He himself, coming from the most influential family in the low lands and linked by marriage to an old aristocratic house in the Kandyan highlands, had available to him the traditional sources of support that the elite had used so far to acquire power. There were several other leaders of varying grades in the elite hierarchy.

Besides these traditional props, he had attracted, knowingly and unknowingly, the support of a wide spectrum of political opinions and interest groups. Left-wing and radical forces that had spent several years in a vain attempt to dethrone the UNP by constitutional and extra-constitutional means, now saw in Bandaranaike and the SLFP the only chance to shift this juggernaut. A number of influential left-wing politicians saw the futility of working through their own weak political parties and left to join the SLFP. In doing this they strengthened the radicalism of this party and tried to draw Bandaranaike reluctantly in their direction. Furthermore, one of the three Marxist political parties, the V.L.S.S.P., led by a father figure of Ceylonese Marxism and trade unionism decided to join the SLFP in a coalition to fight the election on a common platform. These two parties and a few other minor ones formed the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front). Even the other two marxist parties, spurred on by a tremendous zeal to bring down the UNP, entered into no-contest agreements with the MEP so as not to split the anti-UNP vote.

In a way more important than these party alignments in the 1956 elections was the overt and covert influence exerted by lower echelons of the elite, particularly those based in rural areas, and with ambitions for upward mobility through commerce, bureaucratic employment or political power. These groups had so far been utilised by the governing urban elite of the UNP to gather votes for them during elections. Now they had alternative patrons, offering themselves some hopes of immediate and rapid advancement through policies that would favour such advancement. Just below them were another group, perhaps more important, not just in the lead up to the election but even after it. The most prominent among them were the Buddhist clergy and their lay supporters pressing the cause of Buddhism and utilising the opportunity provided by the elections to remove those whom they perceived to stand in the way of the Buddhist cause. This group converged with

those who were campaigning for Sinhala language and against English and Tamil. The articulate leaders among them were, besides Buddhist priests, Sinhala school masters, Ayurvedic physicians, minor village officials - all those who saw their advancement blocked by a lack of proficiency in English and by disproportionate importance of minorities. Both these issues, Sinhala and Buddhism, formed good propaganda and extremist racist and fanatical positions were taken in platform speeches, pamphlets and political cartoons. In the event the UNP received a trouncing, their representation reduced from 54 to 8 and the MEP had a comfortable majority to form a government.

The sharpness of the UNP defeat and the entry of new forces into the political arena made analysts react extravagantly to these events then and for many years later. The terms 'social revolution', 'age of the comman man', 'people's government', 'second phase nationalism' were used to characterise these events. The historian has the advantage of long-term perspective, the benefit of seeing forces unleashed developing and evolving into something else. He also has the ability to look far into the past to seek the origins of apparently novel phenomena. Michael Roberts' writings have gone far to put in a historical perspective, the apparent newness of these forces and to administer a corrective to interpreting this as the enthronement of a new elite to replace the old.[11] The idea of the destruction of the old English-educated westernised elite is easiest to dispose of. A study of the 1956 Parliament and Cabinet and of many later Parliaments and Cabinets up to the present shows that the old elite had not been displaced or dislodged. Certainly the elite that supported the UNP were displaced but other members of the elite held leading positions in the new government.

It is therefore not correct to say that the Sinhala-educated elite had replaced the English-educated, nor is it true that the lower middle class and peasantry had ousted the urban bourgeousie and the wealthier classes. It did appear

so at that time with the immediate shock of the defeat of the party of power and privilege entrenched for over a decade. Even the rural masses thought so as was demonstrated by the euphoria of the post-election days. But it did not take too long to see that a section of the old elite was well in power. All that had happened was that this elite had infused a consciousness and in a real sense enfranchised for the first time the vast mass of sub-elite humanity among the Sinhalese, both in village and town. This it had done through a number of issues which struck a chord among these people. The etlie had used, in helping to reach out to these submerged people, a variety of regional, local and parochial leaders of little communities who, in their turn, had seen an opportunity by supporting this section of the elite to come out into the political limelight and use governmental power for themselves. Each of the parties in this political coalition — the elite leaders at the top, and the sub-elite leaders in their localities—thought they were manipulating the other to achieve their own interests.

At one level, this peaceful transfer of power by the ballot box helped to entrench a tradition of constitutionalism, an aim which the governing elite of the UNP had striven to foster in the expectation that it would work to their benefit. It also locked the island into a two-party system in which two groups of political forces could compete in the political system. Though shattered in terms of parliamentary seats, the UNP had received 28% of the total votes and could work its way back if it adjusted to the new political situation. Some commentators would give Bandaranaike the credit for saving Ceylon's democracy even if his other contributions continue to be hotly debated.

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in Power 1956-1959

As a government elected on a rising wave of expectations and specific promises, it had to stand up and deliver. This led Ceylon into a new stage of political behaviour, leaving behind the stage of government by elites manipu-

lating public opinion and political contest and then going on to govern in the way they chose. Bandaranaike began to fulfil the specific promises made in the area of cultural and linguistic policy as it was obvious that it was these, more than any other, which had swept him into office. Besides, these were measures that needed no preparation or planning, only a boldness in executing them without heeding opposition. Thus was passed in June 1956 the 'Sinhala Only' Act which made Sinhala the sole official language of the country. Other measures were enacted to give various forms of support to Buddhism, Sinhala language and culture. Both the measures concerning language and those concerning Buddhism were to haunt Bandaranaike till his death and leave a legacy of bitterness he did not envisage.

It must be understood here that the new ruling elite, as respresented in Bandaranaike's government, were not personally commited to this new revivalism and cultural assertion any more than those of the previous government. They did pay lip-service to it and affected its forms such as wearing national dress on public occasions and making public acts of Buddhist ritual. The new cultural policy was therefore not initiated and administered by those who were autochthonous to that culture but was imposed from above by those who had ridden on its waves. This is very significant because when aspects of cultural policy and Sinhala and Buddhist hegemony ran into problems, this ruling elite could not compromise or modify these policies with authority and confidence. They were manipulating these forces, without understanding them and did not know how far they could carry them forward and how far they could withdraw. Having been carried to power by the upsurge of these communal forces, they were eternally in awe of these forces and dared not compromise or hold them back. This was one of the most potent problems in inter-communal relations.

It was also demonstrated, in a far more complex fashion, over the attempts to fashion a policy of state support

and subvention of Buddhism. It was clear at the outset that if Buddhism was to make a claim for special attention and state support, it had to organise itself into more centralised, unified institutions from the very atomised and individualistic form in which clerical and monastic institutions were then run. Attempts to bring about this unity, through the creation of a Sasana Commission, floundered in the early years when faced with the regional, class and caste divisions among the various orders. Again the ruling elite were clearly out of their depth in dealing with these problems, not themselves being an intrinsic part of the movement but outsiders seeking to manipulate it to their interests. This proved Bandaranaike's Achilles heel and eventually contributed to the tragedy that felled him.

Though hitherto cultural and communal factors were emphasized as explaining the event of 1956 and became the preoccupations of government, management of the economy had to be an important function and economic factors were at the background to the emergence of the cultural, religious and linguistic problems. It was seen above that the UNP had locked itself into a system of massive support for social welfare expenditure and that productivity did not keep pace with this and population increase further exacerbated the situation. The Bandaranaike government, elected on a populist platform and with an influential Marxist minority within it, could not reverse this trend. Bandarnaike himself had no deep convictions about economic strategies apart from a vague commitment to a mixed economy. The proportions of the mix became a matter of continuing conflict between the left and the right within the governing party and Cabinet. The government began with a slant against foreign capital interests and indigenous capitalist houses as they had unanimously supported the UNP government. It took some time for the divisions among the political elite to be reflected among the bourgeousie and for Ceylonese capitalist families to detach themselves from alliance with the UNP and to build up lasting links with the SLFP and the government.

Economic policy moved in haphazard fashion under the Bandaranaike government, largely influenced by political considerations. There was an increase in state intervention in the economy by the nationalising of private assets in some sectors. But these were selected as much by consideration of national economic factors as by political expediency, used as a means to strike at the economic roots of UNP power and support. In the areas of transport, import wholesaling, port management and some industrial enterprise, the state took to itself an active role. The real problem in these years was the weakness of management both of the enterprises and of labour. In the politicised atmosphere after the election victory, political and party influence in managerial appointments and policy-making ensures inefficiency and encouraged corruption. One of the weakest areas was labour management. Under the UNP, draconian measures were used to put down labour unrest and trade union leaders were political opponents of the government. During the Bandaranaike government, trade unions were led by people who were in the governing party or were giving it general support. Widespread worker unrest in key services had a ruinous effect on the economy.

Overall the economy itself performed in the same way it had under the UNP. Prices of key exports fluctuated and continued to fall, while prices of imports were rising. Through government policies, the indigenous capitalist interests were fostered and they entered tentatively into import wholesaling, and some nascent industry. The food subsidy bill and the welfare budget were really burgeoning and the government was unwilling and unable to do anything about it. The widening conflict between left and right within Cabinet on the economic strategy made it difficult to move in a consistent direction. Threatening postures antagonistic to foreign capital by some ministers were matched by efforts by the Finance Ministers to attract foreign capital. Important measures of land reform initiated

by left wing ministers were opposed and sabotaged by those of the right.

While economic policies were drifting in indecisive fashion, language and religious issues were being pushed to the fore and were shaping political attitudes and actions. They were issues with an immediacy and urgency to govenment and society. The Sinhala Only Act passed within three months of the government assuming office set the country on an irreversible path of dissension and internicine strife which is yet unfolding with unpredictability. Tamil representatives, having fought the Bill in both houses of Parliament, took to extra-parliamentary agitation. Their first satyagraha on the lawn of Galle Face, outside Parliament, was the start of a cycle of Tamil protest followed by Sinhala mob violence in Colombo and other parts of the island.

What Bandaranaike took to be no more than a token gesture to his extreme flank surprised the Tamil leaders by its brevity and the sharpness of its attacks on their rights. In this first attempt to legislate for the official language of the country, no mention was made of Tamil and the Tamils thus lost any legal protection they had enjoyed for the use of their language in state affairs. A new party, the Federal Party, had been formed in 1949, which had become increasingly popular among the Tamils of the north and the east. In the 1956 elections this party had emerged victorious and those Tamils who were cooperating with the UNP had been soundly defeated. The language controversy, as it built up before the 1956 elections and intensified with the passing of the Sinhala Only Act, served to concentrate the minds of the Tamils and rally them behind the Federal Party. The language rights of the Tamils became the most contentious issue of politics and pushed into the background a number of other issues of Tamil rights that the Federal Party had tried to politicise.

The Federal Party's demand was for parity of status between the two languages, that is that Sinhala and Tamil

be both recognised as official languages throughout the country. In their negotiations with the Prime Minister, they were prepared to compromise on this and asked for a recognition of Tamil as the language of administration and law in Tamil-speaking districts of the north and the east and that in other parts a Tamil citizen should have the right to correspond with the government in his own language. After the passing of the Language Act, the Federal party succeeded in mobilising Tamil public opinion and gave the Tamils right round the country a unity they had not achieved before. The party kept on the pressure over this issue and planned mass agitation in the predominantly Tamil settled areas of the island.

Bandaranaike realised the potentially explosive nature of this agitation and was prepared to negotiate with the leaders of the Federal Party, as accredited representatives of the Tamils. The negotiations were conducted in a spirit of compromise and resulted in the signing of an agreement—the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact—in July 1957. The agreement provided for legislation to recognise Tamil as the language of the national minority and for some decentalization power through regional councils. Bandaranaike had always been ready to concede some recognition for Tamil and the Sinhala Only Act had for him been a largely political act to keep faith with the constituency that voted him to power. In the first draft of that Bill, he had made provision for the 'reasonable' use of Tamil but had wilted under pressure from Sinhala extremists within his party and in the country. The same was to happen now to the B - C pact.

Soon after it was signed, agitation of a viciously communal character broke out, with Sinhala and Buddhist extremist leaders coming out strenuously against its provision. Faced with this pressure, Bandaranaike once again succumbed and abrogated the pact. The agitation against the pact was being orchestrated by his political opponents, the UNP, who saw here an issue to climb back to power. Thus

there was the ironic situation where one faction of the elite had used Sinhala communalism to gain power and now the rival faction was using that same communalism to regain that power. Bandaranaike did not have the moral and political courage to face the issue head-on and from now there began a political condition in the island in which Tamils were used as whipping horses for contending Sinhala political factions. Bandaranaike had the chance to put language policy and Sinhala linguistic aims within realistic bounds in the first two years of his administration, but failed to seize it through his weakness and vacillation. This was a clear land-mark in the evolution of Sinhala-Tamil relations in the island.

The Tamils decided to continue their agitation and early in 1958 began to challenge various aspects of the implementation of the 'Sinhala only' policy. Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups demonstrated in Colombo in opposition and urged the Government to be stern with the Federal Party. The rising tensions broke out into major civil riots at the end of May and the beginning of June. Tamils in Colombo and a number of other coastal and inland towns, and in the plantation districts and agricultural colonies, were brutally attacked by Sinhala mobs. Many were killed, much Tamil property was damaged and about 10,000 Tamils were assembled in refugee camps and dispersed to safety in north Ceylon. There was some damage to Sinhala property in Jaffna. These race riots, the worst up to that time in Ceylon's history, initiated a new era of communal relations and a pattern of politics and mob behaviour. It was a warning to the Tamils that, in their political campaigns, Tamils living in Sinhalese areas were hostages and a legitimate target. It showed that racial antagonism to Tamils was an emotion all too easy to stir up and that this could easily be translated to violent and even brutal behaviour. This reservoir of antagonism could be fuelled in a premeditated and organised manner by malevolent political forces; or it could be set

alight by some immediate political issue or political action taking place elsewhere. Another aspect of the whole incident was the relationship of the state to subject communities in its position as the custodian of law and order. One of the most ominous features of the riots was the tardy and ham-handed response of the government to a situation that was rapidly worsening. The government allowed four days of rioting and destruction to continue before it declared emergency and called in the armed forces. This too was done largely on the initiative of the Governor-General who was only the formal head of state. The police, in many areas, were known to have been passive spectators to Sinhala mob violence, either out of sympathy for the rioters or of confusion as to what the attitude of their superiors was. Again this feature of a minority community being unable to rely on the forces of law and order to protect it was a new phenomenon and, unfortunately, the beginning of a recurring phenomenon. Finally there was the feature of a number of Tamils fleeing to seek refuge from Sinhala areas to Tamil districts, underlining the territorial boundaries between the two communities.

When emergency regulations were in force, no political activity of any kind was allowed. Tamil leaders were in detention. Under the cover of emergency, Bandaranaike passed legislation to allow some recognition to Tamil. But that was as far as he went. He drew back at the threat of the extremists and did not pass the required regulations to give effect to the legislation on the use of Tamil.

Bandaranaike faced a different set of problems in confronting the other arm of Sinhala communalism - the Buddhist arm. This was an issue within the Sinhala community but again it involved the relationship between state and a religious community. The commitment given by Bandaranaike to give Buddhism its ' rightful ' place, if only less clearcut than the commitment to Sinhala language, came back to hound him throughout his tenure. Unlike the language commitment, there was no simple solution to enthrone Buddhism and he was really caught in a vice.

The radicals and ultras of the Buddhist movement called stridently for the most extreme measures to proclaim Ceylon a Buddhist state and to implement policies that naturally followed from this status. Not only did they want to enthrone Buddhism the state religion, they also wished to uplift Buddhists in many material ways such as employment, investment, living standards and the like. The Sinhala Buddhist movement was not just a struggle in the abstract for principles, it was also a pragmatic struggle for material and quantifiable things in life. Thus it was formulated and led, not merely by elements in the Buddhist clergy but also, even more prominently, by members of the Sinhala elite who either by conviction or from self-interest made the movement into a multi-pronged one of principle and profit.

On the other wing of Sinhala Buddhism were the conservative upper hierarchy of the old and traditional Buddhist institutions. They held positions of power and influence in the Buddhist church and did not stand to gain very much by any state - aided moves to enhance the position of Buddhism. They would certainly accept a higher status to Buddhism in state and nation as it would further augment their status in society. They were not malcontents and did not wish to do anything to rock the boat. On the contrary, they felt threatened by the rise of other centres of power in the Buddhist church and by the use by these other and rising clerical and lay groups to use their political influence in the new dispensation to emerge as rival centres of Buddhism. This basic division was underlined by class, caste and regional fissions which severely politicised the whole Buddhist movement in these years.

Bandaranaike and the elite rulers around him had neither the commitment nor the empathy to take over the leadership of the Buddhist movement themselves and unify it behind a programme of reform and rehabilitation. He tried to get such a consensus through a Commission for reform of Buddhism but major interest groups refused to

participate in it. The measures that were taken, through the Ministry of Culture, to provide state support to Buddhism served to alienate less favoured groups. The powerful Union of Buddhist clergy, the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna, a prominent supporter of government, itself factionalised. The programme of reform to uplift Buddhism *and* Buddhists left sections disgruntled. It was out of such disgruntlement that arose the conspiracy, involving Buddhist clergy and laymen, that led to the assassination of Bandaranaike by a priest in September 1959.

In one significant area Bandaranaike provided the country with a change of direction which was historic. This was to draw Ceylon away from close association with the western bloc and steer her towards a course of neutrality in foreign policy. This was done in a series of deliberate steps. The Defence Agreement with Britain was repudiated and the British naval and air bases were taken over by the Ceylonese armed forces. In the United Nations, Ceylon tended to support the non-aligned nations and broke free of consistently siding the western powers. The strident anti-communism of the previous governments was abandoned and closer economic and cultural ties were forged with the communist states, especially the Soviet Union and China. All this meant, of course, that Ceylon was drawing closer to India in its foreign policy attitudes but this did not lead to any emotional ties between the two nations. The Sinhala coldness towards India continued and even Bandaranaike felt uncomfortable in the company of Indian leaders.

Mrs. Bandaranaike and the asssertion of Sinhala hegemony

The assassination of Bandaranaike resulted in a further spurt forward of Sinhala self-assertion and urge for hegemony. Other elite groups, representing other political parties, now joined in this push. The UNP, which had already played around with Sinhala communalism, as in 1957 and 1958, and found the experience politically invi-

gorating, trimmed its liberal and secular sails to the prevailing winds. This had enabled it to stage a comeback, in the two elections held in 1960, as major political party. More significantly, the two Marxist parties had decided that they should marry socialism to Sinhala communalism and had, in effect, become Sinhala socialist parties. In these elections, no political party contending for the votes of the Sinhalese could dare suggest any recognition of Tamil as an official language, nor could it go back on any measures taken to rehabilitate Buddhism. On the other hand, they were vying with each other, promising further measures for the upliftment of Buddhists, to implement vigorously the language act and to speedily repatriate Indian Tamils. The Tamils became the whipping-boys of Sinhala communal politics and parties vied with each other in how extreme they could be in relation to the Tamils.

The assumption of leadership of the SLFP by the assassinated prime ministers's widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, at first reluctantly but later with increasing authoritarianism, marked a new stage in the implementation of Sinhala socialism. The Marxist parties, alarmed at the growth of the UNP, drew closer to the SLFP which itself became transformed into a curious mixture of Sinhala socialists and aristocratic paternalists. The two Marxist parties supported Mrs. Bandaranaike's government within and outside Parliament and in 1964 joined the government and secured important Cabinet posts for their leaders.

Under Mrs. Bandaranaike, the Sinhala communal bandwagon rolled on at faster pace. Unrestricted by libertarian considerations that had bothered her husband, she went ahead ruthlessly with measures to enforce Sinhala as the one official language throughout the island. Regulations were passed to conduct administration in all government departments in Sinhala. Later this was extended to the law courts where business was to be conducted in Sinhala. To the Tamils, the two elections of 1960 had merely been the occasion to rally themselves behind the Federal

Party and give it a mandate to speak for them. This they did resoundingly and a bloc of 16 M.Ps. represented the Tamils of the north and the east.

The drive towards statism, economic intervention and the greater assertion of Sinhala and Buddhist interests was, more or less, forced on the SLFP government and Mrs. Bandaranaike through the necessity to secure and maintain political power. Some of the earlier aims of the SLFP had already been achieved under Bandaranaike, others had vanished in the atmosphere of conflict and controversy they created. To regain power from a resurgent UNP and the momentum achieved in 1956, it was necessary to press ahead with some of these goals and throw away the moderation that had been a Bandaranaike characteristic. Not saddled by intellectual ideas or commitments as her husband had been over a long political career, her one interest in politics was the maintenance and exercise of power. The SLFP machinery had been fragmented and factionalised, a process that was compounded by the conspiracy and murder charges that were being brought over the assassination of Bandaranaike and in which prominent members of the party were involved. She set about picking up the threads of the party and giving it a coherence with a native shrewdness and an inborn authoritarianism that came out of her Kandyan feudal background. She had the advantage of immediately proving an electoral success and this, more than anything else, brought recalcitrant party bosses in line.

While she quickly asserted a dominance in party, government and country, what was lacking was vision and commitment to long-term ideals. She only had at her disposal the ideas of Sinhala and Buddhist extremism, which Bandaranaike had tried to moderate, and ideas of state socialism which had divided the party. She now pressed ahead with implementation of the Official Language Act, effectively making Sinhala the language of administration in a number of departments of government throughout

the country. She went further in her language policy and enacted measures to make Sinhala the language of the courts. The Tamils, united now under the Federal Party, reacted with a satyagraha campaign against the language policy in a number of acts of civil disobedience. These measures were pursued with success in the predominantly Tamil-speaking areas of the north and east. The government faced a mounting pressure from Sinhala opinion to act with vigour against the Tamil movement. This it did in January 1961 when emergency was declared and the armed forces were sent for the first time to the northern districts to break up the campaign. A number of FP leaders were taken in custody. Mrs. Bandaranaike showed no inclination to find a political solution to the language problem, hoping to stifle Tamil grievances with a show of massive state military power, an attitude that was to become endemic among influential Sinhala politicians for many years.

Mrs. Bandaranaike also rushed headlong into the very sensitive area of the control of education. This had been a prominent Buddhist grievance and one round which the movement had organised itself in the 1950s. Through the grants-in-aid system, a number of Christian denominations ran several schools, far beyond the proportion of Christians in the population. Thus a great majority of students in Christian schools were Buddhists and among these were the schools of high quality which produced the elite that ruled the country. Though Buddhist and Hindu missions took advantage of grants-in-aid to run their own schools, the head start the Christians had and the impetus they had derived from western headquarters of these missions kept them in the lead. The Buddhist movement wanted all schools to be nationalised and run as part of a grand state system and demanded that the state withdraw funds from denominational schools.

Bandaranaike had realised the enormity of the task of nationalising all schools and seems to have favoured the

maintenance of a plural system of education. In any case, he had so many other problems to occupy him and he ignored Buddhist demands in education. He had given University status to the Buddhist Pirivenas and thought this would satisfy them for the time being. Mrs. Bandaranaike was more receptive to Buddhist demands and set about to nationalise the schools in two Acts which took over the schools and Teachers' Training Colleges run by denominations with state aid. This created another situation of social conflict, this time with Christian communities and Churches. Church leaders vigorously protested against this nationalization and encouraged the laity to resist the actual take-over by the state of school properties. The Catholic Church, by far the largest Christian denomination with the greatest number of schools thus affected, was prepared to go to extreme limits of civil disobedience in resisting nationalization. The government, however, stood firm and was prepared to take over the schools by force, if necessary. The Church authorities reopened negotiations with the government and suspended their action with the result that the overwhelming majority of denominational schools now became state schools controlled and administered by the Department of Education. This Department now became a very powerful body in the state, run by a large bureaucracy, and gave its minister and the government vital powers of patronage through control over appointments, promotions and transfers of teachers extended over the length and breadth of the country.

An abortive *coup* to remove the government, planned in slipshod fashion in January 1962 by high ranking elements in the armed forces and some bureaucrats, further added to the volatility of the political atmosphere. The *coup* was an expression of the great revulsion felt by the cosmopolitan, westernised upper classes toward Mrs. Bandaranaike's government and the populist and communal-oriented reforms she was pressing ahead with. These groups felt their world crash from under them with a greater rapidity than under the government of S.W.R.D.

Bandaranaike, who, they felt, had still retained some of the values and beliefs they themselves cherished. The increasing use of the army as an instrument of state power, to keep the peace and suppress opposition and protest, had given officers in the army a feeling of involvement in the political process. The *coup* itself was very poorly planned and incompetently managed and the officers had not the political *nous* to maintain power even if they had succeeded in overthrowing the government. No major political party or grouping had participated in the attempt. All that it did was to discredit the westernised middle and upper classes and distance them from the government even further. Many of the *coup* leaders were Christians, some were Tamils, and this further underlined the popular hostility among the Sinhala supporters of the governments and entrenched them in their view that these minority groups were enemies of their interests.

In this way, the *coup* gave an invaluable weapon in the hands of the Buddhist movement which had made the large number of Christians in the higher ranks of the services one of its targets of attack. The government was now justified in looking closely at recruitment policies and consciously made the army respond to the interests of the Sinhala and Buddhist majority in the nation in all its ranks and services. This was the beginning of a very important process that was to have major repercussions in communal politics. What appeared to be legitimate affirmative action recruitment policies to redress past imbalances had consequences to the ethos and spirit of the armed forces. Sinhala Buddhist elements in the army became increasingly powerful and dominant and a Buddhist identity was transmitted from top to bottom of the hierarchy. Many important units came to look upon themselves as Sinhala regiments upholding Sinhala power and hegemony against hostile minorities. In this manner, the break-up of a supra-communal concept of nation in the country at large was now taking place in the country's armed forces. The Ceylonese army was set on the road to being organised on an ideology

other than that of sheer military professionalism and this was to leave its impact on the island's events in future years.

The element of populist radicalism was seen in other reforms enacted in the first years of Mrs. Bandaranaike's administration. The programme of nationalization, initiated under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, was extended. In April 1962 petroleum distribution was taken over from a number of British and American oil companies and vested in a state corporation. In a major reform of the bureaucracy, the Civil Service, inherited from the British, was disbanded and a unified administrative service was instituted with the possibility of rising from the lowest to the highest ranks. Recruitment to this service was now open to competition in the local languages, thus admitting for the first time into the higher echelons of the bureaucracy youths who were educated solely in the Sinhala and Tamil mediums. This also had the effect of dispensing with open competition across all communities in a common English language medium and enabled the introduction of an unannounced policy of quotas as between language media. Again here was an instance of affirmative action to redress legitimate grievances of the Sinhala community creating ripples which extended well beyond that immediate goal.

Mrs. Bandaranaike continued her husband's foreign policy goals of moving Ceylon away from a firm commitment to the western powers to a position of non-alignment and neutrality between the great powers. She followed this policy more assertively and took steps to strengthen Ceylon's ties with the communist powers, the Soviet Union and China. This was done through state visits, more intensive cultural contacts, greater trade, which in turn had the effect of reducing Ceylon's dependence on the west. Such a foreign policy stance brought Ceylon closer to India in its perceptions of the world. The uncomfortable attitude of Sinhala elites towards India was discussed above.

S.W.R.D. Bandarananike had gone some way towards reducing the distance between the two but even he was feeling his way towards defining a proper relationship. Mrs. Bandaranaike, in her style of meeting problems head-on, took up the long festering issue of Indian immigrants in Ceylon and achieved some remarkable temporary success at a solution. Taking advantage of the fact that, after the long Nehru era in India, the new prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, wanted to mend fences with India's neighbours, she was able to negotiate an Indo-Ceylon agreement on the future of Indians in Ceylon. This agreement which catered for the provision of Ceylon citizenship to some, Indian citizenship and ultimate repatriation to others, was widely held to be a major concession Ceylon had secured from India. There was, however, a large group of stateless persons on whom no agreement was reached.

This agreement and the resultant rapproachment with India, combined with the other foreign policy initiatives, put Ceylon firmly in the camp of non-aligned nations, among whom Mrs. Bandaranaike played an increasingly prominent role. After the India-China war of 1962, Ceylon's good relations with both sides to the dispute put her in a position to mediate and Mrs. Bandaranaike sought to emerge as a mediator. She went on an ill-prepared peace mission to China and nothing came of it. She seemed to thrive on her new exposure to the international scene and appeared more at ease in handling external problems than in the internal arena. Internally, the reforms she pushed ahead with, hurt an array of vested interests whose opposition cumulatively contributed to great instablity.

The opposition of groups outside the government she confronted with a single-minded ruthlessness her husband had lacked. But she was more vulnerable to the opposition from within her own party ranks. Here her political inexperience showed and the basic weaknesses of party

organization. While the SLFP had a fundamental commitment towards the assertion of Sinhala hegemony against historically entrenched minority interests, it had not progressed towards a more precise definition of goals or how these were to be achieved. Further, it had not succeeded in developing a proper party apparatus, with decentralised units at provincial, district and village level. Mrs. Bandaranaike had been totally uninvolved in political activity until she was pushed forward as leader in the July 1960 elections as a measure of desperation in the face of a revived UNP. She was therefore uneasy in dealing with the old party bosses and soon erected a fence of relatives around her. The most prominent of these was Felix Dias Bandaranaike, her husband's nephew, who became a close adviser and confidante and rose by stages to the powerful Finance Ministry in her Cabinet. The old guard was rather hostile to these developments.

This factionalism was compounded by a division in the party between left and right wing ideologists. Mrs. Bandaranaike and her kin-group threw their weight behind the left wing of the party, more as a tactic than out of conviction. The left had some clearly definable goals of policy and action which separated the government from the UNP and matched the populist mood of its Sinhala supporters. This move to the left was encouraged by the opposition to the government of powerful capitalist interests, especially the press barons who ran an insolent campaign against her personally. The government took steps to curb press monopoly and announced measures in this direction. This move against the press brought to a head the intra-party split between left and right. At this stage the Marxist parties made a major move towards support of the SLFP government. They had been alarmed at the revival of UNP support in the country and at the frustration of socialist policies by the right wing of the SLFP. The strongest of the Marxist parties with the largest Parliamentary support, the Lanka Sama Samajast Party, came out in full support of the government in 1964.

This precipitated a split in the SLFP and the right wing leaders walked out of the party into opposition. Immediately Mrs. Bandaranaike brought the LSSP into government and its leader, Dr. N. M. Perera, was appointed to the Finance portfolio. This was an important stage in the realignment of Ceylonese politics. Up till this point, Marxist parties had been the only parties that looked at the problems facing Ceylon in a truly national perspective and offered solutions that cut across ethnic, linguistic and other sectional differences of an ascriptive character. While this had lost them some influence among Sinhala communal groups, it had enabled them to provide a bridge between the Sinhalese and Tamils in political attitudes. The Marxist parties, with the exception of Philip Gunawardena section which had joined the Bandaranaike government in 1956, had been opposed to the use of state power to bring about Sinhala ascendancy and had attempted to stave the spread of Sinhala communalism among the working class. They did not have any great success in this and were alarmed at the erosion of their limited power base. The resistance to change of right wing and conservative elements in society, of which the attempted army *coup* of 1962 was a manifestation, made them come down more heavily on the side of the government. They supported the programme of nationalisation and extension of state control over the economy. As the government's reforms hurt more and more vested interests, these rallied round the UNP which, under Dudley Senanayake, transformed itself into a vigorous opposition after 1963. This and the division within government between radicals and conservatives persuaded them to ignore the SLFP's communal appeals and come out in support of the radical group under Mrs. Bandaranaike, who herself showed inclination to co-operate with them and accept them in government.

Basic to the political problems of Mrs. Bandaranaike's government was the poor performance of the economy. The deterioration in terms of trade that had begun under

her husband's government continued at a faster pace. Declining price of Ceylon's exports and an increase in the price of imports worsened the balance of payments. During the five years of her government, the growth in the economy sometimes just kept pace with the growth in population, in other years fell short of it. The annual growth in population was in the region of 2.4% while growth in the GNP ranged from a low of 1.82% (1963) to 4% (1962). The balance of payments problem forced on the government a policy of stringent import restrictions. This caused a great deal of dissatisfaction among the urban lower and upper-middle classes which had been consumer-oriented for many years, with a great desire for imported goods. This reinforced the opposition of the better-off section of society to the government and started seeping downwards as economic hardship spread.

One result of the drastic curbing of imports was the growth of projects for import substitution. Industrial production was stimulated to cater to the unfulfilled demand and private investment moved in to take advantage of the opportunity. This saw the early growth of a new industrial entrepreneurial class, many of whom were supporters of the government and owed a good deal to its patronage in import quotas, licences and exchange permits. This was to be a very significant development in terms of political alignments in the subsequent course of Ceylon's politics. The shortage of foreign exchange meant that this was a haphazard development and the nascent industries were often suffering shortages in raw material and deterioration of capital equipment.

The acute financial situation once again raised the issue of rice subsidy, a sensitive issue in Ceylon politics. Despite continuing improvement in agricultural productivity, the rice import bill and the increasing cost of subsidy to the consumer was a great strain on the country's finances. The Finance Minister repeatedly attempted to reduce the

subsidy but was defeated in this by the parliamentary party, sensitive to the electoral impact. The Government thus had little room to manoeuvre in respect of reducing its subsidy bill which contributed to its moving to the end of its term in a situation of economic crisis.

The split within the SLFP had made the government's majority in Parliament uncertain and the dissidents soon moved close to the UNP in opposition. The government lost a crucial vote in the House of Representatives in December 1964 and the Prime Minister decided to go to the polls in March 1965. In this election the polarising tendency among the Sinhalese between conservative free entreprisers and socialists of every description was taken a step further. The opposition forged a coalition centred round the UNP to which adhered the right wing dissidents of the SLFP, the rump of the MEP and assorted champions of linguistic communalism. The UNP itself had undergone a remarkable rebirth, with an effective administrative machinery at electorate level. It took its appeal to chauvinistic elements among the Sinhala literati which had so far been the natural constituents of the old SLFP. In this it was assisted by the MEP and the linguistic communalists whose credentials as defenders of the Sinhala nation were well established. One result of this was for the party to move away from its national, all-island status, a trend which was to become significant in the politics of the 1970s and 1980s. It did, however, retain some support among the Tamils of the eastern province.

The SLFP now moved closer to the left and became the centre of a coalition with the allied parties, L.S.S.P. and the Communist Party. It fought the elections on a programme of the continuation of socialist policies, and geared its appeal to the peasantry and the lower middle-class, expecting the Marxist parties to bring in the working class vote. The polarisation between Sinhala and Tamil politics continued. The two Tamil parties, the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, fought it out for the Tamil

vote on the basis of presenting a united voice for the Tamils in the face of Sinhala dominance. Shortly before the elections, the F.P. seems to have come to some understanding with the UNP leader over the solution of some problems of the Tamils, and the Tamils both of the plantations and those settled in Sinhalese areas appear to have cast their votes for the UNP. The elections also saw a return to political activism of conservative sections of the Buddhist clergy, preaching the dangers of Marxism and communism and of the close alliance of the SLFP with these parties. Attempts of the government to nationalise the press had turned the clergy violently against the government.

In the event, it was the mounting economic hardships of 1964/early 1965 that induced a desire for change and persuaded a section of the voters to try out another set of remedies. The swing towards the conservative parties was marginal but sufficient to allow the leader of the UNP with the support of the allied parties to form a government. Ethnic and religious minorities too appear to have felt that they may have a better deal with the UNP and their votes must have made a crucial difference to the outcome in marginal electorates. Among the Tamils, the F.P. once again emerged victorious out of its contest with the T.C. In the Government formed by Dudley Senanayake in March 1965, which he proclaimed as a national government, all the allied parties were given places in the Cabinet. A significant feature was the inclusion in the Cabinet of a member of the F.P., thus Tamils securing representation in the Cabinet for the first time since 1956.

The UNP Interlude 1965-1970

This government under Dudley Senanayake, 1965-70, forms an important stage in the political evolution of Ceylon. During these years a number of developments which had characterised the history of post-independence politics came to fruition, other new trends made their appearance. The first of these relates to the Sinhala-Tamil issue in respect of

which, in retrospect, the Senanayake government appears as the last opportunity to settle outstanding problems between the respective claims of these two communities within the existing political framework. The leaders of the UNP and the F.P. had entered into an agreement by which the UNP agreed to enact a number of measures to redress Tamil grievances. Some devolution of power was to be effected to the Tamil districts through district councils. Tamil fears over systematic colonization of Sinhalese in the northern and eastern provinces were to be allayed. Regulations permitting the use of Tamil in the administration of those provinces were to be enacted, as also for the use of Tamil in judicial administration.

Senanayake had also promised some concession to the highland Tamils represented by the Ceylon Workers Congress. These concessions related to the eradication of discriminatory treatment of Indians who had opted for Indian citizenship, as well as for those who had been granted Ceylon citizenship in respect of civil rights. In this manner, Dudley Senanayake, the prime minister, had recognised the necessity for reconciliation between communities after a decade of estrangement and suspicion. He assumed power with this spirit of reconciliation and there was some justification for the claim that his government was a 'national' government. But this nationalism and the spirit of reconciliation appears to have operated at the level of the elites of the two communities and Senanayake made the mistake of not taking the Sinhala common folk into his confidence and of not launching, from the outset, a programme of political education of his people, utilising his undoubted political prestige. There was, of course, the major political fact that the opposition, which under the SLFP was only narrowly beaten, was in full cry utilising every opportunity to undermine the government.

The Senanyake government thus assumed power with some good ideas but without a clear mandate. The prime minister began honouring the promises he had given to the

Tamils and legislation was passed giving them limited language rights and removing some hardships of the Indian Tamils. When it took up the question of political devolution through district councils, it attracted a rabid communal attack from an alliance of Sinhala extremists, Buddhists and the opposition parties. This campaign once again widened the gulf between communities, raised old fears and destroyed the good effects of the conciliatory policies of 1966 and 1967. The government abandoned the proposal for district councils and the FP withdrew from its alliance with the government. Once again there was no Tamil representative in Cabinet. The opposition attack on government concessions to minorities, Ceylon and IndianTamils, Christians, brought communal politics back to the boil. It saw a revival of strident Sinhala extremism, led by the Buddhist clergy and exploited by the opposition, which even the government felt impelled to placate. The government moved away from promises it had made to these minorities, as in the case of district councils and some relief to Christian denominational schools.

It was in economic policy that the government made a change of direction. It did not attempt to go back on the structure of state control over some sectors of the economy brought about by the two previous SLFP governments. Instead it sought to encourage expansion through incentives to private enterprise. To this end it liberated economic controls, hoping that foreign capital would flow in once again. The very fact that a government believed to be friendly to private enterprise had won power led to greater private investment and there was some growth in the economy from 1966. The government was more favourable to foreign capital which now started flowing in. Foreign aid from western countries, which was halted under the previous government, was resumed. U.S. aid was resumed after the settlement of outstanding issues of compensation over the nationalization of the property of American oil companies. Also international credit agencies were more

responsive to Ceylon's request for loans. The Aid Ceylon Club, a consortium of some western countries and Japan, met Ceylon's immediate needs to tide over her balance of payments problems.

Foreign assistance, particularly from the international credit agencies, came at a price. The government had to agree to put its financial house in order along lines indicated by these bodies. The chief problem here, from their point of view, was the extravagant expenditure on social services and they especially singled out the growing rice subsidy which was primarily responsible for a continuing trade deficit. As seen above, the rice subsidy was the sacred cow of Ceylon politics. Senanayake, with a degree of boldness not shown by his predecessors, reduced the weekly ration of subsidised rice from two measures per person to one measure which was to be distributed free. The government got away with this change without provoking any immediate clamour but the opposition was to continuously harp on this issue with a promise to restore the cut after the next election.

Senanayake combined the steps to reduce the subsidy on rice with concerted measures to increase food production. Throughout his political and ministerial career, he has been colsely associated with the land and with strategies of agricultural colonization. He now gave the full weight of government authority to these strategies. Great emphasis was given to extending land under irrigation, research on better strains of seed paddy and their dissemination among the peasants, promoting increased use of fertilization and an emphasis on extending agricultural education to the peasant farmers. Most important of all was the increase in the guaranteed purchase price of paddy to a level which provided an incentive and gave the farmer a good return for his labour. All these measures bore fruit and from 1966 record increases in rice production were witnessed. But the market price of rice had risen considerably and this was a great hardship to the urban consumers.

In a further effort to stimulate the economy, the government adopted a measure of partial devaluation in 1968 through a two-tiered exchange rate for the Ceylon Rupee. While it had the effect of liberalising imports and satisfying the demand of the wealthier classes for consumer goods, it led to an overall increase in prices and, in combination with the increased price of rice, contributed to a sharp rise in the cost of living. The most serious problem, however, was unemployment which was felt most steeply among the educated. The sluggish performance of the economy over the last ten years and the continuing growth in population at an annual rate of 2.5% was now beginning to have its impact on employment. The bulge in the demographic curve in the young teen age and early twenties group brought them into the employment market while opportunities were not expanding and, in some sectors, were even constricting. The emphasis on education, now done through the Sinhala and Tamil mediums upto University, from four universities and other tertiary institutions, had thrown up the category of graduate unemployed. Understandably it was among these sections that disillusion with government was worst and therefore organised opposition to its policies began.

Throughout its five years in power, the government gave the impression of living on borrowed time. Its victory in the 1965 elections was not decisive and it was constantly looking over its shoulders at the opposition. It was as if the UNP was not quite convinced of its policies for the nation. It did not try hard to carry the nation with it in strategies it thought most suited and Senanayake fell victim to the type of leadership from behind that had been a characteristic of the Bandaranaike years. The opposition, with an expectation of being inevitably returned to power at the next election, kept hammering away at government weaknesses. The biggest electoral weakness was, of course, the government's association with the leaders of the Ceylon and Indian Tamils and the measures it had taken to con-

ciliate them. The taunt of a government and a leader soft on the Tamils had now become a telling political argument. Then there was the cut in the rice subsidy which affected every individual and the effects of which were felt more with every increase in the market price of rice. The issue of unemployment was also used skilfully by the opposition and particularly the educated unemployed provided them with a political cadre of activities in the election campaign. The government had further alienated the educated youth by its authoritarian attitude to Universities through an insensitive Minister of Education. The minorities — Tamils and Christians — who had supported the UNP in 1965 in the hope of some relief were now apathetic to its prospects.

The coalition of Sinhala and Buddhist communalism and Marxist radicalism which Mrs. Bandaranaike had put together towards the last years of her government was further welded in opposition. This coalition was institutionalised in 1968 into the United Front with an agreed programme to fight for a return to power at the next election. The three parties in this Front were the SLFP, LSSP and CP. Mrs. Bandaranaike had emerged with a greater control of the party apparatus where she now distributed next of kin in strategic positions. The agreed programme of the Front was in the direction of greater regulation and state control of economy and the extension of the public sector. The Marxists emerged as the 'ideas men' in the coalition, providing the major thrust for socialistic economic policies. They supported Mrs. Bandaranaike's leadership of the SLFP against any remaining dissident elements of the right and helped in her clear dominance of politics in the next few years. When the elections were held in May 1970, the opposition appeared a more forceful and united alternative with policies put across in simple fashion and capturing the mood of Sinhala hegemony and continuing defence of Sinhala interests. In a landslide victory the United Front together won 116 of

the 151 seats in the legislature, with the SLFP emerging as the dominant party with 91 seats. The UNP was decimated, being reduced from 65 in the previous legislature to 17. Among the Tamils, the FP held its own as the dominant Tamil party.

Mrs Bandaranaike Rampant, 1970-1977

The UF 's moment of triumph was also an occasion of great responsibilty. It had come to power with an immense mandate, such as had never yet been given to a government in Ceylon, and the clear expectation was that it should fulfil its promises of economic development by an alternative strategy. Yet the constraints that had faced the previous government were still present and new problems were added with the customary reluctance of foreign capital to be attracted to countries with socialist regimes. There was then the looming oil crisis which threw out of gear the ambitious plans of the new government. The seven years of Mrs. Bandaranaike's second administration form an important chapter in the island's political evolution, economic relationships and social configuration. It was a period of hectic activity, both government initiated and by forces external to it. Political relationships were constantly in a state of flux and reforms initiated by government developed an uncontrollable momentum of their own. Despite the huge majority it enjoyed in parliament, it never gave the appearance of being in control of the political situation. A number of forces in Sinhala and Tamil society emerged in complex fashion that would have made it impossible for any government to chart the course of events.

Within a year of the accession of the new government, the country was subject to a traumatic event that shook the foundations of state power and forced political realignments. There were a number of background factors that help to understand this event.[12] The first of these is the demographic factor with 60% of the population below the age of 25.

Next, 68% of the unemployed population of about 2.5 millions were of the age group 15-29. There was in 1970 a total of 14,000 unemployed university graduates and to this number 4000 were being added every year. Over the previous 15 years, expanding opportunity among the Sinhalese had brought large sections of the rural petit-bourgeois into the lower echelons of the ruling elite. Through education and the democratic electoral process, these rural elites had acquired a taste of power. But their further rise was blocked by the entrenched power of the older urban elites and by the stagnant nature of the economy and the bureaucratic machinery. Thus just at a time when the better-off rural peasantry and lower middle class were aspiring to follow their superiors out of the villages and into a share of power, this was blocked and they saw nothing but unemployment and poverty facing large numbers of their children for whom they had hoped so much. Combined with this rising expectation was the phenomenon of social change that had gone on among the Sinhalese for over two decades. In Sinhala society, various low and middling status castes had risen up through education and entrepreneurship and were challenging the higher castes for recognition. Electoral politics had been greatly influenced by caste, in the context of intense competition between parties for their vote. All these factors were particularly intense in their operation in densely populated Sinhalese villages of the southern lowlands, the lower highlands and in the new colonization villages.[13]

Dissident elements among this new rural intelligentsia did not gravitate, as they might have done, to Marxist parties of the left. On the contrary they had no real empathy with the leadership of these parties or their party apparatus as these parties were very much under the control of English-educated elite of the upper classes of urban Ceylon. Instead, they formed their own organization with fundamentally revolutionary aims with Che Guevarist and Maoist influences and in 1964 came together in clandestine fashion in the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP: People's

Liberation Front). They retained this tightness of structure and a secrecy in their operations and, with the spread of unemployment in 1965-70, their recruitment widened. In the May 1970 elections, they campaigned for UF candidates and there was some expectation of rapid and radical changes being enacted when the UF government assumed power.

The apparent tardiness in implementing announced programmes of nationalization and job creation produced a disillusionment with government which spread rapidly. This was particularly directed against the Marxist members of the government and they were accused of betraying the cause of revolution and socialism. From July 1970 to March 1971, the JVP campaigned extensively in its Sinhala Buddhist constituency, criticizing the government. Being a purely Sinhala movement, led by Sinhala-educated youth, they absorbed the prevailing anti-Tamil and anti-Indian sentiments of Sinhala extremism. But their anger was predominantly directed against the state and the capitalist system it upheld.

The JVP's revolutionary strategy was to organise small cells of adherents who were to be instructed in party ideology. The process of instruction consisted of a few lectures putting across a simplified analysis of the political and economic situation and the way for a quick seizure of state power. The call for action was to come from a secretive and well-organized command structure. The order was given in the first week of April and simultaneous attacks were mounted in widely different parts of the country. Police stations were attacked to seize arms. The plans to seize Colombo and kidnap the prime minister were unsuccessful. Nevertheless in the inland regions, state security forces were caught off guard and it took some weeks for the army to restore order and apprehend the rebels. By June, 14,000 insurgents were captured or had surrendered. Between 2,000 and 3,000 lost their lives.

The April insurgency was a desperate move by a rising class of rural intelligentsia who found their future progress frustrated by other entrenched classes of all political persuasion. It was above all a revolt of the Sinhala youth. All those captured were between the age of 19 and 32 and 90% were unemployed, under-employed or employed in poorly paid jobs. Eighty per cent came from village schools. All major castes were represented but a large proportion came from the lower to middling castes. It was a severe jolt to the government, which being of the left would have expected attacks on it from the right. The shock to the Marxist wing of the government was particularly severe. While Marxist leaders in government decried the adventurism of the youthful rebels they could not but sympathise with their grievances nor could they fault their ends.

The insurgency helped to move the government further to the left and accelerate the pace of reform on the political and economic front. Ministers set about implementing election promises with a sense of urgency. The change in the constitution from the Dominion of Ceylon to the Republic of Sri Lanka was hastened. Succeeding governments had declared their intention to do this but had been dismayed by the division of opinion that arose. The Mrs. Bandaranaike government convened a Constituent Assembly in July 1970 out of the elected House of Representatives and in May 1972 the Assembly had adopted a new constitution. The Ceylon Legislature under the Soulbury constitution had some important restrictions to its law-making power and these had been upheld by the courts in some important judgements. Governments, particularly those of the left, felt themselves constrained in their reformist legislation and there was a strong feeling in the governing party that these limitations to the power of the Legislature should be removed.

The Constitution as passed by the Assembly was very much the work of the government and reflected its ideas

and interests. The legislature was made unicameral, the cabinet system of responsible government was retained and there was no change to the system of parliamentary representation through electorates. The Dominion of Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka with a President as head of state appointed for a term of four years by the prime minister. Laws passed by the legislature could not be contested in the ordinary courts but could only be challenged by a special constitutional court. An adverse opinion of the court could be overridden by an amendment of the constitution. Public services officials were under the control of the Cabinet, not of an independent commission as under the Soulbury Constitution.

The Constitution contained a statement on Principles of State Policy which were not enforceable in a court of law. These were defined as the progressive advancement towards the establishment of a socialist democracy and elimination of economic and social privilege, disparity and exploitation. A weak statement on citizens' fundamental rights made these subject to the national interest. Sinhala was declared the official language and there were provisions for the use of Tamil for administrative purposes. Buddhism was given the 'foremost place' and it was the duty of the state to protect and foster it while freedom of all other religions was assured. Thus the constitution legalised the progress of the past 15 years towards Sinhala and Buddhist hegemony and the temporary ascendancy of socialist forces.

Though Tamil leaders initially participated in the Constituent Assembly, they failed to make any impression on its deliberations or conclusions. The FP, representing the majority of the Tamils, presented a draft for a federal constitution with five autonomous regions. It also asked for the recognition of Tamil in the constitution as a national language and more liberal provision for citizenshep. These demands were strenuously denied by the government and 15 out of 19 elected Tamil representatives walked out of

the Constituent Assembly, proclaiming that it had no right to make laws for the Tamil people. The UNP was opposed to the constitution for different reasons. It was dissatisfied with the provisions that strengthened the power of the state over citizens and weakened the independence of the judiciary and the public services. Thus, denied the support of all parties and all communities, the constitution was very much the instrument of the immediate political victor.

The insurgency also accelerated the pace of economic reforms and the realignment of economic relations to reflect the dominance of socialist and authoritarian thinking in the governing party. These changes were effected in the context of growing economic crisis, with falling export earning and a huge rise in the import bill spearheaded by the rise in oil prices. The open economy under the UNP government had been utilised by foreign companies to repatriate profits, especially in the plantation sector. Nevertheless, ministers went ahead with radical legislation with single-minded determination and changed the basis of economic power in the land. Through these acts, the power of the state to control the economy was vastly enhanced. An act was passed in 1972 empowering the state to nationalise companies employing more than 100 persons. The state could issue directives or appoint directors to the boards of private and public companies. A ceiling of Rs. 2,000 per month was imposed on individual incomes after tax and other liabilities. Company dividends were limited to below 12%. Ownership of housing property per family was also restricted.

Even more remarkable were the attempts at land reforms. This was the second attempt at land reform after the tentative steps taken in 1958 to control paddy land ownership. These measures applied to all types of agricultural land and for the first time attempted to redistribute land under plantation crops. In two stages, the laws first limited ownership of agricultural land to 50 acres or 25 acres of paddy land and excess land was vested in a

Land Reform Commission for redistribution. At this stage public companies were exempted from the land reform legislation. Land thus acquired was mainly vested in co-operatives and in a state plantation corporation. In 1975, a more drastic measure of reform nationalised all land owned by public companies. Agency Houses that managed the plantations were brought under the Minister's control. The large estates thus acquired were run by the state plantation corporation and a newly-created body called Janata Estate Development Board. These far reaching measures brought to an end foreign control over the lucrative plantation industries of Sri Lanka.

Sinhala - Tamil relations, which had been frozen after the dissolution of the alliance between the UNP and FP, once again achieved a dynamism and entered a new stage under the Bandaranaike government. Mrs. Bandaranaike had sought to promote a body of leaders among the Tamils favourable to the government and thus undermine FP hold on Tamil opinion. She had appointed a Tamil to the Cabinet by resorting to her right to nominate MPs. She promoted other non - FP politicians in the north as intermediaries with government. Tamil grievances came to a head with the process of constitution - forming and with the total refusal of the government and the Sinhala leadership to compromise on Tamil demands. The fact that Marxist politicians, who had once been sympathetic to the Tamil problems, now rallied behind Sinhala opinion served to further polarise the two communities. Thus the Tamils felt they had no share in the new constitution which was passed in the absence of Tamil representatives. Under this constitution, they had lost even the flim sysafeguards they had in the provisions of the old constitution (section 29 (2)) and lost the ultimate security of a recourse to law against legislative discrimination. Tamil opinion was that the constitution was a *de jure* confirmation of a *de facto* process of relegating them to a position of second class citizens that had gone on for the past 15 years.

In May 1972 all the Tamil parties, including the party of the plantation Tamils (CWC), came together to form the Tamil United Front, a move of great significance in the evolution of Tamil political identity. This was the first time that the Tamil - speaking people from all parts of the island had come together and was symptomatic of the growth of a Tamil identity and self-consciousness similar to what had happened among the Sinhalese over the past two decades. The Tamils rejected the new constitution and went on to develop their ideas of sovereignty and self-government through a federally constituted state or, if need be, through a separate political entity. The term *Elam* for this Tamil state now came into popular usage. Mr. Chelvanayakam, the elder statesman of the Tamil cause and leader of the FP, resigned his parliamentary seat in October 1972 and proclaimed his intention to recontest the seat on the demand for a state for the Tamils. The government did not take up the challenge immediately but when it did so in February 1975 he won the seat by a large majority against a government-supported communist party candidate. The TUF now met in Vaddukoddai in May 1976 and adopted the policy of a separate state called Tamil Elam as their goal. It reconstituted itself into the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). In taking this momentous decision, the difficult position of the Tamils in the plantations of the central highlands became clear. They could not very well participate in a separate state constituted out of the Tamils of the north and the east and their leaders made known their reservations, though they continued to be a part of the united Tamil movement.

The government largely ignored these developments and continued to attempt to split the Tamils and wean them away from the unified leadership provided by the FP. It did this by providing strong support to left-wing groups in the north and by raising the divisive issues of caste and untouchability in Tamil society. It even tried, with much less success, to establish branches of the SLFP in the Jaffna

peninsula. Ministers made frequent visits to the northern districts to officiate at various ceremonies. In 1974 a Jaffna campus of the University of Sri Lanka was established which the Prime Minister ceremoniously opened. Whatever favourable effects of these actions were nullified by heavy-handed and insensitive tactics by government and its northern supporters.

One particularly outrageous incident which became a watershed in the hardening of Tamil opinion towards the state occurred in January 1974 on the occasion of the Fourth International Conference of Tamil Studies in Jaffna. This was an international academic and cultural movement, inaugurated in 1966, to bring together scholarly interest in the study of the Tamils in periodic conferences held in countries where there were Tamils settled in large numbers or where Tamil studies were well entrenched. The first conference was held in 1966 in Kuala Lumpur, the second in Madras in 1968, the third in Paris in 1971 and the fourth was scheduled in Jaffna. This conference, coming at a time when the Tamils of Sri Lanka were feeling threatened and their self-awareness was being sharpened, stirred up unusual popular interest. Crowds gathered in and outside the assembly hall to listen to speeches and see the cultural events. There was already considerable tension between the organisers and the Tamil supporters of government who were afraid that the sentiments stirred by the conference would further strengthen the TULF and weaken whatever support they had. On the last evening of the conference, a crowd had gathered to listen to a public lecture by a visiting delegate. While the meeting was going on, armed police suddenly intervened, fired into the crowd with tear gas and guns. An overhead electric cable was shot down and seven people were electrocuted to death. The crowd fled all round in pandemonium and the police swarmed the town in jeeps for several hours into the night assaulting and terrorising people. This behaviour by police was continued sporadically for the next few days.

Though there had been instances of police repression in the north before this, these had been in response to acts of civil disobedience and peaceful political demonstrations This was the first time that the force of state terror was unleashed on an unresisting people. The memory of this, reinforced by the death of seven Tamils of whom five were youths aged between 14 and 26, was to linger long and shape the thinking of Tamils and especially of the youth in the immediate ensuing months. The government's strategy of winning over Tamils was in shambles. Instead it widened the gulf between government and its dwindling band of supporters in the north and others.

It is at this time that the first appearance of alternate strategies for the defence of the Tamils against a Sinhala state is seen. So also was seen the first signs of youth participation in the political struggle of the Tamils. Both the phenomenon of youth activism and of the use of armed struggle in the attainment of Tamil rights are a sharp break from the past. All previous political parties were wedded to non-violence, peaceful protest and were led by traditional leaders who had grown old with the Tamil cause. To understand the rise of Tamil youth militancy, attention should be drawn to another aspect of government policy that was pursued with vigour by the second Sirimavo Bandaranaike administration. It has already been noted that Buddhist groups were constantly putting pressure on government to discriminate in favour of Sinhala Buddhists in recruitment to the public service, police and armed forces. Successive governments had given in to these pressures and whatever imbalances that existed had been more than redeemed in favour of Sinhalese. Now the pressure was mounting to similarly discriminate in favour of Sinhalese in admissions to Universities. In the humanities and social sciences, the Sinhalese had already secured a dominant position. It was in the admissions to the sciences and to the prestigious professional faculties of engineering and medicine that the Sinhala extremists now turned their atten-

tion. Here selection was on the basis of merit and Tamil students from Colombo and Jaffna schools continued to be admitted in numbers considerably above their ratio in the population.

The government gave in to this clamour and in 1971 it was done by a crude devise of differential qualifying marks for Sinhalese and Tamil students to these faculties. The obvious inadequacy of this method struck University academics who protested on academic grounds. In 1973 a more sophisticated system of standardisation of marks across the three language media in which students sat the examination was attempted. In the following year a district quota element was introduced into selection to supplement the criterion of standardised marks. These measures led to a sharp drop in the admission of Tamils to science-based courses in 1974 and 1975. The proportion of Sinhalese admitted was sharply increased. Tamil opinion was outraged and opposition to the scheme also came from the Colombo schools. A Cabinet Committee was appointed to look into it and proposed a scheme by which 70% of the admissions were to be on open merit, 30% on district quotas of which half was to be reserved for backward districts. This improved the Tamil position somewhat.

The upshot of all this was that Tamil grievances, which had so far been felt most at the level of civil rights, equality and had outraged emotions and feeling, now began to impinge on bread-and-butter issues of every day life. It was, of course, a long-term development. Tamil senior and middle level administrators had first felt the impact of the 1956 Sinhala only legislation in the blocking of their promotion prospects. Later as recruitment was carried out on a linguistic basis, Tamils began to be shut out of public service employment at all levels. The private sector and the plantations that had absorbed educated Tamils also began to close in as the tentacles of the state extended into other economic enterprises. In the proliferating state cor-

porations, the Tamils had no chance. Besides communal discrimination, political discrimination also began to work against the Tamils. Under Mrs. Bandaranaike's second government, the most blatant form of political jobbery was institutionalised. Recruitments were done through letters of recommendation of M.P.s and there being no Tamil MPs in the government party the Tamils lost out on this as well. Thus the seeds of Tamil youth militancy were sown during Mrs. Bandaranaike's second administration on ground which had been tilled and fertilised over twenty years of the rise of Sinhala hegemony.

The Tamil movement was not yet a threat, however, and Sinhala opinion could afford to ignore it. The older TULF leaders, having declared for Tamil Elam in a desperate throw, had no further moves to make. In the meanwhile, important political developments were taking place among the Sinhalese. The two wings of the government were beginning to drift apart. Mrs. Bandaranaike, having gone along with her Marxist allies in destroying fundamental liberties and setting up an authoritarian state, found that she could go no further on that road to save her government and arrest the country from the economic mess to which it was heading. The nationalisatian of the plantations had resulted in a decline in production and a drop in export earnings. The disemphasis on the paddy production programme and the denial of a free market in rice had led to a drop in rice production. The new Sinhala entrepreneurs who had risen under economic protection from the 1960s were irked by state controls and regulation. The right wing exponents of private enterprise in the SLFP now began to assert themselves and in September 1975 the LSSP was ousted from government.

There was now a shift to the right in economic policy but this was of no avail. Unemployment had risen by 1976 to 24%. Mrs. Bandaranaike came to rely more closely on a small group of relatives and sycophants. She depended on her Kandyan gentry connections who now occupied

important positions in government and party. The older members of the SLFP were shut out from the inner councils. Political patronage and nepotism were taken to extremes. In the meanwhile, the UNP had staged a remarkable recovery. The leadership was taken over by J.R. Jayawardene, the most astute of the old guard leadership. Not saddled by adherence to fundamental political principles, he appreciated and had a yearning for the acquisition of power. He completely revamped the party and shed its image of a party of urban elites. He brought in the new generation of Sinhala liberati and extended branches into rural centres. He put the party in the main stream of Sinhala Buddhist dominance. He exploited every weakness of the Bandaranaike government and provided an alternative path to economic growth. He promised greater opportunities for the private sector and put forward proposal for a free-trade zone near Colombo where foreign capital could invest in complete freedom for an export market. As the last years of the government were years of utter economic misery — food shortages, rising prices, labour unrest and high unemployment—economic issues dominated the July 1977 elections. Jayawardene was able to make statements of assurance to the Tamils, recognising the justice of their grievances and promising redress. The left was in shambles, the youth voted UNP in protest and the minorities felt any change would be better. The results were a landslide even more remarkable than that of 1970. The UNP won 140 out of the 168 seats, the SLFP was reduced to 8 seats and the Marxist parties were annihilated. Among the Tamils, the TULF emerged as the dominant party winning 17 out of 22 seats it contested and its leader became the Leader of the Opposition.

Jayawardene, the Presidency and the Sinhala-Tamil Relations, 1977-1985

The Jayawardene government took office with a great deal of good will, massive popular support and with the

semblance of adherence to rational decision-making. Jayawardene himself had sounded very statesmanlike before and immediately after the elections, emphasizing the need for reconciliation between communities, classes and interests and pitching the aims of government on high Buddhist moral principle. The first actions were in keeping with these intentions. But, as with the Mrs.Bandaranaike government, the very magnitude of the victory produced problems for the victors and set them along ways of thinking which were contrary to the democratic tradition that had succeeded in rooting itself in the island. It must be said that the previous Bandaranaike government had already played around with authoritarianism and these ideas were to be picked up by the UNP government with greater efficacy. That government had extended the life of a parliament elected for a five-year term by another two years and in its last days was trying to extend it further if it could drum up the necessary two-thirds majority. The new government had a massive 83% majority in parliament and the Prime Minister was ruthless enough to put it to effective use.

The Prime Minister set in motion a chain of events to entrench and perpetuate his and his party's hold on power and politics. The UNP had declared its intention of altering radically the Republican Constitution of 1972. Besides the defects already noted and which the UNP and others had criticised, Jayawardene saw that he had to minimise the drastic effects of the swing of the pendulum on government and power. He was determined to see that this should not happen again and he also thought that five years was too short a term for the changes he was trying to effect. Above all he was determined that the SLFP should not rise again and that Mrs. Bandaranaike's charismatic appeal to the Sinhala voter should not have adverse effects on the UNP. Jayawardene moved further in his preference towards an executive presidency, with concentration of power in the centre, rather than in a cabinet of ministers. Proportional representation was to avoid the imbalances

created by the 'first past the post' system of election. The move towards a new constitution thus was a mixture of genuine idealistic concern for a more acceptable framework and a pragmatic desire to entrench his and the party's power.

Soon after gaining power, in August 1977, a parliamentary select committee on constitutional reform was appointed and while this committee was working on amendments to the constitution, the Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment establishing a presidential system. Jayawardene was installed as executive president on 4th February 1978. The constitution of the second republic of Sri Lanka was finalised and proclaimed in September 1978. The constitution made Sri Lanka into a republic of, what has been called, the 'Gaullist' model. The president is popularly elected by universal franchise for a term of six years. He is head of state and of the executive and governs with the help of a prime minister and cabinet of ministers whom he appoints from the legislature. The president is not a member of the legislature but can ask to be heard at all times. The prime minister's position is somewhat ambivalent, as the president and not he, heads the cabinet and appoints and dismisses ministers. Election to the legislature was by proportional representation with the district as the basic electoral unit. Voting was for lists of political parties and seats were assigned to parties according to proportion of votes cast. There was a cut off point of 1/8 of the votes cast. There was provision for referendum to ascertain popular views on important questions.

In respect of civil rights and independence of judiciary, the constitution restores some of the safeguards that had been lost under the 1972 constitution. The separation of executive, legislature and judiciary was more precisely demarcated. The Public Services Commission and the Judicial Services Commission were restored. Fundamental rights were more clearly defined and were justicable in the

highest courts. Emergency powers of the executive were more rigorously supervised by the legislature. Any change to these provisions had to be by a two thirds majority of the legislature and proportional representation ensured that henceforth no one party could secure such a majority. But in the present legislature the government party had a two thirds majority and thus the facility to whittle down the provisions it had entrenched.

In keeping with the spirit of conciliation, the constitution for the first time gave recognition to Tamil as a national language and guaranteed its use in relation to the enactment of laws, in parliament and in local authorities, as a medium of instruction and as a language of administration and of the courts. Further, fundamental rights were extended to all non-citizens, that is, the statelesss Indian Tamils and the distinction between citizens by descent and citizens by registration was removed. This was a major grievance of the Indian Tamils who had qualified for citizenship. These acts generated much good will from both Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils. The Indian Tamil party, CWC, had joined the government and its leader was a member of the Cabinet.

Thus the constitution had elements that were liberal and democratic, conducive to a genuine expression of the popular will and those that had the potential for authoritarianism and even dictatorship. Much would have depended on the spirit in which Jayawardene and the ruling party operated it. At the time it was enacted, the UNP had a tight grip on all the organs of political power which they had secured under the previous rules of operation. If they chose to hold on to this dominance and utilise it to the continuing discomfiture of their opponents - and their subsequent acts show that this was precisely what they did - they would make a mockery of the fine clauses of checks and balance elaborately written into the constitution. In this respect, Jayawardene betrayed on the one side the idealism, fairness and compassion which he could and did

on occasion display and on the other a Machiavellian longing for the power-play of politics and the satisfaction in grinding down an opponent that has also been a quality of his political career.

His political actions revealed the latter side of his character. In unnecessary acts of vengeance, he had Mrs. Banadaranaike arraigned for political corruption and used his majority in parliament to deprive her of civil rights. This not only removed her from parliament but also cancelled out her undoubted electoral appeal in any future electoral contest. Then followed one Machiavellian act of manipulation after another of the constitution and of the referendum machinery to entrench himself and his party in power. Realising that the inevitable swing of the pendulum of public opinion against the ruling party had begun in the face of intractable economic problems, he began to take resort to various populist means, within and outside the constitution, to strengthen his hold on the party and his party's hold on parliament. Sri Lanka was set on the road to a Bonapartist regime, acclaimed by referendum and in the name of popular sovereignty.

In an opportunistic move, Jayawardene decided to advance the presidential elections to 1982 and submitted himself for reelection. The opposition parties were in disarray and could not agree on a single candidate. Jayawardene was reelected, gaining 52. 9% of the votes, a figure made possible by the TULF boycott of the elections. Well aware that, while his personal popularity had not dwindled, his party and especially many M. Ps were widely unpopular, he then announced a referendum to extend the life of parliament by a further six years to 1989. The referendum was held while the country was in a state of emergency, with opposition leaders in custody and the press unfriendly to government banned. The referendum was carried and the way was paved for a one—party rule to theend of the decade. Minority opposition parties were effectively disfranchised. President Jayawardene achieved

a dominance in Sri Lankan politics not seen since the era of royal absolutism. By the same token he has committed the error of rendering his costitution a partisan document to which no opposition could adhere.

His major argument for thus dismembering democracy which he had for long claimed to uphold was that a period of strong rule was necessary to get the island out of the mess into which 25 years of partisan politicking had taken it. And yet he appears to be not as energetic in the exercise of power as he was in the fight to acquire it. In a centrifugal and plural political and social system as in Sri Lanka, it was difficult to exercise centralised authority. Jayawardene took his election victory as a clear mandate for an open economy and set about to dismantle the system of regulatory controls erected by the previous government. Nationalised industries were made to compete in the open market and made more efficient. The paddy market was freed and prices made to find their own levels as incentives to production. Liberalization of the economy brought in foreign capital and loans. The I.M.F. and Aid Sri Lanka Consortium as well as bilateral loans eased the foreign exchange problem and enabled industrial investment. Much had been made of the free trade zone' and an area was set apart in Katunayaka, about 30 kilometres north of Colombo as an Export Promotion Zone. Foreign entrepreneurs were invited to set up factories to produce for an export market and it was expected that this would generate employment and bring in much needed technical sklils. Unfortunately it was launched when the international economy was in recession. The zone did not attract sophisticated industries, rather it brought in the traditional ones like textiles and footware in order to take advantage of the trade quotas provided for Sri Lanka to western markets. It was expected that the tourist industry would take off.

All these measures had some effect, though they were slow and conditioned by unexpected international crises and traumatic local upsets. As with the previous UNP

government, the country was being saddled with a huge debt which had to be serviced annually. The liberation of entrepreneurship, the tourist industry and the free trade zone increased employment. Unemployment was reduced from a high of 24% (1973) to 15% in 1981. At the same time there was high inflation and middle and working classses suffered a decline in living standards. There was a pronounced consumerism, with liberal imports, but beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest classes. There was growing income disparity — all features which had led to electoral disaster for government in power. The local entrepreneurial classes benefited from the economic boom. The Sinhala entrepreneurs who had had a head—start moved on to higher finance and sophisticated industry. Tamil entrepreneurs who had stayed with import—export and were dispossessed by the expansion of the state into other sectors now diverted to secondary industry and the production of consumer goods. Jayawardene's strategy of national integration and stability through expansion might have worked if the other imponderables in society and in the world around had not intervened.

The most potent of these factors was the relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils which now took the centre of the stage. Up till the 1980s, the Sinhala—Tamll problem was at best of nuisance value to Sinhalese leaders, raising its head now and then and occasionally erupting into a sporadic racial attack by Sinhala mobs on Tamils in the neighbourhood. Successive governments and the Sinhala intelligentsia could perceive no problem, nor could they understand the intensity of feeling that was developing among the Tamils. Issues of the 1950s and 1960s, that had been somewhat remote and intangible, now grew to impinge upon daily life. The issues of language policy, employment, education, colonization and civil liberties now began to loom large and in every one of these areas the developments of the 1970s posed intractable problems that rent the nation apart in the 1980s. To understand the deterioration of inter—ethnic re-

lations, it is necessary to recapitulate a number of background factors and identify others that were making their appearance.

The movement of Sinhala self-assertion had grown from 1956 with increasing momentum and over two decades showed no sign of being satiated. On the contrary each victory was the launching pad for further advances on other fronts where it was felt the Sinhalese as a community were disadvantaged. It began with Sinhala as an official language, extended to the control of education, then to employment in the armed forces, police, public services and state corporations, went further into employment in the plantation sector and finally into university admissions. In all these cases, the appeal was to the democratic principle of the interest of the majority. It was felt,with some justification in certain aveues of national life, that the Sinhalese were not enjoying benefits in proportion to their numerical dominance of the population. In these years the Sinhalese occupied between 70% and 74%of the total populatlon. When a majority undertakes a united drive to secure for itself what it feels are its legitimate dues by the use of state power, it is launching on a path not easily reversible. It may not know where to stop discriminating in its favour. The Sinhala majority in the Sri Lankan (Ceylonese) nation-state had been taught by its leaders from 1956 that state power was a legitimate weapon by which it could further its interests and defend them.

By the 1970s, in a number of areas of political and economic power, the Sinhalese had acquired a dominance well in excess of their proportion in the population. There was the frightening situation that the Sinhalese were represented in the legislature in excess of their population, having over 80% of the seats, a most uncommon case of weightage to the majority. In respect of employment, the old imbalances had been turned around to give them an advantage in the public services, armed forces and corporations where they hold between 82% to 85% of all positions.

P. 73

This had been done through a massive policy of reverse discrimination in favour of Sinhalese in employment in the 1960s and 1970s. Massive investment in colonization schemes had pushed the frontiers of the Sinhala population, into the north-central and eastern parts of the country. In the 1970s, a beginning had been made to satisfy the old grievance of the up-country Sinhalese against Indian Tamil dominance of employment in the plantations. In the last phase, Sinhala pressure groups were looking to specific sectors where minorities still had some footing and were agitating to prise them out. At every stage, governments either initiated these actions or gave in to powerful pressure groups. It is this open-ended, limitless drive to assert one community's interests in terms determined by its extremist leaders that has been responsible for many of the problems that followed.

The community most affected was that which had most to lose by this onslaught. The old settled Sri Lankan Tamils formed 11% of the population in 1963, 11.1% in 1970 and 12.6% in 1981. The Indian Tamil settlers of the 19th and 20th centuries dwindled from 10.6% in 1963 to 5.6% in 1981 through repatriation to India. Many of the measures to rehabilitate Sinhalese noted above affected the Sri Lankan Tamils, other later measures have begun to affect the Indian Tamils. The intensity of emotional feeling over the Sinhala-only legislation was referred to above. Subsequent developments and the implementation of the Sinhala—only policy shifted opinion from an emotional reaction to material concern. The implementation of a Sinhala-only policy in employment meant the shift from a competitive system of recruiting to all white-collar jobs in the public service through the common medium of English to the ability to impose quotas as between communities. With the pressure on governments to bring the ratio of employment to match population, there had to be a boost to Sinhala recruits and a drastic reduction of Tamil recruits to eradicate the advantages they had enjoyed under the competitive system. Thus the period 1960 to the present saw vast avenues of

traditional employment blocked to Tamils of educational levels ranging from G.C.E. O level school leavers to University graduates. In 1983, a survey showed that the unemployment rate among young Tamils who have passed G.C.E. A levels was 41%.

Likewise, the question of colonization and settlement by Sinhalese in the sparsely populated districts of the northern and eastern provinces was for many years largely a political one. This process had turned some districts in the Eastern province into Sinhalese majority areas and in others made them a large minority with access to state power. Upto a point these could be rationalised as occupying land which had been unoccupied and in which the Tamils had shown no interest. But this was ceasing to be the case. Tamil dispersal outside the densely populated Jaffna peninsula, in the 19th and first half of the 20th century, had been southwards and overseas to British territories of Southeast Asia. When these avenues were blocked, Tamils started looking to sparsely populated but fertile lands in the districts of Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaithivu. Likewise in the east there was a push into the interior. As Tamil settlers were more prepared to migrate to these lands, they felt the state was discriminating against them in the selection of colonists in irrigation development projects in those territories.

This growing conflict was compounded by a few factors that began to operate from the 1970s. Recession in the plantation industry and nationalization of plantations had resulted in the displacement of Tamil estate labour which was driven to destitution and vagrancy in the hill country towns. To this was added the fear for personal safety caused by the spread of anti-Tamil racial attacks and violence by Sinhala mobs provoked by racial extremists. What started as a trickle of this displaced labour to vacant land in the north and east became a steady stream after the 1977 violence. Voluntary welfare groups among Tamils sponsored such settlements and assisted

Indian Tamils to work on the land in safety and dignity. Thus both on the part of the older Sri Lanka Tamils and the hill country Tamils there was a pressure to move into what had been a no-man's land between Sinhalese and Tamil villages. The attitude of the states and of Sinhala colonists and politicians to this movement was an important ingredient in Sinhala-Tamil relations.

The introduction of measures of severe discrimination in 1971 favouring admission of Sinhalese over Tamils in tertiary institutions also brought home Tamil grievances against state policy. The effect of these measures, adopted in many revised forms throughout the 1970s, was to deny the chance of university education to a number of Tamil school leavers intellectually capable and highly motivated towards pursuing higher education. To understand the depth of feeling here, it should be remembered that to the Tamils education had been the major lever of upward mobility and of social security throughout the 20th century. This left large cohorts of teenagers in the villages of Jaffna with an acute sense of deprivation, unemployment and physically idle but intellectually alert and agile to want to do something about their position. To the Tamil way of thinking, a denial of education was perhaps the worst deprivation of all.

To these may be added a factor that appears to emerge for the first time in the nature of economic development taking place in the mid-1970s. Up to this time, material issues of conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils were limited to employment and educational opportunity. Now with the severe recession that seized hold of the economy under Mrs. Bandaranaike's second administration, Sinhala-Tamil competition was extended to the level of bourgeoise entrepreneurs and of urban poor. At the level of the entrepreneurs, the open economy fostered by Jayawardene in 1977 had led to the rise of a range of Tamil industrialists who were competing effectively with the older Sinhalese entrepreneurs. This Tamil investment was concentrated in Colombo and the environs and was visible. At the level

of the urban proletariat, the widespread unemployment and destitution could easily be exploited by racist propagandists to turn Sinhalese mobs against Tamils. Economic factors were more conducive now for the manipulation of organised mob violence of a majority against a minority.

Another set of factors related to the attitudes and relationships within governing bodies - both the popular representatives and bureaucratic and security organs of the state. Before the rise of Sinhala hegemonism,the bureaucracy at all levels and the security forces of army, navy and police may be said to have shared a loyalty to a state neutral to communities and political parties. They conceived of their duties as the protection of the citizen, whoever he may be, and generally functioned in a professional manner right till the mid 1960s. The recruitment to these ranks from the mid 1960s brought in a new ethos, a new concept of their duties and aims. The equation of a Sri Lankan nation with the Sinhalese community now extended to the state, making the various organs of the state instruments for the ascendancy of the Sinhalese over other minorities. This was particularly so, in the light of later happenings, in the armed forces and the police where professional standards and levels of recruitment were messed up by political interference especially after the attempted *coup* of 1962.

In the political wing of government, the thrust of leadership which Jayawardene appeared to give in the lead-up to the 1977 elections and for the next two years seems to have been blunted by the force of political reality within his own party. The public statements mollifying Tamil sentiments and the measures taken to satisfy some of their grievances in language policy, University admissions and in the Constitution of 1978 appear to have exhausted the fund of goodwill he had and he showed signs of retracing his steps from 1979. During the anti-Tamil violence of 1977, he had forthrightly criticised Sinhala racialism but in later such incidents of a far more violent character he became more ambivalent and even downright wily as

time went on. Political commentators have attempted to explain this in many ways. There is firstly his age which made it difficult for him to appear as a permanent, long-term leader in the political scene. This in turn led to factional in-fighting with individuals and groups jockeying for position in the contest for succession of leader of the UNP. In these intraparty conflicts, the attitude and policy towards the Tamils was an important touchstone of support and adherence. A leader who presented himself most intransigent towards the Tamils had the widest following among the Sinhala masses.

The prime minister who stood second in line of succession had started as a man of moderate views with some contacts among minority groups. Rivals for succession could thus play on this and move to his right in respect of communal policy. Three or four of the leading ministers were thus building up bases of power in the party and in the country. These bases consisted of trade union groups loyal to individual ministers and para-military bodies, both of which could be called out on the streets at short notice. Then there were Buddhist extremist groups that could be used to pressurize government. Jaywardene felt unable to re-establish the tight control that he once had on the party and the ministers. This may have been partly because of his isolating himself in the presidency, with his own advisers and bureaucracy and not interacting in parliamentary and Cabinet affairs. Thus situations arose where ministers undermined presidential executive policies and initiatives. The Tamils became more directly the tool of UNP intra-party politics and personal rivalries.

Even as these developments were taking place in Sinhalese political opinion, very fundamental transformations were taking place among the Tamils. The old FP which had now transformed itself into the TULF, representing as it did the 'old guard' in Tamil politics, was no longer able to keep its position of sole representative of Tamil aspirations. Their inability to deliver any but the most

minor of concessions from the Sinhalese state cost them their credibility. As discussed above, the impact of Sinhala ascendancy and of state policies in this direction were being felt across the spectrum of Tamil society and in all the regions where Tamils were settled. While electorally the Tamils continued to give overwhelming support to the TULF, except in the Batticaloa district where the personal political influence of a Tamil leader made possible his election as a UNP member, some among them were beginning to look to alternative methods to attain Tamil aims. The methods of political agitation of the FP and TULF, of satyagraha and hartals, had only brought on the participants the full weight of state power and, on occassions, the spontaneous force of mob violence.

It is not surprising that the lead in the search for alternative methods was taken by the youth, among whom unemployment and the denial of opportunity for tertiary education had left a force of enormous political potential. The goal of an independent Tamil state embracing the northern and eastern provinces had not come into realistic Tamil political thinking till the 1970s. When it did it was seen by most as a starting point for bargaining over essential demands, which continued to be language rights, territorial integrity and devolution of power. The concept of Eelam as this independent Tamil state came into the political vocabulary after 1975. At about this time the strategy of armed force to achieve this objective also appeared. In 1972 a student body called Tamil Manavar Peravai (TMP, Tamil Student Federation) appeared in the north. It came a year after the JVP insurrection which must have had some influence on the Tamil students' thinking. At this stage it was a ginger group providing support to the TULF, though, in the climate of fear of revolutionary violence and repression of Marxist youth, some Tamil students appear to have been arrested and disposed of.

The spread of revolutionary ideas of armed struggle against the Sinhala-dominated state gained momentum

during the years of cynical pursuit of power of the second Bandaranaike administration and especially in the aftermath of the police action at the Fourth International Tamil Conference in Jaffna in January 1974. It was at this time that these student groups forged links with Tamil student groups in South India. At about this time, another group called the Tamil New Tigers was formed with the more specific aim of waging armed insurrection against the government for a separate Tamil state. It started as a group of amateur revolutionaries, noted more for boldness and audacity than for strategy, and the government set in motion a massive police repressive machinery in the north armed with emergency powers. Torture and liquidation of suspects, detention without trial and the despatch of the army to the north were measures begun under the Bandaranaike administration to combat this incipient threat.

Youth militancy grew in direct proportion to the determination of government to stamp it out by military means. What started at first as an armed struggle by a section of broad Tamil movement to secure their future now developed its own logic and its own momentum. By the time the UNP government came to power, the armed struggle path was being taken by more than one grop.

The oldest of them was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with a strong Marxist orientation, links with international liberation movements and with cells and training camps in the jungles of the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. A splinter group breaking away from LTTE was the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOT) also with international links. The PLOT is active in propagandizing the Tamil cause in India and through illegal broadcasts from offshore bases. A third group is the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization which appears to be a totally domestic body. Its leaders were captured in 1981 and sentenced to death in a trial which gave the movement much publicity and Tamil sympathy. While in jail, the

two leaders were brutally beaten to death by Sinhala prisoners in July 1983.

By 1981 the government had on its hands a classic insurgency problem. To the government and to Sinhala public opinion, these movements were terrorist movements that had to be eradicated by military means. Vast battalions of the armed forces were sent to the north and the east armed with an array of weapons and with emergency powers suspending civil rights. A most draconian piece of legislation by any standards, the Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed in 1979 which gave the state wide powers, including the power to dispose of bodies without an autopsy. As the government went down the path of a military solution, it started looking for international assistance including Israeli specialist advisers against insurgency and British mercenaries experienced in anti-insurgency operations. It also lanuched on a scheme of massive military expenditure, buying weapons from the United States, Britain, and even, it is said, from South Africa.

To the Tamils, however, the Tigers, as they were collectively called, were the 'boys', perhaps intrepid and audacious, but well-intentioned and fighting for a cause which none of their other leaders had succeeded in furthering. The Tigers saw themselves as a guerrilla movement fighting a war of liberation against the Sri Lankan state. The Sri Lankan armed forces in the Tamil territories were an army of occupation and hence legitimate targets of attack. The insurgents have shown themselves a well-disciplined and tightly controlled body, except for a time in 1982 when two groups were fighting each other in an internicine conflict. They have chosen their targets and planned their attacks carefully. Their attacks have been directed against the army and police in ambushes and in frontal attacks on police posts. The Tigers have also seen Tamils who collaborated with government as their legitimate target. In this way they have assassinated supporters of both the SLFP and the UNP. Further, the Tigers direc-

ted their attacks on Banks and any other government institutions handling money with the self-proclaimed intention of financing their cause. Up till 1985, they have been scrupulous in the avoidance of any other forms of violence, undermining the government's attempt to tar them as unmitigated terrorists. Thus over ten years of continuing activity, they have succeeded in maintaining the goodwill and certainly the acquiescence of the Tamil populace among whom they moved. Otherwise it would be impossible for them to operate in the way they do.

The government and some influential sections of Sinhala political opinon were caught off-guard by this new development in the Tamil problem and were at a loss to know how to react to it. Up to that time the reaction to any act of peaceful civil disobedience by the Tamils had been the sporadic anti-Tamil riot in Colombo and a few other towns which the government quickly contained. Now when news of Sinhala soldiers and police killed in action reached Colombo, Sinhalese opinion reacted with unprecedented bitterness that soon turned into violence. The worst anti-Tamil riots of this type, of an extent that made some commentators use the terms 'pogrom' and 'genocide', occurred in July 1983. In a successful ambush of an army column in Jaffna, the guerillas killed 13 soldiers. When news of this reached Colombo and in the vengeful mood created by the feneral of these soldiers which was fed by some unwise publicity by the organs of the state, the whole of Colombo was up in flames in a mad mood of killing and arson directed at Tamils living there. The spontaneous reaction of Sinhala mobs to a mood of emotive anger at Tamil killing of Sinhala soldiers was one element of the situation. What was new and frightening was the organised aspect of the violence against Tamil lives and property. Both before and after the curfew was declared, gangs of thugs went around in state-owned vehicles and the state railway with names and addresses of Tamil residences and business property and systematically destroyed

them street by street. Both the army and police force watched passively and even as some foreign reporters had witnessed, actively assisted the rampage. The government put the death toll at 400 but more realistic estimates put it at around 2000. About 120,000 Tamils were rendered homeless and were housed in hastily set up refugee camps. Many Tamil houses, business establishments and 70 factories owned by Tamils were destroyed.

The use of state transport and the facility of being provided with details of names and addresses from voters' lists and of ownership of property through business registers leave the strong presumption of collusion and perhaps incitement by leading members of the government. The name of at least one minister who has been active in anti-Tamil movements has been widely mentioned in this connection. The President's reaction was another frightening aspect of the whole episode and left his reputation for fairness and strong leadership in shreds. His public statements, far from quenching raging flames, tended in the opposite direction. In speaking to foreign journalists immediately after the events, he is reported to have absolved himself of responsibility for the security of the Tamils and expressed no interest in their feelings. This served to alienate even the large middle class Tamil population living in Sinhalese areas who had earlier tended to have faith in his ability to solve the Tamil problem. Besides alienating international opinion it made it difficult even for friendly governments to come openly to his support. That this was not a sudden reaction, in the heat of the moment, is seen in the way the Sri Lankan government went on to rationalise and even justify the atrocities of July 1983. *Sri Lanka*, a Ministry of State publication (Overseas Information Series No. 6) talks calmly of the 'kith and kin' of the 'terrorists' as 'virtual hostages on soil held by the people whose youngsters they were shooting up'. Another publication from the same source derides the 'terrorists' for not being present when their people were being butchered in Colombo. It is this alienation of the

State and its security organs from the Tamil peple that is one of the startling aspect of this July 23 rd holocaust. Some would say that this is only a confirmation and acceptance of an unpoken premise that had been there all along.

This was then one reaction to the insurgency. Events in Colombo were duplicated before and during 1983 in other Sinhalese towns and with particular horror in the hill country districts. There was another reaction and this was limited to the districts where Tamils were the majority settlers, and particularly in the Jaffna peninsula, the prime seat of Tamil culture and leadership. Here, under the guise of anti-insurgency operations, was let loose a murderous regime of terror and brutality which has been well documented from the government's own belated admissions and, more importantly, from an array of impartial investigations by local and international human rights groups. In desperate and entirely unprofessional responses to insurgent attacks, the police, army and navy stationed in the north and the east let loose spurts of arson and indiscriminate fire power against broad civilian targets, leading to huge losses of innocent civilian life and damage to property. Among a miriad of established cases, a few may be mentioned. In May 1981, during a campaign for local elections, Sinhala units of the police went on a rampage in the city of Jaffna, burning and looting hundreds of shops, a Tamil newspaper office, TULF offices, an M.P's house and, most grievous of all, burnt down the city public library with its valuable collection of books and manuscripts. It was widely rumoured that some ministers were behind this episode. In May 1983, units of the Sri Lankan navy went berserk in the port-town of Trincomalee, firing into crowds, destroying and setting fire to property. The major July 1983 riots, referred to above, were preceded by an army rampage in Jaffna in response to the killing of 13 soldiers. In 1984, Tiger insurgent attacks on the army became more frequent and the army responses have become standard and predictable. After a successful Tiger attack, the army engages in authorised and unauthorised acts of indiscriminate reprisals in

the neighbourhood of the incident. Firing into crowded markets (Chunnakam), training heavy guns on churches and stores (Jaffna), bombarding coastal villages from land and sea (Valvettithurai), flattening entire streets of a town (Mannar), these are known frustrated reactions of an army without discipline, without strategy and without leadership.

By the middle of 1984, the frequency and intensity of insurgent attacks and the scale of the response of the security forces had plunged the north and the east into civil war. The Minister for Naitonal Security defended massive reprisal acts on the civilian population with the argument that the population was suspected of actively and passively aiding the insurgents. Systematic raids on Tamil homes resulted in the seizure of thousands of youths who were then transported to army detention centres to the south. Lengthy curfew hours, restrictions on motor transport, banning of movement of shipping along the coast brought economic activity to a stand-still, increased disaffection and had the effect of increasing recruitment to the rebels. As a result the insurgents were able to restrict the mobility of the army and engage in some spectacular raids on military targets. Throughout 1984 the civilian casualties in the north and the east were expanding and it looked as if the tactic of the security forces was to make the civilians pay the price for insurgent hostility. It was hoped thus to turn the civilian population against the Tiger insurgents. The strategy was a failure. Far from turning the people against the insurgents, it resulted in massive exodus from coastal villages, which felt the brunt of the terror of the army and the navy, to India. This in turn intensified the refugee problem that India had to cope with from 1981. By the end of 1984, it was estimated that a total of 90,000 people had sought refugee in India. This refugee problem kept alive India's interest in the solution of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict.

The indiscriminate reprisals on civilian populations must have been worrying to the Tamil insurgents. Also

worrying was the government strategy of arming Sinhalese settlers along the border areas adjoining Tamil villages. These considerations must have moved the insurgents to abandon their strategy of not attacking civilian targets. From December 1984, Sinhalese colonization villages in what were once Tamil areas and towns deep into Sinhalese areas have been chosen for attack. These have resulted in the first Sinhala civilian deaths in the course of this war. This is an escalation of the conflict which now enters a new stage of total warfare.

A third reaction was to pursue the path of negotiations and concessions. In this respect, the President, who had taken useful initiatives in 1977 and 1978, allowed himself to be bogged down, partly by the fear of a revived opposition and partly by machinations within his own party and government. When the process af negotiation was resumed in the middle of 1979, through the mediation of neutral individuals, the impression could not be avoided that it was the intensifying insurgency that had finally persuaded the President to move. The mediators were exploring means of devolution of power that would satisfy Tamil opinion and preserve the unitary structure of the state. A Presidential Commission was appointed in August 1979 to draft concrete proposals for a devolution of power, through the institution of district councils. The Commission was divided on the crucial issue of the power of the proposed District Development Councils and its relation to the Centre. It reflected the reluctance of its Sinhala members to dilute the power of the central Government. In the act to establish District Development Councils in 1980 the President incorporated some of the suggestions of the TULF but in form only.

By the act, the District Development Council was to consist of M.Ps of the district and members elected to the Council. Its Executive Committee was headed by the District Minister, an appointee of the President, and had as its other members the chairman of the Council and two

members appointed by the District Minister in consultation with the Chairman. The Exective Commitee formulated and implemented an annual development plan for the district and prepared an annual budget. The council had powers of subordinate legislation on taxation but subject to the approval of the Minister and the sanction of parliament. It had power of borrowing money subject to the approval of the District Minister and the Minister of Finance. It was clear that the District Development Councils were very much under the thump of the President and the central government. The District Minister was on the spot as the representative of the President and could block the decisions of the Council. The President or parliament could override the decisions of the Council. The Budget passed for the first Council was so small as to make it of little effect. In fact these Councils fell short of concessions promised to Tamils by Sinhala leaders in other pacts that had been negotiated between them. Above all, the Councils had no constitutional validity and could be scrapped by parliament at any time.

The TULF contested the elections for the District Councils, won majorities in all Tamil districts except Amparai and attempted to make the reforms work. They were soon frustrated at the lack of power and resources and the overwhelming power still in the hands of the central government and the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy in Colombo was especially uncooperative and this combined with the constant opposition within the government made sure that it would not succeed. Events of national politics soon swept these Councils out of significance and when the TULF M.Ps and elected members of local bodies refused to take the oath of allegiance to the constitution, they ceased to be members of these bodies.

The next process of negotiation had to wait ti ll the July 1983 anti-Tamil violence and, more importantly, the pressures on the President by international opinion and especially India. Again, Jayawardene gave the impression

of being reluctantly dragged to the conference table by the effects of the insurgency and by Indian pressure. The Indian government played the role of mediator between the TULF and the government and the Indian prime minister sent her personal emissary to Colombo. Through his good offices, some proposals were agreed to as a basis of negotiations and an all-party conference was summoned in January 1984. The Indian proposals contained measures for devolution of power and guarantees for the security of person of the Tamils. Again Jayawardene stalled in the face of opposition among influential Sinhala groups, including Buddhist priests. His government reverted to a military solution and accelerated the war against the insurgents in the north and east.

In 1984, armed clashes between insurgents and military became more intense and the 'scorched earth' policy of the armed forces again aroused international, especially Indian, concern. Under this pressure, Jayawardene again resumed the peace process in August, rejecting the proposals agreed to earlier but putting forward unilateraliy a proposal for a second chamber in which minority interests were to be accommodated. The TULF rejected this proposal out of hand but Jayawardene was hoping to get the support of middle class Tamil opinion in Colombo and divide the Tamils. He was reverting to a game that had been played without success by many Sinhala leaders.

Liberal, nationalist and social-democratic opinion among both Sinhalese and Tamils have been watching these developments with increasing helplessness and despair. At personal and group level, Sinhalese have reacted with compassion and idealism to the plight of Tamils around them. At times of anti-Tamil violence, they have rendered succour to individuals and groups at great risk to themselves. At group level, a rethinking of attitudes and ideologies of nationalism and racism has emerged. A number of groups have appeared which are looking at issues of civil rights, discrimination, regionalism and are prepared to advocate

radical solutions outside the accepted framework of Sinhala hegemony. A process of re-educaton of Sinhala public opinion has begun, made all the more difficult by the governing party's control of the major organs of communication. A similar process of re-education among Tamils back to a faith in territorial unity is not possible until their security from state and mob terrorism has been assured and some at least of their grievances are settled.

Finally, there is the internationalization of the Tamil problem which began from 1974 when South Indian delegates to the International Tamil Conference were shocked at the tragedy that attended it. Up till then South Indian public opinion was not overly agitated by the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils. In so far as they were concerned, it was for the Tamils of the plantations who were beginning to be repatriated from 1965. A marked shift in opinion took place on both sides of the palk straits. Sri Lankan Tamils looked to Tamil Nadu at first for moral and cultural support, but increasingly for more tangible material support in their cause. South Indian Tamils became more receptive to this call for support as they became more aware of the problems and as leaders of opinion on both sides interchanged ideas and influenced each other. By 1977 all parties of Tamil Nadu politics were agreed that the cause of the Tamils in Sri Lanka required their constant and unrelenting support.

A further stage was reached when Tamil Nadu was able to represent to the Indian nation that the cause of the Tamils of Sri Lanka deserved national attention. They were helped in this by the anti-Tamil attacks of immense proportions that began from 1977 and were widely reported in the Indian press. To this moral concern was added the factor of international power politics when the Sri Lankan government appealed to the United States and Britain and, in a fit of political madness, to Pakistan and Bangladesh for assistance against hypothetical external attack. The old anti-Indian streak in some Sinhala elites

had reappeared and India could not sit idly by. The Indian prime minister acted quite forcefully and promptly in July/August 1983 staking a claim for the first time, for a special Indian interest in the Sri Lankan communal problem, at least in its international aspects. The prime minister's envoy became closely involved in internal political discussions and the President continued to accept subsequent Indian involvement, though not with good grace. As the 1984 events unfolded themselves, the pressure on Mrs. Indira Gandhi to intervene was very great from all parties in the Indian parliament and she appeared to be prepared for another phase of intervention in the last months of 1984.

The death of Mrs. Gandhi was deeply mourned by the Tamils of Sri Lanka. They had learnt to look upon her as a beacon of hope in their tribulations. She had always been well-informed on their problems and kept the Sri Lankan government thinking as to her reactions. The Government hoped that Rajiv Gandhi would not be as concerned with the Tamil problem. There was a good deal of wishful thinking on the part of the Sri Lankan government politicians that they would now be left alone to impose their own solution to the problem. They have now been disillusioned of this and Mr. Gandhi has, in his own way, maintained India's interest and pressured for a peaceful solution. Exchange of visits between ministers and officials of the two countries in March and April 1985 have helped to keep India's hand on the table.

It could be seen from all this that the Tamil problem has been at the centre of the stage of Sri Lankan politics over the last four years. Political argument within the Sinhalese community, vociferous and volatile at all times, has been muted. Constitutional amendments were passed without a stir. Civil liberties were curtailed without a whimper. Economic issues are not canvassed. There is no political opposition to Jayawardene worth talking about. The whole political atmosphere has been radically

transformed. Yet Jayawardene appears a beleaguered President. He lacks the authority of a national leader. He has fallen into the ranks of Sinhala leaders who lead from behind. The great expectations of yesterday have gone unfulfilled. By his political actions and constitutional solution, he has halted the tread-mill by which Sinhala politics could advance further. The Sri Lankan political process had been brought to a grinding halt. To get it going again it should be lifted out of the constitutional straight-jacket into which it was put in 1977-81.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Ceylon, Report of the Commission on Coustitutional Reforms.* Cmd. 6677. (London, September 1945).

2. There is an abundant literature on the transfer of power in Ceylon. See especially, Sir Ivor Jennings, *The Constitution of Ceylon* (London, 3rd ed., 1953) pp. 3-17, Sir Charles Jeffries, *Ceylon : the path to independence* (London 1962). K. M. de Silva, 'The History and Politics of the Transfer of Power', *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* Vol. 3 (Colombo 1973) pp. 489-533. K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Delhi 1981), pp. 430-478.

3. *Ceylon, Report of the Commission* .., pp. 38-49.

4. Jeffries, *Ceylon ...*, cited in B. H. Farmer, *Ceylon : A Divided Nation* (London 1963). Foreword by Viscount Soulbury.

5. B. H. Farmer, *Ceylon : A Divided Nation,* Foreword.

6. For a cogent statement of this analysis, see B.H. Farmer, 'The Social basis of Nationalism in Ceylon'. *Journal of Asian Studies,* xxiv. 3 pp. 431-39.

7. For an acute and thoroughly documented study of the rise of some important Sinhalese castes, see M. Roberts, *Caste, Conflict and Elite Formation, The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka* 1500-1931 (Cambridge 1982) especially pp. 98-179.

8. He is believed to have asked Buddhist extremists requesting state support for Buddhism whether they wanted to add one more to the three refuges in the Buddhist *credo* — the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

9. For a critical appraisal of this scheme, see B. H. Farmer, *Pioneer Peasant Colonization in Ceylon* (Oxford 1957).

10. *Buddhist Committee of Inquiry. The Betrayal of Buddhism* (Balangoda 1956).

11. M. Roberts, 'Stimulants and Ingredients in the Awakening of latter-day Nationalism'. *Collective Identities, Nationalism and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka* ed. M. Roberts (Colombo 1979) pp. 214-42. 'The

Political Antecedents of the Revivalist Elite in the MEP Coalition of 1956'. Ceylon Studies Seminars 1969/70 Series No. 1.

12. There is a considerable literature analysing the insurgency of April 1971 : S. Arasaratnam 'The Ceylon insurrection of April 1971 : some causes and consequences', *Pacific Affairs* 45.3 (1972) pp. 356-86 ; G. Obeyesekara, 'Some Comments on the social backgrounds of the April 1971 insurgency in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), *Journal of Asian Studies*, xxxiii, 3 (a974) pp. 367-84 ; F. Halliday, 'The Ceylonese Insurrection', *New Left Review* 69 (1971) pp. 55-93 ; R. N. Kearney and J. Jiggins ' The Ceylon Insurrection of 1971'. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 13.1 (1975) pp. 40-63.

13. For a penetrating discussion of the role of caste in Sinhalese politics, see Janice Jiggins, *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese* 1947-1976 (Cambridge 1979).

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