

# **SRI LANKA - HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE**

SRI LANKA'S HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE covers more than 2,000 years. Known as Lanka--the "resplendent land"--in the ancient Indian epic Ramayana, the island has numerous other references that testify to the island's natural beauty and wealth. Islamic folklore maintains that Adam and Eve were offered refuge on the island as solace for their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Asian poets, noting the geographical location of the island and lauding its beauty, called it the "pearl upon the brow of India." A troubled nation in the 1980s, torn apart by communal violence, Sri Lanka has more recently been called India's "fallen tear."

Sri Lanka claims a democratic tradition matched by few other developing countries, and since its independence in 1948, successive governments have been freely elected. Sri Lanka's citizens enjoy a long life expectancy, advanced health standards, and one of the highest literacy rates in the world despite the fact that the country has one of the lowest per capita incomes.

In the years since independence, Sri Lanka has experienced severe communal clashes between its Buddhist Sinhalese majority-- approximately 74 percent of the population--and the country's largest minority group, the Sri Lankan Tamils, who are Hindus and comprise nearly 13 percent of the population. The communal violence that attracted the harsh scrutiny of the international media in the late 1980s can best be understood in the context of the island's complex historical development--its ancient and intricate relationship to India's civilization and its more than four centuries under colonial rule by European powers.

The Sinhalese claim to have been the earliest colonizers of Sri Lanka, first settling in the dry north-central regions as early as 500 B.C. Between the third century B.C. and the twelfth century A.D., they developed a great civilization centered around the cities of Anuradhapura and later Polonnaruwa, which was noted for its genius in hydraulic engineering--the construction of water tanks (reservoirs) and irrigation canals, for example--and its guardianship of Buddhism. State patronage gave Buddhism a heightened political importance that enabled the religion to escape the fate it had experienced in India, where it was eventually absorbed by Hinduism.

The history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, especially its extended period of glory, is for many Sinhalese a potent symbol that links the past with the present. An enduring ideology defined by two distinct elements--sinhaladipa (unity of the island with the Sinhalese) and dhammadipa (island of Buddhism)-- designates the Sinhalese as custodians of Sri Lankan society. This theme finds recurrent expression in the historical chronicles composed by Buddhist monks over the centuries, from the mythological founding of the Sinhalese "lion" race around 300 B.C. to the capitulation of the Kingdom of Kandy, the last independent Sinhalese polity in the early nineteenth century.

The institutions of Buddhist-Sinhalese civilization in Sri Lanka came under attack during the colonial eras of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. During these centuries of colonialization, the state encouraged and supported Christianity--first Roman Catholicism, then Protestantism. Most Sinhalese regard the entire period of European dominance as an unfortunate era, but most historians--Sri Lankan or otherwise--concede that British rule was relatively benign and progressive compared to that of the Dutch and Portuguese. Influenced by the ascendant philosophy of liberal reformism, the British were determined to anglicize the island, and in 1802, Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) became Britain's first crown colony. The British gradually permitted native participation in the governmental process; and under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 and then the Soulbury Constitution of 1946, the franchise was dramatically extended, preparing the island for independence two years later.

Under the statesmanship of Sri Lanka's first postindependence leader, Don Stephen (D.S.) Senanayake, the country managed to rise above the bitterly divisive communal and religious emotions that later complicated the political agenda. Senanayake envisioned his country as a pluralist, multiethnic, secular state, in which minorities would be able to participate fully in government affairs. His vision for his nation soon faltered, however, and communal rivalry and confrontation appeared within the first decade of independence. Sinhalese nationalists aspired to recover the dominance in society they had lost during European rule, while Sri Lankan Tamils wanted to protect their minority community from domination or assimilation by the Sinhalese majority. No compromise was forthcoming, and as early as 1951, Tamil leaders stated that "the Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood."

Sinhalese nationalists did not have to wait long before they found an eloquent champion of their cause. Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S.W.R.D.) Bandaranaike successfully challenged the nation's Westernized rulers who were alienated from Sinhalese culture; he became prime minister in 1956. A man particularly adept at harnessing Sinhalese communal passions, Bandaranaike vowed to make Sinhala the only language of administration and education and to restore Buddhism to its former glory. The violence unleashed by his policies directly threatened the unity of the nation, and communal riots rocked the country in 1956 and 1958. Bandaranaike became a victim of the passions he unleashed. In 1959 a Buddhist monk who felt that Bandaranaike had not pushed the Buddhist-Sinhalese cause far enough assassinated the Sri Lankan leader. Bandaranaike's widow, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias (S.R.D.) Bandaranaike, ardently carried out many of his ideas. In 1960, she became the world's first woman prime minister.

Communal tensions continued to rise over the following years. In 1972 the nation became a republic under a new constitution, which was a testimony to the ideology of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and Buddhism was accorded special status. These reforms and new laws discriminating against Tamils in university admissions were a symbolic threat the Tamil community felt it could not ignore, and a vicious cycle of violence erupted that has plagued successive governments. Tamil agitation for separation became associated with gruesome and highly visible terrorist acts by extremists, triggering large communal riots in 1977, 1981, and 1983. During these riots, Sinhalese mobs retaliated against isolated and vulnerable Tamil communities. By the mid-1980s, the Tamil militant underground had grown in strength and

posed a serious security threat to the government, and its combatants struggled for a Tamil nation--"Tamil Eelam"--by an increasing recourse to terrorism. The fundamental, unresolved problems facing society were surfacing with a previously unseen force. Foreign and domestic observers expressed concern for democratic procedures in a society driven by divisive symbols and divided by ethnic loyalties.

## **ORIGINS**

Ancient Indian and Sri Lankan myths and chronicles have been studied intensively and interpreted widely for their insight into the human settlement and philosophical development of the island. Confirmation of the island's first colonizers--whether the Sinhalese or Sri Lankan Tamils--has been elusive, but evidence suggests that Sri Lanka has been, since earliest times, a multiethnic society. Sri Lankan historian K.M. de Silva believes that settlement and colonization by Indo-Aryan speakers may have preceded the arrival of Dravidian settlers by several centuries, but that early mixing rendered the two ethnic groups almost physically indistinct.

### **Ancient Legends and Chronicles**

The first major legendary reference to the island is found in the great Indian epic, the Ramayana (Sacred Lake of the Deeds of Rama), thought to have been written around 500 B.C. The Ramayana tells of the conquest of Lanka in 3000 B.C. by Rama, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. Rama's quest to save his abducted wife, Sita, from Ravanna, the demon god of Lanka, and his demon hordes, is, according to some scholars, a poetic account of the early southward expansion of Brahmanic civilization.

### **Buddhist Chronicles**

The most valuable source of knowledge for scholars probing the legends and historical heritage of Sri Lanka is still the Mahavamsa (Great Genealogy or Dynasty), a chronicle compiled in Pali, the language of Theravada Buddhism, in the sixth century. Buddhist monks composed the Mahavamsa, which was an adaptation of an earlier and cruder fourth century epic, the Dipavamsa (Island Genealogy or Dynasty). The latter account was compiled to glorify Buddhism and is not a comprehensive narrative of events. The Mahavamsa, however, relates the rise and fall of successive Buddhist kingdoms beginning with Vijaya, the legendary colonizer of Sri Lanka and primogenitor of the Sinhalese migrant group. In the Mahavamsa, Vijaya is described as having arrived on the island on the day of the Buddha's death (parinibbana) or, more precisely, his nirvana or nibbana (see Glossary), his release from the cycle of life and pain. The Mahavamsa also lavishes praise on the Sinhalese kings who repulsed attacks by Indian Tamils.

Vijaya is the central legendary figure in the Mahavamsa. He was the grandson of an Indian princess from Vanga in northern India who had been abducted by an amorous lion, Simha, and son of their incestuous and half-leonine offspring. Along with 700 of his followers, Vijaya arrived in Lanka and established himself as ruler with the help of Kuveni, a local demon-worshipping princess. Although Kuveni had betrayed her own people and had given birth

to two of Vijaya's children, she was banished by the ruler, who then arranged a marriage with a princess from Madurai in southeastern India. Kuveni's offspring are the folkloric ancestors of the present day Veddahs, an aboriginal people now living in scattered areas of eastern Sri Lanka (see Ethnic Groups , ch. 2). Many scholars believe that the legend of Vijaya provides a glimpse into the early settlement of the island. Around the fifth century B.C., the first bands of Sri Lankan colonists are believed to have come from the coastal areas of northern India. The chronicles support evidence that the royal progeny of Vijaya often sought wives from the Pandyan and other Dravidian (Tamil) kingdoms of southern India. The chronicles also tell of an early and constant migration of artisan and mercantile Tamils to Sri Lanka.

From the fifth century A.D onward, periodic palace intrigues and religious heresies weakened Buddhist institutions leaving Sinhalese-Buddhist culture increasingly vulnerable to successive and debilitating Tamil invasions. A chronicle, a continuation of the Mahavamsa, describes this decline. The main body of this chronicle, which assumed the less than grandiloquent title Culavamsa (Lesser Genealogy or Dynasty), was attributed to the thirteenth century poet-monk, Dhammakitti. The Culavamsa was later expanded by another monk the following century and, concluded by a third monk in the late eighteenth century.

### **The Impact of Buddhism**

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. from India, where it had been established by Siddhartha Gautama three centuries earlier (see Buddhism , ch. 2). The powerful Indian monarch, Asoka, nurtured the new comprehensive religio-philosophical system in the third century B.C. Asoka's conversion to Buddhism marks one of the turning points in religious history because at that time, Buddhism was elevated from a minor sect to an official religion enjoying all the advantages of royal patronage. Asoka's empire, which extended over most of India, supported one of the most vigorous missionary enterprises in history.

The Buddhist tradition of chronicling events has aided the verification of historical figures. One of most important of these figures was King Devanampiya Tissa (250-c. 207 B.C.). According to the Mahavamsa, Asoka's son and emissary to Sri Lanka, Mahinda, introduced the monarch to Buddhism. Devanampiya Tissa became a powerful patron of Buddhism and established the monastery of Mahavihara, which became the historic center of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Subsequent events also contributed to Sri Lanka's prestige in the Buddhist world. It was on the island, for example, that the oral teachings of the Buddha--the Tripitaka--were committed to writing for the first time.

Devanampiya Tissa was said to have received Buddha's right collarbone and his revered alms bowl from Asoka and to have built the Thuparama Dagoba, or stupa (Buddhist shrine), to honor these highly revered relics. Another relic, Buddha's sacred tooth, had arrived in Sri Lanka in the fourth century A.D.. The possession of the Tooth Relic came to be regarded as essential for the legitimization of Sinhalese royalty and remained so until its capture and probable destruction by the Portuguese in 1560. The sacred Tooth Relic (thought by many to be a substitute) that is venerated in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy links legendary Sri Lanka

with the modern era. The annual procession of Perahera held in honor of the sacred Tooth Relic serves as a powerful unifying force for the Sinhalese in the twentieth century. Asoka's daughter, Sanghamitta, is recorded as having brought to the island a branch of the sacred bo tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. According to legend, the tree that grew from this branch is near the ruins of the ancient city of Anuradhapura in the north of Sri Lanka. The tree is said to be the oldest living thing in the world and is an object of great veneration.

The connection between religion, culture, language, and education and their combined influence on national identity have been an age-old pervasive force for the Sinhalese Buddhists. Devanampiya Tissa employed Asoka's strategy of merging the political state with Buddhism, supporting Buddhist institutions from the state's coffers, and locating temples close to the royal palace for greater control. With such patronage, Buddhism was positioned to evolve as the highest ethical and philosophical expression of Sinhalese culture and civilization. Buddhism appealed directly to the masses, leading to the growth of a collective Sinhalese cultural consciousness.

In contrast to the theological exclusivity of Hindu Brahmanism, the Asokan missionary approach featured preaching and carried the principles of the Buddha directly to the common people. This proselytizing had even greater success in Sri Lanka than it had in India and could be said to be the island's first experiment in mass education.

Buddhism also had a great effect on the literary development of the island. The Indo-Aryan dialect spoken by the early Sinhalese was comprehensible to missionaries from India and facilitated early attempts at translating the scriptures. The Sinhalese literati studied Pali, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, thus influencing the development of Sinhala as a literary language.

## **THE CLASSICAL AGE, 200 B.C.-A.D. 1200**

### **Early Settlements**

The first extensive Sinhalese settlements were along rivers in the dry northern zone of the island. Because early agricultural activity-- primarily the cultivation of wet rice-- was dependent on unreliable monsoon rains, the Sinhalese constructed canals, channels, water-storage tanks, and reservoirs to provide an elaborate irrigation system to counter the risks posed by periodic drought. Such early attempts at engineering reveal the brilliant understanding these ancient people had of hydraulic principles and trigonometry. The discovery of the principle of the valve tower, or valve pit, for regulating the escape of water is credited to Sinhalese ingenuity more than 2,000 years ago. By the first century A.D, several large-scale irrigation works had been completed.

The mastery of hydraulic engineering and irrigated agriculture facilitated the concentration of large numbers of people in the northern dry zone, where early settlements appeared to be under the control of semi-independent rulers (see Land Use and Settlement Patterns , ch. 2). In

time, the mechanisms for political control became more refined, and the city-state of Anuradhapura emerged and attempted to gain sovereignty over the entire island. The state-sponsored flowering of Buddhist art and architecture and the construction of complex and extensive hydraulic works exemplify what is known as Sri Lanka's classical age, which roughly parallels the period between the rise and fall of Anuradhapura (from ca. 200 B.C. to ca. A.D. 993).

The Sinhalese kingdom at Anuradhapura was in many ways typical of other ancient hydraulic societies because it lacked a rigid, authoritarian and heavily bureaucratic structure. Theorists have attributed Anuradhapura's decentralized character to its feudal basis, which was, however, a feudalism unlike that found in Europe. The institution of caste formed the basis of social stratification in ancient Sinhalese society and determined a person's social obligation, and position within the hierarchy.

The caste system in Sri Lanka developed its own characteristics. Although it shared an occupational role with its Indian prototype, caste in Sri Lanka developed neither the exclusive Brahmanical social hierarchy nor, to any significant degree, the concept of defilement by contact with impure persons or substances that was central to the Indian caste system. The claims of the Kshatriya (warrior caste) to royalty were a moderating influence on caste, but more profound was the influence of Buddhism, which lessened the severity of the institution. The monarch theoretically held absolute powers but was nevertheless expected to conform to the rules of dharma, or universal laws governing human existence and conduct (see Religion , ch. 2).

The king was traditionally entitled to land revenue equivalent to one-sixth of the produce in his domain. Furthermore, his subjects owed him a kind of caste-based compulsory labor (rajakariya in Sinhala) as a condition for holding land and were required to provide labor for road construction, irrigation projects, and other public works. During the later colonial period, the Europeans exploited the institution of rajakariya, which was destined to become an important moral and economic issue in the nineteenth century (see European Encroachment and Dominance, 1500-1948 , this ch.).

Social divisions arose over the centuries between those engaged in agriculture and those engaged in nonagricultural occupations. The Govi (cultivators--see Glossary) belonged to the highest Sinhalese caste (Goyigama) and remained so in the late twentieth century. All Sri Lankan heads of state have, since independence, belonged to the Goyigama caste, as do about half of all Sinhalese. The importance of cultivation on the island is also reflected in the caste structure of the Hindu Tamils, among whom the Vellala (cultivator) is the highest caste.

### **Rise of Sinhalese and Tamil Ethnic Awareness**

Because the Mahavamsa is essentially a chronicle of the early Sinhalese-Buddhist royalty on the island, it does not provide information on the island's early ethnic distributions. There is, for instance, only scant evidence as to when the first Tamil settlements were established. Tamil literary sources, however, speak of active trading centers in southern India as early as the third century B.C. and it is probable that these centers had at least some contact with

settlements in northern Sri Lanka. There is some debate among historians as to whether settlement by Indo-Aryan speakers preceded settlement by Dravidian-speaking Tamils, but there is no dispute over the fact that Sri Lanka, from its earliest recorded history, was a multiethnic society. Evidence suggests that during the early centuries of Sri Lankan history there was considerable harmony between the Sinhalese and Tamils.

The peace and stability of the island were first significantly affected around 237 B.C. when two adventurers from southern India, Sena and Guttika, usurped the Sinhalese throne at Anuradhapura. Their combined twenty-two-year rule marked the first time Sri Lanka was ruled by Tamils. The two were subsequently murdered, and the Sinhalese royal dynasty was restored. In 145 B.C., a Tamil general named Elara, of the Chola dynasty (which ruled much of India from the ninth to twelfth centuries A.D.), took over the throne at Anuradhapura and ruled for forty-four years. A Sinhalese king, Dutthagamani (or Duttugemunu), waged a fifteen-year campaign against the Tamil monarch and finally deposed him.

Dutthagamani is the outstanding hero of the Mahavamsa, and his war against Elara is sometimes depicted in contemporary accounts as a major racial confrontation between Tamils and Sinhalese. A less biased and more factual interpretation, according to Sri Lankan historian K.M. de Silva, must take into consideration the large reserve of support Elara had among the Sinhalese. Furthermore, another Sri Lankan historian, Sinnappah Arasaratnam, argues that the war was a dynastic struggle that was purely political in nature. As a result of Dutthagamani's victory, Anuradhapura became the locus of power on the island. Arasaratnam suggests the conflict recorded in the Mahavamsa marked the beginning of Sinhalese nationalism and that Dutthagamani's victory is commonly interpreted as a confirmation that the island was a preserve for the Sinhalese and Buddhism. The historian maintains that the story is still capable of stirring the religio-communal passions of the Sinhalese.

The Tamil threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms had become very real in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. Three Hindu empires in southern India--the Pandya, Pallava, and Chola--were becoming more assertive. The Sinhalese perception of this threat intensified because in India, Buddhism--vulnerable to pressure and absorption by Hinduism--had already receded. Tamil ethnic and religious consciousness also matured during this period. In terms of culture, language, and religion, the Tamils had identified themselves as Dravidian, Tamil, and Hindu, respectively.

Another Sinhalese king praised in the Mahavamsa is Dhatusena (459-77), who, in the fifth century A.D., liberated Anuradhapura from a quarter-century of Pandyan rule. The king was also honored as a generous patron of Buddhism and as a builder of water storage tanks. Dhatusena was killed by his son, Kasyapa (477-95), who is regarded as a great villain in Sri Lankan history. In fear of retribution from his exiled brother, the parricide moved the capital from Anuradhapura to Sigiriya, a fortress and palace perched on a monolithic rock 180 meters high. Although the capital was returned to Anuradhapura after Kasyapa was dethroned, Sigiriya is an architectural and engineering feat displayed in an inaccessible redoubt. The rock fortress eventually fell to Kasyapa's brother, who received help from an army of Indian mercenaries.

In the seventh century A.D., Tamil influence became firmly embedded in the island's culture when Sinhalese Prince Manavamma seized the throne with Pallava assistance. The dynasty that Manavamma established was heavily indebted to Pallava patronage and continued for almost three centuries. During this time, Pallava influence extended to architecture and sculpture, both of which bear noticeable Hindu motifs.

By the middle of the ninth century, the Pandyan had risen to a position of ascendancy in southern India, invaded northern Sri Lanka, and sacked Anuradhapura. The Pandyan demanded an indemnity as a price for their withdrawal. Shortly after the Pandyan departure, however, the Sinhalese invaded Pandya in support of a rival prince, and the Indian city of Madurai was sacked in the process.

In the tenth century, the Sinhalese again sent an invading army to India, this time to aid the Pandyan king against the Cholas. The Pandyan king was defeated and fled to Sri Lanka, carrying with him the royal insignia. The Chola, initially under Rajaraja the Great (A.D. 985-1018), were impatient to recapture the royal insignia; they sacked Anuradhapura in A.D. 993 and annexed Rajarata--the heartland of the Sinhalese kingdom--to the Chola Empire. King Mahinda V, the last of the Sinhalese monarchs to rule from Anuradhapura, fled to Rohana, where he reigned until 1017, when the Chola took him prisoner. He subsequently died in India in 1029.

Under the rule of Rajaraja's son, Rajendra (1018-35), the Chola Empire grew stronger, to the extent that it posed a threat to states as far away as the empire of Sri Vijaya in modern Malaysia and Sumatra in Indonesia. For seventy-five years, Sri Lanka was ruled directly as a Chola province. During this period, Hinduism flourished, and Buddhism received a serious setback. After the destruction of Anuradhapura, the Chola set up their capital farther to the southeast, at Polonnaruwa, a strategically defensible location near the Mahaweli Ganga, a river that offered good protection against potential invaders from the southern Sinhalese kingdom of Ruhunu (see fig. 2). When the Sinhalese kings regained their dominance, they chose not to reestablish themselves at Anuradhapura because Polonnaruwa offered better geographical security from any future invasions from southern India. The area surrounding the new capital already had a well-developed irrigation system and a number of water storage tanks in the vicinity, including the great Minneriya Tank and its feeder canals built by King Mahasena (A.D. 274-301), the last of the Sinhalese monarchs mentioned in the Mahavamsa.

King Vijayabahu I drove the Chola out of Sri Lanka in A.D. 1070. Considered by many as the author of Sinhalese freedom, the king recaptured Anuradhapura but ruled from Polonnaruwa, slightly less than 100 kilometers to the southeast. During his forty-year reign, Vijayabahu I (A.D. 1070-1110) concentrated on rebuilding the Buddhist temples and monasteries that had been neglected during Chola rule. He left no clearly designated successor to his throne, and a period of instability and civil war followed his rule until the rise of King Parakramabahu I, known as the Great (A.D. 1153-86).

Parakramabahu is the greatest hero of the Culavamsa, and under his patronage, the city of Polonnaruwa grew to rival Anuradhapura in architectural diversity and as a repository of Buddhist art. Parakramabahu was a great patron of Buddhism and a reformer as well. He reorganized the sangha (community of monks) and healed a longstanding schism between

Mahavihara--the Theravada Buddhist monastery--and Abhayagiri--the Mahayana Buddhist monastery. Parakramabahu's reign coincided with the last great period of Sinhalese hydraulic engineering; many remarkable irrigation works were constructed during his rule, including his crowning achievement, the massive Parakrama Samudra (Sea of Parakrama or Parakrama Tank). Polonnaruwa became one of the magnificent capitals of the ancient world, and nineteenth-century British historian Sir Emerson Tennent even estimated that during Parakramabahu's rule, the population of Polonnaruwa reached 3 million--a figure, however, that is considered to be too high by twentieth-century historians.

Parakramabahu's reign was not only a time of Buddhist renaissance but also a period of religious expansionism abroad. Parakramabahu was powerful enough to send a punitive mission against the Burmese for their mistreatment of a Sri Lankan mission in 1164. The Sinhalese monarch also meddled extensively in Indian politics and invaded southern India in several unsuccessful expeditions to aid a Pandyan claimant to the throne.

Although a revered figure in Sinhalese annals, Parakramabahu is believed to have greatly strained the royal treasury and contributed to the fall of the Sinhalese kingdom. The post-Parakramabahu history of Polonnaruwa describes the destruction of the city twenty-nine years after his death and fifteen rulers later.

For the decade following Parakramabahu's death, however, a period of peace and stability ensued during the reign of King Nissankamalla (A.D. 1187-97). During Nissankamalla's rule, the Brahmanic legal system came to regulate the Sinhalese caste system. Henceforth, the highest caste stratum became identified with the cultivator caste, and land ownership conferred high status. Occupational caste became hereditary and regulated dietary and marriage codes. At the bottom of the caste strata was the Chandala, who corresponded roughly to the Indian untouchable. It was during this brief period that it became mandatory for the Sinhalese king to be a Buddhist.

## **DECLINE OF THE SINHALESE KINGDOM, 1200-1500**

### **Sinhalese Migration to the South**

After Nissankamalla's death, a series of dynastic disputes hastened the breakup of the kingdom of Polonnaruwa. Domestic instability characterized the ensuing period, and incursions by Chola and Pandyan invaders created greater turbulence, culminating in a devastating campaign by the Kalinga, an eastern Indian dynasty. When Magha, the Kalinga king, died in 1255, another period of instability began, marking the beginning of the abandonment of Polonnaruwa and the Sinhalese migration to the southwest from the northern dry zone. The next three kings after Magha ruled from rock fortresses to the west of Polonnaruwa. The last king to rule from Polonnaruwa was Parakramabahu III (1278- 93). The migration is one of the great unsolved puzzles of South Asian history and is of considerable interest to academics because of the parallel abandonment of dry-zone civilizations in modern Cambodia, northern Thailand, and Burma.

## **A Weakened State: Invasion, Disease, and Social Instability**

The Sinhalese withdrawal from the north is sometimes attributed to the cumulative effect of invasions from southern India (a rationale that has been exploited against the Tamils in modern Sinhalese politics). This interpretation has obvious weaknesses because after each of the south Indian invasions of the preceding centuries, the Sinhalese returned to the dry zone from the hills and repaired and revived the ancient irrigation system. K.M. de Silva suggests that the cumulative effects of repeated invasions "ate into the vitals of a society already losing its vigour with age." A civilization based on a dry-zone irrigation complex presupposes a high degree of organization and a massive labor force to build and maintain the works. The decline of these public works mirrored the breakdown in the social order. Another factor that seems to have retarded the resettlement of the dry zone was the outbreak of malaria in the thirteenth century. The mosquito found ideal breeding grounds in the abandoned tanks and channels. (Malaria has often followed the destruction of irrigation works in other parts of Asia.) Indeed, all attempts at large-scale resettlement of the dry area in Sri Lanka were thwarted until the introduction of modern pesticides.

During the thirteenth century, the declining Sinhalese kingdom faced threats of invasion from India and the expanding Tamil kingdom of northern Sri Lanka. Taking advantage of Sinhalese weakness, the Tamils secured control of the valuable pearl fisheries around Jaffna Peninsula. During this time, the vast stretches of jungle that cover north-central Sri Lanka separated the Tamils and the Sinhalese. This geographical separation had important psychological and cultural implications. The Tamils in the north developed a more distinct and confident culture, backed by a resurgent Hinduism that looked to the traditions of southern India for its inspiration. Conversely, the Sinhalese were increasingly restricted to the southern and central area of the island and were fearful of the more numerous Tamils on the Indian mainland. The fact that the Hindu kingdom at Jaffna was expending most of its military resources resisting the advances of the expansionist Vijayanagara Empire (1336-1565) in India enhanced the Sinhalese ability to resist further Tamil encroachments. Some historians maintain that it was the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century that prevented the island from being overrun by south Indians.

Foreign rulers took advantage of the disturbed political state of the Sinhalese kingdom, and in the thirteenth century Chandrabhanu, a Buddhist king from Malaya, invaded the island twice. He attempted to seize the two most sacred relics of the Buddha in Sinhalese custody, the Tooth Relic and the Alms Bowl. In the early fifteenth century, the Ming dynasty Chinese interceded on behalf of King Parakramabahu VI (1412-67), an enlightened monarch who repulsed an invasion from the polity of Vijayanagara in southern India, reunited Sri Lanka, and earned renown as a patron of Buddhism and the arts. Parakramabahu VI was the last Sinhalese king to rule the entire island.

During this extended period of domestic instability and frequent foreign invasion, Sinhalese culture experienced fundamental change. Rice cultivation continued as the mainstay of agriculture but was no longer dependent on an elaborate irrigation network. In the wet zone, large-scale administrative cooperation was not as necessary as it had been before. Foreign trade was of increasing importance to the Sinhalese kings. In particular, cinnamon--in great

demand by Europeans--became a prime export commodity. Because of the value of cinnamon, the city of Kotte on the west coast (near modern Colombo) became the nominal capital of the Sinhalese kingdom in the mid-fifteenth century. Still, the Sinhalese kingdom remained divided into numerous competing petty principalities.

## **EUROPEAN ENCROACHMENT AND DOMINANCE, 1500-1948**

### **The Portuguese**

By the late fifteenth century, Portugal, which had already established its dominance as a maritime power in the Atlantic, was exploring new waters. In 1497 Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and discovered an ocean route connecting Europe with India, thus inaugurating a new era of maritime supremacy for Portugal. The Portuguese were consumed by two objectives in their empire-building efforts: to convert followers of non-Christian religions to Roman Catholicism and to capture the major share of the spice trade for the European market. To carry out their goals, the Portuguese did not seek territorial conquest, which would have been difficult given their small numbers. Instead, they tried to dominate strategic points through which trade passed. By virtue of their supremacy on the seas, their knowledge of firearms, and by what has been called their "desperate soldiering" on land, the Portuguese gained an influence in South Asia that was far out of proportion to their numerical strength.

At the onset of the European period in Sri Lanka in the sixteenth century, there were three native centers of political power: the two Sinhalese kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy and the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna. Kotte was the principal seat of Sinhalese power, and it claimed a largely imaginary overlordship not only over Kandy but also over the entire island. None of the three kingdoms, however, had the strength to assert itself over the other two and reunify the island.

In 1505 Don Lourenço de Almeida, son of the Portuguese viceroy in India, was sailing off the southwestern coast of Sri Lanka looking for Moorish ships to attack when stormy weather forced his fleet to dock at Galle. Word of these strangers who "eat hunks of white stone and drink blood (presumably wine). . . and have guns with a noise louder than thunder. . ." spread quickly and reached King Parakramabahu VIII of Kotte (1484-1508), who offered gifts of cinnamon and elephants to the Portuguese to take back to their home port at Cochin on the Malabar Coast of southwestern India. The king also gave the Portuguese permission to build a residence in Colombo for trade purposes. Within a short time, however, Portuguese militaristic and monopolistic intentions became apparent. Their heavily fortified "trading post" at Colombo and open hostility toward the island's Muslim traders aroused Sinhalese suspicions.

Following the decline of the Chola as a maritime power in the twelfth century, Muslim trading communities in South Asia claimed a major share of commerce in the Indian Ocean and developed extensive east-west, as well as Indo-Sri Lankan, commercial trade routes. As the Portuguese expanded into the region, this flourishing Muslim trade became an irresistible

target for European interlopers. The sixteenth-century Roman Catholic Church was intolerant of Islam and encouraged the Portuguese to take over the profitable shipping trade monopolized by the Moors. In addition, the Portuguese would later have another strong motive for hostility toward the Moors because the latter played an important role in the Kandyan economy, one that enabled the kingdom successfully to resist the Portuguese.

The Portuguese soon decided that the island, which they called Cilao, conveyed a strategic advantage that was necessary for protecting their coastal establishments in India and increasing Lisbon's potential for dominating Indian Ocean trade. These incentives proved irresistible, and, the Portuguese, with only a limited number of personnel, sought to extend their power over the island. They had not long to wait. Palace intrigue and then revolution in Kotte threatened the survival of the kingdom. The Portuguese skillfully exploited these developments. In 1521 Bhuvanekabahu, the ruler of Kotte, requested Portuguese aid against his brother, Mayadunne, the more able rival king who had established his independence from the Portuguese at Sitawake, a domain in the Kotte kingdom. Powerless on his own, King Bhuvanekabahu became a puppet of the Portuguese. But shortly before his death in 1551, the king successfully obtained Portuguese recognition of his grandson, Dharmapala, as his successor. Portugal pledged to protect Dharmapala from attack in return for privileges, including a continuous payment in cinnamon and permission to rebuild the fort at Colombo on a grander scale. When Bhuvanekabahu died, Dharmapala, still a child, was entrusted to the Franciscans for his education, and, in 1557, he converted to Roman Catholicism. His conversion broke the centuries-old connection between Buddhism and the state, and a great majority of Sinhalese immediately disqualified the young monarch from any claim to the throne. The rival king at Sitawake exploited the issue of the prince's conversion and accused Dharmapala of being a puppet of a foreign power.

Before long, rival King Mayadunne had annexed much of the Kotte kingdom and was threatening the security of the capital city itself. The Portuguese were obliged to defend Dharmapala (and their own credibility) because the ruler lacked a popular following. They were subsequently forced to abandon Kotte and retreat to Colombo, taking the despised puppet king with them. Mayadunne and, later, his son, Rajasinha, besieged Colombo many times. The latter was so successful that the Portuguese were once even forced to eat the flesh of their dead to avoid starvation. The Portuguese would probably have lost their holdings in Sri Lanka had they not had maritime superiority and been able to send reinforcements by sea from their base at Goa on the western coast of India.

The Kingdom of Sitawake put up the most vigorous opposition to Western imperialism in the island's history. For the seventy- three-year period of its existence, Sitawake (1521-94) rose to become the predominant power on the island, with only the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna and the Portuguese fort at Colombo beyond its control. When Rajasinha died in 1593, no effective successors were left to consolidate his gains, and the kingdom collapsed as quickly as it had arisen.

Dharmapala, despised by his countrymen and totally compromised by the Portuguese, was deprived of all his royal duties and became completely manipulated by the Portuguese advisers surrounding him. In 1580 the Franciscans persuaded him to make out a deed donating

his dominions to the king of Portugal. When Dharmapala died in 1597, the Portuguese emissary, the captain-general, took formal possession of the kingdom.

Portuguese missionaries had also been busily involving themselves in the affairs of the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna, converting almost the entire island of Mannar to Roman Catholicism by 1544. The reaction of Sangily, king of Jaffna, however, was to lead an expedition to Mannar and decapitate the resident priest and about 600 of his congregation. The king of Portugal took this as a personal affront and sent several expeditions against Jaffna. The Portuguese, having disposed of the Tamil king who fled south, installed one of the Tamil princes on the throne, obliging him to pay an annual tribute. In 1619 Lisbon annexed the Kingdom of Jaffna.

After the annexation of Jaffna, only the central highland Kingdom of Kandy--the last remnant of Buddhist Sinhalese power-- remained independent of Portuguese control. The kingdom acquired a new significance as custodian of Sinhalese nationalism. The Portuguese attempted the same strategy they had used successfully at Kotte and Jaffna and set up a puppet on the throne. They were able to put a queen on the Kandyan throne and even to have her baptized. But despite considerable Portuguese help, she was not able to retain power. The Portuguese spent the next half century trying in vain to expand their control over the Kingdom of Kandy. In one expedition in 1630, the Kandyans ambushed and massacred the whole Portuguese force, including the captain-general. The Kandyans fomented rebellion and consistently frustrated Portuguese attempts to expand into the interior.

The areas the Portuguese claimed to control in Sri Lanka were part of what they majestically called the Estado da India and were governed in name by the viceroy in Goa, who represented the king. But in actuality, from headquarters in Colombo, the captain-general, a subordinate of the viceroy, directly ruled Sri Lanka with all the affectations of royalty once reserved for the Sinhalese kings.

The Portuguese did not try to alter the existing basic structure of native administration. Although Portuguese governors were put in charge of each province, the customary hierarchy, determined by caste and land ownership, remained unchanged. Traditional Sinhalese institutions were maintained and placed at the service of the new rulers. Portuguese administrators offered land grants to Europeans and Sinhalese in place of salaries, and the traditional compulsory labor obligation was used for construction and military purposes.

The Portuguese tried vigorously, if not fanatically, to force religious and, to a lesser extent, educational, change in Sri Lanka. They discriminated against other religions with a vengeance, destroyed Buddhist and Hindu temples, and gave the temple lands to Roman Catholic religious orders. Buddhist monks fled to Kandy, which became a refuge for people disaffected with colonial rule. One of the most durable legacies of the Portuguese was the conversion of a large number of Sinhalese and Tamils to Roman Catholicism. Although small pockets of Nestorian Christianity had existed in Sri Lanka, the Portuguese were the first to propagate Christianity on a mass scale.

Sixteenth-century Portuguese Catholicism was intolerant. But perhaps because it caught Buddhism at its nadir, it nevertheless became rooted firmly enough on the island to survive the

subsequent persecutions of the Protestant Dutch Reformists. The Roman Catholic Church was especially effective in fishing communities--both Sinhalese and Tamil--and contributed to the upward mobility of the castes associated with this occupation. Portuguese emphasis on proselytization spurred the development and standardization of educational institutions. In order to convert the masses, mission schools were opened, with instruction in Portuguese and Sinhalese or Tamil. Many Sinhalese converts assumed Portuguese names. The rise of many families influential in the twentieth century dates from this period. For a while, Portuguese became not only the language of the upper classes of Sri Lanka but also the lingua franca of prominence in the Asian maritime world.

## **The Dutch**

The Dutch became involved in the politics of the Indian Ocean in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Headquartered at Batavia in modern Indonesia, the Dutch moved to wrest control of the highly profitable spice trade from the Portuguese. The Dutch began negotiations with King Rajasinha II of Kandy in 1638. A treaty assured the king assistance in his war against the Portuguese in exchange for a monopoly of the island's major trade goods, particularly cinnamon. Rajasinha also promised to pay the Dutch's war-related expenses. The Portuguese fiercely resisted the Dutch and the Kandyans and were expelled only gradually from their strongholds. The Dutch captured the eastern ports of Trincomalee and Batticaloa in 1639 and restored them to the Sinhalese. But when the southwestern and western ports of Galle and Negombo fell in 1640, the Dutch refused to turn them over to the king of Kandy. The Dutch claimed that Rajasinha had not reimbursed them for their vastly inflated claims for military expenditures. This pretext allowed the Dutch to control the island's richest cinnamon lands. The Dutch ultimately presented the king of Kandy with such a large bill for help against the Portuguese that the king could never hope to repay it. After extensive fighting, the Portuguese surrendered Colombo in 1656 and Jaffna, their last stronghold, in 1658. Superior economic resources and greater naval power enabled the Dutch to dominate the Indian Ocean. They attacked Portuguese positions throughout South Asia and in the end allowed their adversaries to keep only their settlement at Goa.

The king of Kandy soon realized that he had replaced one foe with another and proceeded to incite rebellion in the lowlands where the Dutch held sway. He even attempted to ally the British in Madras in his struggle to oust the Dutch. These efforts ended with a serious rebellion against his rule in 1664. The Dutch profited from this period of instability and extended the territory under their control. They took over the remaining harbors and completely cordoned off Kandy, thereby making the highland kingdom landlocked and preventing it from allying itself with another foreign power (see fig. 2). This strategy, combined with a concerted Dutch display of force, subdued the Kandyan kings. Henceforth, Kandy was unable to offer significant resistance except in its internal frontier regions. The Dutch and the Kingdom of Kandy eventually settled down to an uneasy modus vivendi, partly because the Dutch became less aggressive. Despite underlying hostility between Kandy and the Dutch, open warfare between them occurred only once--in 1762--when the Dutch, exasperated by Kandy's provocation of riots in the lowlands, launched a punitive expedition. The expedition met with disaster, but a better-planned second expedition in 1765 forced the Kandyans to sign a treaty that gave the Dutch sovereignty over the lowlands. The Dutch, however, maintained their

pretension that they administered the territories under their control as agents of the Kandyan ruler.

After taking political control of the island, the Dutch proceeded to monopolize trade. This monopoly was at first limited to cinnamon and elephants but later extended to other goods. Control was vested in the Dutch East India Company, a joint-stock corporation, which had been established for the purpose of carrying out trade with the islands of Indonesia but was later called upon to exercise sovereign responsibilities in many parts of Asia.

The Dutch tried with little success to supplant Roman Catholicism with Protestantism. They rewarded native conversion to the Dutch Reformed Church with promises of upward mobility, but Catholicism was too deeply rooted. (In the 1980s, the majority of Sri Lankan Christians remained Roman Catholics.) The Dutch were far more tolerant of the indigenous religions than the Portuguese; they prohibited open Buddhist and Hindu religious observance in urban areas, but did not interfere with these practices in rural areas. The Dutch banned Roman Catholic practices, however. They regarded Portuguese power and Catholicism as mutually interdependent and strove to safeguard against the reemergence of the former by persecuting the latter. They harassed Catholics and constructed Protestant chapels on confiscated church property.

The Dutch contributed significantly to the evolution of the judicial, and, to a lesser extent, administrative systems on the island. They codified indigenous law and customs that did not conflict directly with Dutch-Roman jurisprudence. The outstanding example was Dutch codification of the Tamil legal code of Jaffna- -the Thesavalamai. To a small degree, the Dutch altered the traditional land grant and tenure system, but they usually followed the Portuguese pattern of minimal interference with indigenous social and cultural institutions. The provincial governors of the territories of Jaffnapatam, Colombo, and Trincomalee were Dutch. These rulers also supervised various local officials, most of whom were the traditional mudaliyar (headmen).

The Dutch, like the Portuguese before them, tried to entice their fellow countrymen to settle in Sri Lanka, but attempts to lure members of the upper class, especially women, were not very successful. Lower-ranking military recruits, however, responded to the incentive of free land, and their marriages to local women added another group to the island's already small but established population of Eurasians--the Portuguese Burghers. The Dutch Burghers formed a separate and privileged ethnic group on the island in the twentieth century.

During the Dutch period, social differences between lowland and highland Sinhalese hardened, forming two culturally and politically distinct groups. Western customs and laws increasingly influenced the lowland Sinhalese, who generally enjoyed a higher standard of living and greater literacy. Despite their relative economic and political decline, the highland Sinhalese were nonetheless proud to have retained their political independence from the Europeans and thus considered themselves superior to the lowland Sinhalese.

## **The British**

## **Early Contacts**

In 1592 an English privateer attacked the Portuguese off the southwestern port of Galle. This action was England's first recorded contact with Sri Lanka. A decade later, Ralph Fitch, traveling from India, became the first known English visitor to Sri Lanka. The English did not record their first in-depth impressions of the island until the mid-seventeenth century, when Robert Knox, a sailor, was captured when his ship docked for repairs near Trincomalee. The Kandyans kept him prisoner between 1660 and 1680. After his escape, Knox wrote a popular book entitled *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon* in which he described his years among his "decadent" captors.

By the mid-eighteenth century, it was apparent that the Mughal Empire (1526-1757) in India faced imminent collapse, and the major European powers were positioning themselves to fill the power vacuum in the subcontinent. Dutch holdings on Sri Lanka were challenged in time by the British, who had an interest in the excellent harbor at Trincomalee. The British interest in procuring an all-weather port was whetted when they almost lost the Indian port of Madras to the French in 1758. The Dutch refused to grant the British permission to dock ships at Trincomalee (after The Netherlands's decision to support the French in the American War of Independence), goading the British into action. After skirmishing with both the Dutch and French, the British took Trincomalee in 1796 and proceeded to expel the Dutch from the island.

## **The British Replace the Dutch**

In 1766 the Dutch had forced the Kandyans to sign a treaty, which the Kandyans later considered so harsh that they immediately began searching for foreign assistance in expelling their foes. They approached the British in 1762, 1782, and 1795. The first Kandyan missions failed, but in 1795, British emissaries offered a draft treaty that would extend military aid in return for control of the seacoast and a monopoly of the cinnamon trade. The Kandyan king unsuccessfully sought better terms, and the British managed to oust the Dutch without significant help in 1796.

The Kandyans' search for foreign assistance against the Dutch was a mistake because they simply replaced a relatively weak master with a powerful one. Britain was emerging as the unchallenged leader in the new age of the Industrial Revolution, a time of technological invention, economic innovations, and imperialist expansion. The nations that had launched the first phase of European imperialism in Asia--the Portuguese and the Dutch--had already exhausted themselves.

While peace negotiations were under way in Europe in 1796, the British assumed Sri Lanka would eventually be restored to the Dutch. By 1797 however, London had decided to retain the island as a British possession. The government compelled the British East India Company to share in the administration of the island and guaranteed the company a monopoly of trade, especially the moderately profitable--but no longer robust--cinnamon trade. The governor of the island was responsible for law and order, but financial and commercial matters were under the control of the director of the East India Company. This system of "dual control" lasted from 1798 to 1802. After the Dutch formally ceded the island to the British in the 1801 Peace of

Amiens, Sri Lanka became Britain's first crown colony. Following Lord Nelson's naval victory over the French at Trafalgar in 1805, British superiority on the seas was unchallenged and provided new security for the British colonies in Asia.

Once the British had established themselves in Sri Lanka, they aggressively expanded their territorial possessions by a combination of annexation and intervention, a policy that paralleled the approach pursued by Lord Wellesley in India in the early nineteenth century. This strategy directly threatened the continued existence of the Kingdom of Kandy. Unrest at the Kandyan court between a ruling dynasty of alien, southern Indian antecedents and powerful, indigenous Sinhalese chieftains provided opportunities for British interference. The intrigue of the king's chief minister precipitated the first Kandyan war (1803). With the minister's knowledge, a British force marched on Kandy, but the force was ill prepared for such an ambitious venture and its leaders were misinformed of the extent of the king's unpopularity. The British expedition was at first successful, but on the return march, it was plagued by disease, and the garrison left behind was decimated. During the next decade, no concerted attempt was made to take Kandy. But in 1815 the British had another opportunity. The king had antagonized local Sinhalese chiefs and further alienated the Sinhalese people by actions against Buddhist monks and temple property. In 1815, the Kandyan rebels invited the British to intervene. The governor quickly responded by sending a well-prepared force to Kandy; the king fled with hardly a shot fired.

Kandyan headmen and the British signed a treaty known as the Kandyan Convention in March 1815. The treaty decreed that the Kandyan provinces be brought under British sovereignty and that all the traditional privileges of the chiefs be maintained. The Kingdom of Kandy was also to be governed according to its customary Buddhist laws and institutions but would be under the administration of a British "resident" at Kandy, who would, in all but name, take the place of the monarch.

In general, the old system was allowed to continue, but its future was bleak because of the great incongruity between the principles on which the British administration was based and the principles of the Kandyan hierarchy. Because the changes under the treaty tended to diminish the power and influence of the chiefs, the British introduced the new procedures with great caution. The monks, in particular, resented the virtual disappearance of the monarchy, which was their traditional source of support. They also resented the monarchy's replacement by a foreign and impartial government. Troubled by the corresponding decline in their status, the monks began to stir up political and religious discontent among the Kandyans almost immediately following the British annexation. The popular and widespread rebellion that followed was suppressed with great severity. When hostilities ended in 1818, the British issued a proclamation that brought the Kandyan provinces under closer control. British agents usurped the powers and privileges of the chiefs and became the arbitrators of provincial authority. Finally, the British reduced the institutional privileges accorded Buddhism, in effect placing the religion on an equal footing with other religions. With the final British consolidation over Kandy, the country fell under the control of a single power--for the first time since the twelfth-century rule of Parakramabahu I and Nissankamalla.

## **Modernization and Reform**

According to Sri Lankan historian Zeylanicus, each of the three epochs of European rule on the island lasted roughly 150 years, but rather than being assessed separately, these epochs should be thought of collectively as a "mighty cantilever of time with the Pax Britannica as the central pillar." Many British institutions have survived and currently have a direct and lasting influence on cultural and political events. Historian E.F.C. Ludowyck concurs, stating that whatever the Portuguese and Dutch did, the British improved upon. He attributed this accomplishment to British grounding in liberalism, a belief in the emancipation of slaves, the absence of religious persecution, and conscious attempts to maintain good relations between the rulers and the ruled.

When the British first conquered the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka, the indigenous population of the island was estimated at only 800,000. When the British left a century and a half later, the population had grown to more than 7 million. Over a relatively short period, the island had developed an economy capable of supporting the burgeoning population. Roads, railways, schools, hospitals, hydroelectric projects, and large well-operated agricultural plantations provided the infrastructure for a viable national economy.

In the early years of British colonization, Sri Lanka was not considered a great economic asset but was viewed instead almost exclusively in terms of its strategic value. By the 1820s, however, this perception was changing. As governor, Sir Edward Barnes was responsible for consolidating British military control over the Kandyan provinces through a program of vigorous road construction. He also began experimenting with a variety of commercial crops, such as coffee. These experiments provided the foundation of the plantation system that was launched a decade later. In administrative matters, the British were initially careful not to change the existing social order too quickly and were not inclined to mingle socially. A sharp distinction was made between the rulers and the ruled, but in time the distinction became less defined. The governor, who held all executive and legislative power, had an advisory council made up of colonial officials with top posts filled by members of a civil service recruited in Britain. The governor was under the direction of the Colonial Office in London but was given whatever discretionary powers he needed to balance the colony's budget and to make sure that the colony brought in enough revenue to cover its military and administrative expenses.

By the early 1830s, the British had almost finished consolidating their position in Sri Lanka and began to take more of an interest in securing the island's political stability and economic profitability. A new wave of thought, influenced by the reformist political ideology articulated by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, promised to change fundamentally Britain's relationship to its colonies. Known as utilitarianism, and later as philosophical radicalism, it promoted the idea of democracy and individual liberty. This philosophy sponsored the idea of the trusteeship, i.e., that new territories would be considered trusts and would receive all the benefits of British liberalism. These philosophical abstractions were put into practical use with the recommendations of a commission led by W.M.G. Colebrooke and C.H. Cameron. Their Colebrooke Report (1831-32) was an important document in the history of the island. G.C. Mendis, considered by many to be the doyen of modern Sri Lankan history, considers the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms to be the dividing line between the past and present in Sri Lanka.

## **The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms**

In 1829 the British Colonial Office sent a Royal Commission of Eastern Inquiry--the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission--to assess the administration of the island. The legal and economic

proposals made by the commission in 1833 were innovative and radical. The proposed reforms opposed mercantilism, state monopolies, discriminatory administrative regulations, and, in general, any interference in the economy. Many of the proposals were adopted and helped set a pattern of administrative, economic, judicial, and educational development that continued into the next century.

The commission worked to end the protested administrative division of the country along ethnic and cultural lines into lowcountry Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, and Tamil areas. The commission proposed instead that the country be put under one uniform administrative system, which was to be divided into five provinces. Colebrooke believed that in the past, separate administrative systems had encouraged social and cultural divisions, and that the first step toward the creation of a modern nation was the administrative unification of the country. Cameron applied the same principle to the judicial system, which he proposed be unified into one system and be extended to all classes of people, offering everyone equal rights in the eyes of the law. His recommendations were adopted and enforced under the Charter of Justice in 1833.

The commissioners also favored the decentralization of executive power in the government. They stripped away many of the autocratic powers vested in the governor, replacing his advisory council with an Executive Council, which included both official and unofficial nominees. The Executive Council appointed the members of the Legislative Council, which functioned as a forum for discussion of legislative matters. The Legislative Council placed special emphasis on Sri Lankan membership, and in 1833 three of the fifteen members were Sri Lankans. The governor nominated them to represent low-country Sinhalese, Burghers, and Tamils, respectively. The commissioners also voted to change the exclusively British character of the administrative services and recommended that the civil service include local citizens. These proposed constitutional reforms were revolutionary--far more liberal than the legal systems of any other European colony.

The opening of the Ceylon Civil Service to Sri Lankans required that a new emphasis be placed on English education. In time, the opening contributed to the creation of a Westernized elite, whose members would spearhead the drive for independence in the twentieth century. The Colebrooke-Cameron Commission emphasized the standardization of educational curriculum and advocated the substitution of English for local languages. Local English schools were established, and the missionary schools that had previously taught in the vernacular also adopted English.

## **Economic Innovations**

The Colebrooke-Cameron reforms had an immediate impact on the economic development of the island. Many features of the economic structure the reforms helped put into place still

exist. The commission advocated a laissez-faire economy. To encourage free trade, the government monopolies over cinnamon cultivation and trade were abolished. Traditional institutions, such as land tenure by accommodessan (the granting of land for cultivation, as opposed to its outright sale), was abolished, as was the rajakariya system. Rajakariya was opposed not only on moral grounds but also because it slowed the growth of private enterprise, impeded the creation of a land market, and interfered with the free movement of labor.

In the mid-1830s, the British began to experiment with a variety of plantation crops in Sri Lanka, using many of the technological innovations developed earlier from their experience in Jamaica. Within fifteen years, one of these crops, coffee, became so successful that it transformed the island's economy from reliance upon subsistence crops to plantation agriculture. The first coffee plantation was opened in the Kandyan hill region in 1827, but it was not until the mid-1830s that a number of favorable factors combined to make the widespread cultivation of the crop a highly profitable enterprise. Governor Edward Barnes (1824-31) foresaw the possibilities of coffee cultivation and introduced various incentives for its cultivation, particularly the lifting of coffee export duties and exemption from the land produce tax. When slavery was abolished in the West Indies and coffee production there declined, Sri Lankan coffee exports soared, filling the gap in the world market. The problem of limited availability of land for coffee estates was solved when the British government sold lands that it had acquired from the Kandyan kings.

The coffee plantation system faced a serious labor shortage. Among the Sinhalese, a peasant cultivator of paddy land held a much higher status than a landless laborer. In addition, the low wages paid to hired workers failed to attract the Kandyan peasant, and the peak season for harvesting plantation coffee usually coincided with the peasant's own harvest. Moreover, population pressure and underemployment were not acute until the twentieth century. To compensate for this scarcity of native workers, an inexpensive and almost inexhaustible supply of labor was found among the Tamils in southern India. They were recruited for the coffee-harvesting season and migrated to and from Sri Lanka, often amid great hardships. The immigration of these Indian Tamils began as a trickle in the 1830s and became a regular flow a decade later, when the government of India removed all restrictions on the migration of labor to Sri Lanka.

British civilian and military officials resident in Kandy provided initial capital for coffee cultivation, provoking contemporary observations in the 1840s that they behaved more like coffee planters than government employees. This private capitalization led to serious abuses, however, culminating in an 1840 ordinance that made it virtually impossible for a Kandyan peasant to prove that his land was not truly crown land and thus subject to expropriation and resale to coffee interests. In this period, more than 80,000 hectares of Kandyan land were appropriated and sold as crown lands.

Between 1830 and 1850, coffee held the preeminent place in the economy and became a catalyst for the island's modernization. The greater availability of capital and the increase in export trade brought the rudiments of capitalist organization to the country. The Ceylon Bank opened in

1841 to finance the rapid expansion of coffee plantations. Since the main center of coffee production was in the Kandyan provinces, the expansion of coffee and the network of roads and railroads ended the isolation of the old Kandyan kingdom. The coffee plantation system had served as the economic foundation for the unification of the island while reinforcing the administrative and judicial reforms of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission.

The plantation system dominated the economy in Sri Lanka to such an extent that one observer described the government as an "appendage of the estates (plantations)." Worldwide depression in 1846 temporarily checked the rapid development of the plantation system. Falling coffee prices caused financial disruption, aggravating the friction that had been developing between the static traditional feudal economy and modernized commercial agriculture. In order to make up for lost revenue, the government imposed a series of new taxes on firearms, dogs, shops, boats, carriages, and bullock carts. All of these taxes affected Sinhalese farmers. Other measures that further alienated the Kandyans included a land tax and a road ordinance in 1848 that reintroduced a form of *rajakariya* by requiring six days' free labor on roads or the payment of a cash equivalent. But the measure that most antagonized the Kandyans (especially those associated with the Buddhist *sangha*) was the alienation of temple lands for coffee plantations.

British troops so severely repressed a rebellion that broke out among the Kandyans in 1848 that the House of Commons in London commissioned an investigation to look into the matter. The governor and his chief secretary were subsequently dismissed, and all new taxes, except the road ordinance, were repealed. The government adopted a new policy toward Buddhism after the rebellion, recognizing the importance of Buddhist monks as leaders of Kandyan public opinion.

The plantation era transformed the island's economy. This was most evident in the growth of the export sector at the expense of the traditional agricultural sector. The colonial predilection for growing commercial instead of subsistence crops later was considered by Sri Lankan nationalists to be one of the unfortunate legacies of European domination. Late nineteenth-century official documents that recorded famines and chronic rural poverty support the nationalists' argument. Other issues, notably the British policy of selling state land to planters for conversion into plantations, are equally controversial, even though some members of the indigenous population participated in all stages of plantation agriculture. Sri Lankans, for example, controlled over one-third of the area under coffee cultivation and most of the land in coconut production. They also owned significant interests in rubber.

In 1869 a devastating leaf disease--*hemleia vastratrix* struck the coffee plantations and spread quickly throughout the plantation district, destroying the coffee industry within fifteen years. Planters desperately searched for a substitute crop. One crop that showed promise was *chinchona* (quinine). After an initial appearance of success, however, the market price of the crop fell and never fully recovered. Cinnamon, which had suffered a setback in the beginning of the century, was revived at this time, but only to become an important minor crop.

Among all of the crops experimented with during the decline of coffee, only tea showed any real promise of success. A decline in the demand for Chinese tea in Britain opened up possibilities for Indian tea, especially the fine variety indigenous to Assam. Climatic conditions for the cultivation of tea were excellent in Sri Lanka, especially in the hill country. By the end of the century, tea production on the island had risen enormously. Because of the inelasticity of the market, however, British outlets soon became saturated. Attempts to develop other markets, especially in the United States, were largely unsuccessful, and a glut emerged after World War II.

The tea estates needed a completely different type of labor force than had been required during the coffee era. Tea was harvested throughout the year and required a permanent labor force. Waves of Indian Tamil immigrants settled on the estates and eventually became a large and permanent underclass that endured abominable working conditions and squalid housing. The census of 1911 recorded the number of Indian laborers in Sri Lanka at about 500,000--about 12 percent of the island's total population. In the 1980s, the Indian Tamils made up almost 6 percent of the island's population (see Population , ch. 2.)

The Tamil laborers emigrated to Sri Lanka from India not as individuals but as part of family units or groups of interrelated families. Thus, they tended to maintain their native cultural patterns on the estates where they settled. Although the Indian Tamils spoke the same language as the Sri Lankan Tamils, were Hindus, and traced their cultural origins to southern India, they considered themselves to be culturally distinct from the Sri Lankan Tamils. Their distinctiveness as a group and their cultural differences from the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils were recognized in the constitutional reforms of 1924, when two members of the Indian Tamil community were nominated to the Legislative Council.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, experimentation in crop diversification, on a moderate level in the years before the collapse of the coffee market, became of greater importance. Responding to international market trends, planters attempted to diversify the crops they produced to insulate their revenues from world price fluctuations. Not all their experiments were successful. The first sugar plantation was established in 1837, but sugar cultivation was not well-suited to the island and has never been very successful. Cocoa was also tried for a time and has continued as one of the lesser exports. Rubber, which was introduced in 1837, became a major export during the slump in the tea export market in the 1900s. The rubber export trade exceeded that of tea during World War I. But after suffering severe losses during the depression of the 1930s, rubber exports never again regained their preeminent position.

### **Rise of the Sri Lankan Middle Class**

By the nineteenth century, a new society was emerging--a product of East and West. It was a society with strict rules separating the rulers from the ruled, and most social association between the British and Sri Lankans was taboo. The British community was largely a microcosm of English society with all its class divisions. At the top of the social pyramid were the British officials of the Ceylon Civil Service. Elaborate social conventions regulated the conduct of the service's members and served to distinguish them as an exclusive caste. This

situation, however, changed slowly in the latter part of the nineteenth century and quite rapidly in the next century.

In Sri Lanka as in India, the British created an educated class to provide administrative and professional services in the colony. By the late nineteenth century, most members of this emerging class were associated directly or indirectly with the government. Increased Sri Lankan participation in government affairs demanded the creation of a legal profession; the need for state health services required a corps of medical professionals; and the spread of education provided an impetus to develop the teaching profession. In addition, the expansion of commercial plantations created a legion of new trades and occupations: landowners, planters, transport agents, contractors, and businessmen. Certain Sinhalese caste groups, such as the fishermen (Karava) and cinnamon peelers (Salagama), benefited from the emerging new economic order, to the detriment of the traditional ruling cultivators (Goyigama).

The development of a capitalist economy forced the traditional elite--the chiefs and headmen among the low-country Sinhalese and the Kandyan aristocracy--to compete with new groups for the favors of the British. These upwardly mobile, primarily urban, professionals formed a new class that transcended divisions of race and caste. This class, particularly its uppermost strata, was steeped in Western culture and ideology. This anglicized elite generally had conservative political leanings, was loyal to the government, and resembled the British so much in outlook and social customs that its members were sometimes called brown sahibs. At the apex of this new class was a handful of Sri Lankans who had been able to join the exclusive ranks of the civil service in the nineteenth century. The first Sri Lankan entered by competitive examination in 1840. At that time, entrance examinations were held only in London and required an English education, so only a few members of the native middle class could aspire to such an elitist career. Consequently, in spite of the liberal policies that Colebrooke and Cameron recommended, the British held virtually all high posts in the colonial administration.

### **Buddhist Revivalism**

Beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Buddhist clergy attempted to reform the sangha (religious community), particularly as a reaction against Christian missionary activities. In the 1870s, Buddhist activists enlisted the help of an American, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott. An ardent abolitionist in the years leading up to the American Civil War, Olcott cofounded and later became president of the Theosophical Movement, which was organized on a worldwide basis to promote goodwill and to champion the rights of the underprivileged. Shortly after his arrival in Sri Lanka, Olcott organized a Buddhist campaign against British officials and British missionaries. His Buddhist Theosophical Society of Ceylon went on to establish three institutions of higher learning: Ananda College, Mahinda College, and Dharmaraja College. Olcott's society founded these and some 200 lower schools to impart Buddhist education with a strong nationalist bias. Olcott and his society took a special interest in the historical past of the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms on the island and managed to persuade the British governor to make Vesak, the chief Buddhist festival, a public holiday.

## **Constitutional Reform**

The rediscovery of old Buddhist texts rekindled a popular interest in Sri Lanka's ancient civilization. The study of the past became an important aspect of the new drive for education. Archaeologists began work at Anuradhapura and at Polonnaruwa, and their finds contributed to the resurgent national pride. In the 1880s, a Buddhist-inspired temperance movement was also initiated to fight drunkenness, and the Ceylon Social Reform Society was founded in 1905 to combat other temptations associated with Westernization. Encouraged by the free reign of expression that the government extended to these reformists, a growing number of communal and regional political associations began to press for constitutional reform in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The colonial government was petitioned for permission to have Sri Lankan representation in the Executive Council and expanded regional representation in the Legislative Council. In response, the colonial government permitted a modest experiment in 1910, allowing a small electorate of Sri Lankans to send one of their members to the Legislative Council. Other seats held by Sri Lankans retained the old practice of communal representation.

## **World War I**

World War I had only a minimal military impact on Sri Lanka, which entered the war as part of the British Empire. The closest fighting took place in the Bay of Bengal, where an Australian warship sank a German cruiser. But the war had an important influence on the growth of nationalism. The Allies' wartime propaganda extolled the virtues of freedom and self-determination of nations, and the message was heard and duly noted by Sri Lankan nationalists. There was, however, an event, only indirectly related to the war, that served as the immediate spark for the growth of nationalism. In 1915 communal rioting broke out between the Sinhalese and Muslims on the west coast. The British panicked, misconstruing the disturbances as part of an antigovernment conspiracy; they blamed the majority ethnic group and indiscriminately arrested many Sinhalese, including D.S. Senanayake--the future first prime minister of Sri Lanka--who had actually tried to use his influence to curb the riots. The British put down the unrest with excessive zeal and brutality, which shocked British and Sri Lankan observers alike. Some sympathetic accounts of the unrest take into consideration that the judgment of the governor of the time, Sir Robert Chalmers (1913-16), may have been clouded by the loss of his two sons on the Western Front in Europe. At any rate, his actions insured that 1915 was a turning point in the nationalist movement. From then on, activists mobilized for coordinated action against the British.

The nationalist movement in India served as a model to nationalists in Sri Lanka. In 1917 the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League mended their differences and issued a joint declaration for the "progressive realization" of responsible government in India. Nationalists in Sri Lanka learned from their Indian counterparts that they had to become more national and less partisan in their push for constitutional reform. In 1919 the major Sinhalese and Tamil political organizations united to form the Ceylon National Congress. One of the first actions of the congress was to submit a proposal for a new constitution that would increase local control over the Executive Council and the budget. These demands were not met, but they led to the promulgation of a new constitution in 1920. Amendments to the constitution in 1924

increased Sri Lankan representation. Although the nationalists' demand for representation in the Executive Council was not granted, the Legislative Council was expanded to include a majority of elected Sri Lankan unofficial members, bringing the island closer to representative government. Yet the franchise remained restrictive and included only about 4 percent of the island's population.

### **The Donoughmore Commission**

In 1927 a royal commission under the Earl of Donoughmore visited Sri Lanka to ascertain why representative government as chartered by the 1924 constitution had not succeeded and to suggest constitutional changes necessary for the island's eventual self-rule. The commission declared that the constitution had authorized a government characterized by the "divorce of power from responsibility," which at times seemed "rather like holy matrimony at its worst." The 1924 constitution, considered by the commission to be "an unqualified failure," failed to provide a strong, credible executive body of representatives. To remedy these shortcomings, the commission proposed universal adult franchise and an experimental system of government to be run by executive committees. The resulting Donoughmore Constitution, promulgated in 1931 to accommodate these new proposals in government, was a unique document that provided Sri Lankans with training for self-government. The document, however, reserved the highest level of responsibility for the British governor, whose assent was necessary for all legislation. The legislative branch of the government--the State Council--functioned in both an executive and legislative capacity. Seven committees performed executive duties. Each committee consisted of designated members of the State Council and was chaired by an elected Sri Lankan, who was addressed as minister. Three British officers of ministerial rank, along with the seven Sri Lankan ministers, formed a board of ministers. The British ministers collectively handled responsibility for defense, external affairs, finance, and judicial matters.

The Donoughmore Constitution ushered in a period of experimentation in participatory democracy but contemporary political scientists have criticized it for not having provided an atmosphere conducive to the growth of a healthy party system. The system of executive committees did not lead to the development of national political parties. Instead, a number of splinter political groups evolved around influential personalities who usually followed a vision too limited or an agenda too communally partisan to have an impact on national politics.

Among the Sinhalese, a form of nationalism arose that sought once again to restore Buddhism to its former glory. The Great Council of the Sinhalese (Sinhala Maha Sabha), which was founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1937, was the strongest proponent of this resurgent ideology. Other groups followed suit, also organizing on communal grounds. These groups included the Burgher Political Association in 1938, the Ceylon Indian Congress in 1939, and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress in 1944.

### **Growth of Leftist Parties**

During the Donoughmore period of political experimentation, several leftist parties were formed. Unlike most other Sri Lankan parties, these leftist parties were noncommunal in

membership. Working-class activism, especially trade unionism, became an important political factor during the sustained economic slump between the world wars. The first important leftist party was the Labour Party, founded in 1931 by A.E. Goonesimha. Three Marxist-oriented parties--the Ceylon Equal Society Party (Lanka Sama Samaja Party--LSSP), the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL)--represented the far left. All three were divided on both ideological and personal grounds. The Soviet Union's expulsion of Leon Trotsky from the Communist Party after Lenin's death in 1924 and Stalin's subsequent decision to enter World War II on the Allied side exacerbated these differences, dividing the Communists into Trotskyites and Stalinists. The LSSP, formed in 1935 and the oldest of the Sri Lankan Marxist parties, took a stance independent of the Soviet Union, becoming affiliated with the Trotskyite Fourth International, which was a rival of the Comintern. Most LSSP leaders were arrested during World War II for their opposition to what they considered to be an "imperial war." Although in more recent years, the LSSP has been considered a politically spent force, gaining, for example less than 1 percent of the vote in the 1982 presidential elections, it has nevertheless been touted as the world's only successful Trotskyite party.

The CPSL, which began as a Stalinist faction of the LSSP that was later expelled, formed its own party in 1943, remaining faithful to the dictates of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik-Leninist Party was formed in 1945 as another breakaway group of the LSSP. The leftist parties represented the numerically small urban working class. Partly because these parties operated through the medium of trade unionism, they lacked the wider mass appeal needed at the national level to provide an effective extraparliamentary challenge to the central government. Nonetheless, because the leftists occasionally formed temporary political coalitions before national elections, they posed more than just a mere "parliamentary nuisance factor."

## **World War II and the Transition to Independence**

When Singapore fell to the Japanese in February 1942, Sri Lanka became a central base for British operations in Southeast Asia, and the port at Trincomalee recaptured its historically strategic importance. Because Sri Lanka was an indispensable strategic bastion for the British Royal Navy, it was an irresistible military target for the Japanese. For a time, it seemed that Japan planned a sweeping westward offensive across the Indian Ocean to take Sri Lanka, sever the Allies' lifeline to Persian Gulf oil, and link up with the Axis powers in Egypt. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, mastermind of the raid on Pearl Harbor, ordered Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo to command a large armada to seek and destroy the British Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. The two nations' fleets played a game of hide-and-seek, but never met. Some military historians assert that if they had met, the smaller British fleet would have met with disaster. The British instead fought several desperate air battles over Colombo and Trincomalee and lost about thirty-six aircraft and several ships.

Yamamoto's grand strategy failed to isolate and destroy any major units of the British fleet. But if the Japanese had persisted with their offensive, the island, with its limited British naval defenses, probably would have fallen. The Japanese carrier force, however, suffered such high

aircraft losses over Sri Lanka--more than 100 warplanes--that it returned to Japan for refitting rather than press the attack. By returning to Japan, the force lost its opportunity for unchallenged supremacy of the Indian Ocean. The focus of the war in this theater then shifted away from the island.

On the whole, Sri Lanka benefited from its role in World War II. The plantation sector was busy meeting the urgent demands of the Allies for essential products, especially rubber, enabling the country to save a surplus in hard currency. Because Sri Lanka was the seat of the Southeast Asia Command, a broad infrastructure of health services and modern amenities was built to accommodate the large number of troops posted into all parts of the country. The inherited infrastructure improved the standard of living in postwar, independent Sri Lanka.

Unlike India, where nationalists demanded a guarantee of independence as recompense for their support in the war effort, Sri Lanka committed itself wholeheartedly to the Allied war effort. Although the island was put under military jurisdiction during the war, the British and the Sri Lankans maintained cooperative relations. Sri Lankan pressure for political reform continued during the war, however, and increased as the Japanese threat receded and the war neared its end. The British eventually promised full participatory government after the war.

In July 1944, Lord Soulbury was appointed head of a commission charged with the task of examining a new constitutional draft that the Sri Lankan ministers had proposed. The commission made recommendations that led to a new constitution. As the end of the war approached, the constitution was amended to incorporate a provision giving Sri Lanka dominion status.

British constitutional principles served as a model for the Soulbury Constitution of independent Sri Lanka, which combined a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature. Members of the first House of Representatives were directly elected by popular vote. Members of the Senate, or upper house, were elected partly by members of the House and partly by the governor general, who was primarily a figurehead. The British monarch appointed the governor general on the advice of the most powerful person in the Sri Lankan government--the prime minister.

## **INDEPENDENCE**

The British negotiated the island's dominion status with the leader of the State Council, D.S. Senanayake, during World War II. Senanayake was also minister of agriculture and vice chairman of the Board of Ministers. The negotiations ended with the Ceylon Independence Act of 1947, which formalized the transfer of power. Senanayake was the founder and leader of the United National Party (UNP), a partnership of many disparate groups formed during the Donoughmore period, including the Ceylon National Congress, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, and the Muslim League. The UNP easily won the 1947 elections, challenged only by a collection of small, primarily leftist parties. On February 4, 1948, when the new constitution went into effect (making Sri Lanka a dominion), the UNP embarked on a ten-year period of rule.

## **Divisions in the Body Politic**

The prospects for an economically robust, fully participatory, and manageable democracy looked good during the first years of independence. In contrast to India, which had gained independence a year earlier, there was no massive violence and little social unrest. In Sri Lanka there was also a good measure of governmental continuity. Still, important unresolved ethnic problems soon had to be addressed. The most immediate of these problems was the "Indian question," which concerned the political status of Tamil immigrants who worked on the highland tea plantations. The Soulbury Commission had left this sensitive question to be resolved by the incoming government.

After independence, debate about the status of the Indian Tamils continued. But three pieces of legislation--the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948; the Indian and Pakistani Residents Act No. 3 of 1948, and the Ceylon Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949--all but disenfranchised this minority group. The Ceylon Indian Congress vigorously but unsuccessfully opposed the legislation. The acrimonious debate over the laws of 1948 and 1949 revealed serious fissures in the body politic. There was a cleavage along ethnic lines between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and also a widening rift between Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils.

In 1949 a faction of the Ceylon Tamil Congress (the major Tamil party in Sri Lanka at the time) broke away to form the (Tamil) Federal Party under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The creation of the Federal Party was a momentous postindependence development because it set the agenda for Tamil exclusivity in Sri Lankan politics. Soon after its founding, the Federal Party replaced the more conciliatory Tamil Congress as the major party among Sri Lankan Tamils and advocated an aggressive stance vis-à-vis the Sinhalese.

## **United National Party "Majority" Rule, 1948-56**

The largest political party in independent Sri Lanka, the United National Party (UNP), emerged as an umbrella party from the colonial era. It was similar in some respects to the Indian National Congress. Like its Indian counterpart, the UNP represented a union of a number of groups espousing different personalities and ideologies. Known later as the "uncle-nephew party" because of the kinship ties among the party's top leadership, the UNP served as the standard-bearer of conservative forces. In late 1947, when the party won the country's first general election, the UNP attempted to establish an anticommunist, intercommunal parliamentary form of government. Prominent nationalists, such as D.S. Senanayake and S.W.R.D.

Bandaranaike (the country's first and fourth prime ministers, respectively), led the UNP. The party's internal differences gradually worsened, however. The first and most serious break came in July 1951, when Bandaranaike's left-of-center bloc seceded to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the first major non-Marxist political movement to oppose the UNP.

Despite the benevolent guidance of Senanayake, the UNP could not defuse the nascent dissension between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Some of Senanayake's policies, particularly his

awarding of land grants to Sinhalese settlers for the resettlement of the northern dry zone, precipitated renewed competition between the two ethnic groups.

When Senanayake died in a horseback-riding accident in March 1952, not only the UNP, but also the entire nation suffered from the loss of the only man who could pose as a credible symbol for the country's unity. In the election that was held immediately after Senanayake's death, the UNP, led by his son Dudley, and the SLFP, led by Bandaranaike, vied for Sinhalese votes, while the Tamil Congress and Federal Party competed for the Tamil vote. The UNP won the election, and the SLFP emerged as major opposition party. The SLFP managed to win only nine out of forty-eight seats in Parliament. The Tamil Congress, having supported the UNP, lost much of its following to the Federal Party, which continued to advocate an autonomous homeland within a Sri Lankan federation. Ethnic tensions, although mounting, remained manageable.

After D. S. Senanayake's death, the nation's economic problems became apparent. The terms of world trade were turning against Sri Lanka. The population was growing faster than production in most sectors. A World Bank (see Glossary) study completed in 1952 noted that social and welfare services were consuming 35 percent of the budget. The report recommended that the government rice subsidy--which accounted for the major portion of the expenditure--be reduced. Prime Minister Senanayake followed the advice, but the move proved to be his political undoing. A massive, sometimes violent civil disobedience movement was launched to protest the reduction of the rice subsidy and provoked the resignation of Senanayake. In October 1953, his cousin, Sir John Kotelawala, became prime minister and remained in office until the UNP defeat in the 1956 election.

The UNP government under Kotelawala disagreed with India's interpretation of political solidarity in the developing world. This divergence became painfully clear to India at the Colombo Conference of 1954 and the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955. Kotelawala's strident condemnation of communism, as well as the more fashionable condemnation of Western imperialism, especially irritated India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Kotelawala was also anxious to have Ceylon join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), but he encountered strong domestic opposition to the plan. The Soviet Union was especially sensitive to what it considered the government's pro-Western attitude and repeatedly vetoed Sri Lanka's application to join the United Nations (UN). Sri Lanka was finally admitted in 1955 as part of an East-West agreement.

The UNP continued a defense agreement with the British that spared Sri Lanka the cost of maintaining a large military establishment. National defense consumed less than 4 percent of the government budget in the postindependence years, and hence the military was not in a position to interfere with politics.

### **Emergence of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party**

Following its defeat in 1952, the SLFP marshaled its forces in preparation for the next national election. The 1956 election was destined to become a turning point in the modern history of

Sri Lanka and is seen by many observers as a social revolution resulting in the eclipse of the Westernized elite. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike campaigned as the "defender of a besieged Sinhalese culture" and demanded radical changes in the system. Bandaranaike came from a family of Westernized Sinhalese and was educated at Oxford, but early in his political career, he rejected many of the Western elements of his background and embraced the Buddhist faith and adopted native garb (regarded at the time as an affectation among members of his class). Bandaranaike brought to the election a deep knowledge of the passions that communal politics could provoke. His Sinhala Maha Sabha, founded in 1937 as a movement within the Ceylon National Congress, was the only wing of the congress at that time that sought to infuse a Sinhala consciousness into Sri Lankan nationalism. The Sinhala Maha Sabha formed the backbone of Bandaranaike's SLFP and helped spread his 1956 election warning that Buddhism was in danger. Accusations of a "conspiracy" between the UNP and the Roman Catholic Church helped raise emotions feverishly. As one commentator put it, "Bandaranaike built up a popular following based on the Sinhalese dislike of Christian influence, essentially stoking the fires of communal and religious bigotry."

Bandaranaike and his supporters used the UNP's pro-Western stance as a potent propaganda weapon against the party. He claimed that the independence granted in 1948 was "fake" and that real independence could only be attained by severing all links with the Commonwealth of Nations. In economic matters, Bandaranaike planned to nationalize plantations, banks, and insurance companies. He advocated the control over trade and industry vested in Sinhalese hands. With such a radical platform, Bandaranaike managed to unite many disparate groups into his People's United Front (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna--MEP), a political coalition under the leadership of his SLFP formed to defeat the UNP. In addition, he was able to forge a no-contest pact with two Marxist parties, the LSSP and the CPSL.

The central and most explosive issue of the 1956 election was a linguistic one. After independence, it was commonly accepted that Sinhala and Tamil would replace English as the language of administration, but Bandaranaike announced that only Sinhala would be given official status if his coalition won the election. Bandaranaike introduced a dangerous emotionalism into the election with his "Sinhala only" platform, which labeled both Tamil and English as cultural imports.

The 2,500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha (which also marked the legendary landing of Vijaya and his followers on the island) coincided with the 1956 election, electrifying the political atmosphere. The UNP was susceptible to the emotional power of these issues. In what was later seen as a shameless last-minute reversal, the party also espoused the "Sinhala only" program. This political about-face came too late to help the UNP, for the party lost the election, winning only eight seats in parliament. The People's United Front won the majority share of fifty-one seats.

### **Tamil Politics**

Some political commentators hold that it was in the wake of the 1956 elections that two completely separate and basically hostile political systems emerged in Sri Lanka: one for the Sinhalese and another for the Tamils. The trend toward Tamil exclusivity, however, despite

periods of accommodation with Sinhalese political parties, had begun developing before independence. The first political organization to be formed specifically to protect the welfare of an ethnic minority was the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), which G.G. Ponnambalam founded in 1944. The Tamil Congress attempted to secure adequate constitutional safeguards before the country attained its independence. These attempts reflected Tamil anxieties that British domination would simply give way to domination by the Sinhalese majority.

After independence, a dissident Tamil group in the ACTC emerged under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The new group disagreed with Ponnambalam's policy of collaboration with the intercommunal, but Sinhalese-dominated, UNP. In 1949 the dissidents broke away from the ACTC and formed the rival Federal Party, which proposed establishing an autonomous Tamil linguistic state within a federal union of Sri Lanka. The Federal Party regarded this alternative as the only practical way to preserve Tamil identity.

In 1956 the Federal Party emerged as the dominant Tamil political group as a result of its convincing victory over the conservative Tamil Congress. The Federal Party had a distinct advantage because the Tamil Congress had suffered considerably from the stigma of its association with the UNP (which had abandoned its policy of making both Sinhala and Tamil national languages in an attempt to obtain the support of the numerically greater Sinhalese vote).

The Federal Party continued to consolidate its strength and became an important player in national politics. In 1965 the party became a component of the UNP-led coalition government by committing its bloc of parliamentary seats to the UNP, which at that time needed the Federal Party's support to form a stable parliamentary majority. In 1968 however, the Federal Party withdrew from the UNP government because its leaders were convinced that the party could no longer derive any tangible benefits from further association with the UNP. In 1970 the Federal Party campaigned independently, unlike the Tamil Congress, whose leaders called on the Tamils to join a united front with the Sinhalese.

## **Sri Lanka Freedom Party Rule, 1956-65**

### **Legislation and Communal Agitation**

Some of the first actions taken by the new SLFP government reflected a disturbing insensitivity to minority concerns. Shortly after its victory, the new government presented parliament with the Official Language Act, which declared Sinhala the one official language. The act was passed and immediately caused a reaction among Tamils, who perceived their language, culture, and economic position to be under attack.

The passage of the Official Language Act precipitated a current of antagonism between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The Sri Lankan Tamils, represented by the Federal Party, launched a satyagraha (nonviolent protest) that resulted in a pact between S.V.R.D. Bandaranaike and S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The agreement provided a wide measure of Tamil autonomy in Northern and Eastern provinces. It also provided for the use of the Tamil language in administrative matters. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact also promised that "early consideration" would be extended to Indian "plantation" Tamils on the question of Sri Lankan

citizenship. But the pact was not carried out because of a peaceful protest by Buddhist clergy, who, with support from the UNP, denounced the pact as a "betrayal of Sinhalese-Buddhist people."

In May 1958, a rumor that a Tamil had killed a Sinhalese sparked off nationwide communal riots. Hundreds of people, mostly Tamils, died. This disturbance was the first major episode of communal violence on the island since independence. The riots left a deep psychological scar between the two major ethnic groups. The government declared a state of emergency and forcibly relocated more than 25,000 Tamil refugees from Sinhalese areas to Tamil areas in the north.

### **Populist Economic Policies**

The Bandaranaike government actively expanded the public sector and broadened domestic welfare programs, including pension plans, medical care, nutrition programs, and food and fuel subsidies. This social agenda threatened to drain the nation's treasury. Other popular but economically unfeasible schemes promoted by the Bandaranaike government included restrictions on foreign investment, the nationalization of critical industries, and land reform measures that nationalized plantations and redistributed land to peasants.

When a Buddhist extremist assassinated Bandaranaike in September 1959, the nation faced a period of grave instability. The institution of parliamentary multiparty politics proved strong enough to endure, however, and orderly, constitutional actions resolved the leadership succession. The office of prime minister passed to the minister of education, Wijeyananda Dahanayake, who pledged to carry on the socialist policies of his predecessor. But policy differences and personality clashes within the ruling circle forced the new leader to dissolve Parliament in December 1959. The short-lived Dahanayake government, unable to hold Bandaranaike's coalition government together, was defeated by the UNP in the March 1960 general elections. The UNP won 33 percent of the seats in the lower house, giving the party a plurality but not a majority.

### **United National Party Interlude**

The new prime minister, Dudley Senanayake, honored his election pledge to avoid compromise with the leftist parties and formed an all-UNP government with support from minor right-of-center parties. His overall parliamentary majority, however, was below the minimum seats required to defeat an opposition motion of no-confidence in the UNP cabinet. Less than a month after its formation, the UNP government fell. A new election was scheduled for July 1960.

### **Return of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party**

The UNP fell because it lacked the support of any other major party in Parliament. The leftists tried to bring it down, and the Tamils withheld their support because the UNP had earlier

hedged on the issue of the use of the Tamil language. Most important, the UNP had earned the reputation among Sinhalese voters of being a party inimical to Sinhalese nationalism.

Meanwhile the SLFP had grown stronger because of its unwavering support for making Sinhala the only official language. The SLFP found in the former prime minister's widow, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias (S.R.D.) Bandaranaike, a candidate who was more capable of arousing Sinhalese emotions than Dahanayake had been in the March elections.

In the July 1960 general election, Bandaranaike was profiled as a woman who had nobly agreed to carry on the mandate of her assassinated husband. She received the support of many of the same small parties on the right and left that had temporarily joined together to form the People's United Front coalition (which had brought her husband victory in 1956). She won the election with an absolute majority in Parliament and became Sri Lanka's seventh, and the world's first woman, prime minister. The new government was in many ways the torchbearer for the ideas of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, but under his widow's direction, the SLFP carried out these ideas with such zeal and force that Sinhalese-Tamil relations sharply deteriorated. One of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's first official actions was to enforce the policy of Sinhala as the only officially recognized language of government. Her aggressive enforcement of this policy sparked immediate Tamil resistance, which resulted in civil disobedience in restive Northern and Eastern provinces. Bandaranaike reacted by declaring a state of emergency and curtailing Tamil political activity.

Bandaranaike also antagonized other significant minority groups, particularly the Christians. In response to a recommendation by an unofficial Buddhist commission, her government took over the management of state-assisted denominational schools. The move deprived many Christian missionary schools of support. Roman Catholic activists spearheaded demonstrations, which forced the government to reconsider some of its measures. Still, relations between the prime minister and the Christian denominations remained unstable.

Bandaranaike moved vigorously early in her administration to nationalize significant sectors of the economy, targeting industries that were under foreign control. The 1961 creation of the State Petroleum Corporation adversely affected the major petroleum companies--Shell, Esso, and Caltex. The new corporation was guaranteed 25 percent of the country's total petroleum business. Under Bandaranaike's instruction, state corporations began to import oil from new sources, effectively altering for the first time the pattern of trade that had been followed since British rule. Sri Lanka signed oil import agreements with the Soviet Union, Romania, Egypt, and other countries not traditionally involved in Sri Lankan trade. The government also put important sectors of the local economy, particularly the insurance industry, under state control. Most alarming to Bandaranaike's conservative opponents, however, were her repeated unsuccessful attempts to nationalize the largest newspaper syndicate and establish a press council to monitor the news media.

In foreign relations, Bandaranaike was faithful to her late husband's policy of "dynamic neutralism," which aimed to steer a nonaligned diplomatic stance between the superpowers. Sri Lanka exercised its new foreign policy in 1962 by organizing a conference of neutralist nations to mediate an end to the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. Although the conference failed to

end the war, it highlighted Sri Lanka's new role as a peacebroker and enhanced its international status.

The UNP opposition was apprehensive of Bandaranaike's leftward drift and was especially concerned about the SLFP alliance with the Trotskyite LSSP in 1964. The UNP approached the March 1965 election as a senior partner in a broad front of "democratic forces" dedicated to fight the "totalitarianism of the left." It enjoyed significant support from the Federal Party (representing Sri Lankan Tamils) and the Ceylon Workers' Congress (representing Indian Tamils).

### **The United National Party Regains Power, 1965-70**

The UNP "national government" emerged victorious in the March 1965 elections, capturing more than 39 percent of parliamentary seats, compared to SLFP's 30.2 percent. One of the first actions of the new government, led by Senanayake, was to declare that the nation's economy was virtually bankrupt. Senanayake also announced his intention to improve relations with the United States. (In 1963 the United States had suspended aid to Sri Lanka because of Bandaranaike's nationalization of foreign oil concerns.)

The government tried to develop a mixed economy with an emphasis on the private sector. Between 1965 and 1970, private sector investment was double that of the public sector, thereby reversing the trend set in the previous administration. Despite the UNP's emphasis on the private sector, the economy generally failed to show a major improvement. This failure was partly caused by a nearly 50 percent increase in the cost of rice imports after a worldwide shortage in 1965 and a concurrent steep decline in the price of Sri Lanka's export commodities. In

1966 the UNP government was forced to declare a state of emergency to ward off food riots. Senanayake reduced the subsidized weekly rice ration by half. The reduction remained in effect throughout the remainder of the "national government" period and contributed greatly to UNP's defeat in the 1970 general elections.

The UNP paid more attention to Buddhist sensitivities than it had in the past, and in an effort to widen the party's popularity, it replaced the Christian sabbath with the Buddhist poya full-moon holiday. This action satisfied Buddhist activists but alienated the small but powerful Roman Catholic lobby. The UNP also tried to earn favor with the Tamils by enacting the Tamil Regulations in 1966, which were designed to make Tamil a language officially "parallel" to Sinhala in Tamilspeaking regions. Sinhalese activists immediately expressed hostility toward the Tamil Regulations. Civil violence ensued, and the government was forced to proclaim a state of emergency that lasted for most of the year.

### **United Front Rule and Emerging Violence, 1970-77**

In order to prepare for the 1970 general election, Sirimavo Bandaranaike formed a coalition in 1968 with the LSSP and CPSL to oppose the UNP. The new three-party United Front (Samagi Peramuna) announced that it would work toward a "people's government" under the leadership of Bandaranaike and that it would follow a so-called Common Programme, which promised

radical structural changes, including land reform, increased rice subsidies, and nationalization of local and foreign banks.

The United Front resurrected communal emotionalism as a timely and potent campaign weapon. It attacked the UNP for its alliance with the two main Tamil political groups, the Federal Party and the Ceylon Workers' Congress. At the same time, the United Front also announced that it would adopt a new constitution to make Sri Lanka a republic and that it would restore "Buddhism to its rightful place." The United Front won 118 of the 135 seats it contested, with the SLFP, the biggest single party, winning 90 seats, the LSSP 19, seats and the CPSL 6 seats. The UNP won a meager seventeen seats.

The United Front government moved quickly to implement key features of its Common Programme. The philosophy of the coalition government was seen most transparently from its foreign and economic policies. The United Front issued declarations that it followed a nonaligned path; opposed imperialism, colonialism, and racism; and supported national liberation movements. The government quickly extended diplomatic relations to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (then North Vietnam), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. It also pledged to suspend recognition of Israel. In economic matters, the United Front vowed to put private enterprise in a subsidiary role.

Prime Minister Bandaranaike tolerated the radical left at first and then lost control of it. Sensing mounting unrest, the government declared a state of emergency in March 1971. In April, the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna--JVP), a Maoist and primarily rural Sinhalese youth movement claiming a membership of more than 10,000, began a "blitzkrieg" operation to take over the government "within 24 hours." The JVP followed a program--known as the Five Lectures--that included an agenda to deal with "Indian expansionism," the island's unstable economic situation, and the inability of the traditionalist leftist leadership to assert power or attract widespread support (an allusion to the LSSP and the CPSL). The JVP threatened to take power by extraparliamentary means. Fierce fighting erupted in the north-central, south-central, and southern rural districts of the island, causing an official estimate of 1,200 dead. Unofficial tallies of the number of dead were much higher. The JVP came perilously close to overthrowing the government but the military finally suppressed the movement and imprisoned JVP's top leadership and about 16,000 suspected insurgents.

In May 1972, the United Front followed through on its 1970 campaign promise to promulgate a new constitution to make Sri Lanka a republic. Under the new constitution, the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government were vested in the National State Assembly. Many important and vocal sectors of society opposed this concentration of power. The 1972 constitution disturbed the UNP, which feared an authoritarian government might emerge because of the new document. The UNP was especially alarmed that a Trotskyite, Dr. Colvin de Silva (Bandaranaike's minister of constitutional affairs), had drafted the constitution.

The distinct lack of protection for the rights of minorities in the new constitution dismayed many sectors of the population. The Tamils were especially disturbed because the 1972

constitution contained no elements of federalism. Instead, a newly conferred status for Buddhism replaced the provisions for minorities provided by Article 29 in the 1948 constitution. The constitution also sanctioned measures that discriminated against Tamil youth in university admissions. Tamil youth were particularly irked by the "standardization" policy that Bandaranaike's government introduced in 1973. The policy made university admissions criteria lower for Sinhalese than for Tamils. The Tamil community--the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress, and other Tamil organizations--reacted collectively against the new atmosphere the new constitution produced, and in May 1972, they founded the Tamil United Front (which became the Tamil United Liberation Front--TULF--in 1976).

By the mid-1970s, the antagonism between the right and left was destroying the United Front coalition. The growing political influence of the right wing led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike's son, Anura, precipitated the expulsion of the LSSP from the United Front in September 1975. The withdrawal of the CPSL in 1977 further weakened the coalition.

### **The United National Party Returns to Power**

After Dudley Senanayake died in 1973, a struggle for the leadership of the UNP ensued between his nephew, Rukman Senanayake, and Junius Richard (J.R.) Jayewardene, a more distant relative. Jayewardene had been involved in politics for years, having been elected to the State Council, the parliament's colonial predecessor, as early as 1943. A leader of the UNP since independence, Jayewardene had deferred to the Senanayake family. But in 1970, when the UNP suffered a resounding defeat to the United Front, Jayewardene became more assertive. His party manifesto--The UNP in Opposition, 1970--contended that the majority of Sri Lankans perceived the party as the party of the "haves, the affluent, and the employers." He also contended that the people had come to perceive the SLFP as the party of the "have nots, the needy, and the unemployed." Jayewardene moved forcefully to refurbish UNP's image and announced that the party would inaugurate an era of a just and righteous (dharmishta) society. After becoming president of the party, Jayewardene began to restructure the UNP and make the party more attractive, especially to young people. By the time of the general election of 1977, Jayewardene had developed an extensive grass roots party organization.

### **Election of 1977 and More Violence**

After molding the UNP around his personality and having successfully built up the party's infrastructure, Jayewardene easily became prime minister. The UNP won an unprecedented landslide victory in the 1977 elections, winning 140 of 168 seats. The SLFP was reduced to eight seats. The Sri Lankan Tamils, however, gave little support to Jayewardene or any other non-Tamil politician. The Sri Lankan Tamils entered the parliamentary election fray under the banner of TULF, which had elevated its earlier demand for regional self-rule to a demand for an independent state, or Eelam (see Glossary). TULF became the largest opposition party in Parliament and captured all fourteen seats in the heavily Tamil Northern Province and four east coast seats. TULF won in every constituency with a Tamil majority on the island, except one. In Jaffna District, TULF candidates won all eleven seats, although forty-seven other candidates contested the seats. TULF originally included the largest Indian (plantation) Tamil political organization, the Ceylon Workers' Congress, but after the 1977 election, the leader

of the Ceylon Workers' Congress accepted a cabinet post in the UNP government. The Sri Lankan Tamil demand for Tamil Eelam had never been of central concern to the Indian Tamils, who lived mostly outside the territory being claimed for the Tamil state.

The opportunities for peace that the 1977 UNP electoral victory provided were soon lost. Just before the 1977 elections, Chelvanayakam, the charismatic leader of TULF, died, leaving the party without strong leadership. A Tamil separatist underground (which had split into six or more rival and sometimes violently hostile groups that were divided by ideology, caste, and personal antagonisms) was filling the vacuum left by the weakened TULF and was gaining the allegiance of an increasing number of disenchanting Tamil youths. These groups were known collectively as the Tamil Tigers. The strongest of these separatists were the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), founded in 1972 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. The LTTE was responsible for some of the earliest and most gruesome acts of Tamil terrorism (see the Tamil Insurgency , ch. 5). The LTTE first gained notoriety by its 1975 assassination of the mayor of Jaffna, a supporter of the SLFP. During the 1977 elections, many Tamil youths began to engage in extraparliamentary and sometimes violent measures in their bid for a mandate for a separate state. These measures precipitated a Sinhalese backlash. An apparently false rumor that Sinhalese policemen had died at the hands of Tamil terrorists, combined with other rumors of alleged anti-Sinhalese statements made by Tamil politicians, sparked brutal communal rioting that engulfed the island within two weeks of the new government's inauguration. The rioting marked the first major outbreak of communal violence in the nineteen years since the riots of 1958. Casualties were many, especially among Tamils, both the Sri Lankan Tamils of Jaffna and the Indian Tamil plantation workers. The Tamil Refugee Rehabilitation Organization estimated the death toll at 300.

### **Constitution of 1978**

After coming to power, Jayewardene directed the rewriting of the constitution. The document that was produced, the new Constitution of 1978, drastically altered the nature of governance in Sri Lanka. It replaced the previous Westminster-style , parliamentary government with a new presidential system modeled after France, with a powerful chief executive. The president was to be elected by direct suffrage for a six-year term and was empowered to appoint, with parliamentary approval, the prime minister and to preside over cabinet meetings. Jayewardene became the first president under the new Constitution and assumed direct control of the government machinery and party.

The new regime ushered in an era that did not auger well for the SLFP. Jayewardene's UNP government accused former prime minister Bandaranaike of abusing her power while in office from 1970 to 1977. In October 1980, Bandaranaike's privilege to engage in politics was removed for a period of seven years, and the SLFP was forced to seek a new leader. After a long and divisive battle, the party chose her son, Anura. Anura Bandaranaike was soon thrust into the role of the keeper of his father's legacy, but he inherited a political party torn apart by factionalism and reduced to a minimal role in the Parliament.

The 1978 Constitution included substantial concessions to Tamil sensitivities. Although TULF did not participate in framing the Constitution, it continued to sit in Parliament in the hope

of negotiating a settlement to the Tamil problem. TULF also agreed to Jayewardene's proposal of an all-party conference to resolve the island's ethnic problems. Jayewardene's UNP offered other concessions in a bid to secure peace. Sinhala remained the official language and the language of administration throughout Sri Lanka, but Tamil was given a new "national language" status. Tamil was to be used in a number of administrative and educational circumstances. Jayewardene also eliminated a major Tamil grievance by abrogating the "standardization" policy of the United Front government, which had made university admission criteria for Tamils more difficult. In addition, he offered many top-level positions, including that of minister of justice, to Tamil civil servants.

While TULF, in conjunction with the UNP, pressed for the allparty conference, the Tamil Tigers escalated their terrorist attacks, which provoked Sinhalese backlash against Tamils and generally precluded any successful accommodation. In reaction to the assassination of a Jaffna police inspector, the Jayewardene government declared an emergency and dispatched troops, who were given an unrealistic six months to eradicate the terrorist threat.

The government passed the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act in 1979. The act was enacted as a temporary measure, but it later became permanent legislation. The International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and other human rights organizations condemned the act as being incompatible with democratic traditions. Despite the act,

the number of terrorist acts increased. Guerrillas began to hit targets of high symbolic value such as post offices and police outposts, provoking government counterattacks. As an increasing number of civilians were caught in the fighting, Tamil support widened for the "boys," as the guerrillas began to be called. Other large, well-armed groups began to compete with LTTE. The better-known included the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Army, and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization. Each of these groups had forces measured in the hundreds if not thousands. The government claimed that many of the terrorists were operating from training camps in India's Tamil Nadu State. The Indian government repeatedly denied this claim. With the level of violence mounting, the possibility of negotiation became increasingly distant.

### **The Riots of 1981**

In June 1981, local elections were held in the north to elect members of the newly established district development councils. TULF had decided to participate and work in the councils. In doing so, TULF continued to work toward autonomy for the Tamil areas. Extremists within the separatist movement, however, adamantly opposed working within the existing political framework. They viewed participation in the elections as compromising the objective of a separate state. Shortly before the elections, the leading candidate of the UNP was assassinated as he left a political rally. The sporadic communal violence that persisted over the following three months foreshadowed the devastating communal riots of 1983. When elections were held a few days later, concomitant charges of voting irregularities and mishandling of ballots created the nation's first election scandal since the introduction of universal suffrage fifty years earlier.

## **Presidential Election of 1982**

TULF decided to boycott the 1982 presidential elections, partly in reaction to the harsh Prevention of Terrorism Act and partly in response to pressures exerted by Tamil extremists. Only

46 percent of the voters in Jaffna District turned out. In Sinhalese districts, 85 percent of voters turned out. Increasing violence by Tamil youths in the north and east of the island accompanied the call for a Tamil Eelam. The rising level of violence in 1983 led the government to pass a sixth amendment to the Constitution, which specifically banned talk of separatism. All sixteen TULF members of parliament were expelled for refusing to recite a loyalty oath, thus removing a critical channel for mediation.

## **The Riots of July 1983**

In July 1983, the most savage communal riots in Sri Lanka's history erupted. Conservative government estimates put the death toll at 400-- mostly Tamils. At least 150,000 Tamil fled the island. The riots began in retaliation for an ambush of an army patrol in the north that left thirteen Sinhalese soldiers dead. The army was reputed to have killed sixty Tamil civilians in Jaffna, but most of the violence occurred in Colombo, where Sinhalese mobs looked for Tamil shops to destroy. More than any previous ethnic riot on the island, the 1983 riots were marked by their highly organized mob violence. Sinhalese rioters in Colombo used voter lists containing home addresses to make precise attacks on the Tamil community. From Colombo, the anti-Tamil violence fanned out to the entire island. The psychological effects of this violence on Sri Lanka's complex and divided society were still being assessed in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the communal rioting, a self-evident truth was that the island's history, and the complexity of its society, had a portentous message for the present: Sinhalese and Tamil Sri Lankans were fated by history and geography to coexist in close proximity. This coexistence could be discordant or amicable, and examples of both could be drawn from Sri Lanka's history. It was a message, however, whose meaning was forgotten as the ethnic communities were drawn increasingly into a vortex of rancor and violence that made the restoration of harmony a persistently elusive goal for the Sri Lankan government.

*Informative general histories of Sri Lanka include K.M. de Silva's A History of Sri Lanka, E.F.C. Ludowyk's A Short History of Ceylon, Zeylanicus's Ceylon, S. Arasaratnam's Ceylon, and Chandra Richard de Silva's Sri Lanka: A History. Source books on medieval history are Wilhelm Geiger's translations of the Pali chronicles, the Mahavamsa and Culavamsa, and the comprehensive The Early History of Ceylon by G.C. Mendis. Highly informative for the study of modern political events and ethnic disturbances are S.J. Tambiah's Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide, and the Dismantling of Democracy, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson's Politics in Sri Lanka, and Government and Politics in South Asia by Craig Baxter, Yogendra K. Malik, Charles H. Kennedy, and Robert C. Oberst.*

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