SRI LANKA IN THE MODERN AGE A HISTORY

NIRA WICKRAMASINGHE

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PREFACE

IDENTITIES AND HISTORIES

'*Narratives, then, are never plenipotentiaries over the past.*'—Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p. 180

In the southern Sri Lankan coastal town of Matara in the early nineteenth century a poet recorded the beauty of the city. This was at the height of colonialism, a time when, less than a hundred miles away, the elites of the Kandyan kingdom in the central hills were being stirred into growing forms of resistance. The poet wrote as if the presence or absence of colonial rulers was irrelevant—they did not even warrant a single mention.[1] Was this a feeling shared by most men and women under colonial rule in the deep south? Did their lives go on, unaffected by changes in politics at the level of the state? Was colonialism only a shadow that loomed upon aspects of their lives, other forms of politics, other battles for power? Half a century later a wall painting in the temple of Kathaluwa in the Galle district depicted *yakkas* (devils) who lived in hell as British colonial masters in top hats and black suits, thus denoting definite derision if not animosity towards colonial rule. How can one fathom the thoughts and feelings of the people? Are they refracted in that poet's musings or in that artist's mural?

Writing a political history of modern Sri Lanka that does not incorporate the richness of multiple experiences is in my view an

[1] *Kavminikondola*, verses 13–30, cited in Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, 'The Formation of Sinhala Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', MPhil thesis, University of Colombo, 2000, p. 61.

enterprise that lacks heart and soul.[2] Political history in Sri Lanka has been surprisingly static and rigid in the face of the changes that have shaken the discipline of history and the particular study of political history world-wide. There has been at the same time an expansion in scope and a loss of anchors: politics is today an all-encompassing theme that includes all types of power relations in society; in a parallel fashion it is a domain where uncertainties and unevenness prevail, and where figures and results once accepted as given are constantly read anew from different perspectives.

This book is a personal attempt to depict to a general readership what I feel history is made of, on the basis of my own research and a critical reading of recent research by historians and social scientists. Many may disagree with my plot and choice of actors and events. At the heart of my recasting is a recognition of the centrality of the notion of a people-centered politics of identity in order to understand the political yearnings, bargains and alliances that took place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How people moved from vague intimations of identity and difference to pride in collective membership and finally to categorical territoriality and its violent defence constitutes the thread of my project.

Writing a general political history of the last hundred years in a single volume is a task that historians and political scientists have not yet attempted for Sri Lanka. Mainstream historiography has of course dealt with that century in works that focus on particular aspects of twentieth-century Sri Lanka: religious change, communalism, Sinhala nationalism, Tamil separatism are themes that have been covered in a number of excellent books and articles. This book builds upon and draws from these very works.[3] As in the rest of the world, general histories by professional historians in Sri Lanka are out of vogue as most scholars tend to prefer approaching larger issues with the help of a smaller lens. The closest that anyone has come to a general political history of the twentieth century are the works or sections of works written from the 1960s to the 1990s by K.M. de Silva, C.R. de Silva, Robert Kearney,

[2] James S. Duncan, *The City as Text: the Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1990, and John C. Holt, *The Religious World of Kirti Sri: art and politics in late medieval Sri Lanka*, New York, 1996, stand out as scholars who have read religious-political meanings in the architecture and topography of Kandy and in murals.

[3] I owe much to the insights of Gananath Obeysekere, Michael Roberts, S.J. Tambiah, H.L. Seneviratne and K.M. de Silva, to mention only a few names that will recur in the course of this study.

Howard Wriggins, Wiswa Warnapala, A.J. Wilson, James Jupp and James Manor.[4] In all these books politics is understood in a restricted sense with a focus on regime and constitutional changes, political parties and electoral politics. Rarely do other actors practising a different sort of politics enter the picture.[5]

My own approach departs from that of those authors in three ways. First, the positivist language and choice of themes in these books suggest a nearly exclusive claim to the knowledge of what constitutes history, what has to be recorded—I work with less certainty. Secondly, these books do not sufficiently historicise categories of analysis such as state, nation, Sinhala or Tamil. Thirdly, these books—probably in keeping with their aim of providing an ordered picture of reality—serve as examples of a form of history writing in which a sense of life is absent. Writing with a general reader in mind, I hope to reintroduce a more narrative form of history writing, releasing history from the straitjacket and canons in which it has become constricted and thus evoking a reality that is differentially refracted through varying experiences and positionalities. I have not always relied on unusual sources. In fact books of mainstream scholars have very often been immensely helpful. I have simply emphasised events differently, taken a different reference point or dwelt at length on a footnote of history.

I write, however, with the knowledge and regret that if history is indeed the record of men/women in time, most men and women have never appeared in the written histories of Sri Lanka. Rectifying this bias would mean writing a history from the grassroots, a history of the local based on ethnographical work—something that is quite beyond the ambitions of one individual but can be undertaken through, for example, oral history and the systematic collection of life histories.

The genesis and evolution of critical approaches to identities and categories of analysis in Sri Lankan history have been finely examined in two recent essays and it is not necessary here to dupli-

[4] K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, London, 1981, Parts V–VI; James Jupp, *Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy*, London, 1978; Robert N. Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)*, Ithaca, NY and London, 1973; James Manor (ed.), *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, London, 1984; Wiswa Warnapala, *The Sri Lanka Political Scene*, New Delhi, 1993; A.J. Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947–1979*, London, 1979; C.R. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1987; W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, 1960.

[5] Wriggins, although writing in the 1960s, saw the importance of other actors that he called interest groups, including caste groups and religious formations.

cate these works. Eric Meyer defined the debate on identities as made up of three contrasting positions: the primordialists conceive the present internal conflict as one reproducing a fundamental antagonism that goes back to ancient times and is anchored in a collective memory transmitted in an uninterrupted fashion through language (Sinhala as opposed to Tamil) and religion (Theravada Buddhism as opposed to Hindu Saivism); the modernists consider that identities as they exist in the present are the fruit of a recent evolution which started in the tenth-thirteenth century period but took shape mainly during the colonial period; more recently a small group of postmodernists has attempted to go beyond this debate and deconstruct the discourse on identities.[6]

A few years earlier John Rogers traced the turning point in the discourse on identities to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when liberal and Marxist scholars developed arguments to counter primordialist understandings of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict. Leslie Gunawardana's 1979 essay became a 'master text' for a certain strand of scholarship.[7] It was written in the context of deteriorating ethnic relations. In the 1980s young scholars, mainly based abroad, whose writings were informed by Edward Said's ideas on orientalism and Foucault's deconstructionism, broadened the base of the critique of mainstream scholarship.[8]

Drawing from the modernists' and postmodernists' approach, a recent work attempted to gain a better understanding of the term 'Sinhala' in a particular historical context by locating the term in relation to its 'other' rather than merely tracing its genealogy. The fundamental point was also made that at a given point, for instance

[6] Eric Meyer, 'Des usages de l'histoire et de la linguistique dans le débat sur les identités à Sri Lanka', *Purusartha* 22, 2000–1, pp. 91–123; John Rogers, 'PostOrientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: the Case of Sri Lanka', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53, 1994, pp. 10–23.

[7] R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, 'The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in history and historiography', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, V, 1979, pp. 1–36.

[8] Michael Roberts has recently initiated a critical reading of the post-orientalist scholarship in which he critiques the lack of empirical research undertaken by these scholars and their unwillingness to historicise their findings. See Michael Roberts, 'Submerging the People? Post-Orientalism and the Construction of Communalism' in George Berkemer *et al.* (eds), *Explorations in South Asian History: Festschrift for Dietmar Rothermund on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 311–23. See David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, Princeton, 1999 for a thoughtful examination of the need to dehistoricise history.

in the early nineteenth century, there were a number of parallel identitarian discourses giving the term 'Sinhala' more than one meaning.[9] What was questioned here was the entire enterprise of history writing. How should one write history without it becoming a history of the group that became dominant in the modern nation-state? How should one write a history that is not a 'history for'?[10]

Valentine Daniel has argued that communities have different ways of approaching their past and therefore of writing their histories.[11]

Although his claim that Tamils are the only community that conceive their past as 'heritage' rather than 'history' is questionable, more than any other social scientist he has contributed to a rethinking of what constitutes history by adding the qualification 'for whom'. However, few historians have begun to rewrite their history taking these considerations into account.

A critique parallel to that of communities and identities, unmentioned in John Rogers' article, emerged in the 1970s. It was centred around gender, very much an extension of feminist activism. These works pointed out the silences and biases of mainstream historiography where women are absent. Many of these works that tried to retrieve lost histories have been inspired by, if not derived from, similar work undertaken in Western and Indian academia. The influence of Partha Chatterjee's framework for study of gendered renderings of the nation has been crucial.[12] While historical works studying the way gender has been a central trope within dominant Sinhala Buddhism and militant Tamil nationalism have been of some quality, works highlighting more recent trends have been increasingly critiqued as too general in their use of concepts such as patriarchy and little informed by sound fieldwork. Recent scholarship has reestablished the richness and ambiguities of feminism and the existence of a number of social formations within Sri Lanka where gender relations vary considerably.[13]

[9] Devasiri (note 1), pp. 187–201.

[10] Claude Lévy-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, London, 1966, pp. 257–60.

[11] Cited in Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*, Princeton, 1996, p. 34.

[12] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, New Delhi, 1994.

[13] Janaki Jayawardena, 'Cultural Constructions of the "Sinhala Woman" and Women's Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka', PhD, University of York, 2003.

Unfortunately mainstream political history has remained insensitive to the fact that gender is crucial to the understanding of nationalism. Gender has remained a separate issue in Sri Lankan historiography, where mainstream scholars deny its significance and refuse to read or quote any works from within this discipline; in a parallel situation academics in the field of women's studies rarely read works—even written by women—that do not stem from their own epistemological domain. However, a few political scientists have recently attempted to bridge the gap—gender specialists returning to a social political history, or political scientists who incorporate a gender perspective.[14] In a modest fashion this book tries to capture these two reading and thinking publics, forcing them to confront the 'other'.

Writing about Africa and the political legacy of colonialism, Mahmood Mamdani echoed my own yearnings when he limpidly wrote, 'the challenge today is to define political identities as distinct from cultural identities, without denying that there may be a significant overlap between the two'.[15] Until now indigeneity has been in many postcolonies, as in Sri Lanka, the litmus test for rights with an array of disastrous consequences: rebellions from within the Sinhala people grew out of the state's denial of equality as a directive principle of the state; rebellions by Tamil groups against the legitimate state were premised on the principle that indigeneity allowed territorial claims and legitimised the right to homelands.

Identity and indigeneity have been tied together in the public discourse of multiculturalism and rights and in popular perceptions of Sinhalaness and Tamilness, in a nearly obsessive manner. The time may be ripe to tear them apart and evolve new meanings to express ideas of commonality and being. This book was written from that perspective.

The notion of identity which has been the locus of much intellectual discussion carries several burdens, the main one being its dependence on the meaning given to culture.[16] Scholars in a vari-

[14] See for instance Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2000; Neloufer de Mel, *Women and the Nation's Narrative, Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2001.

[15] Mahmood Mamdani, 'Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Over-coming the Political Legacy of Colonialism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43, 4, 2001, pp. 651–64.

[16] See Ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr (eds), *Identities*, Chicago 1995.

ety of disciplines began in the 1980s to address what we might call the politics of identity.[17] Their work expanded on the evolving antiessentialist critique of ethnic, national and racial identities. A parallel shift occurred in the public discourse, from preoccupation with identity in the singular to an effort to think in terms of plurality. Multiculturalism was adopted in many states such as Canada and Australia as state policy to deal with plurality. The tendency was then to read identities as they were situated and formed in relation to one another. There is an obvious contrast between self-understandings of identity—which in Europe and elsewhere are often monolithic—and the historical career of identity concepts. Javad Tabatai has for instance pointed out that identity as it is conceived in the world of Islam—in marked contrast with the European conception—is uniform, monotonous and monolithic, founded on an idea of authenticity as something unchanged and unchangeable. European cultural and political identity is as it is because it is plural and in the making, living in crisis and within a crisis.[18] That such a contrast exists between people's self-perception in Europe and in the Islamic world is questionable. A Frenchman still perceives himself as a descendant of the Gauls; generations of schoolchildren learnt about '*nos ancêtres les Gaulois*'. The difference resides more in the fact that the academic scholar of Islam can still advocate a monolithic Muslim identity.

Identities, we are constantly forewarned, are dynamic, simultaneously formed and formative. While most would agree today that identities are indeed fuzzy in nature, few scholars have pointed towards a certain scholarly fetishism of fluid and changing identities that has emerged in academia, not dissimilar to the much abhorred essentialism. John Kelly has, for instance, asked whether people are as obsessed with representing themselves as academics are with reading these representations. In many studies there is an assumption that colonised peoples have but one goal, which is to represent themselves in the symbolic, semiotic sense, to constitute an identity for themselves rather than, for example, to seek leverage and varieties of alternatives. People are seen as uncritically ris-

[17] Some of the significant writings of the 1980s in this perspective pertaining to Sri Lanka are Charles Abeysekere and Newton Gunasinghe, *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1987; Social Scientists Association, *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984.

[18] Javad Tabatai, 'L'Incompréhension des civilisations. Le cas de la Perse', *Le Débat. Histoire, Politique, Société*, 119, March–April 2002, pp. 68–78.

ing to the bait of identity. As Kelly has forcefully put it, it is perhaps time to go beyond the Saidian model of Europe kidnapping others' power to represent themselves and the Andersonian model of utopia where groups are homogeneous, self-defining and exclusive or territory-filling horizontal communities. People are sometimes more eager to say 'This is what we want' than 'This is what we are'.[19]

This study will show that many kinds of imagined communities were and still are concurrently sustained, and what sustains them is not only ideas of representations in an exclusively semiotic sense, but also definite structures of legal identification and representation. In Anderson's wake communities, national or otherwise, are best depicted as imagined rather than organically primordial, since they are formed of people who never meet and are unlikely to do so. But from there what are the mechanisms that make some *imaginaries* more foundational than others, and how do some alternatives sustain themselves? Actual regimes of representation, legal and other routines, constitute the communities represented. This work will show that both colonialism and nationalism tried with more or less success to institute specific regimes of representation through the mechanisms of enumeration, the vote, ceremonial ranks and offices, employment through collective religious practices and national rituals and celebrations. Identity is best read as tangible—not as a substance, but as something that is embodied in practice.

Through its reflection on identity this book tries to write a history of peoples and communities as opposed to a history of the process of state-building. But in so doing it will not attempt to write a comprehensive history of the 'fragments' of the nation, but rather a history that incorporates the lives of the fragments of society, ethnic groups, small religious communities, caste communities, workers, women's organisations that represent minority cultures and practices.[20] It will do so by charting the historicising process

[19] John D. Kelly, '"They Cannot Represent Themselves": Threats to Difference and So-called Community Politics in Fiji from 1936 to 1947' in Crispin Bates (ed.), *Community, Empire and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora*, Basingstoke, 2001, pp. 46–86; John D. Kelly, 'Diaspora and World War, Blood and Nation in Fiji and Hawaii', *Public Culture*, 7, 3, 1995, pp. 475–97.

[20] The concept of 'fragment' is borrowed from Gyanendra Pandey, 'In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about the Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today', *Representations*, 37, winter 1992, pp. 27–55, who stresses that the importance of the fragmentary point of view in that it resists the drive for shallow homogenisation and struggles for other potentially richer definitions of the nation and the future political community.

that privileged certain groups and interpretations and sidelined others. Indeed, although multiple oral histories have been collected by anthropologists such as Mark Whitaker in eastern Sri Lanka,[21] undertaking such a study for the entire island is obviously not possible. Furthermore, communities write or relate their own histories, but when recording these one has to be constantly mindful that community leaders and representatives are not neutral parties. Their own agenda is often to aggrandise the caste or religious group they belong to.

To write a history constantly pinpricked by other histories by giving a place to communities and peoples that do not generally appear in the narrative of the state, to reframe the formation of collective identities in Sri Lanka by consideration of the material, institutional and discursive bases, is a less ambitious but more meaningful project than attempting a comprehensive history of the 'fragments' of society.

The ten chapters that compose this book have been with me for a number of years as ideas or unrealised projects. Some parts draw from my own writings in journals and edited volumes, while others are more precisely and obviously reworkings of sections of my doctoral thesis, the book that it spawned and my two recent published works, *Dressing the Colonised Body* and *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*.

The first four chapters, which look at the colonial heritage and the pre-independence half of the twentieth century, focus on the formation of culturally grounded political identities and the ways in which communities negotiated modernity and the birth of democratic politics. The next three chapters look at the framework of rights drawn by the state and the attempts of specific groups and communities—the left movement and the Tamil separatists—to redefine this circle of power. The last three chapters form an attempt to understand the shape of the postcolony as it hesitatingly saunters into the twenty-first century, weighed down by its inheritance and three decades of civil war. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the end of the civil war in 2009 and the new regimes of power and legitimacy that were created by the triumphant and patriotic state.

[21] Mark P. Whitaker, 'A Compound of many Histories: the many pasts of an east coast Tamil community' in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, London and New York, 1990, pp. 145–63.

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GLOSSARY

accommedessans	land granted in return for duties or services or offices held
Adigar	chief officer of state in Kandyan kingdom
ahimsa	non-violence
almairah	cupboard
Amarapura Nikaya	fraternity of non-Goyigama Buddhist monks, so named because its founder received ordination from Burmese monks in Amarapura, a former capital of Burma
anagarika	(literally) 'homeless'
appam	food made out of rice flour, originally a South Indian food
Arachchi	village level official generally below a *Korale*; non-commissioned officer in Lascarin force
Arya	high status obtainable through the performance of meritorious acts
ayurveda	indigenous system of medicine
badda	revenue
bana	a Buddhist sermon
Basha Peramuna	(literally) Language Front Batgam Sinhalese caste associated with palanquin bearing and guard duty
bhikkhu	an ordained Buddhist monk
Buddha sasana	Buddhist teachings and the institutions that sustain them
Cakravarti	world ruler, universal emperor
Chakra	(literally) wheel, circle; denotes the 'wheel of becoming' or 'round of existence'; also the spinning wheel

chena	forest land brought into cultivation by the slash and burn method (from Sinhala *hena*)
Chettiar	bankers group of South Indian merchants and money-lenders.
Comboy	type of cloth, originally imported from Cambay
coolie	1, Kuli, aboriginal tribe of Gujarat; 2, generally, unskilled labourer (pejorative)
dagaba	also *cetiya*; domed monument containing relics of the Buddha, and of other luminaries
Dalada Maligawa	Temple of the Sacred Tooth in Kandy *dansala* a hall where food is given free *dayakaya* lay patron of a temple
Dhamma	Buddha's teachings
Disava	administrative head of a province
Disavani	province or district under a Disava
Durava	Sinhalese caste; generally associated with toddy tapping
edibala	(literally) Great Power
Elu	the supposedly pure Sinhalese language, free from Sanskriti influence
gamsabhava	village council
Ganga	river
Goyigama	Sinhalese caste, cultivators
guru	(literally) teacher/mentor
hartal	general strike and shutdown
hatana	war
Hela	*see* Elu
indi appam	also known as string hoppers; originally a South Indian food
jaggery	brown sugar made from the sap of the kitul palm
jataka	tales relating to the previous births of Gautama Buddha
Kalavava	Kala tank
kangany	headman, selected from among themselves or appointed by the employer of gangs of Indian immigrant labour in a plantation
Karava	Sinhalese caste, generally associated with fishing
katchcheri	the headquarters of a district administration
kavi kola	leaflets in verse
kitul palm	jaggery palm

Kola Koti	(literally) green tigers
kolam	masked drama
konde	rolled-up bun of hair at the back of the head
Korale	unit of administration, generally part of a Disava
Koviyar	Tamil caste associated with funeral duty
kovil	Hindu temple
Kshatriya	warrior caste, second highest in the four-fold varna scheme
landraad	Dutch civil courts of law with cognisance over all land disputes of the local population
Lascarin	indigenous soldier
Low Country	districts in the Western and Southern Provinces, the Chilaw district and the western part of the Puttalam district
lekammitti	register of lands, cadastral register
Madya Maha Vidyalayas	(literally) central schools
Mahabadda	(literally) Great Revenue, the Cinnamon Department
mahajana	an association of people
Mahanaduwa	Great Court of Justice in the Kandyan Kingdom
Maha Sangha	Great Order of *Bhikkus*
Maha Vidyala	(literally) college
Mahavamsa	'Great Chronicle', composed in four parts, the first in the sixth century, the second in the thirteenth, the third in the fourteenth and the last in the eighteenth. In the European edition only the first part is called the *Mahavamsa*. The latter parts form the *Culavamsa*.
Mudaliyar	1, a chief headman; until the eight-eenth century a civil and military officer; and an administrator of a Korale in British times; 2, also used only in the Low Country as an honorary title from the mid-nineteenth century
Muhandiram	1, assistant to a Mudaliyar; 2, an honorary title
Navalar	Tamil service caste associated with toddy tapping
Nekati	Sinhalese caste in the Low Country, astrologers
Nikaya	group of monasteries under single leadership
Nurti	drama of operatic character with a large proportion of prose dialogue

osariya	form of wearing the sari in Sri Lanka, mostly by Kandyans
pada yatra	protest march
Pallar	Tamil service caste associated with toddy tapping
Pattu	subdivision of a Korale
pansala	monastery
Parava	caste associated with fishing, found mainly in South India
perahera	procession, pageant
pinkama	meritorious deed
Pirivena	(Buddhist) educational institution attached to a temple
Pirith	Ritual chanting of Buddhist texts
Poson	Month of June
pottu	a dot worn on the middle of the forehead
Poya day	full moon day of the month
Rajakariya	lit. King's Duty; encompassed any service to the king, a lord or a temple in the Kandyan kingdom. In British times also denoted compulsory service to the state.
Rajarata	north-central part of the island
Rodis	oppressed caste among the Sinhalese, associated with mendicancy
Ruhuna	south-eastern part of the island
Saiva Siddhanta	Saiva doctrine
Salagama	Sinhala caste, generally associated with cinnamon peeling
samanera	Buddhist novice
Sangha	Buddhist monastic community
sarong	body cloth stitched together at both ends, commonly worn by Sinhalese men
satyagraha	soul force
Siyam Nikaya	fraternity or sect of Buddhist monks dominated by Goyigama caste
swabhasha	indigenous language
swaraj	self-government
thera	honorific term for Buddhist monk
Thesavalamai	Tamil law toddy lightly fermented drink made from coconut palm sap
tombo	list or register of persons or lands
tupasses	(derogatory) people of mixed descent

Ukkussa	(literally) eagle
Up-Country	Central and North-Central Provinces, the Provinces of Uva and Sabaragamuwa, the Kurunegala district and part of the Puttalam district, the Sinhalese divisions of the districts of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mullaitivu
Vahumpura	Sinhalese caste; generally associated with jaggery making
Vaishnavites	believers in the god Vishnu
Valavva	dwelling of chief, manorial residence
Vamsa literature	Literature about the lineage
Vedda	descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Sri Lanka predating arrival of the Sinhalese
Vellala	Tamil caste; cultivators
Vel-vidane	Officer in charge of providing water to the fields of the village
Vesak	second month of the Sinhalese calendar (May–June); day marking the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha
Vidana/Vidana Arachchi	village level officer
vihara	Buddhist temple
Wasala Mudiyanse	(literally) Gate Mudaliyar
yakka	maleficent being, demon
yaktovils	healing ritual to chase a demon.
Yodavava	Yoda tank

ABBREVIATIONS

B-C	Pact Bandaranaike Chelvanayakam pact
BLP	Bolshevik Leninist Party
CBOs	community based organisations
CIC	Ceylon Indian Congress
CNC	Ceylon National Congress
CP	Communist Party
CPSL	Communist Party of Sri Lanka
CWC	Ceylon Workers' Congress
DDC	District Development Council
DJV	Deshapremi Janatha Vyapara (People's Patriotic Movement)
DWC	Democratic Workers' Congress
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students.
FP	Federal Party
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
JSS	Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front)
NMAT	National Movement Against Terrorism
NSSP	Nava Sama Samaja Party
PA	People's Alliance
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
PR	Proportional representation
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act

ABBREVIATIONS

RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SVV	Sinhala Veera Vidhana
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TSF	Tamil Students' Federation
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UF	United Front
UNCEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNP	United National Party.
USP	United Socialist Party
VLSSP	Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party
VOC	Vereenigde Oost Indishe Compagnie
WIDER	World Institute for Development Economic Research

PART I

PRE-INDEPENDENCE YEARS

CHANGING LIVES

The first four chapters of this book look at the ways in which people, communities and individuals responded to late colonialism, the strategies they devised, the modes of representation they constructed, the forms of identity they assumed for themselves and for others in a variety of situations. As a background to the last five decades of colonial rule in Sri Lanka let us first look at the changes in the way people lived.[1]

In the early twentieth century, beyond the laws and decrees of British colonial rule and often in a parallel development, the lives of the people of Ceylon were changing. Changes visible to the eye were witnessed in the houses built and renovated during this period. Until the early twentieth century tiled houses were not common in villages where most houses had a raised platform of earth with timber posts planted on the platform and a thatched roof on a timber framework. The walls were usually of wattle and daub. The most basic ground plan was rectangular with one or two rooms and an open verandah. Until 1818, when a British proclamation extended the privilege of having a tiled house to a larger group than the adigars, the privilege had been confined to persons having a Commission for office signed by the Governor.[2] But in the

[1] This section draws from Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 52–7.
[2] The Adigar was the chief officer of state in the Kandyan kingdom.

first decades of the twentieth century the old mud walled houses were gradually being replaced by tiled houses. Official sanction was given to this new development: 'It is a bye-law of most local boards that every new house built must be tiled', testified E.B. Denham.[3] In Jaffna too, two-or three-roomed stone-built houses were signs of prosperity.

For the richer families tiles were imported from British India: Mangalore tiles were in vogue. Granite slabs for the floor and country tiles in temples were traded for glazed flooring of European manufacture, while many of the pigments employed by temple artists—natural products such as roots and brick—were imported from Europe.

One of the few detailed accounts of the furniture in an 'ordinary villager's house' is given in Denham's report of 1911. With the sense of detail of an apothecary he described the furniture in the house of a villager in the Colombo Mudaliyar's division.[4] It was mainly functional but of good quality, for instance, a satinwood *almairah* and a jakwood bed were mentioned. The wall had a few Buddhist pictures and the only concessions to frivolity were the mirrors, wine glasses and clock.

In Kalutara a villager's house contained pictures of the Buddha published and sent out by Mellin's Food Company as an advertisement, together with a portrait of the late John Kotalawela. For commercial companies religious memorabilia reproduced en masse were fast becoming a useful means of promoting their goods.

The pictures on the walls in other simple households were also generally of a religious nature: saints, the Virgin and Child, the birth and renunciation of Prince Siddhartha. Pictures of kings and queens of Europe were also popular, and even available in boutiques in interior villages. These images linked colonised subjects across the subcontinent in an imagined community of servants of the Raj.

In the house of a Vidana Arachchi, Japanese pictures hung on the walls. Western-style hygiene was also entering the home with wash-stands in bedrooms, combs and hairpowder boxes. The custom had long been to have the toilet and bathroom separated from the rest of the house. Highly perfumed soap was in great demand. Even in the interior villages 'Cherry Blossom' and 'Famra' soap

[3] E.B. Denham, *Report of the Census of 1911*, Colombo, 1912, p. 159.

[4] The Mudaliyar was the chief headman and the administrator of a Korale in British times.

and powder were available in small boutiques and sold in great quantities. Soap was sold at Rs 35c a bar and toilet powders at 40c a tin. A popular perfumed powder was 'White Rose',[5] a name that married in one image the white colonial master with the rose, evoking the gentleness of his civilisation. The irony was that the Sinhala villager had probably never smelt the fragrance of a rose. But through contact with cosmetics the labouring body of the Sinhala man and woman became a desiring body. A letter to the editor of the *Sinhala Jatiya* castigated the new trend of women 'to waste money unnecessarily to beautify themselves, following the latest fashions and using strange things like perfume'.[6]

Denham's interest in collecting such data reflects the colonial ruler's concern with the body of colonial subjects. Hygiene, domesticity and manners were merely components in a larger network concerned with their bodies. The native body was an imagined subject that generated pervasive concern in official, settler and missionary discourse.

Food habits also changed with the import of foreign products. The middle classes drank imported gin, brandy and whisky and, as one would expect, led the lifestyle of English gentlemen and women or what they imagined this to be. Aerated waters were commonly consumed and to meet the demand manufacturers had sprung up on the island. Cream soda was among the most popular drinks. The consumption of meat increased considerably as the rise in the number of butchers and cattle thefts proves. At well-to-do village weddings meat was now being served. With festivals being celebrations of belonging and membership through the sharing of food, the sharing of meat created a new basis for social interaction. Although there are no data relating to this matter it was probably in Christian communities that meat was eaten. In the daily food of the people, too, changes were taking place: tea, coffee and milk were gradually replacing rice conjee, cold rice water and buttermilk. Tea boutiques were springing up everywhere especially near railways. The

100 per cent increase in the amount of preserved milk imported between 1901 and 1911 reflected the change in consumption habits. In the same way prepared foods for children such as malted milk and Mellin's and Allebury's foods were being consumed, as this saved time. The Ceylon described by Denham was one at the

[5] E.B. Denham, p. 170.
[6] *Sinhala Jatiya*, 1 Feb. 1923.

threshold of the age of modernity where women went to work and spent minimal time in the kitchen. The popularity of tinned soups, meats and sardines was such that every bazaar was stocked with these products.

Perhaps as significant as the adherence to Western types of food by the middle classes was the wholesale adoption as virtual national foods of various south Indian foods such as appam and indi appam brought to Colombo by the Malayalee migrant workers. In matters of food the island was a crucible of influences.

Even more than changes in food, the rural areas resolutely laid claims to modernity with the conquests of the sewing machine and the gramophone, which brought Sri Lanka into the modern age. While the gramophone—visible in the colony through advertisement and showrooms—became a significant organising principle of a modern colonial private home in urban areas, the sewing machine could be found in the most remote rural areas of the island. It epitomised modernity: easy to work, noisy, faster than humans and an instrument of standardisation. It could create replicable serials. In this sense it was as much a part of the driving power of modernity as photography or print. With the sewing machine the human touch disappeared, the particular was replaced by a reproducible model.[7]

Sari blouses for instance could be made in vast quantities as each person had a block pattern which the tailor referred to. The sewing machine contributed to the *coup de grâce* for traditional weaving by its art of replicating rather than creating unique products.

In the late nineteenth century a number of companies were vying for the market. Among them was Wrenn Bennet and Co. which advertised 'the ideal sewing machine selling by thousands in England'.[8] But Singer was by far the most successful.

The first shop and office of the Singer Sewing Machine Company were established in Colombo in 1877 at 27 Main Street, Pettah. In

1851 Singer introduced the first practical sewing machine with two roller feeds. Subsequently it developed domestic straight stitch hand operated models. The machines were marketed through Singer-owned retail outlets. Branches were next opened in Kandy, Galle and Hatton. Thereafter the Singer Sewing machine Company

[7] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition, 2nd ed. London and New York, 1991, pp. 182–3.

[8] *Ceylon Examiner*, 23 March 1896, p. 1.

established branches in many towns throughout the island. People accepted the machines with open arms because Singer offered the sewing machine on easy payment terms from the start. An advertisement in the Sinhala paper *Lakmina* warned against imitations and expounded the after-purchase servicing as well as the easy payment scheme.[9] The first users were housewives and tailors; the first clothes sewn were jackets, shirts and sarongs.

A typical Singer advertisement went:

If you wish to reduce your tailoring expenses
If you wish to save your time
If you wish to see your family neatly dressed
If you wish to see your ladies engaged in useful and intelligent work at home.[10]

The appeal was clearly to the housewife and displayed a conventional perception of a useful occupation for womenfolk. Indeed, at that time middle class women were also becoming involved in leisure activities—such as piano playing—which were not considered useful by many.

Some tailoring establishments such as Whiteaway Laidlaw & Co., Drapers and Outfitters advertised themselves as users of sewing machines—an added proof of quality tailoring—in 1918. With the conquest of the sewing machine the tailor too became modernised. Hannalis, the caste of Sinhalese tailors, had never been numerous since they worked mainly in the courts of the kings. In the early nineteenth century they were described by Davy as 'very few'. A century later tailoring had mainly become the preserve of Tamils and Burghers as the newspaper advertisements indicate.[11]

Competing with Singer were other brands such as National and Pfaff. National advertised its product in the Sinhala papers thus:

New national sewing machine
No home is complete without this machine.

The machine was sold less as a useful item and more as a status symbol.[12] Pfaff sold it as an ideal Christmas or wedding present.[13] The sewing machine would gradually become a central part of a middleclass woman's dowry in Ceylon. Its appeal also came from its un-assuming size. Unlike other machines of the modern age such

[9] *Lakmina*, 4 Jan. 1895, p. 1.
[10] *Ceylon Independent*, 6 Feb. 1904, p. 10.
[11] Bryce Ryan, *Caste in Ceylon*, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 113–14.
[12] *Lakmina*, 19 Jan. 1918, p. 4.
[13] *Ceylon Independent*, 6 Feb. 1903, p. 7.

as trains or cars, it was 'human' in its size and appearance. Not long after Mahatma Gandhi issued a sweeping ban on the use of Western machinery in India in the early 1920s he decided to make one exception: the sewing machine. This, he explained after learning how to operate a Singer during a jail term, was one of the few useful things ever invented.

1

COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS

'Does Brazil, Arabia, Persia, any of the individual kingdoms of India, Pegu, Siam, the Moluccas, China or Japan produce such wealth in such a small compass as Ceilão?'

— J. Ribeiro, *History of Ceilão with Notes from De Barros, De Couto and Antonio Bocarro*, Part II, transl. from the Portuguese by P.E. Peris, Galle: Albion Press, n.d., p. 340.

'[They] eat stones and drink blood, they give two or three silver coins for one lime or one fish, the sound of their cannon is louder than that of thun-der at the end of the world and the cannon balls fly many leagues and shatter forts of iron and stone.'

— *Alakesvarayuddhaya*, sixteenth century, in A.V. Suraweera (ed.), *Alakesvarayuddhaya*, Colombo, 1965, p. 28.

Colonialism touched Ceylon and its peoples in an uneven fashion. Only in the western and south-western regions of Ceylon had there been early signs announcing the burgeoning of modernity: the growth of towns, a moving labour force and population flows from South India, the spread of the use of money, an increase in production and the expansion of long distance trade had broken the isolation and insularity of many people. Lives had become interconnected across territories, seas and oceans.

Changes that had commenced between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries under the Portuguese and Dutch gathered momentum during British rule. The market society that developed was dominated by the needs and demands of plantation capitalism—coffee, then tea, coconuts, rubber—and commercial capital-

ism. The needs of the economy were answered by an influx of labourers of South Indian origin to service the plantations and to a lesser extent towns, ports and roads. This added a further element of diversity to the population of an island that had received migrants from South India since ancient times and had integrated them into Sinhala society, and through colonial encounters spawned new social formations such as Christian or Catholic Sinhalese or Tamils and people of mixed descent.

The new export economy became an integral though subordi nate part of a vast imperial network of production and exchange which was more or less coordinated and controlled by the metropolis in London. Within the island the extension of capitalism was partial. Even though the use of money spread relatively rapidly and widely, norms and values of an earlier age did not cease to exist. But modernity touched everything, like a light sprinkle of rain that people hardly felt. Tinned food was enjoyed in the most isolated rural hideaways. Ginger ale was consumed far from centres of urban sophistication. There was of course a considerable regional variation in the degree to which the new institutions, norms and practices spread. Modernity was not evenly distributed, as was demonstrated by the multifarious ways in which different social groups creatively recast the 'tradition/modernity' dichotomy imposed by colonialism, both transforming tradition and creating specific, local modernities.

Conquest and sovereignties

Popular memories of Portuguese and Dutch colonialism are lost in the dust of the lands that were conquered. While the poet Alagiyavanna sang the praise of Rajasinha I of Sitavaka in the sixteenth century, and the triumph of Rajasinha II against the Portuguese at Randenivela and Gannoruva inspired many other poets, the lives and woes of the people over whom these kings reigned remain un-known. How did colonial rule touch people beyond the violence of conversion and forced labour? Did the natives marvel at the technological advance of the Europeans? How did they invent Europe in their minds? How did they invent themselves?

Land. Colonial conquest was predicated on superior sea power and arms, military organisation, political strength and economic

wealth.[1] For four hundred years the island of Sri Lanka was the prey of successive naval powers that controlled parts or the totality of its land. Colonial rule was a multifaceted form of control. Popular history has generally differentiated between Portuguese rule (1505–1658), Dutch rule (1658–1796) and British rule (1796–1948) in the guise of first the East India Company and then the Crown. The 'rule' of these three powers was sometimes nothing more than a presence that grew, spread or declined in space and time. A feature of Portuguese activities in Asia and Africa was the aim not so much of territorial conquest as the control of commerce by means of naval power. For them 'Ceilão', as they called the island, was a strategic point through which the spice trade passed. In 1595–6 Dutch ships appeared in the Asian waters and in 1602 the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), which benefited from extensive state support and monopolistic privileges, posed a deliberate challenge to the Portuguese position in the East. While Portuguese and Dutch claimed sovereignty over the lands they conquered over a period of 150 years by taxing, coercing and converting, the British used an array of subtle technologies of rule that convinced the natives that this rule was real and not virtual.

The extent of land that fell under the sovereignty of colonial rulers in Sri Lanka varied considerably over time. Sovereignty was never total and was often a contested terrain. While one colonial ruler would claim power over a particular patch the inhabitants of that area would often give their allegiance to another ruler. Although the Dutch *Plakkaat*s (legal proclamations) displayed elements of systematic rule over the subject, it was British rule that most clearly attempted to create a modern colonial state where natives would become colonial subjects.

European colonisers of Ceylon considered the perimeter of their authority as a frontier, a temporary boundary that they were compelled to push forward until it reached the physical limits of the island. Sri Lankan kingdoms were principally identified according to their metropolitan centre, for example Sitavaka (the exception

[1] Channa Wickremesekera's book *Kandy at War: Indigenous Military Resistance to European Expansion in Sri Lanka, 1594–1818*, New Delhi, 2004, explores the main elements of Kandyan resistance and its effectiveness against European military power during the period of Kandyan-European military confrontation He argues that Kandy was doomed by the beginning of the 19th century to fail against an adversary far superior in weapons and resources and able to conduct a total war.

being the kingdom of Jaffna with its capital at Nallur), or the region in which they were located, for example the 'hill-country kingdom'. Sri Lanka, from being a cluster of centrebased overlapping societies—galactic states, as it were—became a boundary-based society where the sea played the main role.[2] The topographical propensity is not, however, a privilege of modernity, even if modernity strengthened it. Indeed recent work on popular texts known as 'boundary books' or *kaidaimpot* shows a near-obsessive concern of the premodern polity with the demarcation of the island into divisions, districts and villages.[3]

When stormy sea forced the fleet of the son of the Portuguese Viceroy in India Don Lourenço de Almeida to dock at Galle in 1505, as popular history recounts, there were three native centres of political power: two Sinhalese kingdoms in Kotte and Kandy and a Tamil kingdom in Jaffna. The kingdom of Kotte was only a shadow of the powerful state of the classical period. It claimed over-lordship of Kandy and the entire island, but in fact none of the three kingdoms had the power to assert dominance over the other two. Thus there were no clear boundaries between each kingdom. There were also differences between ritual sovereignty and actual political control, and allegiance of chieftains wavered from one kingdom to another. Some of the Vanniar chieftains, in the Vanni region in the East of the island, appear to have recognised the over-lordship of the Kotte and Jaffna kingdoms equally and at times acknowledged both simultaneously.

Conquest of the land by the Portuguese was a gradual process. They were initially given permission to build a residence in Colombo for trade, but they soon showed their true ambition when they fortified the trading post and displayed hostility towards the island's Muslim traders who monopolised trade in and around the city. The first clash between the Sinhalese and the Portuguese witnessed the Sinhalese forces armed with bows and swords aided by the Muslims attacking the fort and building a stockade alongside it.

[2] The metaphor of a galactic model—i.e. a central planet surrounded by differentiated satellites which are more or less 'autonomous' entities held in orbit and within the sphere of influence of the centre—is borrowed from S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge, 1976.

[3] Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: the Premodern and Precolonial Formations', ICES Ethnicity Course Lecture Series 1, Colombo, 2004.

The Portuguese soon exploited internal divisions among the ruling family to extend their power over the island. They offered protection to the young king of Kotte, Dharmapala, in return for privileges that included a continuous payment in cinnamon and permission to rebuild the fort at Colombo. The young monarch eventually converted to Roman Catholicism, an act that was to be exploited by the rival king at Sitawake Mayadunne. The latter soon succeeded in annexing much of the Kotte kingdom and later his son besieged the Colombo fort a number of times. The Portuguese were on one occasion compelled to eat the flesh of their dead to avoid starvation. The kingdom of Sitavaka (1521–94) rose to become the predominant power in the island but collapsed after the death of King Rajasinha in 1593.[4] Without a fleet the Low Country Sinhalese did not succeed in chasing away the Portuguese who could always rely on reinforcements arriving by sea from their base at Goa. When Dharmapala died in 1597 he bequeathed his territories to the king of Portugal (at that time the king of Spain), who asked his emissary the Captain-General to take formal possession of the kingdom. The Portuguese became *de jure* sovereigns over the lowlands of Sri Lanka. The north of the island was annexed only in 1619 after two failed expeditions.

Attempts by the Portuguese to invade the kingdom in the mountains in the centre of the island met with resounding defeats in 1592–4 and many times later. The origins of the Kandyan kingdom, situated in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, date back according to 'tradition' to the fifteenth century, when Senasammatha Vikramabahu declared his independence from the king of Kotte around the year 1474. The full name of the kingdom was 'Kanda uda pas rata' or the five districts on the mountain. The Portuguese shortened it to Candea, using the name for both the kingdom and its capital Senkadagalanuwara.[5] The Kandyan kingdom became stronger as it welcomed victims of Portuguese religious persecution, and after 1616 instigated rebellions in the Low Country. Again in 1630 the Portuguese were heavily defeated by the army of

[4] C.R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Sitavaka' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II (*c. 1500 to c. 1800*), Peradeniya, 1995, pp. 61–104; Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[5] Lorna S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1707–1782*, Colombo, 1988, p. 22, note 1.

King Senarat led by his son Rajasinghe. Rajasinghe II (1635–87) followed a risky diplomatic course, allying with the Dutch to oust the Portuguese.

The Dutch commercial company, the VOC, entered the Sri Lankan scene at the beginning of the seventeenth century under the pretext of helping the king of Kandy wage war against the Portuguese. After wresting control of the island's richest cinnamon lands, the Dutch eventually pushed the Portuguese out of Colombo and Jaffna. The extent of land they occupied was not however as large as the former Portuguese territories. Outside Jaffna, to the west, south and east, the Dutch held less territory. The ports of Trincomalee, Kottiyar and Batticaloa, for example, now belonged to Kandy.

Interestingly, Kandyan officials treated the Dutch as their feudatories and insisted the lands administered by the latter belonged to their own king. People's perception—when it was expressed at times of rebellion against the Dutch—was also that the king of Kandy possessed overlordship of the territories ruled by the VOC.[6] When a war was waged against the Dutch the king of Kandy raised his army by enlisting peasant soldiers from the intermediate belts between the lowlands and highlands. A number of war poems composed during the Portuguese occupation of the lowlands, such as *Rajasiha Hatana* and *Maha Hatana*, had emphasised the Kandyan kings' overlordship over a territory that included the Low Country. Whether the people shared the patriotic sentiment expressed in these poems cannot be fathomed. A similar sentiment appears quite clearly in some of the Matara writings emanating from the lowlands, where the kings of the Kandyan kingdom were praised as though the poets lived in an area under Kandyan rule rather than under Dutch colonial rule.[7] One of the prominent works of Matara literature, *Kavminikondola*, alludes (verses 10–11) to Kirthi Sri Rajasingha as king of the whole of Lanka.[8]

[6] S. Arasaratnam, 'The Consolidation of Dutch Power in the Maritime Regions, 1658–1687' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *A History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II, p. 235.

[7] The term 'Matara literature' refers to the movement of literary activity that took place mainly in the deep-southern areas of the island at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

[8] Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, 'The Formation of Sinhala Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', MPhil, University of Colombo, 2000, pp. 60–1.

Dutch governors were sometimes identified as regional rulers under the Kandyan king and referred to as '*governadoru*', a perception sustained by the practices of the Dutch themselves. On one occasion the Dutch Governor Pijl referred to himself as the 'king's most faithful governor and humble servant'.[9] Dutch sovereignty was thus more virtual than real, as the complexity of the reactions of the people subjected to colonial rule suggests. The main works of Matara literature were sponsored by members of a low-country Sinhala elite that remained aloof from any opposition to colonialism and participated as minor officials in Dutch rule. The sentiments of the more common people cannot be discerned from these sources, but the main picture evokes a certain amount of autonomy and freedom for the local elites in the maritime areas.

While the Dutch were in possession of the Low Country, King Rajasinghe of Kandy organised a resistance that combined guerrilla warfare, negotiations and attempts at alliances with France and England. After his death, as Kandyans did not cease to incite the Low Country Sinhalese to revolt against colonial rule, the VOC resorted to force. After an unsuccessful attempt to capture Kandy in 1763, the Dutch succeeded two years later, but failed to consolidate their victory. However, in 1766 colonial rule was given written sanction when the Kandyan king was obliged to sign a treaty that gave the Dutch sovereignty over the entire coastline of the island up to a depth of four Sinhalese miles. From then on the kingdom of Kandy became a landlocked entity. A Sinhalese proverb described the transfer of power from Portuguese to Dutch colonisers in these terms: 'We gave pepper and got ginger in exchange'. Indeed Dutch ambitions would prove to be just as devastating for the natives as those of the Portuguese.

The commercial decline of the Dutch occurred at the time the British East India Company, involved in Indian politics, took interest in the island for strategic reasons. The excellent port of Trincomalee was a vital base for the control of the southern coast of India. In 1782 the French and British competed for the port, which remained in the hands of the Dutch until the occupation of Holland by the French during the revolutionary wars. The Stathouder, a refugee in London, authorised Britain to annex Ceylon in 1796.

[9] Ibid. and Tikiri Abeyasinghe, 'Princes and Merchants: Relations between the Kings and the Dutch East India Company in Sri Lanka, 1688–1740', *Journal of the Sri Lanka National Archives*, 2, 1984, p. 40.

Changing structures and landscapes. Although there had been trade with other countries before—rice and cloth had been imported from India, while exports varied from arecanut to cinnamon, gems, pearls and elephants—it was the Portuguese who brought the inhabitants of Ceylon into direct contact with Europe. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese were intent on building a system of trading and military outposts connected by sea lanes. They came to Ceylon, or what they called Ceilão, for spices more than for Christians. Their aim was to do away with the middleman and establish direct contact with the sources of spices in the East. Unlike their Asian competitors the Portuguese were armed traders. Political control over the areas of production was necessary to secure a reliable supply of the desired goods. In Ceylon they found cinnamon, which they developed by relying on the Salagama peoples, who were relatively recent migrants from South India, to provide their counters with supplies. Portuguese rule over the south-western plains lasted for only six decades and over Jaffna for only forty years, periods during which rebels and hostile armies threatened them on a number of occasions.

Portuguese colonialism did not lead to substantial changes in the administrative system. The existing basic structure of native administration was not altered. The archetype remained the Sinhalese system. The Sinhalese administration was hierarchical, with the king at the apex and several grades of officials under him. His kingdom was divided into four Disavas or provinces: Matara in the south, Sabaragamuwa in the south-central region, the Four Korales that lay to the northeast of Colombo, and the Seven Korales that covered the northern plain and stretched as far as the land of the Vanni. Each Disava was subdivided into Korales. While the officer administering a Disava was called the Disava, the officer administering a Korale was called the Korale Vidana or simply the Vidana. The Vidana's functions were both administrative and military. He attended the king's court, appointed the subordinate officers, allotted lands, and summoned and led the provincial Lascarin force (ordinary soldiers) in war. The Lascarins in the early seventeenth century numbered between 4,000 and 12,000 people who were generally recruited either among the Nayar from Kerala or among the Karava/Karayar.[10]

[10] Eric Meyer, 'Labour Circulation between Sri Lanka and South India in Historical Perspective' in Claude Markovitz, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subramanyam (eds), *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 64.

The Vidana also had extensive civil and criminal jurisdiction over the inhabitants of his area.

Coexisting with this system based on territory was a 'departmental system' consisting of a number of *badda*s. The term *badda* denotes a caste group organised as a unit for purposes of revenue and service to the state. The most important *badda*s in seventeenth-century Kotte were those concerned with the production of cinnamon and the capture, taming and care of elephants.

Portuguese were installed at the top layer of the administrative system—chief officials being the captain-general and superintendent of revenue. The Portuguese captain-general stepped into the vacuum created by the remoteness of the King of Portugal. People of the island appear to have adopted the same mode of address and salutation towards the captain-general that they had employed for their own rulers. Ribeiro noted that he was addressed as *deiyo* (God), the usual mode of addressing the king. Even the Sinhala Chronicle, the *Rajavaliya*, used the term *Raja* (king) to denote this officer.[11] Although Portuguese governors were put in charge of each province and even referred to as Disavas, the customary hierarchy determined by caste and land ownership remained unchanged. The Portuguese took over not only the territorial and departmental organisation (*badda*) but also the native military organisation that consisted of ordinary soldiers commanded by the Disavas, the Mudaliyars and other officers.

The principal change in the administration introduced by the Portuguese was the creation of a separate branch for revenue matters. A Superintendent of Revenue, assisted by a *feitor* (factor), was put in charge of government revenue and expenditure. Revenue farmers were used to collect a number of taxes, but under Portuguese rule revenue from export of agricultural products was clearly much more important than taxes on land and its produce.

For a person living through these troubled times, the Portuguese also transformed the landscape of those parts of the island they occupied—essentially the south-western plains—by transplanting three main institutions and their constituent building types: the *feitoria*, the fort and the church gave visibility to the Portuguese presence. The *feitoria* was the residence of the Superintendent of Revenue and the *feitor*, the Portuguese royal trading representative, and also served as the royal warehouse. In Colombo the Portuguese

[11] Tikiri Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon 1594–1612*, Colombo, 1966, pp. 76–7.

dismantled their *feitoria* in 1507 and returned in 1517 to construct a fort, quite plainly a military establishment, using a simple plan. The fort of Colombo was very similar to a medieval castle with a single line of ramparts, a ditch and a moat.[12] After 1517 the intentions of the Portuguese had clearly matured from alliance with the kingdom of Kotte to annexation. They were proving to be more than 'coastguards who had got out of hand'.[13]

When the Dutch took control of the lowlands and the Jaffna peninsula they moved the administrative headquarters from Galle to Colombo, but they maintained, just as the Portuguese had done, much of the indigenous administrative system. It was a system of indirect rule with Dutch officials in the higher echelons of the administration and native chiefs below them.[14] The administrative structure was broadly divided into three groups, commercial, civil and military. The Dutch governor of Lanka, who ruled aided by a Council, was at the apex of the administrative ladder. Sri Lanka was divided into three commands: Colombo under the governor himself, and Jaffna and Galle under lieutenant-governors. In civil administration the Dutch found it useful to take on for themselves the office of Disava. The posts of Disava—there was one each for Colombo, Jaffna and Galle, and later for Batticaloa and Matara—were thus filled by Dutchmen who had supervisory control over the indigenous administrative service.[15] Each Disavoni was, as before, divided into Korales, Pattus and villages with Mudaliyars, Korales and Atukorales, all natives, as their chief administrative officials. Minor chieftains who had converted to Calvinism from Roman Catholicism retained their positions. The VOC modified the headman system, creating a *Mahabadda* (cinnamon department) for Salagama Vidanes and headmen who owed allegiance to the Dutch captain of the Mahabadda, thus placing them outside the traditional hierarchies.[16] Native officials were payed for their services through *accommedessans*, the grant of revenues of productive land.

[12] C.R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in the early Sixteenth Century: Political Conditions' in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *A History of Sri Lanka*, vol. II, pp. 11–36.

[13] Tikiri Abeyasinghe, in ibid., citing the *Culavamsa*, the official Sinhala Chronicle, p. 2.

[14] Sinnapah Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658–1687*, Amsterdam: Djambatan NV, 1958.

[15] Ibid., Chapter 6.

[16] C.R. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 139; K.W. Goonewardena, *The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1638–1658*, Amsterdam, 1958.