VII

NATIONALISM AND ITS IMPACT

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Of the distinctive features of the Sri Lanka variant of Asian nationalism[1] the most remarkable is the prominent role played by the "reform" movement within the wider theme of nationalist agitation. 'Constitutionalist', 'moderate' and 'conservative' are some of the terms used to describe the reformers and their political attitudes. Each of these has its uses. What is common to them all is an emphasis on constitutional reform as the major goal of political endeavour.

At every stage the 'constitutionalists' had demonstrated a commitment to agitation through the prosaic techniques of memorial and deputation and formal negotiation; there was at the same time a pronounced distaste for agitational techniques such as 'non-co-operation', 'boycott' and for a politicization of the masses. Secondly, there was a firm belief in the possibility of reconciling 'Ceylonese' patriotism with loyalty to Britain on the assumption that these were complementary and not inherently incompatible. In the decade after independence this took the form of an emphasis on the Commonwealth connection, and Defence Agreements with Britain, and the maintenance of the link with the British Crown—Ceylon was a monarchy in striking contrast to the republican status which India and Pakistan opted for. The third feature was their vision of the goal of political endeavour—the concept of a territorial nationalism without any special, much less, exclusive association with any ethnic group, or any section of an ethnic group, in brief a multi-ethnic nation state. In this comprehensive all-island focus, and in the emphasis on the concept of a multi-racial polity they were at one with their Marxist critics of the nineteen thirties and forties. Indeed the Marxist version was much more comprehensive because it

1. For discussion of nationalism in Sri Lanka see particularly, K. M. de Silva, 'Nineteenth century origins of nationalism in Ceylon' in, *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon* Vol. III, K. M. de Silva (ed) (Colombo, 1973) pp. 249-261; and 'The reform and nationalist movements in the early twentieth century'. *ibid.*, pp. 381-407; 'The history and politics of the transfer of power' *ibid.*, pp. 489-533. M. W. Roberts, 'Reformism, nationalism and protest in British Ceylon: The roots and ingredients of leadership'. *Ceylon Studies Seminar* 1974, No. 4; and 'Variations on the theme of resistance movements: the Kandyan rebellion of 1817-18 and latter day nationalism in Ceylon'. *Ceylon Studies Seminar* 1970/2, No. 10. See also, Sir Ivor Jennings, 'Nationalism and political development in Ceylon' in *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. 3, pp. 62-84, 99-114; and 197-206.

The present essay is based largely on these articles.

encompassed the Indian plantation workers as well, a group which not even the most liberal of the "constitutionalists" were willing to regard as an integral element of a Sri Lanka polity. Fourthly, Sri Lanka was to be a secular state, embracing all the indigenous people in a territorial concept of citizenship. In this too the "constitutionalists" and their Marxist critics saw eye to eye.

In the years after independence one of the major pre-occupations of the government was with the need to establish a sense of Ceylonese nationalism on territorial lines, and under D. S. Senanayake's leadership political leaders aimed at subordinating communal differences to the common goal of fostering parliamentary democratic institutions and strengthening the foundations of nationhood. The primary aim was the establishment of an equilibrium of ethnic forces within a multi-racial polity. For many years it seemed as though these policies had succeeded, but beneath the surface powerful forces were at work to upset the equilibrium; ideals of reconciliation and harmony gave way before the stresses released by the divisive forces of language and religion. This shift was consistent with the essence of party politics in which, given a common basis of agreement, the numerically larger group could peacefully alter the power structure. Thus the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority, long dormant, began to assert its national dominance. The first casualities were the concepts of a multi-racial polity, of a Ceylonese nationalism, and of a secular state.

One of the common assumptions about the evolution of nationalism in Sri Lanka is that there were two distinct phases in it, one liberal, moderate and concerned about communal reconciliation and harmony in a plural society, and the other populist if not radical and essentially disruptive of communal and religious harmony. The dividing line is 1955-6. But any realistic assessment of nationalism in the island in the years after independence must begin by demonstrating that any novelty in this second phase was deceptive and that it had its roots in earlier phases of nationalist awakening going back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In Sri Lanka as in many parts of Asia the origins of modern nationalism can be traced back to programmes of religious revivalism which were a reaction against missionary enterprise. Religious revival—a Buddhist revival, more specifically—preceded and inspired political nationalism providing as it did an ideal basis for the rejection of the West. This first phase in the emergence of nationalism would cover the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Whilst the incipient nationalist sentiment was primarily religious in outlook and content—a re-assertion of Buddhist values—political overtones in it were visible quite early and became more pronounced in the first two decades of the twentieth century with the growth of the temperance movement. These activities were concentrated in the low-country and there religious revivalism and temperance agitation demonstrated many of the characteristic features of nationalist activity as it emerged after 1955-6.

Nevertheless it is remarkable that a movement as powerful as this, and one which affected not merely the *elite* but the people at large should have had so little impact on the formal political activity of the *elite* in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Efforts were made to establish an ideological link between religious

revival and political nationalism, most notably by Anagarika Dharmapala. He saw the political implications and potential of the forces that were emerging, and he was among the first to advocate *swaraj*, but the blend of religious enthusiasm, militant nationalism and the advocacy of radical social reform which Dharmapala stood for evoked little sympathy from the effective political leadership of the national *elite*, "nationalist" and "constitutionalist" alike.

Though men like Dharmapala responded more positively and perhaps more intelligently to the challenges of the first decade of the twentieth century, the initiative in political issues went almost by default to the "constitutionalists". These latter seldom understood the complexities of the nationalist movement of their day. Steeped in the British Liberal tradition they placed their hopes on the establishment, in the course of time, of a Sri Lanka version of the British system of parliamentary government and the transfer of a substantial measure of political authority to the elected representatives of the people of the country. For many years students of the politics of Sri Lanka, many of whom consciously or unconsciously reflected these same political attitudes, tended to regard the "constitutionalists" and their political activities as *the* nationalist movement in the island, and they chose to disregard the virile brand of politics associated with the agitation for Buddhist revival and the cultural heritage associated with it and the Sinhala language.

This brand of militant Buddhist nationalism receded into the background after the riots of 1915, and for over a generation thereafter. The reasons for this would appear to lie in the field of politics rather than in any decline of interest in Buddhism or Buddhist activity. There was a mood of restraint and excessive caution in politics, and the distrust of enthusiasm which was one of its most notable characteristics spilled over into the sphere of religious activity as well. F. R. Senanayake[3] and D. B. Jayatilaka the most prominent of the leaders kept a tight rein on religious enthusiasm. Their approach to the religious problems of their day was in every way a contrast to Dharmapala's. They set the pace in Buddhist activity from about 1918, up to the time of Jayatilaka's retirement from active politics in 1942 (with F. R. Senanayake's untimely death—he died on 31 December 1925—D. B. Jayatilaka emerged as the undisputed Buddhist leader).

In the nineteen thirties, with the introduction of universal suffrage, politicians of the first (1931-1935) and the second (1936-1947) State Council, unlike their predecessors in the reformed Legislative Council of the 1920's, became subject to the pressures of a popular electorate. Buddhist pressure groups could now work through the electoral process to influence elected State Councillors. Sinhala Buddhists were awakening to a new political awareness, and by the very nature of democratic "parliamentary" politics there were political groups who sought to build a political programme emphasising the traditional cultural and religious patterns associated with Buddhism. The most notable of these groups was S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's Sinhala Maha Sabha.

2. Despite F. R. Senanayake's key role in the politics of the 1920's there is a surprising dearth of published material on his career apart from a pamphlet in Sinhalese, and a few brief newspaper articles.

There could be few doubts about the viability of religio-cultural nationalism as a political force, or of the validity of its appeal to a democratic electorate, but its potentially divisive effect on a plural society such as Sri Lanka's deterred the moderate leadership in the Board of Ministers from giving their support to such a programme with any enthusiasm. The Sinhala Maha Sabha could not conceive of a Ceylonese polity that was not essentially Buddhist or Sinhala in orientation; and, in the late 1930's it took issue with the Ceylon National Congress on the question of a "Ceylonese" political entity. For the Ceylon National Congress this was an essential element in its political policy. But the Sinhala Maha Sabha had always been sceptical about it and was not reluctant to give public expression to its doubts about the viability of a "Ceylonese" political entity.

The government still prided itself on its neutrality in religious affairs, but it had become politic to underline a sense of special obligation towards Buddhism. The political leadership of the day attached to western concepts of secular government and the apparatus of political democracy, would not go beyond this. They were disinclined to yield to pressure from the more vociferous Buddhist groups such as the Sinhala Maha Sabha and the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. The influence of D. B. Jayatilaka was crucial in this. His dual role of elder statesman in political and religious affairs gave him added prestige in both spheres, which he used to dampen excessive zeal and enthusiasm, and to curb what he regarded as extremism. Along with D. S. Senanayake he successfully postponed an open confrontation between a militant Buddhist movement urging the establishment of a Sri Lanka polity on traditional Sinhala-Buddhist lines, and those who were committed to the maintenance of the liberal ideal of a secular state in which the lines between state power and religion were carefully demarcated. (The Marxists too, at this stage, remained dogmatically unresponsive to this brand of nationalism, often dismissing it as mere chauvinism) It required D. B. Jayatilaka's retirement from active politics (and his death shortly thereafter) to open the way for a new generation of militant activists many of whom were members of the Sinhala Maha Sabha to take control of the Buddhist movement. Their impact on the life of the country became noticeable after independence, and with the formation of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party there emerged a mounting hostility to the western educated elite and the equilibrium of political forces which had been established in 1948 and seemingly consolidated in 1952 in the general election that followed upon the death of D. S. Senanayake.

The Sinhala-educated intelligentsia found that rewarding careers were closed to them by the pervasive dominance of English as the language of administration. Though they were not without influence in the villages they had seldom in the past been able to exert any influence on a national scale, and they felt that they had been unjustly excluded by the western educated elite from a share of power commensurate with their numbers. More importantly they felt that they were better able than the latter to speak for the villagers. By extension they also felt that the Tamil community had taken an unfair share of power by virtue of their superior educational pportunities.

In addition they felt that in its spiritual home Theravada Buddhism and the culture associated with it were not receiving sufficient support or respect. These fears culminated in the *Buddha Jayanthi* year, the world wide celebration in 1956 of the 2500th anniversary of the attainment of *nirvana* by the Buddha. At that time too a report by a prestigious non-government commission (consisting of Buddhist personalities), on the deplorable state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka heightened these fears—they charged that the value of independence was vitiated by the fact that the ruling elite was completely dominated by an alien outlook, and values and estranged from their national history and culture.

If religious fervour was the prime determinant of change, the language question was its sharp cutting edge. Indeed the two—Buddhism and Sinhala—were so closely interwined that it was impossible to treat either in isolation. The anxiety to preserve and strengthen the Sinhala language stemmed partly at least from the fear that if it fell into decay in Sri Lanka, its valuable religious and cultural tradition would die with it. What occurred at this time was a profoundly significant transformation of nationalism—language became the basis of nationalism on the lines of the linguistic nationalism of Central Europe of the mid-nineteenth century.[3] This metamorphasis of nationalism affected both the Sinhala and Tamil populations.

The consequences of the transformation may be outlined as follows: Firstly, the concept of a multi-racial polity ceased to be politically viable any longer. In Sinhala the words for *nation*, *race*, and *people* are practically synonymous, and a multi-racial or multi-communal nation or state is incomprehensible to the popular mind. The emphasis on Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalese carried an emotional popular appeal compared with which the concept of a multiracial polity was a meaningless abstraction.

Secondly, the abandonment of the concept of a multi-racial polity was justified by laying stress on the western concept of a democratic sanction deriving its validity from the clear numerical superiority of the Sinhala-speaking group. At the same time the focus continued to be an all-island one, and Sinhala nationalism was consciously or unconsciously treated as being identical with a Sri Lanka nationalism. The minorities, and in particular the Ceylon Tamils refused to endorse the assumption that Sinhala nationalism was interchangeable with the larger Sri Lanka nationalism.

Similarly the association of Buddhism with the state, and the simultaneous reduction of Christian influence especially after 1960 were integral features of the abandonment of the concept of a multi-racial polity. There was increasing pressure for the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion, but this the political leaderships in both the major parties, the S.L.F.P. and the U.N.P., were able to resist. However,

3. For a succint analysis of linguistic nationalism in mid-nineteenth century Europe, see Sir Lewis, Namier, *Vanished Supremacies*. See the essay on "Nationality and Liberty." (Peregrine Books, London 1962).

with the adoption of a republican constitution in 1972 the position changed. Chapter II of the Constitution laid it down that: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Section 18 (1) (d)". Sri Lanka had ceased to be a secular state pure and simple, even if it had not become a theocratic state which Buddhist pressure groups would have liked it to be.

Thirdly, linguistic nationalism was a populist nationalism, in contrast to the elitist constitutionalism of the early years after independence. The masses—and more especially the rural masses—had entered the political arena, and no longer could political activity be confined to the *elite*. This linguistic nationalism despite its seeming novelty at the time it first appeared in the mid 1950's, had its roots in the recent past, and especially in the temperance movement of the early years of the twentieth century when a similar mixture of religious fervour and commitment to national culture had captured the imagination of the Sinhalaese people, particularly in the rural areas of the low country, and in the towns in all parts of the island save the Tamil areas. In the nineteen fifties the scale was wider, and the appeal somewhat deeper.

One of the notable consequences of this emergence of Sinhala Buddhist populism was the setback it gave the Marxist movement. By the end of the nineteen thirties Marxism had continued the process of politicizing the urban working class which A. E. Goonasinha had pioneered in the early nineteen twenties. They had always been conscious of the inter-connection between social problems and the political struggle for national independence, and in so doing they had helped accelerate the pace of national regeneration. Marxist thought had served to strengthen the forces of secularism in the island's politics. The Second World War had the effect of disrupting their activities and halting the progress they had made, but with independence and the first elections to the House of Representatives in 1947, they emerged as the most potent challenge to the government of the day, if not a credible alternative to it. To this status of the alternative government they always aspired and it was this aspiration which was thwarted by the emergence of linguistic nationalism and the populist form it took in the mid-nineteen fifties. With the emergence of the language movement, they watched the gains of the past disappear, and the prospects of the future become much more limited. They found to their dismay and discomfiture, that linguistic nationalism had an appeal which cut across class interests, and that it evoked as deep a response from the Sinhala working class as it did among the peasantry and the Sinhala educated *elite*. The cosmopolitan outlook of the Marxists and their enlightened advocacy of a multi-racial secular polity proved to be profoundly disadvantageous, and they were compelled to compromise on these issues, without, however, any substantial political benefits. From the position of the alternative government they were reduced to the status of an appendage of the populist Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Though the Buddhist movement was generally hostile to Marxist ideology, it had no strong opposition to the adoption of a socialist programme. Since plantation

enterprise, nascent industry and the island's trade were dominated by foreign capitalists, and the minorities were disproportionately influential within the indigenous capitalist class,. Buddhist pressure groups viewed socialism as a means of redressing the balance in favour of the majority group. Every extension of state control over trade and industry could be justified on the ground that it helped curtail the influence of foreigners and the minorities. The Sinhala Buddhist section of the capitalist class was not averse to socialism so long as its own economic interests were not affected. The result was that the populist Sri Lanka Freedom Party has been able to reconcile a commitment to a hazy socialism with an advocacy of the interests of a section of the indigenous capitalist class—the Sinhala Buddhist segment of it.

We now turn to the last of the consequences of the emergence of a populist linguistic nationalism among the Sinhalese—its effects on the Tamil question. It is of such far-reaching importance in the island's contemporary history that it needs separate treatment.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth, there was a remarkable contrast between Tamils and the Sinhalese in their political attitudes: the former were far ahead in political consciousness and receptivity to nationalist ideas then emerging in the Indian sub-continent. This lead they maintained till the early 1920's. During this period they did not regard themselves as a minority, but aspired to equality with the Sinhalese as one of two majority groups in the island as indeed their enfranchised segment was under the restricted franchise then prevailing.

It was in the early 1920's that the basic issues involved in the fundamental problem of Tamil politics—their relationship with the Sinhalese within the larger Sri Lanka polity—were dramatised in the careers of two distinguished Tamil politicians who dominated the politics of the island at this time, the brothers Ponnambalam Arunachalam and Ponnambalam Ramanathan.[5] Their careers afford a study in contrast as regards their aspirations for the people of this country: Arunachalam stood for harmonious association between the Sinhalese and Tamils in nationalist politics and nation-building, for mutual trust and responsive co-ordination of sectional interests in the struggle for a common goal of *swaraj*. He viewed the Sinhalese and Tamils as associates in the building up (and eventually in the government) of a multi-racial polity.

Ramanathan, in contrast, emphasised the virtues of a separate identity for the Tamils, of a Tamil nationalism to be fostered in collaboration with the British and if necessary in opposition to Sinhala nationalism. Ramanathan was much less visionary and idealistic than his brother. For him, the numerical inferiority of the Tamils had to be accepted as a fact, and on that basis it was imperative to protect the special interest of the Tamils by emphasising their distinctive communal identity. Under British rule this would mean unabashed collaboration with the imperial power in

return for the protection of minority interests and rights, and an insistence on a special if not privileged status as the price of acceptance of the eventual transfer of power by the British. G. G. Ponnambalam's 'Fifty-Fifty' campaign of the nineteen forties was the *reductio ad absurdum* of this process of political activity. There were two basic considerations: the emphasis on Tamil nationalism as something essentially divergent from, if not positively hostile to, Sinhalese nationalism; and secondly, the rejection, tacit or explicit of Arunachalam's concept of a multi-racial polity and a Ceylonese or Sri Lanka nationalism. There was a hard-headed pragmatism in all this, for the events of the mid-nineteen fifties were to demonstrate that for the Sinhalese themselves the concept of a Ceylonese nationalism could hardly hold its own against the compelling attractions of Sinhalese nationalism. Besides, Arunachalam's eventual disenchantment with the Congress served to underline the fact that, for many Sinhalese, responsive co-operation between the Sinhalese and Tamils pre-supposed the acceptance by the Tamils of an essentially subordinate position merely by virtue of their numerical inferiority, and that their status in a Ceylonese polity could seldom be anything more than that of a junior partner.

One important feature needs to be emphasised. At this time, for all their talk of a linguistic, religious and cultural separateness from the Sinhalese, the Tamils' concept of nationalism lacked coherence and cohesion. As with the Sinhalese, it was language that provided the sharp cutting edge of a new national self-consciousness. This was the Federal Party's great contribution to Tamil politics. Not only did they draw attention to the possession of a Tamil territorial unit, and the memory of an independent Tamil kingdom (which survived from the thirteen century to the beginning of the seventeenth), they also emphasised the role of language as the determinant of nationhood. In 1951 at the first national convention of the Federal Party it was claimed that "the Tamil speaking people in Ceylon constituted a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood"—the "separate historical past" of the Tamils and their linguistic unity and distinctiveness. While the Sinhalese regard Sri Lanka as a nation state, the Tamils preferred to look upon it as a state-nation created by western imperialism, and in particular by the British. This view has been consistently emphasised by the Federal Party as well as by other Ceylon Tamils in recent years, and it is the foundation of their claim for a measure of regional autonomy (ranging from a unit or units in a Federal structure, to the more recent emphasis on a separate Tamil state).

With the change of government in 1956 the power of the Sinhala intelligentsia was quickly translated into a growing clamour for "Sinhala only", and the demolition of the language settlement arrived at in 1944-6. The fears of the Tamils were immediately aroused, tensions grew extremely high and erupted in 1956 and 1958 into race riots. To assuage the feelings of the Tamils, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike introduced legislation to permit the "reasonable use of Tamil" in administration. Though the bill was approved by Parliament, the regulations necessary for its implimentation were not passed till 1966.

If the race riots of the nineteen fifties underlined the combustible nature of linguistic nationalism in a plural society, there were more ominous long-term dangers

as well. The fact is that the Sinhalese, though an overwhelming majority of the population of the island, nevertheless have a minority complex *vis-a-vis* the Tamils. The Sinhalese (who number about 9 million) feel over-shadowed by the more than 50 million Tamil speakers in Sri Lanka and present-day Tamilnadu their nearest neighbours. Within Sri Lanka the Sinhalese outnumber the Tamils by more than three to one; but they are in turn outnumbered by nearly six to one by the Tamil speaking peoples of South Asia.

Historical tradition, cultural distinctions and geography separate the Tamils of the two countries from each other, and in the early years of independence in Sri Lanka the Tamils of the North and the East showed little inclination to identify themselves with the Tamils of Tamilnadu. Nevertheless the Sinhalese feared this possibility. Ironically enough, worsening relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and the deep sense of grievance engendered among the latter by the abandonment of the language compromise of 1944-6 has tended to make the link with Tamilnadu more attractive if not yet politically viable. This trend has been strengthened by the decline in power of the Indian National Congress in Tamilnadu and the emergence of the DMK more conscious of the rights of Tamils in South Asia and less inhibited in expressing concern about these. The association is still fitful and tentative, but it has potential for transformation into something more cohesive. The fears of the Sinhalese are thus in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

There is also the question of the relations between the Ceylon Tamils, and the Tamil speaking plantation workers in the island. The only link between them is language. Once again a closer association has emerged in the face of Sinhalese pressure. But it was only in 1972 that the growing solidarity between them was consolidated into joint political activity in which the Ceylon Workers Congress, the main trade-union cum political party of the plantation workers, pledged themselves to work together in the newly formed Tamil United Front under the leadership of the Federal Party leader, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam.

For decades the plantation workers were regarded as transients, and as an unassimilable minority living in their plantation ghettos isolated from the indigenous population. But the question of their franchise came up in 1927 and remained a matter of deep controversy for a generation thereafter. Their rights to permanent citizenship have been defined with elaborate care eliminating the claims of the bulk of them who came to be classified as "stateless" though resident in Sri Lanka. Treaties negotiated with India in 1964 and 1974 have all but settled this question of statelessness. Most will be repatriated to India, but a limited number will be accepted as citizens and permanent residents of Sri Lanka, thus conferring a new legitimacy on those plantation workers recognized as Sri Lanka citizens.

It is the Kandyan Sinhalese who feel most threatened by the plantation workers in their midst. They have taken the lead in the insistence on rigid rules and regulations for the grant of citizenship to the latter; on this issue the Kandyans have found easy converts among the low-country Sinhalese. Indeed it was the common campaign

against liberal citizenship rights to Indian plantation workers, conducted in opposition to the Donoughmore Commission, which brought the low-country Sinhalese and Kandyans together after a period of estrangement. Not that Kandyan fears and suspicions about the low-country Sinhalese dominance ever completely subsided. The Kandyan claim for a federal political structure in 1927 before the Donoughmore Commission and in 1944 before the Soulbury Commission was proof that they had not.

In the first half of the nineteenth century Kandyan resistance was the major political problem that confronted the British in Sri Lanka. But Kandyan resistance to the British petered out in the two or three decades after the suppression of the 'rebellion' of 1848, and disappeared for ever thereafter. By a deliberate change of policy the British converted the Kandyans from a suspect group into a bloc of loyalists. The Kandyan problem in the sense of a 'traditional' nationalism guided by an aristocratic leadership had ceased to be a serious threat to the continued stability of British rule.

Between the 1880's and the attainment of independence the Kandyans mostly took satisfaction in a new role, that of associates of the British, and a counterweight to the reform and nationalist movements dominated by the western educated *elite* of the low country. The leaders of Kandyan opinion seldom showed much sympathy for the political aspirations of these movements. They stood aloof and suspicious when not positively hostile. The tradition of Kandyan "resistance" was invoked not against the British but against the "constitutionalist" leadership. Nevertheless the memory of Kandyan resistance and of the Kandyan Kingdom as the last independent Sinhalese kingdom persisted, to provide some inspiration for the more forward looking "reformers" and those among the latter who came to form the nucleus of a genuine "nationalist" movement basing itself on Sinhalese tradition.

There were many reasons why the Kandyans took shelter under the colonial umbrella and offered collaboration in return for certain minimum requirements being met. The most important of these, it would appear, were the basically economic ones. Though the Kandyan region was the main centre of the plantation industry, fewer benefits from this process of economic development had accrued to the Kandyans themselves than to any other group among the peoples of the island. Indeed their claim that they had suffered greatly from the development of plantations in their midst, though somewhat exaggerated, is not entirely without merit. Grievances about land, and fears about a potential political threat from the Indian plantation workers were the two most important aspects of this. They were a self-proclaimed backward community seeking redress for these grievances. Their leadership remained aristocratic and conservative in outlook.

It was after independence that Kandyan influence on Sinhala nationalism began to make itself felt. By 1956 a new leadership had emerged. Populist in outlook they found a natural home in the SLFP. Curiously, though, when the Kandyan influence in the SLFP reached a peak after the 1960's, it was under a more traditional

aristocratic leadership.[4] But aristocratic resuscitation did not mean a return of conservatism. On the contrary it was receptive to populist pressures and socialist ideology.

There are three points of significance in the Kandyan influence on the growth of nationalism. Firstly, Kandyan pressures were the guiding influence in the development of policy on the questions relating to Indian plantation labour in Sri Lanka. At times these pressures have developed vehemently and unabashedly racialist overtones. The rigid tests devised for Sri Lanka citizenship have eliminated a substantial portion of the Indian plantation labour from the voters' lists. This had the effect of giving the Sinhalese population in the Kandyan areas a disproportionate share of the seats in Parliament. (With the delimitation of 1959, the Kandyans with just 26% of the population had 44% of the seats). Secondly, in the 1970's the Kandyan influence has served to radicalise land policy in general and to impose state control and ownership on plantations in areas where population pressure is severe. These initiatives have assumed the form of a passionate search for a redress of historic grievances. Thirdly, Kandyan influence has been basically anti-capitalist in outlook, an understandable development given the animosity of the Kandyans towards the enterprising outsiders who have dominated economic activity in their regions—whether they were low-country Sinhalese, Indians, Moors or Europeans. There are very few Kandyans in the indigenous capitalist class, and this no doubt has facilitated the easy reconciliation of aristocratic leadership and socialist ideology.

It would be evident from this brief essay that nationalism in Sri Lanka is a thing of a myriad shapes and forms. Just as it has kept changing over the last three quarters of a century, it could be confidently predicted that the one point of consistency in the future would be this infinite changability. And the impact of nationalism will continue to be at once cohesive and disruptive.

There will be those who, despite all the evidence to the contrary, insist on the exclusive rights of the brand of nationalism they advocate or adhere to, to the status of nationalism proper. And they will insist that all other varieties are spurious, defective and less than comprehensive. But it would be more realistic to remember that there are as many versions of nationalism as there are of socialism, and—more importantly —there are as many roads to nationalism as there are nowadays to socialism.

4. This influence has been especially strong since 1970. It is a point worth noting that in 1975, the President of the Republic of Sri Lanka, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chief Justice and the Governor of the Central Bank are all Kandyans.