

# THE POLITICAL ANTECEDENTS OF THE REVIVALIST ELITE WITHIN THE MEP COALITION OF 1956

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## The Setting

The resounding victory of the *Mahajana Eksath Peramuna* (MEP) in which the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) was the largest single component,<sup>1</sup> at the general elections of 1956 is commonly acknowledged to have been due in part to the support and coalescence of certain interest groups which had not employed their political potentialities to the same degree at previous elections. In political analyses these interest groups have generally been subsumed under one head and been described variously as

- (i) "the upper levels of the Sinhalese-speaking intelligentsia";<sup>2</sup>
- (ii) "the lower middle-class traditionalists";<sup>3</sup>
- (iii) "Sinhalese-educated lower middle-class";<sup>4</sup>
- (iv) "rural middle classes";<sup>5</sup>
- (v) "new village leadership";<sup>6</sup>
- (vi) "alternative village leadership";<sup>7</sup>
- (vii) "national bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie";<sup>8</sup> and
- (viii) "the rural middle classes and the Sinhala-Buddhist intelligentsia".<sup>9</sup>

Applying functional distinctions, most accounts describe this political formation as being composed of *bhikkhus*, school-teachers in vernacular schools and ayurvedic physicians. A few accounts include the notaries, "minor landowners", and the *mudalalies* (village money-lenders-shopkeepers) or small businessmen.<sup>10</sup> Farmer would also include within this group "the English-educated young men from the provinces, the sons of small cultivators, minor officials, shop-keepers, and the lower middle-class groups generally", though he stresses that the group as a whole was more Sinhala-educated and Sinhala-oriented than English-educated or Western-oriented.<sup>11</sup>

Referring to their political intervention in 1956, in characteristic fashion, Denzil Peris talks sweepingly of a "shift of political power" and the "replacement" of the "westernized bourgeoisie" by the "national bourgeoisie".<sup>12</sup> Arasaratnam, too speaks of "the dethronement of the westernized elite".<sup>13</sup> This is to overestimate the power they secured. It is more correct to describe the situation, as Ralph Pieris does, in terms of their "upsurge"; or, Wriggins does, as an assertion of their voice against their better-endowed neighbours.<sup>14</sup> As Hector Abhayavardhana noted in 1962, the Westernised political elite of former times remained a dominant political force.<sup>15</sup> Cabinet ministers have generally been drawn from their ranks. The command-centres of the major political parties remain in their hands.

Such differences and nuances aside, there can be little doubt that the general elections of 1956 mark (a) the upsurge of a Sinhala-Buddhist revivalist nationalism, and (b) the rise of various interest groups representing this revivalist nationalism to the position of a political force of nation-wide significance. Since the personnel who comprised these groups were not

drawn from one strata of Sri Lanka society, the term "elite" is preferable to those labels which stress their class background. They do not altogether fit the label "intelligentsia". Nor is it satisfactory to stress their village or rural background when several leaders among these groups came from urban backgrounds or functioned as journalists, ayurvedic physicians, and traders in Colombo and other urban centres.<sup>16</sup> I will be referring to these groups as "the revivalist elite of the 1950's" in the conviction that the term carries fewer evils, though like most typologies it is probably not free of shortcomings.

In describing the political role of the revivalist elite of the 1950's, few authors have probed their historical antecedents. Following indications provided by popular conversation among academics, journalists and political activists, it would be reasonable to say that most scholars recognise that the upsurge of the 1950's had cultural roots in the religio-cultural revivalist movement among the Sinhalese that appears to have commenced in the later half of the nineteenth century<sup>17</sup> a movement which was inspired by the Sinhalese past and Sinhalese culture in ways which underlined its Buddhist content and which expressed militant objections to the changes resulting from Western penetration.<sup>18</sup> However, it is widely believed that this religio-cultural movement did not carry much political significance during the first few decades of the twentieth century. In stating that the "national bourgeoisie (whom he mistakenly regards as the sole architects of the religio-cultural "stirrings" of the early twentieth century) were "politically ineffective" up to 1931,<sup>19</sup> Denzil Pieris would seem to illustrate popular opinion on this point. Robert Kearney, too, contends that it was "of marginal political importance until after independence".<sup>20</sup> Presumably Kearney was influenced towards this view by his conviction that the Sinhalese religio-cultural revivalism "grew separately from the political independence movement shepherded by the Ceylon National Congress", and that the Westernized elite "were scarcely aware of the traditionalist onslaught".<sup>21</sup>

With reference to the political experience and the organisational antecedents of the revivalist elite of the 1950's, moreover, the general consensus is that it was a force which appeared newly on the political scene. This point is implicit in the use of such words and phrases as "new", and "sprang up" and "emerged from obscurity".<sup>22</sup> A few imply that that this elite group appeared on the political scene in the 1950's. Referring to the period 1947-1956, for instance, de Souza states:<sup>23</sup>

An 'alternative village leadership' sprang up in opposition to the big families in the villages who formed the political base of the UNP: this had, as yet, an unformed and miscellaneous character ... It consisted generally of a section of the rural intelligentsia supported by the village 'Hampdens' - the small men who were ready to clash with the powers that be.

Again, Arasaratnam contends that they had "no training in organized leadership or disciplined activity" and only bestirred themselves in the period 1947-56.<sup>24</sup> Others believe that their political roots can be traced back to the 1930's to the influence of universal franchise, local government institutions, and the formation of the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and his associates in 1937. Farmer, for instance, notes that "well before the

1956 elections" many individuals comprising the new village leadership he describes "had engaged in a campaign to place themselves in places of authority in the village (for example, as officebearers in rural development and co-operative societies, often in opposition to traditional and more aristocratic village leaders)."<sup>25</sup> Kearney correctly urges a point that is often recognised in emphasising S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's liaison with the rural population through the institutions of local government when he held the portfolio of Local Administration from 1936 to 1951.

For some fifteen years he was in frequent contact with village functionaries elective and appointive, throughout the island. Through this channel he seems to have maintained much closer contact with the moods, desires, and fears of the rural villagers than did most of his colleagues in the government. He built up a following among the village committee-men which by 1956 became a firm base of support for the SLFP and the MEP coalition.<sup>26</sup>

It is probable that many people will also lay special emphasis on the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* as providing organisational and political experience to the revivalist elite.<sup>27</sup> though Marshall R. Singer reveals the poverty of background knowledge which pervades his book in stating that the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* "closely paralleled" the Ceylon National Congress and had the "same class groupings".<sup>28</sup> What is clear is that, in tracing the political antecedents of the revivalist elite of the 1950's, the starting point is never taken beyond the 1930's. Denzil Pieris is not alone in his confidence on this point. De Souza states categorically that "not a single feature of the structure of present-day politics in Ceylon can be traced beyond 1931."<sup>29</sup>

Such a view is underlined and furthered by the manner in which the Ceylonese political leadership in the period before 1931 is commonly depicted. Two points are made, Firstly, the political activists are described as a Westernized bourgeoisie, "a middle class intelligentsia of professional commercial and proprietary folk",<sup>30</sup> "rather well-to-do, highly educated, urban Westernized types",<sup>31</sup> and so on in similar vein. In the second place, it is stressed that this Westernized group led Ceylon gently along towards independence and that the nationalist movement, as in India. With the exception of Wriggins, Kumari Jayawardena and P. T. M. Fernando,<sup>32</sup> most writers and speakers imply or state that the politics of the period before 1931, A. E. Goonesinha's labour movement excepted, was solely the moderate constitutional politics of a small coterie of Ceylonese who had little or no connection with the masses. Thus, Kearney notes that "the Ceylonese independence movement failed to establish roots or engender enthusiasm among the masses",<sup>33</sup> Jayasinghe observes that even after the incidents of 1915 "the Ceylonese reformers would not be deflected from their chosen path of moderation" and made no attempt "to organise the masses for political action".<sup>34</sup> While Singer is satisfied on this point by the fact that in 1927 the Ceylon National Congress and its branch associations could claim "a total membership of only seven thousand".<sup>35</sup>

Such opinions have been nurtured in part by the the fact that the literature which the Westernized left behind is not inconsiderable and that historians who have paid attention to the recent past have been content for the most part to delve amidst their bequests and have made little effort yet to direct their attention to more obscure corners of the field. Impressions

and clues thrown up by reference to the works of Kumari Jayawardena and P. T. M. Fernando, through reconnaissance among sundry historical manuscripts and by an application of oral history techniques, however, suggested that modifications were called for in the historical interpretation on the nature of the nationalist movement and on the political antecedents of the revivalist elite of the 1950's.

Four aspects were indicated: (1) It was evident that the religiocultural movement of the early twentieth century and particularly one of its limbs, the temperance movement, had a strong political content and the it should not be sharply differentiated from the the political movement for self-government; (2) It appears that some of the political leaders were not oblivious to the possible usefulness of mass support; and that they built up some froms of mass politics through the temperance movement and the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* (and its branches), even though these movements were not sustained; (3) It appeared that they used members of the Sinhalese lowermiddle-class as their agents, intermediaries, and assistants; (4) It appeared that these intermediaries and assistants were the political ancestors of the revivalist elite of the 1950's and that several of them provided the nucleus of the second-rung activists in the *Sihula Mahajana Sabhā*, while a few even lived to work for the political triumph of the SLFP and MEP, (where they did not remain staunch supporters of the Ceylon National Congress and the UNP).

This essay is an attempt to elaborate and probe these impressions. As a necessary foundation, it begins with an analysis of the elite groups of the early twentieth century and draws a distinction between a "national elite" and a "local elite". It proceeds to depict certain features in the politics of nationalism and parliamentarianism in the period 1900 - 1947. Thereafter it employs biographical data, to present a tentative hypothesis which suggests that the politicisation of the revivalist elite of the 1950 can be traced back to the 1910's and 1920's, and that several members of the interest groups which constituted the revivalist elite received organisational experience and ideological sustenance during these early decades; and/or imbibed the heritage passed on by their forerunners, those of an older generation who did not live to see their powerful contribution to political history in the 1950's.

### **National and Local Elites in British Ceylon**

In grafting onto Ceylon the simplified individualistic structure of England, the British stimulated the development of a market society and generated a process of social flux. It was a gradual process; not a cataclysmic one. It was concentrated in the agricultural sector and its ancillary services, and therefore developed as an outgrowth on a traditional base. But it was a metamorphosis for all that. It was out of this social transformation that new Ceylonese elites were born.

The process of elite formation in British Ceylon was a gradual one attended by much regional variation. The transformation effected under British rule provided individuals and families with the opportunity of achieving and consolidating elite status through two broad sets of factors: (a) new fields of economic enterprise and (b) educational acquisitions in the English medium in an environment which gave scope, albeit with limitations, for such acquisitions. The two avenues of advance were not independent but closely intertwined. The

hard-earned wealth of the pioneer entrepreneurs enabled them to educate their sons in the best schools; and/or to send them to the Inns of Court in London to become fully-fledged barristers. The second and third generations employed their education to consolidate their economic and social position. In other instances, the profession provided a ladder to the ramparts of the elite and acquisition of landed property from professional earnings, of a judicious marriage, buttressed the ladder. Dowries, strategic marriage alliances and the formation of family phalanxes or *pelantiyas*<sup>36</sup> were another component in elite formation; they generally constituted a secondary stage or second step in that the attainment of a suitable occupational and/or financial position was the primary stage and a basis for the negotiation of such contracts.

Within the indigenous population, in time, one could identify two elite groups, the national elite and the local elite. The "national elite" describes those individuals and families who possessed the attributes of elite status to a greater degree than the local elite; and whose circle of influence could be said to have had a national significance rather than a limited significance, regional or otherwise. The national elite refers to those individuals who, for one reason or another, generally did not have "to wait in the queue"<sup>37</sup> when they sought administrative and other services; and to those who provided leadership in public affairs, including movements of protest.<sup>38</sup> It included both those members of the traditional elite of early British days who had adapted themselves to the social transformation and maintained their elite status as well as those families which had emerged newly. In British Ceylon it was typified by such individuals and families as the descendants of Francisco de Mel of Moratuwa, of Harmanis Dias of Panadura, of Ponnambalam Mudaliyar of Colombo and of Don Adrian Jayewardene of Grandpass, the Panabokkes of Udapalata the Dunuwilles of Kandy, the Rambukoptas of Uva the Ratwattes, the de Sarams and the de Liveras, the Obeyesekeres, Dias Bandaranaiques and Pieris Siriwardhanas, the Senarat Mudalige Pereras of Kotte, the Senanayakes of Botale, the Pedrises of Galle and Colombo, the de Abrew Rajapakses of Welitara, Walter and H. J. C. Pereira, C. M. and Dr. H. M. Fernando, A. Sabapathy, W. Duriswamy, A. Drieberg and M. Macan Markar.<sup>39</sup>

The "local elite" on the other hand describes less influential individuals who were nevertheless set apart from the masses. In British Ceylon it was exemplified by such individuals and families as the Bastiankorralage Rodrigos of Hendala-Pamunugama,<sup>40</sup> C. Don Bastian,<sup>41</sup> Hemendra Sepala Perera<sup>42</sup> P. H. Abraham Silva,<sup>43</sup> and the Wijenayake *pelantiya* in Hinidum Pattu in the Southern Province which is described by Gananath Obeyesekere.<sup>44</sup> It will be evident that the non-entrepreneurial professions represented in the local elite were less prestigious than those represented in the national elite. They included such occupations as those of the registrar of marriages, the *korala*, the village headman or *vidane aratchi*, schoolmasters, coroners, presidents of village tribunals and, in some instances, notaries public. In short, the petty bureaucracy of the districts, sub-districts and small towns were a segment of the local elite. Local notables or landed gentry, one section of the group which Ceylonese refer to as "landed proprietors", also constituted part of the local elite. Owners of moderate extents of property (whether paddy, tea, rubber, coconut or cinnamon producing properties), these individuals were emancipated from agricultural work and followed the life-style of the *pelantiyas* described by Obeyesekere.<sup>45</sup> A third element were the *mudalalies* and local tradesman

in other words, the 'petty entrepreneurs'. It also included several (though not all the) members of the Kandyan *goyigama* aristocracy whose status and power was on the decline, or whose bases of influence were too limited or too localised to enable one to class them within the national elite, however high their social status. Modifications of this sketch of the local elite are necessary, however, with reference to relatively more urbanised areas, round Colombo, Kandy and Jaffna for instance. The occupational groups who formed part of the local elite were more diverse and could be said to include such elements as swabasha-media journalists, authors from lower-class origins, clerks, struggling proctors and others of such rank.

It follows from such a description that the local elite consisted of numerous groups whose physical and social contact with each other may have been limited, but whose range of influence and social position had some common features and whose position *vis-a-vis* the national elite and the masses was sufficiently similar for them to be viewed as *an* elite (albeit a segmented elite), rather than separate elites. In other words, the local elite was regionally segmented. The achievement of local-elite status was also a foundation for social progress upwards into the national elite. In this sense the local elite was, in part, an intermediate station for individuals or families who were, in effect, moving socially upwards or downwards between the national elite and the mass of the people. This made for a blurring of the border zone between the two elites. It also means that an individual could be classed within the local elite during an early stage in his career, while being included in the ranks of the national elite later on, where success in his career justifies such an adjustment.

The distinction between the national and local elites extended beyond their circles of influence and their occupations. It pervaded their orientation. The local elite was generally less Westernized than the national elite and had closer ties with the rural masses. Where bilingual, members of the local elite were generally more proficient in the vernacular than in English. In the Sinhalese districts, by and large, they were Sinhala speaking. Several of them also adopted the respectable yet peculiarly Ceylonese attire of coat and cloth, or coat and calf-length cloth over trousers. In contrast, the national elite was inclined to adopt a Westernised life-style and was English-speaking.<sup>46</sup> The national elite of our description is in fact the same as the "Westernized bourgeoisie", or the Western-educated, urban, middle-class political leadership, referred to previously in my precis of writings on the nationalist movement.<sup>47</sup>

The national and local elites added significant, new components to the social structure of the island. They were not mere extensions of the traditional elite as in Indonesia.<sup>48</sup> The leadership provided by the new elites was largely based on personal achievement whereas that of the traditional elite of pre-British and early British times would seem to have been based largely on ascribed status.<sup>49</sup> However, the sense in which these groups were "new" must be qualified by at least two points. In the first place, both elites were influenced and aided by traditional forms of status aspiration.<sup>50</sup> Among other tendencies, these concepts placed a high premium on government office and on forms of landownership which permitted an individual to emancipate himself from direct cultivation of the soil. Secondly, it is evident that the newly-emergent national and local elites included several families who were part and parcel of the traditional aristocracy of the early British period; in other words, that some

members of the traditional elite had used their bases of power and affluence to adapt themselves to the social transformation of British times by acquiring the necessary levels of Western education and even entering such new status-consolidating professions as those of medicine and law.

The national and local elites would seem to have been more differentiated than the traditional elite of pre-British and early-British days. Economic distinctions in the form of income-levels were more accentuated than before and provided lines of division that were "horizontal" in the sense that stratification along levels of income are horizontal. Such distinctions were compounded by "vertical" lines of cleavage imposed by long-standing communal (ethnic) and religious affiliations, vertical in the sense that they cut across income-levels and included all strata under one ethnic or religious umbrella. The rise of new elites would also seem to have exacerbated the age-old distinctions imposed by regional and caste differences. Since the newly-emergent national elite was composed largely of Low-Country Sinhalese families,<sup>51</sup> the Kandyan segments of the national and local elites responded with some degree of jealousy, parochialism and hostility to the domination thus implied. Caste rivalry was accentuated by the fact that numerically significant sections of the national elite were from the *karava* and *salagama* castes.<sup>52</sup> Neither were Low-Country Sinhalese elites united. Within the national elite, the Low-Country *goyigama* elite, represented by such families as the Obeyesekeres, Dias Bandaranaiques and Pieris Siriwardhanas, still retained their hold on the Ceylonese section of the Establishment and was openly hostile to the rising *goyigama* families represented by such individuals as N. D. P. Silva, D. C. G. Attygalle, D. C., F. R. and D. S. Senanayake, Dr. C. A. Hewavitarna and D. B. Jayatilaka and treated them as interlopers. Speaking broadly, therefore, one can refer to several major factional conflicts within the Sinhalese section of the national elite: the Kandyan elite vs the Low-Country Sinhalese elite; the *goyigama* establishment elite vs the newly-emergent *goyigama* elite; the *goyigama* establishment elite vs the *karava* elite; the *karava* elite vs the *salagama* elite. It is probable that the local elite was drawn into this complex of conflicts. Such conflicts, however, did not serve as overriding considerations on every occasion. The lines of factionalism were not rigid. Social contacts and marriage alliances sometimes cut across these divisions. The circumstances peculiar to each issue influenced the patterns of grouping and conflict. Groups coalesced, split and realigned themselves.

The national and local elites, therefore, were composed of dissimilar parts and possessed a heterogeneous nature. At the same time, nevertheless, the different parts of the national elite were linked by important common denominators.<sup>53</sup> Whatever their caste or race or religion, members of the national elite generally did not query the existence of private property or of private enterprise. Their very existence as an elite rested (in part) on these pillars. Whatever their origins once they had consolidated their position as members of the national elite, they became members of a single class — the term "class" being used in the Marxian sense of a social group which draws its income from similar sources and thereby has a common interest in relation to other such groups or classes in society. In short it was an elite that was representative of the capitalist class which formed the upper crust of the indigenous society. In this sense all its members had a certain community of interest with the British ruling elite<sup>54</sup> who were also part (the dominant part) of the capitalist class.

Their class situation provided the different segments of the national elite with a degree of homogeneity<sup>55</sup> It might perhaps, be possible to depict this class situation as the basic framework within which they functioned, as a circumference so to speak which enveloped and linked the heterogenous elements of the national elite. But its walls were thin. The very heterogeneity of the national elite imposed numerous strains which, every now and then, breached the community of interest engendered by class. No study of major political and social development in British Ceylon will be adequate which does not recognise both the heterogeneity and the class homogeneity of the national elite.<sup>56</sup>

### **Tributary Streams of Nationalism**

Twentieth century Ceylonese nationalism developed largely within the social formations which have been described in this paper as national and local elites, though the national elite also contained elements who were strongly anglo-phile and unsympathetic to the demands of its leading political activists. Throughout, the most prominent element in the broad stream of nationalism was a group of ultra-moderate constitutionalists whose principal demand was initially limited to requests for greater Ceylonese participation in government, whose agitation followed constitutional and moderate paths, and whose culture and value system was significantly Westernised. There was another element, represented by such men as Ponnambalam Arunachalam,<sup>57</sup> Dr. P. M. Lisboa Pinto, A. E. Bultjens, C. E. Victor S. Corea, A. E. Goonesinha, A. P. Tambyah, C. H. Z. Fernando and Mohamed Reyah, whose ideas were more radical and sometimes included an active interest in relatively more radical types of trade union organisation than those favoured by the ultra-moderate constitutionalists. This group can be labelled the "mild-radicals".<sup>58</sup> Both these groups, however, included several individuals who sympathised and associated with the religio-cultural revivalist movement noticed (briefly) earlier. The latter constituted another tributary stream of nationalism, a stream which was largely Sinhala-Buddhist rooted and traditionalist in its orientation and was greatly influenced by such cultural and religious developments as the Buddhist-Christian debates of the mid-nineteenth century and the Buddhist Theosophical Movement. Its leadership included personnel from both the national and local elites - with such individuals as Arthur V. Dias, W. H. W. Perera, Walisinha Harischandra, the Anagarika Dharmapala, Martinus C. Perera, P. B. Ratnayake, R. A. Mirando, W. E. Bastian, and Lindamullege John de Silva representative of the national elite; and such personnel as C. Don Bastian, (Pundit) Thomas Karunaratne, D. E. F. V. Abayakoon, Walter Andrew Samerasekera, Hemendra Sepala Perera, P. H. Abraham Silva, J. E. Gunesekera, Brachmachari D. E. Wickremasuriya, G. H. "Boralasgamuwa" Perera, Dinetti Buddhadasa and D. W. Wickremaratchi<sup>59</sup> drawn from the local elite.

While recognising the diverse origins and forms of Ceylonese nationalism, any analysis which attempts to represent these patterns in a cut-and-dried style does so at its own peril. Several political activists straddled at least two of the three tributary streams of nationalist thinking that I have depicted.

### Local Educational and Religious Associations at the Turn of the Century

Both a product and an engine of the religio-cultural revivalist movement, the local educational and religious associations which sprang up during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constitute a largely neglected yet significant historical phenomenon. While the evidence I have come across is fragmentary it is nevertheless adequate enough to suggest that there was a proliferation of these associations or *samāgam* during this period. A *Sinhalese Diary* for 1893 mentions 25 associations, a few with several branches, which fall within our range of interest.<sup>60</sup> They seem to have been a late nineteenth century development. Of the fourteen associations on which the date of inauguration is noted, eight (plus one branch association) had been started between 1890-92, and four in the 1880s.<sup>61</sup> The associations were not confined to Colombo and major urban centres. Both the *Diary* and evidence dating from the first two decades of the twentieth century indicate that market towns and service-centres such as Panadura, Ambalangoda, Gintota, Weligama, Matara and Tangalle on the sea coast, and Gampola, Pelmadulla, Bandaragama, Veyangoda, Akuressa, Rambukkana and Gampaha in the interior, were among the places where such associations were located<sup>62</sup>. Several of these service-centres were little more than villages at this stage; and there can be little doubt that Kumbaldiwala, Attangalla and Kamburupitiya, where temperance societies were active in the 1910s, were villages.

The evidence on the social background of the office-bearers which I have been able to gather so far is limited and pertains to a fraction of the individuals listed.<sup>63</sup> On these flimsy foundations it appears that the social bases varied. In the association in Pelmadulla and that representing the Three Korales the leadership was provided by the traditional aristocracy, *ratemahatmayas* and *korales* from well-known Kandyan families.<sup>64</sup> In other instances one finds the lower rungs of the headmen system—*vidane aratchies* and constable *aratchies* among the office bearers.<sup>65</sup> A second group of leaders was the Sinhala literati<sup>66</sup>. C. Don Bastian was the President of the Colombo Society for the Development of Wisdom (Colombo *Gnānā-bi-vurdi Samāgama*); P. Weragama Bandara G. P. Weerasekera and D. H. Samarasinghe Kaviratna Pandithuma were among the officials of the Buddhist Theosophical Society of Colombo.<sup>67</sup> Among the active participants and office-bearers of the Colombo Society for the Awakening of Intelligence, which functioned from Slave Island in the 1900's, were the Sinhala journalists, poets and writers, Abraham Mendis Gunasekera, Walter Andrew Samarasekera (1876-1955). G. D. Palis Appuhamy (c. 1842-1910) and Muhandiram John A. Perera Wijenayake.<sup>68</sup> A third group were ayurvedic physicians.<sup>69</sup> A fourth group were the small businessmen and traders mostly representative of a newly-emergent entrepreneurial local elite. In the religious association in Hatton (begun in 1884) four out of the five office-bearers were *mudalalies*;<sup>75</sup> and it would seem that petty entrepreneurs exerted a significant influence in the activities of similar associations in the early twentieth century. They were a very active element, for instance, in the temperance and religious societies in the Kegalle-Rambukkana area in the 1900's and 1910's; examples being one Wijetunga (a trader) of Gampaha, P. H. Abraham Silva (small business) in Rambukkana, Setuhamy (a small landowner, dealer in plantains and a fiscal's officer) in Rambukkana, Sirimala Mudalali and his brother Lapaya Mudalali of Manikkawa near Hingula and a "sundry boutique trader and baker" named W. J. Fernando.<sup>71</sup> P. M. Udeni de Silva (1887-1914) who is said to have been the

Secretary of the Kandy Peasants Association for a short time and been active in social reform movements, appears to have been a businessmen of sorts.<sup>72</sup> Finally, it should be noted that most of the associations mentioned in the *Sinhalese Diary* 1893 had Buddhist priests as their patrons and advisers.<sup>73</sup>

The overwhelming majority of the associations mentioned in the *Sinhalese Diary*, 1893, 22 out of the 25, were concerned with the development and protection of the Buddhist doctrines, and with the furtherance of knowledge through the sponsorship of Buddhist schools. The names adopted by the association's were generally indicative of their objects. A few typical examples were:<sup>74</sup>

- Parama Vig-ñā-nārtha Samāgama* : The Buddhist Theosophical Society  
*Sugatha Dhamma-dara Samāgama* : The Society for the Aid of the Buddhist Doctrines  
*Sugatha Sāsana-lōka Samāgama* : The Society for the Englightenment of the Buddhist *sāsana*  
*Sugatha Sama-yōdaya Samāgama* : The Society for the Illumination of Buddhism  
*Bauddha Dhammō-pa-kāra Samāgama* : The Society for the Aid of the Buddhist Doctrines.

However, the objectives were often clarified further in the diary. Notes indicate that several of the associations were responsible for running schools, generally described as "Buddhist schools". Many societies sought to prevent the breach of the five Buddhist precepts and to promote meritorious deeds. The main object of the *Sugatha Dhamma-dara Samāgama* of Panadura, for instance, was teaching the youth Buddhism and the secular sciences (*lavukika shāsthra*). Among their objectives a few specified social welfare work of various types, the clearance and maintenance of roads, the prevention of false litigation, the prevention of gambling disturbances (*sūdu keli arali perali*) and the promotion of good behaviour and self-help. The Gintota *Sugatha-sāsano-pa-kāri Samāgama* even believed in assisting the government to collect its taxes in time. There was one association with branches in Colombo, Ambalangoda and Galle which was intended to advance the knowledge of the Sinhalese people and to promote their languages so as to further the unity of the race, to enable decisions to be reached scientifically and to broaden the use of the Sinhala language. The *Gnānā-nu-kula Samāgama* (The Society concerned with Wisdom) of Moratuwa sought to improve knowledge and debating skills without any partisanship towards caste, religion or religious sect. The *Bandaragama Grāmārak-shaka Samāgama* (Village Protection Society) in which John A. Kotelawala was President sought to prevent crime and work for the general 'good' (*yahapatha di-yu-nu-kirieema*).<sup>75</sup>

The sixth annual report of the Colombo Society for the Awakening of Intelligence, covering the year 1904, indicates that its activities were of a literary and intellectual nature. They included debates on topical questions such as the payment of headmen and school curricula, as well as debates and talks on such topics as "From What Do You Get the Best Results: Eating Vegetables or Meat?" and "Waking up Early".<sup>76</sup>

Evidence on the activities of such individuals as P. H. Abraham Silva and Arthur V. Dias and some of the objectives adopted by the Total Abstinence Central Union in 1915,<sup>77</sup> leads me to the supposition that these primarily religio-educational societies took increasingly to social service work during the early years of the twentieth century; in short, that they became concerned with village upliftment on a wider front. One can safely presume that, following the major temperance campaign of 1903-04, temperance work became one of their predominant interests. Consumption of alcohol and drunkenness were commonly regarded as introductions from the West and aspects which were both alien to and repugnant to indigenous culture.<sup>78</sup> One would expect the activists in the religio-cultural revivalism, namely the office-bearers and members of the associations mentioned above to take wholeheartedly to such a cause as temperance. One piece of evidence supports this view. Two of the religio-educational associations in Gampola are said to have discussed questions of temperance during the 1910's though a temperance society known as the *Siri Punyawardhana Amadyapa Samāgama* existed in the same village.<sup>79</sup> With the abatement of the temperance campaign in the late 1910's and the 1920's moreover, village improvement objectives of a broader, more varied sort gained increasing importance in the *mahajana sabhās* which were launched under the auspices of F. R. Senanayake, the Ceylon Reform League and the Ceylon National Congress from 1919 onwards.

### The Temperance Movement in the Early Twentieth Century

Studies by Kumari Jayawardena and P. T. M. Fernando <sup>80</sup> have done much to clarify the nature of the temperance movement at the broad national level during the early twentieth century. Since the consumption of liquor was widely regarded as a Western innovation of un-Buddhist flavour, the temperance agitation attracted many elements who were hostile to excessive Westernization and who wished to emphasise the wholesome aspects of indigenous traditions. It also had a strong political content. It was used as a facade for attacks on the government. It was a very convenient and effective means of embarrassing the British authorities.<sup>81</sup> The political activists in the national elite made a shrewd tactical decision in choosing the issue of temperance as a major platform on which a challenge was directed at the British. It must be remembered that at this stage the local milieu was essentially conservative and non-violent in character; and that most of the political activists were members of the liberal professions or owners of properties. As such, their clientele was partly British. Their economic interests as well as social position was largely dependent on the maintenance of goodwill among the powers-that-be. They could not jeopardise their position through overt and extremist political activities.<sup>82</sup> In the second place, a temperance campaign was a very effective way of reaching down to the masses and mobilising their support. An appeal to tradition is often an effective channel to the roots of society. History affords numerous examples of how "early movements of criticism against European overlords managed to win mass support only when they started injecting a religious content into their politics".<sup>83</sup> The question of temperance possessed more than a dram of religion in its measure of political appeal. The Ceylonese temperance leaders chose well. And it was a considered choice. Fernando notes that the leaders of the temperance movement "visualised the temperance organisation as being a possible basis on which a nation wide political movement could be initiated."<sup>84</sup> It is possible that similar motives contributed towards their decision to launch a

movement to make the Sinhalese New Year Day a "National Day". Beginning in April 1914 public celebrations were held every Sinhalese New Year. At these occasions the refreshments, dances and games took a traditional form. Only Sinhalese were invited. Speeches were in Sinhala.<sup>85</sup>

There is little doubt that the temperance movement "attracted mass participation in both rural and urban areas,"<sup>86</sup> particularly in the 1910's though the fact that its vigour was not sustained in the 1920's made its impact much more limited than the potentialities it carried. The high points of the movement were the campaign of 1903-04; and that of 1912-15 which was directed against the government's decision to introduce the excise system of Madras through the Excise Ordinance of 1912, the concomitant increase of toddy taverns, and a General Order to government servants in April 1914.<sup>87</sup> The command centre of the latter agitation was the Total Abstinence Central Union of Colombo, which was inaugurated at the Young Men's Buddhist Association in July 1912.

The Central Union had about a score of active members who met once a week for such matters as organizing new societies and arranging propaganda meetings. At the village level there were societies which met at least once a month. When several societies were established in a locality they were placed under a District Union ... Many such Unions were established, the most well-known being the Hapitigam Korale Union. Once every three months representatives of the Central Union and the District Unions met in conference to discuss organizational matters. And bi-annual conventions were held in Colombo...<sup>88</sup>.

In 1915 and 1917 two different sources claimed that the total membership of the temperance societies was about 50,000.<sup>89</sup> The tactics adopted by the temperance leaders were not confined to memoranda, deputations and lobbying directed at the British authorities. They resorted to propaganda of a non-violent but sturdy nature through the press, mass public meetings, pamphleteering and the formation of district and village societies. Some of the meetings drew mammoth crowds. It would appear, for instance, that about 25,000 and 30,000 people attended meetings conducted by the Hapitigam Korale Union in November 1913 and August 1913.

The leadership of the temperance movement was centred among members of the national elite. The leaders included such ultra-moderate constitutionalists as the Senanayakes, D. B. Jayatiiraka, W. A. de Siiva, H. A. P. Sandrasagara, A. Kanagasabai, P. Ramanathan, and Dr. Marcus Fernando. It included religio-cultural revivalists in the persons of the Hewavitaranas, Martinus C. Perera, Lindemullege John de Silva Arthur V. Dias, R. A. Mirando and Walisinha Harischandra among several examples. It also provided an opportunity for some individuals who were knocking at the doors of national elite status, such men as P. B. Ratnayake and L. B. Ranaraja, to effect an entry and consolidate their position through the services they rendered in temperance work.<sup>91</sup> In seeking mass support, however, they needed a host of intermediaries and assistants, both in urban and rural areas.<sup>92</sup> In the absence of a study of the temperance movement at the grass roots, only tentative suggestions can be made regarding these intermediary layers of the temperance organisation. Within

the Sinhalese districts it would seem that the support which the temperance movement received varied from locality to locality. In some villages it is probable that some of the existing *samāgamas* were metamorphosed into temperance societies. Whether the societies were new there is reason to believe that members of the local elite *status quo ante*, provided the leadership, though it is possible that a few individuals with strong convictions and personalities climbed into the rungs of the local elite through temperance agitation. These men served as catalysts of opinion. They also provided the links between the political activists in the national elite and the masses. Among such examples were P. H. Abraham Silva of Dodanduwa and Rambukkana, H. de Abrew Rajapakse of Dumbara, the Hettihewage de Silvas in Gampola, Loku Banda Aturapana in Kegalle, R. James of Kumbaldiwala, H. T. Gurusinghe and Sirimala of Manikkawa in Hingula,<sup>93</sup> Thambugala Mudalali of Hingula,<sup>94</sup> the Wickremaratchi brothers (G. P. and P. P.) of Gampaha,<sup>95</sup> D. W. Wickremaratchi, the journalists U. P. Ekanayake and C. Don Bastian,<sup>96</sup> Dinetti Buddhadasa<sup>97</sup> and S. M. Perera of Matale.<sup>98</sup>

The aftermath of the communal riots of mid 1915 provided a setback to the temperance movement. As a measure of self-protection, its leaders attempted to disprove the British authorities contention that it was a political movement. The leading Ceylonese political activists, moreover, devoted their attention to the post-riots campaign for justice. Since the media of public meetings and propaganda in the press were employed for this purpose this campaign produced a semblance of mass support. It also stirred national sentiment and prompted the political activists to concentrate on the demand for further instalments of political reform, demands which they pressed through a revived Ceylon National Association, the newly constituted (1917) Ceylon Reform League and, subsequently, through the Ceylon National Congress. As a consequence, the temperance movement lost much of its early vigour. However, the government's decision, 1917-18, to accept the principle of local option in deciding on the existence of taverns, itself a delayed outcome of the temperance campaign served "as a stimulus for renewed activity" among the temperance societies. Local option permitted the closure of a tavern if 75% of the road-tax payers in the locality voted against it.<sup>99</sup> The temperance societies now sought to utilise this opportunity of achieving their objects by rallying mass (male) support in preparation for local option polls. These campaigns called for considerable organisational and propaganda work by the temperance leaders (generally from the national elite) and their agents (generally from the local elite) in the villages. The diaries of the Revd. John Simon de Silva provide evidence of the concentrated activity which such a campaign involved. Revd. de Silva was stationed in Kandy and was one of the principal organisers of the temperance movement in Kandy and the Central Province in 1921. The local option campaign in this region involved discussions with the government agent, committee meetings, public meetings, lectures, street preaching, house to house visiting and parades with bands, street drums and cymbals. During the period of 152 days extending from June to November (inclusive) 1921 Revd. de Silva devoted attention to tasks connected with the local option campaign on at least 71 days. On many occasions virtually his whole day was taken up with such work. Besides campaigning in the town of Kandy and its environs (e. g.: Peradeniya, Katugastota, Buwelikada), during this period he also paid visits to Tennekumbura, Teldeniya, Gampola and Nawalapitiya on temperance work.<sup>100</sup>

It would appear, however, that in the period 1888–late 1920's the temperance movement did not reach the heights of popularity that it secured in the period 1912–15. This was partly because the leading political activists had secured a beachhead in the corridors of political power and set their sights on more political reform. It was partly because the interests of the local associations were diverted towards political questions as well as the broader social and economic problems arising from a policy of village upliftment. The latter change is reflected in organisational realignments. From 1919–20 till the early 1930's the mantle of organisational leadership in district and rural politics was generally taken over by societies bearing the name "*Mahajana Sabhā*". Many of these societies served as offshoots of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* and were affiliated to the Ceylon National Congress.

### The People's Associations or Mahajana Sabhas

The starting point of the *Mahajana Sabhās* was the formation of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* on the 19th September 1919. Remarkably, the impulse came from the moderate-constitutionalist wing of the national elite. It is widely believed that this was not merely the brainchild of F. R. Senanayake but also reached fruition because of his energies.<sup>101</sup> At a joint meeting of the Ceylon Reform League and the Ceylon National Association on the 13th September 1918 it was decided "to form a political association in Colombo with branches in the country to embrace the Sinhalese-speaking public".<sup>102</sup> The organisation was not meant to be communal. Several Tamils attended the early meetings. In addressing the inaugural meeting in Sinhalese Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam made it clear that a parallel movement would be launched in the Tamil Districts; and F. R. Senanayake emphasised that it was not intended to be an association of any particular race caste or creed.<sup>103</sup> It was only after the split between Sinhalese and Tamil leaders in the early 1920's that the *Mahajana sabhā* movement like the Ceylon National Congress assumed a predominantly Sinhalese hue.<sup>104</sup> The main object was "to reach the great masses of the people";<sup>105</sup> in the words of the Ceylon Reform League "to reach as large a propotion as possible of people who speak the vernacular"<sup>106</sup>. It was in keeping with this objective that Piyadasa Sirisena proposed that the association should be called the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* and should seek "to promote the social political and economic interests of the people of Ceylon".<sup>107</sup> An associated and underlying aim was the desire to show the British authorities and other critics that the movement for self-government was not confined to a small body of Colombo lawyers; and that the vernacular-speaking sections of the populace were sympathetic to the "ideals towards which the English-educated classes" had striven in the 1920's.<sup>108</sup> Broadly speaking therefore it was also a movement to make the people aware of their rights and to widen their political horizons.<sup>109</sup>

More *mahajana sabhās* sprouted soon. By the end of 1920 there were *mahajana sabhās* in Kegalle and Jaffna; and by 1923 in Kandy Rambukkana Telwatta and Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia.<sup>110</sup> By 1927 there were at least twenty seven regionally-based associations bearing the designation *mahajana sabhā*. In the era preceding 1919 several regionally-based political bodies bearing the term 'Association' had functioned as branches of the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Reform League.<sup>111</sup> Several of these societies, such as those in Chilaw, Ambalangoda, Matale, Matara and Negambo, continued to carry the same name and to function as limbs of the newly-established Ceylon National Congress. A few, such

as that in Kandy, appear to have amalgamated with the *mahajana sabhās* or changed their name to *Mahajana Sabhā*. In Negombo and Matara *Mahajana Sabhās* coexisted with 'Associations'. More significant, however, was a new phenomenon. The political associations of the 1920's were not confined to the main towns and coastal centres such as Galle, Panadura, Chilaw and Kandy. They sprang up in such bazaar-towns and rural centres such as Rambukkana, Mahadampagama, Minuwangoda, Telwatta and Kendangamuwa; and in such areas as Otarapalata, Yatakalan Pattu and Ambatalanpahala. In some instances the development of these *Mahajana Sabhās* appears to have been due to the initiative of the central political bodies, the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* and the Ceylon National Congress.<sup>112</sup> In others their rise appears to have been the outcome of local initiative. In common with the regionally located "Associations",<sup>113</sup> the *mahajana sabhās* functioned as loosely-affiliated branches of the Ceylon National Congress. They were also loosely-attached limbs of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā*. The *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* was, in turn, affiliated to the Ceylon National Congress and was, in a sense, an associated command-post under the control of F. R. Senanayake (till 1925). In both cases the connections were loose. Neither the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* nor the Ceylon National Congress were tightly-disciplined and well-knit political organisations.

In keeping with the original intentions, the activities of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* and the regionally-located *sabhās* in the early 1920's were avowedly political. The reform of the Legislative Council was one of their major debating points and the occasion for many a protest of protests which took a non-violent and legal form.<sup>114</sup>

At the same time, the *mahajana sabhās* paid much attention to matters of economic and social reform. The upliftment of the villagers was one of their major interests.<sup>115</sup> They served as a conduit for grievances. They were a means of protest against governmental acts of omission or commission. The matters taken up ranged from complaints against government officers to the increase of school fees, the issue of books in the vernacular, the malfunctioning of a particular irrigation system, or the flooding of a paddy field. Broadly speaking, on the fragmentary evidence which I have examined, four major areas of interest could be delineated: (a) questions of food supply and paddy culture; (b) furthering the cause of temperance and abstinence from liquor by taking advantage of the system of local option; (c) education; and (d) the improvement of local government and institutions.<sup>116</sup>

The leadership of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* centred around F. R. Senanayake until his premature death in 1925. On the basis of a sketchy survey of the *mahajana sabhā* movement in the early 1920's, it seems that Arthur V. Dias, Amadoris Mendis, Revd. J. S. B. Mendis, A. A. Wickremesinghe, Forrester Obeyesekere, George E. de Silva and Revd. John Simon de Silva were among members of the national elite who took a continuous and active interest in the work of the *mahajana sabhās*. Among others who devoted their energies to the *mahajana sabhās* in the 1920's Dinetti Buddadasa of Pinwatte and Nuwara Eliya, J. E. Gunasekera, S. D. S. Gunasekera, A. P. Gunaratne (or Gooneratne) of Hangawatte, D. E. Jayakody of Katana, B. M. F. Jayaratne, D. D. W. Pratiraja, Charles V. Ranawaka, Peter Weerasekera of Yakkala, P. H. A. Silva of Rambukkana, A. P. Gunatilaka (Goonetillake) of Narammala, A. A. de Silva of Telwatta, Piyadasa Sirisena and D. W. Wickremaratchi appear to have been prominent.

My investigations of the social and occupational background of the *mahajana sabhā* activists have not preceded beyond a preliminary stage. Any views regarding the social composition of the movement must therefore be considered tentative. It is strongly suggested, however, that a large proportion of the active members could be classed within the local elites. This does not apply merely to the *mahajana sabhās* in the rural areas and in the service centre. It applies to the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* as well. J. E. D. Gunasekera and Piyadasa Sirisena had actively assisted the Ceylon Reform League to collect signatures for a memorial to the Secretary of State in 1917-18.<sup>117</sup> Gunasekera was competently bilingual, wore trousers and was a teacher at Ananda before he became the Principal of Mahabodhi College, a post he held when he was selected as Secretary of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā*.<sup>118</sup> Sirisena (1875-1946) was a prominent Sinhala journalist and novelist; from a rural and relatively poor background, he sported a *konde* and moustache (in the early twentieth century), generally wore a coat and cloth, and had only limited abilities in expressing himself in English; and is said to have been a propagandist for the temperance movement in the 1910's.<sup>119</sup> D. W. Wickremaratchi appears to have been a self-made man who was originally from Kuruwalana in Siyana Korale; competently bilingual, he entered the Sinhala journalist profession and is said to have been an editor of the *Sinhala Bauddhaya* and an officer in the Mahabodhi Society for a time in the period before 1910; in the late 1910's he was editor of the *Dinamina* when F. R. Senanayake put him in charge of the Mahajana Press<sup>120</sup> and made him editor of a Sinhala weekly named *Swadesha Mithraya*, which became (for a while) the organ of the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā*.<sup>121</sup>

The occupational and social background of those members of the local elite who participated in the *mahajana sabhās* varied. Journalists and teachers comprised one group. Provincial and suburban proctors, notaries public and coroners (a juridico-local elite) appear to have been another. There also seems to be a sprinkling of small landowners and ayurvedic physicians; and several businessmen.<sup>122</sup> A few appear to have been self-made men. Others were born into propertied families of high local status.

The political impact of the *mahajana sabhā's* however, was lessened by the fact that the leading political activists failed to maintain their interest in the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* after the death of F. R. Senanayake in 1925. This was largely because they were given a share in the government of the country through the Manning-Devonshire reforms of 1924 and the Donoughore Constitution of 1931, and through the slow but steady Ceylonization of the public services.<sup>123</sup> Thereby they "achieved a sense of participation in national affairs" and, as in the instance of the temperance cause, were "deflected away" from the original objectives which had led them to launch people's associations. In the period 1928-31, moreover, they were involved with the Donoughore Commission and the debate on its suggestions; and thereafter in the politics of electioneering and the political activities centred around the State Council and the demands for further constitutional reform. In consequence, the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā* seems to have declined.<sup>124</sup> Not so the regionally-located *mahajana sabhās* however. A good many sustained themselves and in the 1930's political organisations bearing similar designations appeared in localities which had not been as politically active before. In a context in which universal franchise operated, this is not surprising. These *mahajana sabhās*, also continued to function as affiliated branches of the still-surviving Ceylon National Congress

(which was in a weak and moribund state during a greater part of the 1930's). When the Congress began to shake off its lethargy in the late 1930's and when a new generation of political activists effected a rejuvenation (temporary) of the Congress in the early 1940's,<sup>125</sup> these *mahajana sabhās* provided the nucleus for its expansion and for its political activities. Under a new constitution which the Ceylon National Congress adopted for itself around 1940, its branches were known as "National Congress Associations" (e. g. Uturu Yatakala Pattu National Congress Association. In several instances a *mahajana sabhā* altered its name or served as the basis for such a branch association.) According to one list there were 32 branch associations of this sort around 1940-41, including such places as Otarapalata and Medapalata in Chilaw District, Dunagaha-Godagaha near Negambo, Talatuoya in Kandy District, Baddegama, Bingiriya, Veyangoda and Ahangama.<sup>126</sup> Another table depicts the formation of 79 branch associations between 1940 and 1945.<sup>127</sup> A third table mentions 56 branch associations for the period 1944-45; and indicates (for what it is worth) that in October 1945 out of these 56 associations claimed a membership of 9303 members.<sup>128</sup>

One of the most significant features in the *mahajana sabhā* movement in the Sinhalese districts was the fact that proceedings were in Sinhala. Consequently, a much larger number of individuals were drawn into politics than had hitherto been the case (the temperance agitation excepted). Political participation was extended beyond the limited, numerically-miniscule, English-speaking urban circles. The local elite was among the elements who profited from this development. Through the *mahajana sabhās* their political experience was considerably furthered. As in the case of the temperance movement, they received useful leadership-training and organisational experience. They were afforded new avenues for political initiative. It also follows that the political and social contacts engendered in the *mahajana sabhās* had an influence on their thinking. In other words, the people's associations would have been one of the springs from which the ideology, or the ideologies of the local elite would have fashioned. It is of great significance that among the prominent activists in the *mahajana sabhās* were several members of the Sinhala literati: such as Piyadasa Sirisena, D. W. Wickremaratchi, and Dinetti Buddhadasa. It also included many others who were promoters of the religio-cultural revivalism that prevailed during this period: (1920's & 1930's) such persons as J. E. Gunasekera, V. K. "Gandhi" Jayawardena, Peter Weerasekera of Yakkata and D. S. Goonesekera of Kodagoda and Galle;<sup>129</sup> and such "village Hampdens" as P. H. Abraham Silva, Brachmacharya D. E. Wickramasuriya, A. P. Gunaratne of Mirigama, Muhandiram D. Alagiyawanna of Siyane Korale, A. A. de Silva of Telwatta, K. L. Justin Perera of Rambukkana and G. A. A. Gunatilake of Otarapalata,<sup>130</sup> and such representatives of the national elite as Dr. C. A. Hewavitarana, P. B. Ratnayake, P. de. S. Kularatne, W. H. W. Perera, Arthur V. Dias and Amadoris Mendis. Both these individuals and the evidence which has been marshalled earlier stand testimony to the fact that the religio-cultural revivalist movement was not "completely divorced" from the political movement for self-government as so many have alleged. There was a significant cross-fertilization between the two through the temperance movement and the *mahajana sabhās*, particularly within the layers of the local elite. During the early twentieth century there was greater political life in several rural areas than has been generally recognised hitherto. Nor was political activity in the 1920's confined to the *mahajana sabhās* and other regionally based branches of the Ceylon National Congress, or to the trade union and labour associations in Colombo.<sup>131</sup> There were several other political associations whose designations and membership are of relevance; to cite a few, the Galle Ayurvedic

Association, the Progressive Nationalist Party which appears to have been centred around Valentine S. Perera and C. Ponnambalam (and even attracted young S.W. R. D. Bandaranaike's attention), and the Sinhalese National Association led by D. H. S. Nanayakkara and M. P. de Zoysa (Snr)<sup>132</sup> Several of these associations were mushroom organisations. Nevertheless, they reflect a quickening of the political pulse and must be taken into account in unravelling the political dynamics and shifting alignments of the 1920,s. Even more relevant to the political story of the late 1920's and the succeeding decades is the role of the Village Committees and an organisation known as the All-Ceylon Village Committees' Conference which was launched on the 16th-17th December 1925. The latter was initiated by Arthur V. Dias and D. H. S. Nanayakkara <sup>133</sup> It sought to federate and unite the existing local government bodies in the villages so as to further the "progress and well-being of the people".<sup>134</sup> Bandaranaike became its President around 1929-30, a post he held for several decades.<sup>135</sup> The all-Ceylon Village Committees Conference contributed powerfully towards his political base. Significantly, D.H.S. Nanayakkara was an office-bearer in this organisation for several decades and among those who participated in its activities were M. P. de Zoysa (Snr.), Mudaliyar E. A. Abayasekera, Muhandiram D. Alagiyawanna, D. W. Wickremaratchi, Hemapala Munidasa, D. S. Gooneskera and Mudaliyar D. J. Senaratne <sup>136</sup>. The relationship between the All Ceylon Village Committees Conference, the Village Committees, the *mahajana sabhās* and other branches of the Ceylon National Congress forms an important part of the political dynamics of rural Ceylon. It also happens to be one of the several areas of lacunae in our political historiography<sup>137</sup>.

### The Period 1931-1956

Another facet which requires attention is the role of the local elite, the regionally-located and suburban political associations, and the Village Committees during the elections for the State Council in 1931 and 1936 (and during by-elections). The elections were considerably influenced by the role of personalities. The social standing and local roots of a candidate and his kin were among the crucial determining factors. Caste and religion were also of some importance.<sup>138</sup> But all the candidates needed intermediaries and assistants. Ludowyk notes that universal franchise "brought into the foreground during elections and kept in the background thereafter a nondescript crew of canvassing agents, contact men and public relations specialists without whom elections could not have been successfully managed"; and that "the number of Independents who appeared for election was surprisingly large, even when 'parties' had been organized later, because extrapolitical considerations and the activities of this tribe of 'fixers' were more decisive than party organization".<sup>139</sup> Much of this is probably true. But whether these 'fixers' were "nondescript" can be subject to serious question. In examining such questions particular attention should be paid to the local elite and such political associations as existed in rural, suburban and urban Ceylon.

Among other factors, two new political forces added new dimensions to, and produced further complexities in the politics of Ceylon. One was the Left Movement which commenced in the early 1930's and which chrySTALLISED around the *Lankā Samasamāja Party* when it was formed in December 1935.<sup>140</sup> The second was the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* which was formed in 1937.

While the Leftist parties concentrated largely on urban Ceylon (and more latterly on forming trade unions among the plantation labour force), they were not wholly inattentive to the needs of the villagers particularly in constituencies that were being nursed by some of their leaders. While in keeping with their ideology, their critique of the headman system in the 1930's was also designed to build up support among the masses.<sup>141</sup> The militant romanticism of the late 1930's, the war years and the immediate post-war era enabled the Left Movement to capture the support of a significant section of the younger generation. Among those attracted to the Left Movement were several whose orientations were Sinhala-Buddhist, whose abilities of expression in Sinhala were greater than that of English, and whose background was lower middle-class: B. J. Fernando, Basil Silva, Bodhipala Waidyasekera, Chandraratne Manawasinghe, Somaweera Chandrasiri and Henry Pieris to name but a few. At this stage (1931-1947) most of these individuals would have fallen within the category of the local elite defined earlier in this essay. In time, it appears that tensions developed between their orientation and the ideologically rigid and doctrinaire policies pursued by the western-educated urbanised leadership of the LSSP.<sup>142</sup> For several of these individuals, the tensions produced a strain on their party loyalties. It was partly (and only partly) for this reason that as the language and religious issues built up in the late 1940's and early 1950's, several of them drifted away from the LSSP (e. g. Manawasinghe & Chandrasiri). Significantly, the greatest single split within the party, that of October 1953, which led to the breakaway of roughly one third of the membership, occurred on an issue which boils down to the question of language and general orientation, though the formal issue was the question of coalition or cooperation with the SLFP.<sup>143</sup> Of those who left the LSSP, several appear to have (eventually) found their 'natural' political hearth within the ranks of the SLFP. Others joined Philip Gunawardena's VLSSP, the only Marxist-based party which tacked its sails according to the developing winds of political change and coalesced with the SLFP under the designation *Mahajana Eksath Peramuna*.<sup>144</sup>

As for the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā*, it is significant that the resolution which proposed such a name was moved by Piyadasa Sirisena.<sup>145</sup> From its inception it was an organisation that was dominated by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.<sup>146</sup> It was also closely associated with the All-Ceylon Village Committees Conference. There appears to have been a considerable overlap in the personnel who were active in both organisations. Among those who assisted Bandaranaike in the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* were A. Ratnayake, A. P. Jayasuriya, R. S. S. Gunewardena Jayaweera Kuruppu, D. M. Rajapakse, on the one hand, and M. P. de Zoysa (Snr.), Muhandiram D. Alagiyawanna, D. W. Wickremaratchi, Jim Munasinha, Hemapala Munidasa, D. H. S. Nanayakkara and Mudaliyar D. J. Senaratne on the other; while Nanayakkara and Senaratne were Joint Honorary Secretaries for a considerable period of time.<sup>147</sup> Its membership included prominent members of an older generation of Sinhala literati, besides Piyadasa Sirisena and D. W. Wickremaratchi (died: 1949) Walter Andrew Samarasekera (died 1948), W. Daniel Fernando Waidyasekera (1833-1946) and G. H. Boralasgamuwa Perera (died 1948) were members.<sup>148</sup> So were representatives of a younger generation of journalists and authors if one is to judge by the names of Hemapala Munidasa, Jayantha Wirasekera and W. D. S. Gauthamadasa. It is widely known that Buddhist priests, ayurvedic physicians (e. g. W. Daniel Fernando Waidyasekera, D. J. S. Parana Yapa and Pandit G. P. Wickremaratchi) and teachers were among the most active elements in the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā*. At

the same time a younger generation of activists of local elite status (such as L. M. Gooneratne of Mutwal and P. P. Siriwardena) joined the other generations represented by such persons as D. D. W. Pratiraja and D. S. Goonesekera. It must be kept in mind that one could be a member of the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* without severing connections with the Ceylon National Congress (and more latterly the UNP).<sup>149</sup> When S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike resigned from the UNP in 1951, however, several of the individuals mentioned above as well as a section of the rank and file in the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* followed him into the SLFP and provided the nucleus around which his political foundations were expanded. The connections between the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* and the local government bodies on the one hand and the revivalist elite and the SLFP - MEP are recognised. One need not belabour the point.

### The Threads

The political experience of the revivalist elite in the MEP coalition of 1956 was not limited to the two decades preceding the year 1956. It dates back to the early twentieth century. The route by which this essay has tried to establish these connections has been that of biographical data on members of the politically-alert local elite, data set within background descriptions of the religio-cultural *samāgam* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the temperance societies, the *mahajana sabhās*, and the local government associations of the twentieth century. This methodology raises one major problem. The politically-active local elite of the twentieth century were numerically larger than the coterie which dominated the Ceylon National Congress and represented the western-oriented national elite. Do the few examples provided in this essay suffice to establish the aforesaid connections? Phrased thus, a negative answer is called for. However, two factors must be kept in mind. In the first place, several individuals who have been cited as examples were prominent members of the Sinhala literati. As such, their influence and example would have extended beyond their immediate circle of friends and acquaintances and also extended beyond their life-span. Secondly, in its range of coverage this survey has been fragmentary, frankly so. The social composition of the temperance societies and the *mahajana sabhās* have not been studied in detail. The social background of many individuals who have been identified as participants in such associations have not been probed. In such circumstances the evidence of interpenetration between the political and the religio-cultural movements of the early twentieth century on the one hand, and the instances of connections between these movements and the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* on the other are of significant proportions. The threads of my argument are not so thin as they might seem. There is enough to support a tentative hypothesis.

The starting point is the religio-cultural revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The revival was not completely divorced from the political movement towards self-government. Both movements influenced each other. The interpenetration is seen in the temperance societies and the *mahajana sabhās* as well as the literature of the Sinhala educated intelligentsia. It is also seen in the interests and activities of certain political activists, both within the national elite and within the local elite particularly within the latter. In short, cross-fertilisation occurred to some degree at both levels. Concomitantly therefore, the national and local elites could be said to have influenced each other. At the very least, the national elite appear to have influenced the local elite. Members of the local elite served as

agents of the national elite. They functioned as their intermediaries in the temperance movement, in the *Lanka Mahajana Sabhā*, in the Ceylon National Congress, and even perhaps in the All-Ceylon Village Committee Conference. But while being agents, many of them were also local leaders. The Sinhala journalists and authors were able to mould opinion. The office-bearers and activists in the regionally located associations had room to exercise their own initiatives. They were not mere puppets. In both these ways, in more diverse ways perhaps, their organisational experience was nurtured and developed. So too, in all probability, was their political thinking. And it would seem that they were given increasing recognition with the passage of years. The executive committee of the Ceylon National Congress in the four years 1920 to 1923 did not include any individuals whom I would class within the local elite, with the exception of J. E. Gunasekera.<sup>150</sup> From 1924 however, members of the local elite status began to enter its ranks as representatives of regionally located *mahajana sabhās* and other associations. In 1924, for instance, S. M. Fernando and J. W. Perera (Ambatala Pahala M. S.), D. H. S. Nanayakkara (Sinhalese National Association), M. P. Senanayake (Minuwangoda Association), F. P. Seneviratne (Kadugannawa Association), D. P. S. Setunga (Nawalapitiya National Association), P. H. Abraham Silva (Rambukkana M. S.) and Oliver Stembo (Moratumulla Union) were nominated to the Executive Committee. Recognition did not mean a decisive role on the bridge, however. They remained intermediaries and catalysts.

The organisational experience and the attitudinal influences that were gathered by the local elite through these opportunities and activities constitute the political antecedents of the revivalist elite of the 1950's. Through personal association in these organisations and through the political and religio-cultural literature, the experience and the ideas of one generation were passed down to a new generation. The politically-alert local elite of the 1900's can be linked to the revivalist elite of the 1950's through a lineage of individuals. The individuals provide the links in an ideological and attitudinal chain, a chain which constituted a stream of thought as well as a strand of organisational experience. In the 1890's and 1900's this chain is represented by such persons as C. Don Bastian, P. Weragama Bandara, Abraham Mendis Gunasekera, Hemendra Sepala Perera, Battaramulle Sri Subhuti *thero* and Piyadasa Sirisena; in the 1910's by such examples as Perera, Subhuti *thero*, Sirisena, Mudaliyar E. A. Abayasekera, P. M. Udeni de Silva, J. E. Gunasekera, A. P. Gunaratne, Walter Andrew Samarasekera and D. W. Wickremaratchi; in the period 1919-37 by Sirisena, Abayasekera, J. E. Gunasekera, Gunaratne, Samarasekera, D. W. Wickremaratchi, D. S. Goonesekera, D. H. S. Nanayakkara, Muhandiram D. Alagiyawanna and M. P. de Zoysa (Snr.) and in the decades after the formation of the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* (in 1937) by Sirisena, Abayasekera, Samarasekera, D. W. Wickremaratchi, Goonesekera, Nanayakkara, Alagiyawanna, de Zoysa, G. P. Wickremaratchi, Jim Munasinha, Mudaliyar D. J. Senaratne, J.S. Parana Yapa of Maradana, Hemapala Munidasa and M. P. de Zoysa (Jnr.).

It will be seen that several individuals had a long life-span and that they must have transmitted their ideas and their experiences to several generations of youthful (or new) adherents to the "cause". Among those who carried the political heritage of the pre-Donoughmore era into the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* perhaps the most important members of local elite status were Piyadasa Sirsena (1875-1946), D. W. Wickremaratchi (d. 1949), D. H. S. Nanayak-

kara, Muhandiram D. Alagiyawanna, Walter Andrew Samarasekera (1876-1955), W. Daniel Fernando Waidayasekera (1883-1946), D. S. Goonesekera, M. P. de Zoysa (born: 1902), Pundit G. P. Wickremaratchi, (born: 1889) Mudaliyar E. A. Abayasekera (1891-1965), W. K. "Gandhi" Jayawardena, G. H. Boralasgamuwa Perera and Mudaliyar D. J. Senaratne. A few of them even lived to contribute their mite towards the effective pressure exerted during the general election of 1956 by the interest groups they represented.

The long tradition of organisational experience may provide a small part of the explanation for the success of these groups once they coalesced in the MEP. It also explains the timing of the upsurge in the 1950's. The local elite were tired of their intermediary and secondary status. Their confidence and experience had grown. They awakened to the fact that the fruits of power were being guzzled by the national elite and a small section of the populace. They too wanted a place in the sun. To draw on a military metaphor, in 1956 these subaltern-corporals of the political world became dissatisfied with their limited areas of command and entered the officer's mess as permanent members. But it was perhaps in the nature of Ceylonese politics that they marched into the mess under the banners of a western-educated officer and gentleman - none other than Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike.<sup>151</sup>

#### REFERENCES

1. MEP stands for People's United Front. The loose coalition known as the MEP came into being (formally) in February 1956 and consisted of the SLFP, Philip Gunawardena's VLSSP, W. Dahanayake's *Bāshā Peramuna*, K. M. P. Rajaratne's *Jāthika Vimukthi Peramuna* and other assorted elements including some members of the disbanded Republican Party and I. M. R. A. Iriyagolle.
2. E. F. C. Ludowyk, *The Modern History of Ceylon*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966, p. 240.
3. Ralph Pieris, New Elites in Ceylon in *Transactions of the Fifth World Congress of Sociology*, Lcuvain, International Sociological Association, 1969, p. 302.
4. Donald E. Smith, The Sinhalese Buddhist Revolution in Donald E. Smith (ed.) *South Asian Politics and Religion* New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 471.
5. W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon, Dilemmas of a New Nation* New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 366. This short-hand is preceded by the statement: "The election agitation ... drew into political activity rural professional and middle class groups which, with the aid of the priesthood, brought into question the traditional influence wielded in the country-side by landowners and rural notables". Marshall R. Singer prefers the singular the "rural middle class". See *The Emerging Elite: A study of political leadership in Ceylon*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, M. I. T. Press, 1964, pp. 140-42. This social formation must not be confused with his "emerging elite" whom he sees as the group of parliamentarians who emerged in the general elections of 1956 and 1960 and who were "a new middle group... 'middle' not only in terms of class and social background but also in terms of values and self-images.." their fusion of Western and traditional value systems, and their ability to straddle both English and vernacular language sectors. *Ibid*, pp. 49-51, 104-16, 144-497.