

## Language and Sinhalese Nationalism: The Career of Munidasa Cumaratunga\*

K. N. O. DHARMADASA

<sup>1</sup>The nationalist mission, therefore, was to recover or reconstruct the authentic uniqueness of the nationality (which had been contaminated by foreign models) and, thereby, to recover for the present as well as establish for the future the greatness that had existed in the past."

Joshua A. Fishman, "The Impact of Nationalism on Language Planning" in J. Rubin and B. H. Jernudd (ed.), *Can Language Be Planned*, Hawaii, 1971, pp. 3-20.

Munidasa Cumaratunga<sup>1</sup> (1887-1944) was one of the most outstanding personalities of the Sinhalese literary scene in the period extending from the 1920's to the 40's. He is remembered today mainly as a grammarian and a literary figure. As a grammarian his contribution was singular, unprecedented and, as yet, unsurpassed.<sup>2</sup> He was, moreover, a gifted literary artist<sup>3</sup> and a perceptive critic.<sup>4</sup> His achievements in these fields have tended to loom too large in the evaluation of his career. When his career as a whole is taken into consideration, however, it can be argued that it had a significance that extended beyond the literary and linguistic spheres, and that its impact on Sinhalese society was much deeper than hitherto recognised.

Although he had published several works previously<sup>5</sup> the incident which brought Cumaratunga into the limelight was the *Kukavi Vādaya*

\* This is the revised version of a paper presented to the *Ceylon Studies Seminar*, Peradeniya on 3-10-1973, as paper no. 11 of the 1973 series. I wish to acknowledge the helpful comments of my colleagues who were present. My special thanks are due to Mr. Derek de Silva, Dr. C. R. de Silva, Professor Ashley Halpe, Dr. Gerald Pieris and Dr. Michael Roberts who were helpful in the preparation of the final draft for publication.

1. Known as Munidasa Cumaratunga at the beginning of his career, he changed his name at subsequent stages to Munidasa Cumaratunga, Cumaratunga Munidasa and finally, Cumaratungu Munidas — each time to tally with a new insight into the "pure Sinhalese" tradition which he sought to resuscitate. He is best known as "Munidasa Cumaratunga." (His name is depicted here in the spelling he himself used).
2. See Sarathchandra Wickramasuriya, "Munidasa Cumaratunga's Contribution to Sinhalese Linguistics," *The Ceylon Journal of the Humanities*, 1, 1, 1970, pp. 57-75.
3. See Ariya Rajakaruna, *Nutana Sinhala Kavyaya I*, Maharagama, 1962, pp. 55-84.
4. See Ariya Rajakaruna, "Munidasa Cumaratunga Ha Kavya Vicaraya," *Samskruti*, 8, 2, 1960, pp. 1-19.
5. See the list of books given in Ven. Sitinamaluwe Sumanaratana (ed.), *Cumaratunga Munidasa*, Colombo, 1955, pp. 365-369.



("Controversy on poetastery")<sup>6</sup> provoked by his declaration that Ven. Totagamuve Sri Rahula (fifteenth century) — one of the most esteemed literary figures of the classical period — was a poetaster and not a poet in the real sense of the term.<sup>7</sup> At the end of this controversy, which gave him an opportunity to display his capabilities as a scholar, critic and polemist, Cumaratunga emerged as one of the most widely known personalities in the Sinhalese literary world. Thenceforth he embarked on a dynamic career which has perhaps been the most controversial in modern times due to his unorthodox ideas and virulent criticisms of the existing form of traditionalism as well as the Establishment in Sinhalese society. His views, especially on the history of the Sinhalese race and the Sinhalese language were mostly passionate beliefs based on his own conviction rather than on historical evidence. And the manner in which he criticised those who disagreed with his views sometimes lacked concern for propriety and etiquette. The socio-political context in which he had to operate may perhaps explain some of these idiosyncracies.

The target of Cumaratunga's criticism was the state of affairs in his own time, seen in the context of the immediate past; the ideal he upheld was the bygone glory of a more distant past. This attitude from an anthropological point of view may be categorised as nativistic. Nativism is defined as the preservation endeavour arising within a culture in reaction to a real or imagined threat of it being supplanted by another.<sup>8</sup> An examination of Cumaratunga's career shows that he envisaged the "threat" to be that arising from the expansion of Western culture under colonial rule as well as the insidious but deep-rooted Indian cultural influences which had become something taken for granted in the national tradition.

At the time Cumaratunga embarked on his career, fears had already been expressed regarding the possible extinction of indigenous traditions, especially the Sinhalese language, in the face of the advances of Western culture.<sup>9</sup> He took upon himself the mission of preventing such a possibility. The means he adopted was the resuscitation of the "genuine Sinhalese tradition."<sup>10</sup>

As will be seen in the course of the present study, of the various aspects of culture he was most concerned with language. With regard to language the resuscitation of the genuine Sinhalese tradition generally attributed to Cumaratunga may be considered as the culmination of a

6. Began as correspondence appearing in the newspaper *Swadesa Mitraya* and was carried on from 7-6-1925 to 4-12-1927. The controversy ended with a public debate held on 2-2-1928 at Ananda Vidyalaya, Colombo.

7. See *Kukavi Vadaya* (ed.) Jayantha Weerasekara, Colombo, 2482 B.E. (1938 A.D.).

8. Cf. "After two societies have come into sufficiently close contact for one to feel the other as definitely more populous, stronger, or better equipped so that its own culture is in the process of being supplanted by the other, a conscious preservation effort or defence is often produced. Such reactions have been called Nativistic endeavours...." A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, N.Y., 1948, p. 437.

9. For example, John de Silva, the leading dramatist during the early years of the twentieth century stated that one of his aims as an artist was to instil a love for the Sinhalese language into the minds of the contemporary youth who were neglecting it under the influence of western civilization. See his introduction to the text of the play, *Sri Vikrama Rajasinghe Caritaya*, Colombo, 1906.

10. See D. V. Richard de Silva, *Kumaratungu Muni Dasna*, Colombo, 1969, p. 34.

process which was set afoot during a cultural renaissance during the second half of the eighteenth century. It is pertinent at this juncture to recount briefly the manner in which it came about.

The classical period of Sinhalese literature is considered to have ended with the reign of Parakramabahu VI (1415—1467). The succeeding period was one of political instability characterised in the first instance by the endeavours of rival contenders to seize the throne and secondly by the long drawn out warfare among petty local rulers as well as between them and the European invaders, the Portuguese and the Dutch in succession. This unsettled period between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries saw the decline of the Buddhist church and the literary tradition which was nurtured by the monks in the *pirivena* institutions. By the eighteenth century Kandy had become the only seat of Sinhalese government. As a result of the conciliatory attitude of the commercially-minded Dutch together with the desire of the war-weary Sinhalese for a breathing space, there ensued a period of peace and re-construction interrupted only by a brief war in the 1760's. And due primarily to the efforts of a monk named Welivita Asarana Sarana Saranankara (1698—1778), who was actively supported by the reigning monarch, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe (1747—1780), there was a religious, literary and artistic renaissance in the Kandyan kingdom.<sup>11</sup> As tradition, which was normally handed down in pupillar succession, had been broken during the preceding period of turmoil, the need of the day was an all-round resuscitation.<sup>12</sup>

Thus with regard to literature and language the literary genres which had gone into disuse after the fifteenth century were re-introduced and a determined effort was made to use the literary language of that period. There was considerable achievement with regard to the first undertaking. The second, however, does not seem to have been fully accomplished. For, in the literature of the "renaissance" period it can be observed that, along with the correct use of the classical idiom, aberrations too occur, not to mention interferences from the contemporary spoken idiom.<sup>13</sup> Thus the task of putting back the linguistic clock was not completed during the initial attempt and was left for the future.<sup>14</sup>

The second stage of this process was seen in the British period in connection with the revival of classical learning during the second half of the nineteenth century. Three centres of oriental learning, Paramadhammacetiya (1849), Vidyodaya (1873) and Vidyalkara (1875), had come into existence. And because of the efforts of several eminent scholars who were associated with these institutions, the bulk of the classical works of Sinhalese literature came to be edited and printed. These were

11. See M. Sri Rammandala, "Saranankara Sangharajayan Vahanse," M. B. Ariyapala and C. Godage (ed.) *Mahanuvara Sri Pushpadana Swarna Jayanthi Sangrahaya*, 1958, pp. 20-39.
12. See Ven. Kotagama Vacissara, *Saranankara Sangharaja Samaya*, Colombo, 1960, pp. 207-220.
13. See Ven. Degammeda Sumanajoti, "Mahanuvara Yugaye Gadya Kruti" *Vidyalkara Sinhala Sangarava*, 1960-61, pp. 10-34.
14. See M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, "Effects of Purism on the Evolution of the Written Language," *Linguistics*, 36, Mouton, The Hague, 1967, pp. 5-17.

eagerly received by a newly literate public.<sup>15</sup> At the same time this emergent class of educated Sinhalese was being stimulated vigorously into the awareness of a glorious cultural heritage by the Sinhalese-Buddhist revival which came about as a reaction to Christian missionary expansion and the general westernization of society.<sup>16</sup> The spirit of nostalgic nationalism was the vogue of the day. In this atmosphere Sinhalese scholars were able to complete the task that was entered upon in "the first stage of purism."<sup>17</sup> Two scholars stand foremost among those responsible for this accomplishment. They are Ven. Ratmalane Sri Dharmarama (1853—1919) and Pundit W. F. Gunawardhana (1861-1935) who were able to clarify, as a result of research into classical literature, a large number of controversial points in contemporary literary usage.<sup>18</sup> The idiom which emerged as a nett result of this puristic endeavour approximated to the *Misra Sinhala* ("mixed Sinhalese") which was used in classical prose works such as *Pujavaliya* (thirteenth century).<sup>19</sup>

*Misra Sinhala*, which is characterised by borrowings from Pali and Sanskrit, is one of the two registers<sup>20</sup> that comprise the language of classical Sinhalese literature.<sup>21</sup> It is used in (a) exegetical works such as the *Dhampia Atuva Getapadaya* (tenth century), (b) inscriptions from about the twelfth century onwards and (c) edificatory prose works in the tradition of the *Amavatura* (twelfth century) and the *Pujavaliya* (thirteenth century). On the other hand there is the register of *Elu (Hela)* ("pure Sinhalese") used in (a) inscriptions from about the sixth century to about the eleventh century, (b) prose works of the same period such as the *Sikha-Valanda*<sup>22</sup> and (c) verse compositions from about the sixth century A.D. up to about the fifteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The tendency after about the twelfth

15. The principle of vernacular education was accepted by the colonial government in the early 1840's. The expansion of vernacular education consequently can be seen in the figures pertaining to the following years. See Tables I and II in U.D.I. Sirisena, "Educational Provision and Progress under the Laws for Compulsory Education," *Education in Ceylon: A Centenary Volume*, Colombo, 1969, pp. 513-524.
16. See L. A. Wickremaratne, "Religion, Nationalism and Social Change in Ceylon, 1865-1885," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1969, no. 2, pp. 123-150.
17. See M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *op. cit.*
18. For the contribution of Ven. Dharmarama, see W. F. Gunawardhana, *Guttala Kavya Varnana*, Colombo, 1916, Introduction, especially pp. xxix-xxxi. And for the contribution of Pundit Gunawardhana see Ariya Rajakaruna, "W. F. Gunawardhana saha Sinhala Viyaranaya," in *Sampradaya Ha Sihina Lokaya*, Colombo, 1968, pp. 233-303.
19. W. F. Gunawardhana in the introduction to his *Siddhanta Pariksanaya* (Colombo, 1924) says that the *Pujavaliya* "is written in the same literary Sinhalese which we use at the present day."
20. By register differences are meant the variations in linguistic form determined by the social context. See M. A. K. Halliday, Angus McIntosh and P. Strevens, *The Linguistic Science and Language Teaching*, London, 1964, pp. 87-95.
21. By classical Sinhalese literature I refer to the literature of the period from about the sixth century A.D. to about the fifteenth century A.D. By the sixth century the language had emerged from the Prakritic stage (See D. B. Jayatilaka, *Sinhala Sabda Kosaya*, Vol. I, Colombo, 1937, Introduction). The fifteenth century is generally accepted as the last stage of the classical period of Sinhalese culture (See Ven. Nivandama Dharmakirti, *Sinhala Sahityaye Swarna Yugaya*, Kelaniya, 1952).
22. A compendium of vinaya rules for monks, attributed to the tenth century (See Ananda Kulasuriya, *Sinhala Sahitaya I*, Maharagama 1961, p. 97).
23. See fn. 21 above.

century was to use *Misra Sinhala* as the standard medium for all prose writings and *Elu* as the exclusive medium of verse compositions.<sup>24</sup>

Thus it will be noted that as far as the language of prose is concerned *Misra Sinhala* may also be considered as a stage in its evolution. In the history of Sinhalese literature it is found that the influence of the Sanskrit language and literature was getting strong towards the end of the Anuradhapura period (circa fifth century B.C. to eleventh century A.D.) and that it reached its zenith during the Polonnaruva period (twelfth-thirteenth century).<sup>25</sup> It would have been this strong impact of Sanskrit that paved the way for the adoption of *Misra Sinhala* as the medium for all prose writings—the mixture being characterized by a very strong Sanskrit element.<sup>26</sup> And it was this form of prose that became the ideal of linguistic perfection for the puristic endeavour during the Saranankara Renaissance and was established during the second wave of purism that arose during the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

In his early prose writings Cumaratunga uses *Misra Sinhala* displaying, as it were, his erudition in Sanskrit and Pali by a profuse use of borrowings.<sup>28</sup> In course of time, however, he came to adopt "pure" Sinhalese exclusively, resuscitating a pre-twelfth century practice. The later idiom of Cumaratunga was characterized by the adoption of a large number of features from the classical usage of about the twelfth century.<sup>29</sup>

The linguistic policy of Cumaratunga derives from his conception of the manner in which a language should be developed. Defending the restoration of "ä," an obsolete phonological and grammatical feature, he says, "It is seen that in the Sinhalese language of the past there was the proper use of "ä." Scholars believe that as a result of the decline of learning it had subsequently gone out of use. Some maintain now that as it is possible to manage affairs without the use of "ä" as of old, it is unnecessary to restore it. This view cannot be accepted."<sup>30</sup> He proceeds to compare this situation with a hypothetical one in order to highlight the absurdity, in his opinion, of this viewpoint. If, due to the deterioration of contact with the civilized world, people in a remote village were to forget the use of clothes, he asks whether it would not be necessary at a later date to restore them to civilized ways.<sup>31</sup>

24. The earliest verse compositions found in inscriptions of about the third century B.C. use the Prakritic idiom found in other lithic records of the time. From the period of the Sigiri Graffiti (Seventh-tenth century A.D.) up to the fifteenth century (see fn. 21 above), *Elu* remained the exclusive language of verse. In the fifteenth century began a genre of panegyrics which for auditory effect resorted to the adoption of Sanskrit, Pali and Tamil borrowings.

25. See O. H. de A. Wijesekera, "Pali, and Sanskrit in the Polonnaruva Period," *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. IV, 1955, pp. 91-97.

26. See Ven. Medaundayoda Vimalakirti and Ven. Kadawedduwa Sumangala, *Sinhala Bhasave Itihasaya*, Colombo, 1965, p. 154.

27. See fn. 19 above.

28. See the Introduction to his first edition of *Muvadevdavata*, Colombo, 2466 B.E. (1922 A.D.)

29. See Sarathchandra Wickramasuriya, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

30. Translated from an article written to the periodical *Swadesa Mitraya*, 24 August, 1926. Reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, 2 (A Collection of Cumaratunga's speeches and writings), Colombo, 1962, pp. 87-94.

31. *Ibid.*

He believed that the Sinhalese language was "corrupted" by scholars who thought it fashionable to use borrowings. In an explanation as to why he effected a change in his own language he declared:

Of late we have been committing a great mistake. That is, using in our writings as many borrowings as possible from Sanskrit. In the same manner as it is considered fashionable to-day to lean towards English those who lived sometime ago thought it very cultured to lean towards Sanskrit. . . . Now we have a duty to perform. That is to do our best to emancipate the Sinhalese language. Without impairing our conviction, we must attempt, wherever possible, to use pure Sinhalese. We must attack the mean idea that without borrowing from Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil or English it is not possible to express the thoughts of the Sinhalese.<sup>32</sup>

It is pertinent to note here the antipathy to western as well as to Indian influence.

In his estimation, among all these languages, pure Sinhalese—"Helese" as he called it—ranked highest. Answering a query in *The Helio*, the English periodical he edited, he declared, "please understand that the *Helese* language is older than the oldest of Indian languages."<sup>33</sup> In elevating *Helese* to an exalted status he vehemently rejected the accepted theory of its Indo-Aryan origin. "Those who consider that we, our language and our customs etc. are derived from somewhere else do indeed disparage us," he said. "There is perhaps no other nation older than we. How can we, therefore, accept the theory that everything of ours is derived from outside?"<sup>34</sup>

Connected with such views on the *Helese* language was his conception of the history of the *Helese* people. Rejecting the *Mahāvamsa* tradition of Vijayan colonization as a "concoction of the monks of the Mahavihara," he put forward a theory which traced the history of the *Helese* to remoter antiquity. According to him long before the beginning of the lineage of kings recorded in the *Mahāvamsa*, this island was populated by the *Helese* who had built up a great civilization. The land was much larger, extending up to Madagascar. Great monarchs such as Taraka and Ravana who could effectively challenge the military might of the mightiest of Indian empires ruled over the *Helese*. This great civilization came to an end due to the treachery of "*Helese* traitors" such as Vibhisana and Kuveni. And consequently Indian influences swept over its culture "debasing" and "corrupting," among other things, the language of the *Helese*.<sup>35</sup>

32. Tr. *Subasa*, Vol. I, no. 3, 1939, p. 29.

33. *The Helio*, Vol. I, nos. 11 and 12, 1941, p. 87.

34. Tr. *Subasa*, Vol. I, no. 4, 1939, p. 43.

35. Cumaratunga's views on the history of Ceylon have never been presented by him in the form of a complete theory in one single work. Instead they are found scattered in his numerous writings and in the records of his speeches. See the report of the speech he delivered before Vidyodaya Sisya Samitya on 18-7-1931 recorded in the periodical *Swadesa Mitraya* and reprinted in *Hela Heliya*—2, pp. 71-80. Also see his contributions to *The Helio* Vol. I, nos. 11 and 12, 1941, p. 87; nos. 15 and 16, 1941, pp. 124-125; and to *Subasa*, Vol. II, no. 25, 1941, pp. 392-395. These ideas were put together and elaborated by his associate R. Tennakoon in "The Hidden History of the *Helese*," which appeared in several instalments in *The Helio*, Vol. I.

In place of the slogan, "Country, Nation and Religion" (*rata, jaatiya, aagama*) proclaimed by the traditionalist elite of the day Cumaratunga exhorted the adoption of "Language, Nation and Country" (*basa, rāsa, desa*). It is significant to note that "Religion" has been replaced by "Language" and that "Language" has been placed foremost. At the root of these changes lies the political philosophy of Cumaratunga. A close associate of Cumaratunga, writing his biography (entitled *Maha Hela Vata*, "The Story of the Great Helese") says:

It is accepted by learned scholars that the life-blood of a nation is its language. This is a universal truth. Munidas (i.e. Cumaratunga) who also believed it wholeheartedly, surveyed the world with his keen intellect, taking guidance from history. What he saw everywhere was that whenever language became weak (*dumbul*), the nation deteriorated. To Munidas who pondered over the past and the present of the *Helese* nation, one truth became obvious. That is, the one unmistakable way of fortifying the nation was to fortify the language.<sup>36</sup>

This statement reveals the basis of Cumaratunga's political philosophy.

Linguistic purism, for which Cumaratunga is known best,<sup>37</sup> was not for him an end in itself. In his opinion it was the means to build up a cultured and strong nation. "Signs are appearing," he wrote in 1936, "that Sinhalese is becoming a most uncivilized language... With a civilized people what becomes civilized first is their language... Need it be said that a people who use an uncivilized language are themselves uncivilized?... The time has arrived for us to correct this. This is not a malady that cannot be cured."<sup>38</sup> He continues to elucidate the steps that should be taken to forestall this decline. Firstly, writers should be careful to use only "good" language and secondly, voluntary organizations with the aim of propagating good language should be set up.<sup>39</sup> He took great care to use the good language not only in his writings but in his speech as well, and admonished others to do so too.<sup>40</sup> At his instance a society called *Sinhala Samājaya*, "the Sinhalese Society," was constituted in 1935.<sup>41</sup> In the meantime he carried on a consistent campaign for "purity" of language through the paper *Lak Mini Pahana* of which he was the editor from 1934.<sup>42</sup> This paper had to be wound up in 1936 because of financial difficulties and the *Sinhala Samājaya* too seems to have died out before

36. Tr. Amarasiri Gunawadu, *Maha Hela Vata*, Matara, 2501, B.E. (1957 A.D.) p. 87.

37. See M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *op. cit.*, and Sarathchandra Wickramasuriya, *op. cit.*

38. Tr. "Sinhala Abhagyaya," *Vidyodaya* I, 1, 1936. Reprinted in *Hela Heliya* I, pp. 1-13

39. *Ibid.*

40. See his editorial to *Lak Mini Pahana* (2478 B.E. Nikini pura, 5), entitled "Kiyana Sinhala" ("Spoken Sinhalese"), and the series of articles which followed, entitled "Sinhala Siksava" ("the study of Sinhalese"), most probably written by him under the pseudonym "Guru."

41. See Amarasiri Gunawadu, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

42. The *Lak Mini Pahana*, one of the earliest Sinhalese newspapers was inaugurated by a group of scholars in 1862 under the editorship of Koggala Pandituma and was carried on for several years and had to be wound up sometime later. It was revived in 1883 under the editorship of M. Dharmaratne, popularly known as 'Pahan Katruu,' who continued it up to 1924. Cumaratunga revived it again on 26-6-1934 (see Ven. Kalukondayawe Prajnasekara, *Sinhala Puvatpat Sangara Itihasaya* I, Colombo 1965, pp. 78-90).

long.<sup>43</sup> However the indefatigable Cumaratunga started in 1939 a periodical named *Subasa*, "The Good Language," whose aim was to foster and propagate what was in his estimation the good language.

Though he still continued to use *Misra Sinhala*, the language he advocated by this time was markedly different from the standard usage among contemporary scholars. The most significant point of divergence was the resuscitated *ü* in Cumaratunga's language.<sup>44</sup> Not long after the inauguration of *Subasa* Cumaratunga adopted an extreme form of puristic idiom which was characterised by the exclusive use of *Elu* forms, the complete resuscitation of the grammatical usage of about the twelfth century and a daily increasing number of newly coined words modelled on classical *Elu* idiom. He named it *Helese*. Answering a query raised by one of the readers of *Subasa*, Cumaratunga once placed side by side the two forms of language in order to illustrate that any sentiment could be expressed in *Helese* form without the aid of borrowings.<sup>45</sup>

"සුන්දරිය, මෙහි බලව. මේ පාණ්ඩ්‍ය රාජයා යැ. උභයාංශයෙහි අර්ථින වූ මුක්තාභාර ඇත්තේ යැ. හරිවන්දනයෙන් කරන ලද අඩගරාග ඇත්තේ යැ. එ හෙයින් තරුණ රිචි කිරණයෙන් රක්ත වණ වූ කුට ඇති ගලන නිර්කුර ධාරා ඇති පව්ත රාජයකු මෙන් බබළයි. ලංකාධිපති රාවණයා ද ඉන්ද්‍ර ලෝකය ජය ගන්නා පිණිසැ ගියේ මොහු හා සමඟ යැ. තාමිබුල වල්ලියෙන් පරිනද්ධ වූ පුග වෘක්ෂයන් ඇති ඒලා ලතායෙන් ආලිඛිත වූ වන්දන වෘක්ෂයන් ඇති කමාල පත්‍රමය ආස්තරණ ඇති මලය ස්ඵලයන්හි ක්‍රීඩා කිරීමට පහදුව. මේ රාජයාගේ ශරීරය ඉන්ද්‍රවර ශ්‍රාම යැ. ඔබගේ ශරීරය ගෝරෝවන ගොර යැ. විද්‍යුලතා මේසකුට දෙදෙනාගේ මෙන්, අනෝර්තය ගොහා පරිවර්ධනය පිණිසැ ඔබ දෙදෙනාගේ සංයෝගය වේවා."

This passage appearing in Cumaratunga's *Prabandhopadesaya* (2482 B.E. (1938 A.D.), Colombo, p. 73) was translated into the *Helese* idiom by him in the following manner:

"යහදසන නුවන් පිනවන්නැ. එඩි නොමැඩි පඩි රජ යැ මේ. හළන දළ මුක්තරින් දළුවෙන දළ යැ. රිචිරි හරි හරිසදුන් මිහිර අහරවන අහරා ගත් ඇඟ යැ. ඒ හෙයින් තුරුණු රිචි කිරණ පැතුරුණු කුළින් දෙපසැ හැලි හැලි දිළි අලි හැලි හැලි බැබළී පළ පුවළ ගිරි රජකු මෙන් වොරජයි. ලකිසුරු දසසිරසා ද දුරු ඉදුරු මැදුරු දුදුරු කරනු සඳහා මෙ රජ සඳ හා සඳහා යැ ගියේ. නිමල කමල දල ඇතිරිලි පැතිරිලි ඇති මලය තලයෙහි, බුලත් ලිය පුවක් තුරු වලදී, මල් ලිය සදුන් තුරු වලදී, තෙල හෙමලිය අර ඉදුනිල් මිණිතුර නොවලදී ද? මොහු සිරුර ඉදුවර බඳු අදුරු යැ. ඔබ සිරුර ගොරොද පරදවන ගොර යැ. මේ කුළෙහි විදුලිය මෙන් මේ කළයෙහි ලෙළ දී උනුන් පැහැ පහන්නැ."

Compared with the language used in the generality of contemporary prose writings, the *Helese* of Cumaratunga was more archaistic<sup>46</sup> and absolutely free of all borrowings—Pali, Sanskrit or any others. His avowed aim was to reinstate the "good language" that was lost during the period of national

43. Amarasiri Gunawadu, *op. cit.*

44. This peculiarity was the target of much derision from many contemporaries. See Abiram Gamhewa, "Kumaratungu Vahara," in Ven. Sitinamaluwe Sumanaratana (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 121-151.

45. *Subasa*, Vol. II, no. 19, 1941, p. 299.

46. The language used in the generality of contemporary prose writings itself was archaistic. See fn. 19 above.

decline.<sup>47</sup> This aim was in fact the same as that of the resuscitatory and puristic linguistic policy launched during the Saranankara Renaissance. The heirs of the Saranankara Renaissance who continued this policy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had stopped when they reached an approximation to the *Misra Sinhala* of the thirteenth century.<sup>48</sup> Cumaratunga, however, carried this archaistic and puristic endeavour to its logical conclusion when he adopted an approximation to the *Elu* of an earlier period.

Cumaratunga was thus the heir to the past. At the same time he can be viewed in other ways as the reflection of the times and as the progenitor of the future.

The near fanatical effort to reinstate what was deemed to be "pure" Sinhalese could perhaps be explained if the contemporary political situation were taken into account. The apparent amity between the two major communities, Sinhalese and Tamil, during the early days of agitation for political reform experienced its first cracks during the second decade of the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup> The 1920's and the 1930's were characterised by a widening of the communication gap between them. With the nationalist enthusiasm brought about by the Sinhalese-Buddhist revival, the anti-Muslim feeling generated by the incidents of 1915,<sup>50</sup> and the resentment against the Tamils forming the background, the stage was ready for the *Helese* showdown, with its nativistic assertions and millennialistic potentialities. Judging from the political philosophy and the outlook on the history of Ceylon set forth by the *Helese* movement, the millennium suggested by it could not have been a comfortable place for other ethnolinguistic communities.<sup>51</sup>

Cumaratunga was the first to raise the Sinhalese language to the status of a cause and a mission. It was in a socio-economic milieu wherein education in Sinhalese brought meagre economic rewards and was looked down upon as a sign of social inferiority that he raised the battle cry for "pure Sinhalese." His contention was that the Sinhalese language had deteriorated during the period of national decline and that this factor lay at the root of all the ills that beset the nation. "A base, corrupted, inelegant and insipid language," he said "will produce a mean and miserable mentality."<sup>52</sup> Again, reproaching the Department of Education of the colonial government for designing a system of education which sought to produce people with a slavish mentality," he presented the following caveat: "The Department has done and are still doing

47. See the report of the speech entitled "Sinhala Grantha Wamsaya," delivered in 1931 as reprinted in *Hela Heliya*, 2, pp. 71-80.

48. See fn. 19 above.

49. The rift occurred over the question of the changeover from communal to territorial representation. Subsequent attempts at "patching up" never had any lasting results. See K. M. de Silva, "The Formation and Character of the Ceylon National Congress, 1917-1919," *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, 10, nos. 1 & 2, pp. 70-102.

50. For details of the anti-Muslim activities in 1915 see "A Symposium on the 1915 Communal Riots," *Ceylon Studies Seminar*, Peradeniya, 1969/70 series, June 1970, *passim*.

51. The *Helese* ideology embodied in the slogan "Language, Nation and Country" meant specifically "the *Helese* language, the *Helese* nation and the *Helese* country." And the one single factor underlying the ideology is the assumption of the superiority of everything that is "Helese." See *Hela Gitiya*, "The Song of the Helese," compiled by Cumaratunga in *Hela Miliyasiya*, Colombo, 2485 B.E. (1941 A.D.) pp. 63-64 and the works cited in fn. 35.

52. *The Helio*, Vol. I, nos. 9 and 10, 1941, p. 74.

everything to make the language lawless, graceless, powerless and worthless. Language without dignity produces men and women without dignity. Men and women without dignity are as base as beasts and can be made to stoop to any meanness."<sup>53</sup> Thus, according to him, the first step in the struggle for freedom was the adoption of "good language" which would consequently lead to the growth of a free and independent national spirit. The political philosophy of Cumaratunga, therefore, seems to have been based on the belief that the upliftment of the nation was finally and indispensably dependent on "good language."

Although some of the above sentiments of Cumaratunga were expressed only towards the end of his career it is possible to view his activities in their totality as a continuous endeavour to establish this foundation.

He viewed language as comprising two extremes—correct and incorrect, or in his own words *sista* ("civilized") and *asista* ("uncivilized").<sup>54</sup> His career was devoted to the task of clarifying what the "civilized" language was, and to the mission of propagating it. To this mission he brought to bear a versatile talent which was perhaps the most remarkable in the Sinhalese scholarship of the time. He edited classical literary works, compiled treatises of grammar, prepared school text books and literary works for children, wrote poems and plays, made public speeches and took part in debates, edited newspapers and periodicals and launched organizations in which those who agreed with his ideas were mobilized.

In the initial stage of his public career Cumaratunga edited, together with elucidatory notes, a number of classical literary works. His elucidatory notes included to a large extent explanations of points of grammar—illustrating his main area of interest.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, he turned to compiling treatises of grammar. It seems that the intensive study of over thirty classical works which he edited<sup>56</sup> formed the basis of his extensive knowledge of grammar which is found compiled in the *Sidat Sangara Vivaranayaa* (2478 B.E.),<sup>57</sup> the *Kriyaa Vivaranaya* (2479 B.E.),<sup>58</sup> and the *Vyaakarana Vivaranaya* (2481 B.E.).<sup>59</sup> The last work remains to this day an unsurpassed comprehensive grammar of Sinhalese in spite of several shortcomings arising from the author's erroneous views regarding the nature of language.<sup>60</sup>

The exegetical details in Cumaratunga's editions of classics reveal an attempt to cater to the student rather than to the scholar. Moreover, he wrote a large number of school texts—the list including fourteen readers, two collections of verse, two guides to prose composition, two guides to verse compo-

53. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

54. See the editorial of *Lak Mini Pahana*, 2478, B. E. Asala pura 7, reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, I, pp. 26-29.

55. For example, *Muvadev Da Vivaranaya*, Colombo, 2466, B.E. (1922 A.D.) *Amavatura Vivaranaya*, Colombo, 2467 B.E. (1923 A.D.); *Subhasita Vivaranaya*, Colombo, 2468 B.E. (1924 A.D.) and *Pujavali Vivaranaya*, Colombo 2470 B.E. (1926 A.D.). fn. See 57 below.

56. See the list of his works in book-form given by Ven. Sitanamaluwe Sumanaratana in Ven. Sitanamaluwe Sumanaratana (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 365-369.

57. I.e. 1934 A.D. Cumaratunga used the Buddhist era in his datings.

58. I.e. 1935 A.D.

59. I.e. 1937 A.D.

60. See M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *op. cit.* and Sarathchandra Wickramasuriya, *op. cit.*

sition, two Sanskrit text books for beginners, and three children's stories.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps this intense activity on the school front was motivated by the desire to build up the younger generation in conformity with his objectives.

For the adult audience he wrote poems, short stories,<sup>62</sup> and plays.<sup>63</sup> Also he is the author of a treatise on music.<sup>64</sup> The avowed aim of writing plays and the treatise on music was the resuscitation of "the lost tradition" in *Helese* drama and music.<sup>65</sup> Being an impressive orator and a masterly polemist, he took his mission to the public platform whenever the opportunity arose.<sup>66</sup> The paper *Lak Mini Pahana* (26-6-1934 to 21-1-1936), the Sinhalese periodical *Subasa* (10-7-1939 to 16-2-1942) and the English periodical *The Helio* (29-8-1941 to 22-12-1941) were the journalistic platforms he used, and used with gusto. The editorials, open letters to important personalities, answers to queries and the special articles he contributed to them, display a zealous spirit fired with a mission. In this campaign he was ably supported by a group of like-thinking scholars such as Jayantha Weerasekara (1895-1949) and Raipiel Tennakoon (1900-1964).<sup>67</sup> It was only when the campaign seemed to be making a considerable impact within the Sinhalese society that Cumaratunga took up the technique of establishing organizations.

The first attempt of Cumaratunga to establish an organization was the founding of the *Sinhala Samājaya* ("The Sinhalese Society") in 1935. This association seems to have fizzled out soon, without any achievement to its credit.<sup>68</sup> Cumaratunga at the time was also a member of the *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* ("The Great Association of the Sinhalese") founded in the mid 1930's under the leadership of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. However, Cumaratunga does not appear to have been happy about its activities. It is reported that at one of the early meetings Bandaranaike moved, from the chair, that the name *Sinhala Maha Sabhā* be replaced by *Swadesiya Maha Sabhā* ("The Great Association of the Indigenes") at which point Cumaratunga defended the retention of the word *Sinhala* with an eloquent speech and the motion was defeated.<sup>69</sup> The *Sinhala Maha Sabhā*, however, was a political organization with a western educated leadership having a programme of action which did

61. See the list referred to in fn. 56.

62. Of the poems only *Piya Samara* (Colombo, 2479 B.E. 1935 A.D.) appeared in book form. Other verse compositions and the short stories appeared as contributions to periodicals.

63. *Dorata Vāduma* and *Nikam Hākiyaya*, Colombo, 2485 B.E. (1941 A.D.).

64. *Hela Mīyāsiya*, Colombo, 2485 B.E. (1941 A.D.).

65. See the introductions to *Nikam Hākiyaya* and *Hela Mīyāsiya*. Cumaratunga believed that he was resuscitating "the lost traditions." However the claim that what he presented in these works comprises the lost tradition is not substantiated by any proof.

66. The capabilities of Cumaratunga as orator and polemist are vividly described by Jayantha Weerasekara in the introduction to his edition of the "Kukavi Vadaya." (See fn. 7 above). The accounts given me by others who saw and heard him corroborate these estimations.

67. See their numerous contributions to *Subasa* and *The Helio*. After Cumaratunga's demise, Weerasekara and after him Tennakoon were considered as the leading figures of the *Hela Havula*.

68. See fn. 41 above.

69. See Harischandra Wijetunga, *Cumaratungage Samaja Darsanaya*, Colombo, 1962, p. 15.

not include the development of the Sinhalese language as envisaged by Cumaratunga and thus does not seem to have attracted his wholehearted support as an association that could fulfil the mission he wanted to accomplish.<sup>70</sup>

It was during the early 1940's when *Subasa* and *The Helio* were exerting considerable influence on society that Cumaratunga founded one of the most dynamic organisations of the time—*The Hela Havula*—"The Pure-Sinhalese Fraternity."<sup>71</sup>

The *Hela Havula* was a unique organization in that it had no patron or president. Its only office bearers were two organizers and a committee of seven. When a meeting was summoned a Chairman was elected for the occasion.<sup>72</sup> The theme of Cumaratunga's address to the inaugural meeting of the *Hela Havula* was that in order to uplift a nation the primary step that should be taken was the improvement of its language. "It is beyond the capabilities of a single individual to develop a country," he said, "or to develop a language. Therefore, let us form an association, create branches all over the country and win over the *Helese* to our cause."<sup>73</sup>

With this as its aim the *Hela Havula* movement soon gathered momentum. Branch organizations sprouted in Matara, Kalutara, Gampaha, Kandy, Kegalla, Unawatuna, Ahangama, Ratnapura, Katugastota, Dodanduwa and Bandarawela.<sup>74</sup> It appears that a considerable section of the Sinhalese educated elite was drawn into the *Hela* movement. This comprised largely the younger generation of school teachers and Buddhist monks. Cumaratunga had often made special appeals to the school teachers.<sup>75</sup> Having been himself a teacher (1909-1917), a school inspector (1917-1922) and the principal of two training Colleges—Nittambuwa (1927-1929), and Balapitiya (1929-1930)—he would have known the importance of this social category in the building up of a national movement. Also, records of the activities of the *Hela Havula* show that a number of young Buddhist monks played an active role in it.<sup>76</sup> This was in spite of the opposition of almost the entire hierarchy of the Buddhist clergy to the *Hela* movement.<sup>77</sup>

70. After the inception of the *Hela Havula* by Cumaratunga (see below) there was open conflict between the two organizations. F.g. see R. Tennakoon, "An Open Hint to the Sinhala Maha Sabha," in *Subasa*, vol. iii, nos. 21 and 22, 1941, p. 321 where Mr. Bandaranaike is referred to as "The presumptuous leader of the Sin-Helese." (The word "Sin-Helese" was a pejorative term used by Cumaratunga). For how the political involvements of the *Sabha* disillusioned some others who were associated with it originally, see Ven. Kalukondayawe Prajnasekara, *Swayam Likhita Sri Prajnasekara Caritapadanaya*, Colombo, 1970, p. 297. Another cause for Cumaratunga to break away may be the fact that W. A. Silva, the novelist, instead of Cumaratunga, was made the head of the literature panel of the *Sabha*. See Ven. Prajnasekara, *op. cit.*

71. The inaugural meeting was held at his home in Panadura on 11-1-1941.

72. Amarasiri Gunawadu, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

73. See the report given in *Subasa*, Vol. II, no. 18, pp. 278-279.

74. Amarasiri Gunawadu, *op. cit.*

75. See for example, the large number of editorials and special articles he contributed to *Lak Mini Pahana*, *Subasa* and *The Helio*, concerning education, language and the teaching profession. Some of these are reproduced in *Hela Heliya* 1 and 2.

76. There were Buddhist monks in the first Committee of the *Hela Havula*. (See the report referred to in fn. 73). Among those who took an active part in the *Hela* movement were Ven. Kodagoda Nanalu, Ven. Warakagoda Silruwan, Ven. Polhene Nanalakuru and Ven. Talpavila Minidonu, all of whom contributed articles to the second anniversary number of *Subasa*, 1940.

77. Some details of this conflict are discussed below.

The appeal of the *Hela* movement to the youth of the day is not difficult to explain. In an era of growing democratization and mass participation in the affairs of state, the *Hela* movement presented a clear philosophy which was both challenging and novel as well as nationalist and populist in stance.

In his creative writing Cumaratunga had often displayed his anti-imperialist fervour. In a poem written in 1923 he lauds "the noble ones who seven years ago sacrificed their lives when those who came to protect—being bound by a Convention to do so—began unjustly oppressing the people." He concludes the poem by saying, "Those heroes have given a lead, they have shown us how to act in the struggle to drive away the vicious enemies from Lanka, for it is a blessing to die for one's motherland."<sup>78</sup> Contrary to the opinion of some national leaders of the day Cumaratunga did not believe that the imperialist master was gradually preparing the country for freedom. "That our rulers are attempting to give us independence is a thought no sane person would harbour," he said in 1934. "Why should they? If, for example, an ox driver trains his ox to free itself of the yoke and roam about as it wishes, in that case we can expect the foreign rulers to hand over the lands they prey upon to a servile nation and go away."<sup>79</sup> His view was that without waiting for the imperialist master to bestow freedom upon the people they had to work for it themselves: "If we are willing to wallow in servility why should they be keen on granting us freedom?... [Therefore] what should come first is a feeling among ourselves that we can manage our own affairs."<sup>80</sup> For the delay in the growth of such a feeling he blamed the political and cultural leaders of the day. "They (i.e. the English) would have given us full freedom long ago had it not been for the treacherous conduct of some of our own so-called leaders."<sup>81</sup>

The leaders who came under the severest criticism of Cumaratunga were, "Men who do not know our language well enough to write a good essay in it... (but)... pose as the highest scholars... (and)... those in authority who allow this state of affairs to continue."<sup>82</sup> In *Subasa* and *The Helio* there are numerous instances when the dons of the University, especially those of the Oriental Faculty and the editorial board of the Sinhalese Dictionary, are brought to task for various errors of omission and commission.<sup>83</sup> Reviewing in 1940 the sections of the *Dictionary* that was produced after 15 years of labour and an expense of Rs. 350,000, he charges the editorial hierarchy with irresponsibility and incompetence. "The Board of Editors, and the Editorial Staff consisted of M.A.'s, B.A.'s Pundits and Specialists. But they all blundered and that, too, rather badly."<sup>84</sup> Commenting on a proposal to get the University to help in the *Dictionary* project he says, "What the University College has in its hidden stores I cannot say. But judging from what has come to light it can

78. Tr. "Aaadara Bati Kusum Dam Ellamu Veselin," *Swarajyaya*, June 10, 1923. (Reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, 2, p. 145). The reference is to the Kandyan Convention of 1815 and the Riots of 1915.

79. Tr. "Lankave Adhyapanaya," Editorial of *Lak Mini Pahana*, 2478 B.E. (1934 A.D.) Navam Ava 2. (Reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, 1, pp. 14-18).

80. *Ibid.*

81. *The Helio*, Vol. I, nos. 15 and 16, 1941, p. 125.

82. The editorial of *The Helio*, Vol. I, no. 1. 1941.

83. See for example, "An Open Appeal to Sir D. B. Jayatilake," in *Subasa* Vol. I, no. 17, 1940, pp. 251-252; "Hela Vadan Kossa," *Subasa*, Vol. II no. 6, 1940, pp. 85-89; "Vadan Kosu Sapayuma," *Subasa*, Vol. II, no. 7, 1940, pp. 97-98; "Vadan Kosuvata Sarasavi Sahayuva," *Subasa*, Vol. II no. 14, 1940, pp. 211-212 and "An Open Letter to Dr. W. I. Jennings," *Subasa*, Vol. II, no. 23, 1941, pp. 353-356.

84. "University's Aid with Dictionary," *Subasa*, Vol. II, no. 14, 1940, pp. 209-211.

safely be said that the professors and lecturers of that eminent institution cannot be accused of possessing any special knowledge of the Sinhalese language to qualify them to anything like research work."<sup>85</sup> His contention was that the dons of the Oriental Faculty of the University, though they posed as authorities in Sinhalese, Pali and Sanskrit, were thoroughly incompetent people, who had managed to get there by duping the authorities. "How do Europeans usually measure the depth of a person's knowledge of Sinhalese?" he asked and went on to say, "From the efficiency that person shows in English and from the account of the Sinhalese language he could give in English. Persons are known to have gained their Ph.D. degree by submitting theses prepared secretly by yellow-robed savants..."<sup>86</sup> He accused the political leaders of conniving with these people; according to him, at the root of all this was the fact that these leaders themselves were ignorant of the Sinhalese language and cared little for it. In an editorial to *The Helio* apparently addressed to this political leadership, he says:

In the case of English you will never allow your illiterate household servants to be your tutors. Why? Because you know better. You will think it much below your dignity to be influenced in what you speak or write by the unpolished jargon of your servants... But in the case of *Helese* it is just the reverse. The servant leads you by the nose. You begin to consider your servant a profound scholar, and at times you go to the length of ridiculing, on the strength of your servant's teaching, even those who have studied the language of the land for their whole lives. If your servant knows English you will not hesitate to make him your interpreter *mudaliyar* or even to get him appointed professor of Sinhalese in a University.<sup>87</sup>

The above editorial was titled "Doctoring to Death"—the reference being to Professor Malalasekera. Cumaratunga continues to say, "No less a person than Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., D.Lit., M.R.A.S.C.B., Professor of Sinhalese, Pali and Sanskrit, Member of the Text Book Committee, has boldly, unhesitatingly and publicly announced that *The Committee did not pay much attention to errors in the spacing of words, grammar and spelling...* G. P. Malalasekera we must all admit is the accredited official authority on Sin-Helese (sic) language and is it a wonder if that language, under his distinguished direction became grammarless, styleless, powerless, vigourless and graceless and suitable only to the gutter?"<sup>88</sup>

Over the *Dictionary* issue, making "an open appeal," in *The Helio* to Sir D. B. Jayatilaka, the giant of the political arena of the day, himself an accredited Oriental scholar who also happened to be the Editor-in-Chief of the *Dictionary*, Cumaratunga says,

The Sinhalese language is trying its best to get itself freed. It has a right to ask for your assistance. But what assistance are you rendering it at present? Instead of rendering it every assistance to free itself from bondage you yourself are supposed to be holding it tight... I have heard it freely said that had you but released this unfortunate *Dictionary*

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

87. *The Helio*, Vol. I, nos. 7 and 8, 1941, p. 50.

88. *Ibid.* The emphasis is Cumaratunga's. (For the word "Sin-Helese" see fn. 70).

from your relentless grasp, it would have appeared in its entirety before the public several years ago... Many are prepared to believe now that this great undertaking will end in an ignominious fiasco. Then why is there no public protest? Why is there no motion in the State Council moved to suspend work of the Dictionary and thereby save at least a fraction of the public money allotted for it? The reasons are obvious. As the President of the Royal Asiatic Society you have made your position sufficiently secure there. As Home Minister and Leader of the State Council you stand like a huge rock perfectly unshakable and unassailable by the other members who are not such fools to speak about a Sinhalese Dictionary which they do not dare or care to read.<sup>89</sup>

This section of the power elite which came under the virulent criticism of Cumaratunga was closely linked with the hierarchy of the Buddhist church—through affiliations via *pirivena* education and the *dayaka* system.<sup>90</sup> Therefore the “disparagement” of these personalities, who were the acclaimed Buddhist leaders, in itself would have been enough to evoke the resentment of the hierarchy of the priesthood. In addition, the *Hela* school, in pursuance of its linguistic philosophy let off a fusillade of criticism at the theories upheld by the *pirivena* tradition. “The pundits of the temple and the university,” wrote Cumaratunga, “have created a language of their own which is at once debased, insipid, and inelegant.”<sup>91</sup> Also Cumaratunga’s unbridled criticism had found a target in the corruptions of the contemporary Buddhist church as well. In an article written in 1936 titled, “The Disservice We Are Doing to Religion,” he castigates the blind faith of the average Buddhist devotee who venerates even impious monks, just because they happen to wear yellow robes.<sup>92</sup> Although himself a Buddhist, Cumaratunga dissociated himself from this kind of devotion; and his was a very this-worldly and practical philosophy of life. Thus, in one of the poems written towards the end of his career he says, “The sermons which direct our minds to foreign lands,<sup>93</sup> to heaven and to the *Brahma* world are fires which burn the ladder to prosperity. Let us cultivate our lands as our forefathers did. The sinful monks who eat up our brains along with our rice are the hordes of Mara.”<sup>94</sup> Also his adoption of the slogan, “Language, Nation and Country” in place of the traditional one—“Country, Nation and Religion,”<sup>95</sup> his pronouncement that Pali was not the language in which the Buddha delivered his sermons and that it was an artificial medium devised by

89. *Subasa*, Vol. I, no. 17, 1940. Reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, 2, pp. 41-48.

90. Sir D. B. Jayatilaka was a former student of Vidyalkara Pirivena and became consequently the President of its *dayaka sabha*. He was, in addition, the President for life of the Colombo Young Men’s Buddhist Association, the General Manager of the schools of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, the President of the Dharmaprasada Samitiya and the founder President of the All Ceylon Congress of the Y.M.B.A.’s—the forerunner of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. Professor Malalasekera had studied at Vidyodaya Pirivena and was a leading Buddhist educationist. He was one of the most esteemed leaders of the Buddhists and held the presidentship of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress from 1939 to 1956.

91. *The Helio*, Vol. I, nos. 13 and 14, 1941, p. 105. Also note the attacks on scholar monks such as Ven. Weliwitiye Sorata and Ven. Bambarande Siri Sivali in a number of instances in *Subasa*.

92. “Apa Agamayata Karana Varada,” *Sinhala Samaya Vesak Kalapaya*, 2480 B.E. (1936 A.D.) reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, 2 pp. 20-28. In *Subasa* one finds a large number of instances where similar sentiments are expressed by different writers.

93. Possibly a reference to the extolling of *Jambudvīpa* (India) in Buddhist sermons.

94. *Hela Mīyāsīya*, p. 93.

95. The significance of this change was discussed above.

the monks of the Mahavihara,<sup>96</sup> and the castigation of the worldliness of the contemporary priesthood by other members of the *Hela Havula*,<sup>97</sup> all contributed to the precipitation of a head-on clash between the *Hela* movement and the Buddhist hierarchy. An association of the monks called the *Bhiksu Sammelanaya* tried to organize an island-wide protest<sup>98</sup> and the *Hela Havula* replied that its criticisms were levelled against impious monks only.<sup>99</sup> Special care was taken to preserve the support of those monks who were with the *Hela* movement. In one of his editorials to *The Helio* Cumaratunga mentions in laudatory terms "those (monks) of the younger generation who consider that to serve their country, nation and their mother tongue is a duty as great as, if not greater than, the duty they owe to their religion."<sup>100</sup>

From Cumaratunga's point of view it was in the face of such heavy odds resulting from the policies of the colonial government on the one hand and from the attitude of the Sinhala political and cultural leadership on the other, that he appealed to the younger generation for action. "Sinhalese youth! The time has arrived for you to step forward," he said, "our elders are intoxicated with their superiority in age . . . They have no use for the ordinary people . . ." <sup>101</sup> Here one notes the appeal to the youthful sensibility and the populist spirit.

Moreover, in an era where allegiance and deference to the traditional elite was strong and formed largely the basis of the new political leadership, Cumaratunga stood up to question the rationale of this state of affairs. In a poem written at the time when universal adult franchise was granted he said, "The power of the vote you have received, O Sinhalese! is a sure weapon to destroy meanness. If, however, you give it away succumbing to force, to sermons or to money, think intelligently, what succour will there be for the country?" <sup>102</sup> Also he was able to foresee with remarkable insight the consequences of sending up what Shaw called "the big balloon" which "comes down to earth only once in five years or so," the people down below neither having the courage nor the resources to control what happens in between. Thus three years after the adoption of universal adult franchise, winding up an editorial in the *Lak Mini Pahana*, he wrote:

If we do not know what is suitable for our children, if we do not step forward to prevent it when unsuitable things are given to them, if we do not inquire what those whom we elect and send to the legislature are saying and doing, and if on the other hand we are willing to clap hands and garland and to have processions when anybody says anything in any manner, and to go and vote unashamedly when (someone) who has

96. See "Pali Bhasava," *Subasa*, Vol. I, no. 19, 1940, pp. 281-2.

97. See for example, R. Tennakoon, "Mahana Vinaya," *Subasa*, Vol. III, nos. 23 and 24, 1941, pp. 374-378. Several other similar instances are cited in the notice referred to in fn. 98.

98. See the notice reproduced in Arisen Ahubudu, *Cumaratungu Asura*, Colombo, 1957, pp. x-xiii.

99. See Cumaratunga's answer to a query in *Subasa*, Vol. III, no. 11, 1941, pp. 175-176.

100. *The Helio*, Vol. I, no. 3, 1941, p. 18.

101. Tr. from *Lak Mini Pahana*, 15 May 1935, quoted in Harischandra Wijetunga, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

102. Tr. from *Lak Mini Pahana*, 21 August 1934, quoted in Harischandra Wijetunga, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

been doing nothing but disservice for five years comes again before us displaying non-existent geniality, expecting to get into the legislature once more, what do we deserve to get except a bolt of thunder?<sup>103</sup>

Thus Cumaratunga was one of the first among the Sinhalese literati to attempt to make the masses aware of the implications of universal adult franchise. In this attempt a clash with the established political and cultural leadership was inevitable.<sup>104</sup> Cumaratunga did not, in his lifetime, succeed in the endeavour to dislodge them from authority. However, it may be said, that he contributed heavily towards breaking down the inhibitions which prevailed within Sinhalese society regarding criticisms of its own Establishment.

That the novel and challenging views of Cumaratunga found a ready response among the Sinhalese educated youth of the day is clearly manifest in the considerable support the *Hela* movement seems to have received from among the Sinhalese school-teachers and the younger generation of Buddhist monks<sup>105</sup>. Although numerically not very large, the membership of the *Hela Havula* comprised a dedicated and energetic literati. By their resourcefulness they seem to have been able to make a considerable impact on the social ethos. The main contribution of the *Hela* movement, it may be said, was the instillation of a feeling of confidence and self-respect into the minds of the Sinhalese literati who hitherto had suffered from a sense of inferiority due to the socio-economic dominance of the English educated class. This may be viewed as the beginning of the forward thrust of one of the most potent political forces in recent times.

Cumaratunga had as early as 1922 pointed out the necessity of using *swabhasa* in the affairs of state. In a poem entitled "Friends! How will self-government become us," he said, "If people whom we send to the legislature cannot come into our midst and speak to us in our language about what is needed for the development of our own country; we will never be able to enjoy the benefits of self-government."<sup>105</sup> When he was engaged in the task of raising the self-esteem of the Sinhalese, Cumaratunga seems to have been aware of the political potential of the force he was building up. In an article written in 1941, having castigated the meekness of the majority of Sinhalese school-teachers, he says:

103. Tr. Editorial to *Lak Mini Pahana*, 2478 B.E. Poson Ava, 8.

104. The Sinhalese political leadership, consisting of personalities such as Sir D. B. Jayatilaka and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, was backed by this cultural leadership including the hierarchy of the Buddhist church. Hence Cumaratunga's attacks on the above personalities as well as on Professor Malalasekera and the leading Buddhist monks. (See fn. 70, 87, 88, 89, 90 and 98). For the reaction of the Buddhist monks see fn. 98. I have not been able to get information as to how Jayatilaka and Bandaranaike reacted to these attacks. Malalasekera presided over the commemorative meeting held on the fourth death anniversary of Cumaratunga. (See Ven. Sitinimaluwe Sumanaratana ed. *op. cit.*, p. 375). Writing to the paper *Sarasavi Sandarasa* on 5-3-1948, Malalasekera declared that although there were differences of opinion between himself and Cumaratunga the services rendered by the latter to Sinhalese language are so great that his name will be cherished as long as the Sinhalese language will last (*op. cit.*, pp. 225-226).

105. According to *Subasa* (Vol. ii, No. 20, p. 319) there were 300 members present at the first general meeting held on 15-2-1941. And at the third general meeting held on 14-6-1941 there were more than 500 members present (*Subasa*, Vol. ii, no. 32, p. 501). See also fn. 76.

106. Tr. "Kavara lesa Hobiida Siya Rajaya Sabandini," written under the pseudonym 'Lak Daru,' *Swarajyaya*, 10-9-1922. Reproduced in *Hela Heliya*, I, p. 113.

We must not be understood to say that all Helese teachers fall within the ring of miserable wretches referred to above. There are now and then gentlemen teachers distinguishable by their piercing proficiency, indomitable courage and stout determination. Their number is not large but is ever on the increase. The time is ripe for these valiant upholders of national traditions and cultural standards to go a step beyond the firm stand they are already making. . . . They must now advance. So far they have defended themselves. Now they must take the initiative as well as the offensive into their hands.<sup>107</sup>

Again, when the *swabhasa* struggle had been launched and two resolutions aimed at replacing English by *swabasha* had been passed in the State Council,<sup>108</sup> Cumaratunga made the following suggestion in an editorial to *Subasa*: "At the next general election let us adopt a new policy; Let us say beforehand that we shall not vote for a person who will not pledge himself to speak exclusively in Sinhalese in the Council."<sup>109</sup> Here one may note in embryonic form the movement to make language a political issue. Moreover the near fanatic concern for language and the zealous propaganda of the *Hela Havula* would have generated an unprecedented language awareness in the Sinhalese society. Thus, Cumaratunga may be considered as a pioneer in the building up of the forces which were to play the major role in the social and political life of the 1950's.

Cumaratunga has been referred to earlier in the present essay as heir to the past as well as the reflection of the times and the progenitor of the future. With regard to the second aspect of his career, however, there is one peculiarity that needs to be noted. When placed in the context of the main trends of the social, cultural and political forces of his generation, Cumaratunga was an eccentric loner. The *Hela* movement was equally critical of the colonial government as well as the socially acclaimed religio-national elite. Unlike the Temperance Movement and the *Mahajana Sabhā* movement,<sup>110</sup> the *Hela* movement attracted the support of only a narrow section of the society: it was confined to the Sinhalese educated youth with radical orientations who were ready to embrace, in contradistinction to the established ethos of Sinhalese society, a dissenting philosophy—militant and not afraid to question time-honoured tradition.

As reports in *Subasa* indicate, the *Hela Havula* under the leadership of Cumaratunga made great headway soon after its inception.<sup>111</sup> Cumaratunga himself provided the principal force of the movement. And in the eyes of his followers he assumed messianic proportions.<sup>112</sup> The removal of his

107. "Helese Case," *The Helio*, Vol. I, Nos. 9 and 10, 1941, p. 70.

108. Namely, the resolutions proposed by G. K. W. Perera in 1932 and D. P. R. Gunawardena in 1937. See *Debates of the State Council of Ceylon*, 1932, p. 794 and p. 1641 and *op. cit.*, 1937, p. 881 and p. 3090.

109. *Subasa*, Vol. III, Nos. 1-8, 1941, p. 35.

110. For details of these movements see Michael Roberts, "The Political Antecedents of the Revivalist Elite within the M.E.P. Coalition of 1956," *Ceylon Studies Seminar*, 1969/70 series, No. 11. and Tissa Fernando, "Arrack, Toddy and Ceylonese Nationalism: Some Observations on the Temperance Movement, 1912-1921," *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 2:2, 1971, pp. 123-150.

111. See *Subasa*, Vols. II and III, for reports of the intensive activity of the *Hela Havula*.

112. He is usually referred to as *Guru Devi* ("The teacher-god"). And in one commentary work he is referred to as *Cumaratungu Muni* ("Cumaratunga the sage"). See Amarasiri Gunawadu, *op. cit.*, Arisen Abubudu, *op. cit.*, and D. V. Richard de Silva, *op. cit.*

charismatic leadership with his death in 1944—three years after the inception of the *Hela Havula* when it was at the peak of its power—was an irreparable loss. Since then the movement has been on the path of gradual decline.

Thus the *Hela* movement failed to accomplish its aim of “winning the *Helese* over” to its cause. It is difficult to conjecture how the movement would have fared if Cumaratunga’s death did not occur at the comparatively early age of fifty seven. However, the factors operating against him were many. The antagonism of the established elite would have been a serious obstacle to the diffusion of his creed. Moreover, in spite of the exalted status of the Sinhalese suggested by his theories, the identification of language development with classicization led to the adoption of a medium which no doubt appeared difficult and remote to the average Sinhalese, thereby preventing the *Hela* movement from receiving mass support, which was a vital ingredient for the success of any movement in an era of growing democratization. The paradox in the *Hela* ideology is that while it waved a populist banner against the dominant class and its stance, it advocated a language which was largely unintelligible to the masses and was more distant from the spoken idiom than the accepted standard of *Misra Sinhala*.<sup>113</sup>

The failure to make the *Helese* creed acceptable to Sinhalese society at large has ultimately resulted in the dwindling of the *Hela Havula* into a small group with a mission and a grievance. They have made an occasional bid to fulfil their mission: for instance in the *Sammata Sinhala* (Standard Sinhalese) Committee and the Sinhalese School Text Book committee of the late sixties, when they attempted to get a number of *Helese* specialities included in the linguistic form that was to be sponsored by the state. However, they have been unable to achieve much success. For those whose antagonism has been aroused during their campaigns have arrayed themselves in opposition to such attempts and successfully thwarted the ambitions of the *Hela Havula*.<sup>114</sup>

113. In Sinhalese, as is characteristic of many languages with a long standing literary tradition, there is a wide difference between the spoken and written idioms. This diglossic situation is dealt with in detail in K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *Spoken and Written Sinhalese: A Contrastive Study*, M. Phil. dissertation, University of York, 1967 (unpublished).

114. For details of these two controversial issues, see K. N. O. Dharmadasa, *Bhasava Ha Samajaya*, Colombo, 1972, pp. 122-126.