

Chapter One: One land of many kingdoms

The history of Sri Lanka is complex and not easily unraveled, even to those who know it well. Hence, some historical background is necessary for us to move forward the theology of symbiosis that is envisioned in this thesis. My goal in this chapter is to provide an historical overview that will highlight three significant motives in the history of my country: (1) the interface of geographical and religious boundaries; (2) the roots of ethnic and racial identities in foundational myths and stories; (3) the colonial contribution to the ethnic problem.

The Make-up of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, an island situated in the southeastern sea off the coast of India, has been known to historians and travelers since the first century BCE as Thaprobana and Serendib. Early Greek and Roman historians and political officials such as Megasthenes and Pliny documented their knowledge and experience of this country in their literature. The Roman and Greek coinage of that particular period found in the region of the first capital city called Anuradhapura, gives archaeological proof for the theory of the presence of the Greco-Roman visitors and ambassadors in the royal court of the Sri Lanka kings. What ever happened before this time can only be seen shrouded or clouded by metahistorical myths, recorded in religious literature of the early medieval period.

The origin myth¹ begins with the arrival of a band of 700 north Indian (Aryan) men with their leader Vijaya (Victor). Vijaya's father Sinhabahu was reared by a lioness, hence the name Sinha-Lion. These 700 men were banished from the Kingdom of Sinhapura by Sinhabahu for their unruly behavior. In 543 BC, as this convicted band of men was sailing southward, the Buddha who was on his deathbed in Kusi-Nara, North India, would see a vision and a prophesy that his dharma (doctrine) would not be established in the Jambu Dvipa (pristine name of India) but in the Lak Dvipa (Sri Lanka) by the Aryan band sailing southwards. It should be noted that this last vision of the Buddha before he died, or, as the Buddhists say, before he attained "Parinibbana," (final bliss) was committed to writing only in 100 BCE after 400 years of circulation in the oral tradition. Commitment to writing of the Buddhist scriptures took place in a peripheral town in the hill country of Sri-Lanka called Aluvihare.

When the Aryan band arrived in Sri Lanka - known then as Thambapanni, Terra Rossa, as the Sinhalese say; or a derivation of Tamraparni (after the river) as the Tamils claim - they found it to be inhabited by two groups of people called **Yakshas** and **Nagas**. According to anthropological discoveries, these two tribes were people belonging to the south Indian region that is only 22 miles, at the shortest point of distance, in the Palk Strait.

Both the Yakshas and Nagas were animists and shaminists.² The former believed in spirits as more powerful than humans, and the latter worshipped a serpent god. Even today, the Hindus in Sri Lanka, who are mostly Tamils, believe in "Pishasas and

¹ The word myth is to be understood as a pristine of traditional story, ostensibly of historical events that unfold the origin, nature and world view of a people and their culture.

²Yakshas = demons and giants; Naga = cobra.

Vedalam" (spirits and demons) and include cobra cult as part of their worship. Pliny identifies Yakshas and Nagas as the ancestors of the Tamil community. Another myth that identifies the Yakshas and Naga aborigines as Tamils is the Hindu Sanskrit epic "The Ramayana," composed in the 8th century BCE, where the greater part of the story takes place in the domain of the Yaksha (Rakshasa) king Ravana of Lanka. In this sacred classic, Ravana abducts Sita the wife of Rama - the Visnu incarnate. Rama finds this out and rescues his wife by destroying Ravana in a battle. I am of the opinion that the fact that Sinhalese people do not appropriate this epic as one of their classics or sacred literature, also in a way cedes to the opinion that the aborigines of Lanka were non-Aryans or non-Sinhalese.

The next significant phase of the myth of the origin of the nation, is its link with the life and words of the Lord Buddha, the patron of the nation and the founder of the state religion. Two highly important and fundamental myths that links the Buddha physically with Sri Lanka are: (1) That he envisioned the arrival of Vijaya in Sri Lanka and stated that his doctrine will be established there and not in his motherland; (2) Buddha's three visits to Sri Lanka from north to south, from which have grown highly popular Buddhist pilgrimage shrines. There is absolutely no historical or archaeological evidence for the visit of Buddha to Sri Lanka. As in all other religions, the relics and shrines connected with the founders and the earliest of the saints, have their origin from myths and untraceable traditions.¹

Linking the arrival of Vijaya to the last living moment of Buddha is considered anachronistic by scholars since there is at least five decades difference between them.

The death of the Buddha took place around 486 BC, while the Vijaya story is said to have taken place in 543 BCE by the Mahavamsa literature of the 6th century.³

The origin of the Tamils of Sri Lanka is also clouded in myths. Though the Tamil language is an Indo-Dravidian language akin to Sanskrit (not derived from Sanskrit but contemporary to it), there are myths to say that the Lord Siva is the originator of Tamale language. Lord Siva and his sons Gannesh and Skanda are mainly responsible for the growth and beauty of the language, and they taught it to the poets and sages of South India nearly three thousand years ago. Names of grammarians such as Tholkappiyar and Agasthi Rishi, who had written the earliest of Tamil literature that can be detected only as quoted in subsequent classics, are considered to be contemporaneous to Pannini and Pathanchali, the first Sanskrit grammarian and the author of the Yoga dharshama respectively.

The very fact that the Hindu sacred epic *Ramayana*, which speaks of the transport between the southern region of India and Sri Lanka (i.e. abduction of Sita from India by Ravana and the Battle against Ravana by Rama, Hanuman and the troops in Lanka), cannot be seen as absolute fiction without any basis in reality. Most probably there was some commuting done as far back as the 6th century BC. The fact that the sea between Rameswaram of India and the Thalai Mannar pier of Sri Lanka is comparatively shallower than the surrounding parts of the same ocean has made geologists wonder if actually there was at one time the possibility to cross between the two countries or if there was actually that "Sethu anicut" referred to in *Ramayana*. Vijaya himself sails to the Pandyan kingdom in South India to take brides for himself and his companions from

³S. Ponnambalam, Sri Lanka the National Query of the Tamil Liberation. p.22-23.

among the princesses and royal maidens. All these facts together with the religious and cultural affinities aforementioned, make it plausible to determine that ancestors of the Tamils from South India would have settled at least two centuries before the arrival of the band from north India. Until the third century BCE, one does not hear about political or ethnic conflict in Thmbapanni or Tamraparni. The North Indian settlers, the south Indian settlers, the aboriginal Yakshas and Nagas seemed to live, if not peacefully, at least without great strife. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, locates the Naga territory in the north eastern sphere of Sri Lanka and the Nagas in a manner that fits well with Tamil culture.⁴

Anuradhapura Period (The Period of the First Capital)

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka during the time of a supposedly Tamil king called Thevanampriya Thissan. Arahat Mahindha, a son of the Emperor Asoka of North India, first preached Buddhism in Sri Lanka. When Thissan heard the preaching of Mahindha in a place called Mahiyangana, according to Mahavamsa, he was converted to Buddhism and he ordered all his subjects to become Buddhist as well. From that time onwards, not only does the kingdom become Buddhist but Thissan himself acquires a Sinhala name: Tissa. Scholars are of the view that the hunting festival that Thissan was participating in at the time of his hearing the Buddhist preaching, as reported by Mahavamsa, was actually the springtime festivities of the fertility cult belonging to the Hindu shamnist sanctuaries. As Ponnambalam, a famous Sri Lankans judge and historian writes:

⁴ Sachi Ponnambalam, "Sri Lanka, The National Quest and the Tamil Liberation Struggle," Zed Press, 1983, p.17.

At the time of the introduction of Buddhism (3rd Century BC), Tamil kingly rule was centred in Anuradhapura, the ancient capital which the Tamil kings founded, Devanampriya Theesan, the Tamil king at that time, was followed by Senan and Kuddikan (177-153 BC) and by Ellalan (145-101 BC). With the defeat of Ellalan by the Sinhalese prince Dutugemunu, in 101 BC, which is a historical fact, Anuradhapura became the seat of the Sinhalese dynasty. The popularized Sinhalese version of Sri Lanka history, however, represents Devanampriya Theesan as a Sinhalese king (which is inaccurate, for, as earlier contended, Sinhalese emerged subsequent to the introduction of Buddhism), and Ellalan (called Elara in Sinhalese) as a Chola prince, who invaded Ceylon, captured the (Sinhalese) government at Anuradhapura and ruled for about forty-five years.⁵

The first conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils (if not among the populace, at least the kings) is the above-mentioned battle between Ellalan and Duttugemunu in Anuradhapura in 101 BCE. According to *Mahavamsa* and *Chulavamsa*, the two epic chronicles of the deeds of the kings (*Mahavamsa* was written in the 6th century, *Chulavamsa* in the 11th), it was settled between the two of them that a duel would determine the winner. After Duttugemunu won the duel, he built a huge religious monument in Ellalan's honor, called Mirisavethya Dagoba, and ordered that all by-passers should pay homage to it. This act of King Duttugemunu and the historical fact that even after the death of Ellalan, Tamil kings continued to rule that territory, makes one to favor the opinion that this battle was more an assertion of power than capturing a kingdom or a social conflict.

Expansion of territories, invasions into another's domain and superiority - determining duels, are rampant in all histories. Sargon, Serinakerib, Nebuchednezzar, Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Charlesmagne, and Napoleon are but a few names of those who expanded their power territories, by launching invasions and battles.

⁵ Ibid, 28.

Some of them are long forgotten and some of them are mere historic reminiscences. But unfortunately in Sri Lanka, in the words of Prof. Gananeth Obeyasekara, the battle of 101 BCE grew in significance through the years and developed into one of the most important myths of the Sinhalese nationalism in modern times.⁶

Nothing much is known about such conflicts or battles in the ensuing centuries. All chronicles describe the life, politics and religion in the first capital Anuradhapura. Buddhism, having become the religion patronized by the king in this period, attracted the attention and adherence in the kingdom. Gigantic dagobas were built; many monasteries were built for the monks within the city, for them to live. The Bikkus before this period lived in the caves in the forest. Then the royal garden in the city was donated by the king to the Sanga to build pirivenas.⁷ The archeological ruins of about 5 huge dagoba rising over 350 feet above the ground, monasteries, deep and wide ablution pools and walls of ancient Buddhist universities belonging from 200 BCE to 600 CE, yet stand to prove the supreme position that Buddhism held in that era. Though there is evidence for the presence and practice of Mahayana Buddhism in that era, it was Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism that was considered the religion of the Kingdom.⁸

In this era, the Tamils had established their kingdom in the northeastern part of the country; it was governed by two kings, one in the north and one in the east. According to Pliny, the Naga Theepakatpam (Naga domain) had its periphery in Chilaw in the west and Trincomalee in the East. The three great historic Hindu shrines in Chilaw,

⁶ Ibid, 24.

⁷ Sanga = College of Buddhist monks; Pirivena = a particular group of monks, their monastery and their seat of religious education

Trincomolee and Batticaloa is a strong proof for the Hindu practice and belief of the guardian deities of the periphery of the land. The Tamil kings were known as "Ariya Chakravarthis" or "Singai Ariyans" (Singanagar- Jaffna).⁹

The Tamil kings also had a territory of their own in the southeastern part of the country. This may be either because the eastern periphery of the Tamil community or Naga/Yaksha worshippers extended beyond Batticaloa and Pottuvil; or a segment of the same community might have settled down there in earlier times. The inter-religious shrine of Sri Lanka - the mountain known as Adam's Peak: known to Tamils as the Mount of Siva's feet (to the Buddhist as the Mount of the Holy feet of Buddha) was at early times a mountain of the local gods and a place for sun worship (Surya Namaskara) a devotional practice of Hinduism. Another most famous national shrine flocked by Hindus and Buddhists in Kataragama (Sinhala version of the Tamil name *katirkamam*), is a temple dedicated to Skanda diety - the second son of Lord Siva. Both these above said shrines are in the southeastern part of Sri Lanka. This is a proof for my above said statement that the Tamil community might have also spread to the southeastern areas of Sri Lanka in the early periods of history. In the early centuries of the Middle Ages (i.e. from 6th century CE to about the 9th century CE), two dynasties called the Cholas and the Pallavas who were the Tamil kings of South India, became very powerful and expanded their domain up to Indonesia. Needless to say, in this process of expansion and subjugation Sri Lanka too was affected. The sporadic expansions and invasions affected

⁸ Mahayana = "great vehicle" found in Japan, China, Vietnam, etc; "small vehicle" found in Burma, Thailand, etc. It is also called Theravada (lead by monks). Dagoba is a dome-like monument that enshrines a Buddhist relic (derived from the words datu garba = relic chamber).

⁹ The word Ariyan here means "noble"

the life and economy of the Anuradhapura kingdom. Anuradhapura was at that time filled with Indian, Chinese and Middle Eastern traders.

The Cholas and the Pallavas were ardent devotees and promoters of Saivism (Siva Bhakti).¹⁰ Therefore, they were considered by the local king and the Buddhist Sanga as a threat and destructive to Buddhism. It is quite possible that during such periods of war, Buddhist temples may have suffered damage and destruction. But to brand the south Indian Chola invasions as "anti Buddhist projects" cannot be logically sustained. There are two valid reasons, which buttress these positions. One is that until about the 10th century CE, Buddhism thrived both in north and south India, and secondly that the Buddhist monuments and megalithic statues of Buddha in Sri Lanka reveal - South Indian - Sri Lankan melange or blend of artistic styles, and they are made or sculptured with the cooperative efforts of Lankan and Indian craftsmen and sculptors. In the words of the Harvard Professor and reputed Sri Lankan anthropologist S. J. Tambiah:

In South India visibly until the ninth century, there was a strong presence of Buddhism, especially among the mercantile peoples, and by and large, from the first centuries AD until the Chola imperial expansion from the eighth century onwards, and the concurrent Hindu devotional revival and persecution of the Jain and Buddhist communities, the early and classical Buddhism of Sri Lanka during the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva epochs had more to do with South Indian Buddhism than with Buddhism of any other Indian region, by way of exchange, reciprocity, transmission of sectarian doctrines and the granting of refuge to dissident monks during persecutions. Indeed, these exchanges and reciprocities lasted until the fourteenth century. The raising of these matters has as its purpose not the belittling of the Sinhala civilizational triumphs in the Sri Lankan environment as genuine local achievements and crystallizations, but the

¹⁰ Hinduism has denominations or sects, which are inclusive, called Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktham, Kaumaram, Ganapathyam and Saumaram. The name derives from the god/goddess who is held as the principal deity.

debunking of the idea of an age-long and permanent confrontation between two ethnic blocs, the Sinhalese and Tamils.¹¹

The monument of the sixth century BCE which is quasi a wonder of the world if seen from the point of architecture, art and hydraulic achievements, was the king's palace in that time called "Sigiriya." Though the king was an usurper of the throne, as portrayed by Mahavamsa; the monument and other ruins and discoveries in the vicinity reveal potent presence of Mahayana Buddhism of that period of India.

"The view that Theravada, Buddhism has always been dominant among the Sinhalese masses prevails in Sri Lanka. But it is undeniable that Mahayan Buddhism was dominant for a considerable period of history. Mahayana Buddhism was influenced by Hinduism and has had a lasting impact on the culture of the Sinhala people. Further, the practice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is not exactly the path prescribed by Theravada, Buddhism. Perhaps, a minority of the Sinhala Buddhist laity and a large number of the clergy strictly adhere to Theravada, Buddhism. But, the vast majority of the Sinhala Buddhists worship Hindu deities along with the Buddha and go on pilgrimages to Hindu shrines in Kataragama and Muneeswaram, thereby of the Sinhalese and Tamils have much more in common than the practice of the westernized and the more traditional 119 sections of either nationality."¹²

The Polonnaruwa Period (The Period of the Second Capital)

In the 8th century CE, the capital was moved from Anuradhapura to another place slightly southeast called Polonnaruwa (then known as Pulasthi Nagara). The reason for this shift is allured to the sporadic Chola invasions. Polonnaruwa was also called at that time "Kandawuru Nuwara" - "Military City," for the reason that the various regiments were housed there. The royal palace, the official buildings such as the audience hall or

¹¹ S. J. Tambiah, Sri Lanka Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, University of Chicago Press, 1986, 7.

¹² Imayavaramban, On National Relations in Sri Lanka, 32.

the court, the Harem and above all the Tooth Relic Chamber - (The relic being the possession - Palladium of the most powerful king) were all shifted to Polonnaruwa, and remained there until the 13th century CE. The shift of the capital from the southern part of the North east of the country to the northern part of the North East of the country is not a shift of hundreds of miles. The modern mode of transport makes the two points passable within 3 hours. Hence one may question the traditional reasoning of causing the shift to invasions, when one considers the distance between Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. Both eastern and western spheres of the northern part of the country are flat land and devoid of thick jungles. Hence should the invaders from South India enter from Mannar as it always happened, Polonnaruwa is in fact not too far away and inaccessible for the troops.

While I do not rule out the reason of invasion, I am more inclined to look for the reason of the shift to reasons of economic and political stability rather than mere anti-invasion strategy. This traditional reasoning is another very important factor for the intensification and mobilization of anti-Tamil feeling among the Sinhala Buddhist population. The Chola invasions were seen as destructive of Sinhala language and Buddhist religion. As I stated earlier, their main thrust was more a show of power than the simple elimination of native cultures. Another important reason that makes me inclined toward the reason of economic and political stability is the result of the shift seen in the ensuing four centuries. Two famous Sri Lankan archeologists are of the following opinion:

It has been suggested that if the Cholas neglected the maintenance of the vast irrigation system which they found here when they conquered Ceylon, they would have acted to the prejudice of their own interests. This

suggestion is supported by the force of reason, because the Colas were not here on this occasion to plunder and depart, but to conquer and stay. The negative evidence of the absence of any record in the Chronicles of the occurrence of famines or food shortages during their rule suggests that they saw to it that the irrigation continued to function efficiently.¹³

In the Middle Ages or in the Polonnaruwa period, Sri Lanka excelled at what is known as the hydraulic civilization and rice cultivation. Though artificial reservoirs to collect rain water and spring water for irrigation and sanitation were built in Anuradhpura by Devanampriya Tissa and Mahasena and other kings, many such lakes and reservoirs (in Sinhala called Sarnudra - ocean) were constructed by the Medieval kings of the Polonnaruwa period. Long aqueducts and annicuts were dug or constructed to connect the springs and fountains to fill these reservoirs. Even today, one cannot fail to notice the thousands of hectares of the rice fields on the left and the great Parakramabahu Reservoir of the 11th century on the right, divided by the huge bank or annicut.¹⁴

In this region within a space of 1000 square miles one can yet see over fifty such big and small reservoirs built within this period. Even today, it is this region that produces the greatest amount of rice in both the Maha and Yala seasons.¹⁵

In the Middle Ages the Polonnaruwa kingdom did attain both economic and political stability and was self sufficient in food production - rice, vegetable and fish that were the normal food of the majority of the people. (Both Buddhist and Hindus are vegetarians and hence except for milk and eggs they do not consume animal proteins. Even now statistically 60% of the protein intake is from fish). The latter part of the

¹³C.W.Nicholas, and S. Paranavitana, A Concise History of Ceylon, Colombo, Ceylon University Press, 1961, 255.

¹⁴The word annicut is an Anglicization of the Tamil word "annaikkattu," which is the constructed bank to store water.

¹⁵The rice, the staple food of Sri Lankans, is cultivated twice each year.

Middle Ages, i.e. the 11th and 12th centuries CE, is hailed by many historians as the Golden Age of Sri Lanka. Rice and spices, tusks and precious stones were exported through Chinese and Arab merchants to the West which ultimately paved the path to the arrival of the Western trading companies in search of the same commodities in the 15th century CE.

The most notable among the kings of the Polonnaruva, Period is King Parakramabahu II. Befitting his name he was a valiant person (1153 – 1186 CE). He is known to have made a statement that not even a drop of water from the sky should be allowed to flow into the ocean before it is made use for the need of the people. He connected three lakes into a large reservoir for irrigation purposes, and it is called the Parakrama Samudra. The following quote, too, is an assertion by the aforementioned archeological experts, Nicholas and Paranavitana:

Upon assuming the overlordship of the principality of Dakshinadea, the prince Parakramabahu's first step was to secure his frontiers against possible aggression and, to this end, he established military posts at various points, in particular on the east and north where his boundary was contiguous with that of GaJabahu. He then proceeded to develop the agricultural resources of his territory by putting in hand a number of irrigation projects designed to bring large areas of new land under cultivation....

The organization and training of the armed forces of the principality were a complementary part of the expansion in agricultural and commercial activity. Foreign mercenaries, Malays and South Indians, formed the nucleus of the standing army: a section of these constituted the Velaikkara regiment or kings' bodyguards. Certain units of the standing army were specially trained and equipped for night fighting, others for breaking into fortifications and defended buildings. Throughout the principality the acquisition of skill in the use of military weapons and martial training; of every kind were greatly encouraged among young men: youths were organized as cadet units bearing special names.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., 204-205.

King Parakrama also shines as an example for harmonizing and synchronizing the Sinhala, Tamil cultures and the Hindu-Buddhist religions. His mother was from the Pandiyan Kingdom and he also married Tamil princesses from South India. He employed South Indian mercenary soldiers to guard the Tooth relic temple. The granite stele written in Deva-Nagari Tamil script - the only stele in Tamil - found beside the ruins of the "Attadage" (Tooth Temple) says that the Velakkaras (Watchman) are in charge of the security of the Tooth Temple and that no one - not even the ministers of royal household - can go into the temple without their permission.¹⁷ Moreover, the two granite Siva Temples built in the same period and situated in the same premises where the Buddhist monuments are found, are sure enough signs of the magnanimity towards the other religions of this king. The bigger of the two Hindu temples is called the temple of Vanavan Maha-dhevi. Isvaraodayar is a name that certainly sounds Tamil and South Indian.¹⁸

Parakaramabhahu's harmonizing ability is further seen in the art, sculpture and architecture of this period, which has withstood the consuming elements of time and still stand to be admired and fascinated. In fact, they also stimulate a sense of national harmony in the hearts of those who love peace. The greatest of the Megalithic Buddha statues carved out of one single granite rock, Charconite Gnesis, is called *Galvihara* or the Rock Temple. It consists of four statues of the Lord Buddha, each of which is an impressive 40 feet long. From left to right they portray four events of the religious life of Prince Siddharta, the Buddha. They are namely the meditation, the enlightenment, the

¹⁷ The word Velaikarar in Tamil means a watchguard. This system was initiated by the Cholas.

¹⁸ Probably the name of his stepmother.

recluse life and the last moment before death. These four Buddha statues were sculptured by both Sri Lankan and South Indian sculptors collaboratively. While they show the blend of the two sculpture traditions, characteristic features and nuances of the individual schools are also evident in them.¹⁹ Practically all the other major monuments of this period: the Vata dage, the Lanka Thilaka, and the Thibanka temple, are fashioned in this bicultural - blend style. Hindu art motifs, like the mythical marine dragon ("Makara"), the domesticated animals such as lion, elephant, the horses and the cows, and the mythical dwarf slaves/soldiers, called the *ganas*, were also employed by the artists and sculptors of this period to fill the Buddhist temple walls with such Hindu art motifs. It is also important to add that such motifs are also equally theological motifs as they play significant roles in the "divine dramas" (Thiruvilayadal) of the Hindu Puranas.

All these are potent and historical examples of the Parakramabahu period that can effectively replace the earlier-based Mahavamsa myths of ethnic conflicts and foster ethnic and cultural blend and harmony. It is interesting to note that the religious and political forces of Sri Lanka repeatedly elicit the myth of the early part of the first millennium, in order to kindle conflict and friction among the two major ethnic communities of Sri Lanka, rather than focusing on the historical facts of the early part of the second millennium, to foster peace and harmony.

Today perhaps those who hear and see much of Parakramabahu in Sri Lanka are the foreign tourists who read about his times in the guide books or explained by unbiased guide lecturers. But the local pilgrims, tourists and students in their curricular exposures

¹⁹ Even the great Christian spiritual theologian and Mystic Thomas Merton has expressed his wonder at their ability to provoke meditation and peace of mind. See "Asian Journal," Ed. L. Cunningham, Tomas Merton: Spiritual Master," 225-226.

are not afforded this "exotic" knowledge. Even the primary and secondary schools textbooks do not highlight this period of national harmony, but emphasize instead the ethnic conflicts of Mahamvasa myths. Many Tamil educationalists and parents are bewildered at the surreptitious yet fairly patent agenda of injecting "anti-tamil and anti-other religious ideas" into the young and growing minds of Sri Lankan Sinhala students about the minority races and religions in this apparently racist country. It should also be noted that even many broad-minded Sinhala Scholars and parents are equally worried about the issue.

Parakramabahu was not only successful in stopping the Chola invasions from South India but also in waging war against them. He won the battle against the Burmese king Alaungsithu who exploited on the sale of elephants tusks and violated the treaty of trade and friendships between the two countries. He also dispatched a great army to the Pandiyan kingdom to help the heir of a banished Pandiyan dynasty. Though the chronicles of the two countries (*Chulavamsa* of Sri Lanka and the Chola/Pandiya inscriptions of South India) do not agree in the details of the victory, that the king of a relatively small domain should engage in a prolonged war (10 years) against a large and established sovereignty is quite noticeable and speaks of the strength and valor of the former.²⁰

The existence of the Tamil kingdom before the arrival of the Portuguese is corroborated by historic documents and stela inscriptions. According to them, Chola emperor Devaraya II captured Yalpanam, Nagapattanam and Eelam (Jaffna, Naga kingdom and Ceylon) and extracted tribute from the vanquished. Portuguese historian

Nuniz too says that at this time the Sri Lankan kings were under the power of the Cholas. The above documents belong to a period from 1422 - 1515 BCE. Recurrent battles between the northern Tamil kingdom and the southern Sinhala kingdom, called Kotte in the 14th century, corroborates the claim of the Tamil historians and political scientists that there were in fact two nations in one land until the 18th century. One or the other side may have won the battles or may have paid tributes to the other or even to neighboring political powers, but that the Tamil and Sinhala kingdoms in Eelam (Ceylon) were separate and sovereign cannot be denied or undermined.

Victories are eulogized and defeats derided in inscriptions and documents. This is something that did not begin a few centuries ago. Historical and archeological proofs of such eulogies and derision are copiously available in many ancient nations from the third millennium BCE downwards. The pyramids, the obelisks, the clay tablets, papyrus and parchments and steles belonging to the aforementioned period attest this age-old practice. I am of the opinion that actual victory or defeat of a particular period does not legitimize such a state for the rest of history or the future; on the contrary, it proves the legitimacy of the sovereignty of the vanquished despite the power of the victor. Invasions are intrusions and should not be confused with inhabitations. If successful invasions and battles are the criteria for the legitimacy sovereignty, then it would amount to the transformation or sublimation of the jungle-law as political law.

Both historians and sociologists who connive with the political ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist identity as most natural and legitimate identity of Sri Lanka, propound the theory that the Sinhalese population as the people of the land and the Tamils are

²⁰ Ibid., 235.

illegal immigrants - *kalla thonis* (come by illegal boats). But both myths and facts (scriptures and history) agree in saying that if not for the aboriginal Yakhsas and Nagas, both the Sinhalese and the Tamils are immigrants from North and South India respectively. Not only that, as it shall be later elucidated, all those Sinhalese who now have the suffix *nayake* in their names, have derived them originally from the "Nayakkar clan" of the 17-18th century South India.

From Kingdom to Colony

The Portuguese Period (1505 - 1638)

On the 15th of November 1505, it was reported to the king of Kotte that "men of white skin wearing iron armory, eating stone, drinking blood (bread and wine), firing canons louder than thunder, buying fish and vegetable with gold, were seen in Colombo." This marked the arrival of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka. The attitude of the local Sinhalese and Tamil peoples, especially the non-Christians, on the rule of the colonial European over lords in Sri Lanka from the 15th to the 19th century BCE is summarized in the following statement in the 2500 Jubilee book of Buddhism:

And then the prows of Europe faced the East. Gold-hunger entered Lanka along with the cross, and the long struggle began between the Sinhalese who cherished their independence and their religion, the just and fair intentions of the western church and the western princes who while professing that they were out to sell a place in heaven to the Sinhalese are determined to wring, in the shortest possible time, as much wealth as possible from their land.²¹

²¹ Sri Sumangala Pahamune, Revolt in the Temple, Colombo, Sinha Publications, 75.

The Portuguese forcefully occupied and conquered the coastal plains of the country from north to south from east to west. They built huge fortresses with extraordinarily thick ramps and parapets of granite. This obviously had a dual purpose: (1) to stay away from the local people and sail away in times of trouble, and; (2) to guard the coast against enemies such as Moors and other rival Europeans. Urged by zeal to preach the religion to the "damned" and infidels and ordered by the church in Portugal and Papal authority, at first the ship Chaplains and then the missionary religions congregations began to preach, convert the people of Sri Lanka to Christianity and in this case to Roman Catholicism. The following letter of King John III to the viceroy of Goa is a historical document that accuses Christian missionaries (as even now) of their "unethical conversion": "Pagans may be brought over to our religion not only by the hopes of eternal salvation, but also by temporal interest and preferment...Hence they should be provided with places in the customs, exempt from imprisonment in the Navy and sustained by distribution of rice out of the public revenue." Because of the recurrent practice of unethical proselytism and conversions, a derogatory term "Rice Christians" came into being and is still in vogue among educated non-Christians in Sri Lanka.

It is traditionally accepted that Portuguese introduced Christianity, but - as mentioned earlier - there were communities of Nestorians in the kingdom of Anuradhapura from the 6th -8th centuries. The discovery of a Persian Nestorian cross and a baptismal fount in Anuradhapura in 1912 confirms this. Unfortunately, they were not missionary-minded or perhaps were not interested in making members of the alien class, members of their clan church. Therefore, when they left in 8 BCE, Christianity too

disappeared with them. This is why when the Portuguese came in the 15th century, they thought that they were the pioneers of their religion.

The establishment of the Portuguese in Lanka was largely facilitated by the rivalry between the two brothers who ruled Kotte and Sitavakke in the southwest. King Bhuvanekabahu of Kotte sought the help of the Portuguese to keep his brother Mayadunne out of his way as the latter was more crafty and powerful. To ensure the continuity of his dynasty, he had his grandson baptized and proclaimed by the King of Portugal as the legitimate ruler of Kotte. "A golden statue of Dharmapala and a crown was taken to Portugal where it was baptized and crowned."²² Perhaps it is this first historical caricature that initiated the long list of "conversion for political gain" of both Sinhalese and Tamil Chieftains or nobles and aristocrats from the 15th to the 19th centuries. It is important to note that through the so-called effigy-baptism in 1543, Dharmapala and his wife received baptism only in 1557 and were called Don Juan and Dona Katherina. This action was not without its effects on the subjects. Many of the foremost men of Kotte followed this example and received baptisms and 12 churches were built by the Franciscans. But the others were incensed and rose in mutiny which the Portuguese repressed so sternly that many went over to Mayadunne, who was thus enabled to appeal to the people as the champion of Buddhism.

The discovery of the Persian nestorian cross and the baptismal font in 1912 and the 6th century document "Epigraphia Zeilanica" from a writer named Cosmas Indicopleustes has also caused a revolution in the history of Christianity in Sri Lanka.

²² This baptism and coronation in effigy speaks loudly against all doctrines on faith, repentance, conversion and salvation, so clearly articulated in Christianity.

Because traditionally, it was accepted that the Portuguese introduced Christianity (Roman Catholic) to Sri Lanka. But the above said discoveries proved beyond doubt that Christians belonging to the Nestorian Church similar to that in Syria and Kerala in India lived in the Anuradhapura period.

In the time of the Portuguese, the kingdom of the Tamil population consisted of the traditional northeastern regions. The royal kingdom of the Tamils was a triangular territory bordering within Jaffna, Mannar and Nallur in north, west and east respectively. At the same time there were lesser kingdoms comprising the area of modern Vanni and the eastern region of the Tamil territory, which were ruled by vassals called Vanniyars. These lesser kingdoms included the areas of Puttlam in the West and Pottuvil in the east. The kingdoms of Kotte, Kandy, and Ruhunu which were controlled, inhabited and ruled by the Sinhalese population, were bordered by thick jungles between the Tamil lesser kingdoms and the three Sinhala domains.

Just as in Kotte, political rivalry in Jaffna facilitated the entry of Portuguese into the northern terrain. Pararaja Sekaran the king was murdered by Sekaraja Sekaran popularly known as Sankili(yan) in 1519 and the latter became the king. The lawful heir fled to India and sought the help of the Portuguese. When the Portuguese invaded Jaffna, Sankili struck a treaty with them to pay tribute. Missionary and evangelization activities began to prosper in the northern kingdom and thousands became Christians for reasons ranging from conviction to convenience. But Sankili broke the treaty by persecuting the Christians in Mannar in 1544 and killed about 600 of them, who continue to be hailed in the Roman Catholic Church as the "Mannar Martyrs." The Portuguese punished this offense by capturing the capital city, Nallur, and subdued the king to be their vassal.

Some of the kings after Sankili resisted the Portuguese while others accepted their mastery. In 1618 the Portuguese captured the coastal region of Jaffna and made it a Portuguese territory.

One thing that must be noted is the so called persecution in Mannar. Those Hindus who became Christians, i.e. Catholics, not only changed their religion but also their names and their lifestyles. Even to date, one can notice Portuguese names coming down as surnames or family names among the people of this area. It is this change of cultural and racial identity that had alarmed Sankili and spurred the start of the persecution. It looked to him as if the Christians were in reality becoming Portuguese, and therefore would not consider themselves under the jurisdiction of his kingdom. Although this 16th century incident is celebrated very fittingly as the triumph and strength of the Catholic faith, one cannot but notice the social political advantages that were attached to conversion, and the thought-pattern behind the change of socio-cultural identity that was attached to the same. Even in modern times, Christians betray their feeling of nostalgia for English and Latin and foreign names in their life - thus portraying that they are as if "west-bound Sri Lankans." This is one of the significant reasons why Christianity is considered as a "potted plant" in the words of D.T. Niles, a Sri Lankan theologian (1947), and Christians are considered as "Sri Lankan foreigners."

The Portuguese could not subdue the Kandyan kingdom on account of its natural protections by hills, valleys, cliffs, forests and rivers. They therefore besieged and occupied both Trincomalee and Batticaloa, the two harbors in the east, in order to blockade the Kandyan king from receiving foreign help. They erected fortresses in both places. Their destruction of the historical Hindu Shrine, the Koneswarar Kovil, which is

connected with Ravana the king Lanka in the Hindu Pthuhasa Ramayana, in Trincomalee is a painful scar that is recalled by the Sri Lankan Hindus even today.

By 1678, the Portuguese had taken the important coastal cities around the island such as Colombo, Mannar, Jaffna, Nallur, Trincomalee, Batticola, and Galle, but they could not capture the hill country. Even if they besieged and invaded it, they could not sustain their besiege. Their decline in Europe had also begun to weaken their strength here. The slow but steady arrival of the Dutch gave hope to the frustrated Sinhalese and Tamil rulers to get rid of the known devils with the help of the unknown. By 1658 the Portuguese fortress had all been captured by the Dutch and the power of the former came to an end. A Sri Lankan Jesuit priest and historian summarizes the end of the Portuguese rule in the following words:

The Portuguese refusal to have a permanent peace led the king of Kandy invite the Dutch to Ceylon. Even the people of the country had grown hostile to the Portuguese on account of the constant wars, the bad administration of many officials and the lawless behavior of many soldiers.

Further Portugal was a small country and could not possibly send enough soldiers to all the colonies in America, Africa, India and the far east. Portugal had even lost her independence and been annexed to Spain, which was more busy with South America than with any other colony. And when he struggle started in Ceylon, Portugal was concentrating all her efforts on regaining her independence....When human endurance could no longer put up with the adverse conditions, the white flag was hoisted on the fort of Colombo and seventy three men, the only surviving Portuguese, staggered out of the fort to lay down their arms while the Dutch army took possession of Colombo.²³

The Dutch Period (1638-1796)

²³S.G. Perera, History of Ceylon, Vol. 1, Lake House Publication, Colombo, 117-118.

In the early years of the 16th century, the Dutch became quite powerful and groups of merchants launched into sea voyages in search of the spice lands. The pioneering groups of merchants united themselves into an organization called United East India Company. They made Batavia (the new town they built in Jakarta-Indonesia) their strategic center of operation and launched out into India and Sri Lanka. At the invitation of Wimaladharmasuriya the king of Kandy, they set foot first in Batticaloa in 1602. But until the 1636 they could not sign any treaty of trade with Wimala Dharma Sooriya. Only during the reign of his successor Rajasinghe the monopoly of trade and the help to overthrow the Portuguese was signed. From then onwards the Dutch conquered the Portuguese fortresses one by one. It is quite clear that both parties were shrewd and wanted to exploit the other. But neither of them wanted to rupture the relationship for strategic reasons. It is also true that both the Dutch and the Portuguese in many a friendly interval compared notes and facts on the behavior of the local kings with them.

The Dutch accepted Rajasinghe's invitation to drive the Portuguese out of the island in the hope of securing for themselves the cinnamon trade. However they soon realized that they could not trust the king of Kandy who failed to supply provisions to the garrison and even forbade his subjects to do so. They also found the king's request to destroy the forts unreasonable for ordinary prudence required that they should fortify themselves so long as the Portuguese were in the island. Naturally the Dutch had the other reason to keep the forts in good condition, the possibility of the king allying himself with the Portuguese or with any other European nation against them.²⁴

Rajasinghe's successor, Wimaladharmasuriya II was, like Prakramabahu I of Polonnaruwa, an example of harmony and unity amidst differences. His growth and apprenticeship in the temple perhaps had made him the personality he was. During his

²⁴ Ibid., 136.

time there was prosperity and peace in the kingdom. He had friendly and transparent relationship with the Dutch and therefore trade flourished in his time. Though a great champion of Buddhism, he tolerated and favored the other religions and allowed the missionaries of the Catholic and Protestant denominations to freely preach their religions. The greatest work that even stands today in praise of this king is the Dalada Maligawa - the Tooth relic temple in Kandy. It is again most unfortunate that while he is praised in songs, ballads and reports for his attachments and achievements regarding Buddhism; nothing is ever uttered about his magnanimity towards other races and religions.

In the 17th century, Kandyan kingdom experienced the emergence of a new dynasty called Nayakkar dynasty. These Nayakkars were at that time the rulers of South India - a part of the Pandyan Territory. The harmonious monarch Wimaladharmasooriya's queen was herself of Nayakkar origin, and therefore a large royal retinue had come to reside in Kandy. It is this dynasty that continued until the capture of the Kandyan kingdom by the British in 1815. The Nayakkar kings little by little brought many changes and great pomp in court etiquette and protocols which caused anger and hatred specially among the elites and Sinhalese nobles. They also introduced the practice of matrilineal succession to the throne in the event of the absence of a male progeny to the king, although this practice caused much dissent among the royal officials and ministers of that time, it is in harmony with contemporary trends of feminism.

Right from the beginning of their arrival the Dutch had estimated that Lanka was the right and strategic spot for the expansion and development of their trade. They also saw that it was the central spot from which and to which they could shuttle everywhere in Asian port cities. Moreover, the merchandise they wanted was more qualitative and

available without great rivalry and competition. Hence they ensured that they would establish the East India Company in this country.

The Dutch governor said that the King was the sovereign of the inland while the Dutch were his protectors on the shores. They therefore tried their best to stop the trade relationship between the local people and other foreigners. They closed the ports and forced the local merchants to sell their goods to the Dutch Company instead of selling to Muslim and other foreign merchants. Though this act was first seen as a service to the local producers, soon the plot was realized and they retaliated against the company through boycotts, rebellion, and strikes and made the latter to open the ports to the local merchants.

The dusk of the Dutch power in Sri Lanka came towards the ends of the 17th century. The crass corruption of the Dutch administrators of the company of the decline of the power of Holland in Europe were the two main causes. In Sri Lanka the Dutch had become the most hated by the king and populace. Now the king was ready to welcome and entertain any foreign power which would oust the Dutch out of the land of Lanka and the Indian ocean around it. By this time the British fleets had established themselves in India and other Asian ports. The fight between the Dutch and the French forces in Batavia had made Britain the ally of the former.

The British occupation of the Dutch possessions in the maritime provinces of Ceylon in 1796 followed directly from the course of European politics. The Hollanders found themselves entangled in Europe in Napoleonic tentacles and the prince Stadholder had to flee to England for protection. With the concurrence of the Stadholder, and under the guarantee of being restored to the Republic at the conclusion of a general peace; the British took possession of the Dutch settlements in Ceylon. At the Peace of Amiens in 1802, the British who had been holding maritime Ceylon in trust for the Dutch since 1796, found themselves negotiating not with the

stadtholder of an independent Holland, but with France the occupying power of a dependent and puppet Dutch republic. Napoleon Bonaparte had made himself trustee of the Dutch nation. Thus, it resulted that Ceylon became a pawn in the world-wide haggling game between the two great powers.²⁵

The British Period (1796-1948)

Unlike the Portuguese and the Dutch, who had accidentally discovered Sri Lanka on their way to India and Indonesia, many British had visited, traveled and even lived in Sri Lanka in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries before they came in as colonizers. The most famous of them was Robert Knox, Jr. who wrote a book about his experiences in Sri Lanka.

In the middle of the 17th century, British merchants of the English East India Company had gained firm ground in the Indian ports and principal towns such as Goa, Madras, Kalkutta, and Bombay. Besides the Arabian traders, their ships sailed back and forth, importing foreign goods and exporting local commodities. In India, the British were in constant rivalry with the French Company. But Ceylon or Sri Lanka opened her arms and invited them in order to get rid of the Dutch. The invitation attracted the British for the following reasons: (1) This gave them easy access to the land of quality goods; (2) The Dutch were somewhat dependent on the British for their own political subsistence; (3) The ports of Sri Lanka provided strategic stations to harbor British fleets.

The transfer of power and possessions took place rather smoothly in 1796. Once the British settled themselves in the forts they began to make plans, to make good the expenses and loss incurred in their fights and expeditions, through a revenue generation

²⁵ Revolt in the Temple, 84.

system that was practiced in India. About 32,000 tax farmers/collectors were brought from Madras, and the country was divided into three tax zones. These tax collectors were given power to extract money under heavy penalties and judicial powers. As in the case of the Jewish tax collectors of the New Testament, these tax farmers too exploited both the masters and the subjects. Every coconut tree was taxable, irrespective of the quantity of its produce. This caused much resistance and rebellion among the dissatisfied population within one year of the British assuming power. Hence they were forced to make changes to the system.

Having secured a firm foothold in the maritime territory of the country without any cost, the British wanted to get hold of the mountain kingdom of Kandy the only region out of their jurisdiction. As mentioned earlier, both the Portuguese and the Dutch had tried many times but miserably failed as it is guarded by mountains, jungles, and water (Girivana, Jala). Entrance to the central mountainous region was possible only through seven narrow and steep single file pathways called "the pass." Both the Portuguese and the Dutch had incurred heavy losses in their expeditions of war against the king of Kandy. Therefore, the British were on the look out for an "alternative pass" to enter the hills.

At this time, the kings of Kandy were from the Nayakkar dynasty. While the kings were Nayakkar, the ministers and chieftains were Sinhalese. As the king was more powerful, the role of the Chieftains-Adigars were much less powerful, though full of pomp and prestige. One of the Adigar called Pilimatalawa, chief of the ministers, wanted to succeed to the throne. He tried to strike a deal with the British officials and cause rebellion in the kingdom. But it failed and he was beheaded. The conspiracy of the

ministers and chieftains had made the king, Sri Wickrama Rajasinge, anxious, suspicious and stressful. He became therefore, so tyrannical, despotic and inhuman and vengeful in order to survive and stay in power. However, a second conspiracy by an Adigar-minister called Ehalapola with the British governor Robert Brownrigg succeeded, and the British army took control of Kandy on the 15th of March 1815. King Sri Wickrama Rajasinha fled, but was caught, deposed and exiled to India. With this event the Sri Lankan monarchy came to an end, and the King of England was promulgated as the sovereign of Ceylon-Sri Lanka. Its government would exercise power through the governor appointed by the throne of England. There is a proverb in Tamil that says that "the frog betrays its hiding place by its own mount." In the same way, it is very evident from the 15th century onwards that successive betrayals and rivalries between and among kin and clans are among the significant causes for the decline and downfall of the country.

Ceylon of the British Raj

After the abolition of the monarchy in Kandy, the British tried to unify the hitherto various kingdoms under one central administration, by the Britain-appointed governor general. They did away with the frontiers or Kadavats (toll points) where taxes were levied from persons or goods entering into and exiting from the area.²⁶ Thus, it was made clear to the people that the entire country was now under the jurisdiction of the British governor and not under the local chieftains. They abolished the chieftains' system in all the maritime provinces, with the only exception in Kandy, because of their promise to honor them. There too, however, all deliberative power was taken away, leaving only

their prestige and pomp. The Tooth relic that was historically the criterion for power and sovereignty (a type of Palladium) was promulgated as the property of the British government, but under the care and custody of the Buddhist Pirivena resident in the Temple. A rebellion that began in 1817 and lasted for one year claimed the lives of 1,000 British and 10,000 Kandyans.²⁷

Over and above the spices and precious metals of Ceylon-Sri Lanka, the British now turned their attention to coffee and cocoa in the hills. Though these two items were introduced in the Dutch period, now their cultivation was spread all over the hill country. As it was realized that coffee generated tremendous revenue, the British offered employment to the inhabitants of the Hill country to transform the mountains into coffee plantations. But the local Sinhalese were not quite happy to be employed basically as slaves under the foreigners. Moreover, the local Sinhalese and Tamils working under them as cinnamon peelers and pepper pluckers had staged prolonged strikes demanding higher wages and facilities in the 17th and 18th centuries, causing major losses to the companies. Hence, the British decided to import laborers from the neighboring South India to work on the plantations. Thus, within five decades over 275,000 Tamils from South India were transported from Rameswaram, to Mannar by sea, and from there, to Matale and Kandy by land on a long and deadly walk to be employed on the plantations called “estates.”²⁸ In 1847, the great and destructive coffee pest (swarms of bugs that eat the plants and are capable of destroying entire plantations) almost terminated the entire

²⁶ Kadavat means a type of barrier or “thorn gate” at the periphery of a jurisdictional territory.

²⁷ S.G. Perera, pp. 28-29

²⁸ Huge Tamarind and Margosa trees along these routs flanking the early pathways still stand to relate the story of the long, agonizing, and risky journey of the helpless Indian laborers who were brought by the

coffee industry and gave rise to the ever-growing tea industry. Not only the first tea bushes were brought from India (Darjiling) in 1839, but also hundreds and thousands of “coolies” – laborers – were imported from South India. As Tambiah states:

To the British introduction and development of the plantation economy, especially Tea, Sri Lanka owes its last massive wave of immigration of South Indian Tamil "coolie" labor, which was brought into work in the plantations. This 'importation' of the Indian Tamil labor was necessitated by the understandable unwillingness of the Sinhalese rice farming peasants to turn to wage labor and live in coolie lines.²⁹

After the construction of the railroads from Kandy to Colombo and roads from Kurnagala, Dambulla and Colombo to Kandy in the last quarter of the 18th century the transport of the goods and the laborers became easy and fast. According to statistics, the largest number of South Indian laborers arriving was 318,000 in 1870. The South Indian Tamil plantation workers as time went on became a local community in spite of their occasional commutation to their native land and the continuation of their cultural and customary habits and practices. At the beginning of 1900, the plantation Tamils - known as Indian Tamils, had already decided that Ceylon was the home for themselves and their progeny. Two main reasons for this decision could be quoted. First, those who were recruited by the Kanganis were among the poorest, landless laborers who were mostly trying desperately to eke out their life on a hand-to-mouth basis, and therefore they did not want to go back except to visit their relatives or to procure spouses from their caste for their children. Secondly, they lived comparatively well in Ceylon, in homes - lines³⁰ - built for them. Though the pay was meager, they were given additional life subsidies

south Indian middle men called Kanganis who accepted rich commissions from the British to supply low-wage labor.

²⁹ Tambiah, Sri Lankan Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, 66.

such as rationed food, provisions, medical help, occasional local transport facilities and even subsidy for travel to India. It is quite evident that giving such subsidies presupposes that the principals were reaping bumper harvest and profits in the fields of coffee and tea plantations. According to statistics, the percentage of the Indian Tamils in 1953 vis-a-vi the Sri Ceylon Tamils, was 12.0 to 10.9.³¹ This means that there were more Tamils in the hill region alone when compared to the Tamil population in the entire country. It also makes one realize that the greater bulk of the revenue was centered around the plantations on the hills. According to statistics an average of 350 million pounds of Tea and 200 million pounds of rubber and 100 trillion of coconuts were exported annually between 1947 and 1960. Of the total average income of the said period being \$305 million US dollars; the income by tea alone was roughly \$200 million US dollars.³²

From Colony to Commonwealth

Agitation for freedom from foreign rule, and for the right to autonomy (as we have seen earlier as far as 1817) continued as time went on because the British based government began to ruthlessly impose many taxes. For example, a road tax, veranda tax, bullock-cart tax, dog tax, and gun tax were levied from all local people including the Buddhist monks. These repeated agitations and rebellions became even stronger and caused many disruptions and destructions to the government. Hence a commission under two officials called Colebrook and Cameron was sent from England to inquire into the situation and to make concessions. In 1833, therefore, a legislative council consisting of

³⁰ Lines are long barracks consisting mostly of a one room Verandah and small kitchen and meager facilities.

³¹ Satchi Ponnambalam, Sri Lanka: The National Query of the Tamil Liberation, 253.

Englishmen and Sri Lankans of the different ethnic groups were set up to help the governor yet the voice of the natives was not strong and powerful as they were only “unofficial members.” A widespread rebellion broke out in 1848, this time, on religious grounds. The Buddhists were unhappy that the British government controlled religion and religious life inclusive of the most venerated Tooth Relic. Guerilla attacks against many British officials, travelers and institutions were successfully conducted in many parts of the country.

In 1927, another British commission was sent to Ceylon headed by the Earl of Donoughmore. By now the different ethnic groups and their leaders had begun to quarrel among themselves for positions and membership in the legislative council. Hence all representations and memoranda to the commission were centered on adequate number of ethnic representation in the legislative council. It is even ironical to state that some favored the stay of British rule in order to safeguard their communal interests. As Ponnambalam writes:

The Donoughmore Commission Report (1928) made many recommendations of far-reaching significance. In recommending the abolition of representation on ethnic and communal lines and an extension of territorial representation, the commission considered that it would deepen the division of the nation on communal lines. By abolishing communal representation altogether, the commission removed a delicate and pivotal balancing mechanism built into the political system to mirror the nationality structure in the country. The commission's optimistic assumption that, with the abolition of communal representation, the different ethnic entities would cease to think on communal lines and national integration would take effect, was proved totally unfounded. Throughout the 1930s up to independence the question of the proper Sinhalese/Tamil ratio in the legislature became the central bone of

³² A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, McMillan, London, 1974, 88.

contention in the country. In fact, in further deepened the divisions within the nation.³³

All the local representatives in the state council, with one voice, repeatedly brought the motion that both Sinhala and Tamil languages must be made official languages and that education must be given free and in the mother tongue. It is more striking to note that the two great leaders in whose time the Tamil Sinhala ethnic crisis rose to destructive and epidemic proportions (1956-1983), Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Mr. J.R. Jayawardane were the very same persons who just five years before the independence, had very magnanimously lobbied to make Sinhala and Tamil the official languages.

In 1944, the third and final commission under the leadership of Lord Soulbrury made further reforms and developments in the constitution. The State council would be changed into a two-house parliament called the house of representatives and the senate under the governor general representing the throne of England. In 1947, the British Parliament decided to make Ceylon a domain and a country within the commonwealth. The revolutions and rebellions in India- and the hatred and antagonism of the people against the British on account of their high-handed oppression, made the British summarily "quit India" in the same year (1947). Hence they thought it would be wise to give freedom to Ceylon before a similar experience repeated there. The agitation and resistance of the people had pointed to such a trend. Another factor that hastened the independence is the post world War II situation in England. "In fact the (Soulbury) Commission considerably restricted the external sovereignty of the country. But with the

³³ Ibid., 53

victory in the war, the Labor Party which swept to power in the 1945 election, was committed to a quick process of post-war dissolution of the empire.

Within a few months, political parties were hurriedly formed and the first election for the parliament was held. The United National Party under the premiership of Don Stephen Sananayake formed the first government of Independent Ceylon. On the fourth of February 1948 the Union Jack was lowered and the Lion Flag of Ceylon was raised high mast amidst joyful shouts of and tears. The Throne Speech of the King of England promulgated: "After a period of nearly a century and a half, during which the status of Ceylon was that of a colony in my empire, she now takes her place as a free and independent member of the British Commonwealth of nations."³⁴

On the fourth of February 1948, Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, saw the end of foreign domination from which it had suffered for nearly five centuries. Now the sons and daughters of the soil had undertaken the responsibility of ruling and guiding the nation. Sri Lanka by this time, had got used to Portuguese, Dutch and British types of administration and politics, and the new local leadership had also accepted the western and European way of political administration as most apt for the country. Hence, instead of going back to the traditional system of kingdoms or territorial states, they endorsed the unitary national parliamentary system of England. Though this system had its very significant, positive and strong sides, we shall see in the next chapter how it also side by side caused the rise and the gradual development of what would be later known as the ethnic conflict.

³⁴ S.G. Perera, Vol. 2, 217.