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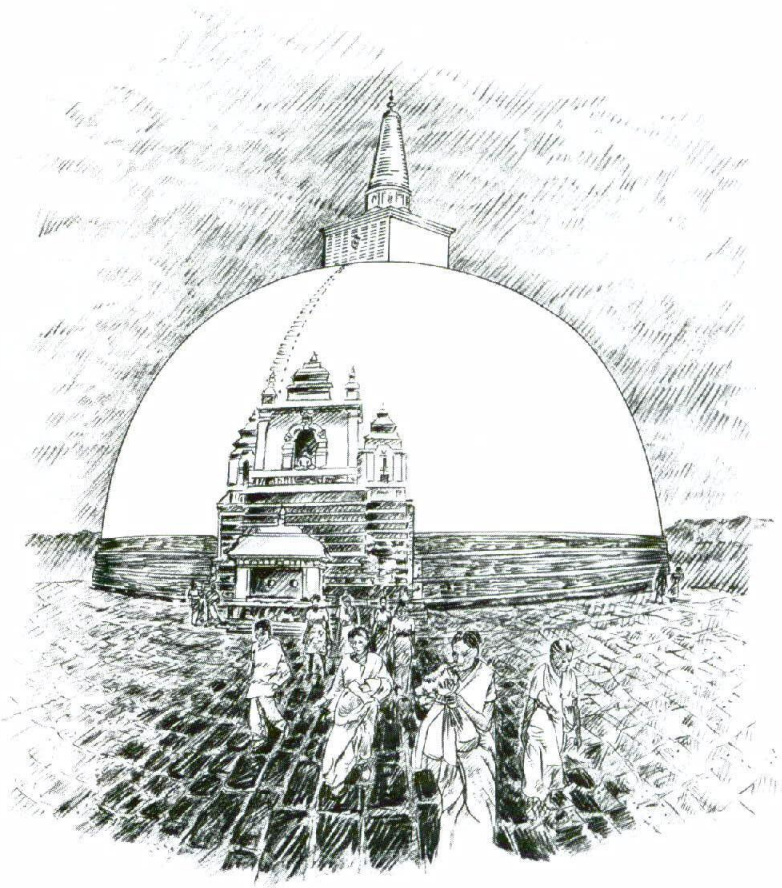
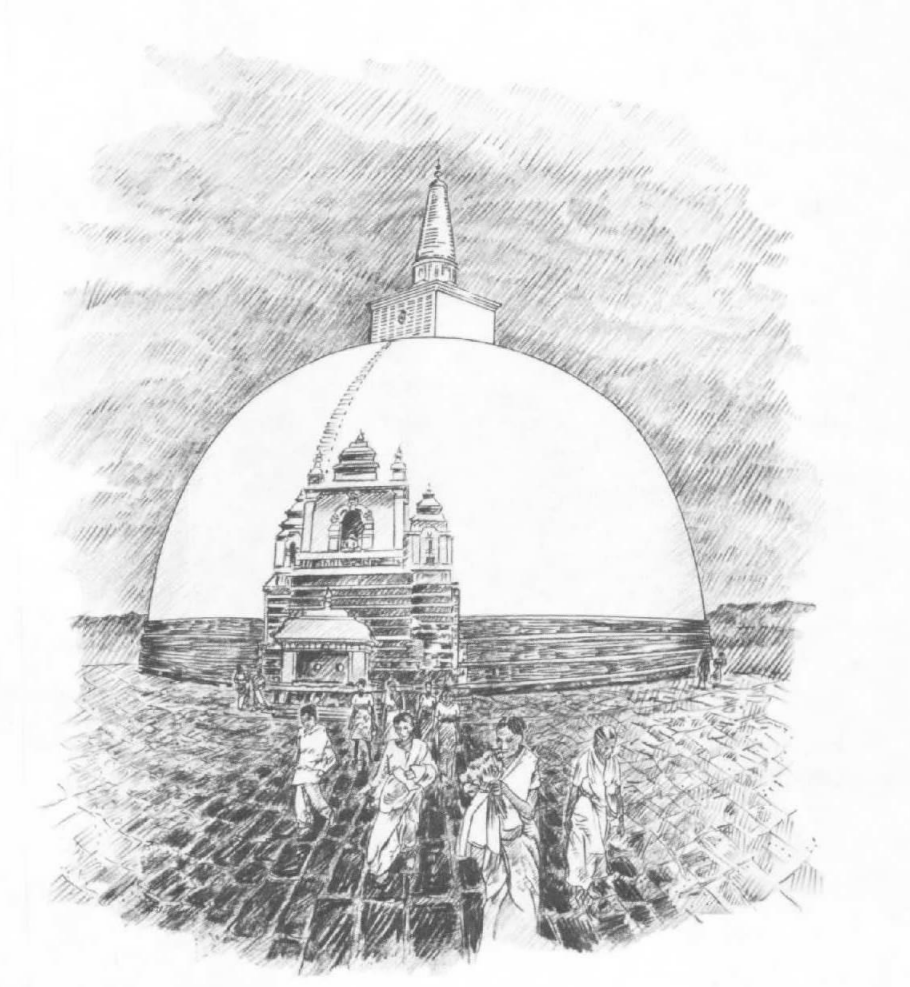
Sri Lanka
a country study



Sri Lanka
a country study

Federal Research Division
Library of Congress
Edited by
Russell R. Ross
and Andrea Matles Savada
Research Completed
October 1988



On the cover: Ruwanveli Dagoba, Buddhist shrine built by Dutthagamani, near Anuradhapura

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Foreword

This volume is one in a continuing series of books now being prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress under the Country Studies—Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book lists the other published studies.

Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

Louis R. Mortimer
Acting Chief
Federal Research Division
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Washington, D.C. 20540

Acknowledgments

This edition supercedes the *Area Handbook for Sri Lanka* written by Richard F. Nyrop, *et alia,* in 1970. Some parts of that edition have been used in the preparation of the current book, and the authors of *Sri Lanka: A Country Study* are grateful for the seminal work done by the earlier edition's authors. The authors also wish to thank various members of the staff of the Embassy of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in Washington, D.C. for their assistance.

Various members of the staff of the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress assisted in the preparation of the book. Richard F. Nyrop made helpful suggestions during his review of all parts of the book. Elizabeth A. Park prepared the telecommunication sections in chapters 3 and 4; Robert L. Worden researched the data used in preparing maps for the book; Carolina E. Forrester checked the content of all of the maps and reviewed the text of the section on geography; and Arvies J. Staton contributed to the figures on military ranks and insignia. David P. Cabitto, Kimberly Lord, and Paulette Marshall did the illustrations; and David P. Cabitto, Sandra K. Ferrell, and Kimberly Lord prepared the graphics. Martha E. Hopkins edited portions of the manuscript and managed editing of the book; Marilyn L. Majeska edited portions of the manuscript and managed production; and Barbara Edgerton and Izella Watson performed word processing.

Others who contributed were Harriet R. Blood, who assisted in the preparation of maps; Mimi Cantwell, Richard Kollodge, Ruth Nieland, and Gage Ricard, who edited portions of the manuscript; Catherine Schwartzstein, who performed final prepublication editorial review, and Shirley Kessel of Communications Connection, who prepared the index. Malinda B. Neale of the Library of Congess Composing Unit prepared camera-ready copy, under the direction of Peggy Pixley. The inclusion of photographs in this book was made possible by the generosity of various individuals and public and private agencies.

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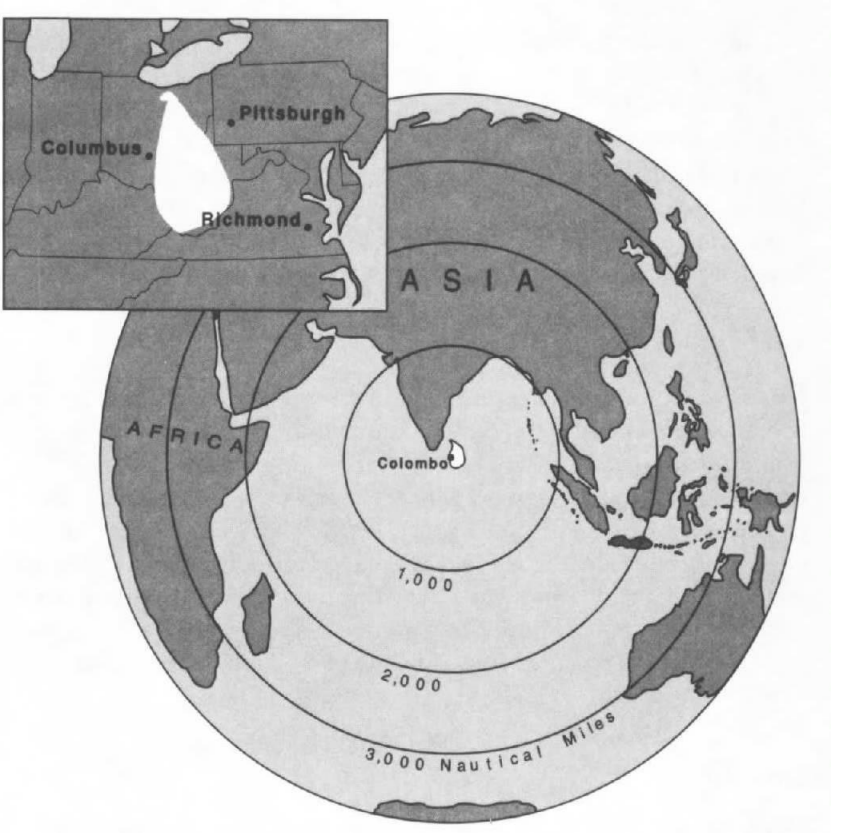
Preface

SRI LANKA: A COUNTRY STUDY replaces the edition of this work published in 1982. Like its predecessor, this study attempts to treat in a concise and objective manner the dominant social, political, economic, and military aspects of Sri Lankan society. Central to the study of contemporary Sri Lanka is the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, its history, ramifications, and the toll it has taken on the country. For all intents and purposes, the national capital of Sri Lanka is Colombo—the site of its government ministries and foreign embassies. In 1982, however, a new parliamentary complex opened in Sri Jayewardenepura, Kotte, a suburb of Colombo, and the administrative capital was moved there.

Sources of information included books, scholarly journals, foreign and domestic newspapers, and numerous periodicals. Chapter bibliographies appear at the end of the book, and brief comments on some of the more valuable sources recommended for further reading appear at the end of each chapter. A Glossary also is included. Contemporary place names used in this book are those approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names. Measurements are given in the metric system, and a conversion table is provided to assist those readers who are unfamiliar with metric measurements (see table 1, Appendix A).

Country Profile



Country

Formal Name: Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Short Form: Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon).

Term for Citizens: Sri Lankan(s).

Capital: Colombo, located on the southwestern coast.

Administrative Capital: Sri Jayewardenepura since 1982.

Geography

Size: Pear-shaped island 29 kilometers off southeastern coast of India; total area 65,610 square kilometers, of which land area 64,740 square kilometers.

Topography: Irregular, dissected, central massif dominates south; highest elevation Pidurutalagala (2,524 meters) but better-known mountain Adam's Peak (2,243 meters), destination of interfaith pilgrimages. Coastal belt (less than 100 meters elevation) succeeded by rolling plains (100–500 meters elevation) of varying width extends from seashore to foothills of central massif. In northern half of island, topography falls away to rolling plain, relieved only by isolated ridges. Rivers extend radially from central massif to coast; longest Mahaweli Ganga (860 kilometers), which flows in northeasterly direction. About 40 percent of island forested. Coastline regular but indented by numerous lagoons and marked by sandy beaches.

Climate: Equatorial and tropical influenced by elevation above sea level, but marked by only slight diurnal and seasonal variations; temperature in Colombo (at sea level) varies from 25°C to 28°C, and in central massif (site of highest elevations) 14°C to 16°C. Subject to southwest monsoon from mid-May to October and northeast monsoon December to March. Rainfall uneven; divides country climatically into wet zone comprising southwestern quarter and dry zone on remainder of island. Annual precipitation in wet zone averages 250 centimeters; in dry zone precipitation varies from 120 to 190 centimeters.

Society

Population: 14,846,750 (according to 1981 census); 16,639,695 (estimated 1988). Average annual growth rate 1.6 percent; average life expectancy 67.5 years (males 66 years, females 69 years); gender ratio 103.7 males to 100 females.

Ethnic Groups: Sinhalese 74 percent; Tamil 18 percent; Moor (Muslims) 7 percent; others (Burghers, Eurasians, Malay, Veddha) 1 percent. Largest ethnic group divided into low-country Sinhalese (subjected in coastal areas to greater colonial acculturation) and Kandyan Sinhalese (more traditional upland dwellers, named after Kingdom of Kandy, which resisted European encroachments until 1815–18). Tamils divided into Sri Lankan Tamils (on island since early historic times) and Indian Tamils (brought in as plantation labor in the nineteenth century).

Languages: Sinhalese speak Sinhala (official language); Tamils speak Tamil (equal with Sinhala as official language since July 29, 1987); English spoken in government and educated circles by about 10 percent of population.

Education and Literacy: Schooling organized in four levels: primary (six years), junior secondary (five years), senior secondary (two years), and tertiary (at least two years). Education compulsory to age thirteen, free in government schools, and fee paid in private institutions. Number of students enrolled (1986) about 3.75 million (government) and 101,000 (private). Government expenditure on education (1986) about 3.6 million rupees (see Glossary). Overall literacy (over age 10) about 87 percent.

Religion: Theravada Buddhist, 69 percent; Hindu, 15 percent; Christian, 8 percent; Muslim, 8 percent. Sinhalese generally Buddhist; Tamils Hindu; Burghers, Eurasians, and minority of Sinhalese and Tamils profess Christianity; Moors adherents of Islam.

Health and Welfare: Nationwide health care system, including maternity services provided by government, but facilities and personnel overtaxed, supplies and equipment lacking; medical infrastructure consists of more than 3,000 Western-trained physicians, 8,600 nurses, 338 central dispensaries, and 490 hospitals of all types. Smallpox eradicated; incidence of malaria declining; unsanitary conditions and lack of clean water major cause of gastroenteritis among adults and infants. Death rate declined from 6.6 to 6.1 per 1,000 in decade from mid-1970s to mid-1980s; infant mortality declined from 50 to 34 deaths per 1,000 in decade from early 1970s to early 1980s. Traditional medicine (*ayurveda*), supported by government, enjoys great credibility.

Economy

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): In mid-1980s, GDP rose incrementally at current and constant factor costs in spite of insurgency and domestic turmoil. Gross national product (GNP) increased from US$5.48 billion (US$349 per capita) in 1984 to US$5.71 billion (US$354 per capita) in 1986. GDP went from US$5.57 billion in 1984 to US$5.84 billion in 1986, with additional increase to US$6.08 billion (subject to revision) in 1987 and projected US$6.27 billion in 1988. Real (constant) growth rate dipped from 5.1 percent in 1984 to 4.3 percent in 1986, with a further estimated 1.5 percent decline for 1987. Reversal of trend expected in 1988, with increase to 3.5 percent growth.

Agriculture: Including forestry and fishing, agriculture accounted for slightly over 25 percent of GDP in 1982–86, but occupied nearly half of labor force during same period. Wet rice (paddy) main subsistence crop with two harvests a year; paddy hectareage and

production have risen steadily since 1977; reached about 900,000 hectares under cultivation and 2.6 million tons harvested in 1986, making country about 75 percent self-sufficient in rice production. Principal commercial crops tea, rubber, and coconuts; tea production in the 1980s varied between 180 and 210 million kilograms annually; rubber production remained constant at about 140 million kilograms annually since 1983; coconut production rose by about 10 percent a year in 1980s, reaching a peak of slightly over 3 million nuts in 1986. Production of all crops dealt setback by drought in 1987, with recovery expected in 1988.

Industry: Contributes somewhat over 15 percent of GDP and occupies nearly 30 percent of labor force; major industrial output consumer goods, especially garments and textiles, and processed agriculture commodities. State plays major role in manufacturing sector, controlling some twenty large-scale enterprises and about fifty corporations; government committed to expanding role of private sector in developing nontraditional exports, import substitutes, and employment opportunities.

Energy: Firewood traditional source, accounts for 60 to 70 percent of energy consumption; main commercial/industrial sources hydroelectric and thermal power; installed capacity in 1986 slightly over a thousand megawatts. Accelerated Mahaweli Program, when completed, expected to provide extra 450 megawatts of power and render nation self-sufficient in energy production.

Services: Accounts for about 15.7 percent of labor force. Active tourism sector slumped badly because of widespread unrest in country after 1983.

Imports: Equivalent to US$1.95 billion in 1986. Major imported commodities include petroleum products, machinery, transportation equipment, food (including rice, wheat, flour, sugar), fertilizer, yarn, and textiles. Principal trading partners Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Imports from United States dominated by wheat, machinery, and equipment.

Exports: Equivalent to approximately US$1.22 billion in 1986; major exported goods ready-made clothing and processed agricultural commodities such as tea, rubber, coconuts, and spices. Dominant trading partner throughout 1980s the United States, which took US$350 million worth of goods in 1987, or fully 25 percent of all Sri Lankan exports.

Balance of Payments: Negative balance of payments throughout 1980s, but chronic trade deficit partially offset by foreign aid and

remittances from abroad. Current account balance amounted to minus US$425 million for 1986, with minus US$357 million estimated for 1987. Total external debt for 1986 amounted to US$412 billion, with debt service ratio about 18.4 percent.

Exchange Rate: For five-year period ending in mid-1988, exchange rate of Sri Lankan rupee fluctuated, on average, less than ten percent annually against value of United States dollar. Most precipitous decline occurred from 1987 to 1988, when value of rupee fell from 26 (free rate) or 28.93 (official rate) to 32.58 (free rate) or 32.32 (official rate) per dollar.

Transportation and Communications

Railroads: Government owned; about 1,944 kilometers of track; network extends radially from Colombo to northern, eastern, and southern coastal cities; service to northern and eastern areas erratic because of domestic unrest.

Roads: Total approximately 75,000 kilometers; paved (bituminous) about 25,500 kilometers; 478,000 registered vehicles in mid-1980s.

Waterways: About 430 kilometers of rivers and canals navigable by shallow draft vessels.

Ports: Deep water ports at Colombo, Trincomalee, and Galle, latter two underutilized; government shipping corporation possessed eight freighters and two tankers in late 1980s.

Airfields: Fourteen, of which twelve usable in late 1980s, eleven having permanent surface runways, one (Bandaranaike International Airport at Katunayaka) with runway more than 2,500 meters.

Telecommunications: International service provided by satellite earth station and submarine cable; international telephone, telex, and direct dialing in operation; about 106,500 telephones nationwide; about 29 radio stations, 24 of which are AM, at least 5 are FM) in operation, with more than 2 million registered receivers in use; 2 television networks broadcast over 4 channels; 350,000 television sets nationwide.

Government and Politics

Government: Constitution of September 7, 1978, guarantees fundamental rights of thought, conscience, and worship and established unitary state with strong executive power. President, elected directly for six-year term, serves as chief of state and government

and appoints cabinet of ministers; October 1982 presidential election won by incumbent Junius R. ("J.R.") Jayewardene of United National Party (UNP), who received 52.9 percent of vote. Legislature consists of 196-member unicameral Parliament having power to pass laws by simple majority and amend Constitution by two-thirds majority. Parliamentary members, chosen by universal suffrage from electoral constituencies corresponding generally to administrative districts, serve six-year terms. Below national level, popularly elected provincial councils established in seven of nine provinces in 1988. Until provincial councils fully operational, basic administrative subdivision remains district governed by council of elected and appointed members, presided over by district minister, who serves concurrently in Parliament. At lowest governmental echelon, administrative functions carried out by popularly elected urban, municipal, town, and village councils. In rural areas, village councils exercise governance over 90 percent of nation's territory.

Politics: UNP headed by President Jayewardene, in power since 1977, retained over two-thirds majority in Parliament and won provincial council elections in 1988. Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), left-of-center, alternated in power with UNP since independence, but boycotted 1988 provincial council elections, and surrendered place as principal opposition group to newly formed United Socialist Alliance (USA), which finished second in elections. USA consisted of four left-of-center parties: Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL), Ceylon Equal Society Party (Lanka Sama Samaja Party—LSSP), New Equal Society Party (Nava Sama Samaja Party—NSSP), and Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP—Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya). Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) only minor party to gain seats in provincial council elections. Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) principal Tamil party, advocates separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka, but not represented in Parliament since 1983. People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna—JVP), formally proscribed, in armed opposition to government.

Administrative Divisions: Nine provinces (Northern and Eastern provinces may be combined into a single province in 1989); twenty-four administrative districts.

Legal System: 1978 Constitution guarantees independence of judiciary. Legal system based on British common law, Roman-Dutch (Napoleonic) law, and customary practices of Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims. Supreme Court, highest court in nation, has chief justice and between six and ten associate justices appointed

by president. Country divided into five judicial circuits, subdivided into districts with district courts and divisions with magistrates' courts. Lowest courts are conciliation boards with responsibility for minor criminal and civil cases.

International Memberships: Asian Development Bank, Colombo Plan, Commonwealth of Nations, Group of 77, Intelsat, Interpol, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Nonaligned Movement, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, United Nations and specialized agencies, World Federation of Trade Unions.

National Security

Armed Forces: Total strength about 48,000 personnel, including reservists on active duty. President serves as commander in chief and defense minister. Minister of national security reports to president, serves as deputy defense minister, presides over Joint Operations Command, which exercises overall responsibility for government counterinsurgency and counterterrorist effort. Chain of command extends downward to individual service commanders, deputy commanders, and chiefs of staff.

Army: Total strength including reservists on active duty, up to 40,000 personnel. Major tactical units five infantry brigade-sized task forces, each with three battalions. Other formations include one or two battalion-sized reconnaissance regiments, plus artillery, engineer, signals, and logistical units. In 1988 army reorganized territorially with individual battalions assigned to each of twenty-one sectors, corresponding generally to administrative districts; sectors grouped into two area commands: Division One for southern half of country, Division Two for northern half. Following Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of July 1987, army deployed against Tamil insurgents in Mannar and Vavuniya Districts, Northern Province, and against JVP terrorists in Southern Province. Military equipment includes small arms of Chinese, Singapore, Pakistani, and Western origin; armored cars and armored personnel carriers of British, South African, and domestic manufacture; mortars and light-to-medium-artillery pieces from Yugoslavia, Pakistan, and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany).

Navy: Total strength, including reservists on active duty, about 4,000 to 6,000 personnel. Service organized administratively into three naval area commands: Northern, Eastern, and Western (a fourth, Southern, to be established), with main naval base at Trincomalee, smaller installations at Karainagar, Tangalla, and Kalpitiya, major facility under construction at Galle. In 1988

principal naval mission patrol of "surveillance zone" in Palk Strait to prevent gun-running by Tamil insurgents between India and Sri Lanka; other naval tasks include enforcement of Sri Lankan Exclusive Economic Zone. Total inventory fifty-five vessels; major surface combatants six command ships (used as tenders for patrol vessels in "surveillance zone"); other ships include Cougar patrol craft and amphibious vessels from Britain, Dvora and Super Dvora craft from Israel, plus locally manufactured and older patrol boats from China and the Soviet Union; additional ships under construction in Republic of Korea (South Korea).

Air Force: Total strength, including reservists on active duty, about 3,700 personnel deployed at 3 large and 9 smaller airbases countrywide. Principal air force missions tactical air support for ground operations, military airlift, and medical evacuation. Organization and inventory include one counterinsurgency squadron with Italian SIAI Marchetti SF-260TP light trainer aircraft, one helicopter squadron with United States Bell models 212, 412, and Jet Ranger, and French SA-365 Dauphin-IIs rotary wing aircraft; one transport squadron with Chinese Yun-8 and Yun-12 turboprops, plus assorted older aircraft, including United States DC-3s (C-47s) and an Indian HS-748; and one trainer squadron of light aircraft, including United States Cessnas.

Paramilitary Forces: Sri Lankan National Police, total strength 21,000 to 28,000 personnel, organized territorially into three "ranges," subdivided into divisions, districts, and police stations; includes National Intelligence Bureau and Police Special Force (formerly Special Task Force), latter comprising 1,100 personnel organized into one oversize battalion of seven companies, with units deployed against JVP terrorists in Southern Province, or serving in rotation as presidential security guard.

Foreign Military Presence: Prior to Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987, small number of Pakistani, Israeli, and retired British military advisers. Since August 1987 Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), reported strength 70,000 personnel, organized into 15 brigades, plus supporting units, deployed against Tamil insurgents in Northern and Eastern provinces.

Defense Expenditures: Increased from less than 1 percent of GDP in early 1980s to over 5 percent in 1987 because of Tamil insurgency, but levelled off following Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. In 1987 expenditures, including supplemental appropriations, amounted to US$408 million or about 5.4 percent of GDP. Projected defense expenditures for 1988 expected to decline somewhat to US$340 million.

Internal Security: Insurgent movement known generically as Tamil Tigers, active since about 1975, fighting for independent state in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka; total estimated strength 5,000 combatants; most prominent insurgent group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); other groups include People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOT or PLOTE), Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). Separate terrorist movement, known as JVP, composed of Sinhalese chauvinists, estimated strength several hundred, opposed to Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, active in Southern Province.

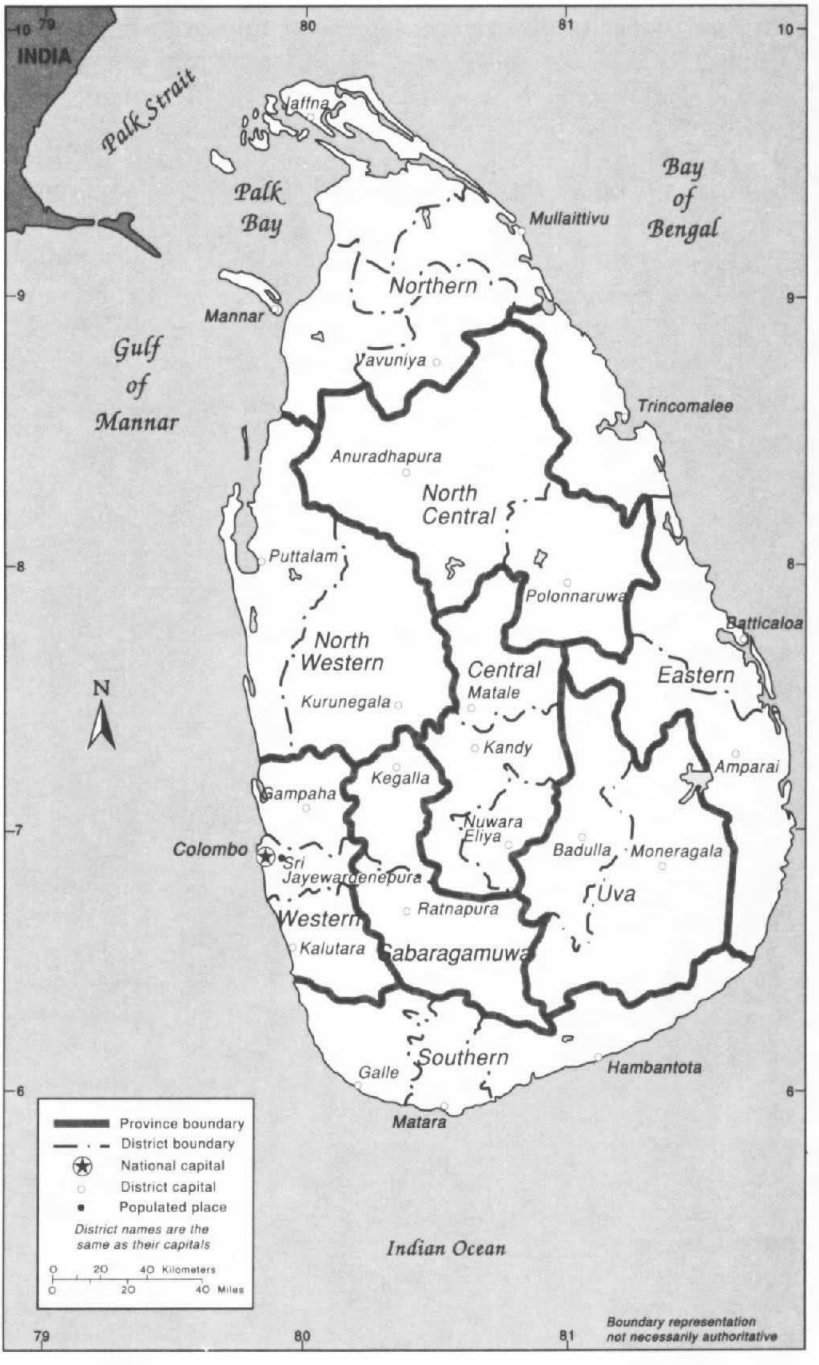


Figure 1. Administrative Divisions of Sri Lanka, 1988

Introduction

SRI LANKA WAS NOT IMMUNE to the spirit of the global and monumental change that swept the world in the late 1980s, promising to usher in a new international order in the 1990s. Indeed, at this writing events on the troubled island nation somehow seemed more under control than they had been in the immediate past. Yet Sri Lanka still had to cope with many of the same daunting and unresolved security problems that it faced in 1983, when a vicious separatist war broke out in the north—a situation later aggravated by an altogether different but equally debilitating insurrection in the south.

Sri Lanka's descent into violence was especially disturbing because for many years the nation was considered a model of democracy in the Third World. A nation with one of the world's lowest per capita incomes, Sri Lanka nevertheless had a nascent but thriving free-market economy that supported one of the most extensive and respected education systems among developing countries. Sadly, in 1990 the recollection of a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka seemed a distant memory.

Prospects for an enduring peace, however remote, lingered as the new decade began. On February 4, 1990, as Sri Lanka celebrated its forty-second Independence Day, the president, Ranasinghe Premadasa, who had assumed power a little over one year before, once again appealed directly to the island nation's more than 16 million people for an end to the long-standing communally based friction between the majority Sinhalese and the largest ethnic minority group, the Sri Lankan Tamils. He also pleaded for a cessation of the internecine struggle among competing groups within the Tamil community and of the open warfare by Sinhalese extremists against the government. The collective strife on the island nation, according to international human rights groups, had over the previous year alone taken as many as 20,000 lives and over the span of a decade killed thousands more. The economy was crippled, the democratic values of the country threatened, and the national memory scarred.

Soothsayers had characterized Premadasa's assumption of power in early 1989 as auspicious. Sri Lanka needed a person of stature and vision to guide the country in its healing process. Many thought Premadasa could fill that role. For the first time since independence, Sri Lanka had a leader who did not belong to the island's high-born Sinhalese Buddhist caste, the Goyigama. Premadasa

came instead from more humble origins and was viewed by many Sri Lankans as more accessible than his predecessor, Junius Richard (J.R.) Jayewardene, under whom he had served as prime minister for ten years. One of Premadasa's first actions on assuming office in January 1989 was to lift the five-and-a-half-year state of emergency declared by his predecessor. Six months later, Premadasa was praised by both the Tamils and the Sinhalese for his unyielding opposition to the presence of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), a military contingent sent into Sri Lanka in 1987 after an agreement between former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene. The IPKF, originally a small force tasked with performing a police action to disarm Tamil separatists in the north, became increasingly entangled in the ethnic struggle and guerrilla insurrection and had grown at one point to as many as 70,000 troops.

By mid-1989 Premadasa was demanding from a sullen India the quick withdrawal of the remaining 45,000 Indian soldiers then on the island. Considering the resentment most Sri Lankans—both Sinhalese and Tamil—had by then developed toward India, the entreaty was both popular and politically expedient. Yet, having to rely on the Sri Lankan military's questionable ability to control the island's mercurial political milieu was a calculated gamble. Still, in June 1989, hopes soared as delicate negotiations were initiated between the government and the most powerful of the Tamil separatist groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). But by then Premadasa was faced with more immediate challenges. A spate of assassinations in the south and a nationwide transportation strike were orchestrated by Sinhalese extremists who had been in the forefront of political agitation against the presence of Indian troops on the island and also against any concessions the government made to Tamil demands for increased autonomy. Premadasa was forced to take urgent action, and he reimposed a national state of emergency, giving his security forces new and draconian powers of enforcement. As bickering between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments over a timetable for the Indian troop withdrawal continued, the Sri Lankan government unleashed a brutal campaign against the Sinhalese extremists. Reports of "death squads" composed of army and police officers who in their zealous pursuit of the subversives also claimed the lives of many innocent victims attracted the attention and ire of Amnesty International and other international human rights groups.

In late March 1990, India withdrew its last troops from Sri Lanka, thereby ending its much maligned three-year period of foreign entanglement, which had inflamed rather than defused the

island's communal and political passions. The pullout created a power vacuum in the island's Tamil-dominated Northeastern Province that was expected to be filled by the resurgent Tamil Tigers. The Tamil Tigers, represented by their own political party, the People's Front of the Liberation Tigers—cautiously recognized by the government—were expected to combine political as well as military pressure against the rival Tamil groups favored by the Indians. Without waiting for the completion of the Indian departure, the Tamil Tigers already were reasserting their control, waging a vigorous and thus far successful military offensive against the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, which headed the provincial government, and several secondary Tamil politico-military groups and their allied militia—the India-armed and trained Tamil National Army. Politically, their prestige enhanced by a reputation honed by their prolonged and skillful combat against the Indians, and what they called their Tamil "quislings," the feared Tamil Tigers were in a good position to win the elections for the Northeastern Provincial Council to be held later in 1990.

In their dialog with the government, the Tamil Tigers no longer emphasized full secession and seemed instead to be more intent, in the absence of their Indian adversaries, on consolidating their military and political power over rival Tamil groups. The government, aware that the Tamil Tigers had not formally renounced the concept of a separate Tamil state, however, realized that the hiatus in fighting could end in renewed fighting and in what could ultimately be the "Lebanization" of the country.

What went so tragically wrong for the beautiful island sometimes referred to as Shangri-la? The answer is elusive and can only partly be explained by the duress experienced by a multifaceted traditional culture undergoing rapid change in an environment restrained by limited resources. A close reckoning also would have to be made of the island's troubled past—both ancient and recent.

Sri Lanka claims the world's second-oldest continuous written history—a history that chronicles the intermittent hostility between two peoples—the Indo-Aryan Sinhalese or "People of the Lion," who arrived from northern India around 500 B.C. to establish magnificent Buddhist kingdoms on the north-central plains, and the Tamils of Dravidian stock, who arrived a few centuries later from southern India. The Tamil symbol became the tiger, and during one brief juncture in the island's history during the tenth century, Sri Lanka was ruled as a province by the Tamil Chola dynasty in southern India. The ancient linkage of northern Sri Lanka with the Tamil kingdoms of southern India has not been forgotten by today's Sinhalese, who cite as a modern embodiment of the

historical threat of Tamil migration, the proximity of India's southern Tamil Nadu state and its 55 million Tamils—a source of psychological and military support for Tamil separatists on the island.

In the sixteenth century, the island was colonized by the Portuguese, later to be followed by the Dutch, and finally, and most significantly, the British in the late eighteenth century. The British succeeded in uniting the island, which they called Ceylon. They established and then broadened a colonial education system centered in British liberalism and democratic values, which would eventually groom the generation of native leaders who had successfully lobbied for independence. The British favored the Tamils somewhat over the Sinhalese, enabling them to take better advantage of what educational and civil service opportunities were available. By the time independence was attained in 1948, a body of able Sri Lankans, pooled from both the Sinhalese and Tamil elites, was ready to take control from the British in a peaceful and well-orchestrated transfer of power.

In its early post-independence years, Sri Lanka was fortunate to be led by Don Stephen Senanayake. He was a Sinhalese who was leader of the United National Party (UNP), an umbrella party of disparate political groups formed during the pre-independence years and one of the two political parties that has since dominated Sri Lankan politics. Senanayake was a man scrupulously even-handed in his approach to ethnic representation, but his vision of communal harmony survived only for a short time after his death in 1952. He was succeeded briefly by two UNP successors, one of whom was his son Dudley. In 1956 control of the government went to the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S.W.R.D.) Bandaranaike, who became the island's fourth prime minister after winning an emotionally charged election.

The 1956 election marked the first instance of serious communal disharmony since independence and presaged the troubled years to come. Symbolically, the election coincided with the 2,500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha and also that of the arrival of Vijaya—the legendary founder of the Sinhalese people—on the island. Emotions became dangerously overwrought because Bandaranaike ran primarily on a "Sinhala Only" platform, which decreed that the language of the Sinhalese would be the only official language, with both English and Tamil branded as cultural imports. Bandaranaike also proclaimed that he would restore Buddhism to its historically elevated place in Sri Lankan society. The argument can be made that the 1956 election and its attendant

emotionalism marked the beginning of the great division between what have become two completely separate and mutually hostile political systems in Sri Lanka, one Sinhalese and Buddhist, the other Tamil and Hindu. Post-election emotions escalated, and it was not long before tragedy followed. In 1958 an anti-Tamil rumor was all that was needed to trigger nationwide riots in which hundreds of people, most of whom were Tamils, died. The riots marked the first major episode of communal violence after independence and left a deep psychological rift between the two major ethnic groups.

In the years after the death of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1959, the SLFP has been headed by his widow Sirimavo, who led her left of center party to victory in the election of 1960 and again in 1970. Popularly regarded as a woman with a mandate to carry on her husband's legacy, she was esteemed by many Sinhalese who heeded her political guidance even when she was out of power. While in office, she vigorously enforced legislation such as the Official Language Act, which openly placed Sinhalese interests over Tamil, further dividing the body politic. During Bandaranaike's last tenure in power, from 1970 to 1977, the deteriorating security situation on the island intensified. In 1971 her new government sanctioned university admissions regulations that were openly prejudicial to Tamils. In the following year, she promulgated a new constitution that declared Sri Lanka a republic, but that was notorious for its lack of protection for minorities.

In 1972 a serious new threat to the stability of the island appeared. Established in the late 1960s, the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna—JVP), a violent movement alternatively described as Maoist and Trokskyite but one indisputably chauvinist in its championship of Sinhalese values, launched its first major offensive in 1972. The JVP attempted a blitzkrieg operation to take over the country within twenty-four hours; it was suppressed only after considerable fighting during a protracted state of emergency declared by the government. In the late 1980s, an invigorated JVP would arise and gather strength from the anti-Indian sentiment that followed the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord and the arrival of Indian troops in 1987.

In 1977 the UNP, led by J.R. Jayewardene, easily defeated Bandaranaike, whose Common Programme with its loosely administered socialist politics had proven so injurious to the economy. Declaring that his government would inaugurate an era of *dharmishta,* or righteous society, Jayewardene crafted a new constitution the following year, changing the previous Westminster-style parliamentary government to a new presidential system

modeled after that of France. The 1978 Constitution, unlike its predecessor, made substantial concessions to Tamil sensitivities. The most blatant excesses of the Bandaranaike government were stopped, especially the discriminatory university admissions criteria aimed at Tamils and the refusal to give Tamil national language status. Yet these measures appeared to be a classical case of too little too late. The political disillusionment of Tamil youth, which had grown during the Bandaranaike years, continued unabated, and the separatist call for a Tamil Eelam, or "Precious Land," became increasingly accompanied by attacks on government targets.

Jayewardene, widely admired as one of the most learned leaders in South Asia, nevertheless was criticized for his inability—or reluctance—to recognize the disturbances in Sri Lanka as something more profound than merely a law and order problem. In 1979 with communal unrest growing steadily worse, his government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act, at first a temporary, but later a permanent, piece of legislation that gave unbridled powers of search and arrest to the police and military. Government abuses soon followed, attracting the harsh scrutiny and condemnation of international human rights organizations. In time, Jayewardene was forced to broaden his assessment of the deteriorating security situation, and he initiated a series of negotiations on increased autonomy with the major Tamil political organization on the island, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). While the TULF and the government pressed for a conference of all appropriate bodies—a peace forum to represent all the religious and ethnic groups in the country—the Tamil Tigers escalated their terrorist attacks, provoking a Sinhalese backlash against Tamils and precluding any successful accommodation resulting from the talks. Thereafter, the talks took place intermittently and at best with only partial representation between representatives of the heterogeneous Tamil community and the government.

Important opportunities for a constructive dialog on Tamil and Sinhalese concerns continued to be missed as negotiators, driven by events seemingly beyond their control, hardened their positions. Under steady pressure from Tamil extremists and in their abhorrence of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the moderate Tamil political organizations, notably the TULF, decided to boycott the 1982 presidential election. When the government proposed the following year to amend the Constitution to ban all talk of separatism, all sixteen TULF members of parliament were expelled for refusing to recite a loyalty oath. The government lost its vital link to mediation. The fissures in Sri Lankan society also grew wider with each new episode of communal violence. Serious rioting again broke

out in 1977 and 1981, but the magnitude of unrest and violence that exploded in the July 1983 riots could not have been anticipated. The riots unleashed an unprecedented wave of violence that engulfed the island and divided Sri Lankan society. The aftermath of that social conflagration was still felt in the early 1990s.

The 1983 riots were in response to the ambush and killing of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers by the Tamil Tigers on the outskirts of Jaffna, the capital of Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated Northern Province. A five-day rampage ensued, with lynchings and summary executions occurring all over the island. As many as 1,000 people, mostly Tamils, were slaughtered. Carefully carried out attacks by Sinhalese rioters in possession of voter lists and addresses of Tamils suggested collusion by some members of Sri Lanka's military and security forces.

Shortly after the riots Jayewardene hurriedly convened an All Party Conference, which was envisioned as a series of ongoing talks with the aim of bringing Tamils and Sinhalese together to negotiate a political settlement of their communal confrontation. The conference, which was first convened in January 1984, resulted in a series of proposals. These proposals, however, were rejected by several of the major Tamil opposition parties, including the TULF. In July 1985, the government, now joined by the active participation of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India, reopened a dialog with the TULF and other smaller Tamil political groups in a series of proposals and counter-proposals. Tamil demands focused on the issues of the devolution of central legislative, administrative, and judicial authority. Progress in the talks soon proved illusory, however, because the moderate TULF had little credibility among the militants, especially the powerful Tamil Tigers, who were steadfast in their opposition to any settlement with the government short of the establishment of a Tamil Eelam.

Jayewardene notified India and the TULF in 1986 that he would significantly devolve state powers, a concession he was previously unwilling to make. Jayewardene's proposed plan offered all nine provinces substantial autonomy, with many of the central government powers pertaining to law and order, representation, and land settlement transferred to provincial councils. The proposed devolution of central powers at that time fell short of meeting Tamil demands for a merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces into a single Tamil-speaking unit. Predictably, the Jayewardene Plan was attacked by Bandaranaike, who also refused to participate in the 1986 All Party Conference through which Jayewardene had hoped to achieve a national consensus.

By early summer 1987 Jayewardene, sensing that Tamil Tiger guerrilla activities against the government were an insurmountable impediment to his efforts at a negotiated peace settlement, launched a military campaign to dislodge them from their stronghold in the north. The Sri Lankan military succeeded in wresting a good proportion of the Jaffna Peninsula from the Tamil Tigers, who then withdrew to the city of Jaffna relying on the consummate guerrilla tactic of using a sympathetic citizenry to insulate them from pursuing troops. When the troops continued to advance and threatened to enter the Tamil stronghold, India, pressured by its Tamil politicians, warned that it would militarily intervene to prevent them from doing so.

New Delhi accused Colombo of employing starvation tactics against the people of Jaffna in its anti-Tiger military operations and demanded to be allowed to send humanitarian relief. Insulted, Sri Lanka refused the demand. In response, India sent a small flotilla of fishing vessels, carrying supplies of food and medicine. Sri Lanka's tiny but tenacious navy turned it away, however, changing India's gesture into a public relations fiasco. Perhaps because of wounded pride, India sent cargo planes escorted by fighters into Sri Lanka's airspace dropping a few symbolic supplies over Jaffna. Sri Lanka, vociferously protesting that its territorial sovereignty had been violated, labeled India a regional bully. While Tamil separatists applauded India's move, most others in Sri Lanka were incensed. Relations between the two countries plummeted.

Good relations with India had been of great importance to Sri Lanka since independence, but the ethnic crisis between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, which culminated in the mid-1980s, poisoned relations between the two states. India had been particularly strident in its accusations of alleged atrocities by the Sri Lankan security forces against the Sri Lankan Tamils and once went so far as to declare that the Sri Lankan government's "genocide" was responsible for the flight of thousands of refugees to India. Sri Lanka accused India of encouraging Tamil separatism and providing Tamil guerrillas sanctuary and training facilities in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu since the early 1980s. Jayewardene specifically leveled his public outrage at Tamil Nadu, calling the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas a private army of the late M.G. Ramachandran, then the Tamil Nadu chief minister. Ranasinghe Premadasa, as Jayewardene's prime minister, did not distinguish Tamil Nadu's role from that of India, calling that country's alleged support of Sri Lanka's Tamil separatism the "terrorist equation."

Overcoming much bitterness, both Gandhi and Jayewardene eventually agreed that a confrontational approach would never address the complicated security and bilateral issues linking the two nations. On July 29, 1987, within two months of the airdrop incident, an agreement, henceforth referred to as the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, was signed between the Indian and Sri Lankan leaders with the purpose of establishing peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka. The accord was timely and politically advantageous to both leaders. Jayewardene in Colombo was increasingly perceived as isolated from the events in the north, and his instrument of influence there, the Sri Lankan military, was depicted by the international media as an ill-trained and poorly disciplined force. He agreed to a plan of devolution that would give Sri Lankan Tamils more autonomy over a newly created Northeastern Province but would at the same time safeguard Sri Lanka's unitary status. Gandhi's government, reeling from an arms scandal, was able to trumpet a foreign relations victory as regional peacekeeper. Gandhi's strategy was to exercise India's military clout to weaken the separatist insurgency in Sri Lanka by collecting weapons from the same Tamil militant groups that it was accused of having previously trained and equipped. Furthermore, it was agreed that India would expel all Sri Lankan Tamil citizens resident in India who were found to be engaging in terrorist activities or advocating separatism in Sri Lanka. To enforce this new state of cooperation between the two nations, the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard would assist the Sri Lankan Navy in intercepting arms from Tamil militants based in India.

The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord had another, lesser known aspect, the importance of which Indian officials acknowledged afterwards, which bears on India's geopolitical perception of itself as a regional superpower. India, wary of competing influence in the Indian Ocean region, insisted that the accord be accompanied by documents which assured New Delhi veto power over what foreign nation could use the harbor facilities at Trincomalee in the northeast. Sri Lanka also was asked to cancel an earlier agreement with the United States that gave the Voice of America rights to expand its transmission installations on the island.

New Delhi was able to obtain the agreement of the TULF, as well as some of the lesser Tamil political groups, and for a brief time the acquiescence of the powerful LTTE, for a cease-fire. Within forty-eight hours of the signing of the agreement in Colombo, the cease-fire went into effect and the first troops of the IPKF arrived in northern Sri Lanka. Yet implementation of the accord proved problematic. Rioting Sinhalese mobs, inspired by

anti-accord rhetoric voiced by Bandaranaike, disrupted the capital. At the farewell ceremony for Gandhi, following the signing of the accord, in a circumstance that proved more embarrassing than dangerous, a Sri Lankan honor guard clubbed the Indian leader with his rifle butt. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the accord held for less than three months.

By early September, violence was breaking out in Eastern Province where Sinhalese and Muslims were protesting the provisional merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces effected for the purpose of electing a single provincial council. The Sinhalese and Muslims felt that because the Northern Province was overwhelmingly Tamil, a merger of the two provinces would result in their minority status. Bandaranaike's SLFP skillfully capitalized on this atmosphere of panic, allying itself with influential Buddhist monks, who together mounted a well publicized campaign against the government's "betrayal" of the non-Tamil population of the Eastern Province.

In October 1987, the accord was repudiated outright by the LTTE following a bizarre episode in which seventeen Tamil Tigers were arrested for trying to smuggle in a cache of weapons from India. While in transit to Colombo, fifteen of the seventeen Tamil Tigers committed suicide by swallowing cyanide capsules. The LTTE, claiming that the prisoners had been forced to take such a desperate action while in custody, immediately made a number of retaliatory attacks on Sinhalese settlements in the east. The IPKF, ill suited to counter-guerrilla warfare, was accused by many Sinhalese of allowing the attacks to take place. Jayewardene angrily declared that if the Indians could not protect the citizenry, he would order the IPKF to withdraw from the province and put his own soldiers on the job. India denounced the Tamil Tigers for attempting to wreck the accord and declared its determination to maintain law and order. The IPKF then began what was the first of its many operations against the Tamil Tigers. The Jaffna operation was costly, taking the lives of over 200 Indian soldiers and bringing home to India the realization that it had underestimated the strength and persistence of the Tamil Tigers. Taking advantage of the distractions in the north, Sinhalese extremists of the JVP gained strength in the south, successfully carrying out several arms raids on military camps. The most spectacular attack the JVP attempted occurred in August 1987 during a government parliamentary group meeting, when a hand grenade exploded near the table where President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Premadasa were sitting.

In 1988 Jayewardene continued working toward the controversial merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces, where the Tamil separatists had long been active. The merger, initially a temporary measure, was a central part of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord under which India sought to ensure that an elected provincial council in the Tamil majority areas enjoyed substantial power to administer Tamil affairs. Although the LTTE boycotted the provincial election and tried to disrupt it, as did the JVP, there was a surprisingly high voter turnout. Still, few Sinhalese voted, and without LTTE participation, the credibility of the provincial council was limited. Furthermore, many viewed the resulting provincial government, dominated by the Tigers' main rival group, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, as a creation of India.

As 1988 drew to a close, Jayewardene announced he would retire and not run in the presidential election scheduled for December. Premadasa, the UNP's candidate, ran against two others, the SLFP's Bandaranaike and a relative political unknown. As the presidential election approached, JVP subversives concentrated on crippling essential services such as buses and trains, fuel supplies, and banking. The UNP's presidential candidate, Premadasa, stated that this was a battle between the ballot and the bullet and that the bullet must not win. The election proved to be the bloodiest in Sri Lanka's history, but the ballot did in fact prevail, with voters defying threats from Tamil as well as Sinhalese extremists. Despite predictions that the voter turnout would not exceed 30 percent in contrast to the 80 percent turnout in the past presidential election, well over 50 percent of the nations's 9.4 million eligible voters showed up at the polls. Premadasa won by a large margin over his closest rival, Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

One of Premadasa's first problems when he took over on January 2, 1989, was what to do about the JVP, which was believed responsible for numerous assassinations the year before. In his victory speech, Premadasa appealed to the JVP to enter into talks with him. The Sinhalese extremists initially were willing to distinguish between him and the outgoing president, Jayewardene, whom they had earlier tried to assassinate. The JVP, which unleashed a steady barrage of anti-Indian propaganda against "Indian expansionism, invading Indian armies," was impressed by Premadasa's anti-Indian rhetoric and even went so far as to praise him as a patriotic leader. Encouraged, Premadasa used the occasion of Sri Lanka's Independence Day celebrations to make an impassioned appeal for an end to the killings on the island and proceeded a little more than a week later to hold the nation's first parliamentary elections in eleven years. The nation had endured

another challenge to its democratic institutions despite the killing of substantial numbers of candidates of various parties and their supporters by the LTTE and JVP.

In May 1989, LTTE guerrillas decided to negotiate with the new government of Premadasa, holding the first direct peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tiger separatist fighters since July 1985. The unexpected decision underscored the fundamental changes that had been taking place among Sri Lanka's Tamil political groups. Political differences among the groups had widened, with some former separatist groups now represented in the Northeastern Provincial Council and in the national Parliament. The LTTE, the remaining guerrilla army in the field, had been isolated and weakened by prolonged combat with Indian troops. Premadasa, stating that he wanted to settle the Tamil problem among Sri Lankans, circumvented Indian participation in the talks. On June 1, Premadasa abruptly called for the withdrawal by the end of July of 45,000 Indian soldiers still in Sri Lanka. Gandhi, for his part, was determined not to lose face by having his forces hurried out of Sri Lanka too quickly in an election year. Yet, India's participation in the struggle had been costly in human, military, and diplomatic terms. The Indian troops were viewed suspiciously by most Sri Lankans, and India's police action had made its neighbors in South Asia uneasy. The Indians, with more than 1,200 casualties, accepted that it was time to go—but at their own pace.

There were critics who believed that Premadasa, who in June 1989 was forced to reimpose a state of national emergency after having lifted it for the previous six months, was making unrealistic demands on India to withdraw quickly; they also believed that he was unwisely pandering to prevalent anti-Indian emotions in order to recover from an early period of unpopularity. Although the argument was made that the longer the IPKF stayed in Sri Lanka, the stronger the support would be for the JVP, it was questionable whether the Sri Lankan military, which admittedly had grown dramatically since 1983, could have successfully controlled the ferocity of both the Tamil Tigers and the JVP without Indian help. Yet, as one Sri Lankan politician admitted, the president was in the unenviable position of having the "IPKF holding his legs and the JVP at his throat."

The Tamil Tigers, despite their truce with the government, remained a ruthless and effective military force. It was not known in 1990 how long their gesture of conciliation would last. The JVP had lost its charismatic leader, Rohana Wijewera, in November 1989, when he was captured and subsequently killed by government

security forces, and it had been brutally suppressed by the government in late 1989 and early 1990. The group, however, still was active and might ultimately pose the most dangerous long-term threat to Sri Lanka's national security.

Premadasa placed much faith in his poverty alleviation plan—his remedy for much of the unrest plaguing the island. But the plan as originally unveiled alarmed both foreign lenders and many Sri Lankan technocrats and would have greatly burdened the already huge government budget. After a period of mounting defense expenditures, systematic destruction of the economic infrastructure by subversives, a worldwide decline in demand for Sri Lanka's traditional raw products, and the partial eclipse of its once robust tourist industry, Premadasa's plan, while well intentioned, was perceived as economically unfeasible.

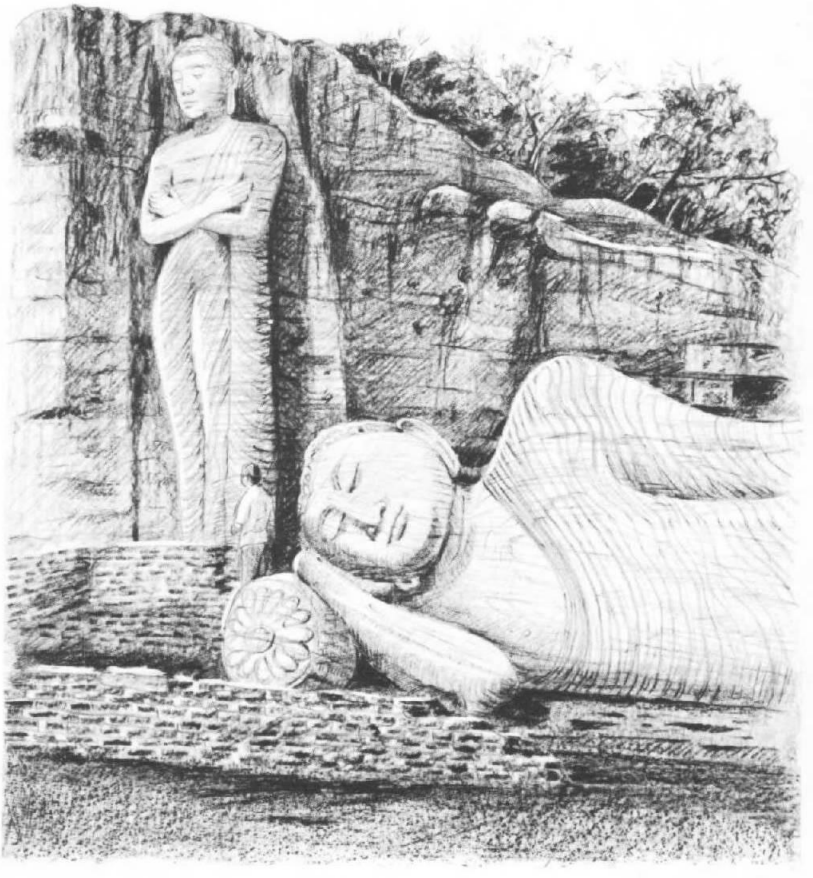
As Sri Lanka entered the 1990s, there were no clear answers as to whether its democratic institutions could survive another onslaught of anarchy, terror, and violence. As India withdrew its last troops from the island amid charges that it had failed to perform its primary task of disarming Tamil separatists, it, too, accused Sri Lanka of not having fully implemented the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord—charging that there had not been an adequate devolution of central power. Yet Premadasa has declared that "Sri Lanka's problems must be settled among Sri Lankans."

Certainly Sri Lanka's problems were increasingly complex and difficult to comprehend. Perhaps the culture of the island with its countervailing forces and fractured institutions can be glimpsed in the somber evocation of struggle captured in lines from "Elephant," a poem written by D.H. Lawrence following a visit to Sri Lanka:

> In elephants and the east are two devils, in all men maybe.
> The mystery of the dark mountain of blood, reeking in
> homage, in lust, in rage,
> And passive with everlasting patience. . . .

May 1, 1990 Peter R. Blood

Chapter 1. Historical Setting



Reclining and standing Buddhas at Polonnaruwa

SRI LANKA'S HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE covers more than 2,000 years. Known as Lanka—the "resplendent land"—in the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana,* the island has numerous other references that testify to the island's natural beauty and wealth. Islamic folklore maintains that Adam and Eve were offered refuge on the island as solace for their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Asian poets, noting the geographical location of the island and lauding its beauty, called it the "pearl upon the brow of India." A troubled nation in the 1980s, torn apart by communal violence, Sri Lanka has more recently been called India's "fallen tear."

Sri Lanka claims a democratic tradition matched by few other developing countries, and since its independence in 1948, successive governments have been freely elected. Sri Lanka's citizens enjoy a long life expectancy, advanced health standards, and one of the highest literacy rates in the world despite the fact that the country has one of the lowest per capita incomes.

In the years since independence, Sri Lanka has experienced severe communal clashes between its Buddhist Sinhalese majority—approximately 74 percent of the population—and the country's largest minority group, the Sri Lankan Tamils, who are Hindus and comprise nearly 13 percent of the population. The communal violence that attracted the harsh scrutiny of the international media in the late 1980s can best be understood in the context of the island's complex historical development—its ancient and intricate relationship to India's civilization and its more than four centuries under colonial rule by European powers.

The Sinhalese claim to have been the earliest colonizers of Sri Lanka, first settling in the dry north-central regions as early as 500 B.C. Between the third century B.C. and the twelfth century A.D., they developed a great civilization centered around the cities of Anuradhapura and later Polonnaruwa, which was noted for its genius in hydraulic engineering—the construction of water tanks (reservoirs) and irrigation canals, for example—and its guardianship of Buddhism. State patronage gave Buddhism a heightened political importance that enabled the religion to escape the fate it had experienced in India, where it was eventually absorbed by Hinduism.

The history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, especially its extended period of glory, is for many Sinhalese a potent symbol that links

the past with the present. An enduring ideology defined by two distinct elements—*sinhaladipa* (unity of the island with the Sinhalese) and *dhammadipa* (island of Buddhism)—designates the Sinhalese as custodians of Sri Lankan society. This theme finds recurrent expression in the historical chronicles composed by Buddish monks over the centuries, from the mythological founding of the Sinhalese "lion" race around 300 B.C. to the capitulation of the Kingdom of Kandy, the last independent Sinhalese polity in the early nineteenth century.

The institutions of Buddhist-Sinhalese civilization in Sri Lanka came under attack during the colonial eras of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. During these centuries of colonialization, the state encouraged and supported Christianity—first Roman Catholicism, then Protestantism. Most Sinhalese regard the entire period of European dominance as an unfortunate era, but most historians—Sri Lankan or otherwise—concede that British rule was relatively benign and progressive compared to that of the Dutch and Portuguese. Influenced by the ascendant philosophy of liberal reformism, the British were determined to anglicize the island, and in 1802, Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) became Britain's first crown colony. The British gradually permitted native participation in the governmental process; and under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 and then the Soulbury Constitution of 1946, the franchise was dramatically extended, preparing the island for independence two years later.

Under the statesmanship of Sri Lanka's first postindependence leader, Don Stephen (D.S.) Senanayake, the country managed to rise above the bitterly divisive communal and religious emotions that later complicated the political agenda. Senanayake envisioned his country as a pluralist, multiethnic, secular state, in which minorities would be able to participate fully in government affairs. His vision for his nation soon faltered, however, and communal rivalry and confrontation appeared within the first decade of independence. Sinhalese nationalists aspired to recover the dominance in society they had lost during European rule, while Sri Lankan Tamils wanted to protect their minority community from domination or assimilation by the Sinhalese majority. No compromise was forthcoming, and as early as 1951, Tamil leaders stated that "the Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood."

Sinhalese nationalists did not have to wait long before they found an eloquent champion of their cause. Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S.W.R.D.) Bandaranaike successfully challenged the nation's Westernized rulers who were alienated from Sinhalese culture; he

became prime minister in 1956. A man particularly adept at harnessing Sinhalese communal passions, Bandaranaike vowed to make Sinhala the only language of administration and education and to restore Buddhism to its former glory. The violence unleashed by his policies directly threatened the unity of the nation, and communal riots rocked the country in 1956 and 1958. Bandaranaike became a victim of the passions he unleashed. In 1959 a Buddhist monk who felt that Bandaranaike had not pushed the Buddhist-Sinhalese cause far enough assassinated the Sri Lankan leader. Bandaranaike's widow, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias (S.R.D.) Bandaranaike, ardently carried out many of his ideas. In 1960, she became the world's first woman prime minister.

Communal tensions continued to rise over the following years. In 1972 the nation became a republic under a new constitution, which was a testimony to the ideology of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and Buddhism was accorded special status. These reforms and new laws discriminating against Tamils in university admissions were a symbolic threat the Tamil community felt it could not ignore, and a vicious cycle of violence erupted that has plagued successive governments. Tamil agitation for separation became associated with gruesome and highly visible terrorist acts by extremists, triggering large communal riots in 1977, 1981, and 1983. During these riots, Sinhalese mobs retaliated against isolated and vulnerable Tamil communities. By the mid-1980s, the Tamil militant underground had grown in strength and posed a serious security threat to the government, and its combatants struggled for a Tamil nation—"Tamil Eelam"—by an increasing recourse to terrorism. The fundamental, unresolved problems facing society were surfacing with a previously unseen force. Foreign and domestic observers expressed concern for democratic procedures in a society driven by divisive symbols and divided by ethnic loyalties.

Origins

Ancient Indian and Sri Lankan myths and chronicles have been studied intensively and interpreted widely for their insight into the human settlement and philosophical development of the island. Confirmation of the island's first colonizers—whether the Sinhalese or Sri Lankan Tamils—has been elusive, but evidence suggests that Sri Lanka has been, since earliest times, a multiethnic society. Sri Lankan historian K.M. de Silva believes that settlement and colonization by Indo-Aryan speakers may have preceded the arrival of Dravidian settlers by several centuries, but that early mixing rendered the two ethnic groups almost physically indistinct.

Ancient Legends and Chronicles

The first major legendary reference to the island is found in the great Indian epic, the *Ramayana* (Sacred Lake of the Deeds of Rama), thought to have been written around 500 B.C. The *Ramayana* tells of the conquest of Lanka in 3000 B.C. by Rama, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. Rama's quest to save his abducted wife, Sita, from Ravanna, the demon god of Lanka, and his demon hordes, is, according to some scholars, a poetic account of the early southward expansion of Brahmanic civilization.

Buddhist Chronicles

The most valuable source of knowledge for scholars probing the legends and historical heritage of Sri Lanka is still the *Mahavamsa* (Great Genealogy or Dynasty), a chronicle compiled in Pali, the language of Theravada Buddhism, in the sixth century. Buddhist monks composed the *Mahavamsa,* which was an adaptation of an earlier and cruder fourth century epic, the *Dipavamsa* (Island Genealogy or Dynasty). The latter account was compiled to glorify Buddhism and is not a comprehensive narrative of events. The *Mahavamsa,* however, relates the rise and fall of successive Buddhist kingdoms beginning with Vijaya, the legendary colonizer of Sri Lanka and primogenitor of the Sinhalese migrant group. In the *Mahavamsa,* Vijaya is described as having arrived on the island on the day of the Buddha's death (*parinibbana*) or, more precisely, his nirvana or *nibbana* (see Glossary), his release from the cycle of life and pain. The *Mahavamsa* also lavishes praise on the Sinhalese kings who repulsed attacks by Indian Tamils.

Vijaya is the central legendary figure in the *Mahavamsa.* He was the grandson of an Indian princess from Vanga in northern India who had been abducted by an amorous lion, Simha, and son of their incestuous and half-leonine offspring. Along with 700 of his followers, Vijaya arrived in Lanka and established himself as ruler with the help of Kuveni, a local demon-worshiping princess. Although Kuveni had betrayed her own people and had given birth to two of Vijaya's children, she was banished by the ruler, who then arranged a marriage with a princess from Madurai in southeastern India. Kuveni's offspring are the folkloric ancestors of the present day Veddahs, an aboriginal people now living in scattered areas of eastern Sri Lanka (see Ethnic Groups, ch. 2). Many scholars believe that the legend of Vijaya provides a glimpse into the early settlement of the island. Around the fifth century B.C., the first bands of Sri Lankan colonists are believed to have come from the coastal areas of northern India. The chronicles

support evidence that the royal progeny of Vijaya often sought wives from the Pandyan and other Dravidian (Tamil) kingdoms of southern India. The chronicles also tell of an early and constant migration of artisan and mercantile Tamils to Sri Lanka.

From the fifth century A.D onward, periodic palace intrigues and religious heresies weakened Buddhist institutions leaving Sinhalese-Buddhist culture increasingly vulnerable to successive and debilitating Tamil invasions. A chronicle, a continuation of the *Mahavamsa,* describes this decline. The main body of this chronicle, which assumed the less than grandiloquent title *Culavamsa* (Lesser Genealogy or Dynasty), was attributed to the thirteenth century poet-monk, Dhammakitti. The *Culavamsa* was later expanded by another monk the following century and, concluded by a third monk in the late eighteenth century.

The Impact of Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. from India, where it had been established by Siddartha Gautama three centuries earlier (see Buddhism, ch. 2). The powerful Indian monarch, Asoka, nurtured the new comprehensive religio-philosophical system in the third century B.C. Asoka's conversion to Buddhism marks one of the turning points in religious history because at that time, Buddhism was elevated from a minor sect to an official religion enjoying all the advantages of royal patronage. Asoka's empire, which extended over most of India, supported one of the most vigorous missionary enterprises in history.

The Buddhist tradition of chronicling events has aided the verification of historical figures. One of the most important of these figures was King Devanampiya Tissa (250–c. 207 B.C.). According to the *Mahavamsa,* Asoka's son and emissary to Sri Lanka, Mahinda, introduced the monarch to Buddhism. Devanampiya Tissa became a powerful patron of Buddhism and established the monastery of Mahavihara, which became the historic center of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Subsequent events also contributed to Sri Lanka's prestige in the Buddhist world. It was on the island, for example, that the oral teachings of the Buddha—the Tripitaka—were committed to writing for the first time.

Devanampiya Tissa was said to have received Buddha's right collarbone and his revered alms bowl from Asoka and to have built the Thuparama Dagoba, or stupa (Buddhist shrine), to honor these highly revered relics. Another relic, Buddha's sacred tooth, had arrived in Sri Lanka in the fourth century A.D. The possession

of the Tooth Relic came to be regarded as essential for the legitimization of Sinhalese royalty and remained so until its capture and probable destruction by the Portuguese in 1560. The sacred Tooth Relic (thought by many to be a substitute) that is venerated in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy links legendary Sri Lanka with the modern era. The annual procession of Perahera held in honor of the sacred Tooth Relic serves as a powerful unifying force for the Sinhalese in the twentieth century. Asoka's daughter, Sanghamitta, is recorded as having brought to the island a branch of the sacred bo tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. According to legend, the tree that grew from this branch is near the ruins of the ancient city of Anuradhapura in the north of Sri Lanka. The tree is said to be the oldest living thing in the world and is an object of great veneration.

The connection between religion, culture, language, and education and their combined influence on national identity have been an age-old pervasive force for the Sinhalese Buddhists. Devanampiya Tissa employed Asoka's strategy of merging the political state with Buddhism, supporting Buddhist institutions from the state's coffers, and locating temples close to the royal palace for greater control. With such patronage, Buddhism was positioned to evolve as the highest ethical and philosophical expression of Sinhalese culture and civilization. Buddhism appealed directly to the masses, leading to the growth of a collective Sinhalese cultural consciousness.

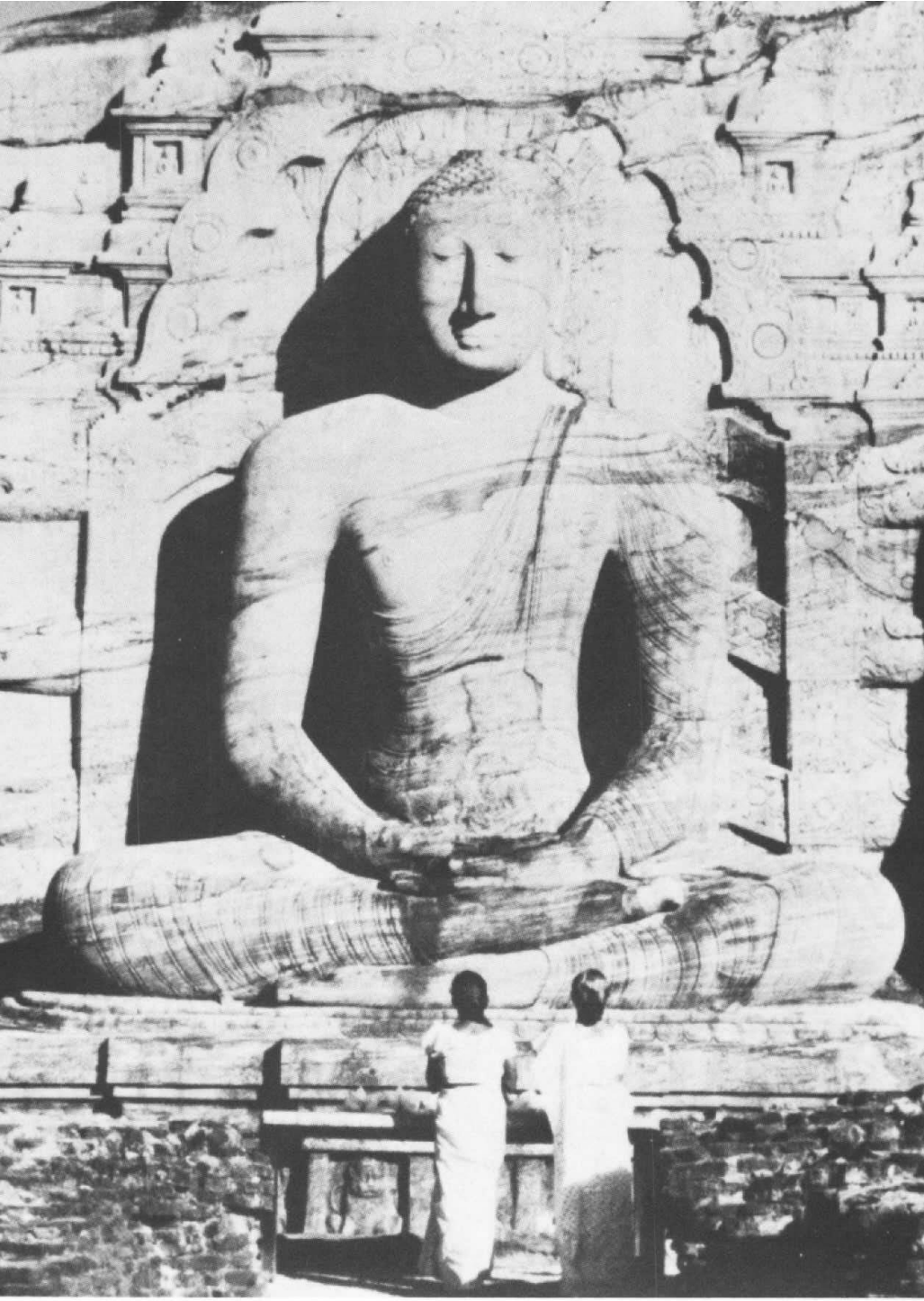
In contrast to the theological exclusivity of Hindu Brahmanism, the Asokan missionary approach featured preaching and carried the principles of the Buddha directly to the common people. This proselytizing had even greater success in Sri Lanka than it had in India and could be said to be the island's first experiment in mass education.

Buddhism also had a great effect on the literary development of the island. The Indo-Aryan dialect spoken by the early Sinhalese was comprehensible to missionaries from India and facilitated early attempts at translating the scriptures. The Sinhalese literati studied Pali, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, thus influencing the development of Sinhala as a literary language.

The Classical Age, 200 B.C.–A.D. 1200

Early Settlements

The first extensive Sinhalese settlements were along rivers in the dry northern zone of the island. Because early agricultural activity—primarily the cultivation of wet rice—was dependent on unreliable



Seated Buddha statue near Polonnaruwa
Courtesy Embassy of Sri Lanka, Washington

monsoon rains, the Sinhalese constructed canals, channels, water-storage tanks, and reservoirs to provide an elaborate irrigation system to counter the risks posed by periodic drought. Such early attempts at engineering reveal the brilliant understanding these ancient people had of hydraulic principles and trigonometry. The discovery of the principle of the valve tower, or valve pit, for regulating the escape of water is credited to Sinhalese ingenuity more than 2,000 years ago. By the first century A.D., several large-scale irrigation works had been completed.

The mastery of hydraulic engineering and irrigated agriculture facilitated the concentration of large numbers of people in the northern dry zone, where early settlements appeared to be under the control of semi-independent rulers (see Land Use and Settlement Patterns, ch. 2). In time, the mechanisms for political control became more refined, and the city-state of Anuradhapura emerged and attempted to gain sovereignty over the entire island. The state-sponsored flowering of Buddhist art and architecture and the construction of complex and extensive hydraulic works exemplify what is known as Sri Lanka's classical age, which roughly parallels the period between the rise and fall of Anuradhapura (from ca. 200 B.C. to ca. A.D. 993).

The Sinhalese kingdom at Anuradhapura was in many ways typical of other ancient hydraulic societies because it lacked a rigid, authoritarian and heavily bureaucratic structure. Theorists have attributed Anuradhapura's decentralized character to its feudal basis, which was, however, a feudalism unlike that found in Europe. The institution of caste formed the basis of social stratification in ancient Sinhalese society and determined a person's social obligation, and position within the hierarchy.

The caste system in Sri Lanka developed its own characteristics. Although it shared an occupational role with its Indian prototype, caste in Sri Lanka developed neither the exclusive Brahmanical social hierarchy nor, to any significant degree, the concept of defilement by contact with impure persons or substances that was central to the Indian caste system. The claims of the Kshatriya (warrior caste) to royalty were a moderating influence on caste, but more profound was the influence of Buddhism, which lessened the severity of the institution. The monarch theoretically held absolute powers but was nevertheless expected to conform to the rules of dharma, or universal laws governing human existence and conduct (see Religion, ch. 2).

The king was traditionally entitled to land revenue equivalent to one-sixth of the produce in his domain. Furthermore, his subjects owed him a kind of caste-based compulsory labor (*rajakariya*

in Sinhala) as a condition for holding land and were required to provide labor for road construction, irrigation projects, and other public works. During the later colonial period, the Europeans exploited the institution of *rajakariya,* which was destined to become an important moral and economic issue in the nineteenth century (see European Encroachment and Dominance, 1500–1948, this ch.).

Social divisions arose over the centuries between those engaged in agriculture and those engaged in nonagricultural occupations. The Govi (cultivators—see Glossary) belonged to the highest Sinhalese caste (Goyigama) and remained so in the late twentieth century. All Sri Lankan heads of state have, since independence, belonged to the Goyigama caste, as do about half of all Sinhalese. The importance of cultivation on the island is also reflected in the caste structure of the Hindu Tamils, among whom the Vellala (cultivator) is the highest caste.

Rise of Sinhalese and Tamil Ethnic Awareness

Because the *Mahavamsa* is essentially a chronicle of the early Sinhalese-Buddhist royalty on the island, it does not provide information on the island's early ethnic distributions. There is, for instance, only scant evidence as to when the first Tamil settlements were established. Tamil literary sources, however, speak of active trading centers in southern India as early as the third century B.C. and it is probable that these centers had at least some contact with settlements in northern Sri Lanka. There is some debate among historians as to whether settlement by Indo-Aryan speakers preceded settlement by Dravidian-speaking Tamils, but there is no dispute over the fact that Sri Lanka, from its earliest recorded history, was a multiethnic society. Evidence suggests that during the early centuries of Sri Lankan history there was considerable harmony between the Sinhalese and Tamils.

The peace and stability of the island were first significantly affected around 237 B.C. when two adventurers from southern India, Sena and Guttika, usurped the Sinhalese throne at Anuradhapura. Their combined twenty-two-year rule marked the first time Sri Lanka was ruled by Tamils. The two were subsequently murdered, and the Sinhalese royal dynasty was restored. In 145 B.C., a Tamil general named Elara, of the Chola dynasty (which ruled much of India from the ninth to twelfth centuries A.D.), took over the throne at Anuradhapura and ruled for forty-four years. A Sinhalese king, Dutthagamani (or Duttugemunu), waged a fifteen-year campaign against the Tamil monarch and finally deposed him.

Dutthagamani is the outstanding hero of the *Mahavamsa,* and his war against Elara is sometimes depicted in contemporary

accounts as a major racial confrontation between Tamils and Sinhalese. A less biased and more factual interpretation, according to Sri Lankan historian K.M. de Silva, must take into consideration the large reserve of support Elara had among the Sinhalese. Furthermore, another Sri Lankan historian, Sinnappah Arasaratnam, argues that the war was a dynastic struggle that was purely political in nature. As a result of Dutthagamani's victory, Anuradhapura became the locus of power on the island. Arasaratnam suggests the conflict recorded in the *Mahavamsa* marked the beginning of Sinhalese nationalism and that Dutthagamani's victory is commonly interpreted as a confirmation that the island was a preserve for the Sinhalese and Buddhism. The historian maintains that the story is still capable of stirring the religio-communal passions of the Sinhalese.

The Tamil threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms had become very real in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. Three Hindu empires in southern India—the Pandya, Pallava, and Chola—were becoming more assertive. The Sinhalese perception of this threat intensified because in India, Buddhism—vulnerable to pressure and absorption by Hinduism—had already receded. Tamil ethnic and religious consciousness also matured during this period. In terms of culture, language, and religion, the Tamils had identified themselves as Dravidian, Tamil, and Hindu, respectively.

Another Sinhalese king praised in the *Mahavamsa* is Dhatusena (459-77), who, in the fifth century A.D., liberated Anuradhapura from a quarter-century of Pandyan rule. The king was also honored as a generous patron of Buddhism and as a builder of water storage tanks. Dhatusena was killed by his son, Kasyapa (477-95), who is regarded as a great villain in Sri Lankan history. In fear of retribution from his exiled brother, the parricide moved the capital from Anuradhapura to Sigiriya, a fortress and palace perched on a monolithic rock 180 meters high. Although the capital was returned to Anuradhapura after Kasyapa was dethroned, Sigiriya is an architectural and engineering feat displayed in an inaccessible redoubt. The rock fortress eventually fell to Kasyapa's brother, who received help from an army of Indian mercenaries.

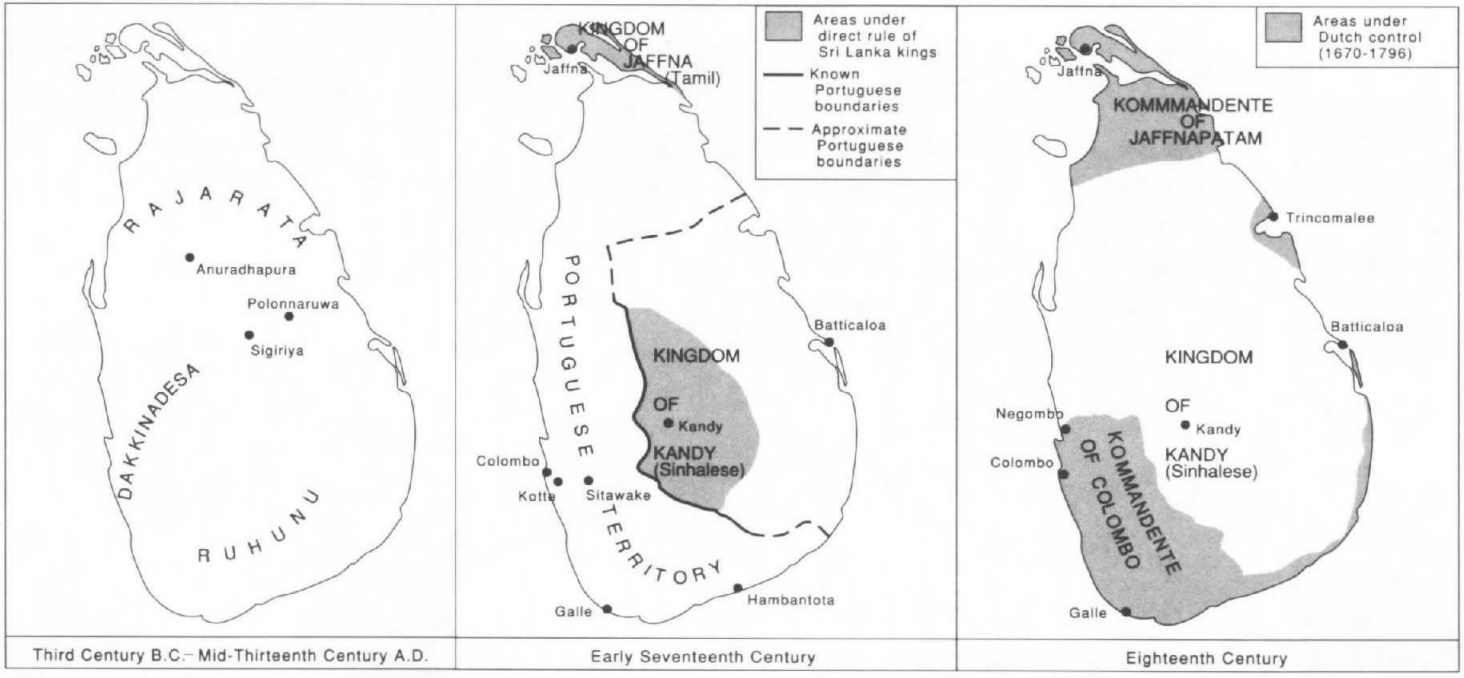
In the seventh century A.D., Tamil influence became firmly embedded in the island's culture when Sinhalese Prince Manavamma seized the throne with Pallava assistance. The dynasty that Manavamma established was heavily indebted to Pallava patronage and continued for almost three centuries. During this time, Pallava influence extended to architecture and sculpture, both of which bear noticeable Hindu motifs.

By the middle of the ninth century, the Pandyans had risen to a position of ascendancy in southern India, invaded northern Sri Lanka, and sacked Anuradhapura. The Pandyans demanded an indemnity as a price for their withdrawal. Shortly after the Pandyan departure, however, the Sinhalese invaded Pandya in support of a rival prince, and the Indian city of Madurai was sacked in the process.

In the tenth century, the Sinhalese again sent an invading army to India, this time to aid the Pandyan king against the Cholas. The Pandyan king was defeated and fled to Sri Lanka, carrying with him the royal insignia. The Chola, initially under Rajaraja the Great (A.D. 985–1018), were impatient to recapture the royal insignia; they sacked Anuradhapura in A.D. 993 and annexed Rajarata—the heartland of the Sinhalese kingdom—to the Chola Empire. King Mahinda V, the last of the Sinhalese monarchs to rule from Anuradhapura, fled to Rohana, where he reigned until 1017, when the Chola took him prisoner. He subsequently died in India in 1029.

Under the rule of Rajaraja's son, Rajendra (1018–35), the Chola Empire grew stronger, to the extent that it posed a threat to states as far away as the empire of Sri Vijaya in modern Malaysia and Sumatra in Indonesia. For seventy-five years, Sri Lanka was ruled directly as a Chola province. During this period, Hinduism flourished, and Buddhism received a serious setback. After the destruction of Anuradhapura, the Chola set up their capital farther to the southeast, at Polonnaruwa, a strategically defensible location near the Mahaweli Ganga, a river that offered good protection against potential invaders from the southern Sinhalese kingdom of Ruhunu (see fig. 2). When the Sinhalese kings regained their dominance, they chose not to reestablish themselves at Anuradhapura because Polonnaruwa offered better geographical security from any future invasions from southern India. The area surrounding the new capital already had a well-developed irrigation system and a number of water storage tanks in the vicinity, including the great Minneriya Tank and its feeder canals built by King Mahasena (A.D. 274–301), the last of the Sinhalese monarchs mentioned in the *Mahavamsa.*

King Vijayabahu I drove the Chola out of Sri Lanka in A.D. 1070. Considered by many as the author of Sinhalese freedom, the king recaptured Anuradhapura but ruled from Polonnaruwa, slightly less than 100 kilometers to the southeast. During his forty-year reign, Vijayabahu I (A.D. 1070–1110) concentrated on rebuilding the Buddhist temples and monasteries that had been neglected during Chola rule. He left no clearly designated successor



Source: Based on information from K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981, xv, xvii–xviii.

Figure 2. The Early Kingdoms of Sri Lanka, Third Century B.C.–Eighteenth Century A.D.

to his throne, and a period of instability and civil war followed his rule until the rise of King Parakramabahu I, known as the Great (A.D. 1153–86).

Parakramabahu is the greatest hero of the *Culavamsa,* and under his patronage, the city of Polonnaruwa grew to rival Anuradhapura in architectural diversity and as a repository of Buddhist art. Parakramabahu was a great patron of Buddhism and a reformer as well. He reorganized the *sangha* (community of monks) and healed a longstanding schism between Mahavihara—the Theravada Buddhist monastery—and Abhayagiri—the Mahayana Buddhist monastery. Parakramabahu's reign coincided with the last great period of Sinhalese hydraulic engineering; many remarkable irrigation works were constructed during his rule, including his crowning achievement, the massive Parakrama Samudra (Sea of Parakrama or Parakrama Tank). Polonnaruwa became one of the magnificent capitals of the ancient world, and nineteenth-century British historian Sir Emerson Tenant even estimated that during Parakramabahu's rule, the population of Polonnaruwa reached 3 million—a figure, however, that is considered to be too high by twentieth-century historians.

Parakramabahu's reign was not only a time of Buddhist renaissance but also a period of religious expansionism abroad. Parakramabahu was powerful enough to send a punitive mission against the Burmese for their mistreatment of a Sri Lankan mission in 1164. The Sinhalese monarch also meddled extensively in Indian politics and invaded southern India in several unsuccessful expeditions to aid a Pandyan claimant to the throne.

Although a revered figure in Sinhalese annals, Parakramabahu is believed to have greatly strained the royal treasury and contributed to the fall of the Sinhalese kingdom. The post-Parakramabahu history of Polonnaruwa describes the destruction of the city twenty-nine years after his death and fifteen rulers later.

For the decade following Parakramabahu's death, however, a period of peace and stability ensued during the reign of King Nissankamalla (A.D. 1187–97). During Nissankamalla's rule, the Brahmanic legal system came to regulate the Sinhalese caste system. Henceforth, the highest caste stratum became identified with the cultivator caste, and land ownership conferred high status. Occupational caste became hereditary and regulated dietary and marriage codes. At the bottom of the caste strata was the Chandala, who corresponded roughly to the Indian untouchable. It was during this brief period that it became mandatory for the Sinhalese king to be a Buddhist.

Decline of the Sinhalese Kingdom, 1200–1500

Sinhalese Migration to the South

After Nissankamalla's death, a series of dynastic disputes hastened the breakup of the kingdom of Polonnaruwa. Domestic instability characterized the ensuing period, and incursions by Chola and Pandyan invaders created greater turbulence, culminating in a devastating campaign by the Kalinga, an eastern Indian dynasty. When Magha, the Kalinga king, died in 1255, another period of instability began, marking the beginning of the abandonment of Polonnaruwa and the Sinhalese migration to the southwest from the northern dry zone. The next three kings after Magha ruled from rock fortresses to the west of Polonnaruwa. The last king to rule from Polonnaruwa was Parakramabahu III (1278–93). The migration is one of the great unsolved puzzles of South Asian history and is of considerable interest to academics because of the parallel abandonment of dry-zone civilizations in modern Cambodia, northern Thailand, and Burma.

A Weakened State: Invasion, Disease, and Social Instability

The Sinhalese withdrawal from the north is sometimes attributed to the cumulative effect of invasions from southern India (a rationale that has been exploited against the Tamils in modern Sinhalese politics). This interpretation has obvious weaknesses because after each of the south Indian invasions of the preceding centuries, the Sinhalese returned to the dry zone from the hills and repaired and revived the ancient irrigation system. K.M. de Silva suggests that the cumulative effects of repeated invasions "ate into the vitals of a society already losing its vigour with age." A civilization based on a dry-zone irrigation complex presupposes a high degree of organization and a massive labor force to build and maintain the works. The decline of these public works mirrored the breakdown in the social order. Another factor that seems to have retarded the resettlement of the dry zone was the outbreak of malaria in the thirteenth century. The mosquito found ideal breeding grounds in the abandoned tanks and channels. (Malaria has often followed the destruction of irrigation works in other parts of Asia.) Indeed, all attempts at large-scale resettlement of the dry area in Sri Lanka were thwarted until the introduction of modern pesticides.

During the thirteenth century, the declining Sinhalese kingdom faced threats of invasion from India and the expanding Tamil kingdom of northern Sri Lanka. Taking advantage of Sinhalese weakness, the Tamils secured control of the valuable pearl fisheries around Jaffna Peninsula. During this time, the vast stretches of

jungle that cover north-central Sri Lanka separated the Tamils and the Sinhalese. This geographical separation had important psychological and cultural implications. The Tamils in the north developed a more distinct and confident culture, backed by a resurgent Hinduism that looked to the traditions of southern India for its inspiration. Conversely, the Sinhalese were increasingly restricted to the southern and central area of the island and were fearful of the more numerous Tamils on the Indian mainland. The fact that the Hindu kingdom at Jaffna was expending most of its military resources resisting the advances of the expansionist Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1565) in India enhanced the Sinhalese ability to resist further Tamil encroachments. Some historians maintain that it was the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century that prevented the island from being overrun by south Indians.

Foreign rulers took advantage of the disturbed political state of the Sinhalese kingdom, and in the thirteenth century Chandrabhanu, a Buddhist king from Malaya, invaded the island twice. He attempted to seize the two most sacred relics of the Buddha in Sinhalese custody, the Tooth Relic and the Alms Bowl. In the early fifteenth century, the Ming dynasty Chinese interceded on behalf of King Parakramabahu VI (1412–67), an enlightened monarch who repulsed an invasion from the polity of Vijayanagara in southern India, reunited Sri Lanka, and earned renown as a patron of Buddhism and the arts. Parakramabahu VI was the last Sinhalese king to rule the entire island.

During this extended period of domestic instability and frequent foreign invasion, Sinhalese culture experienced fundamental change. Rice cultivation continued as the mainstay of agriculture but was no longer dependent on an elaborate irrigation network. In the wet zone, large-scale administrative cooperation was not as necessary as it had been before. Foreign trade was of increasing importance to the Sinhalese kings. In particular, cinnamon—in great demand by Europeans—became a prime export commodity. Because of the value of cinnamon, the city of Kotte on the west coast (near modern Colombo) became the nominal capital of the Sinhalese kingdom in the mid-fifteenth century. Still, the Sinhalese kingdom remained divided into numerous competing petty principalities.

European Encroachment and Dominance, 1500–1948

The Portuguese

By the late fifteenth century, Portugal, which had already established its dominance as a maritime power in the Atlantic, was exploring new waters. In 1497 Vasco da Gama sailed around the

Cape of Good Hope and discovered an ocean route connecting Europe with India, thus inaugurating a new era of maritime supremacy for Portugal. The Portuguese were consumed by two objectives in their empire-building efforts: to convert followers of non-Christian religions to Roman Catholicism and to capture the major share of the spice trade for the European market. To carry out their goals, the Portuguese did not seek territorial conquest, which would have been difficult given their small numbers. Instead, they tried to dominate strategic points through which trade passed. By virtue of their supremacy on the seas, their knowledge of firearms, and by what has been called their "desperate soldiering" on land, the Portuguese gained an influence in South Asia that was far out of proportion to their numerical strength.

At the onset of the European period in Sri Lanka in the sixteenth century, there were three native centers of political power: the two Sinhalese kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy and the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna. Kotte was the principal seat of Sinhalese power, and it claimed a largely imaginary overlordship not only over Kandy but also over the entire island. None of the three kingdoms, however, had the strength to assert itself over the other two and reunify the island.

In 1505 Don Lourenço de Almeida, son of the Portuguese viceroy in India, was sailing off the southwestern coast of Sri Lanka looking for Moorish ships to attack when stormy weather forced his fleet to dock at Galle. Word of these strangers who "eat hunks of white stone and drink blood (presumably wine) . . . and have guns with a noise louder than thunder . . ." spread quickly and reached King Parakramabahu VIII of Kotte (1484–1508), who offered gifts of cinnamon and elephants to the Portuguese to take back to their home port at Cochin on the Malabar Coast of southwestern India. The king also gave the Portuguese permission to build a residence in Colombo for trade purposes. Within a short time, however, Portuguese militaristic and monopolistic intentions became apparent. Their heavily fortified "trading post" at Colombo and open hostility toward the island's Muslim traders aroused Sinhalese suspicions.

Following the decline of the Chola as a maritime power in the twelfth century, Muslim trading communities in South Asia claimed a major share of commerce in the Indian Ocean and developed extensive east-west, as well as Indo-Sri Lankan, commercial trade routes. As the Portuguese expanded into the region, this flourishing Muslim trade became an irresistible target for European interlopers. The sixteenth-century Roman Catholic Church was intolerant of Islam and encouraged the Portuguese to take over

the profitable shipping trade monopolized by the Moors. In addition, the Portuguese would later have another strong motive for hostility toward the Moors because the latter played an important role in the Kandyan economy, one that enabled the kingdom successfully to resist the Portuguese.

The Portuguese soon decided that the island, which they called Cilao, conveyed a strategic advantage that was necessary for protecting their coastal establishments in India and increasing Lisbon's potential for dominating Indian Ocean trade. These incentives proved irresistible, and, the Portuguese, with only a limited number of personnel, sought to extend their power over the island. They had not long to wait. Palace intrigue and then revolution in Kotte threatened the survival of the kingdom. The Portuguese skillfully exploited these developments. In 1521 Bhuvanekabahu, the ruler of Kotte, requested Portuguese aid against his brother, Mayadunne, the more able rival king who had established his independence from the Portuguese at Sitawake, a domain in the Kotte kingdom. Powerless on his own, King Bhuvanekabahu became a puppet of the Portuguese. But shortly before his death in 1551, the king successfully obtained Portuguese recognition of his grandson, Dharmapala, as his successor. Portugal pledged to protect Dharmapala from attack in return for privileges, including a continuous payment in cinnamon and permission to rebuild the fort at Colombo on a grander scale. When Bhuvanekabahu died, Dharmapala, still a child, was entrusted to the Franciscans for his education, and, in 1557, he converted to Roman Catholicism. His conversion broke the centuries-old connection between Buddhism and the state, and a great majority of Sinhalese immediately disqualified the young monarch from any claim to the throne. The rival king at Sitawake exploited the issue of the prince's conversion and accused Dharmapala of being a puppet of a foreign power.

Before long, rival King Mayadunne had annexed much of the Kotte kingdom and was threatening the security of the capital city itself. The Portuguese were obliged to defend Dharmapala (and their own credibility) because the ruler lacked a popular following. They were subsequently forced to abandon Kotte and retreat to Colombo, taking the despised puppet king with them. Mayadunne and, later, his son, Rajasinha, besieged Colombo many times. The latter was so successful that the Portuguese were once even forced to eat the flesh of their dead to avoid starvation. The Portuguese would probably have lost their holdings in Sri Lanka had they not had maritime superiority and been able to send reinforcements by sea from their base at Goa on the western coast of India.

The Kingdom of Sitawake put up the most vigorous opposition to Western imperialism in the island's history. For the seventy-three-year period of its existence, Sitawake (1521–94) rose to become the predominant power on the island, with only the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna and the Portuguese fort at Colombo beyond its control. When Rajasinha died in 1593, no effective successors were left to consolidate his gains, and the kingdom collapsed as quickly as it had arisen.

Dharmapala, despised by his countrymen and totally compromised by the Portuguese, was deprived of all his royal duties and became completely manipulated by the Portuguese advisers surrounding him. In 1580 the Franciscans persuaded him to make out a deed donating his dominions to the king of Portugal. When Dharmapala died in 1597, the Portuguese emissary, the captain-general, took formal possession of the kingdom.

Portuguese missionaries had also been busily involving themselves in the affairs of the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna, converting almost the entire island of Mannar to Roman Catholicism by 1544. The reaction of Sangily, king of Jaffna, however, was to lead an expedition to Mannar and decapitate the resident priest and about 600 of his congregation. The king of Portugal took this as a personal affront and sent several expeditions against Jaffna. The Portuguese, having disposed of the Tamil king who fled south, installed one of the Tamil princes on the throne, obliging him to pay an annual tribute. In 1619 Lisbon annexed the Kingdom of Jaffna.

After the annexation of Jaffna, only the central highland Kingdom of Kandy—the last remnant of Buddhist Sinhalese power—remained independent of Portuguese control. The kingdom acquired a new significance as custodian of Sinhalese nationalism. The Portuguese attempted the same strategy they had used successfully at Kotte and Jaffna and set up a puppet on the throne. They were able to put a queen on the Kandyan throne and even to have her baptized. But despite considerable Portuguese help, she was not able to retain power. The Portuguese spent the next half century trying in vain to expand their control over the Kingdom of Kandy. In one expedition in 1630, the Kandyans ambushed and massacred the whole Portuguese force, including the captain-general. The Kandyans fomented rebellion and consistently frustrated Portuguese attempts to expand into the interior.

The areas the Portuguese claimed to control in Sri Lanka were part of what they majestically called the Estado da India and were governed in name by the viceroy in Goa, who represented the king. But in actuality, from headquarters in Colombo, the captain-general, a subordinate of the viceroy, directly ruled Sri Lanka with

Gadaladeniya Temple, fourteenth century
Courtesy Embassy of Sri Lanka, Washington

all the affectations of royalty once reserved for the Sinhalese kings.

The Portuguese did not try to alter the existing basic structure of native administration. Although Portuguese governors were put in charge of each province, the customary hierarchy, determined by caste and land ownership, remained unchanged. Traditional Sinhalese institutions were maintained and placed at the service of the new rulers. Portuguese administrators offered land grants to Europeans and Sinhalese in place of salaries, and the traditional compulsory labor obligation was used for construction and military purposes.

The Portuguese tried vigorously, if not fanatically, to force religious and, to a lesser extent, educational, change in Sri Lanka. They discriminated against other religions with a vengeance, destroyed Buddhist and Hindu temples, and gave the temple lands to Roman Catholic religious orders. Buddhist monks fled to Kandy, which became a refuge for people disaffected with colonial rule. One of the most durable legacies of the Portuguese was the conversion of a large number of Sinhalese and Tamils to Roman Catholicism. Although small pockets of Nestorian Christianity had existed in Sri Lanka, the Portuguese were the first to propagate Christianity on a mass scale.

Sixteenth-century Portuguese Catholicism was intolerant. But perhaps because it caught Buddhism at its nadir, it nevertheless

became rooted firmly enough on the island to survive the subsequent persecutions of the Protestant Dutch Reformists. The Roman Catholic Church was especially effective in fishing communities—both Sinhalese and Tamil—and contributed to the upward mobility of the castes associated with this occupation. Portuguese emphasis on proselytization spurred the development and standardization of educational institutions. In order to convert the masses, mission schools were opened, with instruction in Portuguese and Sinhalese or Tamil. Many Sinhalese converts assumed Portuguese names. The rise of many families influential in the twentieth century dates from this period. For a while, Portuguese became not only the language of the upper classes of Sri Lanka but also the lingua franca of prominence in the Asian maritime world.

The Dutch

The Dutch became involved in the politics of the Indian Ocean in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Headquartered at Batavia in modern Indonesia, the Dutch moved to wrest control of the highly profitable spice trade from the Portuguese. The Dutch began negotiations with King Rajasinha II of Kandy in 1638. A treaty assured the king assistance in his war against the Portuguese in exchange for a monopoly of the island's major trade goods, particularly cinnamon. Rajasinha also promised to pay the Dutch's war-related expenses. The Portuguese fiercely resisted the Dutch and the Kandyans and were expelled only gradually from their strongholds. The Dutch captured the eastern ports of Trincomalee and Batticaloa in 1639 and restored them to the Sinhalese. But when the southwestern and western ports of Galle and Negombo fell in 1640, the Dutch refused to turn them over to the king of Kandy. The Dutch claimed that Rajasinha had not reimbursed them for their vastly inflated claims for military expenditures. This pretext allowed the Dutch to control the island's richest cinnamon lands. The Dutch ultimately presented the king of Kandy with such a large bill for help against the Portuguese that the king could never hope to repay it. After extensive fighting, the Portuguese surrendered Colombo in 1656 and Jaffna, their last stronghold, in 1658. Superior economic resources and greater naval power enabled the Dutch to dominate the Indian Ocean. They attacked Portuguese positions throughout South Asia and in the end allowed their adversaries to keep only their settlement at Goa.

The king of Kandy soon realized that he had replaced one foe with another and proceeded to incite rebellion in the lowlands where the Dutch held sway. He even attempted to ally the British in Madras in his struggle to oust the Dutch. These efforts ended with

a serious rebellion against his rule in 1664. The Dutch profited from this period of instability and extended the territory under their control. They took over the remaining harbors and completely cordoned off Kandy, thereby making the highland kingdom landlocked and preventing it from allying itself with another foreign power (see fig. 2). This strategy, combined with a concerted Dutch display of force, subdued the Kandyan kings. Henceforth, Kandy was unable to offer significant resistance except in its internal frontier regions. The Dutch and the Kingdom of Kandy eventually settled down to an uneasy modus vivendi, partly because the Dutch became less aggressive. Despite underlying hostility between Kandy and the Dutch, open warfare between them occurred only once—in 1762—when the Dutch, exasperated by Kandy's provocation of riots in the lowlands, launched a punitive expedition. The expedition met with disaster, but a better-planned second expedition in 1765 forced the Kandyans to sign a treaty that gave the Dutch sovereignty over the lowlands. The Dutch, however, maintained their pretension that they administered the territories under their control as agents of the Kandyan ruler.

After taking political control of the island, the Dutch proceeded to monopolize trade. This monopoly was at first limited to cinnamon and elephants but later extended to other goods. Control was vested in the Dutch East India Company, a joint-stock corporation, which had been established for the purpose of carrying out trade with the islands of Indonesia but was later called upon to exercise sovereign responsibilities in many parts of Asia.

The Dutch tried with little success to supplant Roman Catholicism with Protestantism. They rewarded native conversion to the Dutch Reformed Church with promises of upward mobility, but Catholicism was too deeply rooted. (In the 1980s, the majority of Sri Lankan Christians remained Roman Catholics.) The Dutch were far more tolerant of the indigenous religions than the Portuguese; they prohibited open Buddhist and Hindu religious observance in urban areas, but did not interfere with these practices in rural areas. The Dutch banned Roman Catholic practices, however. They regarded Portuguese power and Catholicism as mutually interdependent and strove to safeguard against the reemergence of the former by persecuting the latter. They harassed Catholics and constructed Protestant chapels on confiscated church property.

The Dutch contributed significantly to the evolution of the judicial, and, to a lesser extent, administrative systems on the island. They codified indigenous law and customs that did not conflict directly with Dutch-Roman jurisprudence. The outstanding

example was Dutch codification of the Tamil legal code of Jaffna—the Thesavalamai. To a small degree, the Dutch altered the traditional land grant and tenure system, but they usually followed the Portuguese pattern of minimal interference with indigenous social and cultural institutions. The provincial governors of the territories of Jaffnapatam, Colombo, and Trincomalee were Dutch. These rulers also supervised various local officials, most of whom were the traditional *mudaliyar* (headmen).

The Dutch, like the Portuguese before them, tried to entice their fellow countrymen to settle in Sri Lanka, but attempts to lure members of the upper class, especially women, were not very successful. Lower-ranking military recruits, however, responded to the incentive of free land, and their marriages to local women added another group to the island's already small but established population of Eurasians—the Portuguese Burghers. The Dutch Burghers formed a separate and privileged ethnic group on the island in the twentieth century.

During the Dutch period, social differences between lowland and highland Sinhalese hardened, forming two culturally and politically distinct groups. Western customs and laws increasingly influenced the lowland Sinhalese, who generally enjoyed a higher standard of living and greater literacy. Despite their relative economic and political decline, the highland Sinhalese were nonetheless proud to have retained their political independence from the Europeans and thus considered themselves superior to the lowland Sinhalese.

The British

Early Contacts

In 1592 an English privateer attacked the Portuguese off the southwestern port of Galle. This action was England's first recorded contact with Sri Lanka. A decade later, Ralph Fitch, traveling from India, became the first known English visitor to Sri Lanka. The English did not record their first in-depth impressions of the island until the mid-seventeenth century, when Robert Knox, a sailor, was captured when his ship docked for repairs near Trincomalee. The Kandyans kept him prisoner between 1660 and 1680. After his escape, Knox wrote a popular book entitled *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon* in which he described his years among his "decadent" captors.

By the mid-eighteenth century, it was apparent that the Mughal Empire (1526–1757) in India faced imminent collapse, and the major European powers were positioning themselves to fill the power

vacuum in the subcontinent. Dutch holdings on Sri Lanka were challenged in time by the British, who had an interest in the excellent harbor at Trincomalee. The British interest in procuring an all-weather port was whetted when they almost lost the Indian port of Madras to the French in 1758. The Dutch refused to grant the British permission to dock ships at Trincomalee (after The Netherlands's decision to support the French in the American War of Independence), goading the British into action. After skirmishing with both the Dutch and French, the British took Trincomalee in 1796 and proceeded to expel the Dutch from the island.

The British Replace the Dutch

In 1766 the Dutch had forced the Kandyans to sign a treaty, which the Kandyans later considered so harsh that they immediately began searching for foreign assistance in expelling their foes. They approached the British in 1762, 1782, and 1795. The first Kandyan missions failed, but in 1795, British emissaries offered a draft treaty that would extend military aid in return for control of the seacoast and a monopoly of the cinnamon trade. The Kandyan king unsuccessfully sought better terms, and the British managed to oust the Dutch without significant help in 1796.

The Kandyans' search for foreign assistance against the Dutch was a mistake because they simply replaced a relatively weak master with a powerful one. Britain was emerging as the unchallenged leader in the new age of the Industrial Revolution, a time of technological invention, economic innovations, and imperialist expansion. The nations that had launched the first phase of European imperialism in Asia—the Portuguese and the Dutch—had already exhausted themselves.

While peace negotiations were under way in Europe in 1796, the British assumed Sri Lanka would eventually be restored to the Dutch. By 1797 however, London had decided to retain the island as a British possession. The government compelled the British East India Company to share in the administration of the island and guaranteed the company a monopoly of trade, especially the moderately profitable—but no longer robust—cinnamon trade. The governor of the island was responsible for law and order, but financial and commercial matters were under the control of the director of the East India Company. This system of "dual control" lasted from 1798 to 1802. After the Dutch formally ceded the island to the British in the 1801 Peace of Amiens, Sri Lanka became Britain's first crown colony. Following Lord Nelson's naval victory over the French at Trafalgar in 1805, British superiority on the seas was

unchallenged and provided new security for the British colonies in Asia.

Once the British had established themselves in Sri Lanka, they aggressively expanded their territorial possessions by a combination of annexation and intervention, a policy that paralleled the approach pursued by Lord Wellesley in India in the early nineteenth century. This strategy directly threatened the continued existence of the Kingdom of Kandy. Unrest at the Kandyan court between a ruling dynasty of alien, southern Indian antecedents and powerful, indigenous Sinhalese chieftains provided opportunities for British interference. The intrigue of the king's chief minister precipitated the first Kandyan war (1803). With the minister's knowledge, a British force marched on Kandy, but the force was ill prepared for such an ambitious venture and its leaders were misinformed of the extent of the king's unpopularity. The British expedition was at first successful, but on the return march, it was plagued by disease, and the garrison left behind was decimated. During the next decade, no concerted attempt was made to take Kandy. But in 1815 the British had another opportunity. The king had antagonized local Sinhalese chiefs and further alienated the Sinhalese people by actions against Buddhist monks and temple property. In 1815 the Kandyan rebels invited the British to intervene. The governor quickly responded by sending a well-prepared force to Kandy; the king fled with hardly a shot fired.

Kandyan headmen and the British signed a treaty known as the Kandyan Convention in March 1815. The treaty decreed that the Kandyan provinces be brought under British sovereignty and that all the traditional privileges of the chiefs be maintained. The Kingdom of Kandy was also to be governed according to its customary Buddhist laws and institutions but would be under the administration of a British "resident" at Kandy, who would, in all but name, take the place of the monarch.

In general, the old system was allowed to continue, but its future was bleak because of the great incongruity between the principles on which the British administration was based and the principles of the Kandyan hierarchy. Because the changes under the treaty tended to diminish the power and influence of the chiefs, the British introduced the new procedures with great caution. The monks, in particular, resented the virtual disappearance of the monarchy, which was their traditional source of support. They also resented the monarchy's replacement by a foreign and impartial government. Troubled by the corresponding decline in their status, the monks began to stir up political and religious discontent among the Kandyans almost immediately following the British

Kandyan dancer,
Temple of the Tooth
Courtesy Doranne Jacobson

annexation. The popular and widespread rebellion that followed was suppressed with great severity. When hostilities ended in 1818, the British issued a proclamation that brought the Kandyan provinces under closer control. British agents usurped the powers and privileges of the chiefs and became the arbitrators of provincial authority. Finally, the British reduced the institutional privileges accorded Buddhism, in effect placing the religion on an equal footing with other religions. With the final British consolidation over Kandy, the country fell under the control of a single power—for the first time since the twelfth-century rule of Parakramabahu I and Nissankamalla.

Modernization and Reform

According to Sri Lankan historian Zeylanicus, each of the three epochs of European rule on the island lasted roughly 150 years, but rather than being assessed separately, these epochs should be thought of collectively as a "mighty cantilever of time with the Pax Britannica as the central pillar." Many British institutions have survived and currently have a direct and lasting influence on cultural and political events. Historian E.F.C. Ludowyck concurs, stating that whatever the Portuguese and Dutch did, the British improved upon. He attributed this accomplishment to British grounding in liberalism, a belief in the emancipation of slaves, the absence of religious persecution, and conscious attempts to maintain good relations between the rulers and the ruled.

When the British first conquered the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka, the indigenous population of the island was estimated at only 800,000. When the British left a century and a half later, the population had grown to more than 7 million. Over a relatively short period, the island had developed an economy capable of supporting the burgeoning population. Roads, railways, schools, hospitals, hydroelectric projects, and large well-operated agricultural plantations provided the infrastructure for a viable national economy.

In the early years of British colonization, Sri Lanka was not considered a great economic asset but was viewed instead almost exclusively in terms of its strategic value. By the 1820s, however, this perception was changing. As governor, Sir Edward Barnes was responsible for consolidating British military control over the Kandyan provinces through a program of vigorous road construction. He also began experimenting with a variety of commercial crops, such as coffee. These experiments provided the foundation of the plantation system that was launched a decade later. In administrative matters, the British were initially careful not to change the existing social order too quickly and were not inclined to mingle socially. A sharp distinction was made between the rulers and the ruled, but in time the distinction became less defined. The governor, who held all executive and legislative power, had an advisory council made up of colonial officials with top posts filled by members of a civil service recruited in Britain. The governor was under the director of the Colonial Office in London but was given whatever discretionary powers he needed to balance the colony's budget and to make sure that the colony brought in enough revenue to cover its military and administrative expenses.

By the early 1830s, the British had almost finished consolidating their position in Sri Lanka and began to take more of an interest in securing the island's political stability and economic profitability. A new wave of thought, influenced by the reformist political ideology articulated by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, promised to change fundamentally Britain's relationship to its colonies. Known as utilitarianism, and later as philosophical radicalism, it promoted the idea of democracy and individual liberty. This philosophy sponsored the idea of the trusteeship, i.e., that new territories would be considered trusts and would receive all the benefits of British liberalism. These philosophical abstractions were put into practical use with the recommendations of a commission led by W.M.G. Colebrooke and C.H. Cameron. Their *Colebrooke Report* (1831–32) was an important document in the history of the island. G.C. Mendis, considered by many to be the doyen of modern Sri

Lankan history, considers the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms to be the dividing line between the past and present in Sri Lanka.

The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms

In 1829 the British Colonial Office sent a Royal Commission of Eastern Inquiry—the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission—to assess the administration of the island. The legal and economic proposals made by the commission in 1833 were innovative and radical. The proposed reforms opposed mercantilism, state monopolies, discriminatory administrative regulations, and, in general, any interference in the economy. Many of the proposals were adopted and helped set a pattern of administrative, economic, judicial, and educational development that continued into the next century.

The commission worked to end the protested administrative division of the country along ethnic and cultural lines into low-country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, and Tamil areas. The commission proposed instead that the country be put under one uniform administrative system, which was to be divided into five provinces. Colebrooke believed that in the past, separate administrative systems had encouraged social and cultural divisions, and that the first step toward the creation of a modern nation was the administrative unification of the country. Cameron applied the same principle to the judicial system, which he proposed be unified into one system and be extended to all classes of people, offering everyone equal rights in the eyes of the law. His recommendations were adopted and enforced under the Charter of Justice in 1833.

The commissioners also favored the decentralization of executive power in the government. They stripped away many of the autocratic powers vested in the governor, replacing his advisory council with an Executive Council, which included both official and unofficial nominees. The Executive Council appointed the members of the Legislative Council, which functioned as a forum for discussion of legislative matters. The Legislative Council placed special emphasis on Sri Lankan membership, and in 1833 three of the fifteen members were Sri Lankans. The governor nominated them to represent low-country Sinhalese, Burghers, and Tamils, respectively. The commissioners also voted to change the exclusively British character of the administrative services and recommended that the civil service include local citizens. These proposed constitutional reforms were revolutionary—far more liberal than the legal systems of any other European colony.

The opening of the Ceylon Civil Service to Sri Lankans required that a new emphasis be placed on English education. In time, the

opening contributed to the creation of a Westernized elite, whose members would spearhead the drive for independence in the twentieth century. The Colebrooke-Cameron Commission emphasized the standardization of educational curriculum and advocated the substitution of English for local languages. Local English schools were established, and the missionary schools that had previously taught in the vernacular also adopted English.

Economic Innovations

The Colebrooke-Cameron reforms had an immediate impact on the economic development of the island. Many features of the economic structure the reforms helped put into place still exist. The commission advocated a laissez-faire economy. To encourage free trade, the government monopolies over cinnamon cultivation and trade were abolished. Traditional institutions, such as land tenure by *accommodessan* (the granting of land for cultivation, as opposed to its outright sale), was abolished, as was the *rajakariya* system. *Rajakariya* was opposed not only on moral grounds but also because it slowed the growth of private enterprise, impeded the creation of a land market, and interfered with the free movement of labor.

In the mid-1830s, the British began to experiment with a variety of plantation crops in Sri Lanka, using many of the technological innovations developed earlier from their experience in Jamaica. Within fifteen years, one of these crops, coffee, became so successful that it transformed the island's economy from reliance upon subsistence crops to plantation agriculture. The first coffee plantation was opened in the Kandyan hill region in 1827, but it was not until the mid-1830s that a number of favorable factors combined to make the widespread cultivation of the crop a highly profitable enterprise. Governor Edward Barnes (1824–31) foresaw the possibilities of coffee cultivation and introduced various incentives for its cultivation, particularly the lifting of coffee export duties and exemption from the land produce tax. When slavery was abolished in the West Indies and coffee production there declined, Sri Lankan coffee exports soared, filling the gap in the world market. The problem of limited availability of land for coffee estates was solved when the British government sold lands that it had acquired from the Kandyan kings.

The coffee plantation system faced a serious labor shortage. Among the Sinhalese, a peasant cultivator of paddy land held a much higher status than a landless laborer. In addition, the low wages paid to hired workers failed to attract the Kandyan peasant, and the peak season for harvesting plantation coffee usually coincided with the peasant's own harvest. Moreover, population

pressure and underemployment were not acute until the twentieth century. To compensate for this scarcity of native workers, an inexpensive and almost inexhaustible supply of labor was found among the Tamils in southern India. They were recruited for the coffee-harvesting season and migrated to and from Sri Lanka, often amid great hardships. The immigration of these Indian Tamils began as a trickle in the 1830s and became a regular flow a decade later, when the government of India removed all restrictions on the migration of labor to Sri Lanka.

British civilian and military officials resident in Kandy provided initial capital for coffee cultivation, provoking contemporary observations in the 1840s that they behaved more like coffee planters than government employees. This private capitalization led to serious abuses, however, culminating in an 1840 ordinance that made it virtually impossible for a Kandyan peasant to prove that his land was not truly crown land and thus subject to expropriation and resale to coffee interests. In this period, more than 80,000 hectares of Kandyan land were appropriated and sold as crown lands.

Between 1830 and 1850, coffee held the preeminent place in the economy and became a catalyst for the island's modernization. The greater availability of capital and the increase in export trade brought the rudiments of capitalist organization to the country. The Ceylon Bank opened in 1841 to finance the rapid expansion of coffee plantations. Since the main center of coffee production was in the Kandyan provinces, the expansion of coffee and the network of roads and railroads ended the isolation of the old Kandyan kingdom. The coffee plantation system had served as the economic foundation for the unification of the island while reinforcing the administrative and judicial reforms of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission.

The plantation system dominated the economy in Sri Lanka to such an extent that one observer described the government as an "appendage of the estates (plantations)." Worldwide depression in 1846 temporarily checked the rapid development of the plantation system. Falling coffee prices caused financial disruption, aggravating the friction that had been developing between the static traditional feudal economy and modernized commercial agriculture. In order to make up for lost revenue, the government imposed a series of new taxes on firearms, dogs, shops, boats, carriages, and bullock carts. All of these taxes affected Sinhalese farmers. Other measures that further alienated the Kandyans included a land tax and a road ordinance in 1848 that reintroduced a form of *rajakariya* by requiring six days' free labor on roads or the payment of a cash equivalent. But the measure that most

antagonized the Kandyans (especially those associated with the Buddhist *sangha*) was the alienation of temple lands for coffee plantations.

British troops so severely repressed a rebellion that broke out among the Kandyans in 1848 that the House of Commons in London commissioned an investigation to look into the matter. The governor and his chief secretary were subsequently dismissed, and all new taxes, except the road ordinance, were repealed. The government adopted a new policy toward Buddhism after the rebellion, recognizing the importance of Buddhist monks as leaders of Kandyan public opinion.

The plantation era transformed the island's economy. This was most evident in the growth of the export sector at the expense of the traditional agricultural sector. The colonial predilection for growing commercial instead of subsistence crops later was considered by Sri Lankan nationalists to be one of the unfortunate legacies of European domination. Late nineteenth-century official documents that recorded famines and chronic rural poverty support the nationalists' argument. Other issues, notably the British policy of selling state land to planters for conversion into plantations, are equally controversial, even though some members of the indigenous population participated in all stages of plantation agriculture. Sri Lankans, for example, controlled over one-third of the area under coffee cultivation and most of the land in coconut production. They also owned significant interests in rubber.

In 1869 a devastating leaf disease—*hemleia vastratrix* struck the coffee plantations and spread quickly throughout the plantation district, destroying the coffee industry within fifteen years. Planters desperately searched for a substitute crop. One crop that showed promise was *chinchona* (quinine). After an initial appearance of success, however, the market price of the crop fell and never fully recovered. Cinnamon, which had suffered a setback in the beginning of the century, was revived at this time, but only to become an important minor crop.

Among all of the crops experimented with during the decline of coffee, only tea showed any real promise of success. A decline in the demand for Chinese tea in Britain opened up possibilities for Indian tea, especially the fine variety indigenous to Assam. Climatic conditions for the cultivation of tea were excellent in Sri Lanka, especially in the hill country. By the end of the century, tea production on the island had risen enormously. Because of the inelasticity of the market, however, British outlets soon became saturated. Attempts to develop other markets, especially in the

United States, were largely unsuccessful, and a glut emerged after World War II.

The tea estates needed a completely different type of labor force than had been required during the coffee era. Tea was harvested throughout the year and required a permanent labor force. Waves of Indian Tamil immigrants settled on the estates and eventually became a large and permanent underclass that endured abominable working conditions and squalid housing. The census of 1911 recorded the number of Indian laborers in Sri Lanka at about 500,000—about 12 percent of the island's total population. In the 1980s, the Indian Tamils made up almost 6 percent of the island's population (see Population, ch. 2).

The Tamil laborers emigrated to Sri Lanka from India not as individuals but as part of family units or groups of interrelated families. Thus, they tended to maintain their native cultural patterns on the estates where they settled. Although the Indian Tamils spoke the same language as the Sri Lankan Tamils, were Hindus, and traced their cultural origins to southern India, they considered themselves to be culturally distinct from the Sri Lankan Tamils. Their distinctiveness as a group and their cultural differences from the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils were recognized in the constitutional reforms of 1924, when two members of the Indian Tamil community were nominated to the Legislative Council.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, experimentation in crop diversification, on a moderate level in the years before the collapse of the coffee market, became of greater importance. Responding to international market trends, planters attempted to diversify the crops they produced to insulate their revenues from world price fluctuations. Not all their experiments were successful. The first sugar plantation was established in 1837, but sugar cultivation was not well-suited to the island and has never been very successful. Cocoa was also tried for a time and has continued as one of the lesser exports. Rubber, which was introduced in 1837, became a major export during the slump in the tea export market in the 1900s. The rubber export trade exceeded that of tea during World War I. But after suffering severe losses during the depression of the 1930s, rubber exports never again regained their preeminent position.

Rise of the Sri Lankan Middle Class

By the nineteenth century, a new society was emerging—a product of East and West. It was a society with strict rules separating the rulers from the ruled, and most social association between the British and Sri Lankans was taboo. The British community was

largely a microcosm of English society with all its class divisions. At the top of the social pyramid were the British officials of the Ceylon Civil Service. Elaborate social conventions regulated the conduct of the service's members and served to distinguish them as an exclusive caste. This situation, however, changed slowly in the latter part of the nineteenth century and quite rapidly in the next century.

In Sri Lanka as in India, the British created an educated class to provide administrative and professional services in the colony. By the late nineteenth century, most members of this emerging class were associated directly or indirectly with the government. Increased Sri Lankan participation in government affairs demanded the creation of a legal profession; the need for state health services required a corps of medical professionals; and the spread of education provided an impetus to develop the teaching profession. In addition, the expansion of commercial plantations created a legion of new trades and occupations: landowners, planters, transport agents, contractors, and businessmen. Certain Sinhalese caste groups, such as the fishermen (Karava) and cinnamon peelers (Salagama), benefited from the emerging new economic order, to the detriment of the traditional ruling cultivators (Goyigama).

The development of a capitalist economy forced the traditional elite—the chiefs and headmen among the low-country Sinhalese and the Kandyan aristocracy—to compete with new groups for the favors of the British. These upwardly mobile, primarily urban, professionals formed a new class that transcended divisions of race and caste. This class, particularly its uppermost strata, was steeped in Western culture and ideology. This anglicized elite generally had conservative political leanings, was loyal to the government, and resembled the British so much in outlook and social customs that its members were sometimes called brown sahibs. At the apex of this new class was a handful of Sri Lankans who had been able to join the exclusive ranks of the civil service in the nineteenth century. The first Sri Lankan entered by competitive examination in 1840. At that time, entrance examinations were held only in London and required an English education, so only a few members of the native middle class could aspire to such an elitist career. Consequently, in spite of the liberal policies that Colebrooke and Cameron recommended, the British held virtually all high posts in the colonial administration.

Buddhist Revivalism

Beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Buddhist clergy attempted to reform the *sangha* (religious community),

particularly as a reaction against Christian missionary activities. In the 1870s, Buddhist activists enlisted the help of an American, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott. An ardent abolitionist in the years leading up to the American Civil War, Olcott cofounded and later became president of the Theosophical Movement, which was organized on a worldwide basis to promote goodwill and to champion the rights of the underprivileged. Shortly after his arrival in Sri Lanka, Olcott organized a Buddhist campaign against British officials and British missionaries. His Buddhist Theosophical Society of Ceylon went on to establish three institutions of higher learning: Ananda College, Mahinda College, and Dharmaraja College. Olcott's society founded these and some 200 lower schools to impart Buddhist education with a strong nationalist bias. Olcott and his society took a special interest in the historical past of the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms on the island and managed to persuade the British governor to make Vesak, the chief Buddhist festival, a public holiday.

Constitutional Reform

The rediscovery of old Buddhist texts rekindled a popular interest in Sri Lanka's ancient civilization. The study of the past became an important aspect of the new drive for education. Archaeologists began work at Anuradhapura and at Polonnaruwa, and their finds contributed to the resurgent national pride. In the 1880s, a Buddhist-inspired temperance movement was also initiated to fight drunkenness, and the Ceylon Social Reform Society was founded in 1905 to combat other temptations associated with Westernization. Encouraged by the free reign of expression that the government extended to these reformists, a growing number of communal and regional political associations began to press for constitutional reform in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The colonial government was petitioned for permission to have Sri Lankan representation in the Executive Council and expanded regional representation in the Legislative Council. In response, the colonial government permitted a modest experiment in 1910, allowing a small electorate of Sri Lankans to send one of their members to the Legislative Council. Other seats held by Sri Lankans retained the old practice of communal representation.

World War I

World War I had only a minimal military impact on Sri Lanka, which entered the war as part of the British Empire. The closest fighting took place in the Bay of Bengal, where an Australian warship sank a German cruiser. But the war had an important influence

on the growth of nationalism. The Allies' wartime propaganda extolled the virtues of freedom and self-determination of nations, and the message was heard and duly noted by Sri Lankan nationalists. There was, however, an event, only indirectly related to the war, that served as the immediate spark for the growth of nationalism. In 1915 communal rioting broke out between the Sinhalese and Muslims on the west coast. The British panicked, misconstruing the disturbances as part of an antigovernment conspiracy; they blamed the majority ethnic group and indiscriminately arrested many Sinhalese, including D.S. Senanayake—the future first prime minister of Sri Lanka—who had actually tried to use his influence to curb the riots. The British put down the unrest with excessive zeal and brutality, which shocked British and Sri Lankan observers alike. Some sympathetic accounts of the unrest take into consideration that the judgment of the governor of the time, Sir Robert Chalmers (1913–16), may have been clouded by the loss of his two sons on the Western Front in Europe. At any rate, his actions insured that 1915 was a turning point in the nationalist movement. From then on, activists mobilized for coordinated action against the British.

The nationalist movement in India served as a model to nationalists in Sri Lanka. In 1917 the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League mended their differences and issued a joint declaration for the "progressive realization" of responsible government in India. Nationalists in Sri Lanka learned from their Indian counterparts that they had to become more national and less partisan in their push for constitutional reform. In 1919 the major Sinhalese and Tamil political organizations united to form the Ceylon National Congress. One of the first actions of the congress was to submit a proposal for a new constitution that would increase local control over the Executive Council and the budget. These demands were not met, but they led to the promulgation of a new constitution in 1920. Amendments to the constitution in 1924 increased Sri Lankan representation. Although the nationalists' demand for representation in the Executive Council was not granted, the Legislative Council was expanded to include a majority of elected Sri Lankan unofficial members, bringing the island closer to representative government. Yet the franchise remained restrictive and included only about 4 percent of the island's population.

The Donoughmore Commission

In 1927 a royal commission under the Earl of Donoughmore visited Sri Lanka to ascertain why representative government as chartered by the 1924 constitution had not succeeded and to suggest

constitutional changes necessary for the island's eventual self-rule. The commission declared that the constitution had authorized a government characterized by the "divorce of power from responsibility," which at times seemed "rather like holy matrimony at its worst." The 1924 constitution, considered by the commission to be "an unqualified failure," failed to provide a strong, credible executive body of representatives. To remedy these shortcomings, the commission proposed universal adult franchise and an experimental system of government to be run by executive committees. The resulting Donoughmore Constitution, promulgated in 1931 to accommodate these new proposals in government, was a unique document that provided Sri Lankans with training for self-government. The document, however, reserved the highest level of responsibility for the British governor, whose assent was necessary for all legislation. The legislative branch of the government—the State Council—functioned in both an executive and legislative capacity. Seven committees performed executive duties. Each committee consisted of designated members of the State Council and was chaired by an elected Sri Lankan, who was addressed as minister. Three British officers of ministerial rank, along with the seven Sri Lankan ministers, formed a board of ministers. The British ministers collectively handled responsibility for defense, external affairs, finance, and judicial matters.

The Donoughmore Constitution ushered in a period of experimentation in participatory democracy but contemporary political scientists have criticized it for not having provided an atmosphere conducive to the growth of a healthy party system. The system of executive committees did not lead to the development of national political parties. Instead, a number of splinter political groups evolved around influential personalities who usually followed a vision too limited or an agenda too communally partisan to have an impact on national politics.

Among the Sinhalese, a form of nationalism arose that sought once again to restore Buddhism to its former glory. The Great Council of the Sinhalese (Sinhala Maha Sabha), which was founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1937, was the strongest proponent of this resurgent ideology. Other groups followed suit, also organizing on communal grounds. These groups included the Burgher Political Association in 1938, the Ceylon Indian Congress in 1939, and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress in 1944.

Growth of Leftist Parties

During the Donoughmore period of political experimentation, several leftist parties were formed. Unlike most other Sri Lankan

parties, these leftist parties were noncommunal in membership. Working-class activism, especially trade unionism, became an important political factor during the sustained economic slump between the world wars. The first important leftist party was the Labour Party, founded in 1931 by A.E. Goonesimha. Three Marxist-oriented parties—the Ceylon Equal Society Party (Lanka Sama Samaja Party—LSSP), the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL)—represented the far left. All three were divided on both ideological and personal grounds. The Soviet Union's expulsion of Leon Trotsky from the Communist Party after Lenin's death in 1924 and Stalin's subsequent decision to enter World War II on the Allied side exacerbated these differences, dividing the Communists into Trotskyites and Stalinists. The LSSP, formed in 1935 and the oldest of the Sri Lankan Marxist parties, took a stance independent of the Soviet Union, becoming affiliated with the Trotskyite Fourth International, which was a rival of the Comintern. Most LSSP leaders were arrested during World War II for their opposition to what they considered to be an "imperial war." Although in more recent years, the LSSP has been considered a politically spent force, gaining, for example less than 1 percent of the vote in the 1982 presidential elections, it has nevertheless been touted as the world's only successful Trotskyite party.

The CPSL, which began as a Stalinist faction of the LSSP that was later expelled, formed its own party in 1943, remaining faithful to the dictates of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik-Leninist Party was formed in 1945 as another breakaway group of the LSSP. The leftist parties represented the numerically small urban working class. Partly because these parties operated through the medium of trade unionism, they lacked the wider mass appeal needed at the national level to provide an effective extraparliamentary challenge to the central government. Nonetheless, because the leftists occasionally formed temporary political coalitions before national elections, they posed more than just a mere "parliamentary nuisance factor."

World War II and the Transition to Independence

When Singapore fell to the Japanese in February 1942, Sri Lanka became a central base for British operations in Southeast Asia, and the port at Trincomalee recaptured its historically strategic importance. Because Sri Lanka was an indispensable strategic bastion for the British Royal Navy, it was an irresistible military target for the Japanese. For a time, it seemed that Japan planned a sweeping westward offensive across the Indian Ocean to take Sri Lanka,

Colombo Harbor with its breakwater
Courtesy Embassy of Sri Lanka, Washington

sever the Allies' lifeline to Persian Gulf oil, and link up with the Axis powers in Egypt. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, mastermind of the raid on Pearl Harbor, ordered Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo to command a large armada to seek and destroy the British Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. The two nations' fleets played a game of hide-and-seek, but never met. Some military historians assert that if they had met, the smaller British fleet would have met with disaster. The British instead fought several desperate air battles over Colombo and Trincomalee and lost about thirty-six aircraft and several ships.

Yamamoto's grand strategy failed to isolate and destroy any major units of the British fleet. But if the Japanese had persisted with their offensive, the island, with its limited British naval defenses, probably would have fallen. The Japanese carrier force, however, suffered such high aircraft losses over Sri Lanka—more than 100 warplanes—that it returned to Japan for refitting rather than press the attack. By returning to Japan, the force lost its opportunity for unchallenged supremacy of the Indian Ocean. The focus of the war in this theater then shifted away from the island.

On the whole, Sri Lanka benefited from its role in World War II. The plantation sector was busy meeting the urgent demands of the Allies for essential products, especially rubber, enabling the country to save a surplus in hard currency. Because Sri Lanka was

the seat of the Southeast Asia Command, a broad infrastructure of health services and modern amenities was built to accommodate the large number of troops posted into all parts of the country. The inherited infrastructure improved the standard of living in postwar, independent Sri Lanka.

Unlike India, where nationalists demanded a guarantee of independence as recompense for their support in the war effort, Sri Lanka committed itself wholeheartedly to the Allied war effort. Although the island was put under military jurisdiction during the war, the British and the Sri Lankans maintained cooperative relations. Sri Lankan pressure for political reform continued during the war, however, and increased as the Japanese threat receded and the war neared its end. The British eventually promised full participatory government after the war.

In July 1944, Lord Soulbury was appointed head of a commission charged with the task of examining a new constitutional draft that the Sri Lankan ministers had proposed. The commission made recommendations that led to a new constitution. As the end of the war approached, the constitution was amended to incorporate a provision giving Sri Lanka dominion status.

British constitutional principles served as a model for the Soulbury Constitution of independent Sri Lanka, which combined a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature. Members of the first House of Representatives were directly elected by popular vote. Members of the Senate, or upper house, were elected partly by members of the House and partly by the governor general, who was primarily a figurehead. The British monarch appointed the governor general on the advice of the most powerful person in the Sri Lankan government—the prime minister (see Historical Perspective, 1802-1978, ch. 4).

Independence

The British negotiated the island's dominion status with the leader of the State Council, D.S. Senanayake, during World War II. Senanayake was also minister of agriculture and vice chairman of the Board of Ministers. The negotiations ended with the Ceylon Independence Act of 1947, which formalized the transfer of power. Senanayake was the founder and leader of the United National Party (UNP), a partnership of many disparate groups formed during the Donoughmore period, including the Ceylon National Congress, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, and the Muslim League. The UNP easily won the 1947 elections, challenged only by a collection of small, primarily leftist parties. On February 4, 1948, when the new

constitution went into effect (making Sri Lanka a dominion), the UNP embarked on a ten-year period of rule.

Divisions in the Body Politic

The prospects for an economically robust, fully participatory, and manageable democracy looked good during the first years of independence. In contrast to India, which had gained independence a year earlier, there was no massive violence and little social unrest. In Sri Lanka there was also a good measure of governmental continuity. Still, important unresolved ethnic problems soon had to be addressed. The most immediate of these problems was the "Indian question," which concerned the political status of Tamil immigrants who worked on the highland tea plantations. The Soulbury Commission had left this sensitive question to be resolved by the incoming government.

After independence, debate about the status of the Indian Tamils continued. But three pieces of legislation—the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents Act No. 3 of 1948, and the Ceylon Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949—all but disenfranchised this minority group. The Ceylon Indian Congress vigorously but unsuccessfully opposed the legislation. The acrimonious debate over the laws of 1948 and 1949 revealed serious fissures in the body politic. There was a cleavage along ethnic lines between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and also a widening rift between Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils.

In 1949 a faction of the Ceylon Tamil Congress (the major Tamil party in Sri Lanka at the time) broke away to form the (Tamil) Federal Party under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The creation of the Federal Party was a momentous postindependence development because it set the agenda for Tamil exclusivity in Sri Lankan politics. Soon after its founding, the Federal Party replaced the more conciliatory Tamil Congress as the major party among Sri Lankan Tamils and advocated an aggressive stance vis-à-vis the Sinhalese.

United National Party "Majority" Rule, 1948–56

The largest political party in independent Sri Lanka, the United National Party (UNP), emerged as an umbrella party from the colonial era. It was similar in some respects to the Indian National Congress. Like its Indian counterpart, the UNP represented a union of a number of groups espousing different personalities and ideologies. Known later as the "uncle-nephew party" because of the kinship ties among the party's top leadership, the UNP served as the standard-bearer of conservative forces. In late 1947, when the

party won the country's first general election, the UNP attempted to establish an anticommunist, intercommunal parliamentary form of government. Prominent nationalists, such as D.S. Senanayake and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (the country's first and fourth prime ministers, respectively), led the UNP. The party's internal differences gradually worsened, however. The first and most serious break came in July 1951, when Bandaranaike's left-of-center bloc seceded to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the first major non-Marxist political movement to oppose the UNP.

Despite the benevolent guidance of Senanayake, the UNP could not defuse the nascent dissension between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Some of Senanayake's policies, particularly his awarding of land grants to Sinhalese settlers for the resettlement of the northern dry zone, precipitated renewed competition between the two ethnic groups.

When Senanayake died in a horseback-riding accident in March 1952, not only the UNP, but also the entire nation suffered from the loss of the only man who could pose as a credible symbol for the country's unity. In the election that was held immediately after Senanayake's death, the UNP, led by his son Dudley, and the SLFP, led by Bandaranaike, vied for Sinhalese votes, while the Tamil Congress and Federal Party competed for the Tamil vote. The UNP won the election, and the SLFP emerged as major opposition party. The SLFP managed to win only nine out of forty-eight seats in Parliament. The Tamil Congress, having supported the UNP, lost much of its following to the Federal Party, which continued to advocate an autonomous homeland within a Sri Lankan federation. Ethnic tensions, although mounting, remained manageable.

After D. S. Senanayake's death, the nation's economic problems became apparent. The terms of world trade were turning against Sri Lanka. The population was growing faster than production in most sectors. A World Bank (see Glossary) study completed in 1952 noted that social and welfare services were consuming 35 percent of the budget. The report recommended that the government rice subsidy—which accounted for the major portion of the expenditure—be reduced. Prime Minister Senanayake followed the advice, but the move proved to be his political undoing. A massive, sometimes violent civil disobedience movement was launched to protest the reduction of the rice subsidy and provoked the resignation of Senanayake. In October 1953, his cousin, Sir John Kotelawala, became prime minister and remained in office until the UNP defeat in the 1956 election.

The UNP government under Kotelawala disagreed with India's interpretation of political solidarity in the developing world. This divergence became painfully clear to India at the Colombo Conference of 1954 and the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955. Kotelawala's strident condemnation of communism, as well as the more fashionable condemnation of Western imperialism, especially irritated India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Kotelawala was also anxious to have Ceylon join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), but he encountered strong domestic opposition to the plan. The Soviet Union was especially sensitive to what it considered the government's pro-Western attitude and repeatedly vetoed Sri Lanka's application to join the United Nations (UN). Sri Lanka was finally admitted in 1955 as part of an East-West agreement.

The UNP continued a defense agreement with the British that spared Sri Lanka the cost of maintaining a large military establishment. National defense consumed less than 4 percent of the government budget in the postindependence years, and hence the military was not in a position to interfere with politics.

Emergence of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party

Following its defeat in 1952, the SLFP marshaled its forces in preparation for the next national election. The 1956 election was destined to become a turning point in the modern history of Sri Lanka and is seen by many observers as a social revolution resulting in the eclipse of the Westernized elite. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike campaigned as the "defender of a besieged Sinhalese culture" and demanded radical changes in the system. Bandaranaike came from a family of Westernized Sinhalese and was educated at Oxford, but early in his political career, he rejected many of the Western elements of his background and embraced the Buddhist faith and adopted native garb (regarded at the time as an affectation among members of his class). Bandaranaike brought to the election a deep knowledge of the passions that communal politics could provoke. His Sinhala Maha Sabha, founded in 1937 as a movement within the Ceylon National Congress, was the only wing of the congress at that time that sought to infuse a Sinhala consciousness into Sri Lankan nationalism. The Sinhala Maha Sabha formed the backbone of Bandaranaike's SLFP and helped spread his 1956 election warning that Buddhism was in danger. Accusations of a "conspiracy" between the UNP and the Roman Catholic Church helped raise emotions feverishly. As one commentator put it, "Bandaranaike built up a popular following based on the Sinhalese dislike

of Christian influence, essentially stoking the fires of communal and religious bigotry."

Bandaranaike and his supporters used the UNP's pro-Western stance as a potent propaganda weapon against the party. He claimed that the independence granted in 1948 was "fake" and that real independence could only be attained by severing all links with the Commonwealth of Nations. In economic matters, Bandaranaike planned to nationalize plantations, banks, and insurance companies. He advocated the control over trade and industry vested in Sinhalese hands. With such a radical platform, Bandaranaike managed to unite many disparate groups into his People's United Front (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna—MEP), a political coalition under the leadership of his SLFP formed to defeat the UNP. In addition, he was able to forge a no-contest pact with two Marxist parties, the LSSP and the CPSL.

The central and most explosive issue of the 1956 election was a linguistic one. After independence, it was commonly accepted that Sinhala and Tamil would replace English as the language of administration, but Bandaranaike announced that only Sinhala would be given official status if his coalition won the election. Bandaranaike introduced a dangerous emotionalism into the election with his "Sinhala only" platform, which labeled both Tamil and English as cultural imports.

The 2,500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha (which also marked the legendary landing of Vijaya and his followers on the island) coincided with the 1956 election, electrifying the political atmosphere. The UNP was susceptible to the emotional power of these issues. In what was later seen as a shameless last-minute reversal, the party also espoused the "Sinhala only" program. This political about-face came too late to help the UNP, for the party lost the election, winning only eight seats in parliament. The People's United Front won the majority share of fifty-one seats.

Tamil Politics

Some political commentators hold that it was in the wake of the 1956 elections that two completely separate and basically hostile political systems emerged in Sri Lanka: one for the Sinhalese and another for the Tamils. The trend toward Tamil exclusivity, however, despite periods of accommodation with Sinhalese political parties, had begun developing before independence. The first political organization to be formed specifically to protect the welfare of an ethnic minority was the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), which G.G. Ponnambalam founded in 1944. The Tamil Congress attempted to secure adequate constitutional safeguards

before the country attained its independence. These attempts reflected Tamil anxieties that British domination would simply give way to domination by the Sinhalese majority.

After independence, a dissident Tamil group in the ACTC emerged under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The new group disagreed with Ponnambalam's policy of collaboration with the intercommunal, but Sinhalese-dominated, UNP. In 1949 the dissidents broke away from the ACTC and formed the rival Federal Party, which proposed establishing an autonomous Tamil linguistic state within a federal union of Sri Lanka. The Federal Party regarded this alternative as the only practical way to preserve Tamil identity.

In 1956 the Federal Party emerged as the dominant Tamil political group as a result of its convincing victory over the conservative Tamil Congress. The Federal Party had a distinct advantage because the Tamil Congress had suffered considerably from the stigma of its association with the UNP (which had abandoned its policy of making both Sinhala and Tamil national languages in an attempt to obtain the support of the numerically greater Sinhalese vote).

The Federal Party continued to consolidate its strength and became an important player in national politics. In 1965 the party became a component of the UNP-led coalition government by committing its bloc of parliamentary seats to the UNP, which at that time needed the Federal Party's support to form a stable parliamentary majority. In 1968 however, the Federal Party withdrew from the UNP government because its leaders were convinced that the party could no longer derive any tangible benefits from further association with the UNP. In 1970 the Federal Party campaigned independently, unlike the Tamil Congress, whose leaders called on the Tamils to join a united front with the Sinhalese.

Sri Lanka Freedom Party Rule, 1956–65

Legislation and Communal Agitation

Some of the first actions taken by the new SLFP government reflected a disturbing insensitivity to minority concerns. Shortly after its victory, the new government presented parliament with the Official Language Act, which declared Sinhala the one official language. The act was passed and immediately caused a reaction among Tamils, who perceived their language, culture, and economic position to be under attack.

The passage of the Official Language Act precipitated a current of antagonism between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The Sri

Lankan Tamils, represented by the Federal Party, launched a *satyagraha* (nonviolent protest) that resulted in a pact between S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The agreement provided a wide measure of Tamil autonomy in Northern and Eastern provinces. It also provided for the use of the Tamil language in administrative matters. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact also promised that "early consideration" would be extended to Indian "plantation" Tamils on the question of Sri Lankan citizenship. But the pact was not carried out because of a peaceful protest by Buddhist clergy, who, with support from the UNP, denounced the pact as a "betrayal of Sinhalese-Buddhist people."

In May 1958, a rumor that a Tamil had killed a Sinhalese sparked off nationwide communal riots. Hundreds of people, mostly Tamils, died. This disturbance was the first major episode of communal violence on the island since independence. The riots left a deep psychological scar between the two major ethnic groups. The government declared a state of emergency and forcibly relocated more than 25,000 Tamil refugees from Sinhalese areas to Tamil areas in the north.

Populist Economic Policies

The Bandaranaike government actively expanded the public sector and broadened domestic welfare programs, including pension plans, medical care, nutrition programs, and food and fuel subsidies. This social agenda threatened to drain the nation's treasury. Other popular but economically unfeasible schemes promoted by the Bandaranaike government included restrictions on foreign investment, the nationalization of critical industries, and land reform measures that nationalized plantations and redistributed land to peasants.

When a Buddhist extremist assassinated Bandaranaike in September 1959, the nation faced a period of grave instability. The institution of parliamentary multiparty politics proved strong enough to endure, however, and orderly, constitutional actions resolved the leadership succession. The office of prime minister passed to the minister of education, Wijeyananda Dahanayake, who pledged to carry on the socialist policies of his predecessor. But policy differences and personality clashes within the ruling circle forced the new leader to dissolve Parliament in December 1959. The short-lived Dahanayake government, unable to hold Bandaranaike's coalition government together, was defeated by the UNP in the March 1960 general elections. The UNP won 33

percent of the seats in the lower house, giving the party a plurality but not a majority.

United National Party Interlude

The new prime minister, Dudley Senanayake, honored his election pledge to avoid compromise with the leftist parties and formed an all-UNP government with support from minor right-of-center parties. His overall parliamentary majority, however, was below the minimum seats required to defeat an opposition motion of no-confidence in the UNP cabinet. Less than a month after its formation, the UNP government fell. A new election was scheduled for July 1960.

Return of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party

The UNP fell because it lacked the support of any other major party in Parliament. The leftists tried to bring it down, and the Tamils withheld their support because the UNP had earlier hedged on the issue of the use of the Tamil language. Most important, the UNP had earned the reputation among Sinhalese voters of being a party inimical to Sinhalese nationalism.

Meanwhile the SLFP had grown stronger because of its unwavering support for making Sinhala the only official language. The SLFP found in the former prime minister's widow, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias (S.R.D.) Bandaranaike, a candidate who was more capable of arousing Sinhalese emotions than Dahanayake had been in the March elections.

In the July 1960 general election, Bandaranaike was profiled as a woman who had nobly agreed to carry on the mandate of her assassinated husband. She received the support of many of the same small parties on the right and left that had temporarily joined together to form the People's United Front coalition (which had brought her husband victory in 1956). She won the election with an absolute majority in Parliament and became Sri Lanka's seventh, and the world's first woman, prime minister. The new government was in many ways the torchbearer for the ideas of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, but under his widow's direction, the SLFP carried out these ideas with such zeal and force that Sinhalese-Tamil relations sharply deteriorated. One of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's first official actions was to enforce the policy of Sinhala as the only officially recognized language of government. Her aggressive enforcement of this policy sparked immediate Tamil resistance, which resulted in civil disobedience in restive Northern and Eastern provinces. Bandaranaike reacted by declaring a state of emergency and curtailing Tamil political activity.

Bandaranaike also antagonized other significant minority groups, particularly the Christians. In response to a recommendation by an unofficial Buddhist commission, her government took over the management of state-assisted denominational schools. The move deprived many Christian missionary schools of support. Roman Catholic activists spearheaded demonstrations, which forced the government to reconsider some of its measures. Still, relations between the prime minister and the Christian denominations remained unstable.

Bandaranaike moved vigorously early in her administration to nationalize significant sectors of the economy, targeting industries that were under foreign control. The 1961 creation of the State Petroleum Corporation adversely affected the major petroleum companies—Shell, Esso, and Caltex. The new corporation was guaranteed 25 percent of the country's total petroleum business. Under Bandaranaike's instruction, state corporations began to import oil from new sources, effectively altering for the first time the pattern of trade that had been followed since British rule. Sri Lanka signed oil import agreements with the Soviet Union, Romania, Egypt, and other countries not traditionally involved in Sri Lankan trade. The government also put important sectors of the local economy, particularly the insurance industry, under state control. Most alarming to Bandaranaike's conservative opponents, however, were her repeated unsuccessful attempts to nationalize the largest newspaper syndicate and establish a press council to monitor the news media.

In foreign relations, Bandaranaike was faithful to her late husband's policy of "dynamic neutralism," which aimed to steer a nonaligned diplomatic stance between the superpowers. Sri Lanka exercised its new foreign policy in 1962 by organizing a conference of neutralist nations to mediate an end to the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. Although the conference failed to end the war, it highlighted Sri Lanka's new role as a peacebroker and enhanced its international status.

The UNP opposition was apprehensive of Bandaranaike's leftward drift and was especially concerned about the SLFP alliance with the Trotskyite LSSP in 1964. The UNP approached the March 1965 election as a senior partner in a broad front of "democratic forces" dedicated to fight the "totalitarianism of the left." It enjoyed significant support from the Federal Party (representing Sri Lankan Tamils) and the Ceylon Workers' Congress (representing Indian Tamils).

The United National Party Regains Power, 1965–70

The UNP "national government" emerged victorious in the March 1965 elections, capturing more than 39 percent of

parliamentary seats, compared to SLFP's 30.2 percent. One of the first actions of the new government, led by Senanayake, was to declare that the nation's economy was virtually bankrupt. Senanayake also announced his intention to improve relations with the United States. (In 1963 the United States had suspended aid to Sri Lanka because of Bandaranaike's nationalization of foreign oil concerns.)

The government tried to develop a mixed economy with an emphasis on the private sector. Between 1965 and 1970, private sector investment was double that of the public sector, thereby reversing the trend set in the previous administration. Despite the UNP's emphasis on the private sector, the economy generally failed to show a major improvement. This failure was partly caused by a nearly 50 percent increase in the cost of rice imports after a worldwide shortage in 1965 and a concurrent steep decline in the price of Sri Lanka's export commodities. In 1966 the UNP government was forced to declare a state of emergency to ward off food riots. Senanayake reduced the subsidized weekly rice ration by half. The reduction remained in effect throughout the remainder of the "national government" period and contributed greatly to UNP's defeat in the 1970 general elections.

The UNP paid more attention to Buddhist sensitivities than it had in the past, and in an effort to widen the party's popularity, it replaced the Christian sabbath with the Buddhist *poya* full-moon holiday. This action satisfied Buddhist activists but alienated the small but powerful Roman Catholic lobby. The UNP also tried to earn favor with the Tamils by enacting the Tamil Regulations in 1966, which were designed to make Tamil a language officially "parallel" to Sinhala in Tamil-speaking regions. Sinhalese activists immediately expressed hostility toward the Tamil Regulations. Civil violence ensued, and the government was forced to proclaim a state of emergency that lasted for most of the year.

United Front Rule and Emerging Violence, 1970–77

In order to prepare for the 1970 general election, Sirimavo Bandaranaike formed a coalition in 1968 with the LSSP and CPSL to oppose the UNP. The new three-party United Front (Samagi Peramuna) announced that it would work toward a "people's government" under the leadership of Bandaranaike and that it would follow a so-called Common Programme, which promised radical structural changes, including land reform, increased rice subsidies, and nationalization of local and foreign banks.

The United Front resurrected communal emotionalism as a timely and potent campaign weapon. It attacked the UNP for its

alliance with the two main Tamil political groups, the Federal Party and the Ceylon Workers' Congress. At the same time, the United Front also announced that it would adopt a new constitution to make Sri Lanka a republic and that it would restore "Buddhism to its rightful place." The United Front won 118 of the 135 seats it contested, with the SLFP, the biggest-single party, winning 90 seats, the LSSP 19 seats, and the CPSL 6 seats. The UNP won a meager seventeen seats.

The United Front government moved quickly to implement key features of its Common Programme. The philosophy of the coalition government was seen most transparently from its foreign and economic policies. The United Front issued declarations that it followed a nonaligned path; opposed imperialism, colonialism, and racism; and supported national liberation movements. The government quickly extended diplomatic relations to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (then North Vietnam), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. It also pledged to suspend recognition of Israel. In economic matters, the United Front vowed to put private enterprise in a subsidiary role.

Prime Minister Bandaranaike tolerated the radical left at first and then lost control of it. Sensing mounting unrest, the government declared a state of emergency in March 1971. In April, the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna—JVP), a Maoist and primarily rural Sinhalese youth movement claiming a membership of more than 10,000, began a "blitzkrieg" operation to take over the government "within 24 hours." The JVP followed a program—known as the Five Lectures—that included an agenda to deal with "Indian expansionism," the island's unstable economic situation, and the inability of the traditionalist leftist leadership to assert power or attract widespread support (an allusion to the LSSP and the CPSL). The JVP threatened to take power by extraparliamentary means. Fierce fighting erupted in the north-central, south-central, and southern rural districts of the island, causing an official estimate of 1,200 dead. Unofficial tallies of the number of dead were much higher. The JVP came perilously close to overthrowing the government but the military finally suppressed the movement and imprisoned JVP's top leadership and about 16,000 suspected insurgents.

In May 1972, the United Front followed through on its 1970 campaign promise to promulgate a new constitution to make Sri Lanka a republic. Under the new constitution, the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government were vested in the

National State Assembly. Many important and vocal sectors of society opposed this concentration of power. The 1972 constitution disturbed the UNP, which feared an authoritarian government might emerge because of the new document. The UNP was especially alarmed that a Trotskyite, Dr. Colvin de Silva (Bandaranaike's minister of constitutional affairs), had drafted the constitution.

The distinct lack of protection for the rights of minorities in the new constitution dismayed many sectors of the population. The Tamils were especially disturbed because the 1972 constitution contained no elements of federalism. Instead, a newly conferred status for Buddhism replaced the provisions for minorities provided by Article 29 in the 1948 constitution. The constitution also sanctioned measures that discriminated against Tamil youth in university admissions. Tamil youth were particularly irked by the "standardization" policy that Bandaranaike's government introduced in 1973. The policy made university admissions criteria lower for Sinhalese than for Tamils. The Tamil community—the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress, and other Tamil organizations—reacted collectively against the new atmosphere the new constitution produced, and in May 1972, they founded the Tamil United Front (which became the Tamil United Liberation Front—TULF—in 1976).

By the mid-1970s, the antagonism between the right and left was destroying the United Front coalition. The growing political influence of the right wing led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike's son, Anura, precipitated the expulsion of the LSSP from the United Front in September 1975. The withdrawal of the CPSL in 1977 further weakened the coalition.

The United National Party Returns to Power

After Dudley Senanayake died in 1973, a struggle for the leadership of the UNP ensued between his nephew, Rukman Senanayake, and Junius Richard (J.R.) Jayewardene, a more distant relative. Jayewardene had been involved in politics for years, having been elected to the State Council, the parliament's colonial predecessor, as early as 1943. A leader of the UNP since independence, Jayewardene had deferred to the Senanayake family. But in 1970, when the UNP suffered a resounding defeat to the United Front, Jayewardene became more assertive. His party manifesto—*The UNP in Opposition, 1970*—contended that the majority of Sri Lankans perceived the party as the party of the "haves, the affluent, and the employers." He also contended that the people had come to perceive the SLFP as the party of the "have nots, the needy,

and the unemployed." Jayewardene moved forcefully to refurbish UNP's image and announced that the party would inaugurate an era of a just and righteous (*dharmishta*) society. After becoming president of the party, Jayewardene began to restructure the UNP and make the party more attractive, especially to young people. By the time of the general election of 1977, Jayewardene had developed an extensive grass roots party organization.

Election of 1977 and More Violence

After molding the UNP around his personality and having successfully built up the party's infrastructure, Jayewardene easily became prime minister. The UNP won an unprecedented landslide victory in the 1977 elections, winning 140 of 168 seats. The SLFP was reduced to eight seats. The Sri Lankan Tamils, however, gave little support to Jayewardene or any other non-Tamil politician. The Sri Lankan Tamils entered the parliamentary election fray under the banner of TULF, which had elevated its earlier demand for regional self-rule to a demand for an independent state, or Eelam (see Glossary). TULF became the largest opposition party in Parliament and captured all fourteen seats in the heavily Tamil Northern Province and four east coast seats. TULF won in every constituency with a Tamil majority on the island, except one. In Jaffna District, TULF candidates won all eleven seats, although forty-seven other candidates contested the seats. TULF originally included the largest Indian (plantation) Tamil political organization, the Ceylon Workers' Congress, but after the 1977 election, the leader of the Ceylon Workers' Congress accepted a cabinet post in the UNP government. The Sri Lankan Tamil demand for Tamil Eelam had never been of central concern to the Indian Tamils, who lived mostly outside the territory being claimed for the Tamil state.

The opportunities for peace that the 1977 UNP electoral victory provided were soon lost. Just before the 1977 elections, Chelvanayakam, the charismatic leader of TULF, died, leaving the party without strong leadership. A Tamil separatist underground (which had split into six or more rival and sometimes violently hostile groups that were divided by ideology, caste, and personal antagonisms) was filling the vacuum left by the weakened TULF and was gaining the allegiance of an increasing number of disenchanted Tamil youths. These groups were known collectively as the Tamil Tigers. The strongest of these separatists were the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), founded in 1972 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. The LTTE was responsible for some of the earliest and most gruesome acts of Tamil terrorism (see the Tamil Insurgency, ch. 5).

The LTTE first gained notoriety by its 1975 assassination of the mayor of Jaffna, a supporter of the SLFP. During the 1977 elections, many Tamil youths began to engage in extraparliamentary and sometimes violent measures in their bid for a mandate for a separate state. These measures precipitated a Sinhalese backlash. An apparently false rumor that Sinhalese policemen had died at the hands of Tamil terrorists, combined with other rumors of alleged anti-Sinhalese statements made by Tamil politicians, sparked brutal communal rioting that engulfed the island within two weeks of the new government's inauguration. The rioting marked the first major outbreak of communal violence in the nineteen years since the riots of 1958. Casualties were many, especially among Tamils, both the Sri Lankan Tamils of Jaffna and the Indian Tamil plantation workers. The Tamil Refugee Rehabilitation Organization estimated the death toll at 300 persons.

Constitution of 1978

After coming to power, Jayewardene directed the rewriting of the constitution. The document that was produced, the new Constitution of 1978, drastically altered the nature of governance in Sri Lanka. It replaced the previous Westminster-style, parliamentary government with a new presidential system modeled after France, with a powerful chief executive. The president was to be elected by direct suffrage for a six-year term and was empowered to appoint, with parliamentary approval, the prime minister and to preside over cabinet meetings. Jayewardene became the first president under the new Constitution and assumed direct control of the government machinery and party.

The new regime ushered in an era that did not auger well for the SLFP. Jayewardene's UNP government accused former prime minister Bandaranaike of abusing her power while in office from 1970 to 1977. In October 1980, Bandaranaike's privilege to engage in politics was removed for a period of seven years, and the SLFP was forced to seek a new leader. After a long and divisive battle, the party chose her son, Anura. Anura Bandaranaike was soon thrust into the role of the keeper of his father's legacy, but he inherited a political party torn apart by factionalism and reduced to a minimal role in the Parliament.

The 1978 Constitution included substantial concessions to Tamil sensitivities. Although TULF did not participate in framing the Constitution, it continued to sit in Parliament in the hope of negotiating a settlement to the Tamil problem. TULF also agreed to Jayewardene's proposal of an all-party conference to resolve the island's ethnic problems. Jayewardene's UNP offered other

concessions in a bid to secure peace. Sinhala remained the official language and the language of administration throughout Sri Lanka, but Tamil was given a new "national language" status. Tamil was to be used in a number of administrative and educational circumstances. Jayewardene also eliminated a major Tamil grievance by abrogating the "standardization" policy of the United Front government, which had made university admission criteria for Tamils more difficult. In addition, he offered many top-level positions, including that of minister of justice, to Tamil civil servants.

While TULF, in conjunction with the UNP, pressed for the all-party conference, the Tamil Tigers escalated their terrorist attacks, which provoked Sinhalese backlash against Tamils and generally precluded any successful accommodation. In reaction to the assassination of a Jaffna police inspector, the Jayewardene government declared an emergency and dispatched troops, who were given an unrealistic six months to eradicate the terrorist threat.

The government passed the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act in 1979. The act was enacted as a temporary measure, but it later became permanent legislation. The International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and other human rights organizations condemned the act as being incompatible with democratic traditions. Despite the act, the number of terrorist acts increased. Guerrillas began to hit targets of high symbolic value such as post offices and police outposts, provoking government counterattacks. As an increasing number of civilians were caught in the fighting, Tamil support widened for the "boys," as the guerrillas began to be called. Other large, well-armed groups began to compete with LTTE. The better-known included the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Army, and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization. Each of these groups had forces measured in the hundreds if not thousands. The government claimed that many of the terrorists were operating from training camps in India's Tamil Nadu State. The Indian government repeatedly denied this claim. With the level of violence mounting, the possibility of negotiation became increasingly distant.

The Riots of 1981

In June 1981, local elections were held in the north to elect members of the newly established district development councils. TULF had decided to participate and work in the councils. In doing so, TULF continued to work toward autonomy for the Tamil areas. Extremists within the separatist movement, however, adamantly opposed working within the existing political framework. They

viewed participation in the elections as compromising the objective of a separate state. Shortly before the elections, the leading candidate of the UNP was assassinated as he left a political rally. The sporadic communal violence that persisted over the following three months foreshadowed the devastating communal riots of 1983. When elections were held a few days later, concomitant charges of voting irregularities and mishandling of ballots created the nation's first election scandal since the introduction of universal suffrage fifty years earlier.

Presidential Election of 1982

TULF decided to boycott the 1982 presidential elections, partly in reaction to the harsh Prevention of Terrorism Act and partly in response to pressures exerted by Tamil extremists. Only 46 percent of the voters in Jaffna District turned out. In Sinhalese districts, 85 percent of voters turned out. Increasing violence by Tamil youths in the north and east of the island accompanied the call for a Tamil Eelam. The rising level of violence in 1983 led the government to pass a sixth amendment to the Constitution, which specifically banned talk of separatism. All sixteen TULF members of parliament were expelled for refusing to recite a loyalty oath, thus removing a critical channel for mediation.

The Riots of July 1983

In July 1983, the most savage communal riots in Sri Lanka's history erupted. Conservative government estimates put the death toll at 400— mostly Tamils. At least 150,000 Tamil fled the island. The riots began in retaliation for an ambush of an army patrol in the north that left thirteen Sinhalese soldiers dead. The army was reputed to have killed sixty Tamil civilians in Jaffna, but most of the violence occurred in Colombo, where Sinhalese mobs looked for Tamil shops to destroy. More than any previous ethnic riot on the island, the 1983 riots were marked by their highly organized mob violence. Sinhalese rioters in Colombo used voter lists containing home addresses to make precise attacks on the Tamil community. From Colombo, the anti-Tamil violence fanned out to the entire island. The psychological effects of this violence on Sri Lanka's complex and divided society were still being assessed in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the communal rioting, a self-evident truth was that the island's history, and the complexity of its society, had a portentous message for the present: Sinhalese and Tamil Sri Lankans were fated by history and geography to coexist in close proximity. This coexistence could be discordant or amicable, and examples of both could be drawn from

Sri Lanka's history. It was a message, however, whose meaning was forgotten as the ethnic communities were drawn increasingly into a vortex of rancor and violence that made the restoration of harmony a persistently elusive goal for the Sri Lankan government.

* * *

Informative general histories of Sri Lanka include K.M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka,* E.F.C. Ludowyk's *A Short History of Ceylon,* Zeylanicus's *Ceylon,* S. Arasaratnam's *Ceylon,* and Chandra Richard de Silva's *Sri Lanka: A History.* Source books on medieval history are Wilhelm Geiger's translations of the Pali chronicles, the *Mahavamsa* and *Culavamsa,* and the comprehensive *The Early History of Ceylon* by G.C. Mendis. Highly informative for the study of modern political events and ethnic disturbances are S.J. Tambiah's *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy,* A. Jeyaratnam Wilson's *Politics in Sri Lanka,* and *Government and Politics in South Asia* by Craig Baxter, Yogendra K. Malik, Charles H. Kennedy, and Robert C. Oberst. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment

Woman bringing "ambula" (noon meal) to the field

SRI LANKA LIES practically in the center of the Indian Ocean and thus has climatic and cultural links with three continents. Monsoon winds, driving against Sri Lanka's peaks, support lush vegetation on the southern half of the island, but the northern half is a dry zone. The winds affect human culture as well, having brought wave after wave of immigrants and merchants following the southerly trade routes. Outsiders found a wide range of ecological niches on the coast, on the plains, or in the mountains, and they built a remarkably variegated civilization. Merchants long have sought Sri Lanka as the source of pearls, jewels, spices, and tea. Visitors for centuries have marvelled at the beauty and great diversity of the island.

The South Asian landmass to the north has strongly influenced Sri Lankan culture in the past and continues to do so. From an outlander's perspective, some of the main aspects of Sri Lankan society—language, caste, family structure—are regional variants of Indian civilization. From the perspective of the islander, however, the Indian influence is but the largest part of a continuing barrage of stimuli coming to Sri Lanka from all sides. The people of the island have absorbed these influences and built their own civilization.

The Sinhalese (see Glossary), a distinct ethnic group speaking the Sinhala (see Glossary) language and practicing a variant of Theravada Buddhism (see Glossary), comprise the majority—74 percent—of the population, and their values dominate public life. There are, however, substantial minority groups. The Tamils, speaking the Tamil language and generally practicing Hinduism, comprise almost 18 percent of the population. Muslims, many of whom speak Tamil as their main language, make up 7 percent of the populace. Each of the main ethnic groups is subdivided into several major categories, depending on variables of religion or geography. There also are sizable Christian minorities among the Sinhalese and Tamil. People living in the central highland region of the country generally adhere more closely to their traditional ethnic customs than lowland dwellers.

Caste creates other social divisions. The Goyigama (see Glossary) caste of the Sinhalese—traditionally associated with land cultivation—is dominant in population and public influence, but in the lowlands other castes based on commercial activities are influential. The Tamil Vellala caste resembles the Goyigama in its

dominance and traditional connection with agriculture, but it is completely separate from the Sinhalese caste hierarchy. Within their separate caste hierarchies, Sinhalese and Tamil communities are fragmented through customs that separate higher from lower orders. These include elaborate rules of etiquette and a nearly complete absence of intercaste marriages. Differences in wealth arising from the modern economic system have created, however, wide class cleavages that cut across boundaries of caste, religion, and language. Because of all these divisions, Sri Lankan society is complex, with numerous points of potential conflict.

The population of Sri Lanka has grown considerably since independence in 1948, and in the 1980s was increasing by approximately 200,000 people or 1.37 percent each year. Because of this population pressure, the government has faced a major development problem as it has attempted to reconcile the divergent interests of caste, class, and ethnic groups while trying to ensure adequate food, education, health services, and career opportunities for the rapidly expanding population. Politicians and officials have attempted to meet these needs through a form of welfare socialism, providing a level of support services that is comparatively high for a developing nation. Building on colonial foundations, Sri Lanka has created a comprehensive education system, including universities, that has produced one of the best-educated populations in Asia. A free state-run health system provides basic care that has raised average life expectancy to the highest level in South Asia. Ambitious housing and sanitation plans, although incomplete, promised basic amenities to all citizens by the year 2000. In 1988 the government addressed the nutritional deficiencies of the poor through a subsidized food stamp program and free nutrition programs for children and mothers.

The crucial problem facing Sri Lanka's plural society is whether it can evolve a form of socialism that will address the needs of all groups, or whether frustrated aspirations will engender further conflict. In the field of education, for example, excellent accomplishments in elementary schooling have emerged alongside bitter competition for coveted places in the university system; this competition has fueled ethnic hatred between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. In a land with limited resources, the benefits of social welfare programs highlight the inadequacies of progress for some regional or ethnic groups. In these circumstances, caste, ethnic, or religious differences become boundaries between warring parties, and a person's language or place of worship becomes a sign of political affiliation. The social organization of Sri Lanka

is thus an important component of the politics and economy in the developing nation.

The Physical Environment

Geology

More than 90 percent of Sri Lanka's surface lies on Precambrian strata, some of it dating back 2 billion years. The metamorphic rock surface was created by the transformation of ancient sediments under intense heat and pressure during mountain-building processes. The theory of plate tectonics suggests that these rocks and related rocks forming most of south India were part of a single southern landmass called Gondwanaland. Beginning about 200 million years ago, forces within the earth's mantle began to separate the lands of the Southern Hemisphere, and a crustal plate supporting both India and Sri Lanka moved toward the northeast. About 45 million years ago, the Indian plate collided with the Asian landmass, raising the Himalayas in northern India, and continuing to advance slowly to the present time. Sri Lanka experiences few earthquakes or major volcanic events because it rides on the center of the plate.

The island contains relatively limited strata of sedimentation surrounding its ancient hills. Aside from recent deposits along river valleys, only two small fragments of Jurassic (140 to 190 million years ago) sediment occur in Puttalam District, while a more extensive belt of Miocene (5 to 20 million years ago) limestone is found along the northwest coast, overlain in many areas by Pleistocene (1 million years ago) deposits (see fig. 1). The northwest coast is part of the deep Cauvery (Kaveri) River Basin of southeast India, which has been collecting sediments from the highlands of India and Sri Lanka since the breakup of Gondwanaland.

Topography

Extensive faulting and erosion over time have produced a wide range of topographic features, making Sri Lanka one of the most scenic places in the world. Three zones are distinguishable by elevation: the Central Highlands, the plains, and the coastal belt (see fig. 3).

The south-central part of Sri Lanka—the rugged Central Highlands—is the heart of the country. The core of this area is a high plateau, running north-south for approximately sixty-five kilometers. This area includes some of Sri Lanka's highest mountains. (Pidurutalagala is the highest at 2,524 meters.) At the plateau's southern end, mountain ranges stretch 50 kilometers to

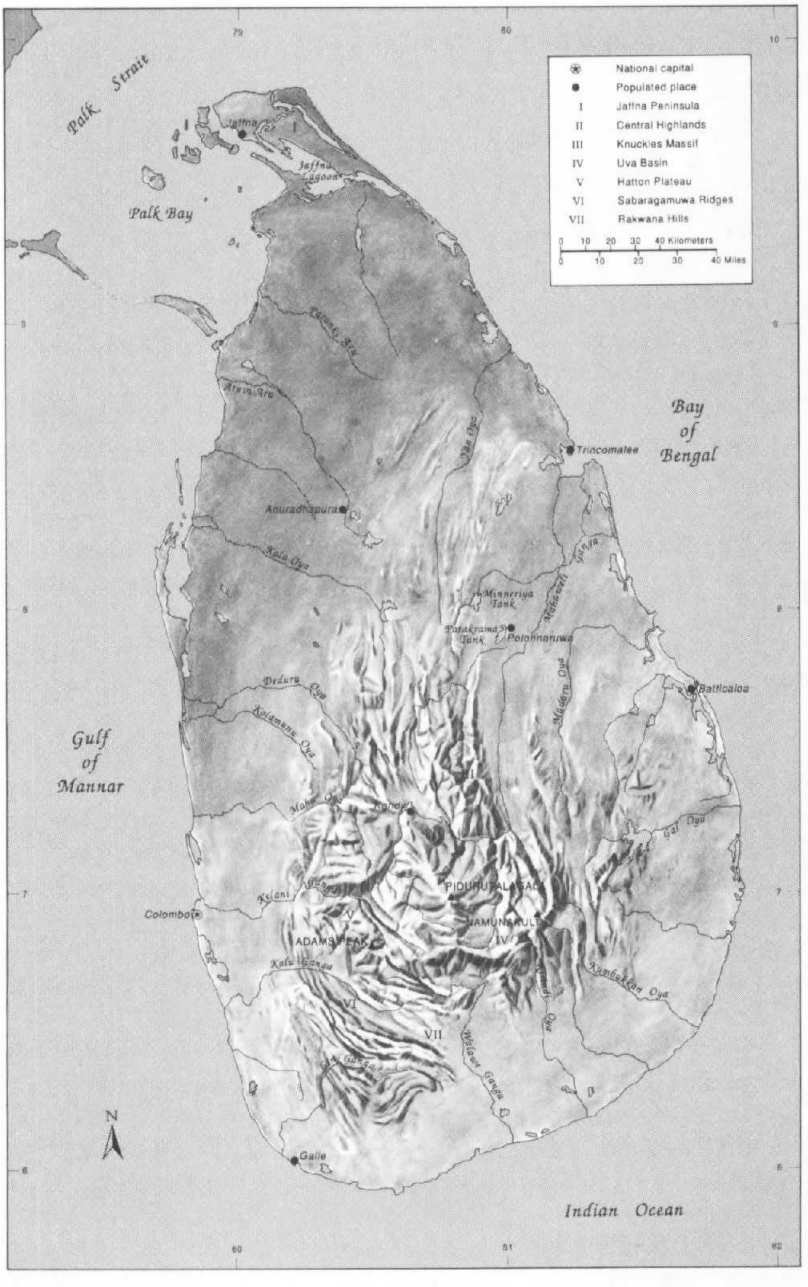


Figure 3. Topography and Drainage, 1988

the west toward Adams Peak (2,243 meters) and 50 kilometers to the east toward Namunakuli (2,036 meters). Flanking the high central ridges are two lower plateaus. On the west is the Hatton Plateau, a deeply dissected series of ridges sloping downward toward the north. On the east, the Uva Basin consists of rolling hills covered with grasses, traversed by some deep valleys and gorges. To the north, separated from the main body of mountains and plateaus by broad valleys, lies the Knuckles Massif: steep escarpments, deep gorges, and peaks rising to more than 1,800 meters. South of Adams Peak lie the parallel ridges of the Rakwana Hills, with several peaks over 1,400 meters. The land descends from the Central Highlands to a series of escarpments and ledges at 400 to 500 meters above sea level before sloping down toward the coastal plains.

Most of the island's surface consists of plains between 30 and 200 meters above sea level. In the southwest, ridges and valleys rise gradually to merge with the Central Highlands, giving a dissected appearance to the plain. Extensive erosion in this area has worn down the ridges and deposited rich soil for agriculture downstream. In the southeast, a red, lateritic soil covers relatively level ground that is studded with bare, monolithic hills. The transition from the plain to the Central Highlands is abrupt in the southeast, and the mountains appear to rise up like a wall. In the east and the north, the plain is flat, dissected by long, narrow ridges of granite running from the Central Highlands.

A coastal belt about thirty meters above sea level surrounds the island. Much of the coast consists of scenic sandy beaches indented by coastal lagoons. In the Jaffna Peninsula, limestone beds are exposed to the waves as low-lying cliffs in a few places. In the northeast and the southwest, where the coast cuts across the stratification of the crystalline rocks, rocky cliffs, bays, and offshore islands can be found; these conditions have created one of the world's best natural harbors at Trincomalee on the northeast coast, and a smaller rock harbor at Galle on the southwestern coast.

Sri Lanka's rivers rise in the Central Highlands and flow in a radial pattern toward the sea. Most of these rivers are short. There are sixteen principal rivers longer than 100 kilometers in length, with twelve of them carrying about 75 percent of the mean river discharge in the entire country. The longest rivers are the Mahaweli Ganga (335 kilometers) and the Aruvi Aru (170 kilometers). In the highlands, river courses are frequently broken by discontinuities in the terrain, and where they encounter escarpments, numerous waterfalls and rapids have eroded a passage. Once they reach the plain, the rivers slow down and the waters meander across flood plains and deltas. The upper reaches of the rivers are wild and

usually unnavigable, and the lower reaches are prone to seasonal flooding. Human intervention has altered the flows of some rivers in order to create hydroelectric, irrigation, and transportation projects. In the north, east, and southeast, the rivers feed numerous artificial lakes or reservoirs (tanks) that store water during the dry season. During the 1970s and 1980s, large-scale projects dammed the Mahaweli Ganga and neighboring streams to create large lakes along their courses (see Agriculture, ch. 3). Several hundred kilometers of canals, most of which were built by the Dutch in the eighteenth century, link inland waterways in the southwestern part of Sri Lanka.

Climate

Sri Lanka's position between 5° and 10° north latitude endows the country with a warm climate, moderated by ocean winds and considerable moisture. The mean temperature ranges from a low of 15.8°C in Nuwara Eliya in the Central Highlands (where frost may occur for several days in the winter) to a high of 29°C in Trincomalee on the northeast coast (where temperatures may reach 37°C). The average yearly temperature for the country as a whole ranges from 26°C to 28°C. Day and night temperatures may vary by 4° to 7°. January is the coolest month, causing people, especially those in the highlands, to wear coats and sweaters. May, the hottest period, precedes the summer monsoon rains.

The rainfall pattern is influenced by the monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal and is marked by four seasons. The first is from mid-May to October, when winds originate in the southwest, bringing moisture from the Indian Ocean. When these winds encounter the slopes of the Central Highlands, they unload heavy rains on the mountain slopes and the southwestern sector of the island. Some of the windward slopes receive up to 250 centimeters of rain per month, but the leeward slopes in the east and northeast receive little rain. The second season occurs in October and November, the intermonsoonal months. During this season, periodic squalls occur and sometimes tropical cyclones bring overcast skies and rains to the southwest, northeast, and eastern parts of the island. During the third season, December to March, monsoon winds come from the northeast, bringing moisture from the Bay of Bengal. The northeastern slopes of the mountains may be inundated with up to 125 centimeters of rain during these months. Another intermonsoonal period occurs from March until mid-May, with light, variable winds and evening thundershowers.

Humidity is typically higher in the southwest and mountainous areas and depends on the seasonal patterns of rainfall. At Colombo,

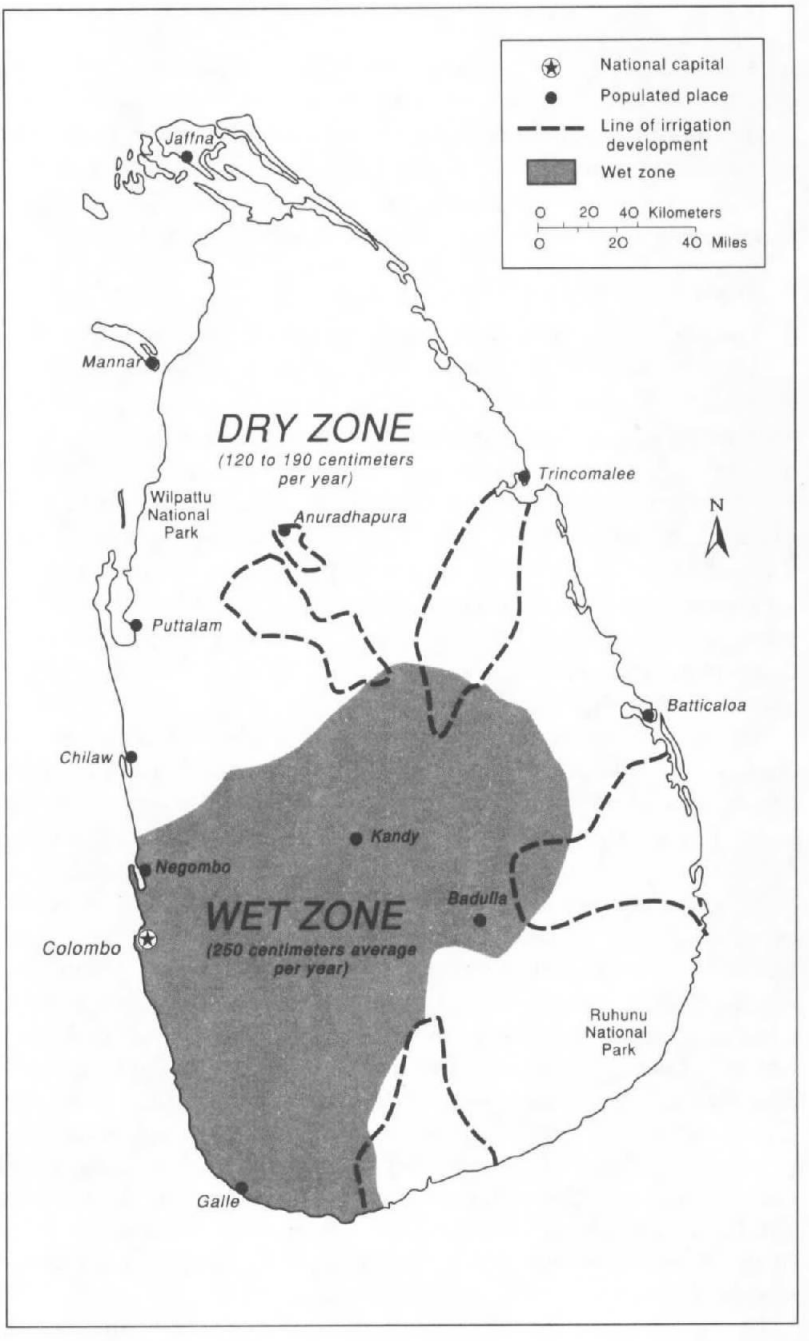
for example, daytime humidity stays above 70 percent all year, rising to almost 90 percent during the monsoon season in June. Anuradhapura experiences a daytime low of 60 percent during the intermonsoonal month of March, but a high of 79 percent during the November and December rains. In the highlands, Kandy's daytime humidity usually ranges between 70 and 79 percent.

Ecological Zones

The pattern of life in Sri Lanka depends directly on the availability of rainwater. The mountains and the southwestern part of the country, known as the "wet zone," receive ample rainfall (an annual average of 250 centimeters). Most of the southeast, east, and northern parts of the country comprise the "dry zone," which receives between 120 and 190 centimeters of rain annually. Much of the rain in these areas falls from October to January; during the rest of the year there is very little precipitation, and all living creatures must conserve precious moisture. The arid northwest and southeast coasts receive the least amount of rain—60 to 120 centimeters per year—concentrated within the short period of the winter monsoon (see fig. 4).

The natural vegetation of the dry zone is adapted to the annual change from flood to drought. The typical ground cover is scrub forest, interspersed with tough bushes and cactuses in the driest areas. Plants grow very fast from November to February when rainfall is heavy, but stop growing during the hot season from March to August. Various adaptations to the dry conditions have developed. To conserve water, trees have thick bark; most have tiny leaves, and some drop their leaves during this season. Also, the topmost branches of the tallest trees often interlace, forming a canopy against the hot sun and a barrier to the dry wind. When water is absent, the plains of the dry zone are dominated by browns and grays. When water becomes available, either during the wet season or through proximity to rivers and lakes, the vegetation explodes into shades of green with a wide variety of beautiful flowers. Varieties of flowering acacias are well adapted to the arid conditions and flourish on the Jaffna Peninsula. Among the trees of the dry-land forests are some valuable species, such as satinwood, ebony, ironwood, and mahogany.

In the wet zone, the dominant vegetation of the lowlands is a tropical evergreen forest, with tall trees, broad foliage, and a dense undergrowth of vines and creepers. Subtropical evergreen forests resembling those of temperate climates flourish in the higher altitudes. Montane vegetation at the highest altitudes tends to be stunted and windswept.



Source: Based on information from *Agro-Bio-Environmental Chart of Sri Lanka*, Tokyo, Resources Council, Science and Technology Agency, 1977.

Figure 4. Precipitation and Irrigation

Forests at one time covered nearly the entire island, but by the late twentieth century lands classified as forests and forest reserves covered only one-fifth of the land. The southwestern interior contains the only large remnants of the original forests of the wet zone. The government has attempted to preserve sanctuaries for natural vegetation and animal life, however. Ruhunu National Park in the southeast protects herds of elephant, deer, and peacocks, and Wilpattu National Park in the northwest preserves the habitats of many water birds, such as storks, pelicans, ibis, and spoonbills. During the Mahaweli Ganga Program of the 1970s and 1980s in northern Sri Lanka, the government set aside four areas of land totalling 190,000 hectares as national parks.

Land Use and Settlement Patterns

The dominant pattern of human settlement during the last 2,500 years has consisted of village farming communities. Even in the 1980s, the majority of people lived in small villages and worked at agricultural pursuits. Traditional farming techniques and lifestyles revolve around two types of farming—"wet" and "dry"—depending upon the availability of water (see Agriculture, ch. 3).

The typical settlement pattern in the rice-growing areas is a compact group of houses or neighborhood surrounding one or several religious centers that serve as the focus for communal activities. Sometimes the houses may be situated along a major road and include a few shops, or the village may include several outlying hamlets. The life-sustaining rice fields begin where the houses end and stretch into the distance. Some irrigated fields may include other cash crops, such as sugarcane, or groves of coconut trees. Palmyra trees grow on the borders of fields or along roads and paths. Individual houses also may have vegetable gardens in their compounds. During the rainy seasons and thereafter, when the fields are covered by growing crops, the village environment is intensely verdant.

The nature of agricultural pursuits in Sri Lanka has changed over the centuries and has usually depended upon the availability of arable land and water resources. In earlier times, when villagers had access to plentiful forests that separated settlements from each other, slash-and-burn agriculture was a standard technique. As expanding population and commercial pressures reduced the amount of available forestland, however, slash-and-burn cultivation steadily declined in favor of permanent cultivation by private owners. Until the thirteenth century, the village farming communities were mainly on the northern plains around Anuradhapura and then Polonnaruwa, but they later shifted to the southwest (see Decline

of the Sinhalese Kingdom, 1200–1500, ch. 1). In the 1980s, wide expanses of the northern and eastern plains were sparsely populated, with scattered villages each huddled around an artificial lake. The Jaffna Peninsula, although a dry area, is densely populated and intensively cultivated. The southwest contains most of the people, and villages are densely clustered with little unused land (see Population, this ch.). In the Central Highlands around Kandy, villagers faced with limited flat land have developed intricately terraced hillsides where they grow rice. In the 1970s and 1980s, the wet cultivation area was expanding rapidly, as the government implemented large-scale irrigation projects to restore the dry zone to agricultural productivity. In the 1980s, the area drained by the Mahaweli Ganga changed from a sparsely inhabited region to a wet rice area similar to the southwest. Through such projects, the government of Sri Lanka has planned to recreate in the dry zone the lush, irrigated landscape associated with the ancient Sinhalese civilization.

Beginning in the sixteenth century and culminating during the British rule of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the plantation economy came to dominate large sections of the highlands. Plantation farming resulted in a drastic reduction in the natural forest cover and the substitution of domesticated crops, such as rubber, tea, or cinnamon. It also brought about a changed life-style, as the last hunting-and-gathering societies retreated into smaller areas and laborers moved into the highlands to work on plantations. Through the late twentieth century, workers on large plantations lived in villages of small houses or in "line rooms" containing ten to twelve units. The numerous plantations of small landholders frequently included attached hamlets of workers in addition to the independent houses of the plantation owners.

The coastal belt surrounding the island contains a different settlement pattern that has evolved from older fishing villages. Separate fishing settlements expanded laterally along the coast, linked by a coastal highway and a railway. The mobility of the coastal population during colonial times and after independence led to an increase in the size and number of villages, as well as to the development of growing urban centers with outside contacts. In the 1980s, it was possible to drive for many kilometers along the southwest coast without finding a break in the string of villages and bazaar centers merging into each other and into towns.

People

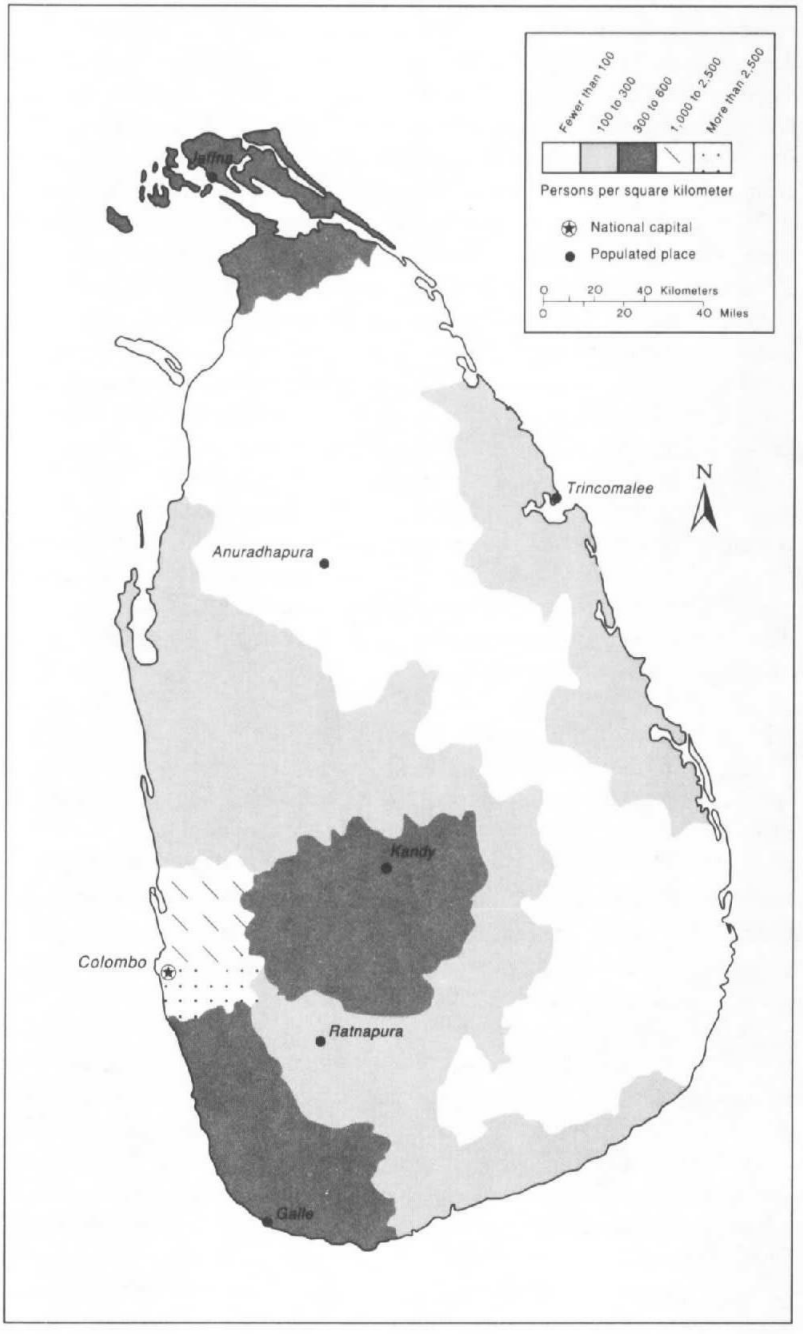
Population

During the early nineteenth century, the population of Sri Lanka was small and concentrated in the southwestern part of the island and in the Jaffna Peninsula in the north. The first official census,

conducted by the British in 1871, recorded a total population of 2.8 million. Between then and the 1980s, the population increased sixfold. Population growth until around 1900 was given impetus by considerable immigration from southern India, as the British brought in hundreds of thousands of Tamils to work the plantation economy. These immigrants accounted for an estimated 40 to 70 percent of the population increase during the nineteenth century. Another significant factor in the growth of population after 1900 was a decline in mortality rates (see Health, this ch.). The period of fastest growth was the decade after independence, when the annual rate of increase was 2.8 percent. The official total in the 1981 census was 14,846,750, and some projections suggested a total of 18 million by 1991 and between 20 and 21 million by 2001. Furthermore, if the 1980s trends continue, the population will double in forty years (see table 2, Appendix).

Although the increase in the number of people remained a major problem for Sri Lanka, there were indications in the 1980s that the country had moved beyond a period of uncontrolled population expansion into a pattern similar to that of more industrialized nations. The crude fertility rate declined from 5.3 in 1953—at the height of the postindependence baby boom—to 3.3 in 1981. Emigration, which outpaced immigration after 1953, also contributed to the decline in population growth. Between 1971 and 1981, for example, 313,000 Tamil workers from the plantation areas emigrated to south India. Increased employment opportunities in the Arab nations also attracted a substantial annual flow of workers from Sri Lanka (a total of 57,000 in 1981 alone). The lowering of the population growth rate was accompanied by changes in the age distribution, with the older age-groups increasing, and by the concentration of people in urban areas. Those phenomena also accompanied lower population growth in Europe and the United States.

Population is not uniformly spread but is concentrated within the wet zone and urban centers on the coast and the Jaffna Peninsula. The country's mean population density—based on 1981 census data—was 230 persons per square kilometer, but in Colombo District density was 2,605 persons per square kilometer. In contrast, the dry zone districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaittivu, and Moneragala had fewer than fifty-five persons per square kilometer. One reason for the unequal settlement pattern was the rainfall distribution, which made it possible for the wet zones to support larger village farming populations. Another reason was the slow but steady concentration of people in urban centers during the twentieth century. The ratio of Sri Lankans living in cities increased from 11 percent in 1871 to 15 percent in 1946 and 21.5 percent in 1981 (see fig. 5).



Source: Based on information from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Statistics Department, *Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka,* Colombo, 1985.

Figure 5. Distribution of Population, 1985

By 1985 a slowly declining crude birth rate hinted at a gradual aging of the population and changed requirements for social services (see table 3, Appendix). For the time being, however, there was considerable pressure for jobs, education, and welfare facilities from the large number of people who were raising families or pursuing careers. In the remaining decades of the century and beyond there was likely to be greater pressure for housing and health care for an aging population.

Urbanization has affected almost every area of the country since independence. Local market centers have grown into towns, and retail or service stores have cropped up even in small agricultural villages. The greatest growth in urban population, however, has occurred around a few large centers. In 1981 the urbanized population was 32.2 percent in Trincomalee District and 32.6 percent in Jaffna District, in contrast to the rural Moneragala District where only 2.2 percent of the people lived in towns. Colombo District, with 74.4 percent urban population, experienced the largest changes. Between 1881 and 1981, the city of Colombo increased its size from 25 to 37 square kilometers and its population from 110,502 to 587,647.

Since independence was granted in 1948, there have been four main trends in migration. First, every year more people move from rural areas to the cities. Second, the cities have changed from concentrated centers to sprawling suburbs. During the 1970s, the city of Colombo actually lost population, mostly to neighboring cities in Colombo District. Part of the suburban growth has resulted from a planned strategy to reduce urban congestion. For example, a new parliamentary complex opened in Sri Jayewardenepura in the suburb of Kotte east of Colombo in 1982 (although Colombo is still considered the national capital). Much of the growth, however, has been the unplanned proliferation of slums inhabited by poor and unskilled masses and lacking public utilities or services. Third, government irrigation projects attracted many farmers from the wet zone to the pioneer settlements in the dry zone. During the decade ending in 1981, the highest rates of population increase occurred in the districts of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, where the Mahaweli Ganga Program attracted immigrant farmers. Fourth, Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic struggles displaced many people during the 1970s and 1980s. During a Tamil repatriation program in the 1970s, large numbers of Tamil plantation workers left for India or moved out of the hill areas toward the north and the east. After the intensification of communal fighting in 1983, an estimated 100,000 Tamil refugees fled to India, where they lived in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu State, and thousands more were relocated

through refugee agencies in Sri Lanka (see The Tamil Insurgency, ch. 5). During the counterinsurgency operations of the Sri Lankan and Indian armies in 1987 and 1988, many residents of the Jaffna Peninsula fled their homes for temporary shelter in refugee camps (see The Armed Forces, ch. 5).

As in South Asia as a whole—and in contrast to global patterns—Sri Lankan males outnumbered females in the mid-1980s. In Sri Lanka, for every 100 female births registered there were 104 males. In the past, the gender ratio of the general population was even more unequal—113 men to 100 women in 1941. In part, this imbalance is attributed to the emigration of plantation workers, many of whom were men. Much of the change, however, may be due to a growing sensitivity to the health of women. Since 1963, the average female life expectancy has increased by seven years, while male life expectancy has risen by three years.

Ethnic Groups

The people of Sri Lanka are divided into ethnic groups whose conflicts have dominated public life since the nineteenth century. The two main characteristics that mark a person's ethnic heritage are language and religion, which intersect to create four major ethnic groups—the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Muslims, and the Burghers (see fig. 6). Ethnic divisions are not based on race or physical appearance; some Sri Lankans claim to determine the ethnicity of a person by his facial characteristics or color, but in reality such premises are not provable. There is nothing in the languages or religious systems in Sri Lanka that officially promotes the social segregation of their adherents, but historical circumstances have favored one or more of the groups at different times, leading to hostility and competition for political and economic power.

Sinhalese

The Sinhalese are the largest ethnic group in the country, officially comprising 11 million people or 74 percent of the population in 1981. They are distinguished primarily by their language, Sinhala, which is a member of the Indo-European linguistic group that includes Hindi and other north Indian tongues as well as most of the languages of Europe. It is likely that groups from north India introduced an early form of Sinhala when they migrated to the island around 500 B.C., bringing with them the agricultural economy that has remained dominant to the twentieth century. From early times, however, Sinhala has included a large number of loan words and constructs from Tamil, and modern speech includes many expressions from European languages, especially English.

The Sinhalese claim to be descendants of Prince Vijaya and his band of immigrants from northern India, but it is probable that the original group of Sinhalese immigrants intermarried with indigenous inhabitants (see Ancient Legends and Chronicles, ch. 1). The Sinhalese gradually absorbed a wide variety of castes or tribal groups from the island and from southern India during the last 2,500 years.

The Buddhist religion reinforces the solidarity of the Sinhalese as an ethnic community. In 1988 approximately 93 percent of the Sinhala speakers were Buddhists, and 99.5 percent of the Buddhists in Sri Lanka spoke Sinhala. The most popular Sinhalese folklore, literature, and rituals teach children from an early age the uniqueness of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the long relationship between Buddhism and the culture and politics of the island, and the importance of preserving this fragile cultural inheritance. Buddhist monks are accorded great respect and participate in services at the notable events in people's lives. To become a monk is a highly valued career goal for many young men. The neighboring Buddhist monastery or shrine is the center of cultural life for Sinhalese villagers (see Buddhism, this ch.).

Their shared language and religion unite all ethnic Sinhalese, but there is a clear difference between the "Kandyan" and the "low-country" Sinhalese. Because the Kingdom of Kandy in the highlands remained independent until 1818, conservative cultural and social forms remained in force there. English education was less respected, and traditional Buddhist education remained a vital force in the preservation of Sinhalese culture. The former Kandyan nobility retained their social prestige, and caste divisions linked to occupational roles changed slowly. The plains and the coast of Sri Lanka, on the other hand, experienced great change under 400 years of European rule. Substantial numbers of coastal people, especially among the Karava (see Glossary) caste, converted to Christianity through determined missionary efforts of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British; 66 percent of the Roman Catholics and 43 percent of the Protestants in the early 1980s were Sinhalese. Social mobility based on economic opportunity or service to the colonial governments allowed entire caste or kin groups to move up in the social hierarchy. The old conceptions of noble or servile status declined, and a new elite developed on the basis of its members' knowledge of European languages and civil administration. The Dutch legal system changed traditional family law. A wider, more cosmopolitan outlook differentiated the low-country Sinhalese from the more "old fashioned" inhabitants of highlands (see Caste, this ch.).

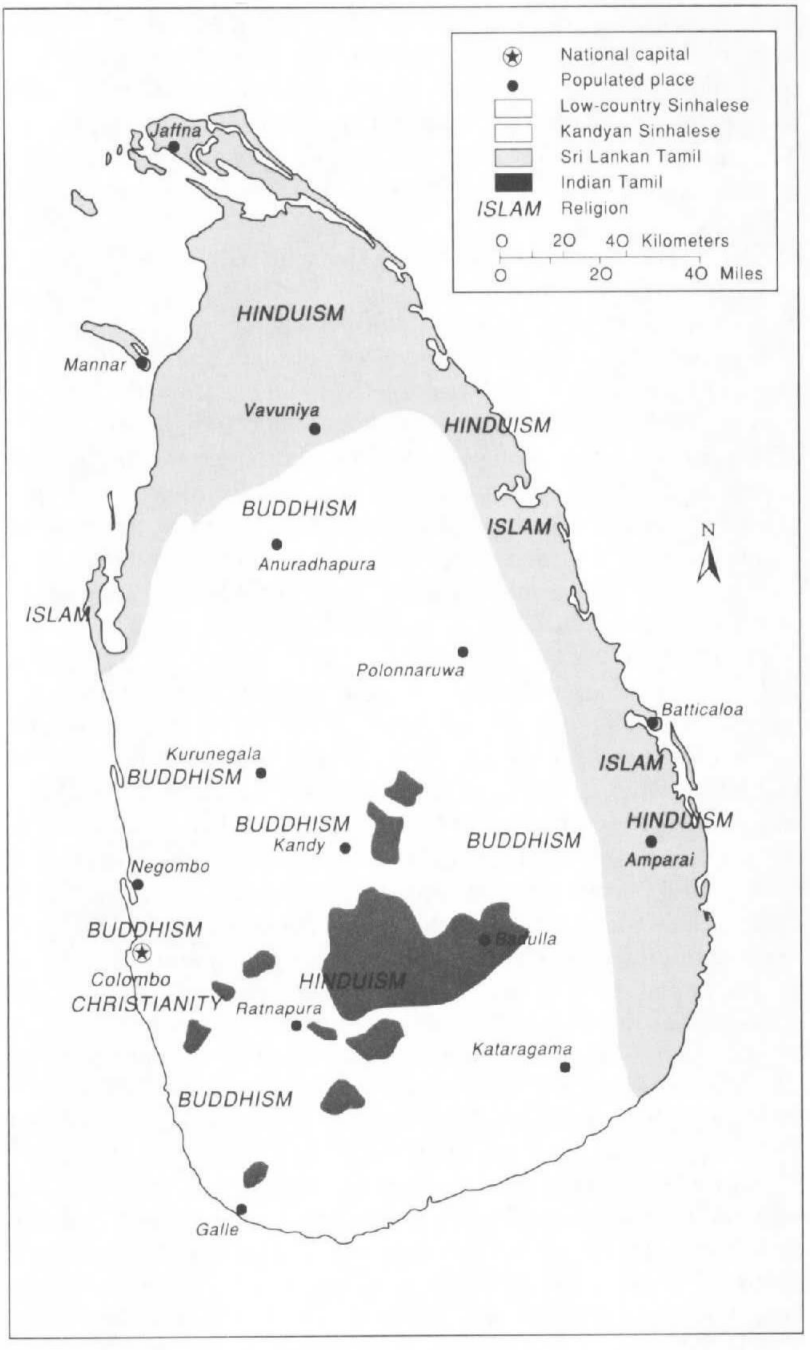


Figure 6. Ethnolinguistic Groups and Religions, 1988

Tamils

The people collectively known as the Tamils (see Glossary), comprising 2,700,000 persons or approximately 18 percent of the population in 1981, use the Tamil language as their native tongue. Tamil is one of the Dravidian (see Glossary) languages found almost exclusively in peninsular India. It existed in South Asia before the arrival of people speaking Indo-European languages in about 1500 B.C. Tamil literature of a high quality has survived for at least 2,000 years in southern India, and although the Tamil language absorbed many words from northern Indian languages, in the late twentieth century it retained many forms of a purely Dravidian speech—a fact that is of considerable pride to its speakers. Tamil is spoken by at least 40 million people in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (the "land of the Tamils"), and by millions more in neighboring states of southern India and among Tamil emigrants throughout the world.

There was a constant stream of migration from southern India to Sri Lanka from prehistoric times. Once the Sinhalese controlled Sri Lanka, however, they viewed their own language and culture as native to the island, and in their eyes Tamil-speaking immigrants constituted a foreign ethnic community. Some of these immigrants appear to have abandoned Tamil for Sinhala and become part of the Sinhalese caste system. Most however, continued to speak Tamil and looked toward southern India as their cultural homeland. Their connections with Tamil Nadu received periodic reinforcement during struggles between the kings of Sri Lanka and southern India that peaked in the wars with the Chola (see Rise of Sinhalese and Tamil Ethnic Awareness, ch. 1). It is probable that the ancestors of many Tamil speakers entered the country as a result of the Chola conquest, for some personal names and some constructions used in Sri Lankan Tamil are reminiscent of the Chola period.

The Tamil speakers in Sri Lanka are divided into two groups that have quite different origins and relationships to the country. The Sri Lankan Tamils trace their immigration to the distant past and are effectively a native minority. In 1981 they numbered 1,886,872, or 12.7 percent of the population. The Indian Tamils are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants who came under British sponsorship to Sri Lanka to work on plantations in the central highlands. In 1981 they numbered 818,656, or 5.5 percent of the population. Because they lived on plantation settlements, separate from other groups, including the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Indian Tamils have not become an integral part of society and indeed have been viewed by the Sinhalese as foreigners. The

population of Indian Tamils has been shrinking through programs repatriating them to Tamil Nadu (see Independence, ch. 1).

Ethnic Tamils are united to each other by their common religious beliefs, and the Tamil language and culture. Some 80 percent of the Sri Lankan Tamils and 90 percent of the Indian Tamils are Hindus. They have little contact with Buddhism, and they worship the Hindu pantheon of gods. Their religious myths, stories of saints, literature, and rituals are distinct from the cultural sources of the Sinhalese (see Hinduism, this ch.). The caste groups of the Tamils are also different from those of the Sinhalese, and they have their rationale in religious ideologies that the Sinhalese do not share. Religion and caste do, however, create divisions within the Tamil community. Most of the Indian Tamils are members of low Indian castes that are not respected by the upper- and middle-level castes of the Sri Lankan Tamils (see Caste, this ch.). Furthermore, a minority of the Tamils—4.3 percent of the Sri Lankan Tamils and 7.6 percent of the Indian Tamils—are converts to Christianity, with their own places of worship and separate cultural lives. In this way, the large Tamil minority in Sri Lanka is effectively separated from the mainstream Sinhalese culture and is fragmented into two major groups with their own Christian minorities.

Muslims

Muslims, who make up approximately 7 percent of the population, comprise a group of minorities practicing the religion of Islam. As in the case of the other ethnic groups, the Muslims have their own separate sites of worship, religious and cultural heroes, social circles, and even languages. The Muslim community is divided into three main sections—the Sri Lankan Moors, the Indian Moors, and the Malays, each with its own history and traditions.

The Sri Lankan Moors make up 93 percent of the Muslim population and 7 percent of the total population of the country (1,046,926 people in 1981). They trace their ancestry to Arab traders who moved to southern India and Sri Lanka some time between the eighth and fifteenth centuries, adopted the Tamil language that was the common language of Indian Ocean trade, and settled permanently in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Moors lived primarily in coastal trading and agricultural communities, preserving their Islamic cultural heritage while adopting many southern Asian customs. During the period of Portuguese colonization, the Moors suffered from persecution, and many moved to the Central Highlands, where their descendants remain. The language of the Sri Lankan Moors is Tamil, or a type of "Arabic Tamil" that contains a large number of Arabic words. On the east coast, their family

lines are traced through women, as in kinship systems of the southwest Indian state of Kerala, but they govern themselves through Islamic law (see Family; Islam, this ch.).

The Indian Moors are Muslims who trace their origins to immigrants searching for business opportunities during the colonial period. Some of these people came to the country as far back as Portuguese times; others arrived during the British period from various parts of India. The Memon, originally from Sind (in modern Pakistan), first arrived in 1870; in the 1980s they numbered only about 3,000. The Bohra and the Khoja came from northwestern India (Gujarat State) after 1880; in the 1980s they collectively numbered fewer than 2,000. These groups tended to retain their own places of worship and the languages of their ancestral homelands.

The Malays originated in Southeast Asia. Their ancestors came to the country when both Sri Lanka and Indonesia were colonies of the Dutch. Most of the early Malay immigrants were soldiers, posted by the Dutch colonial administration to Sri Lanka, who decided to settle on the island. Other immigrants were convicts or members of noble houses from Indonesia who were exiled to Sri Lanka and who never left. The main source of a continuing Malay identity is their common Malay language (*bahasa melayu*), which includes numerous words absorbed from Sinhalese and Tamil, and is spoken at home. In the 1980s, the Malays comprised about 5 percent of the Muslim population in Sri Lanka.

Burghers

The term Burgher was applied during the period of Dutch rule to European nationals living in Sri Lanka. By extension it came to signify any permanent resident of the country who could trace ancestry back to Europe. Eventually it included both Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Burghers. Always proud of their racial origins, the Burghers further distanced themselves from the mass of Sri Lankan citizens by immersing themselves in European culture, speaking the language of the current European colonial government, and dominating the best colonial educational and administrative positions. They have generally remained Christians and live in urban locations. Since independence, however, the Burgher community has lost influence and in turn has been shrinking in size because of emigration. In 1981 the Burghers made up .3 percent (39,374 people) of the population.

Veddah

The Veddah (see Glossary) are the last descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Sri Lanka, predating the arrival of the Sinhalese.