

CHAPTER 2 PSEUDO-MODERNIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PROCESS OF NATION-BUILDING IN SRI LANKA

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When modernization paradigm emerged as a dominant conceptual model in sociology in the 1950's, it made significant impact on the social and political institutions in South Asia. Modernization was conceptualized as a wide-ranging process encompassing economic, social, political and cultural domains. It was hoped that, once exposed to forces of modernization, people in these countries would merge into broadly unified nation-states, largely similar to those that emerged in many Western countries after Second World War. However, the expected social transition did not materialize. Why?

Alternative theoretical paradigms have sought to answer the above question (Alavi and Shanin 1982). The present paper, however is not concerned directly with the above question or the possible answers to it. Rather it is primarily concerned with the nature of the changes that have taken place in Sri Lanka and their implications for the formation and perpetuation of social and cultural identities in the country in order to focus on the question as to why the post-colonial Sri Lankan state found it difficult to hold together its constituent parts.

Colonialism, Elite Formation and the Subversion of the Process of Modernization in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka a highly stratified colonial elite structure provided the backdrop of anti-colonial movement. The anti-colonial, nationalist movement which emerged as a significant social force in the late 19th century was linked to the majority Sinhalese Buddhist community. It failed to develop into a truly national movement that cut across ethnic and religious boundaries as ethnic identities determined the political competitions. On the other hand, there were influential and active national leaders who clearly transcended ethnic and religious boundaries. Although they were the products of colonial English education, their appreciation of the value and significance of native languages, national heritage and culture was clearly evident (Wickramasuriya 1979). They became highly critical of the colonial educational practice which tended to alienate native youths from their own language, history, culture and even physical environment.

Anti-colonial, nationalist thinking which reflected in the nationalist movement as well as in the writings of nationalist leaders had a decisive influence on the policies and programmes implemented after decolonization. Yet, many of these policies and programmes often did not give expression to the substantive ideas held by some of the more enlightened national leaders. Being subjected to pressures of popular politics within a newly established, democratic political framework, political leaders competing for power tended to advocate policies which were not necessarily in keeping with the high ideals of some of the earlier nationalist leaders. These policies, in effect have acted as barriers to the emergence of a modern nation-state transcending primordial identities and divisions. In fact the potential modernizing forces like modern education, mass media, political participation and new technologies through extension services, have been "used" in these countries to reinforce rather than to neutralize traditional identities and primordial loyalties. How did this happen?

Even though the new economic opportunities created by the Portuguese and the Dutch administrations in the 16th and 17th centuries facilitated the emergence of new elites and occupational groups in the coastal areas of the country under their control (Kotalawala, 1978), it was during the British period that far reaching social structural changes were effected by both direct state intervention as well as forces of change that were set in motion by colonial policies. The long established pre-capitalist system of production relations, characterized by a largely caste-based service tenure system known as *rajakariya* (King's service) had to give way to highly commercialized production relations in large parts of the economy. Consequently, land and labour became marketable commodities which could now be sold and bought in the market.

The emergence of modern professions such as law and medicine provided opportunities for upward social mobility for those who had the means to secure the necessary training abroad. The expansion of the state bureaucracy with its legislative, judicial and executive branches since the late 19th century resulted in the creation of a host of prestigious, influential and lucrative positions which could, in turn be filled by those with the necessary credentials. The rapid expansion of state services such as education and health in the first half of the present century created many lower level positions in the state services. These positions became highly attractive to youths belonging to lower social strata. The sole objective of many of these youths was to escape from their socially inferior backgrounds. Education naturally became the primary means of achieving this objective.

During the early years of the British administration, formal education was polarized between elementary instruction in the vernacular and fee levying secondary school education provided in the English medium. Later, most schools, both state as well as private, began to provide instruction in the vernacular (Sinhala and Tamil) while a few schools continued to provide

instruction in the English medium (Fernando 1979). Yet, the polarization of the "educated" population into two groups, one, urban English-educated and the other, mostly rural vernacular-educated continued unabated. This bifurcation tended to follow broad social class divisions; while affluent parents in general could send their children to urban schools where English was the medium of instruction, the most the ordinary rural parents could do was to give their children a vernacular education in rural schools. So, the dream of early nationalist leaders like Ponnambalam Arunachalam to provide the native youths with a bilingual education was shattered by the policies that were implemented by policy makers, both before and after independence.

With the introduction of universal free education in the early 1940s, the ranks of the vernacular educated rural youth in the country swelled rapidly. The rapid expansion of the population of lower age cohorts at least since the late 1940's also made a significant contribution to this trend. On the other hand, English continued to be the official language as well as the medium of instruction in the universities for nearly a decade since independence. Consequently, access to higher positions in the state bureaucracy as well as modern professions was restricted to those with an English education. On the other hand, the rapid expansion of education gave birth to a vocal, rural intelligentsia representing the interests of the rural population, in particular, of rural youth aspiring for higher social positions. They, in turn began to use the newly created democratic space to articulate their grievances and mobilize popular support against the dominance of the privileged, westernized elite which hitherto monopolized higher positions in the state bureaucracy and modern professions. The rise of the centre-left coalition of the MEP in the early 1950's and its landslide electoral triumph in 1956 was largely a reflection of the growing ideological dominance of the new, nationalist intelligentsia associated with the majority Sinhala Buddhist rural population.

Expansion of education in Sri Lanka over the last 50 years has been phenomenal. While the literacy rate has reached nearly 90%, the proportion of the population with a secondary education is also substantial. Yet, the state policies adopted over the last several decades coupled with other factors have led to the segregation of the young population in the country on ethno-linguistic grounds preventing them from forming a broad national identity.

Media Participation and Cultural Identity

Modernization theorists identified increased media participation as an important factor of modernization. While literacy enables ordinary people to read printed material such as newspapers, it also makes them more receptive to messages emanating from extension services and so on. On the other hand, availability of national level radio, telecommunication and other electronic communication services could potentially integrate an otherwise

dispersed and segregated population. The expansion of mass media has been an important aspect of the process of social and cultural change in Sri Lanka in the recent past. Yet, given the expansion of mono-lingual education described earlier, and the continuing spatial segregation of ethnic communities in many parts of the country, modern mass media such as radio, film and the newspapers have not played a significant part in forging a national identity that transcends ethno-linguistic boundaries. Perhaps, their role in reinforcing ethnic identities has been far more significant than their integrative influence.

Industrialization and Urbanization

Social structural changes resulting from the process of industrialization and urbanization are important dimensions of modernization. However, not many ex-colonial, Third World countries have undergone a process of rapid urban industrialization. Contrary to the expectations of the nationalist political elites who succeeded colonial administrations in those countries, Sri Lanka has failed to emerge as "modern nation states" through a process of rapid economic growth and modernization.

On the political front, mobilization of masses by national and local leaders by and large tended to follow ethno-linguistic divisions and this made the competition for power and resources to appear as one between ethnic groups as well. When the issues of political reform were being discussed in the 1920's, representation on ethnic and regional lines as against territorial representation emerged as the most favoured option, particular from the point of view of minorities (Greenstreet 1982). Many representatives of the latter appeared to have felt that, in a centralized, territorially based representative system of government, minorities would be placed in a disadvantageous position with respect to sharing of power and resources. Such perceptions continued to reinforce ethnic identities in the country and decisively influenced the process of political mobilization ever since.

Another important factor which contributed to ethnic cleavages has been the growing significance of the state in the national economy, particularly since the late 1950's. This pattern continued till 1977 when the economy was freed from the tight grip of the state through a package of liberal economic policies involving the privatization of public enterprises, etc. Prior to liberalization, the central administration exercised considerable control over the allocation of productive resources and public goods. Since the corporate, private sector played a much less significant part in the national economy, most people had to depend almost entirely on state institutions for various needs. This was particularly significant for youths aspiring for social mobility as their life chances depended heavily on state policies on education and employment.

In the absence of rapid economic growth at a time when population was rapidly expanding, state could hardly satisfy the rising aspirations of youths.

While this naturally led to the disappointment of many youth, many of those who were adversely affected perceived state policies as unjust and even discriminatory. On the other hand, the allocation of scarce resources and public goods by a highly politicized state bureaucracy was bound to lead to corruption, favoritism and abuse. This practice alienated many youths who failed to reach their desired goals.

As mentioned earlier, the rapid expansion of free education in the country gave rise to a large mass of rural youths with aspirations for social mobility. However, owing to the lack of employment opportunities, more and more of them joined the ranks of the unemployed. The growing competition for the few opportunities available often favoured those who were politically and socially connected to powerful people, leading to the marginalization of the others. Persisting regional disparities in terms of social infrastructure such as educational facilities added another dimension to the sense of deprivation among marginalized groups. The view that an urban elite continued to dominate the politico-economic establishment gained wide acceptance among politically articulate rural youths who have been socialized into believing that they are the legitimate custodians of the "motherland". From here, it was only a small step to argue that the urban (Westernized) elite had no legitimate claim over state power. Hence, the primary objective of rural youth movements to capture state power.

The political posture of the JVP, radical Sinhalese youth movement, represents an interesting blend of interest group politics with identity politics. (1) While the former is a reflection of its radical leftist orientation which is critical for the mobilization of the underprivileged, the latter is a product of the growing tension between ethnic groups within a centralized national polity. Rural Sinhalese youths, who were socialized under the direct influence of a "nationalized" education system, socialist politics and a stagnant national economy, tended to feel threatened by "external" forces including those that threaten the territorial integrity of the Sri Lankan state.

On the other hand, the underprivileged youths, belonging to ethnic minorities were also socialized under the direct influence of nationalist forces. Given the disadvantageous position their elite political leadership occupied in the national political arena, both the leaders as well as their youthful followers tended to articulate their grievances in terms of their minority status. Certain policies that were adopted by the political centre after independence in order to pacify the nationalist forces in the South and later to contain the growing restlessness among disadvantaged rural Sinhalese youths, were perceived by the educated minority youths as signs of racial discrimination. At a time when the centralized state was the dominant influence on the life chances of the swabhasha - educated youths, policy measures taken by the state tended to be perceived as critical in terms of their likely impact on the life chances of diverse interest groups. With the increasing significance of the nationalist

discourse and the rising ethnic tension in the country, ethnic identities of many people tended to get hardened. Such groups, in turn tended to get drawn into liberation movements which promised to promote and safeguard their interests within a separate state.

Thus, the forces of modernization as they evolved in Sri Lanka seemed to have reinforced the pre-existing primordial identities with education playing a critical role in cultural divisions. All this has contributed to the process of a pseudo-modernization in Sri Lankan context.

Note

(1) JVP, or the People's Liberation Front, emerged in the late 1960's as a distinctly rural, Sinhalese youth movement in Southern Sri Lanka. It sought to challenge all other established political parties with various ideological positions.

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CHAPTER 3 INSTITUTION BUILDING IN SOUTH ASIA: DILEMMAS AND EXPERIENCE

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Implied in the very phrasing of the theme of this paper that we are *not* referring to institutions such as family, marriage, caste or similar other institutions which gradually evolve over a period of time. That is, we are talking about institutions of state and civil society which are to be built - to be deliberately inducted and sustained.

South Asian societies have many things to boast of as compared with ex-colonial states elsewhere - democratic states, independent judiciary, vibrant press etc. And yet, the crisis of institutions looms large in all of them and hence I shall focus on the dilemmas of Institution Building.

The space we are referring to is the Indian Civilizational Region. The temporal context is provided by the emergence of national states as successor states to a colonial state after the biggest and one of the longest anti-colonial struggles in history. In the colonial era anti-state mobilization was a legitimate collective enterprise, to attack state-related institutions was an act of heroism. However, there was no consensus about the nature of the anti-colonial movement.

The macro-holists believed that the anti-colonial collective action enveloped the entire population. The central thrust of this collective action was that everybody wanted to be emancipated from the subjecthood of the colonial state to the citizenship of the national state. In this view, the specific deprivations of particular collectivities as motive force for participation was relegated to the background. In contrast, the micro-nominalists emphasized precisely the specific interests of particular collectivities - the peasantry, industrial workers, women, youth, Muslims, Sikhs and the like. In this rendition, there was nothing like an anti-colonial struggle informing it of collective orientation enveloping the entire population. Each of the constituent elements plumbed for their benefits and improvements which in turn called for the creation of appropriate institutional mechanisms so as to effectively bargain with the colonial state (Oommen 1985).

If the macro-holists were 'mobilisationists' determined to demolish the colonial state lock, stock and barrel, the micro-nominalists were 'institutionalists' who bargained for wresting their rights, and entitlements from the colonial state. This contestation, posed the original dilemma of institution building for