

ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND ROLE OF REFORM ORGANIZATIONS IN SRI LANKA

Dr. M.A.S.R. Sanjeevi Manthirathne

(Senior Lecturer),

Department of History and Archaeology,

University of Sri Jayewardenepura Sri Lanka,

Abstract,

Reform organizations origin and established in Sri Lanka as a result of spreading liberal ideas in western and eastern part of the world. It was originally arranged in anti-Christian tone based on the main Buddhist nationalist movement lead by Anagarika Dharmapala. Buddhist movement's origin from the Kandy up to maritime regions in low country had a evolutionary history of ending up by defeating Christians in five great debates under supremacy of Migettuvatte Gunananda thero and also resulted for the arrival of Henry Olcott and establishment of Theosophical society. Ceylon Agriculture Association, Plumbago Merchant Association lead the way for social reformation socio-economic sector. Ceylon National Association, Temperance Movement, Ceylon Social Reform Society and Ceylon Reform league followed by English educated wealthy class made a socio, economic, political and cultural transformation through these reform organizations. Primary objective of the research is based on the role of reform organizations. Through these reform organizations, they were able to train the Sri Lankan society into social politics. Secondary objective is, through that social political training, it positively impact to uplift the national political movement in the country. Primary and secondary textual written sources used for this research. Field visit for National Archives for collecting records and information for this research. For the conclusion, the cultural nationalism and anti- western nature in those movements were latterly minimized and agitation for liberal democratic social values emerged. Emergence of the English educated middle class and their

agitation for the political power and “karawa” cast social emergence in low country and their power struggle with traditional aristocrats specially highlighted with the activities of reforms organizations. However these leaders stressed with maintaing indigenous cultural, ideological, religious establishments, which was considered as the overall interest of the local population of Sri Lanka.

KEY WORDS- LIBERAL, ANTI-CHRISTIAN, IMPACT, UPLIFT, AGITATION, IDEOLOGICAL.

Introduction

The lands which remained under the occupation and hegemony of imperialist rulers continued to suffer economically, politically, culturally, religiously and so on however, under the dissemination of liberal ideas emanating from the Western world in particular from the outbreak of the war of American Independence and French Revolution, began thinking of creating political consciousness among the subjugated people by the leaders from the occupying lands. It was in this context that in the first decade of the twentieth century there was a perceptible quickening in the pace of political activity in the island after the near- immobility in formal politics in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Again, there was Japan’s victory over Russia, hailed with almost as much enthusiasm by sections of the elite in Sri Lanka (especially the Buddhist activists) as it was in other parts of Asia. Secondly-and perhaps more important in a practical sense was the great victory of Liberals in the British general election of 1906, marking the end of nearly twenty years of Tory rule and arousing

hopes of colonial reform, largely because of the ‘pro-Boer’ stand taken by an influential section of the Liberal party. As a result of these developments, the years from around 1905 to 1919 were characterized by the growth of secondary resistance movements in the low-country- in such forms as political associations (both regional and national), trade unions and welfare associations.¹ The concept of secondary resistance was demonstrated most acutely in the resurgence of Buddhism and the sustained temperance agitation closely associated with it. While nationalist sentiments were deeply intertwined with the reassertion of Buddhist values, and despite a persistently anti-Christian tone, one of the most interesting features of the Buddhist revival in the early twentieth century was the extent to which the Buddhist movement in the hands of men like Anagarika Dharmapala, appeared almost the mirror-image of Protestant Christianity in its organizational apparatus.² It was never vehement in its propaganda techniques and the morale was upheld as an integral part of the current Buddhist culture. The new Buddhist revivalist was indeed having the same missionary spirit as those of Christians. Dharmapala grasped, as few of his contemporaries did, the political implications of the Buddhist resurgence, and he never lost sight of the need to set this within the wider framework of the rise of nationalism in Asia. But he was at the same time an unabashed advocate of a Sinhalese-Buddhist domination

1 T. Fernando and R.N. Kearney, *Modern Sri Lanka: A Society in Transition*, Syracuse, 1978, pp.10-12.

2 G. Obeyesekere, “Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon”, *Modern Ceylon Studies*, vol.I,1970, pp. 43-63.

of the island.³ His propaganda bore a remarkable similarity with Mr. Tilak who was the great champion of the Hindu resurgence in Western India. For few parts of the ex-colonial world Anthony Low's comment that 'Empire was as much religious problem as a political or economic or ideological problem.'⁴ The wealthy and the English educated people who were socially linked to them were also influenced. They started forming organizations to get their educational, economic and occupational requirements fulfilled. This was happening in the second half of the 19th century. Even though they built these organizations initially centered on some common problems affecting them, subsequently they tried to interfere in matters of political and social nature. The organizations established and movements started for these activities were of a different nature and in them the Buddhist agitation movements had the backing of the majority of people.

Buddhist Movements

Last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the closure of the long history of Kandyan Resistance Movement. It was now the turn of the Maritime regions and in particular the Western Province where the resistance of the indigenous society to the impact of British rulers took the form of religious revival, formation of political associations and incipient trade union activity.⁵ Together these constituted a process of holding off the intrusive pressures of British rule and of

3 De Silva, K.M., *History of Sri Lanka*, VijithaYapa Publication, Colombo, 2003, pp.375.

4 D. A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, London, 1973, p.14.

5 Nawarathna Bandara, A.M., *National Movements in Sri Lanka under the British Rule*, Colombo, 2007, pp.305-308

accommodating to change and absorb it in forms seldom anticipated by those who initiated them in the first place; above all it was a complex and sophisticated response to Western rule which was somewhere between the traditionalist nationalism of the Kandyans and the ideologically coherent nationalism of the twentieth century. But they had no support from the Kandyans who between the 1880s and the attainment of independence mostly took satisfaction in a new role as associates of the British and a counter weight to the reform and nationalist movements dominated by elite groups from the Maritime Provinces. Initially the response of the people to evangelization had been one of polite indifference. By the late 1840 there were signs that a more marked resistance to it was emerging in a sporadic and localized manner.⁶

The most profound resistance to the spread of Christianity was discernible in the South West from the vicinity of Colombo to Kalutara and beyond in regions that had not been affected by the rebellion. The leadership in opposition to evangelization came largely from *bhikkhus*. Whether this resistance was systematically organized and how widespread it was were matters on which there were no firm evidence but there was a perceptible change in the people's attitude to missionary enterprise from courteous indifference to positive though still somewhat muted opposition and a more explicit commitment to their traditional faith.⁷

6 De Silva, K.M., *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon 1840-1855*, London, 1965, pp.64-137.

7 De Silva, K.M., *The Government and Religion: Problems and Policies 1832 to 1910*, UCHC, pp. 187-212, particularly pp.197-98

By the 1860s the Buddhists' opposition to Christianity was much more self confident and vocal than it had been before and nothing illustrated the change in mood and tempo better than their response to challenges from missionaries to public debates and verbal. These would often become places of confrontation among the different communities and would also create an ill-will besides creating impediments to the political leadership for addressing their fundamental problem of imperialism and the occupation under which they had been living for decades together. Such disputations had been staged from the mid 1840 and in general the missionaries had used their debating skills to the obvious discomfiture of some diffident and not very erudite representatives of the traditional religions.

In 1860 the technique of the public debate which the missionaries had used so effectively in the past only succeeded in providing Buddhist spokesmen with a platform for a vigorous reassertion of the virtues of their own faith. Between 1865 and 1873 there were five debates between Christians and Buddhists and on every occasion the Buddhists faced up to their opponents with verve and assurance that had hardly been evident before.⁸ Of the five debates the first and second at Baddegama and Varagoda (both in 1865) were conducted and concluded in writing. The Udanvita (1866), Gampola (1871) and Panadura (1873) controversies were public debates. The Panadura Debate of 1873 was the most notable of them all.

MigettuwatteGunananda proved himself a debater of a very high skill and the acumen witty and eloquent if not especially erudite. A

8 Malalgoda, K., *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900: A Study in Revival and Change*, University of California Press, 1976, pp.166-169.

contemporary described him as the terror of the missionaries... more wrangler than ascetic the boldest most brilliant and most powerful champion of Sinhalese Buddhism the leader of the present revival.⁹ His triumph at Panadura set the seal on a decade of quiet recovery of Buddhist confidence. In retrospect the establishment of the 'Society for the Propagation of Buddhism' at Kotahena and of the Lankopakara Press at Galle (both in 1862) would seem to mark the first phase in this recovery. There was at the same time a parallel development independent of the theme of Buddhist – Christian confrontation which nevertheless contributed greatly to sustaining the self-assurance of Buddhists. This was the establishment in 1865 of the *RamannaNikaya* an offshoot of the *Amarapura Nikaya* and the foundation of the two centers of Oriental learning: the Vidyodaya Pirivena in 1872 and the Vidyalankara Pirivena in 1876. The *Ramanna Nikaya* laid even greater stress than the *Amarapura* on vows of poverty and humility; its establishment was in fact a conscious attempt to cleanse the *Sangha* and to return to a purer form of Buddhism free from the influence of Hinduism.¹⁰ Newspapers reports of the Panadura debate reached the United States of America where they attracted the attention of Colonel H.S Olcott, the founder (in 1875) of the Theosophical Society.

Olcott began a regular correspondence with Migettuvatte Gunananda and sent him a mass of pamphlets and tracts all deeply critical of Christianity. Migettuvatte Gunananda in turn translated these letters as well as extracts from the books, pamphlets and tracts into Sinhalese and distributed them throughout the island. Through

9 Olcott, H.S., *Old Diary Leaves*, 2nd series, Madras, 1928, p.157.

10 De Silva, K.M., *History of Sri Lanka*, Delhi, 1981, pp.340-341

these translations, the names of Olcott and his Russian associate Madame Blavatsky became familiar to Buddhists; their arrival in the island in 1880 caused great excitement and they were received amid extraordinary scenes of religious fervour. By this time the Buddhist revival was well under way. Because of their familiarity with the rationalist and scientific critique of Christianity the Theosophists gave more positive intellectual content to the movement against the Christian forces in Sri Lanka. Above all they gave the Buddhists what they lacked most, a lesson in the techniques of modern organization to match the expertise in this sphere of the missionaries and in doing so they contributed enormously to the self-confidence and morale of the Buddhists. With the help of leading bhikkus and laymen Olcott started the Buddhist Education Movement; an education fund and a Buddhist national fund were established; the celebration of the *Vesak* festival (commemorating the birth, attainment of enlightenment and demise of the Buddha) was revived and an agitation was started (from 1881) to have *Vesak* day declared an official holiday; and he was instrumental also in the design and adoption (in 1885) of a distinctive Buddhist flag.¹¹ The presence in Sri Lanka of a group of Westerners openly championing Buddhism had a deeply significant psychological effect on the Buddhist movement.

Theosophical Society

For two hundred years or more the Buddhists of Ceylon had struggled to maintain their religion under Western Christian overlords, learning to accept the hardships clinging to their ancient faith. In 1880 Col. Olcott, and Heleina Blavatsky went to Galle (Sri Lanka), where

11 De Silva, K.M., *History of Sri Lanka*, Delhi, 1981, pp.340-341

they were received very warmly. They are represented to have embraced Buddhism there by taking Panchasila. Col. Olcott writes,¹² 'Our Buddhism was that of the Master-Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom-Religion of the Aryan Upanishads, and the soul of all the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed'.¹³ Thereafter, Olcott entered upon one of the most important phases of his life in espousing the Buddhist cause. His contribution towards the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon is one of great significance as also his movement for popular education. The reason for the warm welcome to Olcott and Blavatsky was that a leading member of the Sangha, a brilliant speaker, Bhikku Migettuwatte Gunananda, who had been in correspondence with Blavatsky in New York, had received a copy of the debates unveiled from her and had translated passages from it into Sinhalese.¹⁴

Col. Olcott, accompanied by an interpreter, travelled in bullock carts to remote villages where thousands crowded to listen to him. Finding no book which gave the teachings in simple terms, he compiled *The Buddhist Catechism*¹⁵ whose Sinhalese and English versions appeared on 24 July 1881, the Esala Full Moon Day. The publication through hand presses found it difficult to meet the demand. The book had undergone many editions in a number of languages and was still in demand. Thus heralded an era of the great Buddhist revival in

12 Siriwardana, P.K.W., *Buddhism and Christianity*, Thisara Press Colombo, 1955, p.11

13 Malalasekara, G.P., *Diamond Jubilee Souvenir of the Buddhist Theosophical Society*, 1880-1940, p.04.

14 Siriwardana, P.K.W., *Buddhism and Christianity*, Thisara Press Colombo, 1955, p.11

15 *The Buddhist Catechism*, 44th editions (1938), translated into 20 languages, an internationally used textbook.

Ceylon. Col. Olcott then designed the Buddhist flag which is used all over the world as a symbol of religious unity. The flag consists of ‘the six colours’ said to be in the aura of the Buddha.¹⁶ He sponsored Dharmapala to go to the first world Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893. This brought the teachings of the Buddha to the notice of the Western world. He was also instrumental in the foundation of the Maha Bodhi Society and helped to organize Buddhism in India, besides several other countries.¹⁷

Ceylon Agricultural Association

This association was established in 1882 under the leadership of C.H. de Soysa who was a business tycoon at that time. The main objective at the beginning was to mediate in the problems of cinnamon traders. The traders who exported cinnamon had to face certain difficulties caused by the authorities of London harbour and brokers in the Mineen Street of London.¹⁸ Therefore the necessity of an organization to mediate in this matter became an urgent issue. A short time before this association was established (in 1881) the position of representative in the Legislative Council for the low country Sinhalese had become vacant. At that time the Karawe caste lawyers S.R. Fonseka and S. Dharmaratne opted for this position.¹⁹ But the Governor ignored them and continued to appoint persons from Govigama high ranking families. This became an important point for

16 Buddhist Theosophical Society, Diamond Jubilee of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, 1880-1940, pp.17-18

17 Siriwardana, P.K.W., *Buddhism and Christianity*, Thisara Press Colombo, 1955, pp.32-34

18 *The Ceylon Standard*, Supplement, 13thOct., 1906.

19 Jayasekara, P.V.J., *Social and Political Change in Ceylon, 1900-1919*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1970, p.125.

the wealthy Sri Lankan to form an association for applying pressure on the British Colonial rulers to accept their social leadership. As Patric Peebles notes; it seemed that the Ceylon Agricultural Association was formed parallel to the Ceylon Agricultural Society formed with the participation of 'Mudliyors'.²⁰ The Ceylon Agricultural Association formed in 1882 mediated on behalf of cases not directly associated with trade matters. And when there were questions about the grain tax, they held protest demonstrations demanding to invalidate it.²¹ In 1887 this organization held protest demonstrations regarding the extension of railway lines in the Uva, Northern and Southern provinces and also about the taxes levied for imports.²² From 1882 up to 1888 the Ceylon Agricultural Association had C.H. de Soysa as President. When the Duke of Edinburgh visited Sri Lanka in 1870 he enjoyed the honour of being able to arrange a feast for him.

Plumbago Merchants Union

The production and export of plumbago were the main investments areas of Sri Lankan businessmen as they had a bigger influence on this trade. Thus in 1888 the Plumbago Dealers Association was formed and the main objective the association claimed was to protect the interests of dealers engaged in mining activities through collective action.²³ This association was active for a

20 Peebles Patrik, *The Transformation of a Colonial Elite*, Chicago, 1973, pp. 231-303.

21 *The Ceylon Standard*, Supplement, 13th Oct., 1906.

22 *The Ceylon Observer*, Over Land Edition, 1st Oct., 1888.

23 Wright Arnold, *Twentieth Century Impression*, Asian Educational Services, 1999, p.588.

long time protecting the interests of miners and in 1905 its name was changed to Plumbing Merchants Union.²⁴

Ceylon National Association

The establishment of Ceylon National Association could be pointed out as an occasion which clarifies the way how the wealthy and the English educated people in Sri Lanka started to get interested in political and social problems. The association originated in 1888 by changing the name of the former Ceylon Agricultural Association. The founder members included a few lawyers of the Karawe caste who were significant among the English educated Sinhalese and a few educated Tamils including Ponnambalam Ramanathan who had a high esteem in society. When the Ceylon National Association was established the position of the Sinhalese representative of the Constitutional Council was vacant and the educated Sri Lankans were engaged in various ways to get this post. The names submitted as candidates for this post by *Ceylon Observer* newspaper were A. De A. Senarathne, A.C. Obeysekera and Walter Perera.²⁵ Other names submitted were James Pieris, JeromsPieris and E.T. De Sampayo. These three were not of Govigama Caste.²⁶ Walter Perera belonged to the Durawa caste. He had returned from the United Kingdom after serving there as a lawyer and was by that time serving as a lawyer in Sri Lanka.²⁷ James Pieris was a graduate of Cambridge University and

24 Ibid., p.588.

25 *The Ceylon Observer*, Over Land Edition, September 26, 1888.

26 Jayasekera, P.V.J., "Social and Political Change in Ceylon, 1900-1919" (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1969), p.149

27 Wright Arnold, *Twentieth Century Impression in Ceylon*, Asian Educational Services, 1999, p.105

he was the first Asian to become President of the Student Association of Cambridge University.²⁸

The majority of new educated people who were participating in the activities of the Ceylon Agricultural Association were of Karawe caste. People of this caste had acquired a fairly strong position among the pioneers of the wealthy section of society. In 1888 the young members in this association proposed to change its name to Lanka National Association at the 6th annual conference. They actually wanted to transform it into an association which discusses political issues more openly. The President of the association objected to this. He informed the association by letter that changing of the name in such a manner would transform it into a political association and he was totally against it.²⁹ Even though it was once stressed on the importance of selecting members of the Constitutional Council by vote he didn't consider it necessary to have public protests about it. Some members like him thought in a conservative manner³⁰ and they didn't want to mediate directly in political problems. A Burgher member of the association Dorn Gorst proposed to change the name of the organization to 'Ceylonese Association'.³¹ Ponnambalam Ramanadan spoke in favor of establishing the National Association. He further said that there is an urgent necessity to transform this association into a more useful one with power to influence, and address the Sri Lankans'

28Hulugalla, H.A.J., *Life and Time of D.R. Wijewardana*, The Associated News Papers of Ceylon, Colombo, 1960, p.11.

29 *The Ceylon Observer*, Over Land Edition, 1stOct., 1888.

30 NawarathnaBandara, A.M., *National Movements under the British Period in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2007, pp.317.

31 *The Ceylon Observer*, Over Land Edition, 1stOct., 1888.

different interests rather than the Europeans; an association of this type is of great importance to represent those interests according to him. He further said “Our expectations may appear like going against our European brothers. We all accept the great service rendered by them to our country. We only want to represent our own specific interests.”³² He also didn’t forget to stress that the efforts undertaken are not meant for forming an anti-British political campaign. He in fact wanted to dispel any doubts about the possibility of being accused of treason. “I can assure that we are not going to launch a revolution here. We would like to offer our respect and honor to the British Government now as well as in the future as we did in the past,” said Ramanathan. He added that perhaps later we may also have to speak about reforms to the Constitutional Assembly in addition to our agricultural needs.³³ Ponnambalam Ramanathan was selected as the President.

It is noteworthy that even though such a National Association was formed, it was only limited to a small group. The total number who voted for and against this proposal was nineteen.³⁴ In 1891 the local division of the Civil Service was established due to its agitation. In 1895 A. de A. Seneviratne became its President and, since then up to 1906 it couldn’t hold a single meeting.³⁵ In 1906 efforts were undertaken to reorganize the activities of the National Association under the leadership of Ponnambalam Ramanadan. One reason for this effort to originate was the increasing interest in politics of the youth

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 *The Ceylon Observer*, Over Land Edition, 1stOct., 1888.

35 *The Ceylon Standard*, Supplement 13thOct., 1906, De Silva, K.M., “The Administration System”, p.223

who were becoming part of the English educated elite. English educated people belonging to various religious and national groups participated in this occasion. Among the participants were G.H. Thomas, E.W. Vangihsil, E.N. Shockman, Hector Vanculanberg, Charles Pieris, James Pieris, Charles Batuwantudawe, John de Silva, Jacob de Mel, Saint V. Jayawardena, N.A. Arulanandan, S.C.K. Ratnam, N. Ratnasabhpathi, Sarawanamuttu, T. Muthukumaraswamy, C.A. Hewawitharana, Donald Obesekera, E.W. Perera, and Hector Jayawardena.³⁶

Temperance Movement

The first attacks on the reprehensible features of the government's excise policy the proliferation of taverns in all parts of the country in a sordid pursuit of revenue without heed to the social evil of drunkenness, which spread even more rapidly than the taverns had come from the missionaries and other Christian organizations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They were joined in this enterprise by Buddhists, who by the beginning of the twentieth century were the most vocal if not the most enthusiastic advocates of temperance; within a decade they had succeeded in taking over the leadership of the movement and, more significantly, in giving it a distinct Buddhist identity. Although Christian groups continued their association with temperance agitation, their role was now clearly that of a junior partner whose moral position in the campaign was being cleverly undermined by the success with which Buddhist temperance

36 *The Ceylon Observer*, Over Land Edition, 1stOct., 1906.

enthusiasts linked consumption of liquor with westernization and ‘Christianization’.³⁷

The temperance agitation of the first two decades of the twentieth century-it reached two distinct peaks, one in 1903-5 and a more important one in 1911-14 linked the elite, and particularly its Buddhist segment, with the masses in a common purpose which, though primarily religious in form and content, was never without political overtones. Disparagement of Christianity and attacks on Christian values could be, and were, adroitly extended to cover the British government as well; the fact that some influential officials were articulate Christians was deftly used to *bring* the government itself-as a ‘Christian’ administration within the scope of these criticisms.³⁸ For the elite who moved into the leadership of the temperance agitation the first decade of the twentieth century this was a consolation prize, a surrogate for participation in the government of the country for which they yearned but which lay beyond their grasp; it introduced them to the mechanics of organizing public opinion through the network of temperance societies which sprang up in and around Colombo and other parts of the country.³⁹ Again, with this temperance activity a stratum of society which had hitherto been quiescent if not inarticulate -namely the lower rungs of the rural elite consisting largely of notaries, schoolteachers and small traders made its presence felt as an

37 R. D. Gunawardesia, ‘The Reform Movement and Political Organizations in Ceylon with special reference to the Temperance Movement and Regional Associations, 1900-1930’,(unpublished PH.D. thesis, University of Sri Lanka, Peradeniya, 1976), pp. 14-73.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-73.

39 Roberts Michal Elite, *Nationalism and the Nationalist Movement in British Ceylon*, Colombo, Department of National Archives, 1977, pp. 23-28.

indispensable link between the rural masses and the leadership of the movement. The Hapitigam complex of temperance societies was perhaps the most efficient and effective in the network built up in 1903-05.⁴⁰ It drew crowds of 20, 000 or more to its meetings this rural area at a time when the population of the Colombo district (excluding the municipality of Colombo) was a little over 600, 000. The man behind it was Don Stephen Senanayake who had made his fortune in Plumbago among other things, and who was the D. S. and D. C. Senanayake, all of whom made their into public life through the temperance movement. It provided he take off point into national politics for the Senanayake family.

When this first phase in temperance agitation petered out after 1905, its organizational apparatus was not dismantled but survived to be used for other purposes, mainly religious ones. With the revival British administrators would have used the ward recrudescence of temperance agitation in 1911, this network of village and urban units was revamped and extended to cover most parts of the low-country, and beyond temperance work narrowly defined (which continued to be the main focus of activity) it spread to the wider aspects of rural regeneration and welfare.⁴¹ Between the temperance agitation of 1903-5 and that of 1911-14 there were substantial differences. The campaigns 1911-14 covered a much wider area, and the response they evoked at the grass roots level was, if anything, even more

40 *Ibid.*, pp.30,31.

41 Fernando P.T.M. Buddhist Leadership in the Nationalist Movement of the Ceylon, The Role of the Temperance Campaign, *Social Copass*, vol.20, no.2, 1973, pp. 333-336.

enthusiastic.⁴² There was greater sophistication in the organizational techniques adopted, and above all it came as near as ever in the early twentieth century to a politicized movement. With the formation of the Total Abstinence Central Union, the temperance agitation grew in strength between 1913 and 1914, and assumed the proportions of a popular movement with distinct potential for transformation into a political struggle with wide mass support.⁴³ Some temperance leaders, among them F. R. and D. S. Senanayake, visualized the network of temperance societies as a viable basis for a nationwide political organization. But this promise was to remain unfulfilled.

Jaffna Association and Chilaw Association

The Jaffna Association was formed in 1904.⁴⁴ It was an area where English education was established. The missionaries established English schools there. There was to some extent progress as far as English education was concerned. With the beginning of the British rule the trade activities between Jaffna and India came to a halt. Colombo harbor became the main trade centre. The result was that this area neither developed as a trade centre nor any private business established there. Therefore the educated people of this area couldn't get a job in the Government sector. The Jaffna Association could be categorized as a unity formed among the educated Tamils to achieve these objectives. The Ceylon National Review magazine of Ceylon Social Reform Association started to get the political and economic

42 Blactor Charles, 'The 1915 Riots in Ceylon', *CJHS*, vol.10,1967,no.1/2, pp.27-69

43 Roberts Michal Elite, *Nationalism and the Nationalist Movement in British Ceylon*, Colombo, Department of National Archives, 1977, p.30,31.

44 Russal, Jane, *The Ceylon Tamils Under the Donoughmore Constitution*, (unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, University of SriLanka, 1970,p.01.

requirements of the people of Jaffna.⁴⁵ The Chilaw Association was formed under the leadership of the wealthy Corea family which owned extensive coconut land. Because of the strong objections they showed against the Land Act of 1897, this association was subjected to the anger of colonial authorities.⁴⁶

Ceylon Social Reform Society.

This society, formed in July 1905, showed how the nationalistic influences motivated by the religious reawakening movements have reached the English educated people. The first president of this association was a profound scholar by the name of Ananda Coomaraswamy. Hulugalla Disawa, James Pieris and E. R. Gunaratne were Vice-Presidents and the Joint Secretaries were Museus Higgins, Charles Batuwantudawa and Peter de Abrew.⁴⁷ Ananda Coomaraswamy who was the President of this association had studied science and had a good educational record. He was confident that a nationalistic awakening should be brought about for initiating a movement to protect the indigenous languages and to develop local arts and handicrafts.⁴⁸ Coomaraswamy was also earlier an associate of the Parama Vignanarta Buddhist Society (Buddhist Theosophical Society).

45 *Ceylon National Review*, No.3, 1906, Supplement.

46 De Silva, K.M., Nineteenth Century Origins of Nationalism in History of Ceylon, Vol.iii, pp. 249-261.

47 *Ceylon National Review*, No.3, 1906 Supplement.

48 Crouch James, "Ananda Coomaraswamy in Ceylon: A Bibliography", *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, July-December, 1973, No.2, pp.54-56.

The speech he delivered to the Reforms Committee in 1905 was published in the December edition of the magazine of this Society:⁴⁹

“I hereby declare the objectives of the society. They are encouraging for Sri Lankans to reform the existing social customs and taking the lead in such matters, discouraging the blind imitation of European customs which are not suitable for our society, ensuring the national supremacy within the cultural field and promoting respect and co-operation among communities”.⁵⁰

The committee of this association included the foreign volunteer Musaeus Higgins and F.L. Woodward and the local leaders D.B. Jayatillaka, W.A. de Silva, Charles Batuwantuduwe, C.A. Hewavitharana, Martinus C. Perera, J.P. Obeysekara, G.L. Cooray, John de Silva, W.C. Dias and H.S. Perera etc.⁵¹ Through the Reform Society based on the Sinhalese Buddhist communal basis it accepted as “National” all the customs of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Some rich Buddhist businessmen who helped in Buddhist activities were associated with the production and distribution of arrack. Some rich Buddhists who were closely associated with the business of arrack included H.M. Salgado, the Jeramius Dias family at Panadura, Thomas Amarasuriya at Galle, Sri Chandrasekera at Moratuwa and D.S.

49 Quinn William, W., “Hendry Steel Olcott Impact and Influence on the Buddhism of Ceylon”, *Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, June-December, 1978, No.2, pp.17-37

50 *Ceylon National Review*, No.1, 1906.

51 *Ibid.*

Senanayaka at Mirigama.⁵² The Lanka Social Reform Society was active in matters concerning National Culture to suit the multi-racial and religious set-up which prevailed among the English educated. The President of the society Ananda Coomaraswamy said, “Our social system has deteriorated, wealth and power have gone away from the hands of those who held it once, what is necessary now is a change and in fact a basic change.⁵³ The 1st annual conference of this society was held in 1906. They discussed about encouraging children for Sinhalese education and to the attention of Director of Public Education to focus on it.⁵⁴ Addressing the annual conference of the society in 1907 he said, “It is true that Indian National Congress is basically a political organization. We are proud to remain independent from the Indian politics. But this may not be a very wise position”.⁵⁵ The magazine of the organization was the mouthpiece of the people with published articles showing the national and cultural pride of the East and other articles accusing the blind imitation of the Western customs as well as articles revealing the indigenous arts, literature and history.⁵⁶ Some of the articles showed how Japan has acquired a position equal to the theWestern countries by staying immune to the influences of western customs and religions.⁵⁷

Low Country Product Association

52 Jayasekera, P.V.J., “Social and Political Change in Ceylon: 1900-1919”, (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1969), p.92-93.

53 *Ceylon National Review*, No.4, 1907, p.22.

54 *Ceylon National Review*, Supplement, 1906, pp.8-10.

55 *Ceylon National Review*, No.4, 1907, p.22.

56 *Ceylon National Review*, No.4, 1904, pp.78-80.

57 *Ibid.*, pp.78-80.

In 1907 the Low Country Product Association was formed and its main objective was to facilitate the needs of coconut plantation owners. At first the leadership of this association was in the hands of James Pieris, Markus Fernando, H. L. De Mel and N.D.B. De Silva who had become leaders' among the wealthy and educated in the Karawe caste.⁵⁸ Even though it was originally founded to safeguard the interests of coconut land owners, with the passage of time they started working for the interests of all Sri Lankan Producers.⁵⁹ This association could be introduced as an association formed on the examples of Ceylon Planters' Association of European Land Owners and Ceylon Chamber of Commerce of European businessmen. Land owners and businessmen of Karawe caste dominated this association.⁶⁰

The Ceylon Reform League

The Ceylon Reform League was formed on the 17th of May 1917. Ponnambalam Ramanadhan was appointed as the first president. Among its major objectives was to impress upon the administration and its apparatus to study the political, economic and social problems of the people.⁶¹ Though the new league was proclaimed to be established to bring the agitations for constitutional reforms under a better organized basis only 18 people participated in the meeting organized to establish the new league. An effort was made to restrict the membership as the organizers thought that a delicate

58 NawarathnaBandara, A.M., *National Movements in Sri Lanka under the British Rule*, Colombo, 2007, pp. 305-360.

59 Jayasekera, P.V.J., "Social and Political Change in Ceylon: 1900-1919", (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1969), p.149.

60 *Ibid.*, p.149.

61 Bandaranayake, S.W.R.D.(ed.), *The Hand Book of the Ceylon National Congress*, (HBCNC), Colombo, H.W. Cave and Co., 1028, pp.98.

small group would be able to function with great enthusiasm. The membership fee was fixed 10 rupees per month.⁶² During the first year there were 40 members in the league. Organizations affiliated the league were from Kandy, Galle, Kalutara, Kurunegala, Negombo, Kegalle, Matara and Ratnapura. D.B. Jayatilake and E.W. Perera who were in England at that time to agitate about the incidents in 1915, were appointed as representatives of the league resident in London. The new league sent a dispatch to London in June 1917 which contained its proposals for constitutional reforms.⁶³ The proposals included among others abolishing the communal representation done through nominations, admission of a majority comprised of representatives elected at provincial level, provision of an elected president or a speaker, reducing the number of official in the executive committee and the recruitment of Ceylonese to civil service.⁶⁴

Fifteen out of the nineteen proposed to be selected by vote will be from provincial electorates and the remaining four will be reserved for Europeans, Muslim and Burghers. A service of qualifications based on factors like education, ownership of land and income was formulated to confer franchise.⁶⁵ Not only fluency in English language but also the ability to read and write Sinhala as well as Tamil was included regarding educational qualification. This plan including

62 Jayasekera, P.V.J., "Social and Political Change in Ceylon, 1900-1919" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1969), p.456

63 Bandaranayake, S.W.R.D, edited, *HBCNC*, Colombo, H.W. Cave and Co: 1028, pp.98, 108.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Sir Ivor Jennings, *The Constitution of Ceylon*, Indian Branch, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp.27-35

unified proposals wouldn't be taken for discussions with the Ceylon authorities due to the untimely death of Governor John Anderson.⁶⁶

Though this matter came to a halt all the unity which was formed between the National Association and the Reform league became a foundation for unifying the overall agitations of Ceylonese for reforms. Because of the new enthusiasm which had sprung up vis-a-vis politics after 1916 as many new organizations were formed all over the country. The upcountry association formed in 1917 and the associations established at Galle, Matara, Ratnapura, Sabaragamuwa and Kalutara, the young Muslim league and Ceylonese Indian Association were some of these organizations. Because of this situation the necessity to hold discussions with representatives from various organizations arose for continuing the agitations organized by different organizations on a better foundation. It was evident to them that if various organizations come up with their own proposals separately the effect would be very much less.⁶⁷

The result if this was the decisions taken to summon conference about constitutional reforms for preparing a common plan taking the proposals for constitutional reforms. Arunachalam pointed out that a conference of this type was necessary for discussing about the possibility of organizing a unified program or any other more advanced plan of action.⁶⁸

66 *Ibid.*

67 NawarathnaBandara, A.M., *National Movements under the British Period in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 2007, pp.317-20

68 Bandaranayake, S.W.R.D.(ed.), *HBCNC*, Colombo, H.W. Cave and Co; 1028, pp.98.

Conclusion

. The cultural nationalism and anti-western nature in those movements were not evident here. They were engaged in an agitation which was fostering liberal democratic political values. They were in fact trying to show their allegiance to the British rulers and gain some legislative concessions. The nationalistic concept of theirs was contrary to the philosophy presented by Sinhalese nationalism. This group who opted to work as Ceylonese in matters relating to religion or national problems tried to do so without having any ethical or religious prejudice. The significant feature seen in the organization of this group was that they did expect participation of huge masses in their activities.⁶⁹

Sri Lankan businessmen were producing to meet the demands of the market, and they also had to focus their attention on the demands prevailing in the market. This is the reason that Plumbago producers, owners of cinnamon plantations and subsequently also owners of coconut plantations faced problems in the market. At the import - export market controlled by the European companies and banking system no attention was focused on their needs. Sri Lankans also didn't have the necessary strength to seek assistance from them. It also had to face the difficulties arising out of this situation while developing their business activities.⁷⁰ In between there were also other social problems which the Sri Lankan English educated people and indigenous wealthy people had to face. The people of the new rich elite occupied a high

69 Jayasekara, P.V.J., *Social and Political Change in Ceylon 1900-1919*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1970, pp125-130.

70 *Ibid.*

position in the local society because of their wealth, imitating the Western culture and education. With the development of their economic strength they broke through the traditional bonds and proceeded forward. These groups were subsequently able to win back the patronage which was shown towards the high class Goigama caste.⁷¹

In the meantime, the educated intelligentsia who were following social and political problems with interest demanded that the Legislative Council should be subjected to democratic reforms. They thought that the Legislative Council which was made up of a few members appointed by the Governor should be broadened. They demanded the inclusion into the legislative council of members who would be selected by the vote of people. Their other demand was to allow only the rich and educated class of people the right to vote. Even though Sri Lankans expected the reforms and entry into the Legislative Council in this manner the European hegemony was not ready to accept these. They seemed to maintain the opinion that only members of 'Mudali' families who were the traditional leaders in society should be allowed into the Legislative Assembly. The basic purpose of such views expressed by Europeans was only to create dissensions within the Sri Lankan communities for their own ulterior motives.

A considerable number of people who were among the leaders of the new wealthy class were from the Karawe caste. In the traditional caste system they were not holding the leading position. Therefore the traditional Goigama leaders related to Mudali families didn't like to

71 Patric Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (Governor Sir Arthur Gordon and the Administration of Sri Lanka), New Delhi, 1995, pp.243-246.

allow these 'Karawe' people to extend their status up to political leadership.⁷² They were in close association with the colonial rulers in Sri Lanka for a long time and were able to have good relationships with the European power. There emerged also the very importance of the Karawe before the local British officers. The latter tried to interpret the protests of the Sri Lankans as a clash between castes and declared that behind the demand of Sri Lankans there were no national interests.⁷³ Therefore the educated Sri Lankans joined various movements to establish their leadership socially. Thus the leaders of this organization stressed on maintaining the indigenous cultural, educational institutions, religious establishments, cultural boundaries, ideological institutions besides political organizations that would look after the overall interested of the population of Sri Lanka.

72 SamaraweeraVijaya, "Elite formation and Elite, 1832-1931", *UCHC*, vol.iii, ed. by K.M. De Silva, Colombo, University of Ceylon Press, 1973, pp.246-247.

73 *Ibid.*