Society and Ideology in Ceylon during a 'Time of Troubles', 1795-1850. (1)

THE FIRST PHASE : EXPERIMENT AND REVOLT

'No collection of facts is ever complete, because the Universe is without bounds. And no synthesis or interpretation is ever final, because there are always fresh facts to be found after the first collection has been provisionally arranged'.

(A. J. TOYNBEE : *A Study of History*).

THE vicissitudes of the expression 'culture', as used in the social and historical sciences, are indicative of a significant reorientation in our attitude to social phenomena in recent times. In the usage of archaeologists in particular, the term 'culture' at one time referred almost exclusively to tangible and observable things, notably technological devices such as fire-arms, axes, and ploughs. The term was subsequently used in a much wider sense and included such intangible and invisible phenomena as religion, magic, and ideologies, and finally became an all-inclusive abstraction referring to all things relating to human beings. The significance of this latter connotation of 'culture' is that we now recognise the fact that even material items of 'culture' can never be properly appreciated in terms of their physical constitution alone, without a knowledge of their non-material coefficients. An idol, a flag, or a crucifix, have no cultural significance except in terms of the meanings attributed to them and the beliefs which they symbolize.

This attitude to 'culture' has had its effects on the historical studies. For very often certain concrete events have repercussions which are not immediately apparent. Thus the Black Death in Europe reduced the populations of countries like England and France by one-third within eighteen months; the consequent scarcity of labourers, by changing the existing social relations of Lord and Vassal, was instrumental in destroying the *status quo* of feudal society. Likewise, the process which Maine characterised as the transition from status to contract, the emancipation of the individual from the restraints of a feudal society in which man was conscious of himself only through some general category, such as a corporation, race, or family, gave rise to a profound sense of drift in the face of the a-moral freedom of a bleak laissez-faire ethos.[1]

1. Cf. Sir H. Maine's account of 'the gradual dissolution of family dependency and the growth of individual obligation in its place' (Ch. v. *Ancient Law*, 1861, C. K. Allen's edition, Oxford, 1931, p. 140). For an exposition of the group-conceptions of mediaeval society, cf. Jakob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860, Tr. S. G. C. Middlemore, Oxford, 1945, p. 81 et. seq.), and for an excellent analysis of the consequences of the rise of individualism, *vide* Erich Fromm : *The Fear of Freedom* (London, 1942).

Our interests have shifted from the external manifestations of wars and revolutions *per se*, to the less obvious repercussions of such events in the human mind. Even the historian engaged in archivist research reaches a stage when he is beleaguered by a mass of facts and has perforce to resort to synthesis and interpretation. 'If history is to regain its place in the general intellectual movement of our time, it must restore to the full its erstwhile connection with social generalisations '.[2]

There are innumerable historical instances of societies confronted with various social stimuli to which they respond in different ways. These responses, whether they take the form of surrender or revolt, can be properly analysed only in the context of the total social situation. The Protestant Ethic in Europe, for instance, is not wholly intelligible save in the context of secular stimuli such as nationalism, capitalism, and democracy.[3] The sociological significance of that Ethic lies in the fact that it was a potent lever in extricating European society from feudal stasis. Released from mediaeval parochialism, the expansive polities of Europe were not content with confining their energies within their national boundaries. In the industrial civilization of the Liberal Age, the market was increasingly the arbiter of economic expansion, and the market was not limited by the boundaries of nationality. Improved means of communication was one significant aspect of the Industrial Revolution and linked the economies of far-flung countries.[4] Men were compelled to think in terms of a ' world economy ' from whose tentacles no country could escape completely. Sooner or later inter-national economic forces made their impact on those ' blind alley civilizations ' of the Eternal East which, having reached a point of social and intellectual stasis, were governed by a *vis inertiae;* they were content to derive their inspiration from the Past. Having remained for centuries at this stage of Archaism, ' the usual *denouement* is for some alien empire-builder to step into the breach and to perform for the ailing society the service that ought to have been performed by native hands '.[5] Marx long ago posed the pertinent question: ' Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia ? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in

2. M. Postan : History and the social sciences (in The Social Sciences : their relations in theory and in teaching, London, 1936). A classic sociological approach to historical data is represented in the work of the fourteenth century Arabic historian Ibn Khaldoun (Les Prolegomenes, Tr. de Slane, Paris, 3 vols. 1934-1938).

3. cf. H. R. Niebuhr : Protestantism (in *Enc. Soc. Scs.*, Vol. 12), and P. C. Gordon Walker : Capitalism and the Reformation (*Econ. Hist. Review*, November, 1937).

4. It is interesting to note, however, that even at the close of the eighteenth century, Governor North arrived in Bombay after a ' short and prosperous voyage ' of four months ! (North to Dundas, British Museum Wellesley Mss. No. 13866).

5. Toynbee : *A Study of History* (Vol. 5, p. 341).

bringing about that revolution '.[6] The Eternal East had perforce to adapt itself to the ideology of an industrial civilization. In Ceylon, the process of ideological transformation set in motion social forces which made the first phase of British rule, the period of experiment and revolt, one of unprecedented social and intellectual ferment.

Under the Portuguese and the Dutch, the traditional social and economic system of the Sinhalese continued unimpaired in its significant aspects. The Portuguese colonizers in Asia were scrupulous in their observance of caste distinctions. A Bull of Pope Gregory XV went to the extent of sanctioning the observance of caste distinctions in the seating arrangements in South Indian churches.[7] And Queyroz contends that one of the chief causes of discontent in the latter decades of Portuguese rule in Ceylon was the callous indifference to caste on the part of officials.[8] The Dutch also rigidly adhered to the caste system as the basis of social and economic organization and numerous *placaats* were concerned with the enforcement of caste obligations : thus a decree of October 11th, 1759 ordered ' that natives shall perform such government services as they on account of their castes are obliged to perform notwithstanding they dress themselves like Europeans ', while a Resolution of March 23rd, 1753 was designed ' to prevent the irregular copulation of Chalias and the inconveniences arising therefrom '.[9] Indeed, as Codrington contends, land tenure and economic organization of the Littoral under the Portuguese and the Dutch was more representative of the traditional economic system than that which functioned contemporaneously in the Kandyan provinces. For under the latter Kandyan Kings the traditional system of land tenure was in process of disintegration : a growing sense of individual rights in land gave rise to a great deal of litigation.[10] In contrast to their imperial predecessors, the British had little sympathy for the odious restraints of caste and feudal economic relations.

6. Karl Marx : *The British Rule in India* (New York Tribune, June 25th, 1853, rep. in E. Burns : *A Handbook of Marxism*, London, 1935, p. 187).

7. cf. C. S. Ghurye : *Caste and Race in India* (London, 1932), p. 164.

8. De Queyroz : *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* (tr. Rev. S. G. Perera), Colombo, 1930, Vol. 3, pp. 1024-5.

9. The Dutch regulations as to caste were extremely detailed, and some of their Resolutions were concerned with such details as fixing the dress and the marriage ceremonies of barbers and washermen. These are enumerated in a codification of decrees made by G. L. de Costa (*Description of the Dissave of the Province of Colombo*, Hultsdorf, December 15th, 1770 ; and Fritz's *The Class and Castes of the Natives*, Galle, 20th August, 1793, etc. in C.O. 54/124). These translations were made at the instance of Sir Alexander Johnstone.

10. H. W. Codrington : *Ancient Land Tenure and Revenue in Ceylon* (Colombo, 1938), p. 63.

When the Dutch possessions of the Littoral capitulated to the British forces, these Maritime Provinces were governed for three years from the British administrative headquarters at Madras (1795-1798). One of the first decisions of the Madras Administration was to replace the Sinhalese Mudaliyars by Madrassi Amildars and inferior officers sent over from Madras to establish the system of land revenue operating in India. In consequence, a formidable revolt broke out, and the Committee of Investigation which was appointed to inquire into the disturbances and to review the system of administration, came to the conclusion that the transfer of authority to foreign officials was ' a pregnant source of discontent '.[11] This impolitic arrangement had alienated the native officials who, under the Dutch government, had acted as liaison-officers between the European administration and the inhabitants.

The system of land tenure in Ceylon was the basis of the social and economic life of the people. It was unique in its structure and differed from that of ' the opposite coast '. The King was ' lord of the earth '. Hence the legal maxim current in the third century that ' ownerless land belongs to the King ' refers to the automatic escheat of vacant or abandoned holdings which *ipso facto* reverted to the Crown. The King was also entitled to revenue from the land, or to services from grantees of land. It follows that there were only two parties to the land, whose interests were reciprocal : the King, in whom ultimate property in land vested, and the subject who was required to pay a share of the gross produce, or a commuted tax, or perform specified or unspecified services, in return for the protection he enjoyed. Thus the system of land tenure was the foundation of a purely agrarian economy and was no more than an intricate web of rights and duties. The question of ownership of land hardly arises since grants were made not of land as such, but of revenue and other rights (e.g., exemption from taxes) on certain conditions (e.g., performance of services), for definite or indefinite periods. Private interests and rights were inseparable from political allegiance, and the duties of the subject were, in the last resort, compulsory. For the King could enforce these duties appertaining to the land by appropriate penalties.[12] In general, the economic system resembled the mediaeval European system of sub-infeudation except that in certain cases land was derived directly from the King who, as absolute lord of the land, granted a specific type of allotment (i.e. service tenures, or ' lands of favour ') to individuals, castes, or classes, for services ranging from meritorious military service, to lesser duties such as the running of court errands.[13] The system was extremely complicated

11. Proceedings of the Committee of Investigation on the Revenues of Ceylon, 1797-1798, (in Wellesley Mss., British Museum, No. 13864).

12. i.e. Expropriation in the case of service tenures, on which basis most of the land was held, cf. H. W. Codrington, op. cit. (p. 19).

13. E. Reimers : *Feudalism in Ceylon* (*JRASCB*, XXXI/81), and Ribeiro's *Historic Tragedy of Ceilao* (1685, Tr. P. E. Pieris, 1948 ed., Part I, Ch. x).

in its details but, in brief, it is true to say that it was based on three types of tenure : lands of which government retained immediate possession, i.e., ' the King's Villages '; non-service tenures, which in effect were allotments of land permanently alienated by the state on condition of receiving a share of the produce or a tax ; and service tenures, which could not be alienated or seized for debt, and included all lands temporarily alienated by government on condition of receiving the benefit of personal services performed by the grantees according to their castes.—' The land was divided into different portions, each of which was appropriated to the realization of one particular object of government, whether of religion, finance, justice or defence—personal service, variously modified according to this appropriation, thus constituted the tenure upon which land was occupied, and upon a failure of that service, the King resumed possession. No individual was therefore taxed but in the object of his possession. The soldier and civilian in their respective service, the cultivator of the land in its produce, the workman in his merchandise, and the daily labourer in certain portions of his labour '.[14]

Although liable to abuse, the economic system of Traditional Ceylon was one admirably suited to the disposition of the people, since their ' natural indolence ' made it impossible to obtain labour for wages, ' for no temptation of reward, within the bounds of reason, can induce a Sinhalese to labour while he can exist in idleness '.[15] Their land-holdings entailed a counter-obligation on their part to render to the state either a part of the produce of the land or personal service. Scarcity of specie did not permit the conversion of grain into money.[16] Hence there was no use storing an abundance of agricultural produce which was liable to perish, little inducement to labour unduly, or to over-work slaves.[17] Even undue exaction of tribute in such a barter economy was unnecessary. Thus statements to the effect that the peasants were ' oppressed ' must be appraised in the context of these circumstances. It can indeed be said without exaggeration that the system of regulated services linking lord to peasant, provided a self-regulating mechanism for preventing such oppression.

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14. Minute of the President of the Polit. Dept., February 16th, 1798 (Wellesley Mss. 13864). For confirmation *vide* Schurhammer and Voretzsch : *Ceylon* (Leipzig, 1928), Vol. I, p. 196.

15. Proceedings of Committee (Wellesley Mss. 13864, 16-8-1797).

16. Sir A. C. Lawrie remarked that the exorbitant rate of interest (120 per cent.) in the Kandyan country was proof of the scarcity of floating money (*Kandyan Law and History*. Materials collected for two projected works found among his papers after his death in 1914. 5 Mss. Vols. in Colonial Office Library, London).

17. Regarding treatment of slaves cf. D'Oyly : *Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom* (L. J. B. Turner's ed. 1928, p. 79 : ' in no part of the world is slavery in a milder form ').

It was this complex political and economic system that the Madras Administration attempted to bring into line with the Indian system by substituting wages for service. Grants of land were now auctioned, and the highest bidder had the monopolistic right of 'farming' the revenues. But the people regarded this arrangement as 'an arbitrary deprivation of that property that they had enjoyed under the Kandyan, Portuguese and Dutch Governments'.[18] The Madrassi officers, in 'farming' the revenues, proved to be 'a set of wretches, whose speculations are plunder, whose interests are permanently foreign to the country, and whose rapacious dispositions are perpetually urged forward by the precariousness of their tenure'. There was universal discontent against the new administration, and Lord Hobart concluded that 'the system is so radically bad, that it cannot be sufficiently reprobated';[19]

> 'The renting or farming system is certainly the most convenient, and circumstanced as we are in Ceylon, perhaps the only one that can be successfully resorted to, but the evils to which that system must ever be liable, may be alleviated or aggravated, according to the manner in which it is conducted—Mr. Adam Smith justly observes that the farmers of the Revenue "have no bowels for the contributors, who are not their subjects and whose universal bankruptcy, if it should happen the next day after their farm is expired, would not much affect their interests"'.

Adam Smith certainly was emphatic on this point, and remarks that 'even a bad sovereign feels more compassion for his people than can ever be expected from the "farmer" of his revenue'.[20] And this was exactly what happened in Ceylon. The Madrassis had come over for the sole purpose of 'farming' the revenue and had no interest in anything but peculation and extortion: 'I am certain that no mode for destroying a country could have been devised, that was more completely calculated by the vexations with which it must inevitably be attended, to create amongst the natives and Resident Inhabitants, the most rooted abhorrence of, and disgust to the British Government', concluded Lord Hobart. The Committee of Investigation concurred with these views. As Brigadier General de Meuron commented in a perspicacious Minute;

> 'The Habits and Prejudices of a nation can only be changed by one of two Modes: Gradually, by *mildness* and a clear demonstration of the superior advantages they will derive from the proposed alteration,

18. Minute of Pres. of Polit. Dept, 16-2-1798 (Wellesley Mss. 13864).

19. Minute of the President in Council. June 9th, 1797 (Wellesley Mss. 13864).

20. Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations* (1776, Cannan's ed., rep. in Modern Library), p. 854. Hobart's quotation is from this same passage.

or *violently* by the compulsive efforts of superior Force. The distrust natural to an unenlightened People it is always difficult to remove, and every change excites their suspicions.

'Mildness and persuasion, it appears, were not the distinguishing features of our change of system; and our Force was inadequate to *compel* obedience'.[21]

The Committee found that the districts neighbouring Colombo were 'in open rebellion against the authority of government, and others were showing symptoms of discontent'. To prevent the spread of this smouldering unrest to areas that were relatively tranquil, the Committee recommended a reversion to the traditional system of economic organization. The Madrassi revenue farmers were to be replaced by a regular judicial authority in each Korale or group of villages forming an administrative unit. The chief magistrate or Mudaliyar, and his subordinate officers were 'to be selected from the Vellales, or superior caste of Cingalese exclusively'.[22] For these Mudaliyars had been the channels of communication between the Dutch government and the inhabitants, and their restoration was 'an object of political expediency':

'By vesting the Mudliars with all the authority that may be deemed advisable to entrust to the native servants, you confirm power to men who are remarkable for the value they set upon their situations; who have a thorough knowledge of the dispositions, prejudices, and customs of the people; to whose authority the Inhabitants have been in the habit of submitting; and whom ancient usage has taught them uniformly to respect'.[23]

Another consequence of the abolition of the traditional system of service tenures was that labour had become unprocurable. Although formerly, in a collectivist system, the people served according to their castes in various government 'departments', they now refused to work for wages. This was an unanticipated reaction, for the British officials assumed that the Sinhalese would offer their services for money wages in order to 'better themselves'. But that was an assumption based on experience of human behaviour in an individualistic society. In Traditional Ceylon commerce was at a minimum and the basic structure of the social fabric and the constitution of its ethos were such, that there was no inducement for individuals to exert themselves in accumulating wealth: 'For what should they do with more than food and raiment, seeing that as their estates increase, so do their taxes also ... Neither have they any encouragement to industry, having no vend, by traffic and commerce, for what they have got' (Knox). Taxes were paid to the King,

21. Minute of Brig. Gen. de Meuron (Wellesley Mss. 13864).

22. Proceedings of the Committee of Investigation, 16-8-1787 (Wellesley Mss. 13864).

23. Minutes of Consultation in the Political Department, 16-2-1798, (ibid.)

'the preserver of the Law of the Buddha', as a matter of religious duty.[24] But when they were released from the traditional obligation to serve the government, they were not prepared to work for money wages. As de Meuron complained, 'The people of Ceylon, the most indolent race in India, conceive that their release from the services they were formerly *bound* to perform is connected with a perfect freedom from all labour whatsoever; and workmen are not to be procured at any Price'. The re-instituted native headmen were ordered to procure a specified number of labourers 'at a suitable and regular Price', and a part of the demands on the produce of the land remitted by the government on that account.

Governor North reluctantly agreed that a return to the Dutch system was expedient' though I have no scruple in declaring that under the Dutch and their predecessors, no one (system) could be imagined more directly hostile to Property, Industry, and Improvement, and to the Felicity of the People'. But the traditional felicity of the Sinhalese was something different to the Felicity of the Liberal Age in England. In Traditional Ceylon, Buddhism as the national religion, together with the institution of caste, the system of land tenure, Kingship, and King's Duty (*Rājakāriya*, the equivalent of the mediaeval European *regale servitium*), were elements of an ethos which presupposed social relations of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation. Hocart has explained that modern peoples have lost the secret of making it a joy to pay taxes, because religious belief is no longer the rule. As long as belief is unimpaired tithes are paid to the monarch in whom the spirit of the macrocosm resides. 'There is something to be said for a view of life which makes men so anxious to serve the public'.[25] In terms of such a scale of values, the struggle for existence in a ruthlessly competitive social order would have been considered odious, since it unleashed those selfish and avaricious impulses which Buddhism expressly strove to sublimate.

A classic instance of the transition from *gemeinschaft* feudal relations based on rights in land, to the *gesellschaft* relations of an industrial society in which cash payments had almost become the sole nexus between man and man, is provided by the Liberal ideology which dominated England in the early nineteenth century. Such an ideological transformation usually entails, *inter alia*, 'the victory of egoism, impudence, falsehood, cunning, and the ascendancy of greed of money, ambition, and lust for pleasure'.[26] In England,

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24. cf. A. M. Hocart: *Kings and Councillors* (Cairo, 1936) 'The spirit of the macrocosm resides in the King and so prosperity is attained by making that macrocosm prosperous and bountiful. A poor king is a contradiction in terms'. (p. 197).

25. A. M. Hocart, op. cit., p. 216.

26. F. Tonnies: *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1935 ed. Tr. C. P. Loomis, New York, 1940).

an unique ethos contrived to reconcile untrammelled individualistic strife with the opposite ideal of social harmony, by means of the concept of duty. And that idea of duty in one's ' calling ' in life was essentially a product of the Protestant Ethic—' It expresses the value placed upon rational activity carried on according to the rational capitalistic principle, as the fulfilment of a God-given task '.[27] Adam Smith's celebrated remark about the ' invisible hand ' which guided an individual's actions to promote social ends which were frequently no part of that individual's intention, is a typical statement of the Liberal ideology.[28] The principle of self-love and self-improvement was kept within bounds by a judicious admixture of religious ideas, the doctrines of the Protestant Sects being subtly adapted to temporal developments outside the churches, such as capitalism, nationalism, and democracy.[29] In the absence of these moral restraints, unbridled individualism, ' the struggle to get on, that trampling, crushing, elbowing and treading on each other's heels ', which John Stuart Mill considered to be merely disagreeable symptoms of industrial progress, would surely have been productive of acute industrial discontent, working-class agitation, and even revolution. That acute observer de Tocqueville, concluded that it was the religious factor that rendered English society immune to the convulsive spirit of the French Revolution.[30]

And it was this same Liberal ideology, the product of complex social forces extending over several generations, which the British officials hoped to superimpose on the feudal ethos of Ceylon. These well-meaning reformers were incorrigibly optimistic and never relaxed their endeavours to propagate what they called the ' enlightened ' ideas of their age into Ceylon : in fact, they felt it to be their duty.[31] It is not surprising, therefore, that even the staid *Ceylon Government Gazette*, lapsing into poetry, printed a poem of nine

27. Max Weber : *General Economic History* (Tr. F. H. Knight, 1927, p. 367). Also his *Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* (Tr. Parsons, London, 1931).

28. Adam Smith : *The Wealth of Nations* (Modern Library, ed., p. 423).

29. Troeltsch contends that while Lutherism was only very indirectly influenced by social, economic, and political causes, the religious ethic of Calvin was largely determined by the conditions which governed the practical situation in Geneva ; Calvin was convinced that the anti-Mammon spirit of Christianity could express itself in a society based on trade, industry and money (E. Troeltsch : *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Tr. O. Wyon, London, 1931, Vol. II, p. 642 et. seq.).

30. De Tocqueville : *L'Ancien Regime* (Tr. M. W. Patterson, Oxford, 1947, p. 163).

31. In Orr's proposal for land reform, he says : ' I have freely availed myself of the opinions and reasoning of *englightened men* on similar subjects '. (Letter to the Governor, 20th July, 1813, C.O. 416/2). One of the most quoted among these enlightened men was Adam Smith, who was once cited even by the practical Governor Maitland.

verses, an *Epistle to a Friend in England,* very reminiscent of Kipling :[32]

' No genial change of climate to supply
Health to the cheek, and lustre to the eye,
No nerve with agony or rapture glows
And mind and body stagnate in repose !

' Say what my Friend can scenes like this impart
To cheer the spirits, or to mend the heart !
Then shall I idly languish for my home
And let my thoughts o'er yonder billow roam ?

' No ! be a nobler resolution mine
Born for exertion, why should man repine ?
Since call'd by duty to this sultry strand
Where mighty forests stretch on every hand.

' To the poor pilgrim at the set of sun
His vow completed, and his journey done !
Friendship may boast with rapture unalloy'd
" His single tallent has been well employ'd " '.

This attitude continued throughout the early decades of British rule, and is gently satrized in a verse appearing in *The Colombo Journal* in 1832 :[33]

' This is, indeed, a wondrous age
Most rare of all we 've had :
Improvement now is all the rage,
Folks are improving mad '.

The spirit of that ' enlightened ' Liberal ideology is epitomised in a tract by R. Fellowes in which he states that ' the all-powerful, all-energizing principle which impels society forward in the career of improvement, is that which inspires every man with the desire of bettering his condition '.[34] It is a significant fact that this same writer had previously been resident in Ceylon and had published a few months earlier a History of Ceylon (1817) under the pseudonym ' Philalethes '. In it he suggested that the Liberal ideology should,

32. It must be mentioned that this poet admitted that the Sinhalese laws, customs, and religion, were not without interest :

' And haply in some barbarous code discern
What polished Europe might not blush to learn '.

The fact remained, however, that Europe was ' polished ' and ' enlightened ', while Asia was unenlightened and ' barbarous '. The poet probably was Captain Andersen (*Ceylon Government Gazette,* March 30th, 1814).

33. *The Colombo Journal,* March 10th, 1832.

34. R. Fellowes : The rights of property vindicated against the claims of universal suffrage, with an analysis of the principle of property and new views of constitutional interest and general policy (London, 1818).

as it were, be an article of export into the British colonies. And he chose Ceylon as the ideal field for the experiment :

> ' Ceylon offers the most auspicious theatre and the most favourable opportunities for the gradual emancipation of the people from that state of degeneration in which they are kept by the institution of castes . . . For the wisest purposes, and the most glorious ends, the father of spirits has implanted in the bosom of every individual a desire to better his condition, and to add to his stock of enjoyment, but the elastic energy of this principle is relaxed by the institution of castes, which is equally at variance with the laws of God and with the welfare of man '.[35]

The line of reasoning pursued by the British officials in Ceylon during this period of reform was that the Sinhalese did not differ from the great mass of the human species and were ' alive to the same feelings and are influenced by the same motives that sway their fellow men under happier auspices and more propitious governments '.[36] But in their anxiety to introduce the Liberal ideology under the ' happy auspices ' of their ' propitious government ', they overlooked the fact that the religious foundations of individualism, which held in check its least desirable aspects of strife and unfair competition, were absent in Ceylon. Moreover, individual improvement through increased industry was unknown to the ascetic ethos of Buddhism whose ideal was the attainment of *Nirvāṇa* through abstention from the temptations of this transitory existence. Buddhism, in its pure form, provided no worship for life, no protection from the machinations of nature, manifested in the form of flood, disease, and famine. Hence that remarkable dualism in Buddhistic practice even in this stronghold of Hīnayānism, which resulted in two sorts of ceremonies, ' some belonging to their Gods that govern the Earth, and all things referring to this life ; and some belonging to the Buddou, whose Province it is to take care of the Soul and the future well-being of Men ' (Knox). The common people, whose lives were dominated by superstition, were obliged to incorporate Hindu deities, the ' lapsed intelligences, or malignant dispositions ', who were propitiated in order to obtain health, good crops, and so on.[37]

The consequence of the imposition of the Liberal ideology upon the Buddhistic ethos of Ceylon was the manifestation of a ' schism in the body

35. Philalethes (the British Museum catalogue gives the author as R. Fellowes, A. M. Oxford): *The History of Ceylon* (London, 1817) Knox's *Ceylon* is subjoined to it.

36. ' A Brief Appeal to the Government and People of Great Britain on behalf of the inhabitants of Ceylon' (London, 1835).

37. cf. Knox, p. 126 : L. Meerwarth-Levina : The Hindu Goddess Pattini in the Buddhist popular beliefs in Ceylon (*Ceylon Antiquary and Lit. Reg.* I, 1915), and the general account in A. M. Hocart : *The Life-giving Myth* (in *The Labyrinth*, ed. S. H. Hooke, London, 1935).

politic ', the product of the conflict of incongruous traditions. In the traditional social order, each individual entered at birth into his appropriate social role, in a system of intricately balanced rights and duties. In contrast, the mental climate of the Liberal Age was permeated with individualistic ideas which assumed that individuals would labour to accumulate worldly riches and so ' better themselves ' and ' make good '. This ethos has been aptly labelled ' Integral Liberalism ', because it successfully reconciled the apparently contradictory ideals of social competition and social harmony through the medium of the religious idea of duty in one's ' calling '.[38] But in Ceylon the individualistic ideology was introduced without reference to the corresponding moral and religious notion of duty (which was subtly equated with self-interest by Adam Smith and others, on the ground that men were by nature endowed with a rooted predisposition not to offend their fellows.[39])

Since moral duty was incompatible with competitive individualism in the values of Traditional Ceylon, the emancipation of the people from their customary economic services to the King, led to a disintegration of the social and economic fabric. Governor Maitland found that ' The Servant . . . refuses to obey his master ; the master consequently refuses to support his Servant ; the ancient system of subordination is done away : numbers of the lower castes, without the means of subsistence are daily turned upon the Public and uniformly commit those enormities which for the last few years have disgraced the Province of Jaffna '.[40] Something was wanting in the Liberal system as it operated in Ceylon. Captain de Bussche contended that what the Island lacked were ' Capital, Labour, and a Spirit of Enterprise '.[41] It is worth quoting at length an admirable statement by Boyd, one of the Commissioners of Revenue, as to why the people of Ceylon were not amenable to the enlightened ideas of Liberal Europe :

> ' The inhabitants of Ceylon are by no means exempt from that indolence which is so prevalent in warm climates, and until they can be brought to such a state of moral improvement as to contend successfully against that disposition to inactivity, which is the predominant feature of the generality of Asiatics, it would be vain to expect any

38. cf. J. H. Hallowell : *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology* (London, 1946); for the religious aspect, Max Weber : *The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism* (in Essays Tr. Gerth and Mills, London, 1948).

39. cf. Adam Smith : *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759, Dugald Stewart's ed., London, 1907): ' Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren '.

40. Maitland to Windham, 28-2-1807 (in C. R. De Silva : *Ceylon Under British Rule*, I, 259).

41. L. de Bussche : *Letters on Ceylon* (London, 1826). He suggested the importation of Chinese labourers to make good the lack of cheap labour in Ceylon.

permanent increase of cultivation, let the encouragement be what it may. If a man can secure as much from the produce of one crop as will be sufficient for the subsistence of himself and his family until the next Harvest, no prospect of making an addition to his income will, I fear, stimulate him to any further exertion—should he however chance to have more than sufficient for the purpose specified, instead of laying it out in extending the cultivation of his land, he would probably either convert it into some gold ornament or expend it in procuring to himself almost the only luxury on which an Indian sets any value, the luxury of being idle—that is of neglecting his cultivation for the season or of hiring some one to work in his stead.

'. . . Another apparently insurmountable bar to the success of the proposed measure (a new system of taxation) is the difficulty, nay almost impossibility of convincing a poor unenlightened cultivator, totally ignorant of the subject, and who, having never heard either of Adam Smith, or the author of *Political Economy* (James Stewart), can only reason upon these matters from past experience . . . ".[42]

Even the sanguine Governor North was forced to concede that 'abrupt and total revolutions in Property, Laws, and Civil Polity are not the means by which an enlightened government can improve the understanding, stimulate the industry, and increase the Prosperity of a people long accustomed to Poverty, Idleness and Submission to vexatious and undefined authority'.[43]

But in North's long-term scheme of British policy in Ceylon, this singularly unenlightened system of landholding by Service Tenure was always earmarked for repeal. It was repugnant to 'men of liberal sentiments and enlightened minds'; it was onerous, and placed the cultivators in servitude to the headmen; above all, it was contrary to Adam Smith. Since the native chiefs exacted more services from the people than they were strictly entitled to, North considered that the bulk of the population was anxiously awaiting the abolition of the system.[44] Two years after its re-institution in consequence of the experience of the disasters brought about by its abolition by the Madras Administration, North decided that it was 'absolutely necessary' to abolish Service Tenures again, which he did by a Proclamation of 1801. Lord Hobart was apprehensive of this change on the ground that 'ancient customs are suited to the manners and dispositions of the people where they are in use'. And he was correct. North found that the people were not attentive to their own advantages. He had hoped that the abolition of the system of Service

42. Boyd's Report on Orr's Plan, July, 1813, (C.O. 416/2).

43. Wellesley Mss. 13864.

44. C.O. 54/6, March, 1802.

Tenures would demonstrate to the people the value of time and labour, by which alone a nation could become wealthy and independent of external assistance. Maitland, his successor, was extremely cautious of reform, and characterised North's policy as theoretic: 'It would have been a most strange and unaccountable measure . . . when we were in this state of society, if one of the Ancient Barons had pulled out of his pocket Adam Smith, and said, I will apply to you vassals, whose situation renders it impossible to carry into Effect, all the Rules and Regulations laid down by him for a society in the last state of Civilization and Wealth '.[45] Burnand, in his Memorandum of 1809 pointed out that an increase in crime had resulted from North's reforms: 'In a word, more crimes have been committed in one year than were formerly in twenty '.[46] A Proclamation (No. 18) of 1806 reads: '. . . it appears however of late years measures have been adopted inapplicable to the situation of the country, shaking in a considerable degree the tenure on which various species of property rested, and destructive of the Police and Tranquillity of the People '.[47] For these measures of Reform had given rise to a type of *declasse* individual who resorted to robbery and lawlessness. As Maitland complained, 'every town in the Island was full of Outcasts of every description, without any means of livelihood, and living upon the plunder of the Public '.[48]

It is to be expected then that these decades of social and economic experiment were punctuated by numerous revolts against the new social order. The smouldering discontent and unrest which provides the background to the Great Rebellion of 1817 is a reflection of that profound sense of drift which men experience when torn between two incompatible cultural traditions. For, as Toynbee points out, 'a schism in the souls of human beings will be found at the heart of any schism that reveals itself in the surface of society '.[49]

45. cf. W. F. Lord: *Sir Thomas Maitland* (London, 1897) Chaps. V to IX. It may be said here that Lord's characterisation of North's governorship as the inefficient maladministration of an idealist, is unjust and due to lack of perspective. Judged from the standards of contemporary social philosophy there is much to admire in North's ideals, in relation to which Maitland was merely a competent reactionary. Cp. the more recent account by C. W. Dixon (*The Colonial Administrations of Sir Thomas Maitland*, London, 1939) for a more balanced view.

46. Burnand's *Memoir in Asiatic Journal*, XI and XII and in *Monthly Lit. Reg.*, 1894.

47. *Ceylon Government Gazette*, January 14th, 1807.

48. C.O. 54/25.

49. Toynbee, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 341. This is no mystic revelation. It is merely an impressionistic statement of the sociological concept of cultural marginality. (cf. R. E. Park: Human migration and the marginal man, *American Journal of Sociology*, XXXIII/6, 1928; E. Stonequist: *The Marginal Man*, New York, 1937; and Ralph Pieris: Bilingualism and Cultural Marginality, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 2, 1951).

These considerations have assumed heightened significance in Ceylon at the present time. We have so far detailed the early attempts of imperial reformers to bring the feudal ethos into line with social and economic developments which were rapidly engulfing the entire world. In the process of cultural adaptation, there appears a schism in the body politic, which presages a schism in the souls of human beings. Even today we have not been able to achieve a satisfying cultural synthesis, and the schism in the soul continues to manifest itself in sporadic outbursts of Archaism.[50] The nationalists and the Pundits seek inspiration in the Past. But they are well aware that it is impossible to reinstate the traditional culture of the Sinhalese in its totality, since aspects of it such as the monarchy, *Rājakāriya*, and caste, all of which were vital elements of society in Traditional Ceylon, have few defenders today. We want it both ways, and we vacillate uneasily between extolling the glories of the Past, and exhorting our countrymen to plan for the future.

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50. The recent agitation for a restoration of Buddhism as the state religion, the current hysteria regarding the national languages, are all part of the movement towards Archaism, which, according to Toynbee, are characteristic features of a society in decline. There has even been a proposal to restore the monarchy!