

FEUDALISM, CAPITALISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN A KANDYAN VILLAGE¹

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The term feudalism has long been used to describe the pre-colonial social order in the Kandyan highlands. In his characterization of Kandyan feudalism Pieris (1956) emphasized the rights and privileges of the king and the aristocracy over the peasantry as evident in the land tenure system. Leach (1959) preferred to use the word 'caste feudalism', for caste was used as a mechanism for extracting service from the peasantry. In more recent times there have been attempts to analyze Kandyan feudalism using a more rigorous Marxian framework (Bandarage 1983, Gunasinghe 1983). The present paper investigates post-independence changes in a Kandyan village here called Welivita against its historical background in colonial and pre-colonial times. The broader issue addressed here is how far contemporary social change in Kandyan rural society may be understood in terms of a long-term transition from feudalism to capitalism.²

Following Laclau (1971:33-35), the feudal mode of production can be characterized as follows: first, an economic surplus is produced by a labour force subject to extra-economic compulsion; second, the economic surplus is privately appropriated by a social class not directly involved in production; third, the property in the means of production remains in the hands of the direct producer subject to superior rights of an exploiting class. In the capitalist mode of production too, the economic surplus is subject to private appropriation, but as distinct from feudalism, ownership of the means production is severed from ownership of labour; it is this that permits the transformation of labour-power into a commodity, and with this the birth of wage relations.

A main character of the feudal system, then, was that the economic surplus was appropriated from the direct producer by non-economic i.e. legal, political and customary means. Under capitalism, in contrast, the dispossessed worker produces a surplus for the capitalist not because of legal or political pressure from above, but because of the sheer economic necessity of earning an income.

The development of capitalism in agriculture involves the conversion of land, labour and agricultural produce into commodities freely bought and sold on market, in this process necessarily dismantling the frozen social and economic arrangements that constituted the feudal mode of production. It also involves the growth of a capitalist class structure which separates the successes from the failures, capitalist farmers from the dispossessed farm workers,

1. This paper is based on an unpublished Ph.D. thesis (see Silva K.T. 1982). The field research was supported by a grant under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship programme of the Australian government. A supplementary grant from the University of Peradeniya enabled some follow-up study in 1983. An earlier version of this paper was read in the International Conference on Symbolic and Material Dimensions of Agrarian Change in Sri Lanka held in Anuradhapura from 23 to 27 July, 1984.

2. Welivita is a pseudonym. For an earlier interpretation of social change in Welivita see Silva K.T. 1979.

in place of the feudal class structure based on hereditary distinctions, social bondages and master-servant relations. The concentration of the means of production in the hands of profit-oriented capitalist farmers who replace the feudal landlords whose main form of appropriation is rent (as a share of the produce) extracted from the scattered tenant farmers is at the centre of the social transformation in the countryside. "... capitalism replaces the former scattered production by an unprecedented concentration both in agriculture and in industry" (Lenin 1964: 598).

The conceptual distinction between the two modes of production is fairly easy to establish. It is far more difficult to determine empirically the exact character of a given, specially changing, socio-economic environment. The controversy surrounding the characterization of the contemporary rural scene in India points to the difficulties involved³. The central issue here is whether changes brought about by green revolution in parts of India represents a significant advance of the capitalist mode of production. If this is understood as a case of capitalist development, how then do we characterize the colonial period in feudal or even semi-feudal terms (Chattopadhyay 1972, Patnaik 1971, 1972)? The neo-Marxist view about dependent capitalism also becomes questionable if we do find a continuation of feudal elements during the colonial period (Alavi 1975, Banaji 1975). If we do understand the contemporary rural scene in capitalist terms, how can we account for the persistence of small scale producers and continued existence of frozen social arrangements such as caste (Harriss 1982)?

In the course of the above debate the question of structural transformation in the countryside has increasingly been posed in an empirically testable manner. According to Alavi (1975: 172), the important issues are as follows. First, the extent to which commodity production is generalized i.e. not meant for local consumption. Second, extent to which commodity production is done by landless workers and how far they constitute a force of 'free' wage labourers. Third, the degree of capitalization of rural production and the extent to which capital in the countryside remains in the sphere of circulation and does not affect production relations in agriculture. Fourth, the significance of tenancy relations in agrarian production.

The questions mentioned in the preceding paragraphs have direct relevance to the Kandyan case. However, only some of these questions can be dealt with in a village study. Our primary aim is to present an ethnographic account of the dynamics of change in Welivita during a 31 year period from 1948 to 1979⁴. Such a limited focus enables us to capture details of the processes operating in the larger society. The structural transformation mentioned earlier can not be observed in all its details within a single village. On the other hand we find that all or nearly all aspects of change in Welivita during the post-independence period can be seen as dimensions of a larger transformation affecting the Kandyan society as a whole.

3. This debate can be only briefly discussed here due to limitation of space. For a recent account of the various issues involved see Harriss 1982.

4. The fieldwork reported here was completed in 1979. Therefore, we take 1979 as our cut-off point.

The Village

Welivita is located in what used to be the heartland of Kandyan feudalism. It lies at the bottom of a fairly insulated valley situated some 10 miles to the south-east of the historic Kandy town, which as capital city of the pre-British Kandyan kingdom, constituted the main hub of the feudal relations in the area. Prior to 1815 Welivita and some of its neighbouring villages in the valley constituted a royal village (*gabadāgama*) which produced an agricultural surplus and provided certain services required by the royal family in Kandy under the service tenure system. During the British period (1815-1948), following the abolition of the service tenure in 1832, Welivita ceased to be a service village. The changes originating from the colonial rule, however, resulted in a reorganization of the village social structure along semi-feudal lines rather than in a complete dissolution of the feudal system. As caste provided the key to the social as well as economic organization of the village until after independence (1948), we may well begin our account by looking at the caste composition of the village.

Table 1: *Caste Composition of Welivita, 1979*

Caste Name & Traditional Caste Service	Traditional Relation to Rice Farming	No. of Households	%	Population	%
Patti (officials)	Landlord/owner farmer	14	7.0	82	6.7
Navandanna/Galladu (smiths)	owner farmer	3	1.5	22	1.8
Hena (washermen)	owner farmer	18	9.0	94	7.7
Nakati/Berawa	tenant	161	80.5	1009	82.1
Other	—	4	2.0	21	1.7
		200	100.0	1228	100.0

Feudal background of Welivita is evident in its caste composition. In contrast to the commonly found 'free' villages where the Goigama are normally in a numerical majority, the numerical predominance of one or more low caste groups seems to have been a distinctive structural feature of service villages⁵. The respective feudal overlords required the services of some specific low caste groups in order to maintain their privileged position in society. The existence of customary and legal restrictions applying to the low castes meant that it was easier to subject them to surplus extraction compared to the free peasants of Goigama caste. In other words, the caste system was an important element in the 'general ensemble of extra-economic compulsion' prevailing in Kandyan feudal society.

5. The low caste predominance in service villages is revealed through ethnographic findings of Leach 1961, Evers 1969, Seneviratne 1978 and myself. Leach noted 'It is a general feature of this part of Ceylon that temple property is extensive but very badly maintained. The temple estates are, for the most part, a residue from the days of the Kandyan kingdom. In earlier times the tenants, who were always members of the inferior castes, cultivated the temple lands as part of their service duties, and such service was unenforceable. Today such land is still usually cultivated by members of these same inferior castes, but the cultivators are sharecropping tenants of the temple priest, and the rights of the priest-landlord are unsupported by government sanction (1961:38).

All four caste groups in Welivita belong to the category of service castes, implying that they were at the service of those superior to them in caste hierarchy. However, it is wrong to think that the caste distinctions within the village were irrelevant. The Patti, constituting a relatively low status subcaste of Goigama, have held a dominant position vis-a-vis the other caste groups in the village. Their own conception of the past as well as some available evidence point to the fact that historically the administrative elite in the village came from the Patti caste. Its control over the other three caste groups in the village in turn varied according to caste status. The Navandanna and the Hena, accounting for less than 10 percent of the village population and occupying intermediate positions in the local caste hierarchy, have had some degree of independence compared to the Nakati who are at the bottom of the local caste hierarchy. Over 80 percent of Welivita's population belong to the Nakati (drummer) caste, whose traditional caste occupations of drumming and dancing typically involved dependence upon and obeisance to caste superiors.⁶ It appears that as principal caste servants attached to the royal village, the local Nakati were required to play a dual role as service givers and surplus producers. Their physical concentration in this area in large numbers and structural position within the caste hierarchy made it easy to mobilize them as duty-bound caste servants.

Its caste composition indicates that Welivita has never been an independent social entity. The presence of a large concentration of drummer caste people meant that their caste service was not restricted to the village. The existence of the Patti at the top of the village caste hierarchy implied that the entire village was subordinate to a feudal overlord of higher status. The higher status subcaste of Goigama, namely the Goigama proper (sometimes known as Rate Atto in this area), and the Radala (aristocracy) were not included in the royal village, so that it was directly and completely subject to the surplus appropriation by the royal family. The influence of some Goigama proper families in nearby villages was felt in Welivita only after 1815 when it ceased to be a royal domain.

The Historical Background

In an effort to reconstruct the history of a Kandyan village one has to largely depend on general historical accounts of the Kandyan society. Included in this category are works by Knox (1956), Pieris (1956), Dewaraja (1972) and Bandarage (1982). Regional histories are not available except for the brief sketches in Lawrie (1896). Oral tradition and ethnographic evidence are also useful to a considerable extent.

Let us now examine the background of Welivita in each historical period.

The Kandyan Period, (1500-1815)

Feudal overlordship of the king, aristocracy, and the Buddhist clergy was a central feature of the Kandyan kingdom. Ideologically all land within the kingdom belonged to the king who distributed it among his officials and subjects including the clergy according to

6. To quote Seneviratne "The very act of dancing in front of someone in certain contexts, of which the Perahara is one, places the dancers in a low position and the recipient of the dance in high position. This inequality is enhanced by the dancers worshipping the radala authorities every now and then in the moving Perahara.....the dancers also perform the remarkable feat of walking backwards from time to time...another sign of honour accorded to a high status person to whom one does not turn one's back" (1978; 151).

their respective caste statuses which in turn determined their duties to one another and to the king. The king maintained an exclusiveness from the Kandyan caste system by claiming Kshatriya descent from India. The ruling aristocracy as well as chiefs of the Buddhist clergy generally came from the aristocratic (Radala) subcaste of Goigama which (latter) accounted for the bulk of the population in the kingdom.

The peasantry was broadly divided between the Goigama who were free peasants and the service castes or low castes which in many instances held land subject to caste service and other feudal obligations. Thus the caste hierarchy provided the social framework of Kandyan feudalism. At the pinnacle of the caste hierarchy was the aristocracy which controlled feudal landholdings as well as administrative and religious offices that reinforced their dominant economic position. At the bottom of the caste hierarchy, the level with which this study is specially concerned, were the service castes which were placed in a serfdom (including restriction upon their movement) and dependence, their lower status and economic subordination within the overall scheme determined by interlocking structures of caste, land tenure and civil administration.

In the Kandyan kingdom the rights and obligations within the land tenure system were primarily determined according to the caste system. The king, aristocracy, Buddhist temples and deity shrines each had service villages assigned to them known as gabadāgam, nindagam, vihāragam and dēvalagam respectively. The service villages differed from the vast number of ordinary villages where a majority of the inhabitants were upper caste and were only subject to generalized taxes and duties imposed by the state. The service villages were largely low caste in composition and were bonded to one or the other feudal overlord. The service villages were, therefore, more directly and more systematically subject to feudal exactions. This is an aspect that has received relatively little attention in the writings on the Kandyan kingdom.⁷

As a constituent part of a royal village (gabadāgama), the pre-colonial social order in Welivita was characterized by the land tenure system commonly found in service villages (Pieris 1956). The landholdings in a service village were divided into three distinct domains i.e. lord's domain or muttettu, upper caste domain or pamgu (lit. shares) and low caste domain or nila pamgu (lit. service shares). The inhabitants of a service village were collectively responsible for the cultivation of the lord's domain and transfer of its produce to the lord's mansion. The upper caste inhabitants, whose numbers in a service village was not large and to whom were restricted the positions of authority in each service village, held a permanent and hereditary (paravāni) right to their respective landholdings in the upper caste domain. In contrast, the low caste landholdings, while permanently allocated for the respective caste services, were held by the individuals concerned, on a temporary or conditional (māruvena) basis subject to caste service. Hence, it was through fulfilling the service obligation expected of them that the low caste inhabitants could retain access to the means of production. The land tenure system in a service village gave a weaker right to the service-bound low caste inhabitants and thereby placed them in a subordinate – servile position. Thus the system of surplus appropriation prevailing under feudalism was reinforced by the caste hierarchy.

7. Pieris (1956), for instance, does not elaborate the connection between caste obligations and feudal exactions.

The pre-colonial system of land tenure, however, was not without benefits to the low caste people. The low caste landholdings in a service village, while subject to compulsory service, had been permanently assigned to the respective caste services. This meant that such land could not be transferred from one low caste to another or, more importantly, from a low caste family to an upper caste family. The low caste people had an element of protection in their lower social standing and in the fact that the services of each low caste group were indispensable to the higher orders in society.⁸ Thus while the pre-colonial social order was marked by sharp social inequalities, there were customary mechanisms against further intensification of such inequalities through the now familiar process of 'exploitation of the weak by the stronger'.

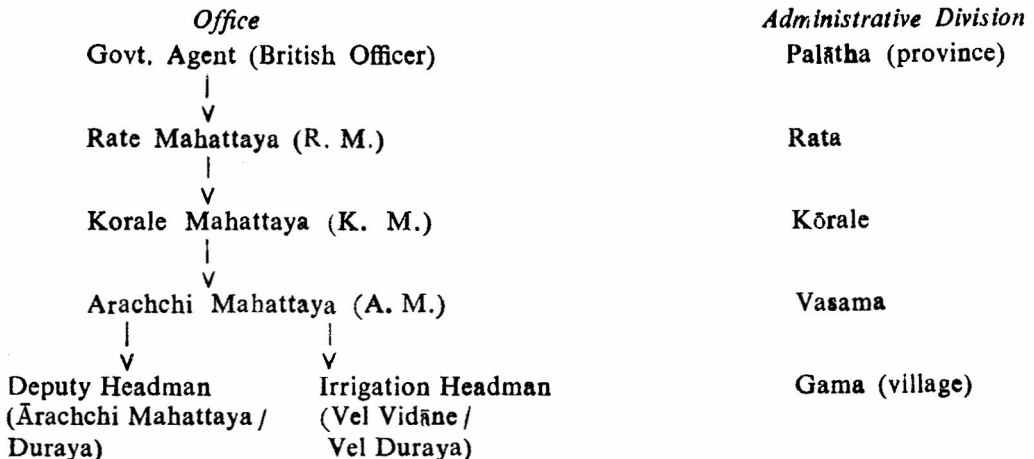
This is the background against which changes in Welivita during the colonial period must be examined.

The British Period (1815-1948)

The effect of colonial rule on Kandyan rural society is yet to be analyzed in a satisfactory manner. On the one hand there is the dual economy thesis which argues that the development of a plantation economy by the aliens had a minimal impact on the Kandyan villages (Snodgrass 1966). On the other hand there is the view that the processes emanating from the British occupation of the Kandyan areas gradually incorporated the rural population into the world capitalist system (Ponnambalam 1980, Bandarage 1982). Various modes of interaction which now seem possible between the colonial and pre-colonial systems have not been seriously considered in relation to the Kandyan society.⁹ In any case the evidence from Welivita indicates that although the rural social structure was substantially altered in the British period, there were also important structural continuities.

One important structural continuity was that the British administration of the Kandyan villages upto 1930 or so was through a hierarchy of native headmen, adapted from the pre-existing feudal administration. These native officials were now made responsible to a newly appointed government agent who was a British civil servant (see figure 1), but the social background of these officials as well as their method of administration showed much continuity with pre-colonial forms.

Figure 1: Village Administration in the British Period



8. Leach 1960: 1-10.

9. See, for instance, Laclau 1972, Benaji 1972 and Alavi 1975.

The government agent for the Central Province was based in Kandy and under him there were nine rata divisions, each under a R. M. Welivita came under the rata division of Pata Hewaheta consisting of three Korale which, in turn, were subdivided into vasama. An Arachchi (headman) was in charge of a vasama covering a few villages. Under each Arachchi there were deputy headmen and irrigation headmen who were village level officials.

On the whole, the native administrative hierarchy headed by Rate Mahattaya served to reinforce certain structural features stemming from the pre-colonial social order. These administrative offices were largely hereditary, although the competition for them may have increased in the latter part of the British period. There were no salary or bureaucratic procedures applicable to these positions until the early part of the 20th century. The R. M., K. M. and A. M. were essentially of Goigama caste. They were expected to come from the respective subcastes within the Goigama caste, although there was an instance where a person belonging to the Patti caste rose to the highest position of R. M. in the Welivita area. Only the lowest rung of the administrative hierarchy was open to the low caste leaders. In villages where low caste people were in a majority, as in Welivita, a deputy headman and an irrigation headman could be recruited from the respective low caste groups, as assistants to higher level officials necessarily from the Goigama caste. However, a petty official of low caste status was officially known in an inferior title. A deputy headman of Goigama caste was called an Arachehi ('officer') whereas a low caste deputy headman was known as a duraya ('office-holder'). There was a similar distinction between vel vidāne ('officer in-charge of paddy fields') and vel duraya ('paddy field attendant'), irrigation headmen representing upper and low castes respectively. The other authors have elaborated the manner in which the administration of temples and shrines rested on the caste hierarchy (Evers 1972, Seneviratne 1978). The data from Welivita shows that there was a similar significance of the caste hierarchy in the civil administration during the British period.

The Formation of a Gentry

During the British period Welivita and the surrounding villages in the valley saw the rise of an upper caste gentry which gradually established a dominance over the area. This gentry gained control over land ownership and administrative offices in several villages in the valley. It consisted of some closely knit kin groups belonging to Goigama proper and Patti castes, the predominant upper caste groups in the area. This gentry emulated aristocratic (Radala) lifestyle and severed kinship ties with ordinary members of the respective caste groups so as to consolidate its status within the larger society. The members of the gentry competed among themselves for land ownership and office, but there was also considerable cohesiveness within the gentry, specially when their common interests were at stake.

Structural parallels to what I term gentry have been reported by several other writers on rural Sri Lanka. Obeyesekere, for instance, found in Southern Sri Lanka landowning kinship alliances locally known as 'pelanthiya'. He defined pelanthiya as 'status groups formed on the basis of a traditional *feudal* ideology' (Obeyesekere 1967:10) (emphasis mine). Although characterized as status groups pelanthiya also had a substantial economic base supported by administrative influence. In characterizing the agrarian stratification in a Kandyan Village named Delumgoda, Gunasinghe (1975) identified a stratum of 'semi-feudal landlords', controlling a substantial amount of land in this village. Describing semi-feudal landlords Gunasinghe mentioned,

Some of these families hail from the days of the Kandyan kingdom. Their ancestors were state officials who manned the feudal state bureaucracy. It is true that most of these families will not be able to trace their ancestry to a Kandyan noble and the scene is largely dominated by the 'new comers' who acquired prominence during the British period. However, the myth of continuity prevails... (1975: 132).

The evidence from Welivita and Delumgoda reveals that the upper caste gentry that evolved during the British period not only possessed a feudal ideology as pointed out by Obeyesekere, but also was instrumental in continuing semi-feudal production relations in the Kandyan areas. A detailed analysis of the origin and development of this upper caste gentry is beyond the scope of the present paper, but the processes whereby the gentry became prominent in the Welivita area can be summarized here.

First, there was a reinvigoration of a local influence structure through the administrative hierarchy described earlier. Under the British rule the more enterprising individuals among the R. M., K. M. and the A. M. were able to increase their power and influence over the local population as they found a greater latitude under the foreign administration. In an area where the bulk of the population was low caste and the higher level officials essentially came from the upper caste, the administrative structure essentially reinforced the caste system and the accompanying social forms which were feudal or semi-feudal in character.

Second, from among the local population these officials were the first to benefit from opportunities for concentration of land ownership under the British rule. Following the deposition of the king, the royal domain (*muttettu*) in and around Welivita became crown property and it appears that the local officials gradually expanded their economic base by acquiring sections of this crown property, in the process re-establishing feudal linkages with tillers of the soil who in this area were essentially low caste. With the abolition of service tenure in 1832, low caste landholdings (*nila pangu*) could now be transferred across caste boundaries. Once again the dominant local families belonging to Goigama proper and Pattj castes were able to benefit from this situation, also helped by a grain tax introduced by the British in the 1840s. The local officials, who were empowered to collect the grain tax from the peasants, seemed to have turned it to their own advantage, compelling specially the low caste peasants to free themselves from the tax burden by transfer of their land to the officials concerned. Obeyesekere (1967) and Roberts (1968) also found that the grain tax ordinances enabled the local officials to enhance their grip on rural society. Because of the insulated position of the valley, the officials in the Welivita area hardly faced any competition from land buyers from the outside, including immigrants from the low country.¹⁰

Third, the evolving production relations in the Welivita area retained a feudal character because of the fact that the landlords used administrative as well as caste privilege in extracting a surplus from the local share-tenants, a majority of whom came from the drummer caste. Both caste privilege and administrative power stood as extra-economic pressure weighing down upon the share-tenants. The service obligations also continued as the share-tenants and the members of their families were required to do some domestic work in

10: These immigrants were largely based in urban centres in the hill country.

landlord houses (walawwa), specially on ritual occasions.¹¹ On the whole, the Nakati, the majority caste group in Welivita, remained bonded servants even though they were no longer connected to a formal feudal structure sanctioned by the state.

During the latter part of the British period, there was an important transition in the power base of the local gentry from hereditary office in the home area to bureaucratic posts in urban centres. Beginning in 1920 or so, the members of the local gentry began to provide an English education for their children in boarding schools in Kandy. The composition of the gentry gradually changed. It now included clerks, teachers, doctors, engineers and even civil servants. This transition corresponded to the efforts by the colonial government to gradually bureaucratize the rural administration with effect from 1930 or so. With its transition to the bureaucracy there was considerable outmigration from the local gentry mainly to the cities of Kandy and Colombo. The more successful branches of the landlord families moved to the cities, leaving their ancestral properties in charge of the less successful who remained in the local area (cf Obeyesekere 1967). The outmigrants too retained control over the means of production as absentee landlords. Eventhough there was a transition in the gentry, its dominance in rural society as well as surplus appropriation from the local peasantry continued, sometimes in new forms. Their newly acquired bureaucratic posts provided an important power base and an effective substitute for hereditary office in continuing their domination in rural society. Eventhough they became urbanized and linked to the national elite, to the extent they continued surplus appropriation from the local population, using extra economic pressure at their disposal, they remained a semi-feudal force in the countryside.

To sum up the changes that occurred in Welivita during the British period, as social securities inherent in the pre-colonial social order disappeared, there was an intensification of inequalities that originated in the caste system. The drummer caste, the lowest and the largest caste group in the village, became economically dependent on a dominant upper caste elite which utilized caste privileges of pre-colonial origin on the one hand and the opportunities opened up during the British period on the other, to gain control over the local population. The village was by no means isolated from the larger political economy of British Ceylon. The acquisition of bureaucratic posts by the gentry signified new linkages with the town. There was also a gradual increase in the numbers turning into wage labourers in nearby tea plantations, particularly among the low caste groups. The overall pattern of social hierarchy within the village, however, remained caste linked and the village economy retained a semi-feudal character.

Post-independence Changes

The social, economic and political changes in Welivita subsequent to national independence (1948), must be understood against the semi-feudal background described in the preceding section. As a predominantly low caste village Welivita remained a more or less exclusive domain of the local gentry. The organization and relations of production within the village, specially in the arena of paddy cultivation, revolved around the caste hierarchy.

11. The term Walawwa is normally applied to aristocratic (radala) houses. The local landlords too used it although they were not aristocratic by caste status.

The continued presence of the gentry especially in newly created administrative posts meant that it now had a new source of power with which to protect and maintain its hereditary interests in the village.

It was in the political arena that there was an initial breakthrough in the transition to capitalism in Welivita. Later there were parallel changes in the economic organization. Let us examine political and economic processes in turn.

Political Change

The earlier forms of political conflict within Welivita were related to competition for positions in the administrative hierarchy. The leading Nakati families in the village held positions of Deputy Village Headman (*duraya*), Irrigation Headman (*vel duraya*) and Chief Drummer in the Temple of the Tooth (*panikkaya*) in Kandy¹², each as deputy or subordinate to and, to a large extent, appointees of higher level officials drawn from upper caste families. In this situation factional divisions within the drummer caste were aligned with corresponding divisions within the Goigama and Patti caste groups in the area, so that each faction was essentially an intercaste alliance in opposition to identical alliances. This form of political conflict was not in defiance of the caste order in so far as conflict at each level of the hierarchy involved opponents of identical status who were required to submit themselves to those at the higher levels in order to remain in contention for office. With the gentry's transition to the bureaucracy the importance of localized competition for office declined, but there was no immediate change in the local political organization. On the whole the pre-1948 political conflict in Welivita upheld the semi-feudal social order with gentry in a controlling position.

The rise of a low caste leadership independent of and largely opposed to the gentry was a turning point in the more recent developments in Welivita. A local Nakati leader named Mambara became a prominent figure in the area since 1948. He entered local politics around 1936 as a member of the Village Council and hence his name Mambara¹³. He became an organizer and the principal spokesman for the drummer caste, the majority caste group in the area. He also had the support of certain other low caste groups in and around Welivita. Realizing the threat posed by the rising influence of Mambara, the local gentry made an early attempt to create a rival faction within the Nakati caste without success. Mambara was gradually able to mobilize more or less his entire caste group in his fight against the gentry.

The rise of Mambara was not an isolated event. He was initially drawn into the political process through the campaigns of George E. de Silva (1879-1951), a higher level politician of low caste origin. George E. de Silva represented the Kandy electorate in the national legislature from 1927 upto 1948 and was one of the founders of the United National Party (UNP). He was a cabinet member of the first UNP government established in 1948. The

12. The post of chief drummer was held by some local Nakati families although the village was not formally linked to the Temple of the Tooth. For details regarding this office see Seneviratne 1978.
13. Mambara, a corruption of the English word 'member', was a commonly used name by which V.C. members were known in rural Sri Lanka.

politics of George E. de Silva has been analyzed in greater detail elsewhere¹⁴. One of his major achievements was that he was able to mobilize a substantial low caste population in localities around the Kandy town. The rise of a low caste politician in what used to be the seat of power of a feudal kingdom may seem paradoxical, but it reflected the articulation and growing influence of anti-feudal forces throughout this region.

One of the first independent political moves by the drummer caste leaders in Welivita was the establishment of a community centre in 1948. This community development outpost came under a nationwide programme started by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the Minister of Local Government in the first UNP government. In Welivita this community centre gradually developed as a centre for Kandyan dance training and, therefore, became locally known as 'kalāyathanaya'. The dance training was supported by a grant from the local Village Council as central government funds for cultural activities were distributed through local government bodies at that time. Mambara, who was also a renowned Kandyan dancer, was the main figure, behind the kalāyathanaya. This organization was also used by George E. de Silva in his political campaigns in this area.

One might approach the developments reported so far from the perspective of persisting caste loyalties. In a recent study, Jiggins (1979) saw electoral mobilization of various low caste groups in various parts of Sri Lanka as a manifestation of the vitality of caste as against class as a basis for political action. A similar analysis is implicit in Seneviratne's (1978) treatment of anti-establishment tendencies within the religious institutions in Kandy. If we adopt a similar viewpoint in regard to Welivita, it may be said that in his politics Mambara appealed to caste loyalties among his own people and manipulated caste symbols. The attempt to promote Kandyan dance, a cultural heritage and a caste profession of the Nakati, may be seen in this light. Such a narrow consideration of caste, however, tends to neglect the historical and structural context of the so-called 'low caste politics'. The follow up of low caste politics in Welivita reveals its anti-feudal and, therefore, progressive character.

Following the national level transfer of power in 1956 from the UNP to a coalition led by the newly established Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), there were more important changes in Welivita. Mambara and his followers readily turned to the new party as its reformist policies had a greater appeal to those fighting against feudal social barriers. In the Welivita area the support for the SLFP came from the same social bases that had been initially mobilized by George E. de Silva as a low caste politician within the UNP. As evident in local events, the SLFP contributed to a greater crystallization of an anti-feudal ideology among the underprivileged caste groups in Kandyan rural society. The tenancy reforms introduced under the Paddy Lands Act of 1958 unleashed a major attack on the remaining semi-feudal arrangements in the countryside. Mambara's leadership was instrumental in the articulation and strengthening of share-tenants' rights in Welivita. It showed that his leadership had the goal of liberating his caste group from the remaining clutches of feudal oppression. On the whole his politics was a reaction against the semi-feudal social order rather than an affirmation of it.

14. See Russell 1981.

The Paddy Lands Act sought to strengthen the share-tenants' position by bringing down the rent to a fixed level and by providing legal safeguards against eviction. Leach (1962: 242n) referred to it as an 'astonishing piece of Marxist legislation'. In Welivita it in fact had a revolutionary effect on dissolving semi-feudal production relations. The Act was followed by a period of turmoil in Welivita. While the low caste share-tenants became increasingly aware of their enhanced rights under the new Act, the landlords sought to retain the traditional half-share rent, evict the militant share-tenants and generally evade the tenancy law. While their entrenched power within the bureaucracy gave the upper caste landlords an upper hand at higher levels, the low caste share-tenants, to their advantage, had a favourable political climate, long-term possession and use of land, the strength of numbers and, above all, a remarkable degree of solidarity among themselves in their fight against the gentry.

The effect of tenancy reform varied according to the relative strength of the parties involved.

First, a substantial number of Nakati share-tenants managed to take advantage of the Paddy Lands Act and, thereby, established themselves as protected share-tenants paying a much reduced rent to the landlords. A majority of share-tenants in absentee-owned land were able to benefit in this manner. The absentee landlords in Kandy and Colombo did try to overcome the sharecropper demands, but because of their physical distance from the village they were unable to withstand the organized campaign by the local share-tenants. Some of the landlords opted to sell their land to the tenants themselves, while the other absentee owners gradually accepted the regulated rent. No precise data are available regarding lands transfers, but it appears that roughly about 25 percent of the paddy area in Welivita came under the statutory control of the local share-tenants. As the control exercised by the absentee landlords declined, there was an overall weakening of the semi-feudal economic base of the gentry. The liberated low caste peasants became a new force in the countryside.

Second, there was an eviction of share-tenants by many of the resident landlords. This was possible due to the vigilance and immediate presence of the resident landlords who had always followed a policy of changing share-tenants from time to time as a protective measure. Following the eviction, for some years the local Nakati boycotted any work for the landlords concerned, compelling the latter to either work the land themselves and thereby do something demeaning to the gentry status, or employ hired workers from outside. In any case evictions resulted in a separation of the workers from the means of production and, thereby, contributed to a change in production relations. Thus the disruption of tied relations to land was an important outcome of the tenancy reform.¹⁵

Third, not all share-tenancy arrangements in Welivita, however, became altered or disrupted through the above mechanisms. In 1979 some 8 percent of the total paddy area in Welivita continued to be operated under half-share tenancy arrangements of one sort or another. These tenants had not been able to benefit from the tenancy reforms because of

15. 'If, for example, the relation of lord and serf in respect of land is no longer binding, and there is no probability of a meaningfully oriented course of action by each party then the social system which we designate 'feudalism' is at an end.' (Pieris 1956: 6).

their continuing ties with the landlords. The prevailing low caste opinion in the village however was rather hostile towards these remaining patterns of subordination. These continuing tenancy arrangements indicate that the process of dissolution of semi-feudal economic ties evident in Welivita is as yet incomplete.

In summary, it can be said that an emerging low caste political leadership played a critical role in the processes leading to the disruption of the semi-feudal social order which had evolved in Welivita during the British period. If we identify the gentry as a conservative force inhibiting rural change, the newly emerged leadership was a dynamic force contributing to tenancy reform and other such change in the countryside. The above-mentioned political processes in turn were closely related to important economic changes that occurred in Welivita during the post-independence period.

Economic Change

As typical of Kandyan villages highland and paddy land constitute the major economic resources in Welivita. The village covers roughly about 200 acres of land consisting of 127 acres of highland and 73 acres of paddy. The highlands are used as housesites, home gardens and small plots of tea, coffee, coconut and pepper. Nearly a third of the highland area is not suitable for cultivation due to steepness, soil erosion and lack of water. Minor export crops, which thrive in certain other Kandyan villages (Morrison 1979), can not be grown successfully in Welivita due to climatic and soil conditions. On the whole highland provides little scope for capitalization of agriculture.

Paddy cultivation, which depends on local rain water and water flow in the village stream, had traditionally suffered from a number of limitations. During the dry season from May to August, a substantial area of paddy situated at higher elevations was left out of cultivation due to the scarcity of water. Paddy yields were quite low partly because the caste based production relations had a rigidity that prevented dynamic change in the rural economy. As the tenants paid a half of the produce to the landlords, many of whom were absentee owners with no direct involvement in the production process, the prevailing tenancy arrangements were grossly counter-productive; because of the half-share rent the tenant, the direct producer, had neither the ability nor incentives to adopt improved practices or make any long term investment on land. As an overall outcome of adverse ecological and institutional factors, the village economy remained stagnant and under-developed.

Prior to 1958 there was only sporadic improvement in production techniques in paddy cultivation in Welivita. Adoption of improved seed varieties, transplanting and application of chemical fertilizer were started by a few successful tenant farmers. However, the prevailing tenurial arrangements prevented widespread utilization of the new practices.

In the early 1950's there began a far more important change in the local agricultural scene. This relates to the utilization of certain paddy fields for cultivation of some vegetable crops during the dry season of each agricultural year. This innovation was initially introduced to Welivita by an uxorilocal (binna) husband who originally came from Marassana where paddy land had long been used for seasonal vegetable cultivation. It was discovered that the paddy

land that remained uncultivated during the dry season due to the scarcity of water can now be utilized for vegetable cultivation which has a lesser demand for water compared to paddy. In effect, there evolved a crop rotation between paddy and vegetables with the latter as a dry season crop grown primarily for the wholesale vegetable market in Kandy. Initially the main advantage of the crop rotation was that it put an end to the annual fallow or low season, thereby, resulting in an intensification of land use. Gradually it was discovered that due to crop rotation paddy harvest in the wet season too was substantially improved. It also became clear that because of the high price the vegetables fetched in the Kandy market, it was far more profitable to grow it in the dry season even on land where paddy was traditionally grown in both seasons. Thus rationality and profitability of crop rotation became increasingly evident. However, in Welivita the crop rotation became firmly established only after 1958 showing, as will be elaborated later, a connection with tenancy reforms.

The post-independence evolution of a successful crop rotation between paddy and vegetables appears to be a widespread development in villages in the south-eastern part of the hill country¹⁶. In 1955 Yalman noted its presence in Terutanne.

In the dry season when the fields were not under rice, some vegetables could be substituted, but the total was strictly limited by the lack of water. In areas nearer the town centres such as Nuwara Eliya, rice lands had been converted into vegetable gardens; it seemed clear that with a steady demand from organized markets and improved transport facilities there would be no insurmountable traditional hindrances to the cultivation of cash crops (1967:48).

As evident from Welivita organized markets indeed have emerged, and vegetables have become one of the principal cash crops in villages in this region.

The recent expansion of cash crop farming of vegetables in villages in several parts of the hill country is linked to the development of a countrywide vegetable marketing network. The wholesale markets in Colombo and Kandy which supply vegetables to smaller markets and retail traders throughout the country serve as the principal outlets for vegetables produced in the hill country villages (Abeysekere and Senanayake 1974, Gunawardena and Chandrasiri 1980). The development of a countrywide network of periodic markets (pola), as recently reported by Deborah Winslow (1977) and Piyadasa Senanayake (1980) may also be related to the expansion of vegetable cultivation. The expansion seems to have mainly affected the cultivation of what are known as exotic or upcountry varieties of vegetables which are distinct from indigenous varieties traditionally grown mostly by chena farmers using primitive techniques.¹⁷

16. For references to the crop rotation see Report on the Kandyan Peasantry Commission 1951, Yalman 1967, Abeysekere & Senanayake 1974 and Gunawardena & Chandrasiri 1980.

17. Examples of the exotic varieties are beans, tomatoes, cabbage and carrots. The indigenous varieties include okra, ma, pathola (snake gourd), watakolu, kekiri (melon) and the like. For more details on this distinction see Winslow 1977.

The seasonal vegetable cultivation in Welivita developed directly in response to the demand from the Kandy wholesale market. The vegetable wholesalers in Kandy, most of whom are immigrant businessmen of low country origin, provide capital to the local vegetable farmers whose produce is directly purchased by these wholesalers. There are four or five wholesalers in Kandy who purchase almost the entire vegetable production in Welivita through advancing credit to the local producers.¹⁸ Lorries owned or hired by the wholesalers are used for transporting vegetables to Kandy. As members of an urban capitalist class the wholesalers now acquire a surplus from Welivita through the medium of merchant capital which has, however, contributed to important structural changes in the rural economy.

The following table describes the vegetable farmers in Welivita during the dry season of 1979.

Table 2: *The distribution of vegetable farming households in Welivita by caste and scale of operation*

<i>Scale of Operation</i>	CASTE					
	<i>Nakati</i>	%	<i>Other</i>	%	<i>Total</i>	%
Large scale	9	5.5	0	0	9	4.5
Medium scale	14	8.6	3	7.9	17	8.5
Vegetables as a subsidiary crop	42	25.9	3	7.9	45	22.5
Total No. of households engaged in vegetable farming	65	40.0	6	15.8	71	35.5
No. not involved in vegetable farming	97	60.0	32	84.2	129	64.5
Total	162	100.0	38	100.0	200	100.0

Only the first two categories of vegetable producers supplied their produce to the Kandy market. Those in the third category produced vegetables mainly for household consumption; if they obtained any surplus it was sold to local shops or to itinerant traders. Oftentimes they cultivated only a small portion of their rice fields with vegetables, using the remaining area for paddy cultivation. The medium scale cashcroppers had at least one rice field fully cultivated with vegetables, but their farm size was not more than one acre. The large scale operators whose farm size was larger than one acre, usually had two or more fields under vegetables. A characteristic feature of the large scale operators was that, in addition to their own land including the land they were controlling as statutory tenants, they leased in land from others for vegetable cultivation under a short term lease. The leaseholders paid a cash rent at the rate of Rs. 400 per crop season for $\frac{1}{2}$ acre plot.

18. For a more comprehensive discussion on the impact of the wholesale vegetable market in Kandy on surrounding rural areas, see Silva, K. T. 1982.

In Welivita through market gardening of vegetables a stratum of relatively successful commercial farmers has emerged. During the 1979 dry season when roughly about two-thirds of the total paddy area in Welivita was under the vegetable crop, nine households (4.5 percent of all households) had a total of 23 acres (33 percent of all farmland) under vegetables with an average of 2.5 acres per household. All the leading cashcroppers in Welivita belong to the Nakati caste, indicating that vegetable cultivation in fact has enabled certain families belonging to the bottom layer of the caste hierarchy to move up in society. Through their cash income from vegetables they purchased land on a moderate scale, educated their children and maintained a relatively high standard of living. They became clearly differentiated from the vast majority of the impoverished low caste households.

As an emerging low caste leader Mambara represented the upwardly mobile social stratum in Welivita. His growing influence showed that the upwardly mobile social stratum has gradually surpassed the gentry as the dominant force in the countryside. Mambara himself was a medium scale cashcropper and his political rise was in many ways linked with the development of cashcropping. We already found that he gave leadership to the local campaign for tenancy reform. He also successfully campaigned for certain infrastructural developments which directly contributed to the development of cashcropping in the area. One such project was reconstruction of canals distributing water from the local stream using concrete, resulting in a substantial improvement in the local irrigation system. Even more important was his role in road building in the area. Until 1965 there was no direct motorable access to Welivita because of its location at the bottom of a steep valley. Those days farm produce was carried on head a mile or so over the rugged mountain upto a point reached by the lorries. The tarred road was extended to Welivita in 1965, largely due to the lobbying by Mambara to the local MP. Now lorries from Kandy can come to Welivita within 30 minutes and the improved transport facilities have been a major factor in the recent expansion of vegetable cultivation.

The expansion of vegetable cultivation in Welivita proceeded hand in hand with the tenurial changes resulting from the Paddy Lands Act of 1958. A weakening of the semi-feudal control exercised by the gentry and acquisition of a greater control over the means of production by some of the local Nakati who were directly involved in cultivation seems to have been a structural prerequisite for the development of cashcropping in Welivita. Following the tenancy reform it became possible for the statutory share-tenants to use the land for cashcropping or sublease it for cashcropping, provided that the statutory paddy rent or its money value was paid to the absentee owners. The resident landlords on the other hand found it advantageous to obtain a high cash rent by leasing out their land to the cashcroppers under a short-term contract valid for only one crop season. That these landlords are not directly involved in vegetable cultivation reveals their increasing marginality, lack of commercial enterprise and restrictions imposed by their caste background as non-cultivating owners. The development of cashcropping was related to several outcomes of the tenancy reform; strengthening of the rights of some of the cultivators, rent regulation and its change from a produce rent to a money rent, the dissolution of hereditary economic ties and the consequent liberation of the low caste population, the switch from long-term tenancy to short-term lease and several land sales from absentee owners to local cashcroppers. Thus the demise of semi-feudal economic forms through tenancy reforms was structurally linked to the advance of the capitalist mode of production.

The evolution of a crop rotation in Kandyan villages must be seen as a spontaneous capitalist development produced mainly by market mechanisms. It can not be directly attributed to any specific production campaign by the government. On the contrary, at the initial stages the government extension staff seemed to have discouraged the growing of vegetables on paddy land as it was seen as a practice contrary to the government drive for self-sufficiency in rice. It has been suggested that the imposition of an import ban on certain commodities in recent times had a positive effect on the local vegetable cultivation.¹⁹ The import restrictions, however, applied to dry, storable vegetables like potatoes, onions and chillies which do not come under the crop rotation in the Welivita area. Although there is a government department responsible for marketing of vegetables, its contribution to the expansion of vegetable cultivation seems to have been quite restricted (Abeyesekera and Senanayake 1974, Gunawardena and Chandrasiri 1980). On the whole it was due to its rationality and profitability as realized by private traders and cashcrop farmers rather than due to any direct support from the government, that the crop rotation developed in the Kandyan villages.

In an agro-ecological sense, crop rotation represents an improvement over simple year-round cultivation of paddy. Each crop has a definite advantage in the particular season in which it is grown and the crop rotation adds to the fertility of soil and constitutes an efficient and profitable use of land and water resources. Because of the crop rotation now the entire paddy area in Welivita is intensively used in both crop seasons. As a result of the changed cropping pattern the actual and potential productivity of land rapidly increased to yield a marketable surplus. The land values increased from about Rs. 4000 an acre in the 1950s to over Rs. 20,000 in 1979. The rationalization of rural production processes has recently been reported for various parts of Sri Lanka,²⁰ but its specific nature in hill country villages must be seen in the light of non-availability of large tracts of irrigated farm land, and the presence of other constraints imposed by hilly terrain and a feudal background. In a context of rapid population growth, the crop rotation has made it possible to use the available land and water resources more efficiently and more productively than in the past. We know from Geertz (1963) that similar processes can lead to an involutive tendency whereby pre-existing social patterns, instead of weakening, achieve a greater elaboration. Our findings on crop rotation however lead us to take the opposite view.

The change in cropping pattern in Welivita has been accompanied by an overall reorganization of the rural economy. A heavy capital outlay is now needed in both paddy and vegetable cultivations, but more predominantly in the latter. Therefore, the owners of capital, namely outside traders and local cashcroppers, have been the main beneficiaries of recent increase in productivity of land. Wage labour had gradually replaced family and cooperative (attam) labour as the predominant modes of labour utilization in local agriculture. Family and and attam labour still have a place in paddy cultivation, but even here the disintegrative processes noted by Gunasinghe (1976) are at work. The recent changes within the rural economy has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the numbers seeking wage-earning opportunities outside the village. The number of local people working in nearby

19. Morrison et. al. 1979.

20. Brow 1978, Hettige 1980, Alexander 1982.

tea plantations has substantially increased in recent years (see Silva K. T. 1980). Seasonal migration to the dry zone in search of farm work is also widespread, especially among the local youths.²¹

The economic processes outlined so far indicated the increased capitalist penetration into the countryside, particularly after 1958. The changes in cropping pattern in particular represent a significant advance of the capitalist mode of production and a corresponding weakening of remaining feudal elements.

Conclusion

Thus both economic and political changes in Kandyan rural society during the post-independence period must be understood in the larger historical context of transition from feudalism to capitalism. The local level politics after 1948 reveals the contradiction between the emerging capitalist forces and the declining feudal elements in the Kandyan rural society. Analysis of political dimensions of agrarian change has been lacking even in the current debate on India. Alavi observes,

None of the participants in the debate have demonstrated that there is any conflict between the new 'rural 'capitalist' class and the 'feudal' landlords, if they can be structurally distinguished at all! (1975: 172).

In the case of Welivita we have demonstrated that the feudal and anti-feudal elements were clearly distinguished and that the contradiction between them was expressed clearly in the political process. Any dualistic notions of co-existence or unity between capitalist and pre-capitalist forms, commonly attributed to colonial and neo-colonial situations, are not supported by our data concerning the post-independence period.

The changes observed in Welivita from 1948 onwards were irreversible and structurally discontinuous in character. We find an overall reorganization of the rural economy, a weakening of the caste system and a parallel development of a rural class structure independent of and largely opposed to the caste hierarchy. If we understand the changes in the colonial period as structurally continuous with the pre-colonial social order and, therefore, producing semi-feudal arrangements, we must consider post-independence changes in far more radical terms i.e. as a structural change in the rural economy. The recent findings of other authors too point to the structurally discontinuous nature of post-independence changes in Kandyan rural society (Gunasinghe 1975, 1976; Robinson 1975; Brow 1978; Seneviratne 1978).

As Gunasinghe (1979) has rightly pointed out, the recent accounts of the Kandyan rural society tend to emphasize the disruptive and disintegrative character of the processes of change operating in the countryside. The evidence from Welivita indicates that the processes operating are not only destructive but also constructive. The crop rotation in particular must be seen as a constructive change, indicating a capitalist reorganization of the rural economy. It can not be said that the post-independence changes in Welivita amount to a full scale

21. For greater details see Silva K. T. (1982).

transition to the capitalist mode of production. The separation of the worker from the means of production is not yet complete. There has not been a complete restructuring of land ownership following tenancy reforms. Despite the increased integration with an outside market, production for subsistence also continues, specially in paddy cultivation. Such continuities, however, may rapidly disappear with further changes in the countryside along the capitalist path. It may well be that the liberalized economic policies of the new government formed in 1977 have led to a further advancement of the processes outlined in this essay.

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