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Recipe for assimilation: national integration, the ethnic other and the evolution of Kandyan consciousness in Sri Lanka¹

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The Kandyan Sinhalese of Sri Lanka (previously Ceylon) occupy the central highlands of the island, and are believed to have a disposition that is 'culturally' different from that of their counterparts in the lowlands. This difference, real or perceived, was most strongly emphasised during the colonial era when the low-country Sinhalese settled in Kandyan areas in large numbers, and started benefiting from the British-introduced plantation economy that thrived on Kandyan soil, thus creating a competition of sorts between the Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese. Such competition subsequently prompted a federal demand by the Kandyans. Interestingly, they currently seem to have harmonised perfectly with the unitary model of the state, their erstwhile demands apparently forgotten. This study explores the reasons behind this evolution of the Kandyan consciousness by studying the function of integrative forces in the nation-building process of post-colonial Ceylon that expedited the absorption of Kandyans into the larger Ceylonese nation. Specifically, it examines the context in which the Kandyan demand for federalism emerged, and how the ethnic conflict shaped the Sinhalese perception of power-sharing and how that in turn impacted the Kandyan understanding of same. Towards this end, the study has made use of the Integrated Threat Theory, National Identity Theory, Ethnic Nation Theory, and Typology of Integration. Surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews have been employed in building the analysis of this research. It contends that the rise of Tamil nationalism effectively paled all intra-Sinhalese divisions, synonymised the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan nation with the Sinhalese ethnicity, and thus provided a very potent incentive for the Kandyans to accept the project of the unitary state, their previous grievances and the resultant demand for federal autonomy notwithstanding.

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Introduction

The discourse on federalism in Sri Lanka does not have a very long history. The first formal argument in favour of federalism was made in 1927 by the Sinhalese occupying the central hills of Sri Lanka, who are known as Kandyans after the name of the capital city of the hills, Kandy. This request was presented to the commission of inquiry appointed by the British government with Lord Donoughmore as its head. The commission, whose main function was to introduce a new constitution to colonial Ceylon, considered the opinions of a number of political actors representing the interests of a myriad of segments of the society that were organised along lines of *inter alia* ethnicity, caste, gender, and territory.

Of these, the Kandyans constituted a collectivity that was self-conscious about its distinctiveness from the low-country Sinhalese due to a number of socio-politico-economic reasons (or rather 'concerns', as this paper attempts to argue). Such self-consciousness led them to request the low-country Sinhalese members of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) to refrain from competing for Kandyan seats at the 1924 elections. This request was not honoured, resulting in only 3 Kandyan seats being left to be occupied by Kandyans themselves (De Silva 1981). The cumulative effect of these developments was that the Kandyans started to view the low-country Sinhalese as a threat to the full realisation of their politico-economic ambitions. This insecurity found expression in a demand for federalism that was presented to the Donoughmore commission in 1927, but in the Donoughmore constitution of 1931, provisions for the entertainment of this demand had not been made available.

Interestingly, the Tamils – who later campaigned for a federal structure and afterwards even a separate state – criticised this request when it was first made (Vivekanandan 2003). Even more interesting, perhaps, is the fact that in the decades following independence the Kandyans gradually lost all their zeal for the federal quest and became perfectly integrated to the unitary project of the post-colonial Ceylonese/Sri Lankan state. In fact, they recently even volunteered to partially relinquish what marginal autonomy has been granted to them under the Provincial Council system along with seven other provinces by repealing clause 13A of the 13th Amendment to the constitution, thus enabling the central government to legislate on matters allocated to Provincial Councils (Central Province wants 13A Amended 2013). The Tamil demand for federalism that was made shortly after the Kandyan one, however, travelled in a completely different direction. In contrast to the Kandyans who found it possible to align themselves with the interests of the increasingly centralising state apparatus of Sri Lanka, the Tamils identified themselves more and more with the cause of greater autonomy that culminated in a bloody struggle for a separate state.

This paper explores the reasons for the transformation of the Kandyan consciousness from endorsing federalism to harmonising itself with the unitary project of Sri Lanka. It

analyses the conditions under which the Kandyan Sinhalese consciousness evolved from demanding federal autonomy in the 1920s to subsequently accepting the project of unitary state. The research also looks at the processes of national and political integration of post-colonial Ceylon/Sri Lanka and how they provided the background for changing dynamics of politics among the Kandyan Sinhalese.

In order to do so, it makes use of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. FGDs were conducted with 20 Kandyan respondents from Sinhala, Buddhist, non-elite (service caste) backgrounds. The ethno-religious bias was due to the need to capture 'Kandyan' as they were perceived back then. However, it is important to note here that the initial demand for federalism was forwarded by only the Kandyan elite. Non-elite Kandyans were chosen as respondents for this study primarily to understand the degree to which they have or have not identified with this cause over time, and to determine their current perception of the Kandyan identity. 15 in-depth interviews were carried out with Kandyan elites to gain insights into the factors that have contributed to the evolution of their sentiment on power-sharing.

Through a phenomenological approach to the puzzle of Kandyans accepting the project of unitary state overtime, the paper attempts to argue that the rise of Tamil nationalism and its demand for secession has led to the weakening of intra-ethnic divisions within the Sinhalese community, leading the Kandyan Sinhalese to accept the project of unitary state. It further attempts to establish that the process of Kandyan integration was complemented by the parallel, and largely independent, process of inter-marriages between Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese families.

Towards this end, the paper has been organised under four sections: First, it looks at how power-sharing in general and federalism in particular have been received in Sri Lanka through the works of scholars who explore the local society's perception of this concept. Then it illustrates the current Kandyan opposition to power-sharing through a national survey conducted in 2012 named *State of Democracy in South Asia*. Next it maps the historical context in which the Kandyan demand for federalism emerged to explain why there was support for a federal system among the Kandyans earlier. Finally, it examines the factors that contributed towards them dropping this demand and accepting the project of unitary state.

Discourse on power-sharing in Sri Lanka

Opinion on federalism, and in fact on any sort of power-sharing mechanism, in Sri Lanka is hugely polarised along ethnic lines due to nearly three decades of confrontational politics between Sinhalese and Tamils. V.S. Sambandan (2006) in his *Federalism and the Media: Some Realities and Stereotypes from Sri Lanka* opines that for the Sinhalese federalism 'means "separation" and for the Tamils, it implies a "renunciation of nationhood"' (110). This polarisation of stances on state reform, and the resultant

tendency of politicians to win votes by offering ethnically more palatable packages to their respective communities has been termed as 'ethnic outbidding' by Neil DeVotta (2004). Further analysing the Sinhalese end of this argument, Uyangoda (2007) holds that 'In the politics of electoral competition ... there has been repeated resistance to power-sharing proposals on the grounds that deviation from the unitary state framework would facilitate minority secession' (10).

Asanga Welikala (2008) observes that the Sinhalese stereotype of state power as something that should be concentrated in a central authority is largely informed by a school of thought that believes that:

dilution of central authority, often derisively attributed to vapid leadership in Sinhala historiography, was seen to produce anarchy, pestilence, moral decadence, and cultural degradation. Therefore centralized unity related to territorial integrity is axiomatic in the traditional Sinhala ontology of the state and exercise of sovereignty, and explains its resonance in the modern nationalist hostility to any sort of political decentralization. Decentralization, devolution, federalism, power-sharing and autonomy, in the Sinhala nationalist view, are mere precursors of an unthinkable certainty: the territorial division of the island (Welikala 2008, 71).

Sinhalese opposition to power-sharing in general and federalism in particular, therefore, 'has been very emotional ... based in the very psyche of the Sinhalese people' (Oberst 1987: 190).

Uyangoda (2011) investigates the reasons for state reforms towards accommodating power-sharing to continue to be resisted in Sri Lanka. In this attempt, he makes an interesting observation saying that 'the war, from the point of view of the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE, has become a process autonomous of the original causes of the conflict' (37). Uyangoda's argument is that the armed struggle actually served to reduce the bargaining power of Tamils by 1) failing to positively contribute at the policy level to address Tamil grievances and making the Sri Lankan state relatively unreformable 2) increasing inter-communal mistrust and importing the belief that only a zero-sum outcome will be accepted as a legitimate and just solution 3) increasing the capacity of Sinhala ruling classes to use Tamils against Tamils, a fact that owes to the annihilatory policies of the LTTE (38-40).

This thinking has gone so far as to have hindered prospects of cooperation between the LTTE and Sinhala state even under grave humanitarian circumstances such as the Tsunami that struck the island in December, 2004. The Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) that was being discussed by the two parties as a means of fund disbursement collapsed due to the LTTE insisting on interim administrative powers with substantive autonomy and the Sinhalese phobia that such an arrangement would undermine the sovereignty of the unitary state (Stokke 2006: 1032).

This brief discussion shows that power-sharing is viewed in zero-sum terms by the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils in Sri Lanka. As part of the majority community, the Kandyan seem to have taken the stance generally assumed by their larger ethnic collectivity, a fact that is illustrated by the statistics presented below.

An illustration of the Kandyan opposition to power-sharing

The Survey on State of Democracy in Sri Lanka 2012 carried out by the Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka explores public opinion on issues related to power-sharing. A cross tabulation of the respondents' responses to questions pertaining to power-sharing against their territorial origins (traditional Kandyan areas versus Southern and Western Provinces to represent low-country areas) reveals the extent to which the Kandyans have been integrated to the unitary project of Sri Lanka.

i) Powers of Provincial councils should be increased

	Kandyan Sinhalese	Southern Province Sinhalese	Western Province Sinhalese
Strongly Agree	5 (1.5%)	18 (3.9%)	37 (4.6%)
Agree	68 (21%)	98 (21.3%)	207 (26%)
Disagree	111 (34.3%)	137 (29.8%)	193 (24.2%)
Strongly Disagree	23 (7.1%)	63 (13.7%)	99 (12.4%)
Don't Know	117 (36.1%)	144 (31.3%)	260 (32.7%)

ii) Powers of some Provincial Councils should be increased more than those of others

	Kandyan Sinhalese	Southern Province Sinhalese	Western Province Sinhalese
Strongly Agree	1 (0.3%)	17 (3.7%)	13 (1.6%)
Agree	60 (18.5%)	96 (20.9%)	132 (16.6%)
Disagree	120 (36.9%)	152 (33%)	228 (28.6%)
Strongly Disagree	30 (9.2%)	65 (14.1%)	178 (22.4%)
Don't Know	114 (35.1%)	130 (28.3%)	245 (30.8%)

iii) Each ethnic group should have the right to elect a quota of MPs from their communities

	Kandyan Sinhalese	Southern Province Sinhalese	Western Province Sinhalese
Strongly Agree	79 (24.3%)	121 (26.4%)	156 (19.6%)
Agree	131 (40.3%)	209 (45.6%)	338 (42.5%)
Disagree	26 (8%)	46 (10%)	80 (10.1%)
Strongly Disagree	9 (2.8%)	17 (3.7%)	42 (5.3%)
Don't Know	80 (24.6%)	65 (14.2%)	180 (22.6%)

iv) Provincial councils should be given police powers

	Kandyan Sinhalese	Southern Province Sinhalese	Western Province Sinhalese
Strongly Agree	5 (1.5%)	5 (1.1%)	19 (2.4%)
Agree	29 (8.9%)	56 (12.2%)	116 (14.6%)
Disagree	49 (15.1%)	70 (15.2%)	111 (14%)
Strongly Disagree	29 (8.9%)	98 (21.3%)	144 (18.1%)
Don't Know	213 (65.5%)	231 (50.2%)	405 (50.9%)

v) Provincial councils should be given land powers

	Kandyan Sinhalese	Southern Province Sinhalese	Western Province Sinhalese
Strongly Agree	4 (1.2%)	4 (0.9%)	12 (1.5%)
Agree	19 (5.8%)	53 (11.5%)	134 (16.8%)
Disagree	52 (16%)	76 (16.6%)	95 (11.9%)
Strongly Disagree	32 (9.8%)	95 (20.7%)	149 (18.7%)
Don't Know	218 (67.1%)	231 (50.3%)	406 (51%)

Source: Survey on State of Democracy in Sri Lanka 2012, Social Scientists' Association, Colombo, Sri Lanka

The above statistics bring into light some interesting traits that signify the evolution of the Kandyan consciousness through the years. Some instances can be cited as follows: The least percentage of respondents who strongly agreed for more powers to the Provincial Councils were from the Kandyan areas, while the highest percentage that disagreed with same was also from those areas. In light of the fact that it was the Kandyans who first introduced the concept of power-sharing to Ceylon, this current resistance to delegating more powers even to Provincial Councils testifies to the strength of their identification with the unitary project of the island. The same can be said about the Kandyan response towards asymmetrical power-sharing. Here, too, Kandyans were the highest percentage of respondents to disagree with the proposal, and second lowest to agree with it.

Among those who agreed to give police powers to Provincial Councils, Kandyan respondents recorded the lowest percentage, while also coming second only to the Southern Province by a very thin margin (0.1%) with regard to the percentage of those who disagreed. Additionally, the lowest percentage of those who agreed to give land powers to the Provincial Councils came from the Kandyan regions. The percentage of those who disagreed for same in the Kandyan regions came second only to the Southern Province.

However, it should also be noted here that the Kandyans have not gone to the extremes that their low-country counterparts have with regard to accommodating power-sharing as a minority demand. For instance, they recorded the lowest percentage of

respondents to have strongly disagreed to more devolution in favour of the Provincial Councils and increasing the powers of some Provincial Councils only. They also recorded the least percentage to strongly disagree with giving police and land powers to the Provincial Councils. Hence these statistics seem to suggest that the Kandyans (as represented in this sample), though they generally have not assumed as hard line a position as the low-country Sinhalese respondents in the sample, have become very well integrated to the aims and aspirations of the Sinhalese-dominated unitary state of Sri Lanka. In this light, it would be important and interesting to look at the conditions that led them to forward a demand for federalism during colonial times.

Kandyan demand for federal autonomy in the Donoughmore era

In 1927 representatives of the Kandyan National Alliance (KNA) gave evidence in front of the Donoughmore Commission demanding a federal setup in the country which would enable the Kandyans – as well as the low-country Sinhalese and Tamils – to manage their own affairs while being united within a single Ceylonese polity. Chapter VI of the Donoughmore Commission report presents the Kandyan federal demand in intricate detail, in which the case for separate existence is made through four arguments: 1) The Kandyan kingdom is being controlled by a legislature in which there are no Kandyan representatives and hence legislating on affairs pertaining to the Kandyans has been left to the mercy of a third party that is neither Kandyan nor British 2) Kandyan institutions and laws are being substituted by foreign institutions and laws, and Buddhists of other nations have been allowed to intervene in matters of Kandyan Buddhist sites 3) Apart from those offices that are held by Kandyan leaders by virtue of tradition, all other high government offices are being held by persons not of Kandyan or British origin 4) When compared with the situation in 1815, the education status of Kandyans has declined considerably due to the discontinuation of the temple education system, which is only one example of the general decline of the Kandyan (Donoughmore Report: 104-105).

In bidding for federalism, the Kandyans have reconstructed history to support their argument claiming that they have lived as a separate political entity for more than 2400 years in the island of Ceylon, and have described the Kandyan Convention as a document exchanged between two sovereign nations (Roberts 1977). The chapter concludes with the commission's observation that while the Kandyan case deserves sympathy, a country that was ruled as a single political unit for about a hundred years under British rule should not be divided like this along racial lines, especially when its people have started intermingling and begun the process of thinking as a nation (Donoughmore Report: 104).

Important to observe here is the Kandyan conception of themselves as constituting a distinct 'nationality' from the low-country Sinhalese. Also included in the chapter is an observation of the Commission that 'the [Kandyan] people as a whole have never ceased to regard the Low Country Sinhalese as foreigners, and that their apparent acquiescence

in the merger of the provinces has been due to lack of cohesion and an absence of political consciousness rather than to an acknowledgment of the benefits conferred by the union' (Donoughmore Report: 106).

It will be interesting to note later on, however, that the lines of these demarcations were redefined to constitute a new 'insider' and a new 'foreigner' in relation to Tamils.

Historical context of the Kandyan federalist demand

The formal articulation of a demand for greater autonomy in the evidence given in front of the Donoughmore Commission was the culmination of a strong perception of marginalisation that had persisted for years among the Kandyans. This section discusses in two phases the reasons for the rise of such sentiments: First, it examines the construction of a Kandyan consciousness as a result of British administrative policies. Then it presents the gradual entry and perpetuation of sentiments of politico-economic deprivation in that consciousness against the low-country Sinhalese that also in turn contributed towards the consolidation of such consciousness.

Construction of the Kandyan Consciousness

The Kandyan kingdom comprised a vast territory when the British conquered it in 1815. This territory included 'the whole of the middle of the island, bounded by a belt of maritime districts, irregularly varying in width from 8 to 30 miles, and at its northern extremity to nearly 50 miles ...' (Appuhamy 1995: 496). This encompassing jurisdiction, and the idea that Kandy was the natural successor to the continuously shifting chain of capitals of the Sinhalese kingdom (Malagoda 1976), also invariably implied that though the kingdom was named after its capital, there was no such distinct cultural identity as 'Kandyan' at least prior to British occupation of the island. Wickramasinghe (2006) confirms this observing that even when the coastal line was under the Portuguese, Sinhalese living in those areas 'emphasized the Kandyan king's overlordship over the territory ... [and in] some of the Matara writings emanating from the lowlands ... the kings of the Kandyan kingdom were praised as though the poets lived in an area under Kandyan rule rather than under Dutch colonial rule' (11).

In light of these conceptions rooted in Sinhalese consciousness, the appointment of Nayakkar kings of South Indian descent to the Kandyan throne, though it initially constituted a calculated move to prevent rifts between the local nobles who were constantly competing for royal power, proved a very expensive political mistake. Especially those living in the capital city, nobles and commoners alike, viewed these rulers with distaste, sometimes calling them *vaduga* which meant 'foreigners' (Wijetunga 1958). This dissatisfaction grew into huge proportions under the rule of Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe – the last king of an independent kingdom within Ceylon – who is widely believed to have employed very harsh methods in ruling, as evidenced most

conspicuously by the notorious execution of the Ehelepola family². As such, the political landscape of the Kandyan kingdom towards the latter part of its existence was fraught with intense political rivalries.

In terms of the economy, the Kandyan kingdom was never too prosperous largely due to its mountainous terrains that were not too conducive for a prosperous agrarian system (Schrikker 2007). With the arrival of the Europeans the situation turned from bad to worse.

The Kandyan kingdom in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was economically weak due to the combination of a poor agricultural base, an unfavourable balance of trade resulting from European control of the coasts, and the high costs of the periodic wars against the Europeans ... the transition from irrigation agriculture in the dry north to rain-fed cultivation in the central highlands was a move from what had been, prior to political disruptions, a surplus-generating agricultural system to a system which produced at a mere subsistence level. In the central highlands, the flat lands required by wet rice cultivation were largely unavailable. Such land was to be produced at great cost through the construction of artificial terraces or the use of lower-yielding varieties of grain that did not require ponded water. Population densities were lower ... than in the wet, flat coastal lowlands ... where rice could support greater population densities (Duncan 1990: 34).

This politically unstable and economically weak kingdom fell to the British in 1815 with the signing of the Kandyan Convention³ that effectively dethroned the Kandyan king and conferred all authority of the kingdom to the English King George III. With this historic convention Ceylon became a colony of the British Empire.

However, as illustrated above, awareness of a distinct Kandyan identity did not prevail at this point of history, and the fall of Kandy was perceived as the fall of the last Sinhalese kingdom in the island. It was the British who in the 1901 census registered a separate entity as 'Kandyans' and included residents of Central, Uva, Sabaragamuwa, and North-Central provinces as people belonging to that entity for the first time in the island's history (Wickramasinghe 2006: 57). As will next be illustrated, the economic policies adopted by the British and their eventual socio-political consequences led to a

² Ehelepola *dissawe*, a Kandyan noble of high standing, was suspected of plotting against the king and instigating a rebellion in his jurisdiction of Sabaragamuwa, and was issued immediate summons to the Kandyan court. Disobeying, he escaped to the lowlands occupied by the British, the punishment for which was given to his family in the form of brutal execution. However, this version of events is contested by scholars such as Colvin De Silva, C. E. Godakumbura, and P. E. Pieris on grounds of the scale of brutality, charges against the King, and the ends the reporting of the incident served (as to whether it was for propaganda purposes or actual reporting of fact) (Pieris 2015).

³ The Kandyan Convention was signed between a number of disgruntled Kandyan nobles who had grievances against their king and hence sought British help to overthrow him, and representatives of the British crown. However, the fundamental clause from the local side was that Buddhism is continued to be given state patronage (Seneviratne 2011: 188).

strong sense of marginalisation that also lent themselves to consolidating this new consciousness of 'Kandyanness'.

Economic and Political Factors that Contributed towards Kandyan Distinction

Initially, Kandyan farmers were reluctant to support the new plantation system of the British that commenced with coffee. 'Among the Sinhalese, a peasant cultivator of paddy land held a much higher status than a landless labourer. In addition, the low wages paid to hired workers failed to attract the Kandyan peasant, and the peak season for harvesting plantation coffee usually coincided with the peasant's own harvest' (Nubin 2002: 114). The main consequence of this reluctance and the labour shortage it created was that Indian labourers and low-country Sinhalese who were willing to fill the void (in terms of labour and plantation infrastructure respectively) came and settled in the Kandyan areas. As the new comers (mostly low-country Sinhalese) slowly claimed control over those services that branched off the plantation economy such as transportation, labour supply, and arrack renting, '[t]he Kandyan Sinhalese soon found themselves left far behind in getting a share of the economic opportunities and prosperity that accompanied colonialism' (Kanapathipillai 2009). Adding to the sense of economic deprivation in the Kandyan mindset was the land issue:

As early as 1869 the Assistant Agent at Kegalle spoke of 'a surplus population, a population which cannot derive subsistence from its labour'. Following the paddy tax, evictions had occurred in Badulla and Nuwara Eliya and the peasants who lost their paddy fields were nearest the subsistence level. In the Kegalle district village land was sold to estates and a landless class of labourers was in the making (Wickramasinghe 2006: 56).

The brunt of this bitterness fell on the low-country Sinhalese who, seasoned by 300 years of interaction with various European colonial powers, were by now well versed in the art of Capitalist entrepreneurship and wasted no time in cashing in on the new opportunities that were presenting themselves in the central highlands (Hoole 1998). What is more, the Kandyans by the end of the nineteenth century actually preferred the plantation Tamils over the low-country Sinhalese (Hoole 1998) as a result of the economic displacement they were suffering thanks largely to the latter.

Apart from these economic grievances there was simmering political discontent as well. 'As the Sri Lankans won increasing degrees of self-government, the Kandyans became aware that under any system of popular franchise, the low-country Sinhalese might outnumber them. Thus... J. A. Halangoda...expressed the up country concern over constitutional reform proposals championed by the CNC' (Jiggins 1979: 24).

In addition to numbers, there was the fact that the low-country Sinhalese had by now gained effective control of the national legislature through economically asserting themselves in the country and meeting the property requirements laid down for

candidacy. Jayawardena (2007) provides an extensive account of how the low-country Sinhalese (belonging to both so-called higher and lower castes) utilised opportunities presented by the new colonial economy to rise to heights of affluence that later afforded them access to national politics, most of whom had made their fortunes in the Kandyan regions. Jayawardena then explains how the wealth thus obtained was concentrated within the extended family circles of these families that contributed towards a significant rise in their power and position, later giving rise to 'the related political families of the 20th century that dominated national politics' (288), which obviously did not include Kandyan families.

The politico-economic marginalisation of the Kandyans became especially pronounced during the 1920s when, after centuries of colonial investment in the local society, a western educated class of professionals was finally emerging. Increasing numbers of the local elite were engaging in vocations considered prestigious such as medicine, law, trading, plantations, and engineering. However, Kandyans who could afford this education were severely underrepresented, as testified by the statistics of 1921 where the number of Kandyans occupied as lawyers and doctors were 53, accounting for a mere 3.4% of the native population to be occupied thus. Statistics on the number of Kandyan men involved in 'white collar' professions as against low-country men from 1901 to 1921 throws this phenomenon into greater relief. In 1901 low-country Sinhalese men made up 39.4% of the white collar force, while Kandyans did only 1.6%. By 1921 this number had risen to 3.2%, only to find that the low-country percentage had also gone up to 42.5% (Roberts 1977).

The resultant perception of threat was politically articulated as a 'minority' grievance with the liberal help of Governor Manning who saw in the aggrieved Kandyan consciousness an opportunity to split the CNC which he regarded as 'an intolerable challenge' (De Silva 1981: 390). Stephan and Stephan (2000) forward the idea that perceptions of threats to survival and wellbeing of the group act as incentives for the group to discriminate against those outside of the group. Accordingly, the categorisation of the Kandyans as a minority came at the expense of Sinhalese solidarity which, though not especially pronounced, was at least not especially endangered till then. Manning was careful to distinguish 'Kandyanness' from 'Sinhaleanness' by agreeing with the Kandyans 'that they, like the Moors and Tamils, were a minority' (Welhengama & Pillai 2014: 83). Manning's manipulation went further. Playing on the political fears of the Kandyan population, he publicly declared that separate electorates should be created for the Kandyan provinces and constitutional safeguards should be put in place to protect Kandyans from low-country political encroachment (Welhengama & Pillai 2014). He is also believed to be a chief architect of the KNA created in 1925 (Ibid).

Manning contributed to the rise of Kandyan nationalism in no small capacity. De Silva (1981) describes Manning as 'one of the most masterful British Governors of the island [who was] totally insensitive to the need for any substantial measure of

constitutional reforms. Indeed he believed that any readjustment of the constitutional structure was detrimental to the British position in Sri Lanka ...' (390. As such, he was alert to any divisions among the natives that could be manipulated to consolidate British power in the island even further, which brought to his attention the Kandyans and their displeasure over low-country Sinhalese domination of the CNC. Ever the calculating political mind, Manning promptly put the full weight of his office behind the Kandyans, publicly endorsing their claim for greater autonomy and convincing the Kandyans to present their case to the Colonial Secretary, which they immediately did (De Silva 1981: 395).

According to Wickramasinghe (2006: 56):

The crux of the discord between Kandyan and Low-Country Sinhalese was the discrepancy, real or perceived, in the distribution both of *de jure* power resources – that is, the power resources which accrued to each individual by virtue of his or her citizenship in the state, in particular the right and ability to petition the government and organize political action – and of *de facto* power resources such as education and wealth. The more articulate members of the Kandyan community translated this sense of deprivation into an appeal for remedial political action.

The main grievance of the Kandyans was that notwithstanding the presidency of a Tamil, the CNC was dominated by the low-country Sinhalese, and as such there was inadequate representation of Kandyan sentiments and aspirations in the primary native political force of Ceylon (Bandarage 2008: 35; Peebles 2006: 84; Bizziouras 2014: 43).. This grievance escalated into a serious rift following the election of 1924 prior to which the Kandyans requested that the low-country Sinhalese not compete in their seats, one that was not honoured and hence resulted in the majority seats being won by CNC-backed low-country candidates (De Silva 1981; Bizziouras 2014; Bandarage 2008). Consequently, the Kandyans broke away from the CNC and formed the Kandyan National Assembly (KNA) in 1925 with the primary objective of agitating for the setting up of a federal system in Ceylon that would enable them to be politically organised separately from the low-country Sinhalese and secure their own political and economic interests. Such objective was what manifested itself in a formal demand for federalism presented in 1927 to the Donoughmore Commission appointed to recommend constitutional reforms for Ceylon.

Historical trajectory of the Kandyan federal demand

The paper has so far shown that the politics of the first few decades of the 20th century highlights the socio-politico-economic competition between Kandyan and low-country elites. As already discussed, the grievances of Kandyans against the low-country

Sinhalese culminated into a political project that demanded federal status to the Kandyan region. However, after almost a century of forwarding this demand, today Kandyans have joined the larger Sinhalese community to clearly reject any attempt of implementing federalism in the country. In the preceding sections, the paper illustrated the Kandyan opposition to power-sharing and discussed the background and context of the federal demand of the Kandyans in the 1920s. In this section it will examine the process by which the Kandyan-low country cleavage has weakened, a cleavage that constituted the main foundation of the federal proposal of the 1920s. The paper identifies two mutually independent developments – one political and the other social – as responsible for bringing these two previous political rivals together: i) Rise of Sinhala nationalism and ii) Formation of intra-Sinhalese kinship ties that cut across territorial divides.

Role of Sinhala Nationalism in Kandyan Integration

In the attempt to explore the reasons behind the Kandyans dropping their federal demand, and in fact strongly embracing the project of unitary state, it is important to look at the integrative function of Sinhala nationalism and the factors that have strengthened it over time. It is not necessary to look too far back in history to see the gradual consolidation of an ethnic consciousness among the various groups of people living in Sri Lanka. This is especially the case with the Sinhalese, whose ethnic consciousness owes in the main to intense communal competition during colonial times.

Jayawardena (1983) identifies a number of levels in which the Sinhalese felt at a distinct disadvantage in terms of economic prospects: 1) Plantations, agency houses, banks and foreign trade which were controlled by the British 2) Export-import sector and wholesale trade were dominated by Indian merchants 3) Muslims and Chettiars called the shots in the Retail trade 4) Wage-employment was increasingly getting crowded by an academically accomplished Tamil community 5) Money lending which was monopolised by Chettiar and Afghan money lenders (133-35). In the face of increasing economic marginalisation, the Sinhalese sought to assert their 'due place' by reverting to 'older forms of identity ... resulting in communalism, casteism, a distortion of history, a revival of myths of origin, and hero-myths along with the creation of visions of a past "golden age"' (141).

Thus, despite the intense rivalry between Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese during this time, the easily visible ethnicised nature of the aforementioned forms of competition gradually started registering in the 'Sinhalese' consciousness. The resultant communal insecurity of the Sinhalese sporadically manifested itself in acts of protest and violence against various minority groups, which also played a significant role in cementing the idea that Sri Lanka 'belonged' to the Sinhalese. This consolidated the idea of an ethnicised Sri Lankan nation (Uyangoda 2011). In this sense, it appears that Sri Lanka has been an exemplification of Anthony Smith's Ethnic Nation (1988), whereby the nation is understood in relation to a particular ethnicity and thus simply mirrors the values and

aspirations of the ethnicity with which it is identified. Importantly, as ethnic demarcations became more forcefully pronounced than other divides, intra-Sinhalese divides were undermined to a considerable extent.

A direct ramification of the synonymisation of ethnicity with nation in Sri Lanka has been an increasingly 'ethnocratic state' (Uyangoda 2011) whose resistance to the accommodation of minority claims stems from 'the proliferation [of] political and ideological forces that are positively opposed to any state reform that would even marginally satisfy the minority ethnic demands ...' (Uyangoda 2011: 45).

The electoral roots of this ethnocratic state can be traced back to S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, whose attempt to negotiate the democratic system of governance came in the form of ethnicised electoral mobilisation. With democratisation and the resultant expansion of bases of political power in post-independence Ceylon, ambitious politicians like him had to look to means of mobilisation potent enough to challenge the existing hegemony of the United National Party (UNP). Ethnicity proved to be handy in this regard both because that was a source untapped by the UNP and because it afforded the advantage of numbers that no other cleavage (such as class, caste or even party) could. A latent, and perhaps unwitting, ramification of this decision was that by highlighting ethnicity as the main cleavage, it effectively undermined caste stratifications, and, it could be argued, even territorial divisions within Sinhalese society to a great extent. In light of the lessening of the grip of caste, it appears hardly surprising that Bandaranaike is venerated very highly by previously oppressed service castes even in the Kandyan areas, despite his low-country origins. This attitude was clearly visible in some of the respondents of service castes interviewed for this study: '*Politicians like Bandaranaike are treasures of this country. Some consider him to be like God. His politics was noble*'.⁴

This process of aligning the interests of political elites and the masses such that their goals and aspirations merge has been named as 'elite-mass integration' by Myron Weiner (1965) in his *Typology of Integration* whereby he explains factors that encourage groups with competing interests to integrate. However, it is important to note here that non-elite Kandyans can only be understood as a group that had competing interests with low-country Sinhalese to the extent that their vocational prospects were curtailed by the latter's economic activity in Kandyan areas during colonial times, and their integration may not be as significant as that of Kandyan elites because they were not party to the initial demand for autonomy.

Bandaranaike's decision to mobilise votes along ethnicity set off a vicious cycle of 'ethnic outbidding' (DeVotta 2004) which was possibly a very strong factor in consolidating ethnic identities in independent Ceylon/ Sri Lanka. These identities in turn played a significant role in feeding respective ethnic imaginations of power-sharing whereby it has taken to mean entirely different things to Sinhalese and Tamils, the two

⁴ Field interview with respondent 24, Kandyan Navandanna caste, September 6, 2014.

principal parties to the country's ethnic conflict. It could be persuasively argued that against this backdrop at least non-elite Kandyans (who were not instrumental in forwarding the federal demand in the first place) found strong reason to endorse the unitary state, the exemplification of the Sinhalese political fantasy.

For example, acute paranoia regarding power-sharing was observed in a respondent of one of the service castes who said; *'You'll see what happens when power is shared! Those people have India!'*⁵ Further, some respondents expressed fear that power-sharing, particularly a federal arrangement, will eventually lead to secession and will constitute a collapse of social cohesion. *'If power is devolved this country will break into two. That won't do. If we give a little, they'll say it's not enough and ask for more ... Can't really say that a federal system will be successful. Having more than one government is going to be a problem. People will start doing whatever they want. This system is good.'*⁶ Exemplifying Tambiah's (1986) claim that the Sinhalese are '[a] majority with a minority complex' (92), one respondent claimed that if power is shared, the Sinhalese would be oppressed by the Tamils, which is a reflection of the popular fear that in the event of Tamils winning greater autonomy, there is the possibility of them joining forces with the 180 million of their kin right across the Palk Strait. *'We will be in trouble, we will be oppressed.'*⁷

The field work suggests that elite Kandyans have been no exception. The fear that accommodation of minority demands for power-sharing would lead to eventual secession was a concern shared by many of the elite respondents of this study as well:

Federal type of power-sharing is too much. It is more the need of other countries than of Sri Lanka. It has been forwarded to satisfy the LTTE and its supporters ... Even if we try to negotiate genuinely Tamils always go for separatism. It has happened in the past. They try to hide behind concepts and do other things.⁸

In some responses it was evident how ethnic consciousness had trumped its territorial counterpart. For instance; *'Even if power-sharing is done it should be in a way that leaves more power in the hands of the central government and the Sinhalese people. Police and land powers should not be devolved under any circumstance.'*⁹ According to another respondent, the Sinhalese were the ones compromising their best interests by continuing the union for the sake of equality and unity: *'Actually we're being deprived, the Sinhalese, not them. I don't like the idea of discrimination and separation that federalism encourages.'*¹⁰ Therefore it seems that despite the initial federal demand, the threat of

⁵ Field interview with respondent 16, Kandyan Bathgama caste, September 6, 2014.

⁶ Field interview with respondent 22, Kandyan Navandanna caste, September 6, 2014.

⁷ Field interview with respondent 24, Kandyan Navandanna caste, September 6, 2014.

⁸ Field interview with respondent 3, Kandyan elite, August 5, 2014

⁹ Field interview with respondent 6, Kandyan elite, August 11, 2014

¹⁰ Field interview with respondent 8, Kandyan elite, September 20, 2014

Tamil nationalism and the resultant evolution of collective consciousness down a few generations have encouraged even the Kandyan elite to not only accept, but also strongly endorse the unitary state.

Stephan and Stephan's (2000) earlier mentioned elucidation of perceptions of threat contributing to discrimination against those outside of the group seems to explain this situation as well. Interestingly, the 'outsider' in the two instances has changed in a way that the earlier outsider now constitutes part of the in-group. Harris Mylonas (2007) explains that cultural proximity between a majority group and a minority one, and the absence of an external national homeland for the two groups could encourage them to form a collectivity. Perhaps this was a factor in the Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese starting to think more in ethnic terms, particularly in response to the rising 'threat' of Tamil nationalism, resulting in the gradual dissolution of territorial distinctions among Sinhalese. In this light, it is easier to understand the dropping of the federal demand by Kandyans which may otherwise appear to be a rather radical shift of events even if one considers the nearly 100 years it took to happen. It should be noted, however, that the integrative function of Sinhala nationalism in making the Kandyan-low country distinction blur was also aided by a parallel process of social significance which is inter-marriages between Kandyans and low-country Sinhalese, particularly the elite.

Role of Inter-Marriages in Kandyan Integration

Among many, inter-marriages between low-country and Kandyan communities have been one of the key factors that has contributed towards weakening the Kandyan-low country cleavage that was apparent during the last stages of colonial rule. Scholars have noted a number of inter-marriages among key elites from low country and Kandyan aristocratic families that bridged the longstanding gulf between these two politico-geographical groups. For example, Jiggins (1979: 113) citing the marriages of D.R. Wijewardene, D.S. Senanayake, Sinha Basnayake, and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, claims that 'marriage has served to forestall potential divisions ... by uniting up-country and low-country families' (113).

An important ramification of especially Bandaranaike's marriage to Sirimavo Ratwatte was that the Kandyan aristocratic Ratwattes were absorbed into the national power play, which saw a number of them being appointed to high offices in the government following the death of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the ascend of his widow Sirimavo to party leadership and later to the highest political office in the country. This process can be viewed as a strong factor that sped up Kandyan integration into the post-independence Ceylonese polity. This pattern of inter-marriage among Kandyan and low-country elite families seems to have continued well into present times as literature illustrates (Yalman 1971; Peiris 2014; Wilson 1988).

The field research conducted for this study also confirmed that inter-marriages have served to strengthen and continue this integration. For example, one respondent stated: *'Our uncle married a Bandaranaike. He was the first Kandyan to do so. Now it is not uncommon. Rambukwathas and Jayawardenas for instance always intermarry'*.¹¹ This integration also seems to have contributed towards a reversal of the perceived status difference between Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese, in that Kandyan elites seem to now consider low-country elites as being on par with them. A Kandyan elite respondent who spoke to the author claimed that *'Low-country itself has so many different castes including aristocrats. They have so many Walauwas (residences of the elite). So many marriages have happened between Kandyan and low-country families'*.¹² The field work further indicates that the mixing of these two groups has become a commonplace occurrence and a way of life, thus leading to more ready acceptance of the low-country by the Kandyans. For example, a Kandyan elite respondent stated thus: *'I see no difference between Kandyans and low-country Sinhalese. My wife is from Colombo. Even prior to my marriage, a lot of my relatives including ones of the earlier generation got married to low-country families'*.¹³ Therefore, it seems that the Kandyan-low country integration that started at the time of transition from colonial rule to independence has come to completion with inter-marriages. Irrespective of the number of such marriages, the field research suggests that the distinction is no longer a matter of concern even when it comes to the intimate affair of marriage. The cultural consciousness of the Kandyan elite in general, then, has apparently diminished in strength due largely to the blurring of the lines of demarcation between Kandyans and non-Kandyans through intermarriages.

Weiner's typology of integration (1965) can be extended to include this vital facet of political integration, which may be named 'elite-elite integration' whereby the merging of erstwhile contending elite interests speeds up the process of national integration (in however restricted a sense) in a country. Even those elites who have not yet mingled with the low-country on a large scale seemed to have adopted increased diplomacy in their articulation of the low-country Sinhalese. For instance, one respondent stated that *'I like those marriages (intermarriages). We always used to give our women to [low-country area], but honestly, we never brought anyone from there. But today unlike before if people are good, should go ahead.'*¹⁴ Another held that *'The low-country people have changed ... they're educated now'*.¹⁵

A possible reason for this shift is the tendency of so many Kandyan elite families to forge alliances with their low-country counterparts, encouraging the hitherto 'unmixed' families to seriously consider the possibility of having to relinquish that status in the near

¹¹ Field interview with respondent 8, Kandyan elite, September 20, 2014.

¹² Field interview with respondent 12, Kandyan elite, October 12, 2014.

¹³ Field interview with respondent 15, Kandyan elite, October 13, 2014.

¹⁴ Field interview with respondent 10, Kandyan elite, September 27, 2014.

¹⁵ Field interview with respondent 4, Kandyan elite, August 7, 2014.

future, especially in the face of rising integration where low-country Sinhalese have migrated to and settled in Kandyan areas in large numbers, and Kandyans shifting to low-country areas (prominently Colombo) for better educational and vocational prospects. In addition, elite-elite integration enabled Kandyan elites – who were for the most part excluded from socio-economic prosperity during the colonial era – to access the highest circles of power and influence through forging matrimonial alliances with low-country Sinhalese elites (Jiggins 1979: 113).

Hence it can be said that intermarriages between Kandyans and the low-country Sinhalese can be seen as one of the key factors that has enabled the integration of Kandyans with the larger Sinhalese polity. It could be argued that an inevitable consequence of this integration was the aligning of political aspirations and concerns as well, because of which the Kandyan Sinhalese later evolved to be ardent supporters of the unitary state, notwithstanding their initial demand for federal autonomy.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the conditions under which the Kandyan Sinhalese consciousness evolved from demanding federal autonomy in the 1920s to subsequently accepting the project of unitary state. To this end, it also looked at the processes of national and political integration of post-colonial Ceylon/Sri Lanka and how they provided the background for changing dynamics of politics among the Kandyan Sinhalese. Employing a phenomenological approach, the paper attempted to argue that the rise of Tamil nationalism and its demand for secession has led to the weakening of intra-ethnic divisions within the Sinhalese community, which was the main factor that contributed towards the Kandyan Sinhalese accepting the project of unitary state. It further attempted to argue that the process of Kandyan integration was complemented by inter-marriages between Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese families.

One of the major findings of this research was that social and political integration of the Kandyan Sinhalese with the larger Sinhalese society occurred within the integrative framework of the nation and nation-state, whose integrative function owed largely to the rise of Tamil nationalism. This points to two theoretical conclusions: 1) Nation-building in ethnically plural societies presupposes politico-cultural unification of different identity groups. This vision of unification was what encouraged the many assimilationist measures by successive governments that aimed at consolidating the newly emerging identity of a single island nation, encouraged in no small measure by the unitary model introduced by the British. Such exercise eventually isolated elements of the population (most notably Tamils) who resisted assimilation on grounds that they constituted a community that cannot be represented by one homogenous nation due to them possessing a language, history, and historical habitat clearly distinct from the dominant group. On the other hand yet other elements whose cultural composition was essentially

similar to the dominant one (such as the Kandyans) were quickly absorbed into the new identity. 2) This process of unifying the constituent groups of the majority ethnic community subsequently evolved the latter into a 'nation/nationality' within the nation-state, a phenomenon that can be termed as 'sub-national integration' which comprehensively explains the absorption of the Kandyans into the larger Sinhalese 'nation'. The process of merging bloodlines through inter-marriages complemented this development. It is in this context that the dropping of the federal demand by the Kandyans gradually took place.

By examining the causes for the Kandyan project for self-governance to first originate and then be completely dissolved in the centralised state project of Sri Lanka, the current research has shed light on the forces of integration as well as disintegration in ethnically plural societies. This knowledge can contribute to the growing body of literature on nation-building and national integration processes. 🙏

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