Modern Asian Studies **38,** 3 (2004), pp. 625–647. © 2004 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Printed in the United Kingdom

Early British Rule and Social Classification in Lanka

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Recent scholarship has put forward two distinct interpretations of the origins of modern national and communal identity in South Asia. One sees colonial modernity as a radical epistemological break and judges the content of pre-colonial pasts irrelevant for understanding modern politics.[1] According to this view, modern identities are responses to colonial constructions of Asian 'tradition'. The other approach sees continuities between the late pre-colonial and early colonial periods.[2] For these writers, the origins of modern national and communal identities lie not only in colonial interventions, but also in non-colonial eighteenth-century social formations and in early colonial interaction between the British and South Asians.

Much of the scholarship that addresses this question compares late nineteenth and early twentieth-century identities with pre-colonial patterns of social differentiation. This article, on the other hand, seeks to address the debate through an examination of changing ideas and practices of social classification during the first half-century of British rule in one South Asian region, the island of Lanka (Ceylon). British rule in Lanka began with the acquisition of the Dutch territories in 1796 and was extended to the entire island when the Kandyan kingdom fell in 1815. This article argues that in the eighteenth century, before the coming of the British, there were multiple and

I would like to thank Ian Barrow, Doug Haynes, and Mridu Rai for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

[1] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. 303–15.

[2] C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

0026–749X/04/$7.50+$0.10

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

partial ways of conceptualizing social difference. These distinctions functioned in contexts where there was an extensive decentralization of power. At first, the British sought to maintain the practices of the old regimes, and drew selectively on local sources in their tentative efforts to understand the island's society and culture. In 1832 and 1833, responding to the report of a commission of enquiry, they jettisoned much previous administrative practice, and established a more centralized, unified, and self-consciously modern framework of government. In the decades that followed, a more authoritative colonial sociology emerged, which made a category called 'nation' or 'race' central to social difference. In sharp contrast to events in nineteenth-century India, the new discourse assigned religion a secondary position, and denied the relevance of caste. This article shows how the seemingly idiosyncratic Lankan case, when viewed alongside developments in India, can contribute to a more general understanding of the South Asia-wide changes in social classification that occurred during early British rule, and which shaped public culture in the late nineteenth century and beyond.

The Eighteenth Century

Using Lanka as a case study for the impact of early British rule on South Asia poses some difficulties. For India as a whole, the pre-British European presence was marginal, and historians have tended to conflate British rule, European ideology, and modernity. They have, in other words, framed their arguments around the impact of a modern Britain on an India little shaped by European influence. In Lanka, in contrast, the Portuguese, and then the Dutch, had since the late sixteenth century been the strongest political force in the richer and more populous parts of the island. From the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, only the Kandyan interior escaped European rule. Although the British took control of Lanka around the same time as in India, they replaced not only an 'indigenous' polity, but, more importantly, the Dutch, whose administration had predated Enlightenment modernity.

Historians of Lanka have dealt with the absence of a straightforward 'indigenous' pre-British model in a number of ways. Until fairly recently, many accepted implicitly that deep social change was rare in pre-modern South Asia, and assumed that social and political organization in the south-western coastal districts in the sixteenth

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century was similar to that of early nineteenth-century Kandy.[3] As a result, late Kandyan society and culture was taken as a template for pre-colonial Lanka. In recent years, the difficulties of this approach have received notice. Patrick Peebles, for instance, has noted that Kandy itself was only formed around the same time that the Portuguese took control of the coastal districts, and that it was always an economically backward area that held only a minority of the island's population.[4] More recently, Anne Blackburn has shown how Kandyan Buddhism was reformulated in important ways in the mid-eighteenth century, not much more than a half-century before the beginning of British rule.[5] It is now also clear that significant changes took place in the maritime districts in the course of the eighteenth century.[6] These findings are consistent with much recent scholarship on eighteenth-century India, which not only points to extensive social change, but also acknowledges important regional variations in culture, social structure, and economy. As a result, pre-British Lanka now appears less distinctive a South Asian 'baseline' for assessing the 'British impact' than it did to earlier generations of historians. The mainland itself is no longer seen as an undifferentiated depository of tradition, but as a series of regions with their own distinct histories. From this standpoint, pre-modern Lanka can be viewed as one among many South Asian regions, linked to other regions but with its own characteristics and its own spatial variations.

In eighteenth-century Kandy, administration and taxation were organized around hereditary status groups that were associated with particular occupations.[7] In the nineteenth century, most of these groups came to be identified as 'castes', but they had no label of their own before then. The highest group, the Nayakkar, included the king and royal family. Of south Indian origin, they had begun marrying into island royalty in the seventeenth century, and became the ruling dynasty and the only Kshatriyas on the island in 1739, when the king

[3] This idea was expressed in the first major British work on Kandy, published soon after its acquisition. See John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orne, and Brown, 1821), 108–9.

[4] Patrick Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1995), 9.

[5] Anne M. Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[6] K. M. de Silva (ed.), *University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka* (Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 1995), vol. 2.

[7] Lorna Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1707–1782* (Colombo: Lake House, 1988).

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was succeeded by his adopted son, a brother of one of his queens.[8] They were never numerous, and the king's power, both before and during Nayakkar rule, was dependent on the support of the Radala nobility. The Radala were a sub-group of the Goyigama, who were identified with farming and probably accounted for a majority of the Kandyan population. Another twenty or so groups of lesser status filled other occupational and ritual niches, though many of these people made most of their living in agriculture.

Kandyan political theory held that it was a central task of royalty to uphold the Buddhist *sasana*, or order.[9] In the eighteenth century, Buddhism was revitalized and reconstructed, and a large proportion of land was assigned to support religious institutions. The court also held an annual festival at the capital, where the relationship between the cosmic and socio-political orders was demonstrated and confirmed. Particular actions could be 'Buddhist' or 'un-Buddhist', depending on whether or not they were consistent with Buddhist ethics or practice. Individuals could also be described as 'Buddhist' or 'non-Buddhist', depending on whether or not they followed the Buddha's teaching. But there was no concept of a single Buddhist community that encompassed the king, monks, and all laymen; and which excluded adherents of other faiths.[10] People followed Buddhist teaching in different ways, according to their social position and inclination. Moreover, in contrast to early modern Europe, the idea that all inhabitants of the kingdom need hold particular beliefs or belong to a particular faith was not part of the prevailing political theory.[11] Kandyan Muslims, for instance, could farm Buddhist temple lands, and provide services to temples as part of their rent.[12]

[8] K. W. Goonewardene, 'The Accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha,' in G. P. S. H. de Silva and C. G. Uragoda (eds), *Sesquicentennial Commemorative Volume of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka 1845–1995* (Colombo: Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka, 1995), 441–67.

[9] H. L. Seneviratne, 'Religion and Legitimacy of Power in the Kandyan Kingdom,' in Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and Legitimacy of Power in Sri Lanka* (Chambersburg: Anima Books, 1978).

[10] Kitsiri Malalgoda, 'Concepts and Confrontations: a Case Study,' in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities Revisited* (Colombo: Marga, 1997), vol. 1.

[11] For the comparison between Europe and South Asia, see Sheldon Pollock, 'India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500,' *Daedalus* cxxvii (1998).

[12] Lorna S. Dewaraja, 'The Muslims in the Kandyan Kingdom (c. 1600–1815): a Study of Ethnic Integration,' in M. A. M. Shukri (ed.), *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity* (Beruwala: Jamiah Naleemia Institute, 1986), 218–22.

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Two important notions of Sinhala-ness were current in eighteenth-century Kandy and among the Sinhala-speaking population of the island. One was based on ancient ideas of Sinhalese kingship, whereby the term *sinhala* could be used to describe the island, the kingdom, the king, and the kingdom's inhabitants.[13] Kandy saw itself as the latest in a long line of Sinhalese kingdoms. The other use of *sinhala*, which dated from around the ninth century, was linguistic and cultural.[14] In this sense, the term could be used to describe the Sinhala language, its literature, and its speakers. Neither of these ideas had a racial component. Sinhala literature was defined by the mastery of specific literary techniques—it did not draw its inspiration from popular culture.[15] Many high-status Kandyan Goyigama families had relatively recent south Indian origins.[16] And, as the history of the Nayakkar demonstrates, a Kshatriya from outside Lanka could be politically Sinhalese.[17]

The key to understanding Sinhala-ness in the eighteenth century is that even when the political and cultural notions coincided, they did not imply a notion of community analogous to the early modern European notion of race or nationality. An individual might be culturally Sinhalese, politically Sinhalese, or both; but there was no special significance attached to the same individual holding both types of Sinhala-ness. The idea of the Sinhalese as a social (whether national, racial, or ethnic) group is now part of modern common sense, but it would have been preposterous in eighteenth-century Kandy, where some high officials spoke Tamil and others often signed their names in

[13] For the early history of this idea, see R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, 'The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography,' in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1990), 46–59.

[14] For the early history of this idea, see K. N. O. Dharmadasa, "The People of the Lion": Ethnic Identity, Ideology, and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Sri Lanka,' *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* xv (1989).

[15] Charles Hallisey, 'Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture,' in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[16] Goonewardene, 'Accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha,' 453, 461; Michael Roberts, 'Ethnicity after Edward Said: Post-Orientalist Failures in Comprehending the Kandyan Period of Lankan History,' *Ethnic Studies Report* xix (2001), 81–2.

[17] Many Sinhalese kings before the Nayakkar also had south Indian origins. There was considerable intermarriage between Sinhalese and south Indian royalty, and some earlier kings were born on the mainland.

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Tamil script.[18] Such an idea would also have excluded the Nayakkar—Sinhalese kings—from the polity and society, and it would have run directly counter to the quasi-racial notions of 'caste' that lay at the heart of the main form of social and political differentiation. The Radala noble and the Hena (washer) villager might share both cultural and political Sinhala-ness, to the extent that both might speak Sinhala and be Kandyan subjects, but this did not imply that they had social bonds that made them like types of people, or part of a fraternal community.

The Dutch, who brought with them the social and political assumptions of early modern Europe, failed to understand the distinction between these two meanings of Sinhala-ness. While they made little effort to systematically classify or analyze the island's population, they assumed that a division of Sinhalese, Tamils, and, occasionally, Moors (Tamil-speaking Muslims) was a natural way to think about islanders.[19] Eighteenth-century Dutch accounts contain many 'ethnic stereotypes' about these groups.[20] This type of division, however, had little relevance for Dutch day-to-day administration, which continued to employ the caste-like groups that had been used by the Portuguese. As in Kandy, compulsory labour was organized along caste lines, but the particular duties required were not uniform within each caste but varied according to family and locality. In contrast to Kandy, however, the ritual and public expression of status distinctions was far from all-encompassing, and for ordinary folk was generally limited to the relations between service castes, who made up less than one-fifth of the population, and other, higher castes.[21] Although the Goyigama was also the largest and traditionally highest caste in the Dutch territories, during the eighteenth century the state

[18] R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, 'Colonialism, Ethnicity, and the Construction of the Past: the Changing "Ethnic Identity" of the Last Four Kings of the Kandyan Kingdom,' in Martin van Bakel, Renee Hagesteijn, and Pieter van de Velde (eds), *Pivot Politics: Changing Cultural Identities in Early State Formation Processes* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994), 199; Goonewardene, 'Accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha,' 452–4; Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation 1795–1833* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries', 1953), vol. 1, 162.

[19] This is evident in S. Arasaratnam (trans.), *Francois Valentijn's Description of Ceylon* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1978), which was first published in 1726.

[20] See, for instance, Arasaratnam, *Francois Valentijn's Description*, 160–72; and Sophia Pieters (trans.), *Memoir by Anthony Mooyart, Commandeur of Jaffnapatam, for the Information and Guidance of his Successor, Noel Anthony Lebeck, 1766* (Colombo: H. C. Cottle, 1910), 2.

[21] John D. Rogers, 'Caste as a Social Category and Identity in Colonial Lanka,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* xli (2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

increasingly bypassed Goyigama officials and dealt directly with other groups, most notably the Salagama (cinnamon peelers).[22]

Even though the Dutch view of the Sinhalese as a nation or race was not employed directly in routine administration, the notion sometimes shaped their political strategy. For instance, when the Dutch discovered that a Nayakkar sat on the Kandyan throne, they saw the presence of a 'foreign' king as an opportunity to divide the Kandyans.[23] They employed anti-Tamil propaganda in unsuccessful attempts to undermine the loyalty of the Radala nobility. The Dutch failed to understand that there was no contradiction in having a Nayakkar on the Kandyan throne. There was no sense that the king needed to be 'racially' or 'ethnically' Sinhalese—such a notion, in fact, did not exist. This misunderstanding on the part of the Dutch also shaped their perceptions of their subjects' loyalty in times of tension or war with Kandy. Sinhala-speaking Dutch subjects sometimes supported Kandy in such struggles. The Dutch often saw this as a natural consequence of national identity, but it is likely that economic exploitation or resentment over the early Dutch religious policies was more important. In the eighteenth century both Sinhala and Tamil speakers often attempted to play the Dutch off against the Kandyans, and vice versa. Being culturally Sinhalese or Buddhist did not automatically imply loyalty to Kandy. In fact, in the late eighteenth century the Dutch bolstered their political position by co-operating with non-Goyigama laymen to arrange travel to and from Burma, which made possible the ordination of non-Goyigama monks, a practice that was forbidden in Kandy.[24]

In the field of religion, the Dutch state practiced policies that were foreign to Kandy, though they had precedents in Portuguese practice.[25] They believed that members of the official church, the Dutch Reformed faith, formed a community whose membership was defined by individual and family choice. Although by the late eighteenth century the Dutch allowed considerable religious freedom,

[22] D. A. Kotelawele, 'Some Aspects of Social Change in the South West of Sri Lanka, c. 1700–1833,' *Social Science Review* no. 4 (1988).

[23] Goonewardene, 'Accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha'.

[24] Kitsiri Malagoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900: A Study of Revival and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 90–7.

[25] For Dutch religious policies, see K. W. Goonewardena, 'Dutch Policy towards Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Some Aspects of its Impact, c. 1640 to c. 1740,' in K. M. de Silva, Sirima Kiribamune, and C. R. de Silva (eds), *Asian Panorama: Essays in Asian History, Past and Present* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1990); Jurrien van Goor, 'Dutch "Calvinists" on the Coromandel Coast and in Sri Lanka,' *South Asia* xix (1996).

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encouraging church membership was always seen as a legitimate aim of the state, and members of the established church were rewarded with legal and political advantages. Membership was also taken as indicative of loyalty to the colonial regime. For the Dutch, individual islanders were unambiguously members or non-members of the established church. However, despite their recognition that Islam and Catholicism were rival faiths whose adherents had a sense of religious identity similar to their own, the Dutch did not divide all islanders into members of discrete religions. They showed little curiosity about the religious practices of 'heathens', or in differentiating among them.

At the end of the eighteenth century, then, the caste-like groups found in both the Dutch territories and Kandy represented the most visible and pervasive form of social differentiation on the island. While the boundaries, life-style, status, and obligations of these groups could be disputed, especially in the coastal regions, in neither polity was there an effort to theorize these divisions in a comprehensive and authoritative manner. Most caste obligations were governed by local custom. Neither was religious or national identity, even in Dutch discourse, formulated in ways whereby all inhabitants belonged to discrete and clearly-defined groups that were suitable as the foundation of a Lankan sociology. Many Christians, Muslims, and worshippers of the Buddha possessed a sense of belonging to religious communities that stretched beyond Lanka, but they did not see themselves as part of comparable or rival 'island' religious groups. The early modern notion of nationality put forward by the Dutch also fell short as the foundation of a systematic sociology, not only because the Dutch did not spell it out in a consistent manner, but also because it had little resonance in the wider society.

Early British Perceptions and Policy

In 1796, when the British first acquired the maritime territories, they had very little knowledge of the island's government or people. After a brief interlude when they attempted to govern with Indian officials, they focused on continuing the practices of the Dutch, making only piecemeal changes here and there.[26] Some of these changes, such as

[26] For early British administration, see Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation*; and U. C. Wickremeratne, *The Conservative Nature of British Rule of Sri Lanka with Particular Emphasis on the Period 1796–1802* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1996).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the reduction of Salagama privileges and the lifting of restrictions on Catholicism, had a direct impact on the lives of islanders. But as late as 1804, according to one writer, only one Britisher had learnt Sinhala, the language of the majority of islanders.[27] For rural administration, the British relied heavily on headmen who had been employed by the Dutch.

The Dutch had built up a rather extensive knowledge of the territories that they controlled, though they did not have a particularly accurate or sophisticated understanding of society or politics in Kandy.[28] The British attempted to draw on this knowledge. They viewed the Dutch records as an important resource, and some of the former Dutch officials took jobs with the new administration. But not all Dutch knowledge was easily accessible. The most recent general Dutch account of Lanka was that by Francois Valentyn, which had been published in 1726, seventy years before the beginning of British rule. It was translated into English, though not published, around ten years after the British assumption of power, and was available in manuscript form to officials and many of the early nineteenth-century British writers on Lanka.[29]

Nowadays, the best-known early British statement on Lankan society is the 1799 minute by Hugh Cleghorn, who declared that 'Two different nations [Sinhalese and Tamil], from a very ancient period, have divided between them the possession of the island.... These two nations differ entirely in their religion, language and manners'.[30] Cleghorn had little knowledge of Lanka, and probably received his information from a Dutch informant. This 'two-nation' theory, moreover, did not become British orthodoxy. There is no trace of it in the first general British book on Lanka, published by Robert Percival in 1803, nor does it appear in other early nineteenth-century British works.[31] Neither did Cleghorn's minute receive wide

[27] James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon, Containing an Account of the Country, Inhabitants, and Natural Productions* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807), vol. 1, 119–20.

[28] K. M. de Silva, *The 'Traditional Homelands' of the Tamils: Separatist Ideology in Sri Lanka, a Historical Appraisal* (Kandy: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1994), 32; Goonewardene, 'Accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha'.

[29] Arasaratnam, *Francois Valentijn's Description*, 19–21.

[30] Quoted in de Silva, *The 'Traditional Homelands'*, 9. Cleghorn's minute was cited repeatedly in late twentieth-century Sri Lanka Tamil nationalist rhetoric.

[31] For a more extensive discussion of the perceptions of social difference found in the early British accounts, see John D. Rogers, 'Colonial Perceptions of Ethnicity and Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Sri Lanka,' in Peter Robb (ed.), *Society and*

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circulation at the time it was penned—it was not published until 1855.[32]

There is one sense, however, in which Cleghorn's views did foreshadow more general colonial perceptions. British writers who sought to construct knowledge about Lanka turned to the early modern European idea of nationality that was used by the Dutch to explain islanders' linguistic and cultural differences. These authors did not agree on what to call this notion—the terms 'class', 'nation', 'race', and 'caste' were all used. Nor did they agree on which groups qualified for this status, or on each group's name. Percival used the term 'native Ceylonese' to describe those who later became known as 'Sinhalese', and subdivided them into the 'Cinglese' (inhabitants of British territories) and 'Candians'.[33] For Percival, the island's third 'class' was the Vedas, hunter-gatherers who lived in the jungle. He believed that the rest of island's inhabitants were recent immigrants and foreigners. James Cordiner, writing in 1807, identified three principal 'classes', the 'Cingalese', 'Candians', and 'Malabars' (Tamils).[34] He classified some of the island's Muslims as Sinhalese, others as Tamil. Anthony Bertolacci, whose book was published in 1818, argued that previous writers were wrong in failing to understand that the 'Ceylonese' [low-country Sinhalese] and 'Candians' were 'one and the same nation, speaking the same language, having the same origin, and following the same religion and habits of life'.[35] He called this group the 'Ceylonese proper'. Bertolacci, unlike Percival and Cordiner, thought the 'Moors' (most of whom spoke Tamil) also qualified as first-tier group. He believed that besides the 'Ceylonese proper' there were three other 'nations' living on the island—the 'Malabars or Hindoos', Moors, and Vedas—'all different in origin, religion, and manners'.[36]

These speculations, which were addressed to a predominantly British audience, found little echo in administrative concerns or practices. They were largely irrelevant for a government that sought

Ideology: Essays in South Asian History Presented to Professor K. A. Ballhatchet (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[32] de Silva, '*Traditional Homelands*', 9.

[33] Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon* (London: C. & R. Balfour, 1803), 114–68.

[34] Cordiner, *Description of Ceylon*, vol. 1, 90.

[35] Anthony Bertolacci, *A View of the Agricultural, Commercial, and Financial Interests of Ceylon* (London: Black, Parbury, and Allen, 1817), 45.

[36] *Ibid.*, 39–46.

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to maintain the caste-like social distinctions that underpinned the mercantilist political economy. The most prominent category found in official records in the first decades of British rule was 'caste' or 'cast'. The term could be used to describe almost any social group.[37] Sinhalese, Tamils, and Moors were often labelled castes. On the other hand, groups that later became castes were sometimes called a 'tribe' or 'race'. Beginning in the 1820s, however, there was a gradual tendency to use the word 'caste' to refer to the groups that were employed for organizing the state's compulsory labour.[38] While the often interchangeable use of 'nation', 'race', and 'caste' sometimes makes writers' intentions unclear, the Moors seem to have occupied an ambiguous position, sometimes thought of as a caste-like group, and sometimes thought of as analogous to Sinhalese or Tamils. There was also considerable confusion about various groups of Tamil-speaking Chettiar, who were often seen as a separate 'caste' or 'nation' similar to the Moors, but who could also be seen as Tamils. At this time, there was little sense that a 'caste' needed to be part of a system, or any concern about whether a particular group should be called a 'caste' or something else.[39] For purposes of everyday administration, the British were happy to live with ambiguity. They felt no compulsion to organize and classify the island's inhabitants.

The 1827 census shows the continued lack of British concern with island-wide issues of social organization.[40] For Kandyan districts, the enumeration was limited to the total number of persons resident in each district. On the other hand, in the maritime provinces both 'cast' and 'religion' were counted. However, no attempt was made to standardize the names of the groups that were used in each district. Groups later labelled castes were listed alongside groups later labelled racial or national groups. Neither was there any consistency in the religious enumeration, which in some districts included categories such as 'heathens' and 'Brahmins'.

[37] For examples, see Wickremeratne, *The Conservative Nature of British Rule*, 32; Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), Colonial Office records (hereafter CO) 54/71 (290), Robert Brownrigg to Lord Bathurst, 17 July 1818; Petition to the Prince of Wales, 12 Aug. 1816, in G. C. Mendis (ed.), *The Colebrooke–Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796–1833* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), vol. 2, 360.

[38] This is evident in Davy, *Account of the Interior*, 84–100.

[39] This absence is marked in the extensive discussion of Kandyan society found in John D'Oyly, *A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom* (Dehiwala: Tisara Press, 1975).

[40] *Return of the Population of the Island of Ceylon* (Colombo: Government Press, 1827).

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What explains the disjunction between administrative and non-official discourse? One reason writers such as Bertolacci may have preferred to organize their accounts around 'nation' instead of 'caste' may have been that there were too many ill-defined and little-known 'caste' groups for them to form the basis for general accounts of the island. Even the government itself never attempted to define 'caste' obligations systematically, preferring to rely on headmen's local interpretations of custom in order to extract labour.[41] The Dutch division of nationality, which was based on early modern European ideas familiar to the British, better served the purpose of colonial writers who sought to delineate the island's population for the benefit of a British audience.

The British acquisition of Kandy in 1815 brought them new responsibilities that required more extensive knowledge of the island's society and culture. However, the impact of this knowledge on the possible development of an island-wide scheme of social differentiation was tempered because Kandy was governed apart from the rest of the colony.[42] In the maritime provinces, for instance, the Church of England was the established religion, and received government support. In Kandy, in contrast, the British continued to support Buddhism, and limited missionary access to the region.

In the Kandyan Convention of 1815, the treaty with the Radala nobles that brought the province under colonial control, the British had made a commitment to uphold the laws and customs of the kingdom. They began with little knowledge about the practices they had promised to maintain. In the early years of British rule there was an ongoing dialogue between the British and Radala officials, in which the Radala explained 'authentic' Kandyan legal and administrative practice, and the British compiled this information in ways that enabled them to reshape and control it.[43] Much of this interaction took place in the deliberations of the Board of Judicial Commissioners, where British officials tried legal cases with the aid of Radala assessors. The British had to begin with a blank slate because there were no written records to rely on. The officials who worked in Kandy in the years immediately following the British occupation had to learn

[41] PRO, CO 54/71, Brownrigg to Bathurst, 17 July 1818.

[42] British official documents occasionally made a three-way distinction between the 'Singalese', 'Malabar', and 'Kandyan' provinces, but the principal administrative divide was between Kandy and the rest of the island.

[43] Frederic Austin Hayley, *A Treatise on the Law and Customs of the Sinhalese including the Portions Still Surviving under the name Kandyan Law* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1993).

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Sinhala—something that had never been necessary in the maritime provinces.

The politics of the British acquisition of Kandy dictated that the British adopt the old Dutch position that the Nayakkar were a 'foreign' dynasty. The Kandyan Convention declared in its English version not only that 'all claim and title of the Malabar race to the dominion of the Kandyan Provinces is abolished and extinguished', but that 'all male persons being or pretending to be relations of the late Rajah Sri Wikreme Rajah Sinha either by affinity or blood . . . are hereby declared enemies to the Government of the Kandyan Provinces and excluded and prohibited from entering those Provinces . . . and all male persons of the Malabar cast now expelled . . . [are] prohibited from returning'.[44] Before long, the Nayakkar were firmly established in colonial consciousness as members of an alien race.

The belief that the Nayakkar were Tamils who were unpopular because of their nationality served British interests, but in the first half of the nineteenth century it was not shared widely among the Kandyan population. In 1803, when the British had attempted to replace the Kandyan monarch with their own nominee, they themselves had chosen a Nayakkar because they thought only such a man would be acceptable among the kingdom's subjects.[45] In the first half of the nineteenth century, all the rebellions and popular movements against British rule featured pretenders to the Kandyan throne who claimed Nayakkar status.[46] In some cases, when the pretender's claim to be Nayakkar was exposed as false, the rebellion's support collapsed. Although supporters of the nobles who had betrayed the final Kandyan king joined the British in emphasizing the 'foreign' character of the dynasty, many Kandyans continued to identify the Nayakkar with Sinhalese kingship.

An important difference between Lanka and India was the British failure to perceive islanders as divided fundamentally by religion. Beginning in late eighteenth-century Bengal, the British in India placed considerable emphasis on a Hindu-Muslim dichotomy.[47] Why

[44] 'The Kandyan Convention,' 2 March 1815, in Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers*, vol. 2, 228.

[45] Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation*, vol. 1, 98–9.

[46] *Ibid.*, 174–93; Gunawardana, 'Colonialism, Ethnicity, and the Construction of the Past', 207–9.

[47] Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command,' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. 4 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 290–5; Rosane Rocher, 'British Orientalism

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did they not view Lankans similarly? One reason was the prominence of Christianity. If religion was deemed as the superordinate social category, then the Christian headmen who dominated the upper ranks of the 'native' administration in the coastal regions might be deemed too 'different' from the inhabitants to be taken as the natural governing class. Second, the British shared the Dutch ignorance of the religious beliefs and institutions of the majority of islanders. Percival, writing about the Sinhalese, asserted that 'with regard to what may be properly termed their religion, neither the Europeans nor indeed they themselves seem to have formed any clear idea. Some have asserted that it is the same with that of the Hindoos with only a slight variation of forms and names'.[48] Although after 1815 the British began to accumulate knowledge about the ways the Kandyan state supported religious institutions, it was some years before they began to feel they had an understanding of the religious practices of the majority of their subjects. There was, for instance, no consensus that 'Buddhism' and 'Hinduism' were distinct religions until at least the 1830s.[49] Third, except for Muslims in the Dutch territories, there was no precedent for administering law based on religious texts. The British adopted a code of customary law for Jaffna that the Dutch had compiled in the early eighteenth century, but this was never conceived as 'Hindu' law—it applied to Christians as well as Hindus, and only to Jaffna Tamils, and not to other Tamils or Hindus. Kandyan customary law also had no religious basis. It was a territorial law that in the early years of British rule was applied to Christians (including Europeans), Hindus, and Muslims as well as Buddhists. Elsewhere, the British generally implemented Roman-Dutch law as the common law of the land.

By 1829–31, when William Colebrooke and Charles Cameron carried out their investigations of the colony's administration, most British writers and officials assumed that the island's population was made up of a number of national or racial groups, and that the Sinhalese formed the dominant group. However, there was little agreement on exactly which groups qualified as nations or races, and the history of even the largest groups remained obscure. In addition, these groups had little relevance in public administration, where caste

in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government,' in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 220–5.

[48] Percival, *Account of the Island*, 198.

[49] Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14–24.

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was much more important, a fact that the commissioners were quick to recognize. The relationship between 'nation', 'caste', and 'religion' not only remained muddled, but there was little sense of any need to untangle the muddle. This confused knowledge, however, was soon reconfigured and reshaped for use in a new sociological framework that developed in the 1830s and 1840s.

The Colebrooke–Cameron Reforms and a New Sociology

An important landmark in the history of British Ceylon is the set of policy decisions taken around 1833, known collectively as the Colebrooke–Cameron reforms. The general thrust of these reforms—utilitarian, liberal, and laissez-faire—was not the product of local circumstances but the happenstance perspective of the commissioners appointed by the Colonial Office, which sought to find ways to make the colony profitable.[50] The commissioners recommended radical changes, including the end of caste-based compulsory labour, the dismantling of government monopolies, and the implementation of a common administrative system throughout the island. The ensuing reforms did not bring about all the changes the commissioners envisaged, but they did fundamentally transform the island's political economy and push British policy in Lanka in a self-consciously 'modern' direction for the first time. Their impact was much deeper than the analogous efforts to change social and economic policy in India.[51]

The commissioners were concerned primarily with universal ideas of political rights, civilization, and progress. They had little interest in social and cultural differences, and assumed that these would fade away over time. As a result, when they addressed social differences their focus was on existing government policies. There were, in the commissioners' eyes, two main fields where the state was upholding undesirable distinctions—the maintenance of a separate Kandyan administration, and the use of caste as a unit of administration and taxation.

The first distinction attacked by the commissioners was that between the Kandyan provinces and the rest of the colony. Since 1815,

[50] For the reforms, see Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers* 2 vols.; and Vijaya Samaraweera, 'The Ceylon Charter of Justice of 1833: a Benthamite Blueprint for Judicial Reform,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* ii (1974).

[51] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28–65.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Kandyan administration had been quite distinct from that of the rest of the island. The island's Supreme Court, for instance, had no jurisdiction in Kandy. Colebrooke felt that this policy had hindered progress by retarding 'that assimilation on which it is on every account desirable to promote between the various classes of whom the population is composed'.[52] The reforms established a uniform judicial and administrative system that covered the entire island, and the provincial boundaries were redrawn so that large areas of the former Kandyan kingdom were attached to coastal provinces.

The reformers also saw caste as an obstacle to prosperity and progress, and argued that the system of compulsory labour that the state had organized along caste lines should be abolished. And from the reformers' viewpoint, if caste was no longer needed for labour organization, it was not needed at all.[53] Although in practice the British never disregarded caste completely, especially in making government appointments, the normative view that it was undesirable took hold quite quickly among many officials.[54] Regulations and policies that took explicit note of caste were repealed or ignored. The government's failure to acknowledge caste became, for the colonial elite itself, proof that they were promoting progress. In an 1843 Legislative Council debate, the Acting Colonial Treasurer, J. N. Mooyart, expressed this point: 'Caste, as a social distinction, is incompatible with the progress of civilization. Hereditary privileges not based on personal merits are favourable to a stationary condition of Society, and preclude salutary changes and improvements'.[55] Two years later, in 1845, a government circular ordered that no official should mention caste in any public proceeding.[56] Although caste distinctions did not fade away, they were expunged from most official and public discourse.

The reforms also reinforced the existing practice of not using religion as the primary mark of social difference. Colebrooke and

[52] 'Report of Lieutenant-Colonel Colebrooke upon the Administration of the Government of Ceylon,' 24 Dec. 1831, in Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers*, vol. 1, 52.

[53] *Ibid.*, 49; 'Report of Lieutenant-Colonel Colebrooke upon the Establishments and Expenditure of Ceylon,' 28 May 1832, in Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers*, vol. 1, 215; Colebrooke to Lord Goderich, 24 Dec. 1831, in Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers*, Vol. 1, p. 49.

[54] Rogers, 'Caste as a Social Category'.

[55] Quoted in K. M. de Silva, *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon 1840–1855* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965), 202–3.

[56] Bertram Bastiampillai, 'Caste in Northern Sri Lanka', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Social Sciences* xi (1988), 50.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cameron, like many officials in London and Ceylon, saw Christianity as one component of a universal scheme of progress and civilization, and believed that good government would eventually lead to conversions. They also saw the principle of religious liberty and the official non-recognition of religious differences as a mark of progress, something that distinguished British rule not only from the Kandyans, but from the Dutch. Cameron noted approvingly that there were no political obstacles to judicial reform because unlike in India there were no established courts based on 'religious opinions'.[57] A discourse that divided Lankans into religious categories would have contradicted a main thrust of the reforms, and reified heathen religions that were an obstacle to progress.

With caste disallowed and religion unsuitable, the reforms set the stage for the emergence of nation or race as the cornerstone of a new colonial sociology. While the commissioners said nothing that dictated that Lankans should be divided in any particular way, they portrayed the abstract categories of 'nation' or 'race' as natural and compatible with progress in ways that political distinctions based on caste or religion fell short. Their views were also influenced by the still unpublished research of a small group of Britishers who were investigating the island's history.[58] An outline of this new knowledge was circulating among officials at the time when the commissioners visited the island.[59] The most important figure in this group was George Turnour, an official who discovered around 1825 that the island had historical chronicles that provided an unbroken narrative that covered over 2,000 years of the island's history. He obtained copies of texts and began to translate them. He collaborated with officials such as Jonathan Forbes and George Skinner, who in their official travels sought to identify archaeological remains that supported the veracity of the chronicles. In 1833, just as the Colebrooke–Cameron reforms were being implemented, Turnour published an historical summary that included a list of Sinhalese monarchs that began with Vijaya, who was said to have founded the kingdom in 543 BC, and ended with the Kandyan monarch who had been deposed by the British in 1815. Turnour saw the history of

[57] 'Report of Charles H. Cameron Esq. upon the Judicial Establishments and Procedure in Ceylon,' 31 Jan. 1832, in Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers*, vol. 1, 135.

[58] Colebrooke to Goderich, 24 Dec. 1831, in Mendis, *Colebrooke–Cameron Papers*, vol. 1, 14–24.

[59] John D. Rogers, 'Historical Images in the British Period,' in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1990), 87–106.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lanka as the history of Sinhalese kingdoms, which had constantly faced Malabar invaders from southern India. This new historical knowledge quickly found its way into general accounts of the colony, such as Simon Casie Chitty's *Ceylon Gazetteer*, which appeared one year later, in 1834.[60] Casie Chitty's book, which was published with government support, not only adopted Turnour's historical framework, but began the process of accumulating detail that linked these historical actors with the present-day inhabitants of the island. According to Casie Chitty, Lankans were divided into three main peoples—Sinhalese, Tamils, and Moors. The Sinhalese were the ancient inhabitants, the Tamils also had a long history on the island, and the Moors were relative newcomers. Casie Chitty, a Christian himself, portrayed race or nation as fixed, but religion as contingent, the subject of individual choice.

In the same year that Turnour first published his findings, the governor, Robert Wilmot Horton, was grappling with a political decision that was forced on him by the reforms. Under the new system, provision was made for a legislative council that would include 'native' representatives. For the first time, there was a need for the colonial state to make an authoritative judgment about how to differentiate among the island's inhabitants. In this regard, Horton wrote to London that 'the Native inhabitants of this Colony consist of three distinct and separate nations, if they may be so called, having different religions and different customs and habits, the Singhalese, Malabars and Moors, all of whom may be considered to have an equal claim to be represented'.[61] Horton, however, saw some ambiguity in the status of the Moors, noting that they 'are numerous in the Western and Southern Provinces, possessing very considerable wealth, [but] they are also to be found in the Kandyan Provinces where they have long been settled and it is remarkable that this domiciliation has in that part of the Island led to their being considered as an inferior Caste rather than a separate race'. For Horton, when considering the Moors the choice was between seeing them as a 'race' or as a 'caste'. In contrast to the Indian practice, there was no thought of labelling them a religious group, and treating them as the dominant component of a Muslim religious community. Indeed, consistent with the spirit of the reforms, Horton wrote that he assumed that 'religious restrictions' should not play a role in choosing legislators.

[60] Simon Casie Chitty, *The Ceylon Gazetteer* (Cotta: Church Mission Press, 1834).
[61] PRO, CO 54/131 (39), Robert Wilmot Horton to Lord Stanley, 23 Nov. 1833.

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In the end, the British decided that the three 'Ceylonese' seats should be filled by a Burgher (Eurasian), a Sinhalese, and a Tamil. This practice was never enshrined in legislation, but the term 'Singalese representative' was employed in public discourse as early as 1836.[62] All the early nineteenth-century Sinhalese and Tamil legislators were chosen from elite families that already had close connections with the government. Indeed, many of them resigned from government service in order to take up their seats. The Sinhalese representatives came from the low-country Christian families that had for a century been viewed as the region's 'native aristocracy'. With the exception of Casie Chitty, the Tamil representatives were Hindus from the most respectable Jaffna Tamil Hindu families. The inclusion of a Burgher as a third 'Ceylonese' representative represented a shift in colonial thinking. In the first two or three decades of British rule, the more wealthy, educated, and respectable descendants of Dutchmen, many of whom had married Lankan women, were often viewed as 'European', on a par with the British. By the 1830s, the distinction between the British and Burghers was hardening.[63]

The institution of racial or national representation in the Legislative Council was not part of a general administrative move towards reifying these distinctions. The general thrust of government policy until mid-century was to place little emphasis on cultural differences among Lankans, and many Britishers in this period knew little and cared less about Lankan society and culture.[64] However, the decision to employ race in the island's representative body remained unquestioned. It was made natural by the development in the late 1830s and 1840s of a new view of the island's history and society, which portrayed Lanka's long history as marked by over 2,000 years of conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils.[65] The foundational work was Turnour's 1837 translation of the *Mahavamsa*, an historical chronicle that was probably composed in the sixth century. In the 1840s, several other writers built on Turnour's work. All shared his belief that the history of Lanka was the history of a vibrant Sinhalese nation whose decline could be attributed at least in part to Tamil invaders. William Knighton, for

[62] PRO, CO 54/150 (35), Horton to Lord Glenelg, 11 Feb. 1836.

[63] Michael Roberts, Ismeth Raheem, and Percy Colin-Thomé, *People Inbetween: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790s–1960s* (Colombo: Sarvodaya, 1989), vol. 1.

[64] For an example, see James Willyams Grylls, *The Out-Station, or Jaunts in the Jungle* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848).

[65] Rogers, 'Historical Images'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

instance, called the 'Malabars' the 'continual enemies of Ceylon', who, 'accustomed as they were to rapine and war, proved too formidable an enemy to the peaceful Ceylonese [Sinhalese]'.[66]

The new historiography saw the colonial modernization of Lanka as the logical end point of the island's history. Some writers sought to convince their readers that ancient Sinhalese literature had been equal to that of classical Greece.[67] Other areas where Sinhalese civilization was said to have excelled included agriculture, philosophy, art, medicine, and statecraft. The Sinhalese even emerged well from comparisons with Britain. Jonathan Forbes, for instance, asserted that their ancestors 'existed as a numerous and comparatively civilized nation at a period antecedent to the discovery of Great Britain and its semi-barbarous inhabitants'.[68] Knighton noted that 'the manner in which the princes of the tropical and luxuriant Ceylon were educated, was precisely similar to that by which a modern English nobleman is fitted for his duties'.[69] The high level of past civilization was seen as an indication that Lanka could be great again. Most writers saw good government, as exemplified by British policies since 1833, and true religion, as exemplified by Protestant Christianity, as the keys to this revival. The division of the island's peoples by the progressive category of race or nation, rather than the backward and timeless ones of religion or caste, made this outcome more plausible.

In the 1840s writers also set Lanka off from India more distinctly than before, and did so in ways that made the island appear at a higher level on a universal scale of civilization. Knighton accepted James Mill's negative portrayal of Indian civilization, but argued that it did not apply to Lanka.[70] He also claimed that Buddhism was superior to Hinduism.[71] Forbes held similar views, commenting that 'the Buddhists, whose system is essentially contemplative, humane, peaceful, and regulated by plain moral laws, have nevertheless unsuccessfully opposed the arbitrary classification and trammels of caste, bloody sacrifices, and the monopoly of superior rank and special

[66] William Knighton, *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845), 121.

[67] George Turnour, *The Mahawanso in Roman Characters with the Translation Subjoined* (Cotto: 1837), xiii. Knighton, *History of Ceylon*, 116.

[68] Jonathan Forbes, *Eleven Years in Ceylon* (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), vol. 1, 2.

[69] Knighton, *History of Ceylon*, 134.

[70] *Ibid.*, 75.

[71] *Ibid.*, 20.

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sanctity claimed by Brahmins'.[72] Writers also found the island's historical consciousness as indicative of its cultural superiority over India. Finally, in the history of Lanka itself, Indians were portrayed negatively, as invaders who had brought about the downfall of the island's civilization.

While the discourse of the 1840s had little immediate effect on government policy or on how most islanders viewed themselves, it provided an epistemological foundation for the social categories that later became part of public and official culture. In the second half of the nineteenth century, race or nationality was understood as the fundamental social division, religion was acknowledged as a secondary identity, and caste was left shadowy.[73] Despite many challenges, this scheme has never been dislodged, and its basic outline has survived into the twenty-first century. However, the particular identities at stake, along with their meanings and uses, have been reshaped constantly. Later identities drew selectively on the new colonial discourse of the 1840s, in much the same way as the 1840s discourse drew selectively on earlier schemes of classification.

Conclusions: Nineteenth-Century Identity Formation in Lanka and India

This article argues that in the eighteenth century there were various muddled schemes of social differentiation across the subcontinent, and that at this time Lanka was no more or less distinct than other regions. In the early nineteenth century, as the British established their domination everywhere in South Asia, new and modern forms of identity emerged. The overall effect was to marginalize some existing forms of social identification at the expense of others, and eventually to produce new social formations that were 'modern', fraternal, and enumerable. These identities were the product of the centralization of state power and its accompanying discourses of modernity, which in South Asia were shaped by the need to be consistent with British power. Across the subcontinent, efforts were then made to categorize

[72] Forbes, *Eleven Years*, vol. 2, 210–11.

[73] John D. Rogers, 'Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: the Case of Sri Lanka,' *Journal of Asian Studies* liii (1994), 18–19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03001136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the new identities within an encompassing sociology based on some singular 'ethnic' principle.

Why did race or nationality emerge as the central social category in colonial Lanka, when religion and caste vied for that position in colonial India? The British decision to govern Lanka separately from the mainland created conditions favourable to the development of distinct patterns of identity formation on the island. The British saw Lanka as a different country, and felt no need to find ways of linking it with nearby regions in the same way that they sought to understand the relationship between, say, Tamil country and the Ganges plain. While efforts to develop an all-India sociology obscured and denied many pre-existing regional differences, the analogous attempts to develop an all-Lankan sociology not only obscured pre-existing intra-island differences but also emphasized the island's uniqueness within South Asia as a whole.

The particular result in Lanka, as on the mainland, was the product of complex historical circumstances. The 'origins' of modern identities in Lanka lie not so much in multiple sources as in complex and ongoing historical processes that themselves constantly drew on multiple sources. The 'pre-history' of modern identities in Lanka cannot be understood apart from the details of the island's eighteenth-century 'baselines' and their early nineteenth-century reshapings any more than it can be understood apart from imperial needs fashioned by historically European notions shaped by Enlightenment modernity. There were many ways in which aspects of the society, economy, and culture of eighteenth-century Lanka shaped the early nineteenth-century processes that eventually laid the intellectual foundations for late nineteenth-century racial and religious identities. For instance, the island's pre-British tax structure, whereby land revenue accounted for only a minor proportion of the state's income, pushed colonial constructions of Lankan 'tradition' in directions that placed less emphasis on ahistorical ruralism than was the case in India. The local eighteenth-century legal traditions also played an important role in shaping modern colonial legal culture. In addition, there were many instances of the process that Charles Hallisey calls 'intercultural mimesis', where 'aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner'.[74]

[74] Charles Hallisey, 'Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism,' in Donald S. Lopez (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha: the Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 33.

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Partha Chatterjee's assertion that colonial models of South Asian 'tradition' were not shaped by pre-modern society cannot be sustained.[75] The particularities of local pre-modern economic, political, and cultural formations shaped the new colonial modernities. The model that emerged in Lanka from the 1830s onwards was produced by a complicated historical process that included the expression of interests and ideas that were neither specifically modern nor specifically colonial. In this sense, the Lankan case supports C. A. Bayly's emphasis on significant interaction between the British and South Asians, which allowed a role for pre-modern India in the shaping of the later national and communal Indian identities.[76] However, Bayly's attempt to link modern identities with a particular eighteenth-century form of identity—'regional patriotism'—receives no support from the Lankan case. Here, Chatterjee's emphasis on an epistemological change that made all modern ideas of the 'social' different from what had come before is more helpful. Where both Bayly and Chatterjee mislead is their assumption that such an epistemological change necessarily represents a complete historical rupture. This leads Chatterjee to exaggerate the extent of historical change, and Bayly to under-emphasize the epistemological change. Neither writer can accommodate the case of modern Sinhalese identity, which was shaped by and draws on pre-modern pasts and non-modern presents in many important ways, but has no direct link with any particular pre-modern social or political formation. This suggests that the arrival of modernity, while marking an important historical break, may not be quite as all-encompassing as portrayed in currently-dominant models of social theory.

[75] Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*.
[76] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*.

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