

The Postcolonial State, Power Politics and Indigenous Development as a Discourse of Power in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper argues that the indigenization of development is not a simple reaction to the dominance of western development ideology, but intricately embedded in the process of the postcolonial state and social formation. The paper examines this thesis in relation to Sri Lanka, in the context of changing national politics in the 1950s—the immediate post-colonial phase, elaborating how the indigenization of development became established as a discourse of power. Tracing the historical roots of indigenization of development, the paper suggests that it is neither the opposite of western development ideology as it is generally understood and interpreted nor a simple nostalgic plea for a march backward towards an Arcadia.

Keywords: postcolonial state, power politics, indigenous development, discourse of power

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Introduction

This paper argues that the indigenization of development is not a simple reaction to the dominance of Western development ideology, but intricately embedded in the process of the postcolonial state and social formation. The paper is divided into three main parts to situate the reader in the broader conceptual as well as historical context. In the first section, I briefly review the notion of indigenous development, outlining its contemporary relevance in the context of the on-going debate on globalization. In the second section, I discuss the unique circumstances under which the post-colonial state was established, focusing on the non-eventful independence, power transfer to the anglicized elite by the British, and the reactions of the immediate post-colonial government. I further elaborate how this political change was inflicted with a crisis of legitimacy, which eventually led to a wider attempt to assert the postcolonial status – thus, a generic process of indigenization that climaxed in 1956. In this section, my intention is to elaborate on the social and political context within which the indigenization of development became a historical necessity. In the third section, I specifically focus on the indigenous discourse of development, elaborating its conceptual foundations and manifestations as they unfolded with the social and political dynamics of 1956. In the concluding section, I elaborate how indigenous development emerged as a discourse of power because of its unique articulation in alliance with the power politics of 1956 that was never to be abandoned in the postcolonial politics in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, I further suggest that any analysis of indigenization of development must be framed within the broader context of postcolonial social formation in order to grasp its dynamics without conceptualizing it merely as an antithesis of the Western ideology of development.

Indigenization of development

Discussions of indigenization of development have begun relatively in recent times—since the mid-1980s, as development has been predominantly discussed in relation to either modernization or the Marxist framework of underdevelopment, with the exception of post-development. While there is no coherent and organized body of writings that can be labeled under this term, even the available literature is largely ‘ephemeral and collectively tend to be fragmented and dispersed’ (Friedman, 1992). Friedman (1992) identifies the

overall tendency as “alternative development” ‘Indigenization’ is primarily used as an umbrella term, to refer, on the one hand, to currently anti-Western discourses and activities, and, on the other, to various programs of localization¹. Hettne (1990) describes this as “another development,” while scholars such as Banuri (1990), Kothari (1977; 1989), Appadurai (1990), Marglin & Marglin (1990) would characterize it more as a “culture-based approach” to development.

Many have argued, explicitly or implicitly, about the imaginative inability and reluctance of the hegemonic development paradigms to grasp the empirical realities of the rest of the world and to understand the relevance of indigenous cultures and traditions (see Escobar, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; Esteva & Prakash 1998; Tucker, 1999, 1997; Hennayake, 2006; Daskon, 2011). Tucker explains that the Western development approach has considerable difficulties in imagining “other” cultures, “other” ways of organizing and operating the world, “other” forms of rationality, and “other” ways of life; these approaches create a “Third World without a history and diminish its value system” (1999, p. 08). Escobar (1995) also explains how mainstream development discourse continues to treat people and cultures in the non-Western societies merely as ‘abstract’ concepts. Although these views are differently articulated, they all share a critique of the logo-centric and binary conceptualization entrenched in the Western development theories and express the need to reconceptualize and perhaps rearticulate development from within indigenous/local contexts. In other words, they focus on the plurality of meanings relating to the concept of development in various societies and cultures (Marglin & Marglin, 1990).

It is also important to note that indigenization is discussed beyond the boundaries of Development Studies, in the context of the representation and identity of non-Western, postcolonial societies. Thus, writings of Said (1979), Wolf (1982), Adas (1989), Sahlins (1985) are all, directly or indirectly, relevant in a broader sense, to understand the theoretical and historical necessity of indigenization in conceptualizing postcolonial societies. The notion of indigenization has also been garbed in a different terminology within the discussions

¹ The two terms, indigenization and localization, generally carries similar connotations. Indigenization does not have a given meaning in the Oxford Dictionary. It derives from the word, endogenous relating more to the notion of nativism.

of globalization as localization. Appadurai writes that ‘a process of indigenization characterizes localization; a marked sense of distinctive cultural identity and through that a search for authenticity appears to be the central focus for any indigenization process’ (Appadurai, 1990, p. 295). Observing the situation in Sri Lanka, it is my opinion that indigenization and localization are not qualitatively different processes, except that localization carries a geographical-scalar connotation. In fact, the globalization debate seems to have widened the perimeters of indigenization, exposing its economic, political and most importantly, cultural tones. The only difference is that some of the ideas are camouflaged in new, seemingly abstract terminologies such as “cultural hybridization”; academics may invent and reinvent terminologies while the same process continues in the society!

While it is useful to bear this broader context in mind, it is a fact that any form of indigenization ideologically challenges the hegemony of Western development discourse. Logically, if the Western development model is unequivocally and universally accepted, adopted, and thus unchallenged, any discussion on indigenization then becomes rather redundant and irrelevant. Hence, even the very presence of the idea of indigenization undoubtedly challenges the widely taken-for-granted notion that modern economic development and its allied modernization and westernization are universally desired and accepted. Indigenization, thus, implicitly represents a critique as well as a reappraisal of Western development theory. However, to interpret this theoretical critique misleadingly as a rejection of material development entailed in Western development theory would be to miss the point.

Characterizing the indigenization of development merely as a reactionary phenomenon is problematic for two reasons. First, such a view assigns it an unwarranted negative image as being in opposition to (modern) development in the sense of providing material benefits to the people and, thus, is over generalized by some authors such as Corbridge (1995) as “anti-development.” The term, “anti-development”, embedded in much familiar euro-centric development thinking, implies a diametrically oppositional discourse. Second, such extreme characterization further tends to undercut the specific cultural and political constitution and articulation of indigenization in post-colonial societies. It is important to note that, although the instant expression of indigenization may appear as a radical protest against

Western modes of development, beneath it may lay the process of ensuring and affirming postcolonial social formation. In Sri Lanka, the indigenization of development has been part of a broader process of cultural nationalism through which the country as a postcolonial society has attempted to reassert her identity, re-assuming cultural identity, which specificity had been subdued during the colonial period.

Emergent post-colonial state and society in Sri Lanka

In order to understand indigenization as a historical necessity of postcolonial social formation, one needs to be familiar with the particular political and social circumstances under which the transition from the colonial to post-colonial state is crafted. The particular way in which independence was granted, the nature of the elite leadership to whom the power from the colonial rulers was transferred, and the policies of the first government run by the elites, together created this necessity through a crisis of legitimacy. Bandaranaike politics in the mid-1950s and the rise of Sinhalese-Buddhist consciousness simultaneously certified indigenization as a necessity of postcolonial social formation in reasserting the local identity after the long years of colonial rule.

Sri Lanka gained independence through a gradual process of constitutional reforms or, in Singer's words, "in the form of a legal debate" (Singer, 1964, p. 06), and the Sri Lankan independence movement did not involve any mass mobilization or revolutionary element, as compared with India (Jupp, 1978). The colonial government handed over political power to the anglicized elite, who had already acquired some experience in politics by serving in the legislature under British rule since 1931. The same elite debated the terms of constitutional reforms and negotiated towards independence with the British, and the very nature of acquiring independence in this manner made it insignificant in that it did not evoke either strong anti-colonial or national emotions or sentiments. Symbolically, the event of independence was the starting point of the long process of asserting postcolonial identity in newly independent societies. However, in Sri Lanka, the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial was so gradual and 'unnoticeable' that it did not appear as such a decisive moment. Berchert asserts that "an observer of the scene in Ceylon could hardly foresee any major political change in the country when independence was achieved in 1948" (Berchert, 1978, p. 202).

The transfer of political power to the local anglicized elite from the colonial rulers is one of the significant characteristics of the postcolonial social formation in Sri Lanka, as it inherited an elite group produced within the colonial social and cultural environment, just as in the other newly independent countries. The colonial system created a social group, through the process of its European proselytization, who would actually identify intimately with the British. This elite group epitomizes the successful hegemony of the British colonial state. Singer states that “the British decided to grant political authority to those ‘natives’ who were most westernized – to those who most closely approximated themselves,” further proposing that “more important for the operation of the political process in Ceylon, in terms of self-image and world outlook, those individuals at the most westernized end of the spectrum possessed a strong sense of identification with British values, attitudes and perspectives” (Singer, 1964, p. 48). This elite group identified closely with the ideals of democracy, a parliamentary political system, and economic modernization. The extent to which their frame of mind was bolted into the colonizer’s mind and the linear logic of development, is well illustrated by the following citation of an elite politician:

The Honorable members here have talked about colonialism for the last ten years. In what part of the world today do you find colonialism? It is found in countries where the inhabitants are cannibals. Such people cannot be made free at all. They must first be trained to govern themselves (Sir John Kotalawala, Hansard, vol.21, 1955-56:165.).

Thus, a gulf between the elite rulers and the civil society was created at the moment of independence itself (Peiris, 1962). Consequently, politics practiced between 1948-56 is identified as nothing but a continuation of the colonial legacy implemented by the elite rulers (Berchert, 1978; Ponnambalam, 1980; Singer, 1964).

Independent Sri Lanka continued with the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. D. S. Senanayake, who had already served in the State Council under the British, became the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka as the leader of United National Party (UNP), while the only opposition came from the Marxist groups– Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), and Communist Party (CP). In March 1952, D. S. Senanayake died and at the immediate polls after, his son, Dudley

Senanayake, became the second Prime Minister. In the meantime, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who until then had supported the UNP government, formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which quickly gathered popular momentum. In 1953, over a general strike caused by the removal of the rice subsidy, the Prime Minister resigned and Sir John Kotalawela became the new Prime Minister. In the mid-1950s, he turned out to be the most symbolic of what Jupp (1978) calls the “repressive conservatism” of post-independence Sri Lanka, as he had become excessively pro-American and denouncing communism.

Economically, this period is generally identified as perpetuating the colonial economic legacy and creating a dependent economy primarily based on the plantation sector (Ponnambalam, 1980). The industrial policy of the new ruling regime was largely determined by its alliance with the urban commercial and proprietor class, while a strong industrialization programme was seen as an encouragement for an industrial proletariat in Sri Lanka (Ponnambalam, 1980) and paving the way towards Marxist politics. Foreign technology and capital were welcome and modernization was exclusively identified as the goal of development (Karunatilake, 1987; Wriggins, 1960; Oliver, 1957). Thus, the leaders of the first government were rather detached from, or uninterested in, the aspirations of the majority ethnic group, resulting in a legitimation crisis which, in turn, paved the way for the rise of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism as a vital political force, which, until then, had been relatively dormant ².

The indifferent and uneventful moment of independence, the specific character, image, and insensitivity of the elite leadership, and the style of governance of the first government together initiated a crisis of legitimacy. On the one hand, the post-colonial state, modeled on the Western nation-state, was to fulfill the ideals of secularism and modernization. Yet, on the other hand, it was also expected to act in the interests of the local populace who had been both economically and culturally suppressed during colonialism. How then, could the post-colonial state perform these dual roles without compromising either one? This is the fundamental paradox of the postcolonial state formation in countries such as Sri Lanka.

The main difference between the colonial and the post-colonial

² Sinhalese-Buddhist revivalism at a cultural level was formed in the 19th century.

state, looking from within, is that the former was largely maintained by coercive power and hence it did not necessarily legitimate its power, while the newly independent state (modern and postcolonial), burdened with the project of modern development, had to derive its legitimacy from its local populace. Therefore, the new state was expected to be attentive and sensitive to the aspirations of the local populace, especially the Sinhalese- Buddhist majority, who were considered to be the most suppressed and deprived sector under colonial rule and neglected by the elite rulers of the immediate post-independence governments. Wriggins elaborates this fraught situation as follows:

Legitimacy acquired at the hustings is very different from the tradition of inherited status and influence. The given or usurped right to rule has become subject to recall by the electorate. The rulers are periodically put to the test of acceptability. Leaders drew largely from the westernized, relatively urbanized layers of the society, and for the most part, wealthy families, have had to seek the approval of culturally indigenous villagers (1960, p. 201).

As such, there was a growing resentment over the UNP-led leadership in the first half of the 1950s, which was caused not by its economic policies but by the image created by them. The inbuilt legitimation crisis of the post-colonial Sri Lankan state was thus accentuated by the politics of the ruling regime, gradually paving way to a kind of politics sensitized to the local aspirations.

At the onset of the legitimation crisis of the post-colonial state, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism altered its character from a cultural to a more political force. The publications in anticipation of Buddha Jayanthi (the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's death), D. C. Wijewardena's *Revolt in the Temple and The Buddhist Commission of Enquiry's Betrayal of Buddhism* in 1956 marked the highest points of the ascendant nationalism. In accordance with the popular Buddhist belief that the Buddha's teachings were to grow and flourish for 2500 years, the 2500th Anniversary (Buddha Jayanthi) marked the apogee of Buddhism and was, in fact, a timely and auspicious event. When Buddha Jayanthi approached, although the UNP government responded with various propaganda, they failed to convince the people that they were sincere and genuine towards the Sinhala-Buddhist cause (Wriggins, 1960). The Buddhist revivalism was thus identified as an

attempt to restore the religion and culture to its lost position during the colonial times. Wriggins states that,

The Buddhist revival was a complex phenomenon. No doubt, it was encouraged by the desire of the Ceylon's secular politicians to ensure themselves of the majority vote. But it was more than this. It revealed profound emotions and a foundation of ideas and aspirations of its own right. It represented, a rural, fundamentalist reaction to the city's worldly ways, a middle- and lower-class protest against the wealthy and influential elite who had been educated by a foreign curriculum away from Sinhalese social ways and religious practices (1960, p. 210).

The desire to restore Buddhism to its 'rightful place' in the affairs of the country underlay the movement. In one sense, it looked to the past, casting back to the times when Buddhist monarchs ruled a realm that was believed to have been happy and serene, the perfect embodiment of Dhamma. In another sense, it was revolutionary. The attempt consciously to alter relations between Sangha and laity and the individual and his faith in an effort to counter denationalizing Western influence has no historical model in recent centuries" (1960, p. 210).

As Wriggins mentioned, it was aimed at designing a new framework of social change that would pay attention to their socio-cultural inheritance, especially of the majority Sinhalese-Buddhists.

It was within this larger context that one of the most astute politicians-S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike found an opportunity to practice truly 'postcolonial politics. Smith's narrative of S. W. R. D Bandaranaike captures this point reasonably well.

The political genius of Bandaranaike lay in his systematic rejection of the westernized cultural image over a period of years, in religion, language and dress, and in the creation of a political program based on the supremacy of the Sinhala Buddhist national identity. In short, he embraced cultural symbols of the majority of the population, he appealed directly to the rural masses. He promised to make Sinhala the sole official language and to restore Buddhism to its rightful place in state and society. It was a populist appeal sacralized by reference to a glorious past. His movement was a modern version of the Buddhist Reconquest, directed now not against the non-Buddhist invaders, but against the cultural transformation of

society which they had produced (1978, p. 90).

he last statement of Smith's narrative well illustrates the fact that Bandaranaike expediently diagnosed the crisis of legitimacy and the emerging paradox of the post-colonial state and as a result, he knew exactly what should be done to acquire power and change the situation. He exploited the resistance activities already springing up and amalgamated the forces expressed as "Pancha Maha Balawegaya of Sangha, Govi, Weda, Guru, Kamkaru (the great five forces of monks, peasants, indigenous doctors, teachers, and laborers) towards mobilizing the electorate. The election campaign was rigorously conducted in the rural areas and eventually garnered a victory of 51 electoral seats out of 59 for his coalition party.

While the effectiveness of this change is subject to debate, the power shift to the new elite group identified by Singer as the "synthesizers of the traditional and modern" (1964, p. 144) is an event of great significance. This shift of power clearly denoted a transformation of elite politics to mass politics and the subsequent result of this was that a powerful rural constituency was established against which the rulers are to be held liable. What is most interesting is that this new elite group demarcated the ground rules of legitimation, entrenching cultural nationalism as the centrifugal force of Sri Lankan politics, now that political independence was already achieved. Hutchinson writes that cultural nationalism,

has its own distinctive aims – the moral regeneration of the national community.... In this enterprise, historical memory rather than the language as such serves to define national community. This invocation of the past, contrary to the accepted opinion, must be seen in positive light, for the cultural nationalist seeks not to regress into an Arcadia but rather to inspire his community to ever higher stages of development. It is this positive vision that makes cultural nationalism a recurring force" (1987, p. 09).

This cultural nationalism obviously demarcated a critical space for what we may today identify as a process of indigenization outlining the desired direction of social change. Until then, development was unequivocally accepted and defined as identical with modernization and continuous economic growth (Karunatilake, 1987; Wriggins, 1960; Ponnambalam, 1980).

Indigenization of development in Sri Lanka

It is very clear that political and economic developments in the immediate aftermath of independence were merely a continuation of the colonial legacy by local elites. However, Bandaranaike politics in 1956 brought forth many transformations among which indigenization was identified as a larger project of historical necessity to reassert postcolonial identity undermined by colonial rule. This section explains how a particular indigenous discourse of development emerged within the larger process of postcolonial social formation elaborating its major components and manifestations.

Oliver (1957) clearly states that economic opinion in Ceylon 'has run from laissez-faire liberalism (prior to independence) through a new deal type of welfarism (during the first and second parliaments) to new nationalist socialism (since 1956). With regard to the changing composition of the political elite and particularly with regard to economic attitude, a shift from the political right to the political left has occurred. The peculiar characteristic of this shift, however, is that it has not been to the Marxist left..., but rather to a nationalist left finding its expression in ethnic nationalistic phraseology' (Passim, 1957). Oliver's observation pinpoints the gradual move towards indigenization of development with the changes in 1956. This clearly indicates that it is not a reaction to the Western model of development per se, but a turn to Sri Lanka's glorious past- its religious and cultural base, suppressed under colonial rule, to focus and envision its future. However, it should be noted that this process was complementarily influenced by the Gandhian movement and thinking in India as a vision that approximates the local more than the Western.

In addition, the Marxist critique of economic imperialism also had an implicit impact in reorienting development thinking towards indigenization in a different, but subtle way. The indigenizationists did not directly formulate reactions to modernization theory, but it was the Marxist groups who performed that task. Economic nationalism was originally proposed and promoted by the Marxist left to end three forms of foreign exploitation—British (for using political power to control the economic), the Indians (for holding the monopoly of mercantile and money-lending sectors, and the Americans (assuming that they will be replaced by the British after the war). A decisive role of the state in terms of its fiscal policy, resource allocation and

price controls on the one hand, and on the other, self-sufficiency in food production, were seen as the two major strategies of economic nationalism. However, development thinking of 1956 deviated from the Marxists' technical argument of evading foreign exploitation to a more culturally reasoned and nuanced discourse that bears upon three interrelated texts—Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology, glorious past, and Buddhist philosophy—thus changing the genre of indigenization of development. I argue that these three texts together formed the conceptual foundation of the indigenous discourse of development in the backdrop of 1956 nationalist politics.

Conceptual foundations of indigenous development

At the heart of the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology lies the strong belief that the majority ethnic group— the Sinhalese, are a “distinct group with a distinct history” (Moore, 1985, p.18). This is well expressed in the two interrelated concepts of Dhammadipa (Island of Buddha) and Sihadipa (Island of Sinhala people). However, the ideology underpinning these concepts was, by no means, a post-colonial invention, but was inscribed in Mahawamsa – The Great Chronicle itself³. In designing the indigenous discourse of development, two areas of interest from this ideology were centralized as important for the revived post-colonial state: (1) preservation of Sinhalese-Buddhist culture, and (2) the custodianship of the peasantry, who inherited and preserved that culture, which was proposed as the foremost responsibility of the rulers. Emplaced within such an ideology, the post-colonial state was regarded as the guardian of Buddhism, contravening the secular principles of the modern state.

In the Sri Lankan nationalist historiography, the glorious past is described as the basis of Sinhalese civilization. In other words, the content of that glorious past, as evident in the ancient ruins in cities such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and the vast irrigation network, provided the material evidence for the ‘historically achieved nature’ of the glorious past, contrary to the argument that it is merely a nostalgic nationalistic myth. Recapturing this glorious past was reinterpreted as the goal of development, thus theoretically challenging the linear view of modernization. In post-colonial Sri Lanka, the past is conceived as

³ This ideology has been amidst controversies in the context of the ethnonationalist crisis in Sri Lanka leading to various interpretations and any analysis of them is beyond the purview of this paper.

glorious in the sense of being developed and as an ideological model for development, thus applying a cyclical theory of history in which colonialism is interpreted only as an ephemeral phenomenon.

What constitutes this glorious past? There are two interpretations, depending on the context within which it is discussed. One refers to the period from about 5th to 9th century, covering two ancient kingdoms, and arguing that the climax of Sinhalese civilization was during those kingdoms, which were subsequently destroyed by foreign invasions. In another context, the glorious past may refer completely to the pre-colonial era on the conviction that it was destroyed due to colonial subjugation⁴. However, when specific examples are given of the glorious past, it often refers to the ancient ruins of religious and cultural significance and the irrigations systems in the Dry Zone.

Sri Lanka was considered to have been a prosperous and harmonious society in its glorious past. The foundation of this society was based on a system of self-sufficient and sustainable villages⁵. The lifeblood of these villages was a highly sophisticated hydraulic system engineered to irrigate the paddy lands⁶. The economic prosperity of the country relied completely on the provision of an effective irrigation system that was considered the utmost responsibility of the king. This is well expressed by the famous utterance on the relationship between land and water resources during the kingship of Parakramabahu I (1153-1186 A.D.), that "...truly in such a country not even a little water that comes from the rain must flow into the ocean without being made useful to man" (Cūlavamsa, p. 277).

The major structural feature of this sustained system was the village, thus making it the unit of development within the indigenous discourse. A typical village was characterized by a Buddhist temple, tank, and paddy field, thus establishing them as the three basic icons of prosperity⁷. These three icons together symbolized the embryonic

4 See for example, Hettiarachchi (1982)

5 See The Mahaweli Authority (1985), Ariyaratne (1970), Hettiarachchi (1982) Abeyasinghe (1978), Ulluwishewa (1991)

6 The ancient society is often termed as 'hydraulic society'. See Leach (1959, 1961), Gunawardana (1971).

7 A sample of selected areas in the Dry Zone were studied by using the one inch maps to show how this image of village centered on tank, paddy field and temple dominate the landscape. For example, within a forty square mile area, ten such villages with all three icons could be identified.

relationship between the economic and cultural worlds, providing a holistic view of development. The significance of this iconic image is well expressed by Leach, that, “the ideal image tends to be a constant which is reinterpreted to fit the changing circumstances of economic and political fact... despite the tremendous empirical changes, the ideal order is still closer to that described by Ievers nearly 60 years ago” (1959, p. 09)⁸. Thus, the concept of the village essentially evokes those three icons of the ancient society and they are not simply artifacts of a glorious past but have become basic constituents of the indigenous discourse. Along with this idea, the Dry Zone emerged as the heartland of Sinhalese civilization, with the peasantry as its backbone.

Buddhist ideas on development have also been integral to the articulation of indigenous discourse and it is widely accepted that the ancient society was prosperous because the rulers pursued the Buddhist path towards development. The popular view of Buddhism as a religion “for life after death” (meaning beyond worldly life) has, to a certain extent, undermined its embedded social and economic philosophy. Although Buddhist teachings primarily deal with attaining ‘nirvana,’ the Buddha had discussed worldly life more generally in various stanzas. A popular belief among the Buddhists is that if one performs good deeds in the present life, the next life will be much better. Therefore, how a Buddhist would organize his or her worldly life is of vital importance.

In Buddhism, social change is perceived through the harmonious relationship between the individual/ society and nature. Silva affirms that the “Buddhist ethic of development is where a man could approach work, society, and nature for the vital expression of his quest for meaning and significance” (1976, p. 52). Thus, the Buddhist theory of development involves both internal components (spiritual/cultural) and external (material well-being). Here, the important fact is that one needs to organize one’s material life in such a way that it will not interfere with the spiritual well-being of the individual. Development thus means a perfect harmony between the two, thus attuned to a non-dichotomous conceptualization.

Buddhism accepts the production of material goods and the exploitation of nature for human use as essential for existence. Yet,

⁸ Here, Leach refers to Ievers, R.W. (1899). *Manual of the North-Central Province, Ceylon* (Colombo, G.P.)

Buddhism endorses only limited exploitation of nature, as it believes that all matter is impermanent (see Sandell, 1987; Dissanayaka, 1993; Silva, 1976). Whatever a person produces, it should be properly and respectfully produced - meaning fairly and justly; even money can be a medium of enjoyment, given that it is accumulated and utilized properly. Consumption itself is divided into four parts, for oneself, for one's dependents, for health and pleasure, and lastly for charity—giving to people in need. The concept of daana⁹ is a central theme in Buddhist theory of development and it is culturally deep-rooted among the rural Sinhalese and manifested in various functions related to agriculture and community activities. Some may even argue that tendency towards welfarism in the 1950s in Sri Lanka would have been influenced by such thinking¹⁰.

Although these three texts constitute the foundation of the indigenous discourse of development, some tend to highlight one over the others, disregarding their intertwinement. For example, the Sarvodaya movement tends to highlight the Buddhist theory of development as being central to the indigenous discourse, while some studies have completely couched it within Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology (see Spencer, 1990; Brow, 1989; Woost, 1990). My argument is that none of these texts can be discussed without invoking the other two; for example, one cannot refer to the glorious past without invoking either the Buddhist theory or the Sinhalese Buddhist ideology. This intertwinement forms the core of indigenous development that was manifested in Sri Lankan society in the context of 1956 power politics.

The development philosophy envisaged by Bandaranaike is expressively inscribed in his booklet, ‘‘Paddy field and the Spinning Wheel’’ (1934). The paddy field and spinning wheel symbols stand as metonyms for a philosophy deviating from the principles of modern development. The book is organized around the two concepts simultaneously, referring to the needs to be economically independent and to restore the glorious past as a model for the future. The spinning wheel symbol is used to deliver the message of the self-reliance of the villagers, perhaps breaking from the exploitative relations of the remains of the feudal system and capitalist economy introduced later. Interestingly,

9 In Buddhist teachings, daana refers to the practice of giving as a way of cultivating generosity, expecting anything in return.

10 In fact, 1955 ‘‘hartal’’ occurred in response to the removal of free rice ration given for all citizens.

but not surprisingly, Bandaranaike ties the symbol of the spinning wheel to the legendary origin of the Sinhalese ethnic group—Prince Vijaya meeting the local queen, Kuweni, while she was spinning—thus investing a sense of historical legitimacy into his vision. The focus on the paddy field reflects the influence of the glorious past in molding the new discourse on development in 1956. He categorically uses the famous statement in Robert Knox’s book (1681) that, “...if they want a King, they may take any man, of either of these two Counties, from the Plow, and wash the dirt off him, and he by reason of his quality and descent is fit to be a King”¹¹ to boost the image of the peasant. This image is certified with reference to the idea of Sri Lanka as the ‘granary of Asia,’ thus highlighting paddy farming as the backbone of the economy. He argues that it is the negligence of the colonial rulers (especially the British) that has deprived the peasantry by citing the British administrative personnel who had acknowledged that negligence. Thus, he successfully argues that state support is essential to develop the agricultural sector, against the liberal argument that the state should keep its distance from the economy.

The paddy field and the spinning wheel were not merely used to evoke or express sentiments and emotions among the rural electorate. He, in fact, made concrete proposals such as the establishment of local weaving mills and restoration of irrigation systems in the Dry Zone, while proposing to increase the extent under paddy cultivation in the Wet Zone. His vision strongly advocated the need for an ‘indigenous way of thinking’, as opposed to the ‘colonial way of thinking’ in order to ‘frame problems and policies’ in our own way¹².

Sarvodaya movement

Sarvodaya emerged as a philanthropic organization in 1958 with a ‘holiday camp in a backward community’ in a remote low caste village in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka, which was the pioneering non-governmental community development project in Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya is recognized as a “community development organization” cum social

11 See page 3 of Robert Knox (1681) *An Historical relation of Ceylon*, London: Richard Chiswell. Robert Knox refers to this as a statement widely uttered among the inhabitants with reference to the nobility of people in Udunuwara and Yatinuwara areas in the Kandy region.

12 The speech made by the Prime Minister, Appropriation Bill, Aug.2, 1956. (*Towards a new Era: Collection of Bandaranaike’s Speeches*, Colombo: Government Information Bureau, p.761).

movement (Coletta, 1979). It is generally known for its ‘people-centered development’ and its emphasis on a bottom-up approach to development (World Bank, 1988; Goulet, 1988; Kantousky, 1980). Sarvodaya has also been closely identified with alternative strategies of development and especially for representing the indigenous discourse of development.

What is possibly the significance of Sarvodaya in the social and political context of 1956? First, the post-colonial social aspirations that surfaced in 1956 were, in some sense, endorsed, by the emergence of the Sarvodaya movement during this period. It proves that there was a conducive political atmosphere for the cultural expectations of the Sinhalese to be materialized. In this context, I argue that Sarvodaya emerged as a culturally collaborative development project endorsing the mainstream social and political ideology of the day¹³. Sarvodaya is significant as it was the only organized movement with practical programs advocating an indigenous theory of development based on Buddhist philosophy. Sarvodaya theory of development is a combination of the Buddhist philosophy and the idea that Sri Lanka was once a self-sufficient society based on a system of sustainable villages (glorious past), which differentiates it from the capitalist model. Sarvodaya leader, A.T. Ariyaratne, envisions that,

Development should be man-centered. The changes, that are brought about in the socio-economic and political environment should be such that they contribute to the fullest development of the personality of the individuals living in that society. There should be a spiritual-cultural and socio-economic content in all development processes. Development should start from the grass-roots from the village up. People should fully participate in planning for development and in the implementation of such plans... It should first strive to satisfy the basic needs of the people and not artificially creates the wants that are a blind imitation from materialistic cultures...” (1999, p. 125) ¹⁴.

Ariyaratne further states that, with reference to their development programmes and activities that “the ideal of Sri Lanka

13 For example, see Ariyaratne, A.T. (1988) *The Power Pyramid and the Dharmic Cycle*, Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha (especially the Chapter three on, ‘National environment in which Sarvodaya was born’)

14 Ariyaratne, A.T. (1999) *Collected Works vol. 1*, (ed. By Nandasens Ratnapala), Ratmalana: Vishva Lekha.

being a ‘Dharma Dveepa’ (Land of Righteousness) and ‘Danyagara’ (Land of Plenty) is always foremost in the minds of the Sarvodaya workers” (1999, p. 126)¹⁵ Although some argue that Sarvodaya is a misnomer for Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology and protestant Buddhism (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988, Ling, 1980), one should not deny that its nationalistic stance is a direct result of, and shaped by, the political and cultural circumstances of 1956. Sarvodaya shares the view that development must be locally oriented more than universally modeled; not only economic, but also cultural and spiritual; measured through a value orientation rather than socio-economic yardsticks, and bottom-up rather than top-down in approach. Within this framework, the ‘village’ is identified as the ideal spatial unit for development advocated by the indigenous discourse and all Sarvodaya activities have been concentrated on villages based on the Buddhist notion of sharamadaana (sharing and offering of voluntary labor). What is most striking and yet relevant to the argument of this paper, is that, no political party or elected government either disassociated with or criticized Sarvodaya as an idealistic movement. Most governments have found that Sarvodaya is an ideological arm of the state to promote indigenous development.

Indigenous development as a discourse of power

Ideas on indigenization certainly pre-existed independence in varied ways –from the economic nationalism promoted by the Marxists to the nationalist resistance movement led by Anagarika Dharmapala. I argue that it remained largely an ideology on one hand, and on the other, as a broader process of consciousness-raising activity among those who were subjugated by colonial culture. Two significant changes occurred with the politics of 1956. First, indigenization received explicit political expression and institutional (state) support and sponsorship. Second, as a result of that, the broader process of raising consciousness during the pre-independence period was now transformed into a powerful discourse that laid down the direction and the character of the new society. Indigenization established itself as a powerful discourse or as Duncan has defined it - the “social framework of intelligibility within which all practices are communicated, negotiated, or challenged” (1990, p. 16). Indigenous development evolved into a ‘tradition’ in the sense of what Edward Said discussed in referring to Michael Foucault’s notion of ‘discourse’.

15 Ibid.

Said argues that “there is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers, in reality, are determined by what they have read, and this, in turn, influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers’ experience.... A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual ... is not easily dismissed. Most important, such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality that they appear to describe. In time, such knowledge and reality produce a tradition or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse...” (1979, p. 94)

The discourse of indigenization articulated by the 1956 political leadership embraced everything that its readers - the Sinhalese-Buddhist community, yearned for and desired to read. Experiences of the readers were determined and shaped by what they had read (Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology, glorious past trope, and Buddhist theory of social change), while it predefined what the writers should write. What the political leaders did in 1956 was to translate a set of symbols and a system of values that rural people cherished, and most importantly lived with, into a powerful political discourse.

The social and political context of 1956 was a reaction, a lament, and a plea for the need to refashion the postcolonial identity after a long period of colonial subjugation. I will thus argue that the idea of indigenization was born as a strategy to resolve the paradox of the post-colonial state and overcome the legitimation crisis faced by the immediate post-independence government and its political leadership. Indigenization, regardless of its social and cultural reasoning, thus became a strategy in ensuring the hegemony of the post-colonial state for the Sinhala majority it took to be their own. The political victory of Bandaranaike in 1956 clearly demonstrated the need to ‘speak the language of the rural constituency’: political success depended on the extent to which leaders speak the language of indigenization. As the Sinhalese Buddhist community emerged as the most decisive electoral force, the strategies of hegemony had to be tailored towards not only their material needs but also to their cultural and ideological interests. Given the strategic positioning of the rural Sinhalese-Buddhist constituency as a power base, interest in indigenization was not only a development ideology but also a power policy for the political leadership. This ‘power policy’ was vital in symbolically and

imaginatively camouflaging the class and status disparities between the rural constituency and the elite of whom Bandaranaike himself was a member, by placing both groups within the shared discourse of 'a glorious past'. Not only did such a symbiotic relationship emerge between the rural constituency and the new elite, but the positioning of the 'rural Sinhalese' itself was redefined within the new discourse. Within the modernization development framework, people are considered as 'objects' (in the sense of helpless, poor, traditional, rural people) of development: they were now indoctrinated with the mentality that 'they are recipients of development,' as, for example, argued by Kothari (1989). However, within the indigenous discourse, they are spontaneously placed as subjects of a glorious past upon whom a new postcolonial project of reconstruction is embarked upon. Thus, an intimate connection is posited between the past and present—something constantly and powerfully present in Sri Lankan socio-cultural history as Kemper (1991) has argued. This is not to argue that the material demands of the rural constituency became completely unnoticed and marginal, but to emphasize that salvaging lost cultural identity turned out to be a matter of priority in the postcolonial nationalist political agenda.

This leads to the second manifestation of indigenization as a discourse of power, not within the political, but within the cultural domain. The rural community (new power base of postcolonial national politics) tends to easily gravitate towards the conceptual foundations of indigenous development more than any other social group, and therefore the political leadership began to pursue their ideological interests, with the support of this power base. This clearly points to the fact, as Moore (1985) correctly argues, that the Sri Lankan peasantry is drafted, or rather co-opted, into the national political agenda to the neglect of their own occupational interests. Had the elite political leadership not manipulated this situation to their advantage or the peasantry not collaborated with them, it would have perhaps led to a situation in which indigenization might have been articulated into a counter-hegemonic force at the level of rural peasantry, manipulated and mobilized possibly by an alternative political force. Any such possibility for the peasantry to be mobilized and articulated on the basis of their own occupational and material interests was curtailed in advance by strategically locating them as subjects of the larger nationalist discourse. Thus, what actually happened in 1956 through

a subtle process of indigenization of development was to twist and re-articulate a potentially counter-hegemonic force into a powerful hegemonic discourse of political power.

I thus argue that the indigenization of development continues to be a strategic discourse of power, not only because it grants political legitimacy to the elite leadership, but also because of its potential counter-hegemonic significance. This is evident from two trends in postcolonial politics in Sri Lanka. First, no regime in power in post-colonial Sri Lanka has ever abandoned it. Even land reforms of the socialist regime of 1970-77, which were tilted towards 'nationalization' as a strategy of development, may be interpreted as inspired by and geared to the aspirations of not only materially improving but also ideologically elevating the rural peasantry. The impact of indigenization of development as a discourse of power became graciously present in the development policies and projects in the post-1977 era when most radical and structural economic transformations were introduced. The indigenous discourse was reworked and manipulated to justify liberal economic policies, to legitimize the political authority of the rulers, and to internalize the ideology of capitalist development in the minds of rural people (Hennayake, 2006). Certain ancient agricultural practices and functions such as Wapmangula (an equivalent of a thanksgiving ceremony) were reinvented, thus redefining development as 'recapturing the glorious past'¹⁶. One of the largest development projects, the Mahaweli River Diversion Project, is portrayed as a project that relies on modern technology and science, capitalist market networks and even foreign financial support, yet ideologically complemented with the indigenous tradition and culture by rebuilding the traditional heartland of the glorious past—the Dry Zone, where the ancient kingdoms were established¹⁷. Tennakoon's (1987) ethnographic study on the jala puja (water offering ceremony) documents and analyses the 'nationalist contours of development discourse' and how the contradictions of modernization and indigenous culture are

16 An article written by an official in the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research stated that the paddy harvest has actually increased after holding this ancient function and it sets a trend towards making Sri Lanka self-sufficient in rice. (Silumina, 1979, October 11, page 11).

17 See for details, The Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka (1985) *Mahaweli Saga: Challenge and Response*, Colombo, Sri Lanka: Aitken Spence & Co. Ltd.

negotiated through ritualized events of development. Even liberal trade policy was ironically justified with reference to the traditional periodic markets¹⁸. Although one may argue that this is merely political rhetoric, the potential power of indigenous development as a discourse of power should not be underestimated.

Second, the indigenous discourse began to reappear in the form of social resistance, especially in the post-1977 era. Two marked movements were protests against the building of a tourist hotel in Kandalama in the ancient heartland on both environmental and cultural grounds, and Wellessa Kerella¹⁹ the protest against selling land to a foreign company to grow sugar cane on grounds of imperialistic economic interests that may lead to the destruction of a historically significant site. These two and many other local resistance movements clearly demonstrated the embedded counter-hegemonic power of indigenous discourse in reacting to the globalization of economy, culture, and society. These counteractive movements should not be interpreted as ‘anti-development’ but as a part of a continuous process of asserting post-colonial identity.

My argument here is that indigenization of development is not an attempt to contest the Western theory of development in toto. It is definitely postcolonial, nevertheless, it does not necessarily become anti-colonial. To see it as a mere counterview set against the modernization paradigm will move us away from its alliance with, and manipulation by, power politics. It is embedded within a particular power relationship that is historically constituted between the ruling elite leadership and the rural Sinhalese constituency. It is almost natural that some elements of contesting Western development will be part of indigenization, as it is intrinsically a postcolonial project. However, to conceptualize it entirely as an oppositional discourse to (modern) development is to miss the point. It is for this reason that I argue that indigenization of development should not be conceptualized as anti-development, but as embedded in the complex and subtle process of postcolonial social formation.

18 See Hansard, 1979, vol.5, no.4, p.473

19 Particular name for the protest was given in identification with a historical battle launched to oust the British from this area in the early 19th century.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that rather than examining indigenization of development as a reactionary force to the discourse and practice of Western development, it needs to be placed within the relevant historical and geographical contexts in order to arrive at a better understanding. The key argument in this paper has been that indigenization of development in Sri Lanka is not an attempt to contest the Western theory of development in toto. It is definitely postcolonial, nevertheless, it does not necessarily become anti-colonial. To see it as a mere counterview set against the modernization paradigm will trick us away from its inherent alliances and manipulation by power politics. Indigenization of development is embedded within a particular power system that is historically constituted between the ruling elite leadership and the rural Sinhalese constituency. It is almost natural that contesting Western development will be part of indigenization, as it is intrinsically a postcolonial project. However, to conceptualize it entirely as an oppositional discourse to modern development is to miss the point. It is for this reason that I argue that indigenization of development should not be conceptualized as anti-development but as embedded in the complex and subtle postcolonial social transformations.

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