PREFACE
The electoral system is an integral component of democracy. As against direct democracy, in an indirect democratic set-up, it helps the voters to choose their representatives from time to time. The electoral system of a particular country depends on its political culture, history and socio-cultural milieu. A type of electoral arrangement in country ‘A’ may be useless in country ‘B’. Also, in the same country a particular electoral system may become irrelevant after a point of time due to changes in socio-political dynamics.

In the early part of the twentieth century there existed only two electoral systems, namely the majoritarian system and the proportional representation system (PR). Both systems originated from Europe. The majoritarian system originated in Great Britain and the earliest move towards proportional representation is seen in the most ethnically heterogeneous European countries like Denmark, Switzerland, Belgium, and Finland. The majoritarian system is called by different names such as Plurality, First-Past-the-Post (FPP), etc., but all the names appeared ambiguous. By the end of the twentieth century, several states around the world started adopting various electoral systems. Generally, they came under ten different categories. In terms of proportionality reflected in the ratio of votes to the seats, these ten main formulae come under three main families: the Plurality Simple Majority System, the Semi Proportional System and the Proportional Representation (PR). Just over half of the countries have followed the Plurality Majority
System; thirty-five per cent of the countries run the national election by the system of PR; and the remaining countries have semi-proportional representation.

Sri Lanka has considerable experience with both electoral systems (FPP and PR) at different points of time. According to A. J. Wilson, "Ceylon is the ideal laboratory for the study of electoral behaviour." Over the years, many significant changes have been brought about in its electoral system. From the pre-independence period to the Second Republican Constitution (1910-1977), the Island followed the FPP system, introduced by the British. During this period, the electoral system was gradually developed by the extension of franchise and change in the electoral arrangement. The UNP government, however, completely changed the system by introducing the PR system in 1978.

The present study focuses on the working of the PR electoral system in Sri Lanka, especially in parliamentary elections. The various aspects considered are: the special features of the system, its impact on national politics in terms of stability of the government, the nature of representative democracy attained through the system, its merits and demerits, and suitability of the PR system to a multi-ethnic society like Sri Lanka.

The study attempts to answer some relevant questions: What are the actual and hidden reasons behind the introduction of the PR electoral system? Has the system reached in practice the scope and aims envisaged by the pioneers in the country? What are the factors that determine the nature of the
representation? Does the system facilitate equal or adequate representation to all communities in the multi-ethnic society of Sri Lanka? The study also considers the suitability of the electoral system to the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society of Sri Lanka. Two hypotheses are tested as part of the study: (1) The PR system benefits more the under-represented political groups than the established mainstream parties. (2) Electoral changes are largely a reflection of the people's political consciousness and the political development in society.

Paucity of well-established literature on Sri Lanka's electoral system was the main motivation to choose this subject. The little available literature is concerned with the needs of electoral reforms in the Island addressing only particular elections. (C.R. de Silva and S.W.R. De. A. Samarasinghe, 1981; A.J. Wilson, 1981; Sundar de Alwis, P. Saravanamuttu, and Rohan Edirisinha, 2000; Tressie Leitan, 1979; Laksiri Fernando and Keneitschel Dietmar, 2000; Victor Gunewardena and D. Wesumperuma, 1987). A few other available election studies hardly deal with particular elections (I.D.S. Weerawardana, 1960; C.R. de Silva and S.W.R. De. A. Samarasinghe, 1980; A.J. Wilson, 1970; W. Warnapala and L. Dias Hewagama, 1983; T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, 1994; S.W.R. De. A. Samarasinghe, 1994). As regards the working of the PR electoral system spanning over two decades, no extensive work has been done. It is hoped that this study fills up the gap.

For critical analysis of the working of the PR system in Sri Lanka the period 1978 to 2000 was chosen for two reasons. First, the PR system was
introduced by the UNP government in 1978 incorporating it in the new constitution. Secondly, the elections of 2000 were a benchmark, which threw interesting results falsifying many myths on the working of the PR system. However, in the end, as a result of political instability, another general election was held in 2001, which enabled me to extend the work up to 2001, again due to the different set of results, for overall analysis and conclusion.

The study is divided into six chapters. The theoretical background is analysed in Chapter One, i.e. "Electoral Systems: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis". It consists of an extensive analysis of the theoretical background of various electoral systems and their classifications, prevalent the world over. The origin and significance of the electoral systems, social context, merits and demerits of each and every system are also looked into. The historical overview of the electoral system in Sri Lanka from the British period up to 1978 is illustrated in Chapter Two. It deals with the growth of representative democracy through different electoral reforms in the pre- and post-independence periods till 1977. It also deals with communal and territorial representation, universal franchise, and administration of elections, functioning of delimitation, electoral violence, electoral participation and assesses how the FPP system works in the Island. While scrutinizing the rationale and the principles behind the introduction of the PR system, Chapter Three traces the actual and hidden reasons and various parties' opinions on its introduction.
Chapter Four is an attempt to analyse the working of the PR system through the experience and outcome of different elections in the past (1989-2001). It examines whether this system provides genuine proportion of representation in the legislature in terms of various ethnic minority groups and also evaluates the political parties and their participation, and the merits and demerits of the PR system in Sri Lanka. The impact of the PR system on national politics is analysed in Chapter Five. It covers some particular issues such as coalition politics, peace process to solve the ethnic problem as well as the power of the executive. While summing up the analysis, the last chapter assesses the prevailing electoral systems in general and provides some suggestions to change the prevailing electoral system.

The study has adopted the historical-analytical method. The data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of government reports, parliamentary debates and speeches of leaders. For firsthand information on the experience and the opinion on the electoral system, interviews were held with renowned political party leaders, members of Parliament, academic staff from the universities, scholars in research institutions, officers from various government departments and religious leaders in Sri Lanka. The secondary sources were collected from books, research articles, journals, magazines, newspapers, and Internet.

Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon until 1972, but I have used both two names interchangeably throughout.