Chapter One

Plan of the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I will attempt to discuss the patterns of social change in the rural society of Sri Lanka during the last fifty years, with a view to understand the process of development and modernization, and how such processes have influenced the social, economic and political spheres of rural Sri Lanka. I seek to do this on the basis of an ethnographic study of the village Teripahe.

I have elaborated later in this chapter the significance of rural society in a country like Sri Lanka. While this study is based on the classical anthropological model of long stretch of fieldwork in particular area, what distinguishes this study is the fact that my analysis, while focussing on the village, constantly seeks to make the connection between the wider international, national and local developments. There is, along with this macro perspective, a strong sense of historical understanding. This chapter therefore pays considerable attention to the nature of development and modernization that took place during colonial period, which had far-reaching implication on everyday life of the village of Teripahe.

It should be mentioned at the very beginning that the village Teripahe was studied by noted anthropologist, Nur Yalman (Under the Bo Tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship and Marriage in the Interior Ceylon, 1967, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles). However, as elaborated out later, this is not a typical re-study. The primary reason for this is the fact that while Yalman’s study was a structuralist understanding of a village seen as a bounded entity, my study attempts to analyse social change in the context of the village. Development and modernization are therefore central motifs in my study. Unlike Yalman’s study, I go beyond the...
village and seek to understand the nature and significance of state policy of a developing country like Sri Lanka on the village level. I found that Frank’s theory of dependency and Smelser’s model of modernization (which I explain at some length in Chapter Two) have several cross societal validity. Several sociologists and anthropologists used this theory and model, and I found them also very useful for my Teripahe study.

This study, therefore, reflects an inter-disciplinary perspective with adequate stress on history, state intervention, development and modernization processes without losing out the shells of the special craft of social anthropology.

Sri Lanka is an island of about 25,000 square miles and lies off the southern tip of Indian peninsula. The south central parts of the island are mountainous reaching the elevation of over 6000 feet above sea level. These highlands are circumscribed by a plain, of which same parts constituted the foothills and scattered and isolated hills.

1.1.1 The Pre-colonial Period

The Sinhalese\textsuperscript{1} civilisation, which was predominantly Buddhist, developed a well-advanced irrigation system for paddy cultivation in ancient history, especially in the north central and southeast regions. Anuradhapura was the first settlement and the capital city of the Sinhalese civilisation and its period (with the same capital) stretched from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC to 1017 AD. However, as a result of the Indian invasions, the political centre shifted to Polonnaruwa from 1017 AD. Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa were the first two capitals of the island and were called Rajarata (\textit{lit.} the country of King). The Rajarata civilisation flourished between the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC and 13\textsuperscript{th} century AD. However, the Indian invasions loomed large even in the 13 century AD, and the Rajarata civilisation began to disintegrate and a gradual shift of
the capital to the southwest was witnessed from the 13th century to the 16th century. Then the colonial invasions by the European powers started. This period also continued to maintain instability as far as the capitals of the Sinhalese civilisation is concerned. Thus, Yapahuwa, Dambadeniya, Kurunegala, Gampola, Kotte, Kandy and Colombo became the capital cities in Sri Lanka. The drift of the capital city to the southwest was a development that covered a period of seven centuries.

With the drift of the capitals towards the southwest, the splendour of the Rajarata civilisation declined. Different localities within the island assumed power and thus fragmentation of political power came into being and the country was politically divided and weakened. This was the political situation when the first of the western powers, though by accident due to stormy weather, reached the shores of the country in 1505. The Portuguese thus set foot on the island in 1505. Following the Portuguese came the Dutch in 1658 AD. Their political and economic interests in the island made them the enemies of the Portuguese. A series of armed confrontations in the littoral made the Dutch victorious and thus began their period of establishment and rule which dates from 1658 to 1796, the year which saw the British come to Ceylon due to extra territorial reasons.

1.1.2 Colonial Situation

Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796), and the British (1796-1948) ruled Sri Lanka for nearly four centuries starting from the 16th century. The Portuguese and the Dutch ruled the coastal region of Sri Lanka. In 1815, the British conquered the entire island. The influences of colonial administration of the Portuguese and the Dutch clearly established social and cultural distinctions between the maritime regions and the Kandyan highland region of the island. Because of this
difference, colonial rulers themselves identified two social and cultural atmospheres in Sri Lanka. First, the “Up Country” that covered the Kandyan Kingdom. Second, Low Country that covered the maritime regions that were affected during the colonial administration.

During the British period, colonial administration took interest in developing commercial plantations in the highlands. Economic changes during the British period was characterised by the increasing importance of systematic and large-scale production of crops that are export-oriented. At the time of independence, Sri Lanka had a dual agricultural economy when a commercially developed plantation sector co-existed along with subsistence agriculture. Quibria (1994:384) describes the agricultural economy and its changes at the last stage of British colonial administration in Sri Lanka as follows:

At that time of Independence [in 1948] the Sri Lankan economy had acquired many of the structural features of a colonial economy. Under the British rule, the country developed a largely export economy based on the three primary commodities – tea, rubber, and coconut. This development effort was confined mainly to the southwestern and central parts of the country. During the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, the colonial administration had developed the economic infrastructure of roads, rail transport, power, and communication to serve the economy. The commercially organised plantation sector that had developed and expanded during this period existed alongside the traditional peasant sector, which was based on subsistence agriculture. The essentially rural economy of Sri Lanka has long been categorized into (a) a plantation sector producing tea, rubber and some coconuts for export, and (b) a smallholder sector producing mainly food, especially rice, fruits, and vegetables for domestic consumption. The plantation economy was initiated during the colonial period, while the rural economy is an aspect of traditional Sinhala village. The British introduced several infrastructural changes to facilitate the growing plantation economy of Sri Lanka.

Throughout the greater part of the British regime in Sri Lanka, the agrarian
policies pursued by the government were generally oriented towards the promotion of the “modern sector” of the economy, which consisted of plantation agriculture and related secondary and tertiary activities. Land legislation promulgated from time to time (for example, the Crown Land Ordinance of 1840 and 1841, the Temple Lands ordinance of 1856, the Partition Ordinance of 1863, and the Waste Lands Ordinance of 1896) and various other fiscal measures such as those related to agriculture taxation were designed mainly to facilitate the release of land for plantation agriculture and/or to induce the spread of the concept of private property in land and thus stimulate commercialized economic activity among the peasantry.

After the formation of commercialized plantation economy they have constituted Donoughmore Commission for constitutional reforms in 1931. The Commission granted universal franchise, and the process of party politics was activated. As a result of these changes, Sri Lankan economy, polity, and social structure have been changed towards modern secular society.

1.1.3 Post-independence Period

Sri Lanka is primarily a rural society. There are more than 20,000 villages (Wijesekera, 1990: 159) in Sri Lanka. In 1998, Sri Lankan population was 18.6 millions with 77 per cent of the population living in rural agricultural society. In 1981, 78 per cent of the population lived in the rural areas (including plantation sector) and 22 per cent in the urban areas. Thus rural society remains the predominant part in Sri Lanka. It is a pluralist society. In 1981, its population consisted of 74 per cent Sinhalese, the major ethnic group, 12.7 per cent Sri Lankan Tamils, 7.05 the Moors, 5.5 per cent Indian Tamils, and 0.8 per cent others. The same census showed its religious composition as 69.3 per cent Buddhists, 15.3 per cent Hindus, 7.6 per
cent Muslims, and 7.5 per cent Christians.

During the last 60 years, Sri Lankan population has grown remarkably. The growth of population from 1930 to 1960 was largely due to the widening gap between mortality and fertility ratios enhanced by the rapid expansion of health services and the virtual elimination of malaria. The rate of natural increase in population rose from 1.4 per cent in 1945 to 2.7 per cent in 1948 and to a peak of 3.0 per cent in 1950. In 1998, the rate of natural increase of Sri Lankan population was 1.1 per cent. During 1930-60, there was a dramatic decline of the crude death rate from 2.03 per cent to 1.43 per cent. The decline of the crude death rate continued until 1967 when it reached 0.75 per cent and has thereafter been moving between 0.70 and 0.56 per cent. The improvement of health is due to the policy of free health services from the government hospitals.

The rapid increase of population has had two major repercussions on national development programmes and planning. The first was the growth of unemployment, further fragmentation of holdings and increasing landlessness. The second was the radical change in the population structure, viz., the increase in the proportion of children and youth. After 1970, however, Sri Lanka has managed the demographic transition successfully and has reached a situation wherein the main problem of population growth has been brought under control.

Since Independence in 1948, the national government conserves these changes on the one hand and they have attempted to introduce several national level changes like language policy, land reforms, and resettlement programme on the other. Though these changes took place in the post-independent Sri Lanka, there have been no significant consequences in both rural and urban societies until 1977. However, the direction of the major structural changes introduced in 1977 and onwards under the
open economic policy was towards a more liberalised capitalism.

1.1.4 Concept of Village

The Sinhalese word for 'village' or 'hamlet' is *Gama* (plural *Gamē*). The Sinhalese term *Gama* (Pali *Gāma*, Sanskrit *Grāma*) also used to a collection of landholdings. The word *panguwa* or *vasama* connoted a single holding forming part of the *gama*. The word *Gama* also implies large estates like *gabada-gama* (the land of the King which supplies grains and other commodities to the palace), *ninda-gama* (the land of a lord), *vihara-gama* (the land of a Buddhist temple), *devala-gama* (the land of a shrine of the deities) in the Kandyan regime.

The arable land is the primary wealth of the villagers. That means the main economic activity of a village is agriculture. The village economy is characterised by a threefold system of land use: (a) irrigated paddy fields, (b) village gardens, and (c) *chenas* (shifting cultivation). Apart from these forms of land, the villagers are partly depending on forest lands also.

The villages of Sri Lanka are organised as per physical and social entities. The physical characteristics of a village can be identified with river or water stream or irrigation water canal, tank or reservoir, the Buddhist temple, paddy fields, forest, graves road, etc. These features of a village can easily be recognised, but the social characteristics are not visible, especially for outsiders. The village is not only a social entity, but a cultural entity too. In most of the villages, we can see that several kin groups are derived from one caste. Farmer (1957: 71-72) explains this situation precisely:

It is important to realise, in the first place, that, as in many oriental societies, the village community is the social group. Although now much affected by outside influences, the Dry Zone Sinhalese village functions as a unit, being largely made up of related families who are closely bound together and to the
village by ties of kinship, custom, and religion... It was traditionally ruled by a *gamsabhā* or village council; the modern ‘village committee’. Although Buddhist, and hence technically classless, Sinhalese society is in fact stratified according to caste; but the divisions are neither so numerous nor rigid as in Hindu society.

This explanation shows that how the traditional Sinhalese village is organised. However, as mentioned by Farmer, the villages have undergone several changes during the colonial period. He describes how these changes were initiated in the Sri Lankan villages:

> It must be realised that the ideal village unit, seemingly immemorial, with its strong family ties, attachment to the land, and principles of cooperation, is a phenomenon now subject to rapid change under the pressure of outside forces. Only in the low caste villages and in villages remote from roads are many of the old customs preserved. Almost everywhere caste is breaking down; villagers are becoming more mobile and Low country Sinhalese and other alien elements have come not only into the colonies and the roadside, ribbon-like bazaars but also into many *Purāṇa* villages (Farmer, 1957: 75).

According to the above statement, we can argue that the changes occurred during the colonial period even affected the oldest villages in Sri Lanka. However, during the later half of the twentieth century several anthropologists and sociologists have identified that there was a traditional type, representative of Sinhalese villages in Sri Lanka (Ryan: 1953, Leach: 1967, Yalman: 1967, Obeyesekere: 1967).

As a villager, I lived part of my life in a village not far from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, and I have some specific image of a ‘village’. As my village is located relatively closer to Colombo (25 miles), the rapid changes that I have observed in the village formed my conception of village and its transformation. However, as an undergraduate of a Sri Lankan university, I had the opportunity to mix with various colleagues who came from different parts of Sri Lanka. Some of them, who came from remote areas, pointed out to me that my perspective of a traditional Sinhala village should not be used to generalise the characteristics of a ‘village’ and more importantly, to conceptualise the pattern of its changes. At this stage, I realised that the concept of village has several interpretations and different people have different
Anthropologically and sociologically, it has been understood that a 'Traditional Sinhalese Village,' is a 20th century concept developed by foreign as well as local anthropologists and sociologists (Ryan: 1953, Pieris: 1956, Leach: 1961, Yalman: 1967, Obeyesekere: 1967, Robinson: 1975), whose studies mainly dealt with rural society. As the concept of society varies with the anthropological discourses, one has to examine what constitutes a rural society. For instance, nomenclatures like 'primitive', 'peasant', 'community', 'modern', 'industrial', etc. are employed very frequently. Along with these terms, concepts directly related to social change—'third world', 'developed', 'underdeveloped', etc., —are also used. Moreover, the concepts of 'global village, or 'globalisation' are now being increasingly used. All these need clarification.

1.1.5 Nature of the Sri Lankan Village Studies

With the development of sociology and social anthropology in 20th century, many scholars studied the peasant society, especially of South Asian countries like India and Sri Lanka. When we consider the studies on Sri Lankan peasant society, we identify two groups of scholars. They are:


Most of the foreign scholars who studied Sri Lankan peasant society were from England and America. They were interested on caste, kinship, marriage, land tenure, politics, and religion. The majority of Sri Lankan scholars has concentrated their research on Sri Lanka itself. Only Daniel, Jayawardena, Tambiah, and Wijewardene have done most of their research elsewhere. There are more than twenty thousand villages in Sri Lanka. But, only a limited number of village studies is available. These studies can be classified into two types: macro studies and micro studies. Macro studies are concerned with the structure and organisation during some period of Sri Lankan traditional society (Wijesekera: 1949, Pieris: 1956, Ariyapala: 1956, Hettiarachchi: 1982). Micro studies are about small communities, particular villages, social structural patterns like caste, kinship, land tenure, politics, etc (Ryan: 1953; Pieris: 1956; Leach: 1961; Yalman: 1967; Obeyesekere: 1967; Robinson: 1975). There have been several attempts to study the changing patterns of the Sri Lankan society since the 70s (Robinson: 1975, Gunasinha: 1975, Silva: 1979, Perera: 1985, Alexander: 1995). However, these studies are not holistic, as they studied only one or two structural patterns of the concerned village.

Obeyesekere was inspired by Nur Yalman's well-known work (Under the Bo tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon) to study social changes in Sri Lanka. Obeyesekere (1967: 288) argues that there (in Terutenne, Yalman's village) should be structural changes because of the changes of the landownership. He explains further:

We have demonstrated that drastic social changes have occurred in Madagama [Obeyesekere's village], similar if not identical changes have taken place elsewhere. Yet social anthropological studies in Ceylon [Sri Lanka] have looked at Sinhalese social structure as if such changes had not occurred. Yalman had studied kinship, marriage, and land tenure.... This is precisely one of the areas where the effects of the Grain Tax [under the British rule]
were actually felt. Yet in his analysis he speaks of the Sinhalese kindred, kinship, marriage and land tenure assuming that what he writes is applicable to Sinhalese society in general. Hardly any attempt is made to investigate whether Terutenne is Terutenne today because of important structural changes that have occurred in its social structure. Yalman's methodology is adequate if one is interested in studying Terutenne of 1958; in which case one can take only of Terutenne kinship, etc., in 1958 not of Sinhalese kinship. A study of the social structure of Sinhalese villages calls for a study of change. It is difficult for us to believe that the changes in landownership in this area had no effects on the social structure of the village.

As Yalman is a structuralist, he is not interested on the patterns of change to disturb his logical structures. Obeyesekere emphasises this point in his review of Yalman's book *Under the Bo Tree*:

"Yalman's assumption of "stable communities" seems greatly exaggerated. This assumption is of some methodological significance to him, because a comparison of stable communities helps him to discover the unvarying general structures... The traditional pattern of land ownership had drastically changed, and there was an influx of immigrants. The significance of these changes for the social structure is not assessed. Again Yalman's own account and suggest that important structural changes had taken place in Terutenne also (1968: 792)."

Besides Yalman's methodology, he might have faced problems of linguistic translation as well as the problems of studying the 'other culture'. In this context, one can study Yalman's village on two reasons. First, to penetrate into the absolute milieu of the village. Second, to probe the social changes in the village from Yalman's stage to the present.

My selection of the village 'Teripahe' for this study is prompted by two factors. First, I made an exploring visit to Teripahe in 1997. During this short visit, I noted several institutional changes, indirectly evident in caste differentiation, marriage, and lineage differentiation. The more prominent material changes observed in the village included a new base hospital, co-operative shop, post office, electricity supply to houses, and new bus service. In this village, I could discern many changes—initiated indirectly by structural development, and directly by wider socio-economic and politico-cultural changes that have taken place during the last 46 years.
Secondly, comparative considerations led me to study this village. This village was studied by Nur Yalman in 1954. (He employed a fictional name for this village called ‘Terutenne’) However, this is not a re-study since the theoretical approaches used are different. I have selected Yalman’s primary village with a different perspective for my research. But this does provide an important reference point for a comparative study of the extent of social change in the rural society of Sri Lanka. These factors prompted me to undertake a study of this village.

1.2 Argument and Research Problems of the Study

From very early times to the present Sri Lanka’s main economic activity has been subsistence agriculture. Therefore, the land and ownership of land constitute higher status and prestige in the rural Sri Lankan society. The traditional caste system also organised by the landlords (Goyigama caste) as the upper caste in the caste hierarchy of Sri Lanka. Caste and land have direct links with kinship and marriage patterns in rural society. Several studies (Leach: 1961, Yalman: 1967, Obeyesekere: 1967, Perera: 1985) have shown several distinct changes of land tenure that had taken place in Sri Lankan rural society. Leach’s ‘Pul Eliya’ explains that the kinship is the prominent fact in land tenure. Obeysekere studied kinship and land tenure in the context of social change in rural society. He clearly mentioned that there is considerable social discontent in the village because of changing patterns of kinship and heirs. In addition there has to be a continuous normative rationalisation of action. Yalman also noted this factor in his primary village and as well as other villages in Sri Lanka. “The main source of income and index of wealth in most dry zone villages is land” (1967: 36). However, this nexus is prominent in both dry and wet zones in Sri Lanka. A recent study (Perera, 1985: 184) shows that there has been little polarisation
between landlords, tenants, and labourers in rural Sri Lanka. This study is based on two villages one in the dry zone and other in the wet zone.

1.2.1 Land Tenure and Social Change

Land is a dominant social index in rural Sri Lanka. During colonial period, after the British conquered the entire Island, they introduced major laws in 1840, to establish their rights on Sri Lanka and to prevent the natives’ encroachment on Crown lands. “Among these laws the major ones were the ‘Ordinance No.12 of 1840—to prevent encroachment upon Crown Lands’ (Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance), which was amended by the Order in Council of 11 August 1841; Ordinance No. 1 of 1897— ‘An Ordinance related to claims to forest, *chena*, waste and unoccupied lands’ (Waste Lands Ordinance)” (Obeyesekere, 1967: 98-99). Then they began to sell these lands for commercial purposes. This situation continued until 1935. In contrast to the early ordinances, the enactment of the Land Development Ordinance in 1935 was a landmark in colonial land policy in Sri Lanka. The most important character of this ordinance was the initiation of social change through redistribution of state owned lands or Crown Lands among landless families. It effectively prevented the sale of crown land. Perera (1985: 63) describes the benefits of this land policy as follows:

Based on this ordinance, the government planned two detailed programs of land distribution. The first is the establishment of large scale colonisation schemes in the dry zone with a view to stopping rural de-population, to better living conditions of the peasants in the dry zone, and to resettle villagers from congested areas in the wet zone. The second is the expansion of agriculture around the villages from time to time and the resettlement of landless villagers further afield in new lands commonly known as Village Expansion Schemes. Sri Lanka can be divided into wet and dry agro-ecological zones. The wet zone covers south-western, western and central highland areas. Rest of the country belongs to the dry zone. According to the history of Sri Lanka, the first settlement appeared in the dry zone. During colonial period, with the rapid growth of population, villagers
encroached on crown land, particularly on boundary of their villages. The State, implementing ‘village expansion schemes’, began to give small allotments to the landless villagers in order to ease population pressure in the villages. Nevertheless, there had been continuous migration from the dry zone to the wet zone due to insufficiency of water, malfunction of irrigation system and malaria-plague. Following this increasing population pressure in the wet zone, the colonial government started dry zone colonisation programme. The nationalist movement in the early 20th century further supported this. After the Independence there were several legislative enactment on state and private lands. In 1958, the government introduced the Paddy Land Act and the Act has in fact been of some beneficial consequence in granting security of tenure. Also most importantly, the Department of Agrarian Services was established to administer the 1958 Act. However, the legislative process concerned with the regulation of paddy land tenure has been slow and marginally effective. However, in 1970s, the government took firm measures, and the action on the state sector was sudden and decisive. “Under the Land Reform Law, No. 1 of 1972, all privately held land above an individual ownership ceiling of twenty-five acres of paddy land and fifty acres of other lands was acquired by the state. Three years later, under the Land Reform (Amendment) Law, No. 39 of 1975, all land held by public companies was nationalised” (Moore, 1985: 65). All these nationalisation programmes were prompted by political reasons. The most important reason was the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – the People’s Liberation Front) youth movement and their abortive revolution in 1971.

1.2.2 Polity and Social Change

Ever since Sri Lanka’s independence in 1948, there have been several reforms,
movements and legislation to transform the traditional Sri Lankan society into a modern one, based on secularism, decentralisation of economic power and other democratic norms.

The upper caste among the Sinhalese and Tamils dominated the nationalist movement on the eve of Independence. They were the English-educated elite to whom the British chose to transfer power. Under the new government, the political elite continues the social welfare system support, such as free primary education and health care introduced by the colonial power, to the masses. In 1950, the government extended free education up to the university level.

In the early period of post-independent Sri Lanka, the Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake introduced several radical changes like Swa Basha (Sinhala only; literally it means native language) policy. Consequently, the new generation of Sinhala-educated group gradually sought avenues for upward socio-economic mobility. However, the lack of adequate economic opportunities frustrated them. The JVP neo-Marxist movement managed to gather the support of these youth and organised them against the newly elected SLFP-Marxist coalition government in 1971. After the abortive JVP insurrection, the government followed a closed economic policy with aims to revitalise the rural peasant economy.

The most important determinant factor in the recent history of Sri Lanka that caused the change of economic, political, social and cultural structures is the open economy. In 1977, the new government (UNP) introduced an open economic policy in contrast to the policy of the early 70s; its direction was towards a more liberalised capitalism. This economic policy gave priority to private sector including massive multinational companies to function in the local economy. The new economy provided many avenues of change in the rural society. Some of the major trends of
transformation in the rural society of Sri Lanka can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. The transformation of the agrarian society from the subsistence-based traditional society to a market-based, profit-oriented, commercialised one.

2. The introduction of modern technology to transform the scattered and underdeveloped colonial agrarian economy into a well-knit compact one and to integrate it with the national economy.

3. The government also introduced several administrative reforms from the grass-roots level to the national-level that resulted in the politicisation of village affairs.

4. The emergence of complex network of various associations and institutions within the agrarian society that maintains close links with urban centres.

5. The process of these changes has directed the capitalist path of development and modernization, especially in the later half of the independent Sri Lanka.

By ascertaining these recent changes in the rural society of Sri Lanka, I have intention to pose a concrete argument that "the modern development and modernization efforts at national and regional levels have significantly transformed the rural society of Sri Lanka. As a result, the concepts of village (Gama), villager (Gamiya) and village life (Gami Jeevithaya) that persisted in the rural society have been changing during the last 50 years of Sri Lanka".

The traditional village (Gama) can be identified as a physical entity. Traditionally, it means the Buddhist temple, reservoir, paddy field, a stream or irrigation canal, forest, grave road, etc. It is also a socio-cultural phenomenon. It means two or three kin groups, explicitly identified on caste and land tenure bases. The Sinhala word Gamiya means the 'villager,' who follows an occupation related to his caste and engages in traditional village life with several appropriate roles. The
village life (*Gami Jeevithaya*) means simple, co-operative, conventional and spiritual
life pattern of a group of villagers or *Gamiyan* who identify themselves as a village
community.

The research with which I intend to deal with in this thesis can be posed as
several inter-related research questions. I have developed these questions by tracing
the above traditional village perspective as my research base. It is intended to be a
holistic study with special focus on contemporary development and modernization.

1. What are the salient features of a Sri Lankan village?
2. What are the basic social spheres, which are more open to changes?
3. Who initiates changes?
4. Which social strata benefit more from these changes?

As I mentioned earlier, Nur Yalman’s anthropological study (*Under the Bo-Tree*,
1967), on Sri Lanka in 1954 is used as the base of this village study.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study is mainly concerned with the social changes in rural society of Sri
Lanka. For this purpose I have selected a particular village called ‘Teripahe’. The
special reasons for selecting this village lie in the facts that the Nur Yalman studied
this village as a typical Sinhala village in 1954. In addition, this is a village that has
been much affected directly by the modern development programmes in Sri Lanka
although located in a remote area. Therefore this village is more suitable for
comparing such periods, i. e., the period of Yalman’s study and the present, and for
analysing the processes of ‘change’ and ‘continuity’. However, the theoretical
perspective of Yalman and mine are different. He used a structural model to study the
village community. I use development and modernization theories to discuss the
processes of change in the rural society of Sri Lanka. Indeed, the concept of modernization is essential to discuss the process of social change in a society. The importance given to these theoretical perspectives and concepts is owing to the fact that Sri Lanka is a country, which has been ruled by three colonial powers. Further, I am probing the period of post-independent Sri Lanka, and the fact is that Sri Lankan economy and social structure continue to develop with a capitalist base even after Independence. Another factor that I would like to mention here is that Yalman was basically concerned with kinship, marriage, and caste in Sri Lankan rural society. But, after this (Under the Bo Tree) there is some more information on land tenure system, local administrative and political structure, material and non-material culture of the village to be depicted that is different from 46 years before. With these resources I can examine how the modern social and cultural mechanism penetrated the rural society of Sri Lanka today.

This is intended to be a holistic study covering almost all structural changes of the village concerned, including environmental and demographical changes, administrative process and its changes and other social and institutional changes like economy, family, marriage, social stratification, and religious and belief systems.

1.4 Objectives of the study

This study is not intended to be a re-study of Yalman. I do not intend to bring in the same theoretical and methodological paradigms of Yalman’s study into this study. The kind of small, isolated communities studied earlier do not exist today, as modern development processes have affected the villages. My interest is not on structuralist models of the village. It focuses on the processes of social change, prompted by development and modernization. However, the findings of Yalman on
Terutenne village form a valid ground from where I can proceed. Hence, the objectives of the study can be stated as follows:

1. In the 1950s, Yalman identified the Sinhala village Terutenne as a typical "traditional Sinhala village". He describes land tenure, caste, kinship, and marriage in the village. However, after Independence, there have been many structural changes (land reform, social welfare, economic reform, politicisation of administrative structure, etc.) in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, even today 78 per cent of the total population live in the rural society and the concept of "Sinhala village" persists. The concept of "Sinhala village" needs to be re-examined today in light of both the 'changes' and the 'continuity' of Sri Lankan village life.

2. There has been a considerable gap of time between Yalman’s study in 1954 and the present research in 2000. With Yalman’s study as a base, I shall seek to map the social changes during the last 46 years of the village Terutenne. In this process, I would like to probe changes of economic, socio-cultural and political structures of the village.

3. If there are qualitative and quantitative changes in the village, what are the socio-political, economic, and cultural causes responsible for these changes of the village? Alongside answering this question, 'patterns of change' in the village can be compared with the 'process of change' at the national and regional levels.

4. Village development is now a part of the nation-wide development process. Therefore, through this study one can examine what types of obstacles obstruct the development process in the village and what types of benefits facilitate the village.
1.5 Research Area and Location

The name of the village is ‘Teripahe’. In Yalman’s book, he used the fictional name, ‘Terutenne’. “Wherever the material discussed might be offensive to the persons concerned, fictional names have been utilised. The name ‘Terutenne’ is fictional” (Yalman, 1967: xiii). Unlike Yalman’s period of study, today, the village Teripahe was exposed to the outer world. In this study, I discuss mostly patterns of social change (for research purpose only) during last 50 years. Therefore, in my study I plan to use the real name Teripahe. This village is situated in the Nuwara Eliya district and in the Walapane Divisional Secretariat. It is about 250 Kms away from Colombo and 10 Kms from Nildandahinne, the nearest small town. Geographically, it is situated in the eastern part of the central highland and above 2500 feet from the sea level. It has an intermediate climatic pattern because the village lies between the Wet zone and Dry zones (for more details, see Chapter Four).

1.6 Of ‘Other Culture’ and ‘Native Culture’

I would like to question the anthropological discourse in the classical period of anthropology. In the classical period of anthropology, western anthropologists studied ‘other cultures’. The prominent British anthropologist, Malinowski studied eastern tribes and referred to native peoples as ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ and even gave prominence to these terms in the titles of his books. A key feature of the modern era with far-reaching implications for anthropological theory and method has been the disappearance of the ‘primitive’ and the ‘savage’. Then ‘other cultures’ became the central object of anthropological enquiry. This position is explained more explicitly by Ahmed and Shore (1995: 19) in their book, *The Future of Anthropology*. 
Today this kind of anthropology is increasingly untenable, not least because 'native peoples' exist in very changed circumstances. Many developments have occurred which now complicate the traditionally unquestioned relationship between anthropologists and their 'objects' of study. The natives are likely to be educated, often with a university degree or PhD from a western university. They are increasingly likely to be members of the anthropologist's own society... In short, western scholars writing about the 'other' can now be held to account and may find their writings challenged by natives who may also be anthropologists.

The notions of 'other culture' and 'native culture' have been developed, and a separate branch called 'native anthropology' has come up in recent history of anthropology. "On the surface of it; and judging from recent debates, there seem to be both gains and losses from being a native anthropologist" (Hastrup, 1995: 157).

Among the gains reported is a possibly privileged access to certain aspects of local culture, notably the emotive and other intimate dimensions. It has also been suggested that a native anthropologist possibly 'feels' the subtle links and nuances within a culture more easily than a foreigner does. The native anthropologist is also not confronted with the imaginative behaviour of the people as is shown to a foreigner. For instance, if a western scholar has studied the village social life in Sri Lanka, the villagers definitely know the differences of both culture and then disclose an 'ideal' behaviour in front of the foreigner. Among the losses are the immediate positioning of the anthropologist within known social categories, a greater pressure to conform to local social norms and a certain propensity towards preconceived notions.

In this context there are several questions raised against native anthropologists. One of the main concerns is ethnocentrism. In the classical period of anthropology this tendency became more prominent, and is being critiqued by the post-modern anthropologists. However, native anthropology itself is susceptible to ethnocentrism. The issue is whether the native anthropologist should also combat ethnocentrism in the peoples they study. Should 'native ethnocentrism' be respected as part of the indigenous v...
prejudice and misinterpretation in the community by providing more information about the values and customs of other peoples? The other questions concerned here are realism and relativism. Scholars are still committed to some notion of truth or more modesty ‘of being right’. Being right does not imply the old objectivist notion of correct representation of reality. It is rather, a matter of assertion and hence of public acceptability. Relativism is no self-evident conclusion to the anthropological search for understanding the real worlds of other people. It cannot make sense of the distinction between ‘being right’ and ‘thinking one is right’. Relativism in the extremely ontological sense violates the nature of human understanding as much as realism does since it requires belief that we can actually understand culture from ‘native’s point of view’. The assumption of accuracy by the native or insider’s view than the outsiders view can be explained as follows:

There are logical dangers inherent in both approaches. The outsider may enter the social situation armed with a battery of assumptions which he does not question and which guide him to certain types of conclusions; and the insider may depend too much on his own background, his own sentiments, his desires for what is good for his people. The insider, therefore, may distort the “truth” as much as the outsider. Since both positions involve the possibility of “distortion” which is better?...

Many anthropologists feel that the native’s view of his own culture reflects the most accurate view (Jones, 1982: 478). As discussed by the Jones, both views have same empirical problems. However, the insider’s view has more advantages to carry research work. The problem at this point is that there are native anthropologists, but there is no native anthropology. Having seen these problems in anthropology, I shall now try to articulate the peasant society in Sri Lanka. I would also like to discuss in brief the Sri Lankan situation of anthropological discourse.

Western scholars studying non-western cultures like the Asian represent the first phase in the history of anthropology. Native scholars, educated and trained in western universities represent the second phase. This situation has been slowly
changing. Unlike India, Sri Lanka is a small country and it does not have an independent anthropological and sociological academic tradition. Most of the Sri Lankan anthropologists and sociologists were trained in the western world. Today, as anthropology is confronted with ‘native scholars’ studying ‘native culture’, the new generation of Sri Lankan anthropologists and sociologists have to face this growing challenge.

The notion of ‘other culture’ and ‘native culture’ have serious implication for anthropological method. The traditional practice of going out into the ‘field’ finding a community to study and writing an interpretative account of that society based on ethnographic insights becomes increasingly unveiled if the society in question has no unified or bounded centre, and if our unit of study no longer even approximates the social reality as it is lived and experienced by our ethnographic subjects. Anthropology is yet to develop a new methodological tool-bag to cope with the complexity of this increasingly fluid ‘New World order’.

1.7 Methodology

A basic aim of anthropological field research is to describe the total culture of a group of people. However, this basic aim can vary with the anthropologist and the way of doing research. “Field methodology is currently a much-discussed subject in anthropology. As usually conceived, research is a task carried out by an “outsider” or “stranger” who enters a society and attempts to learn about the way of life of its people (Jones, 1982:471).” This conventional way of doing research is changing today and the new trend in social anthropology is to carry out the research by a native anthropologist in his/her own society and culture. This research too intends to follow the same manner. However, when we think of the theory and methodology, there are
as yet no sets of theoretical and methodological conclusions generated from the point of view of native anthropologists. Most of the theoretical and methodological paradigms in many social sciences have originated in the West, but mostly based on the non-West societies. Though we argue that there is the new trend of native anthropology, we have to depend on the Western methods for the native research. Can the native anthropologist do better than the outsider by associating with these methods? It seems obvious "that the trained native anthropologist can produce the best and most reliable data, since he knows the language, has grown up in the culture, and has little difficulty in becoming involved with the people" (ibid: 473). If there is such possibility to do comprehensive research work with current methods by a native anthropologist, the problem lies in the question why they failed to innovate and establish new methods.

This thesis intends to study the social changes of rural society of Sri Lanka based on intensive fieldwork and attempts to do comparative and historical analysis with Yalman's study in 1954. In this effort, I am using two interrelated views as my methodology. That is: (a) How did we understand the social change of this rural/village community? (b) In what manner have we attempted to research the village community? The answers to these two views/questions are interrelated and interdependent.

The first view is that how we understood the social change of this village community. This view is constituted of the following three components.

1. The researcher's knowledge of Yalman's study: By reading this study we can better understand the organisation of this village in 1954 and relatively at the beginning of the independent Sri Lanka. We approached the village with this basic understanding through the Yalman's study.
2. The first hand fieldwork in the village: Five-month intensive fieldwork was carried out in the village. During this period, I lived with my family and two research assistants in the village. We rented a house in the middle of the village; this is the area where the highest caste Goyigamas (farmers as well as landowners) community lives. Several reasons are there to select this place. Facilities like a separate kitchen, better room facilities, water and sanitary facilities, and my close friendship with two of their relatives in my university in Sri Lanka are some of the reasons. Presence of my family was a blessing for my work, because all the villagers made very good rapport with us.

3. I have entered the village with some theoretical paradigm, which is related to the main research topic – social change. Especially, the theoretical perspectives such as development and modernization. These perspectives were struggling with Yalman’s findings in my mind constantly. He used the synchronic analysis for understanding the social structure and organisation with the structural perspective. However, my analysis is different from that of Yalman, because I am probing social changes in the rural society during the post-independent Sri Lanka. In this sense, I understood that the theoretical perspectives such as development and modernization are not giving concrete foundation for this study. Therefore, I have decided to use another theoretical perspective that links these two perspectives. Furthermore, the gap between Yalman and the present study is vast and I have to compare most of factors related to Yalman’s study as well as development and modernization efforts during last 50 years. I addition, I am using diachronic analysis in my research when comparing the past and the present.

This view prompted me to constitute the second view of this study. That is, in what
manner we have attempted to research the village community? I think this second view guided me to construct appropriate methodology for the research. It is also comprised of three components. These are:

1. The validity of Yalman’s findings about this village for the present study: At the time of Yalman’s study, this village was relatively one of the traditional villages in the Kandyan region. He, as an outsider to the village, got settled there for ten months and followed ethnographic method for collection of data, such resources will be valuable for the new study. Moreover, his study can be used as a base for this study and by comparing with the present we can identify the manifestations of change in this village during the last forty-six years. By highlighting Yalman’s work we can also testify the outsider’s work in ‘other culture.’ The new trend is one of reversing the gaze towards the native ethnography. This situation can be explained further as follows:

In the not-so-distant past, before the recent challenge of “authenticity” to the claim that only outsiders could know and represent the other, anthropologists fancied that they had a professional license, a guild monopoly, a scientific calling, to study, know, and write about the other. Today, as we traverse the 1990s, the anthropologist’s monopoly claim has been reversed; the native abroad and minorities at home now insist that only they can give an authentic reading of who they are and what they are about... (Rudolph et.al., 2000: 40). Though he had used synchronic analysis it is valid for diachronic analysis today. However, his methodology (ethnography) is also used in this research but with a more advantageous manner.

2. The most crucial factor is to know what type of methodology is most suitable for understanding the process of social change in a village community. The methodology used in this research is selected with several intentions. First, I am concerned with the suitable method to understand the process of social change in a village of rural Sri Lanka. Second, the accuracy of the data for this
research. Third, the time and space for this intensive research process. Fourth, the experiences of explorative visit of this particular village with my university students in 1997. As a consequence, I have selected ethnographic methods for my research. From Malinowski (1922) in the British social anthropological tradition to Messerchmidt (1981) in the USA, cultural anthropological tradition almost entirely used ethnography as a method to study various types of human societies. The “term ‘ethnography’ is used in two distinct senses: that of ethnographic research and that of an ethnographic monograph. As a category of anthropological research, ethnography is characterised by the first-hand study of small community or ethnic group” (Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 1986: 98-99). Such studies combine to varying degree descriptive and analytical elements, but the central characteristic of conventional ethnographies is that they focus on one specific culture or society and consider theoretical or comparative generalisations from the standpoint of the ethnographic example. The origin of the modern ethnographic research tradition is generally traced to Malinowski, who as part of his functionalist theory of society stressed the primacy of field research and participant observation. Ethnography in both US cultural anthropology and British social anthropology had been concentrating on the reconstruction of a specific cultural or social system without regard to its historical development, and relegating historical considerations to a separate area labelled as the study of social or cultural change, as if this were somehow an aberrant rather than a normal feature of human groups. A related tendency in this type of ethnography is the tendency to artificially isolate the unit of study (the tribe, the peasant community), considering it as a self-contained culture or society.
and failing to consider regional, national and international politico-economic and social structures with which the local community interacts. These tendencies in conventional ethnography have been amply criticised from many directions and by many divergent theoretical perspectives, which reject the structural functionalist and cultural relativistic position, and seek to establish a new type of ethnography. Traditional anthropological approaches have more recently been interpreted by post-modern anthropologists. According to Clifford “ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial-committed and incomplete” (Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 7). Hastrup (1995: 14) argues that “the anthropological discourse has been marked by an extensive use of what is known as the ‘ethnographic present’ which involved the suspension of historical consciousness for the purposes of reconstructing an image of a ‘traditional’ or ‘primitive’ society as a functioning whole at a given point in time. It has been the dominant mode of representing the others in traditional social anthropology. The use of tense has been seriously criticised as reflecting a particular relationship of observation and distancing to the object”. Clifford and Marcus (1986: 2-3) have emphasised: “Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilisation, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and records, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes”. In this way the ethnography is the most appropriate methodology for the study of village community or peasant society and culture. I am a native scholar who seeks to analyse my own society. Therefore, I would like to use for this research methods, drawn from an auto-ethnography
approach. This term implies “the anthropological study of a socio-cultural system by a member of the society concerned” (Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 1986: 19). The auto-ethnography openly affiliates with native anthropology. It emphasises that if we make arguments in native anthropology, auto-ethnography is essential part of the research process.

3. The suitability of development and modernization as theoretical paradigms to study the social changes in the rural society of Sri Lanka: As mentioned earlier, most of successive governments have initiated several socio-economic and political reforms during post-independent Sri Lanka. Most of these reforms can be identified as development and modernization processes. Many of them directly affected the rural society. However, there is a process clearly linked with these two theoretical perspectives. That is state intervention. The state is a catalyst for development as well as politicisation of the rural administrative structure. Therefore, theoretical perspectives of development and modernization will be used with the perspective of state intervention for the study of the social changes in the rural society of Sri Lanka (for more details see chapters Two and Three).

The second view and its components are central in this research. This is the view that emphasised the methodology and its significance for this research. Methodology “refers to the structure of procedures and transformational rules whereby the scientist shifts information up and down this ladder of abstraction in order to produce and organise increased knowledge” (Pelto et al, 1978: 2). In other words, methodology helps to solve scholar’s intellectual problems in a certain well-organised way. Therefore, anthropologists can employ one or more methods for their research and it may help develop the reliability and validity of the research.
In this research, I also used historical and comparative methods with auto-ethnography. Historical method is employed to study the several cultural factors in village life. For instance, the identity of the village can be studied through the historical method only, even though Yalman did not discuss these matters in village Terutenne. Especially, the comparative method is very essential when I compare any subject with Yalman’s study. However, Yalman’s study is not facilitating all social structural factors related to the village. Therefore I have to depend on ethnography itself. Auto-ethnography is the principal methodology used in this research. The most important fact related to the methodology is that there are three data collecting techniques used in this study. These are participant observation, in-depth-interviews, and life histories. The research method used here comprises of these three techniques of data collection. In addition, I used a field diary that indicated other experiences during the fieldwork. However, as a sum-up one can say that the methodology in this research is ethnography with elements of historical and comparative methods. (The ways I have used these techniques are described in Appendix One.)

1.8 Organisation of Chapters

This thesis has already mentioned that it follows the classical ethnographic approach of social anthropology, but applies a wider understanding of the macro process in impinging up on the micro processes. This is, however, not to suggest the micro does not have its own autonomy and agency. The organisation of the chapters reflects this understanding. The chapters, therefore, contain macro institutions like state, land tenure, economic life, social stratification and politics. It also works on the creative manner by which the imagined national identity of Sri Lanka weaves itself with local village identity of Teripahe.
The thesis comprises of nine chapters. Chapter One discusses the plan of the thesis. It gives brief introduction of the colonial situation and post-independent period of Sri Lanka. It also, discusses the concept of village and village studies of Sri Lanka, especially during the later part of the 20th century. The discussion of Other Culture and Native Culture explains the nature of the current anthropological studies. It briefly explains two main facts related to the process of social change in rural society of Sri Lanka. After the argument and research problems, the Chapter One discusses the scope of the study, objectives of the study and research area and the location. The methodology employed in this study was discussed in the last part of Chapter One.

Chapter Two explains development and modernization as patterns of change. These two theoretical perspectives directly relate with the process of social change. In this effort, at the beginning, the chapter attempts to verify the conceptual matters of these two patterns of social change. Thereafter, it discusses the theoretical paradigms or models of development and modernization appropriate to study the process of social change in rural society of Sri Lanka. Then, the chapter discusses technology as a catalyst factor for both development and modernization. Culture is an important factor to be understood when we explain the social change in a particular society. In this sense, Chapter Two also discusses westernisation and Goyigamaisation as two processes that help to understand social changes of rural society of Sri Lanka.

Chapter Three explains how state intervention becomes a vital factor of social change of Sri Lanka. With this purpose, land reforms, social welfare, economic reforms and politicisation of rural social structure are considered as main channels of state intervention of Sri Lanka, especially during the post-independence period. The process of state intervention is used in this thesis as a third theoretical perspective to understand the process of social change in the rural society of Sri Lanka.
Chapter Four discusses the basic physical, demographic, economic, social and cultural atmosphere of the village Teripahe. Teripahe is the village subjected to study in this thesis. The village was studied by Nur Yalman in 1954. Taking his study as the base, this chapter describes the above areas and compares between the past and the present (yesterday and today).

Chapter Five explains the imagined identity of self and community in the village Teripahe. The village has a long history that reveals nature of the rural society and culture of Sri Lanka. This chapter helps to understand how the past has changed due to modernity.

Chapter Six discusses the most important social and economic manifestation of rural society. That is land. There are four types of land. Furthermore, the chapter attempts to describe ownership of lands, land and caste, and forms of agriculture in village Teripahe.

Chapter Seven describes the social stratification of village Teripahe. The village is organised in caste system. The caste system of the village has changed due to influence of modernity, especially, as a result of social and economic reforms that took place during the post-independence Sri Lanka. The chapter attempts to discuss how these changes affected village social life and new trends of social stratification of rural society of Sri Lanka.

Chapter Eight attempts to discuss political changes in the village Teripahe and how the villagers are polarised on political lines during the last five decades. The chapter describes how people are divided between the two main political parties as well as how JVP got activated in rural society of Sri Lanka. The village had violent experience during the JVP insurrection. The chapter discusses how caste became a
vital factor in village politics.

Chapter Nine, the last chapter, summarises and concludes the thesis. The conclusion attempts to show how the village Teripahe has changed during the last 50 years, and the findings are seen vis-à-vis the national and regional level social changes of the country.
End Notes:

1 The term Sinhalese implies both ethnic group and their language. They are believed to have migrated to Sri Lanka from Northern India (probably from the Bengal region) and the immigration continued for many centuries. Sinhalese is an Indo-Aryan language derived from ancient Brahmi script, Pali, and Sanskrit. However, "the recent archaeological evidences show that there are microlithic tools, and human skeletal remains testify to the presence of anatomically modern Homo Sapiens at the upland cave site of Batadomba lena by 28,500 years BP. In the lowermost levels of the cave were found geometric microliths, the earliest occurrence of this type of tool in South Asia. (Kenneth A. R. Kennedy, 1990). These recent evidences clearly show that there was a separate culture in Sri Lanka. There has been a great deal of historical intercultural relations between India and Sri Lanka. Nothing denies the fact of "introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka during the reign of Asoka. The historicity of this event is not in any doubt" (Sirima Kiribamune, 1993: 12).


3 For details on Purāna (oldest) village, see R. W. Ievers, Manual of the North-Central Province, Ceylon, 1899, George J. A. Skeen: Government Printer, Colombo, Ceylon [Sri Lanka].


6 The most famous works of Malinowski are: Crime and Custom in Savage Society (1926), Sex and Repression in Savage Society (1927) and The Sexual life of Savages (1929).