Chapter Eight

Political Changes

8.1 Introduction

Sri Lanka is the country that became the first nation in Asia to adopt universal adult suffrage in 1931. Few mass political organisations existed at that time and elections were largely contested at the grounds of personality, caste and educational level of the candidate. However, the situation gradually changed, and there were several popular political parties such as United National Party (UNP), Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), Communist Party (CP), Tamil Congress and Federal Party in 1947 when the parliamentary election was held just before independence. The new party, Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), was established in 1951, just before the election of 1952.

Now there are many political parties that represent all ethnic communities in the country. However, the main political parties, UNP and SLFP have been ruling the country since independence. They had begun paying their attention on rural population, because they became the vote banks after independence. Each party has its election manifesto that gave more weight for rural development. Despite the fact that main parties had given the priority to rural society, there were two insurrections led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which totally depended on rural youths in 1971 and 1988-89. Most of the JVP members including its leaders were from suppressed sections of the society and they were against both the ruling parties and their policies on modernization and development. The JVP expected revolutionary change in political structure as well as social and economic structure of the country.

In this sense, politics became a one of the main factor during the last 50 years
in rural society of Sri Lanka. The state has introduced several reforms such as land reform, social welfare, administrative reforms during the last five decades. As a result of these state interventions, the rural society politicised. How do these changes have affected the stratification of the rural masses on political lines? Who had benefited from these new development efforts? Why had rural youths lined up with JVP? These are few questions discussed in this chapter.

Party politics has become a cultural phenomenon in Sri Lankan society today. It is difficult to discuss any major issue without touching party politics. There has been a high political participation in Sri Lanka during the last five decades. The table 28 shows the percentage of voting behaviour in parliamentary elections since 1947.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Votes</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Arjuna’s Atlas of Sri Lanka, 1997: 178

The above table shows that highest political participation in Sri Lanka was during 1965-1977. However, after the peak-level, there has been a decline in political participation.¹

Rapid process of politicisation in the post-independence era has led to many changes in the rural social structure. The revitalisation of grass roots level organisations and social welfare programmes initiated by each government has accelerated the process and many of the programmes have been introduced on party lines. Can we identify these changes initiated by the state intervention as a process of modernization? Kearney (1979: 57) explains: “The society and politics of Sri Lanka have been undergoing pervasive and fundamental changes over a number of decades. These changes can be viewed as a cluster of interrelated societal transformations,
shared with many nations of Asia and elsewhere, often termed *modernization.* The universal franchise, system of multi-political parties and democratisation can be identified as a part of modernization. These characteristics are clearly visible in Sri Lanka after the independence. The modern nation-state and democratic ideology had been constituted by the colonial administration, and this system has been prompting active participation, in politics, of all members of society.

### 8.2 Polarisation of Villagers

Party politics was an alien phenomenon for villagers of Teripahe before 1950. The party politics of village Teripahe started in the first half of 1950s. The political behaviour of villagers in Teripahe can be discussed under two stages. The first stage started with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The second stage started with economic liberalisation introduced by the UNP in 1977.

#### 8.2.1 Sinhala-Buddhist Nationalism

The first stage, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in the 1950s was led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike under his new political party, SLFP. He joined with small Marxist parties and formed an alliance called ‘Mahajana Eksath Peramuna’ (MEP) in 1956. They introduced *Pancha Maha Balawegaya* (literally the great five forces) viz. *Sangh* (Buddhist Monks), *Vedha* (Ayurvedic Doctors), *Guru* (Sinhala-speaking Teachers), *Govi* (Farmers) and *Kamkaru* (Labourers). This movement had a big bargaining power in rural areas where traditionally Buddhist monks, ayurvedic doctors and teachers held leadership. Furthermore, the MEP government formed a new rural organisation called Cultivation Committee (CC) under the Paddy Land Act of 1958 and changed the Village Headman system by replacing Grama Sevaka system
in 1963 for grass roots level administration. These administrative reforms in the national context had affected village Teripahe also in 1950s. The former Headmaster of village school who had Low Country origin motivated villagers to participate in a political meeting at Nildandahinie town led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and vote for MEP.

Before this political development, the villagers knew D. S. Senanayaka, the leader of Freedom Movement of Sri Lanka, and Colonization Scheme. He was also the leader of United National Party (UNP). They initially voted for M. D. Banda who was the candidate for Mathurata electorate and later became a Minister of Agriculture. Walapane electoral constituency began in 1956. After the initiation of new electorate of Walapane, politics was close subject to the villagers in Teripahe.

T.T.A.N.M.P.B. Sri Nissanka was elected as the Village Headman by defeating former Village Headman Kalubabda Agalakumbura in 1956. When the District Revenue Officer (DRO) inquired the opinion of the public on whom to be elected as the new Village Headman, the former Headmaster openly recommended Sri Nissanka as the suitable person for the post. Even today he believes that the Headmaster’s recommendation was the turning point for DRO’s decision. He became a SLFP member in 1956, and after the abolition of Village Headman system in 1963, he was appointed as Grama Sevaka of Teripahe. His elder brother K. B. Nissanka, who was the successor to the Headmaster of village school in 1945, was also a SLFP member in the village. The former Headmaster’s son-in-law who was the secretary of TTCCS became a SLFP member.

In this sense, the authorities of TTCCS (president – Sri Nissanka, secretary – A. N. M. Gunaratna and treasurer – K. B. Nissanka) represented SLFP in the village Teripahe. However, when several leading members of the village joined the camp of
SLFP, there were several others who represented UNP in the village. They were Kalubanda Agalakumbura, former Village Headman, T. P. R. Nissanka, Chairman of Village Council and chief Irrigation Headman (*Vel Vidane*) and Kalubanda Dissanayake, a shopkeeper in Helagama hamlet. Most of these UNP members were agitated with SLFP group when there was an election of Village Headman in 1956. Thus, these administrative reforms polarised the villagers on party lines.

Most of the villagers voted according to the opinion or representation of the leading members of upper caste Goyigamas. Even, the other small caste communities were also following the opinions of the upper caste members. Especially, leaders of kindred groups controlled the political behaviour in the village. This was a common feature of all villages in Sri Lanka. Robinson (1975) studied a Kandyan village in Nuwara Eliya district and there was the same pattern of political behaviour in the 1960s. She (1975: 208) explains, “political affiliation is now not only relevant but often a mandatory component of decisions about village affairs and household matters”. The political interest and conflicts had gone through the kinship ties in the village that Robinson studied. The same trend developed in the village Teripahe also just before the parliamentary election of 1965.

The SLFP members of Mallagama (Galpitiya) organised a parade up to *Wekumbura* temple through the Helagama hamlet during the 1965 election. There were many UNP members in Helagama and the parade had to go in front of their houses. When the parade was passing through Helagama UNP members assaulted them with stones. When they reached the temple area, the rally was organised in the compound of *Ulugedara* (a house covered with modern tiles) just in front of the temple. The Walapane MP T. B. M. Herath was attending the rally. The incumbent monk in the temple was pro-UNP and all UNP members gathered in the temple
compound and organised a sudden rival rally against the SLFP rally. When MP Herath was speaking the UNP members started to hoot, and they operated temple bell. It was operated nearly one and half hours continuously. However, both SLFP and UNP did not agitate in and around the temple. This was the first political conflict in village Teripahe.

Five years later, the SLFP members organised a parade in 1970 parliamentary election victory, but it did not lead to any conflict in the village. The SLFP leaders had traditional authority in the village and they were able to control their members.

"The channelling of government benefits to rural areas through rural organisations gradually expanded after 1956. The villagers increasingly identified themselves with the political parties which ruled the country, in order to obtain various spoils of these institutional systems and the personal favours of the political leaders" (Perera, 1985: 76). This trend has been evident in village Teripahe since 1956. Tobacco was the main cash crop in the village. Initiated at the beginning of 1950s, the cultivation was managed by the CTC, but regional politicians had influence on them by helping them for registration and permit of tobacco barns in the region. Whichever party was in the power, most of the tobacco barns had been distributed among the respective party members. The situation in Teripahe was little different because entire tobacco cultivation was handled by the TTCCS. But, all the leading members of TTCCS were SLFP members in the village. This political connection was behind the success of TTCCS. The most successful period of TTCCS was 1970-77.

In 1959, the TTCCS had ten barns and most of them were located in the garden lands of SLFP members. After the 1965 parliamentary election, CTC had given four barns to leading UNP members in the village. The Walapane MP, T. B. M. Herath had prompted CTC to give three barns for SLFP members in Teripahe in 1973.
After the election in 1977, Renuka Herath – UNP MP of Walapane – had given several barns to UNP members. During this first stage (Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism), politicisation of the rural social structure of Teripah started. There was one cash crop cultivation and two camps of villagers polarised on party lines.

One of the leading SLFP member, T. N. M. Piyadasa Nissanka, in Helagama hamlet listed the benefits the village Teripah had when SLFP MP T. B. M. Herath was in power. They were:

1. Road access to the village and further improvement of it with tar coat.
2. Development of the infrastructural facilities in the village school.
3. Maternity ward for village dispensary.
4. The village school was promoted into Maha Vidyalaya.
5. Granted more job opportunities to the villagers as teachers, Grama Sevaka, clerk, bus conductor, etc.
6. Started government bus service to the village.

Most of these facilities were the fundamental infrastructural developments in the village to link itself with the outside world. Therefore, most of the senior villagers pay gratitude to SLFP MP T. B. M. Herath today. They always compare his achievements with the capacity of other MP of Walapane (UNP) who got elected after him. Even, they compare the infrastructural developments with those in other villages in the region and also at the national level.

8.2.2 Economic Liberalisation

The second stage of polarisation and political conflict began since 1977. The UNP leader J. R. Jayawardena called a private meeting to discuss Walapane nomination in the election, and U. B. Dissanayaka also was a member of
the meeting. He had an idea to contest for Walapane with the UNP ticket. But, nomination was given to a lady – Renuka Herath – one who descends from Herath pedigree of Walapane. Then U. B. Dissanayaka had contested as an independent candidate but he lost. Later, he joined with Renuka Herath and worked as president of Gramodaya Mandalaya (Village Awakening Board) in village Teripahe.

UNP had landslide victory in 1977 election because many villagers had very hard life under the previous government’s closed economic policy. The previous SLFP led government attempted to promote domestic production in the country. As a result of these experiences, the people elected the UNP into the power. The UNP members of village Teripahe had organised a parade just after the victory. The parade consisted of drummers and they had shouted in front of the houses of SLFP members. However, there was no conflict. It emphasises that still the villagers can have better social integration among groups if there is a process of politicisation of rural social structure. The ‘drummers’ participation was a major political development in the village. They were the members from Berava caste in the village.

The UNP government immediately introduced major economic reforms in Sri Lanka. The economic liberalisation policy or open economy made clear distinction of the economic as well as socio-cultural sphere of the society. UNP had given five job cards to each GND of the country. They had job opportunities such as Cultivation Officer (CC), Grama Sevaka and clerks in government offices. However, there was a conflict on job opportunity between UNP office bearers and party members in the village, and finally one member from Bolagandawela GND had hurt T. B. Agalakumbura, the Secretary of UNP, by knife. Later, Renuka Herath had settled the conflict.

Dēsapālanaya (politics) is considered “an act of eating curd with a razor
blade," a common usage among the villagers in Sri Lanka. Why they are thinking in this way? The answer is that the entire of rural and urban social structure of the country is politicised. Especially, entire administrative body of the state has been politicised. This political divide increased under the UNP regime that started in 1977. The voice of the leading members of SLFP had been suppressed during the UNP regime of 1977-94 in village Teripahe.

There was a puzzle that why TTCCS had become defunct during the UNP rule. The death of TTCCS’s treasurer K. B. Nissanka cannot be the only reason for it. There were president and secretary of TTCCS, and still they are holding their positions. But, TTCCS became defunct. Did the politicians in the region influence this? Or, was it suppressed to get absorbed into the UNP regime? The question is how TTCCS initiated Janasaviya Shop in the village under the Janasaviya programme launched by President R. Premadasa during UNP rule in 1989. How leading SLFP members in the village who run the TTCCS had two lakhs loan from Commissioner of Janasaviya Fund. It is not easy to get a chance for SLFP members to open a shop with assistance of government authority without a great favour from the authority. The politicians in the Walapane have influenced the SLFP members in Teripahe to absorb into the UNP by providing these facilities to run a Janasaviya Shop. They had recovered the loan within two years. This situation reveals that TTCCS had strength to run without the former treasurer. Otherwise, how they easily recovered the loan? These are the questions that remained with TTCCS. The main controversial question is why TTCCS cannot function now under SLFP government since 1994. The office bearers of TTCCS can handover the responsibility to the next successors. They do not attempt to do it. If the tobacco cultivation is not important today, they can support the commercial vegetable cultivation in the village. Is it a corrupt body? There is no
official meeting recently. There is no official record on their budget during the last twelve years.

Ruparatna Senewiratna, SLFP leader lost his reciprocal relationship with Wekumbura temple. Each household gets a chance for alms (foods) for monks in the temple and it is fundamental right of each Buddhist to practise their religious work in the village temple. He is claiming that his father was a founding member of the temple in village Teripahe. But, today politics became a vital factor for village religious practices. However, there is no such situation in Mahawegoda temple in Helagama GND.

The Principal of Maha Vidyalaya in Teripahe, Somaratna Dissanayaka, is a SLFP supporter. Because of his party politics, he was transferred to another school in 1989. Ruparatna Senewiratna and Chandrasiri Nissanka were arrested by the army just after the referendum of 1982. They had been charged with JVP connection in referendum. After the referendum JVP had been banned as an illegal political organisation of Sri Lanka.

8.3 Emergence of JVP movement

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) emerged in 1971 through their abortive insurrection against the National Front government. They were very strongly based on the members in the Low Country, especially Colombo-Matara coastal strip. Furthermore, the leaders of the JVP were mainly of the low caste communities of the country. The movement that became the JVP was formed by a small group of young men associated with the tiny pro-Peking Communist Party, who by about 1965 had become disillusioned with that party and sought to build a revolutionary movement of radical youth. The movement had remained small until about 1969-70, when it
underwent a very rapid expansion, principally attracting rural Sinhala youths of low socio-economic status. The movement had little organisational coherence and no name until late 1969 and early 1970 when an organisational structure was created and the name Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna adopted. The insurrection “left an officially estimated 1,200 persons dead and 14,000 in custody” (Kearney, 1979: 75). Most of the leaders were in custody when the ordinary members died or got killed by the government forces. The convicted leaders had imprisonment and others were rehabilitated by the government.

There were two villagers from Teripahe who were involved with JVP activities in 1971 insurrection. They were working in a farm, managed by the Young Farmer’s Society in Ragala during UNP government in 1965-70. The government started colonisation schemes in plantation areas of central highland of the country. This farm (Samagipura farm) was established under this scheme and later the lands were distributed among the youths who initiated it. Three young men from village Teripahe including A. M. Sirisena had lands (one acre) from this farm. Except Sirisena, the other two were involved in the JVP activity and after the insurrection there was no information about them. Sirisena was a SLFP member and was waiting for an appointment as a Grama Sevaka. He assumed duty in 1972.

After the insurrection of 1971, the JVP had been pardoned by President J. R. Jayawardane under the UNP regime and it had initiated democratic politics in early 80s. Rohana Wijeweera of JVP had contested for Presidential election of 1982 and had 4.19 per cent of votes. However, after the referendum of 1982, the JVP was banned due to political reasons. After ban, it was organised underground. Thereafter, JVP was represented by some other new political organisations such as Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (Patriotic People’s Organisation) and Mauv Bima Surakeemae
Viayaparaya (The Organisation of Safeguard the Motherland). Meanwhile, UNP government signed the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987 and it gave another political chance to JVP. JVP took Indian intervention as one major point of their perspectives. Unlike 1971, JVP was able to organise most of the Sinhalese dominated areas of the country this time, and threaten the democratic political order in 1988-89. This was the political background for second insurrection of JVP in 1988-89. The Opposition party SLFP too marched against the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord and they followed very silent policy against JVP violence. Ultimately SLFP had to face threats from both government paramilitary organisations and the JVP.

Village Teripahe was rocked by JVP violence in 1989. Initially, the JVP activity spread against the UNP members of the village. Simultaneously normal order of school was lost by JVP interventions through both senior students and teaching staff. JVP’s main slogan was “motherland first and then degree or school” (education). The movement affected all universities and the university students who had connection with the movement organised village level activities. Therefore many of schools were closed, or all students and several teachers directly protested against the government.

Two students of Helagama GND who belonged to a UNP family did not cooperate with JVP activities of Maha Vidyalaya in village Teripahe. Then they could not attend the school and they had to face many problems from other students as well as several teachers. These students’ father had complained to regional Director of Education.

This letter of complaint gives a better view of the situation that existed in the village during the JVP insurrection of 1988/89. Why were these agitations extended and related to the two children of U. B. Dissanayaka? There were two reasons. First,
the two students belonged to UNP family, and U. B. Dissanayaka was the president of Gramodaya Mandalaya of village Teripahe. He was a Chief Clerk of Walapane DSD who retired in November 1988. He was the leading member who had made road to Helagama GND and worked as a president of Rural Development Society of Teripahe before becoming a president of Gramodaya Mandalaya. He was managing a small shop in his garden land after the retirement. Second, these two students including another student who belonged to a UNP family had thrown water bags in front of their houses in Helagama at a march of students led by JVP.

The crucial development of JVP activity in the village was in mid-1989. It was few days before the parliamentary election of August 1989. Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (armed branch of JVP) announced a public notice, not to vote at the elections and the five members who vote first would get capital punishment from the organisation. This threat was made in many parts of the country, and the notice was there in village Teripahe too. However, U. B. Dissanayaka voted first and shouted when he came back from the polling centre by challenging anybody dare kill him. After few days a Berava member – Siman – came to meet him and advised him to go somewhere else, as there is a threat of life looming on him. But he did not listen to him. One early night, JVP gunmen of village Teripahe came to his shop and shot him in front of his two children who could not attend the school. The JVP had given code of conduct for funeral and it did not include religious practices (rites of passage).

Police and army investigated the case and patrolled the village for several days. The army squad came and opened a camp in ASCt of the village. They had taken into custody several of villagers including deputy principal of Maha Vidyalaya.

The next target of JVP was T. N. M. Piyadasa and his elder son. The gunmen came, disguised as army soldiers. They had invited T. N. M. Piyadasa and his son for
showing some places in the village. The gunmen collected them near the fence of their garden land and first killed the son in front of his father by cutting the neck. The head was given to the father and then shot him. The reason for murder, according to JVP declaration, was that T. N. M. Piyadasa had passed some information to the army squad in the village. Their funeral ceremony was also subjected to code of conduct by the JVP. In the same way, JVP had killed a woman by stating that she had also behaved as an informer to the army. Before killing her, they had shaved half of her hair and kept her naked in the main junction of the village.

After opening an army camp in village Teripahe, the army had killed six and arrested seven JVP members. The army and other paramilitary method of killing them were also as brutal as JVP killing and can be justified as theories of retribution or deterrence. It is believed that the number of youths who disappeared during the reign of political terror in the country amounted to 60,000 (Silva, 1993: 44). Simultaneously, the polity bureau had been liquidated by the armed forces, and many of ordinary members of JVP had been taken into the custody. JVP had damaged the moral order as well as public property of the country. “The cost of public property destroyed by the JVP rebels was valued at Rs. 95,000 million, and the oft-repeated charge was that the Opposition [SLFP] had given no support to crush the violence perpetrated by the JVP” (Silva, 1993: 44).

When examined, the background of JVP members who were killed, disappeared and rehabilitated by various centres in the country points out that the most vital factor was caste. There were three low caste villagers among the members who were killed by the army. All of them were Berava members in the village Teripahe. The SLFP members tolerated the JVP activities; they were behind several incidents that happened in village Teripahe. In contrast to UNP members, several
SLFP members were directly involved and they accepted JVP membership in village Teripahe. However, there was a leading UNP member who was a secretary of Teripahe branch who led the JVP activity in the village. It is believed that the army paramilitary squad might have killed him.

Currently, JVP has adopted the democratic way of political participation in Sri Lanka. They contested in Provincial Council and Parliamentary election recently and got elected several members to these governing bodies of the country. JVP is the fourth political power in the parliament after the general election of 2000 and it has higher representation than the other Marxist political parties in Sri Lanka. With these developments of JVP politics in the country, there is no significant representation in village Teripahe, today. The villagers are still worried about the bad situation that they experienced during JVP insurrection of 1988-89. There are two members who were rehabilitated by the government in the village. However, they are silent in politics.

8.4 Current Political Atmosphere in Teripahe

After the JVP phase of terror, the villagers had got polarised further into two main camps, UNP and SLFP. Some UNP members themselves changed their party affiliation after 1990 at the national level. They were frustrated with the political violence in Sinhalese dominated areas as well as terrorist problem in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. They realised that the government was not able to solve the war against the Tamil rebels. This attitude at the national level had influenced the villages like Teripahe. The president of UNP branch in the village, Keerthi Mudalali, joined with PA led by SLFP. His rationale was that whatever might be the party conscience, the villagers should select the party, which gives more benefits to the
village. Villages like Teripahe did not develop compared to the other villages in the region as well as at the national level. They do not have proper road access to the village; no regular transport service, and they are still using the same footpath, used several decades back. Therefore, PA was seen with great expectation to solve terrorist problem by peaceful way and develop the rural areas through the *Samurdhi* Programme. Ideologically this programme is very similar to *Janasaviya* Programme, launched by President R. Premadasa in 1989. So, many of the villagers voted PA into power in 1994 parliamentary election.

However, several SLFP leading members in village Teripahe explained that the *Janasaviya* Programme improved villager’s social life. There was infrastructural development under this programme. The Helagama road was extended up to Meeriyabadda covering Mallagama, Teripahe and Dulane GNDs. Many poor families got expanded their houses and roofed with tiles. Even SLFP members without political bias appreciate these infrastructural developments. All poor families received *Janasaviya* benefits without political bias. But, *Samurdhi* Programme is not democratic in this sense, and it is highly politicised at the village level. There are salaried *Samurdhi* Assistants for each GND. They should work for the village as well as satisfy regional politicians. When I was doing my fieldwork the government had employed them to collect information about deserted soldiers from armed forces, serving in terrorist affected areas of the country.

The great expectations given by the PA government could stand long and there are no more job opportunities for the educated youths in the country. The only option is to join the police and armed forces and factories in FTZs in the country. UNP government initiated these FTZs, and politically it will not give credit to the current PA government. Under these circumstances, most of the SLFP members are too
getting frustrated day by day.

The villagers in Teripahе expected more infrastructural development in the village. The villagers believe that the village will be developed if Nildandahinne-Teripahе road is extended up to Viyaluwa in Badulla District through Bathmadilla. There was such a plan under the UNP government but later given up. There is no concrete rationale between the extension of this road and village development. The road proposed is through the high reservation forest around the Mahaweli reservoirs. The only main benefit the villagers get is that they can easily transport paddy harvest of Bolagandawela main field. However, the leading SLFP members in the village were able to get one Rs. lakh for this purpose from Walapane MP’s development fund. When I was in the last stage of my fieldwork they started the road extension work up to Bolagandawela field in 2000.

The shopkeepers and several wealthy members are handling the village politics. They have several facilities than the other villagers in the village. For instance, the electricity supply to the houses is available in the centre of the village. If the road develops from the centre of the village to Meeriyabadda, many villagers can get many benefits and the commercial vegetable cultivation can be expanded in the village. At least they can demand to develop the main road access from Nildandahinne. It is not in good condition to travel. However, policy makers have to satisfy these political demands, otherwise the governing party will not get villager’s votes in next election.

Nanda Liyanagamage (Kalu Sirima, a nickname used by the UNP members in the village) of Helagama GND represents the National Women’s Federation of SLFP. She is the wife of Ruparatna Seneviratna, a leading SLFP member of the village. She works as member of Samatha Mandalaya of Walapane (a board that settles villagers’
disputes). Her birthplace was Kothmale and married to Teripahe. She is a popular figure in Nuwara Eliya district, but today she is frustrated woman in SLFP. The reason is that she contested for the post of chief organiser of Walapane, but the post went to one wealthier merchant who has many shops in Nildandahinne and Kandy. She believes that she can represent the SLFP members in her district. However, now she is a silent woman in SLFP politics. The problem is why she could not contest for other substitute political organisations like *Palath Saba* (Provincial Council) and *Pradeshiya Saba* (Regional Council). She is a Goyigama member. But, Berava member had opportunity to contest for *Pradeshiya Saba*.

Though there is a SLFP alliance government, the UNP MP and members are also very active on their own political line in village Teripahe. UNP MP, Renuka Herath is favouring the Berava members in the village, and she has distributed sewing machines and galvanized roofing plates among them. These things are given through her funds. One day she visited several GNDs of the village when I was doing fieldwork. When she came to Helagama meeting, former *Gramodaya Mandalaya* President’s younger son Sampath Dissanayaka had complained her regarding her favour to Berava members. Other members also supported this allegation, but she justified it by saying that they also work for the party. She warned Sampath that if he cannot work with her, he better leave the party membership and the post he bears. She also explained how she helped his two brothers and a sister to get jobs when she worked as a Minister in the previous UNP government. Furthermore, the UNP members strongly registered their protest against the SLFP and their members who came from outside (Walapane MP’s thugs) to rig the ballot papers in Presidential election of 1999.
8.5 Politics and Caste

Village Teripahe had four main low castes. Among them, Berava caste is the dominant caste. In fact, they are the numerically dominant caste in the Walapane region. They are progressing well in many ways competitively in relation to the Goyigama caste during last few decades. Many Beravas are economically well-off. They are giving better education to their children. Always they are keen on village activities such as politics, religious activities, etc.

Politically, Beravas are divided into two main parties like the Goyigama members. However, many members from the Berava caste participated in JVP activities during the 1988-89 insurrection. This was in the context of caste oppression in the village. When the caste system was significant the Goyigama members had more privileges than the low castes. However, one Berava member became a Pradeshiya Saba member of Walapane under these circumstances. He is Gonnagahawatte Gedara Nandina. He is a descendent of Vidyarathna Ganithayalage Ganithe Gedara pedigree. But, this name, Gonnagahawatte Gedara, is indicating a specific duty in the village – funeral drumming. It is considered polluted duty compared to other ritual drumming in various occasions. They are not allowed to take part in this ritual drumming in the village or anywhere. It shows that Gonnagahawatte Gedara descendents constitute the suppressed group among the other Berava members in the village.

Gonnagahawatte Gedara Nandina’s father – Punchihatana – and mother – Rankendi – had six children. All these children are married and engaged in various occupations. The status of these children is summarised in table 29. The table shows how these Berava members have progressed. They do not engage in their traditional occupation. Many of them are engaged in commercial occupation such as trade and
tobacco cultivation.

Table 29: Third Generation Status of Gonnagahawatte Gedara Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender and Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Married to</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punchinona</td>
<td>Female, 52</td>
<td>Year 8, Teripah</td>
<td>Cousin in Madulla</td>
<td>Both are managing a shop and bakery</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huduva</td>
<td>Male, 50</td>
<td>Year 7, Teripah</td>
<td>Cousin from Madulla</td>
<td>Shopkeeper in Ambagahatenne GND</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odiris</td>
<td>Male, 48</td>
<td>Year 6, Teripah</td>
<td>Relative from Walapane</td>
<td>Tobacco cultivation and handling tobacco buying centre in Teripah</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podina</td>
<td>Female, 46</td>
<td>Year 10, Teripah</td>
<td>M. G. M. Medavewa, Teripah</td>
<td>Paddy cultivation</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandina</td>
<td>Male, 42</td>
<td>Year 7, Teripah</td>
<td>Love marriage, same caste and from Kumbukwela</td>
<td>Pradeshiya Saba member and paddy and tobacco cultivation</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lal</td>
<td>Male, 38</td>
<td>G. C. E. O/L, Teripah</td>
<td>Married to Goyigama woman from Nawalapitiya and settled in Kothmale</td>
<td>Paddy and vegetable cultivation</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey 1999

Except two members, all others have less number of children. Even, the youngest one has married a Goyigama woman in distant place from the village Teripah. Though Nandina has low education, he has held several posts of village organisations in Teripah including SLFP Teripah branch. He joined politics in 1972 and he was president of SLFP Teripah branch for 13 years. He achieved good economic background by tobacco cultivation before coming to politics. The caste name, Nandina, was not suitable for politics and so he adopted the new name as Nandasena. He contested in 1997 for Pradeshiya Saba and was elected as eleventh member of it. There is good reputation of Nandina at least among his own caste members of the region. It is impossible for him to get upper caste Goyigama votes in village Teripah and other villages. However, he found success, breaking many caste barriers against him. He is a reputed person in the village today and if there is any public work or ceremony he is invited for speech. Nevertheless, he is frustrated with SLFP coalition
PA government, because the government does not keep their promises when it came to power. He is of the view that there is no development in the village under the present government. The government has devolved power to the various administrative systems in the country, but no socio-economic development took place in the village level due to lack of channelling of funds for rural development today.

When a Berava member became a Pradeshiya Saba member, the upper caste Goyigama member from Teripahe could not come at least to that stage. Nanda Liyanagamage, a SLFP woman in Helagama GND, was trying to get the post of chief organiser in Walapane electoral constituency. She failed to get the post, though she is a Goyigama member. Caste is an important factor in politics. Caste is a factor and also a connector-factor within politics.

8.6 Chapter Summary

Village Teripahe shows how rural society has been changed and politicised during the last 50 years. The village was politicised in two stages. They are: first, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism since 1956 to 1977, and second, economic liberalisation since 1977 to date. During the first stage, the villagers were polarised into two main parties, UNP and SLFP. In addition, the politicisation of village social structure began. During the second stage, there was reorganisation of rural organisations and many of these organisations were attached to the Gramodaya Mandala system. There were economic and political reforms in the national level and all these reforms caused high politicisation of rural social structure. Along with these leading political parties – UNP and SLFP – there were also several Marxist parties or movements. When the majority of rural masses has been polarised between these two main parties, the Marxist parties also played significant role, but they could not get any mass support.
from the villagers.

However, these two main political parties failed to understand the suppressed groups' needs. This political gap, generated by the frustration and radicalisation of the villagers, was filled by the revolutionary movement called JVP. The JVP movement and other terrorist groups had demoralised the social order of Sri Lanka, especially in rural areas. Several depressed groups and low caste members were leading the JVP movement, and it threatened the privileged castes and other social and political strata of the country. However, the two main parties are still leading the political power of the country. The rural members had been influenced by these two parties since 1950s and they were polarised into these two camps since 1960s. Nevertheless, there is a significant change in the village in that a low caste member of it became a Pradeshiya Saba member of Walapane. These changes were not digested by the upper caste Goyigama members, and as a result, there is a high level of integration among the Berava caste in the region. The escalating terrorist problem of the country has badly affected the development of the rural society of Sri Lanka. This situation has developed frustration among people over the ruling government. Behind all these changes in the rural society, there was state intervention, and the political parties had penetrated the rural society of Sri Lanka. When compared to the situation in 1950s, there is a political modernization in village Teripahe.
End Notes:

1 This was the period of change in the political system of Sri Lanka. The UNP, after forming a government with clear two-third majority, had changed the 'first-past-the-post' system and introduced the 'Proportional Representation system' through the Constitution of 1978. In addition, they introduced the presidential election system in which the president is the 'Head of the Executive, Head of the Government and Commander-in-Chief. They extended the power of government by the Referendum of 1982.

2 The English translation of his complaint runs as follows:

U. B. Dissanayaka,
Helagama,
Teripahe.

Dear Sir,

Two of my children, namely Vajira Dissanayaka and Sampath Dissanayaka, are studying in the Siduhath Maha Vidayalaya, Teripahe.

Vajira Dissanayaka is studying in year 11 and he should sit for G. C. E. (O/L) Examination at the end of this year.

These two children were threatened by other students to participate in the strike on 16th May of 1988. I had complained to the principal on this incident. My children did not participate in another strike despite the threat on them on 20th September of 1988. The principal had told me that these strikes are organised by several staff members of the school.

The deputy principal, S. B. Welakonawatta had disturbed my child's (Vajira) education. I had received a message on 20th September night around 8.45 P.M. that somebody has been planning to kidnap and assault my children, because of their non-cooperation in the strike on 20th September of 1988. Then I did not send them to school and I made a complaint to the police as well.

273
The leading students threatened several other students and my children who did not participate. But the school was not closed after the incident at 10.15 a.m.

Several teachers and prefects of the school have been prompting other students to disturb my children. I believe that if my children are going to school they will assaulted by other students. The principal had told me that he couldn’t control the staff and students in such situations. Therefore, those teachers should be transferred somewhere as there is no other alternative.

Therefore, I expect your kind attention on this matter and request you to arrange such a way for my children to attend school.

Thanking you,

Signed by U. B. Dissanayaka

Several villagers had written to me, when I came back from the village Teripahe, that the SLFP Minister S. B. Dissanayaka’s and Walapane MP C. B. Ratnayaka’s thugs were rigging the many ballot papers of parliamentary election of 2000 in village Teripahe as well as many other villages in the region. The UNP candidate Renuka Herath was defeated in this election.