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CASTE CONFLICT
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The Rise of a Karāva Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500-1931

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dedicated with fondness
to Shona
Kim and Maya

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PREFACE

This book can be said to have its roots in a contretemps between university students and army personnel at Peradeniya Campus in February 1969: for this conflict provided an unexpected vacation which enabled me to write up a seminar paper on the rise of a Karāva elite which was then presented before the Ceylon Studies Seminar. Since then progressively modified versions of this paper have been presented at various times at the Center of Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, at Harvard University, at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and at the Südasiens Institut of the University of Heidelberg. I have profited from every one of these discussions. In the course of re-directing my research and expanding my findings into a book-length analysis, I have also been fortunate in receiving advice and assistance in various forms from numerous individuals. At the risk of courting charges of invidious distinction, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the assistance received from the late G. C. Mendis and the late Shanti Sri Chandrasekera and to thank Paul Alexander, Maren Bellwinkel, Barney Cohn, C. R. de Silva, K. N. O. Dharmadasa, Hans-Dieter Evers, Sena Jayasuriya, V. Kanapathypillai, Bruce Kapferer, Gananath Obeyesekere, Patrick Peebles, L. S. D. Pieris and Dietmar Rothermund for their encouragement and aid. In its final stages the anonymous referees of the Cambridge University Press helped me to bring this production into more readable shape. Despite this imposing list of support, and the equally imposing history of this publication, shortcomings must remain. I claim the right to be criticised for these.

This book embodies only a small part of the data collected in the course of my researches into the processes of elite formation

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Preface

in British Ceylon – a venture which commenced in late 1968 and has continued to the present, interspersed, so to speak, with research work on the nationalist movement in Sri Lanka. The collection of data would not have been possible without the labour of numerous officers at the Department of National Archives in Sri Lanka, at the Public Record Office in London and at the libraries attached to the Südasiens Institut, Heidelberg Universität and the Universities of Peradeniya, Chicago and Adelaide. The research work in 1969–70 and the early 1970s was assisted by several research grants from the University of Peradeniya. Throughout these initial stages I was encouraged by the hospitality and cooperation of numerous Sri Lankan families into whose family biographies I persistently delved. In 1975–6 I had the good fortune to win a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung; and this provided the opportunity and environment for me to begin this book during the latter half of 1976. My move to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Adelaide in 1977 capped, and underpinned, this preparation by providing me with an intellectual climate which assisted me enormously in refining the outlines of my analysis during the course of seminars and personal discussions. On looking back now, I feel that this unplanned ‘trajectory’ in my preparation could not have been better planned.

One must return to ‘first things’ at the last. The bulk of my labour was undertaken at Peradeniya University and was nourished by the spirit of scholarship and endeavour maintained by my gurus and peers at the Department of History. My long association with Peradeniya Campus is something which I shall always cherish.

Adelaide
December 1980

M.R.

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GLOSSARY

<i>anagārika</i>	literally meaning ‘homeless’.
<i>āṅgabadda</i>	literally ‘body tax’, thus a general poll tax or capitation tax. It was levied in different forms from different castes and, therefore, came to refer to the amount of cinnamon each cinnamon peeler was supposed to deliver to the Dutch.
<i>apirisidu</i>	impure, polluted.
<i>aumani (amani)</i>	the system of collecting the revenue directly through government headmen.
<i>avarna</i>	low caste.
<i>baas</i>	foreman, carpenter; a Sinhalese word derived from the Dutch.
<i>badda</i>	a caste organised as a department for rendering service to the state. In other contexts, a rent or tax.
<i>baṇa pota</i>	a book of Buddhist scriptures (plural: <i>poi</i>).
<i>bhikkhu</i>	an ordained Buddhist monk.
<i>bōdhisattva</i>	a Buddha-to-be.
<i>budu gē</i>	a small shrine, usually within a house.
<i>chekkhoes</i> (<i>chekkhus</i>)	indigenous oil-pressing machines powered by animals, usually cattle, moving around in a circle.
<i>chena</i>	swidden agriculture or shifting cultivations; see <i>hēna</i> .
<i>dāna</i>	offering, giving; usually an alms-giving for monks.
<i>dāyaka</i>	literally means ‘donor’; but refers to a lay

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	supporter or patron of a Buddhist monastery, its activities and its monks.
<i>dāyaka sabha</i>	an association of temple patrons devoted to the welfare of each temple.
<i>dēva, deiyō, deviyo</i>	a god (gods).
<i>dēvālagam</i>	villages or paddy fields granted by the king to <i>dēvāla</i> .
<i>dēvalaya (dēvala)</i>	a shrine dedicated to a god or gods of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon.
<i>dhonies</i>	used generally as small coastal transport craft in the Indian Ocean.
<i>dissāva</i>	governor of a province.
<i>divel</i>	(i) a patron's services or gifts to subordinates; (ii) lifetime grants of land, pay or wages.
<i>dubash</i>	literally 'interpreter'; used in India to refer to a native official working for a European company and hence extended to mean (i) a go-between; (ii) a ship's chandler.
<i>durayā</i>	headman of a low caste.
<i>ehemai</i>	yes, a term used by an inferior (e.g. of lower caste) to a superior.
<i>fanam</i>	a coin used in southern India and Sri Lanka in Portuguese times and after.
<i>gabaḍāgam</i>	villages or fields set aside for the maintenance of the state establishment.
<i>gama (gam)</i>	a village or, in some contexts, a field (plural: <i>gam</i>).
<i>gāni</i>	woman, mistress, wife.
<i>gattara</i>	degraded, usually referring to persons from the Goyigama caste who have been degraded in status by the king.
<i>gē</i>	of; thus referring to one's identifying genealogical name and descent group.
<i>gedara</i>	(i) house; (ii) family name, patriline or descent group.
<i>gel kaneel</i>	the duty imposed on each cinnamon

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- peeler to supply a certain quantity of cinnamon over and above that which he was expected to supply freely as his normal labour duty, for which quantity he was paid at a specified rate.
- hāmi* lord, master; a male honorific.
- hāmu* lord, master; an honorific term of address.
- haṭana* battle, struggle.
- havul rassāva* partnership work.
- hēna* land subject to swidden agriculture; corrupted in English to ‘chena’.
- hēvāpanna* the term used to refer to the highest ranking section of the Salāgama caste in more recent times, apparently incorporating the *paniviḍakārayō* and *hēvāyō*.
- hēvāyō* (i) soldiers, or more properly, militiamen liable for *rājakāriya*; (ii) the second-ranking grade in the Salāgama caste.
- hīna jāti* low caste.
- hoṅda* good.
- jāḍi* pickled fish.
- jajmāni* the dyadic relationship between patron and client, landlord and tenant, associated with face-to-face caste transactions in India.
- Jātaka* story of a former life of the Buddha, whilst still a *bōdhisattva* or Buddha-to-be.
- jātiya* (i) race; (ii) nation; (iii) caste; (iv) rank; (v) kindred.
- kachcheri (cutcherry)* the headquarters of a district administration.
- kachcheri mudaliyar* a principal headman serving at the *kachcheri* and acting as a general go-between for the Government Agent.
- karawala* dried fish.
- Kevul (Kevulā)*
(Kevattā) name for the old Sinhalese fishing caste, subsequently used by others for the Karāva (see chap. 3).

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<i>kōlam</i>	the genre of the masked folk-play in southern Sri Lanka.
<i>kolombuva</i>	a low stool or block of wood retained by people in their residences or huts for use by certain visitors of inferior status.
<i>kondē</i>	describes long hair drawn up at the back in a knot or bun; a style that was common among Sinhalese cultivators in the past.
<i>kōralē</i>	a district.
<i>kōralēmudaliyar</i>	<i>mudaliyar</i> of a <i>kōralē</i> .
<i>kurakkan</i>	millet or <i>eleusine coracana</i> .
<i>kuruñdukārayō</i>	one of the intercaste gradations of the Salāgama caste.
<i>kūruvēlēkam</i>	a headman in the elephant department.
<i>lascarins</i>	native militiamen, eligible for military service under <i>rājakāriya</i> .
<i>mādāla</i>	the huge drag net employed for beach seine fishing in Sri Lanka (plural: <i>mādāl</i>).
<i>maḍigē</i>	the transport department in the Sinhalese kingdoms (in our context, the Kingdom of Kandy).
<i>mahajana sabha</i>	an association of people.
<i>mahamudaliyar</i>	the highest office in the Low-Country native department in British times; interpreter and translator to the governor (largely ceremonial after 1833).
<i>mandrādi</i>	the steersman and chief fisherman in a beach seine fishing crew, usually an older and more experienced hand.
<i>maniagar</i>	a Tamil revenue officer.
<i>Marakkala</i>	Moors.
<i>marakkalai</i>	same as a <i>mandrādi</i> , with the latter term being favoured north of Colombo and <i>marakkalai</i> being commonly used further south.
<i>menēri</i>	Italian millet.
<i>mudalāli</i>	a Sinhalese merchant or businessman; a

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- term used to cover a wide range of entrepreneurs.
- mudali* an aristocratic segment of the Goyigama caste, the *mudiyansē* class of people or *mudiyanselā*.
- mudaliyar* (i) a chief headman; until the eighteenth century a civil and military officer; and an administrator of a *kōralē* in British times; (ii) also used as a honorary title from the mid-nineteenth century.
- muhandiram* (i) assistant to a *mudaliyar*; (ii) an honorary title.
- mung āṭa* green gram.
- mutts* the Kannada word for the seat of a spiritual authority or guru.
- nā pīrisa* kindred who constitute one's following, or host of supporters.
- naraka* bad.
- nāyo* relatives, kinfolk.
- nikāya* (i) in a textual sense, one of the five subdivisions of the *sutta pitaka*, which is one section of the Buddhist canon; (ii) as used in this book, the monastic fraternity (sometimes referred to as a 'sect').
- nindagam* villages or fields granted by the state to noblemen.
- ohori* the plural form of *ohoriya*, the part of a woman's cloth that is thrown over the shoulder; but also referring to the Kandyan *sāri*.
- oruva* outrigger canoe, a typical Sinhalese craft.
- pāḍuva* a loss, a shortcoming.
- pahal jāti* low caste.
- panchayat* village or caste council of elders, used as a judicial tribunal.
- paniviḍakārayō* the highest ranking intercaste gradation among the Salāgama in pre-British and early British times.

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- pansala* the building in which monks reside; in a general sense a synonym for a *vihāraya*.
- pāruva* a special canoe with a prow in the shape of a miniature landing-craft, which is used for beach seine work.
- patabāndi* literally ‘tied straps’, but referring to honorific titles that were ceremonially conferred by kings.
- paṭṭi* shepherds, a relatively inferior segment of the Goyigama caste.
- pāṭṭu* a sub-district within a *kōralē*.
- pavula* (i) family; (ii) kindred; (iii) wife.
- pelāntiya* kin-based status groups constituted on the foundations provided by traditional pre-capitalist Sinhalese ideology.
- perahāra* a procession; usually, a religious procession.
- pēruva* (i) class, category; (ii) department.
- pin* merit, moral good.
- pingo* a portage contraption involving a wooden bar, which could rest on the shoulders, and two baskets hanging one from each end.
- pirisa* host or following; the number of persons a lord could muster; synonymous with *sēnāva*.
- pirisidu* pure.
- pirivara* retinue.
- piriveṇa* a monastic school or college.
- radala* the highest sub-caste of the Goyigama. Nowadays, used also as a Sinhalese translation for the English term ‘aristocrat’.
- radalakampēruva* the aristocracy or ruling class.
- rājakāriya* primarily and literally, service to the king; and not dissimilar to corvée labour. Also extended to cover services to a nobleman, a *vihāra* or *dēvala* by tenants occupying their service lands.

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<i>raṭa</i>	country or region.
<i>raṭēmahāṭmaya</i>	a governor of a province or chief headman in the Kandyan Kingdom and the Kandyan provinces of British times.
<i>rēndarāla</i> (<i>rēndakārayā</i>) (<i>rendamahāiṭaya</i>)	a renter of franchises auctioned or leased out by the government.
<i>sāmaṇēra</i>	Buddhist novice.
<i>SamaSamājist</i>	socialist, in the sense in which it is used in the party label of the Lanka Sama Samāja Party.
<i>Sangha</i> (<i>Sam̄gha</i>)	Order of Buddhist monks.
<i>Sāsana</i>	(i) Buddhist teachings, instructions and practices; (ii) more commonly, the Buddhist dispensation.
<i>sīmā</i>	the consecrated boundary within which the higher ordination and other ecclesiastical acts are performed.
<i>sīṭṭuva</i>	(i) revolving credit association; (ii) promissory note; (iii) legal decree, usually written on a palm leaf.
<i>tamuse</i>	you, second person pronoun, usually used among equals as distinct from <i>tō</i> , <i>uṁba</i> which refer to those of subordinate status.
<i>taravad</i>	the matrilineal joint family corporation among the Nayars of Kerala and Tanjore.
<i>terunnānse</i>	a senior monk.
<i>theppan</i> (<i>theppam</i>)	catamaran, a word of Tamil origin.
<i>tovil</i>	menial services.
<i>tovilē</i>	(i) services rendered by a menial to a patron; (ii) an exorcist healing ritual (the common usage today but not used in this sense in this book).
<i>tombo</i>	registers of lands, schools or population compiled under the Portuguese or Dutch administrations.
<i>tunhavul</i>	literally 'three parts'; referring here to

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- land grants in the eighteenth-century Maritime Provinces which gave freehold rights to the grantees, provided that they devoted one-third of the area to cinnamon cultivation and delivered the crop to the Dutch government.
- ūliyakkārayō* the lowest ranking intercaste gradation within the Salāgama caste.
- uṁba* you; generally implying that the person addressed is of inferior status to the speaker and often carrying derogatory connotations.
- unnānse* 'his reverence', a respectful term used to refer to a monk.
- ūpasampadā* higher ordination by which a *sāmaṇēra* (or novice) is admitted to the Buddhist *Sangha* as a *bhikkhu* (monk).
- vāḍa karana minissu* literally 'working people'; that is, people from the service castes or, usually, non-Goyigama folk.
- vaḍuga* immigrant northern (Telugu) warriors.
- vallam (ballam)* a Tamil word for an inshore fishing craft similar to the *pāruva*.
- vamsa* (i) lineage; (ii) caste; (iii) kind.
- variga* (i) kind; (ii) an affinal, endogamous kin group, or sub-caste.
- varṇa* (i) colour; (ii) ancient fourfold division of Hindu society.
- vāsagama* family name, patrilineal name; literally 'dwelling village'.
- vāsala* entrance to the palace, translated 'Gate' in titles.
- vāsala mudaliyars* high honorary rank in Dutch Ceylon and British Ceylon.
- vedarāla* ayurvedic physician, indigenous medical practitioner.
- vidāna* a village-level revenue officer and headman, whose duties sometimes included keeping the peace.

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- vihāraya (vihāra)* building in a Buddhist temple compound which contains one or more religious artifacts.
- wāḍiya* a migrant camp or the dormitory of male workers – usually in reference to fishermen but also used in relation to the camps of cinnamon peelers and graphite mine workers.
- walauwa (valavva)* the residence or residential complex of a Sinhalese noble.
- yāthra dhoni (oruva)* a fair-weather coastal junk, with an outrigger, that ‘ran to 50 tons’ burden’ (James Hornell).
- yevudor* the drag net used for beach seining in Ghana; a word derived from the Portuguese.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AR</i>	<i>Administration Reports</i> (with year of reports following)
<i>CDN</i>	<i>Ceylon Daily News</i>
<i>CJHSS</i>	<i>The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies</i>
<i>CML</i>	<i>Ceylon Morning Leader</i>
CO	Colonial Office
DNA Lanka	Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> , Bengal Branch/Ceylon Branch/Great Britain and Ireland
BB/CB/GB and I	
Karāva Petition, 1830	'The Humble Petition of the undersigned inhabitants of the Fisher Caste, of different stations, viz. Tangalle, Matura, Weligame, Galle, Pantura, Aloomoor Corle, and Negombo', addressed to W. M. G. Coelbrooke [<i>sic</i>], 10 November 1830, in CO 54/131, fols. 472–5
<i>MCS</i>	<i>Modern Ceylon Studies</i>
Moratuwa Petition, 1829	'Petition from 112 Inhabitants of Moratuwa', n.d. [4 August 1829?] in CO 416/32/fols. 501–6 (notes supplied by Dr Patrick Peebles)
<i>Papers CHC</i>	<i>Papers Relating to the Constitutional History of Ceylon</i> , Colombo: Govt Printer
PRO	Public Record Office
RCS in 1818	Reports on Castes and Services, enclosures 8 and 9 in Brownrigg to Bathurst,

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no. 290, 17 July 1818, in CO 54/71, fols. 61–104

ROHP

Roberts Oral History Project: this was undertaken between late 1965 and 1967 and involved interviews with retired British and Ceylonese administrators, as well as senior politicians, with the intention of producing channelled reminiscences. A small number of the recorded interviews and correspondence is available in type-script form at the Library, University of Peradeniya, and at Rhodes House Library, Oxford

*T. Cent. Imp.**Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, comp. by Arnold Wright, London: 1907

UHC

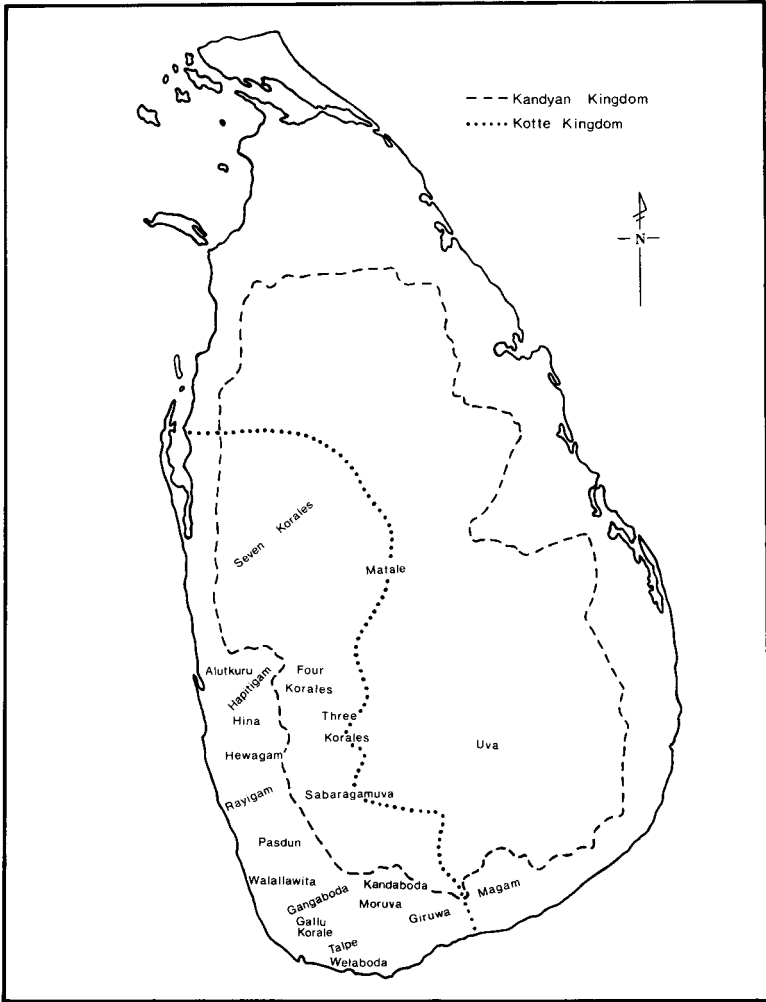
University of Ceylon: *History of Ceylon, Volume Three*, ed. by K. M. de Silva, Colombo: Apothecaries Co., 1973

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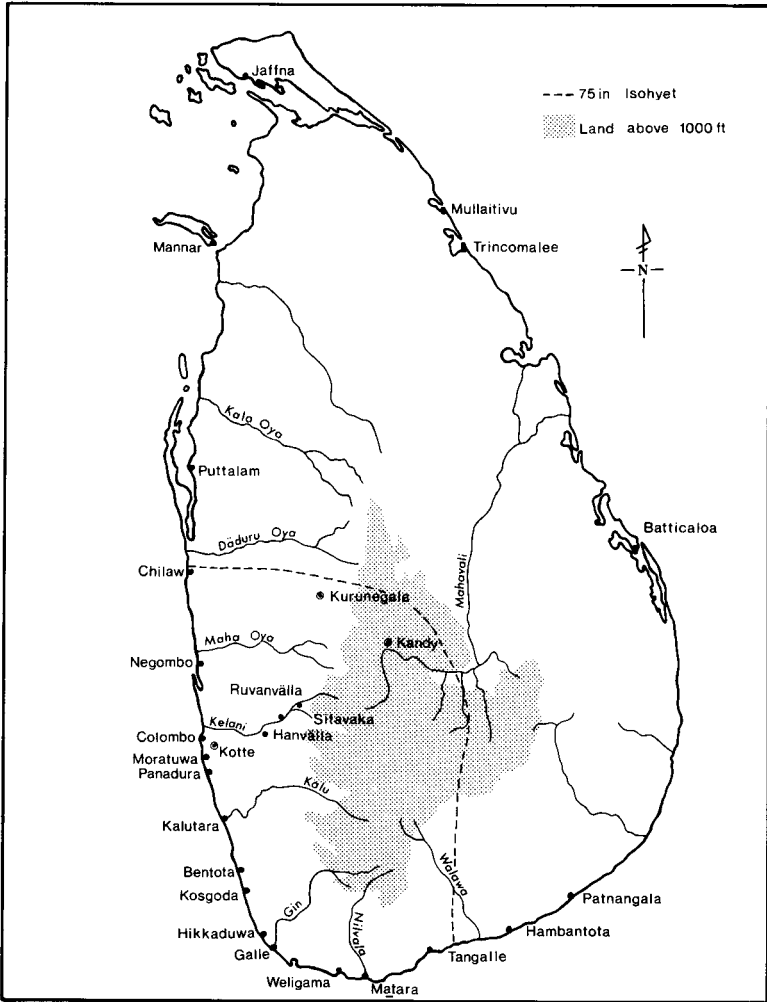
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1 The Kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy. Derived from C. R. de Silva, *The Portuguese in Ceylon 1617-1638*, Colombo: H. W. Cave & Co., 1972 and V. Kanapathypillai, *Dutch Rule in Maritime Ceylon, 1766-1796*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1969

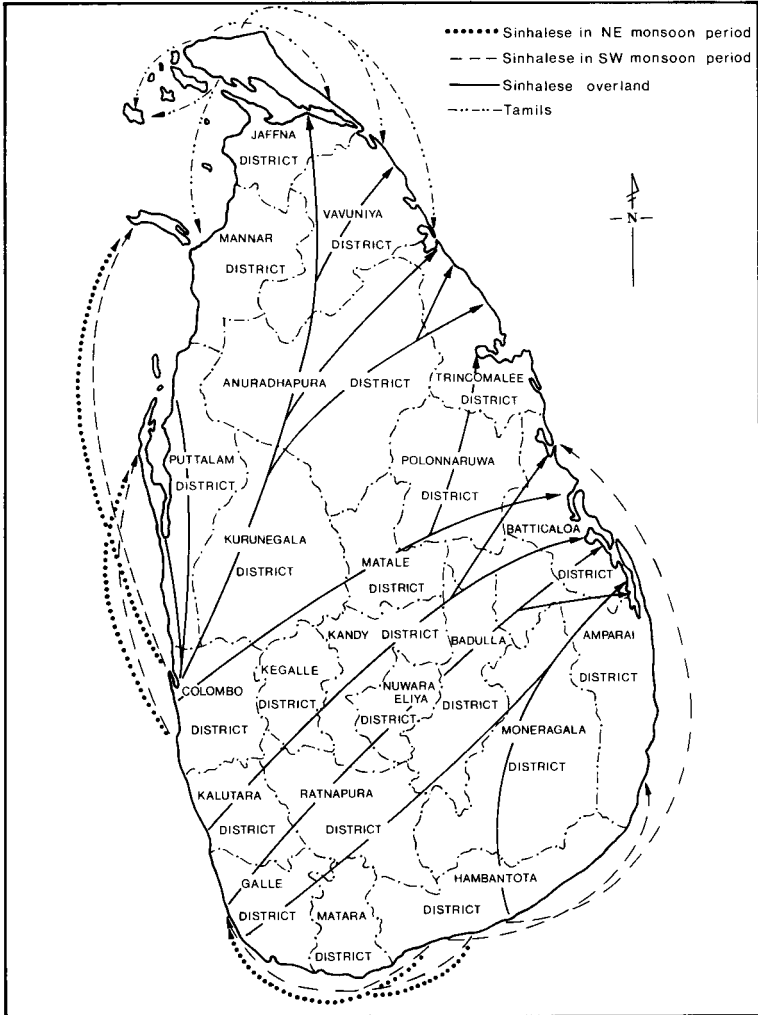
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2 Some physical features and place names

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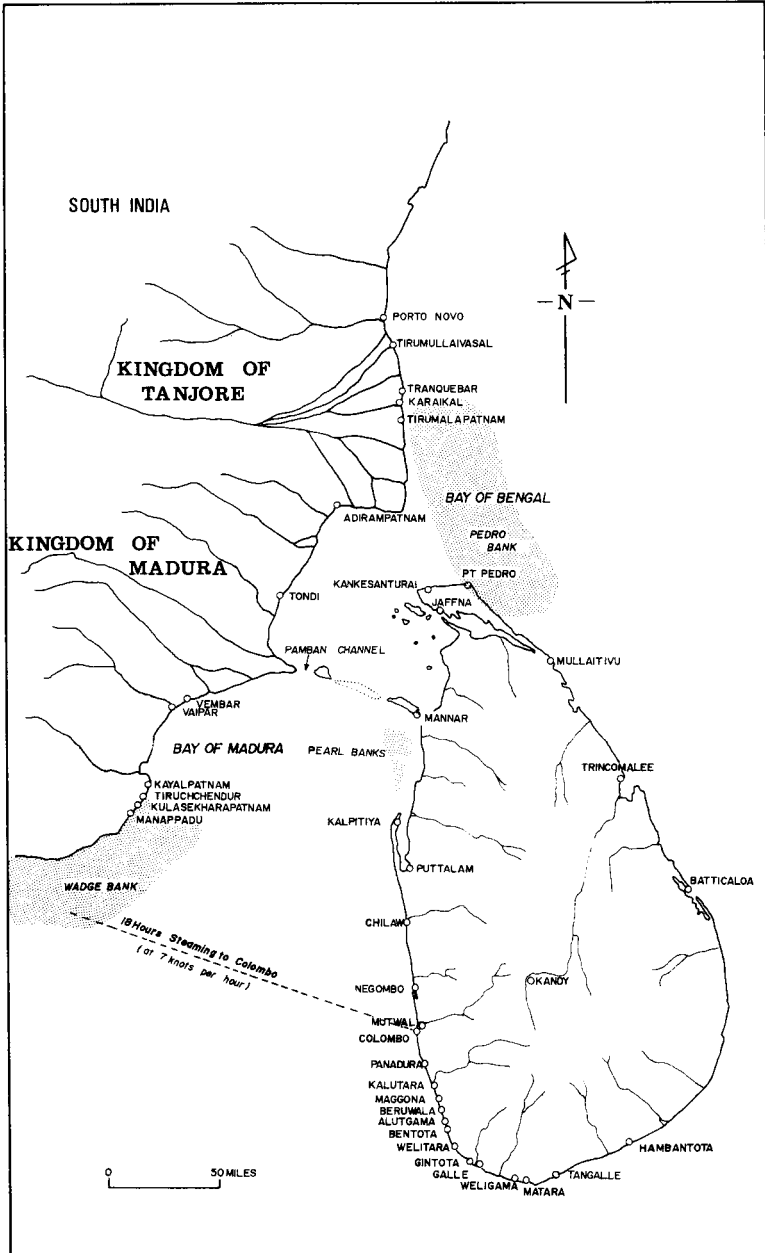
3 Present administrative divisions and the contemporary migration patterns of fishermen. Migration patterns derived from Fritz Bartz, 'Fischer auf Ceylon', *Bonner Geographische Abhandlungen – Heft 27*, 1959 and *Die Grossen Fischereiräume der Welt*, 1964–5

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4 The coastal waters of Sri Lanka and southeastern India. Derived from S. Arasaratnam, 'The politics of commerce in the coastal kingdoms of Tamil Nad, 1650-1700', *South Asia*, no. 1, 1971 b