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978-0-521-13378-4 - Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese 1947-1976

Janice Jiggins

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LONDON • NEW YORK • MELBOURNE

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521133784

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First published 1979
This digitally printed version 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Jiggins, Janice.

Caste and family in the politics of the Sinhalese, 1947–1976.

Bibliography:

Includes index.

1. Family – Sri Lanka. 2. Caste – Sri Lanka.
 3. Sri Lanka – Politics and government. I. Title.
- HQ666.8.J53 301.5'92'095493 78–54715

ISBN 978-0-521-22069-9 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-13378-4 Paperback

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Preface

The interpretation of Sinhalese political dynamics given in this book is put forward with some confidence; it is equally certain that the results of the general election of August 1977 herald the beginning of a new era. This is not to say that the nice calculations of interest described here – the interactions, loyalties, and identities which have influenced Sinhalese politics since Independence – have been all at once overthrown or discarded; on the contrary, the composition of the new United National Party Cabinet indicates that considerations of caste support retain some importance. But both the overwhelming nature of the UNP's landslide victory and the fundamental constitutional changes which the new Prime Minister, Mr J. R. Jayawardene, brought about so swiftly, mark the abandonment of Westminster-style parliamentary politics in Sri Lanka.

For the first time in the island's electoral experience a single party gained an absolute majority of votes at the polls, giving it nearly 83 per cent of the seats in the National State Assembly. The major partner to the defeated United Front government, Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, was reduced to eight seats with approximately 31 per cent of the votes, only two sitting MPs, both Cabinet members, being returned. The other two partners to the United Front – the Communist Party and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party – standing in association with left Independents and some former left-wing members of the SLFP in a United Left Front, took less than 7 per cent of the poll and returned no candidates whatsoever.

Not only did the UNP gain a plurality in aggregate; it won a majority of votes in all but two Tamil-speaking provinces, and out of its 156 candidates, 126 won with an absolute plurality. Even more significantly for the arguments of this book, the UNP captured the SLFP's electoral heartland in Uva Province, Central Province, and North-Central Province (the SLFP returning no member for the first two and only three for the North-Central Province), and ousted the left vote in the coastal Western Province and in Sabaragamuwa. The whole-hearted swing in the Sinhalese areas is indicated, too, in the Moslem representation, which re-emerged strongly

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Preface

in support of the UNP, ten out of eleven Moslem MPs being returned for the UNP.¹

The elimination of most of the Sinhalese opposition at the polls has consequences beyond party, however, for it leaves the Tamils, newly joined in the Tamil United Liberation Front, as the official opposition, symbolising the increasing confrontation between the ethnic groups; a constant reminder of the fears and hostility which broke out into violent communal rioting shortly after the elections.² Some settlement has to be made but no one is pretending it will be easy, nor that it can be made without modifying the concept of the island's polity as Sinhalese and Buddhist, which the Bandaranaiques' SLFP has articulated so forcefully in the years since Independence.³

Mr Jayawardene has sought and been granted powers to move Sri Lanka away from Westminster parliamentary practice towards an executive Presidency with features drawn from both the American and the French experience. The President is to be directly elected as sole executive authority and to have powers to appoint both the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, choosing from members of the National State Assembly who will continue to be directly elected on a constituency basis. Drawing on a principle adopted in the 1972 constitution, the President's decisions and acts will not be subject to judicial review. Mr Jayawardene himself became the first President under the new constitution on 1 January 1978, and will serve a six-year term.

It is argued by the UNP that such a move is necessary to secure an island-wide consensus for policies over the longer term, beyond party factionalism and what has been dubbed the 'political *thathumaru* system' (*thathumaru* refers to a traditional agricultural labour-sharing arrangement). It is to be hoped that the powers and position of a President elevated beyond the parliamentary and party pressures of Sinhalese nationalism will also allow a statesmanlike settlement to be reached between the Tamils and the Sinhalese.

J.J.

July 1978

Select glossary of Sinhalese terms and list of abbreviations

<i>Adigar</i>	traditional Kandyan office and title: chief minister
ANCL	Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd; also known as Lake House, the site of its major publishing business
<i>Appuhamy</i>	respectful form of address (m), as to well-off shopkeepers, etc.
<i>ayurvedic</i> medicine	traditional system of medical knowledge and practice, still widely used
<i>bana</i> hall	preaching hall, attached to Buddhist temple
<i>Bandara</i>	deferential form of address (m) to traditional notable
Bhasha Peramuna	Language Front
<i>Batgam</i> caste	originally, foot-soldiers. Also known less respectfully as the <i>Padu</i>
<i>Berawa</i> caste	drummer caste
<i>bhikkhu</i>	Buddhist monk
<i>chena</i>	jungle or scrub cleared for short-term cropping and then abandoned
CJC	Criminal Justice Commission
CNC	Ceylon National Congress
CP	Communist Party – Moscow-oriented
<i>Dingiri Hamuduruwanē</i>	specifically Kandyan deferential form of address (f) to a ‘Lady of an ancestral house’
<i>Dissawe</i>	traditional Kandyan office and title: governor of a province
<i>Durava</i> caste	toddy-tapper caste
<i>gē</i>	suffix appended to <i>Goyigama</i> family names indicating that the person is descended from that particular house or lineage

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Glossary and abbreviations

<i>gedera nāma</i>	name indicating descent from a particular house or lineage
<i>Goyigama</i> caste	cultivator caste
<i>Hamuduravo</i>	deferential form of address (m); Kandyan usage. Abbreviation: <i>Hamu</i> : familiar/affectionate form of address used with first names
<i>Hamumahataya</i>	deferential form of address (m); maritime usage
<i>Hena</i> caste	washer caste
<i>Hunu</i> caste	lime-burner caste
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – People's Liberation Front
kachcheri	district administration centre
<i>Karava</i> caste	fisher caste
Lake House; Lake House Group	terms used to denote ANCL
LPP	Lanka Prajathanthrawadi Party – Ceylon Democratic Party
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Trotskyist) – Ceylon Equal Society Party
<i>Maha Nayaḱe Thero</i>	high clerical officer within a Buddhist <i>nikāya</i> ; fully ordained monk of more than ten years' standing
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna – People's United Front
MSC	Member of the State Council
<i>mudalali</i>	indigenous entrepreneur or trader in the process of becoming wealthy
<i>Mudaliyar</i> ; Gate <i>Mudaliyar</i> ; Maha <i>Mudaliyar</i>	high-ranking traditional officers
<i>mudiansē nāma</i>	name indicating inherited traditional title(s)
<i>Muhandiram</i>	traditional Kandyan title and office: one of the officers of the palace
<i>nayaḱe</i>	clerical officer within a <i>nikāya</i> ; a fully ordained monk
<i>Navandanna</i> caste	artificer caste
NI	no information
<i>nikāya</i>	sect of Buddhist monks

Glossary and abbreviations

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<i>nindagam</i>	traditionally, land belonging to the king and granted to individuals
Peramuna	Front, as in Bhasha Peramuna
<i>Radala</i>	collective term for members of Kandyan <i>Goyigama</i> noble families
<i>rajaḱariya</i>	king's service: forced services to the state
<i>Rate Mahatmeya</i>	traditional Kandyan office and title: principal officer of a county
<i>Rodiya</i> caste	small caste, nearest in Sinhalese society to an outcast community
<i>Salagama</i> caste	cinnamon-peeler caste
<i>Sangha</i>	the community of Buddhist monks
<i>Sangharamaya</i>	place of study belonging to the <i>Sangha</i>
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLFSP	Sri Lanka Freedom Socialist Party
SMS	Sinhala Maha Sabha – Great Council of the Sinhalese
<i>swabhasha</i>	mother tongue (Sinhala or Tamil)
<i>thathumaruru</i>	traditional form of agricultural labour-sharing
Theravada	one of the two major schools of Buddhism
UF	United Front
<i>Unnahē</i>	respectful form of address (m), as to skilled craftsmen, etc.
UNP	United National Party
<i>Vahumpura</i> caste	jaggery-maker and domestic service caste. Also known less respectfully as the <i>Haḱuru</i>
<i>Valawē Hamuduruwanē</i>	deferential form of address (f) to a 'Lady of an ancestral house'
<i>valauwwa</i>	house of a local notable
<i>varna</i>	a fourfold hierarchy of castes, in which status and power are differentiated, based on classical Hindu theory
<i>vihara</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>viharadhipati</i>	chief monk of a temple
<i>viharagam</i>	land and villages granted to <i>viharas</i>
<i>vinaya</i>	rules for the maintenance of discipline among members of the <i>Sangha</i>
VLSSP	Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party – Marxist offshoot of the LSSP