PEASANT IN TRANSITION
Agrarian Society in Western Sri Lanka under Dutch Rule,
1740-1800

door
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geboren te Gampaha, Sri Lanka,
in 1965
Promotiecommissie

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De voltooiing van dit proefschrift werd gesubsidieerd door het TANAP (Towards a New Age of Partnership) Programma
Dedicated to my Mother and Father
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Acknowledgements

What I have written is part of the history of my own life. I owe a lot to the men and women in the villages that I have studied, and about whose ancestors I have written here. My ‘University’ was their daily life, in the Gorkian sense. It was under the heaven-sent TANAP programme that I completed this dissertation. Unfortunately the rules of Leiden University forbid me to acknowledge here my three supervisors, with whom I have shared five years of my intellectual and personal life.

I would like to thank Dr. Henk Niemeijer, the TANAP coordinator, for selecting me for the TANAP programme. Once I had arrived in Leiden, Ilonka Ooms, Marijke van Wissen-van Staden, the TANAP secretaries at the History Department, and Ilona Beumer of CNWS, all took care of me like a younger brother. I also would like to thank particularly Cynthia Viallé whose keen and unerring judgment has shown me the way through the nightmare of the editorial process.

Yolande Spaans, René Wezel and Ton Harmsen, the Dutch language teachers of the TANAP programme became integral parts of our lives over the last five years. Dr. Hugo s’ Jacob, our palaeography teacher, was always available to us in the reading room of the Nationaal Achief to help us decipher difficult early modern Dutch handwriting. The ‘South-Asia Club’ led by Dr. Jos Gommans and attended by Lennart Bes, Gijs Kruijtzer, Dr. René Barendse and many others formed a wonderful intellectual sounding board for my intellectual ramblings.

Lincoln Paine not only corrected my English but also made valuable comments to the text when Rosemary Robson became too busy helping out my fellow students with their English. I particularly appreciate that Mr. Paine came over from Maine especially to join the public defence of my thesis. Critical comments by Prof. Radin Fernando of the National University of Singapore were invaluable in bringing this work to the level that it is now. Dr. Remco Raben also made valuable comments on the original PhD proposal. Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda made encouraging comments on various chapters, as did Prof. Om Prakash, Dr. Lakshmi Subrahmanyam, Prof. Djoko Suriyo, Prof. Adri Lapian and Dr. Robert Ross during the successful TANAP conferences in Asia. Albert van den Belt, my buddy in the Colombo archive, shared his remarkable knowledge of the subject and also helped with deciphering difficult parts of VOC records.

Milton Liyanage of the Geography Department of Colombo University drew the maps and never complained about my constant intrusions into his cartography room. On the contrary he always welcomed me. Words cannot express my gratitude for the great job he did. Savithri Ranasinghe and Dr. Piydasa enlightened me about many aspects of Sri Lanka’s historical geography, about which I am a novice.

The staff of the Sri Lanka National Archives, including its director, Dr. Saroja Wettasinghe, were helpful throughout the research, as were the staff of the Nationaal Archief in The Hague. Prof. Tilak Hettiarachchi and Prof. Savithri Gunasekera, the present and former Vice-Chancellors, Prof. S.M.P. Senanayaka and Prof. S.T. Hettige, present and former Deans/Arts, Prof. Amal Jayawardane, head of the history department, at the University of Colombo provided all the institutional support. If not for the persuasion of Dr. Indrani Munasinghe, former professor of history at the University of Colombo, I would not have applied for the TANAP programme. She always encouraged me to complete this study.

The discussions deep into the night with Muridan S. Widjojo, Anjana Singh, Kwee Hui Kian and Ch’iu Hsin-hui were most stimulating. Alicia Schrikker and her companion Job always kept their door open to me. Survival in Leiden in the last five years would have been much more difficult if she had not been around. Ota Atsushi was always available for advice on computer matters. I am also much indebted to Ryuto Shimada, Liu Yong, Sri Margana, Hoang Anh Tuan, Bhawan Ruangsilp, Ghulam Nadri

I cannot forget the intellectual inspiration from Deepti Kumara Gunaratna, my long-time political friend, although we have, unfortunately, become strong political opponents by now. My ‘Comrades-In-Arms’ of the Group X were always around me. I would not have solved many technical problem of the application process for the TANAP programme without the constant and hearty support of Mallika Manuratna. Nilmini Diyabedanage and Pratiba Mahanama helped with some technical aspects of overseas study leave.

My wife and life companion Shirani and our daughter Hiranyada had to pay a big price for my overseas academic pursuits throughout the last five and half years, during which I had to ignore many of my family responsibilities. They will be happy that all this has now come to an end.

Finally my heart felt apologies to Dinusha, my younger sister, always waiting for my return from abroad, although fate has not given her the privilege of understanding what I have been doing the way others do.
Abbreviations

JRASS - Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka
PLH - Principal Land Holder
Rd. - Rixdollar
SLNA - Sri Lanka National Archives, Colombo
VOC - Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (United Dutch East India Company);
      when indicated with sources, read 'Archives of the VOC in the Nationaal
      Archief in The Hague
UPHS - University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka

A note on the references to tombos

When referring to tombos, reference to the specific file is not given. Instead, the PLH number,
village, pattuwa and kūrale in which the village is located are given, as in the following example:
PLH 1 of Mapitigama (Hina/Gangabda). In the case of frequently mentioned villages, however,
this rule is not repeated. In the section on primary sources in the bibliography, tombos have been
classified according to kūrale and pattuwa, which makes it easier to trace the relevant file. A list of
villages according to the order found in the tombos is also given as an appendix, which makes it
easier to locate each village.

A note on the tables

* Most of the tables are included in the main text. For technical reasons, some tables had to be
  attached separately as Appendix III.
* There is no Table 3-11, therefore Table 3-12 after Table 3-10.
Glossary

ākāri
Caste of smiths, also known as navandano

ambalāma
Small rest house located by the road, built for the convenience of long-distance travellers.

amuna
A measuring unit. In the case of paddy and other grains it is based on sowing capacity. It varied according to the region.
Forty *karuna* (q.v.) = one amuna. It approximated to two acres of paddy lands.
As for areca-nuts, it ranged from 24,000 to 26,000 nuts.

ande
A system of land tenure based on providing, usually, half of the produce to the landlord.

appalāṃy
A minor headman, it is mostly used as a honorific suffix to the name of high caste persons.

ārachhi
A village level chief, generally below korāla (q.v.)

badakāla
Caste of potters

badda
Institution in which a group of people was organized, mostly on the basis of caste, for performing a particular rājakārya (q.v.).

berana
Caste of tom-tom beaters. They also performed a range of other tasks such as astrology and sorcery.

bhatpatti
Literally, 'the lord of the land'; pre-colonial kings used this title.

binna
Uxorilocal marriage

būdaśiṭṭāva
Embryo-Buddha

darīva
A caste, generally denoting toddy-tappers from coconut palm.

disqāvany
A province administered by the *disqāva*. The Portuguese and the Dutch retained this pre-colonial system of administration.

dispense dorp
(Dutch) Maintenance village of a high Company official, similar to pre-colonial *gahaskgam* (q.v.)

dorp
(Dutch) Village

gamā/ [pl.] gam
Village/ villages

gangoda
A colloquial term for a settlement area of a village

geld kannel
Peeled cinnamon for which a small payment was made to the peeler

gewattād/ [pl.] gewatu
Household garden

goyigama
Highest caste in the traditional caste hierarchy, also the numerically largest caste

bakkāru
An agricultural caste; the name literally means 'those who make juggary

bēnd/ [pl.] bēn
Forest under slash-and-burn cultivation, usually referred to as *chenā*

kankēnām
Overseer

karēva
A caste generally denoting fishermen

karemāṇakāryā
Probably carriers of heavy loads

kāriyakaraṇanno
Literally, those who organize rājakārya (q.v.). Europeans usually referred to them as *mayorāḷi* (q.v.).

kārāḷa
Chief of the kārāḷe (q.v.)

kārāle
Unit of administration, a part of a *disqāvany* (q.v.)

kāmburu/ [pl.] kāmburu
Paddy-field

kāraṇkāmu
A variety of dry grain

karuṇi
See amuna

lasarinet
Mostly denoting indigenous soldiers, but they performed a wider range of duties, such as messengers and guards.

līyadda
A block of paddy field

mahabadda
Cinnamon department

maintementos
Payment made in the form of money or provisions to the performers of rājakārya (q.v.).

mayorāḷi
See kāriyakaraṇanno

mēdalīyār
Highest rank of indigenous chiefdom under the Dutch
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<td>mushandiram</td>
<td>High-ranking indigenous chief below the rank of <em>mudaliyar</em> (q.v.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muttiluwa</td>
<td>Piece of land in a village granted under the pre-colonial system which the village grantee cultivated with the un-paid labour of the other cultivators of the village granted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nainde</td>
<td><em>Rajakariya</em> (q.v.) labour of <em>nainde</em> were mostly for work in plantations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ninda</td>
<td>Literally, inherited property. In tombos, this term is used for lands which were exempted from taxes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>otu</td>
<td>A tax which was usually a tenth of the produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oweit</td>
<td>Meadow lands. Literally a dry land located by an <em>oya</em> (q.v.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oya</td>
<td>River: in Sri Lanka some rivers are called <em>oya</em> while others are called <em>gangas</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>padu</td>
<td>A caste with low ritual status. The people were usually used for menial service, mostly as coolies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panga</td>
<td>A share of an estate (or a village under the pre-colonial system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paravar</td>
<td>A coastal community made up of South-Indian migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paravēni</td>
<td>Literally, inherited (lands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porwaiddakariya</td>
<td>Wood-cutters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praveeni</td>
<td>Another form of the term <em>paravēni</em> (q.v.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paran</td>
<td>Fallow lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rajakariya</td>
<td>Literally, the duty to the king. But in this study it refers to the unpaid labour of the peasant recruited by the rulers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rudeya</td>
<td>A community whose members are traditionally treated as outcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l'Compagnies grond</td>
<td>Piece of land that was declared as belonging to the Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uleyam</td>
<td>Unpaid public work which 'foreigners' were obliged to perform. Here foreigners were mainly Muslims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watta</td>
<td>Garden or plantation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wveliya</td>
<td>Stretch of paddy-fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wibadde vidjene</td>
<td>A village level headman, responsible for collecting paddy revenue from the cultivator on behalf of the Company</td>
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11. Padu settlements in Hina, Alutkuru, Hewagam and Salpity korale

*A note on the maps:* The two maps of Hina korale and Alutkuru korale, made by the VOC administration of Sri Lanka in 1794, are cited a number of times in the text. They have not been included because of their large size. They can be found in the Nationaal Archief in The Hague (No. VELH-332 and VELH-334 respectively). For more details on these two maps, see K. D. Paranavitana and R. K. de Silva, *Maps and Plans of Dutch Ceylon* (Colombo: Central Cultural Fund, 2002), 91-2.
Map No. 1: Sri Lanka and South India

1 BOMBAY  
2 GOA  
3 COCHIN  
4 MANAPADU  
5 CAILPATNAM  
6 TUTICORN  
7 KILAKARAI  
8 TONDY  
9 NAGAPPATTINAM  
10 PORTONOVO  
11 MADRAS  
12 PULICAT  
13 INCHIADU  
14 COLOMBO  
15 GALLE  
16 BATTICALOA  
17 TRINCOMALEE  
18 JAFFNA  
19 RANDY  
20 VENGURLA  
21 PONNECAYL

Source: L. Hooy, Ceylonese Floraantheb, Deel I., (Elversum: Verkoren, 1911), colii
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Source: Hovy, Ceylonese Place-Index, cdv
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One dot represents one family
Map No. 1: Padu settlements in Hina, Alutkuru, Hewagam and Salpity kōrale

One dot represents one family
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4. A foot path (next to the Udugoda *ambalama*) 18-19
Prologue

When I was a little boy, my grandmother used to leave home every now and then in the very early morning, well before dawn, with a bundle of carefully packed betel leaves. These betel leaves she grew in her household garden. Carrying a torch made out of coconut leaves, she set out for the open-air-market (pola) about two miles away. Sometimes I would join her. En route we joined other market-goers with the same produce, and even the occasional bullock cart full of betel leaves. I admit it was not pleasant for a child of five to be woken up so early in the morning, but once we arrived, it was exciting to see so many strangers bustling around the open-air market as the sky turned red to welcome the first rays of the rising sun. Achchi sold her betel leaves to wholesale-buyers while I wandered around in her vicinity. After she purchased a bag of groceries in which dried fish occupied a central place and had safely placed her little money pouch with the remaining money inside her blouse, Achchi and I would return home.

When I started my education, I used to cross the paddy-field together with my cousins and other children in the neighbourhood to go the school located next to the Catholic church in the adjacent village. A narrow earthen bund separating two paddy-fields had been converted into a footpath that crossed not only the paddy-field but also the village itself.

That was more than 35 years ago! Achchi is no more. She was buried in a graveyard located in a far-away village. The open-air-market is gone, too. When I go back to the village, no longer as an insider but as a prodigal son, I see a lot of changes. The narrow footpath that we took to school has made way for a road that carries buses and trucks across the paddy-field, which is now virtually a fallow, barren plot of land. The large rock that stood firm in front of our house and gave us children a wonderful hiding place has been demolished and flattened by powerful explosives. Though these changes inevitably give me a feeling of nostalgic melancholy, at the same time I have grown up enough and experienced enough of the world to be able to place these changes in the context of the larger social and economic transformations that have shaped Sri Lanka over the last three or more decades.

In a broader sense, what is written in the following pages is an attempt to delve into the past, for better or worse, of the very landscape of the village where my grandmother used to grow betel leaves and to try to historicize it by using the cadastral tombos and other archival documents that I retraced in the Dutch East India Company (VOC) archives in Colombo and the Hague; having done so I hope to provide the reader a closer look at the early modern landscape of modern rural Sri Lanka.