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## **Negotiating power and constructing the nation : engineering in Sri Lanka**

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## Chapter 2

### **Imagining the Industrial Nation of Ceylon: Aberdeen - Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme (1900-1936)**

It is the common understanding that Sri Lankans - both Sinhalese and Tamils, tend to look backwards when they are in search of an identity (Daniel 1989). The island is seen as a text book case of ethno nationalism where Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms imagined themselves on the basis of an ethnic past. Independence from the British Empire which was achieved in 1948 without much nationalist mobilisation, particularly of the peasantry as in contradistinction to India, failed to create the space for a Sri Lankan identity that allowed these different groups to transcend their ethnic boundaries and visualise a technologically advanced Sri Lankan state where all ethnic communities share a common future. Spencer (2008) summarises this understanding of the long-term academic inquiry into Sri Lankan nationalism by saying that "Sri Lanka never developed a mass anti-colonial nationalist movement out of which Nehruvian developmental nationalism emerged" (p. 613). While agreeing with the obvious absence of a mass anti-colonial nationalist movement, my main interest in this chapter is to revisit the second part of this claim - the idea about the non-emergence of a discourse on developmental nationalism in Sri Lanka, as witnessed in neighbouring India. Why did the demand for an industrially developed independent Ceylon made by Ceylonese leaders such as Marcus Fernando, Anagarika Dharmapala and Cumaratunga Munidasa not evolve to be a mature 'plan' leading ultimately to the establishment of a Sri Lankan developmental nation? Or was there, in fact, such a 'plan' which escaped the gaze of historians for some reason? Exploring "Land, Labor, Capital and Sectional Interests in the National Politics of Sri Lanka" in the first part of the twentieth century, which is a study on the peasantry and agriculture, Samaraweera (1981) observes at the very end of his essay that Ceylonese nationalists "began to look towards a realistic program of industrialization for the country" only by the 1940s (p. 159).

By selecting the first mass scale hydro electricity generation scheme, the Aberdeen-Laxapana Scheme as my 'worksite' I discuss in the following sections of this chapter how a widespread campaign for a Ceylonese developmental state was, in fact, present. The discourse anchored in the Aberdeen-Laxapana

Scheme proposed an alternative future for the island against the romantic peasant agriculture based vision that succeeded and also resulted in an ethnically divided country. The hydro electric scheme that was under discussion for decades during British colonial rule and began operations in the mid twentieth century was the terrain for a range of important colonial - anti-colonial and nationalistic ideas and counter ideas that have largely gone unrecorded in the discourse of Sri Lankan nationalism so far. The biography of D. J. Wimalasurendra, the key Ceylonese behind the scheme, opens an avenue for one to visit this hidden past and to observe that a realistic programme of industrialisation was present long before the decade 1940. The Laxapana Scheme, as it popularly known now but referred to as Aberdeen-Laxapana Scheme in official colonial documents, is a 'technological' site in the broadest possible sense as defined by scholars on technology such as Kranzberg (1995), Mackenzie & Wajcman (1999[1985]) and Hughes (1986).

## **2.1 Background**

The Aberdeen-Laxapana Scheme is a hydro electricity generation project linked to the fourth longest river in the country, the Kelani River, which starts its journey from the central hill country and reaches the sea in Colombo. It taps the potential of falling water of the Aberdeen Falls of the Kehelgamu Oya tributary and of the Laxapana Falls of the Maskeli Oya tributary to generate a combined capacity of 70,000 horse power (52.5MW). The potential of electricity to be generated by the Scheme was estimated to be much higher than the electricity demand of the entire city of Colombo at the time of planning in the early twentieth century, and the surplus was expected to illuminate and drive industries in other major towns in the island. Cheap hydro electricity produced by the Aberdeen-Laxapana Scheme was expected to replace expensive coal, diesel and gas used at the time as the main sources of generating energy<sup>44</sup>. These expectations, estimates, designs and plans for hydro electricity that were in circulation since the beginning of the century, materialised only much later when construction of the Scheme commenced in 1924, after the delayed adaptation of the motion to go ahead by the Legislative Council of Ceylon. The first plan, Scheme A formulated after lengthy deliberation, was rejected by the Finance Committee on the basis of high cost in 1922, and was replaced by a more efficient scheme - Scheme B, which received the approval of the Council a year later. Construction work started in 1924 but was stopped in 1927 for a number of reasons. Construction resumed in 1939 with a further delay of

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<sup>44</sup> The streets of Colombo were provided with a few gas lamps in 1872 by the Colombo Gas and Water Company. Electricity was generated using diesel and was first introduced symbolically to the island in 1882 by illuminating the Billiard Room of the Bristol Hotel in the capital Colombo. It was provided on a commercial basis by Boustead Brothers Ltd since 1895 (Phillips 1981). There was, however, evidence that electricity was generated on a limited scale by generators of 5 to 122 horse power scale for the use of plantations even by 1885 (Sivasegaram 2006; Wickremaarachchi 2011b).

twelve years with the awarding of the contract to the Hindustan Construction Company of Bombay. The Company was, however, relieved of the contract in 1942, owing to the difficulties encountered during the war. After a supplementary estimate was approved by the State Council, work recommenced in 1945 (Arumugam 2012, p. 12). The Aberdeen-Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme finally entered into operation in 1950, with the government-owned Department of Electrical Undertakings completing construction. It was during this long delay in construction and implementation<sup>45</sup> that a Ceylonese discourse on industrialisation emerged and evolved. The imagining of an industrially advanced Ceylon was made possible by the less expensive and mass scale electrical energy generation capacity of the Hydro Electric Scheme. As I discuss below, the discourse had an anti-colonial and an anti-imperialist flavour.

The Sri Lankan engineer D. J. Wimalasurendra (1874-1953) is considered to be the man who inspired and drove the Scheme. He dedicated his entire life from the days of his early career as a District Engineer of the Public Works Department to his later life as a politician in the first State Council of Ceylon<sup>46</sup>, to seeing the Scheme pushed through, amidst numerous obstacles. In the early twentieth century he investigated in detail the possibility of developing the hydro potential of the island (Phillips 1981), did important contributions to design Scheme A of the project and formulated Scheme B more or less in the form that was implemented when the Finance Committee rejected the initial proposal (Fernando 1956). The paper he presented in 1918 at the Engineering Association of Ceylon, "Economics of Power Utilization in Ceylon" which linked hydro power with the development infrastructure for industrialisation can be considered as the first draft of a vision for a developmental nation, that evolved further during the following decades. Wimalasurendra who, out of frustration, took early retirement from the Department of Electrical Undertakings in 1930, tried his best to campaign for the recommencement of construction of the Scheme as a member of the first State Council from 1931 to 1936. Speeches made by Wimalasurendra at the State Council are a testimony to the advanced imagination of a Ceylonese developmental nation underpinned by the industrial potential provided by the Hydro Electric Scheme.

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<sup>45</sup> One can argue that this delay of almost half a century in implementing the Scheme which under normal circumstances would have taken just four years, could have prevented a possible early industrialisation of Ceylon.

<sup>46</sup> Following recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission the State Council of Ceylon was established in 1931 and functioned in both an executive and legislative capacity, replacing the Legislative Council that was in existence till then. The sixty-one member State Council consisted of fifty members elected from territorial electorates, eight more nominated by the Governor to give adequate representation to minorities and a further three members who were officers of the State (Manor 1989).

Wimalasurendra was born in 1874 as a member of the Navandanna caste, the caste that historically specialised in 'engineering' according to the division of labour defined in the local caste system, occupying a lower position in the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy. His father, Don Juan Wimalasurendra, earned recognition for his master-craftsmanship and was awarded the title 'Mudaliyar' by the colonial government. His family tradition can be seen as the original influence on Wimalasurendra's practical skills. After completing his secondary education at the prominent Sinhala Buddhist school, Ananda College<sup>47</sup>, Wimalasurendra received his initial education in engineering at the Ceylon Technical College. After joining the Public Works Department (PWD) as a Field Overseer in 1898, he was promoted to the grade of Inspector in 1902. After passing the Graduate Membership Examination of the Institute of Civil Engineers, London in India, he was promoted to Acting District Engineer in 1904. He received confirmation in 1907 and was promoted to Second Grade in 1909. In 1915 he attended Faraday House, London to take his second degree in the area of electrical engineering. After receiving exemptions for two years as a mature student, he is said to have completed the remaining two years of the four-year course in just seven months, topping his batch. In 1918 he was promoted again to the position of Grade I Engineer. During this time Wimalasurendra served in many parts of the island. He was thus a Chartered Civil Engineer as well as a Chartered Electrical Engineer, a rare achievement even by today's standards. In 1924 he was appointed Head of the Electrical Engineering Section of the Public Works Department (Arumugam 2012).

## **2.2 Incompatible narratives**

A detailed discussion of the evolution of the Hydro Electric Scheme is required to appreciate the nuances of the imagination of a technologically advanced Ceylon – an imagination in which Wimalasurendra takes centre stage. Sources required to construct this story can be found spread across the twentieth century and can be positioned in different spheres such as technical debate among engineers, colonial administrative literature such as yearly Administration Reports and Sessional Papers published by the Colonial Government, contributions by the local members of the governing bodies such as Legislative Councils and State Councils, public speeches given by the prominent leaders of colonial Ceylon, newspaper reports and articles, biographies of D. J. Wimalasurendra and undocumented narratives of the Scheme related by local people involved in it and passed down orally from generation to generation.

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<sup>47</sup> One of the oldest Buddhist schools in the island, founded by Henry Steel Olcott, the American of European ancestry who also co-founded the Theosophical Society.

A closer look at these sources spread over the span of half a century leads one to identify two rather incompatible narratives that highlight the important tensions that defined the final shape of developmental nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century. The clarity of the 'facts' that are relatively clear in retrospect may not have been so apparent in the heat of the controversies that surrounded this developmental imagination at the time. The two narratives suggest different dates of origin, provide different sets of milestones and highlight different players as those who played prominent roles in the development of the Scheme.

The first of the two narratives can be constructed by drawing particularly from the colonial literature available in the technical and administrative spheres. Papers on the history of the Hydro Electric Scheme presented between 1906 and 1950 at the Annual Sessions of the Engineering Association of Ceylon<sup>48</sup> by British engineers or by Sri Lankan engineers who served under them is one set of sources that can be used to construct this narrative (Strachan 1924; Lynn 1931; Somasundaram 1948; Phillips 1950). Sessional Papers and Administration Reports written by the Directors of the Public Works Department (PWD), Chief Electrical Engineers of the Electrical Department of the PWD and later by the Directors of the Department of Electrical Undertakings are the second set of sources. Almost all the officials who held high office during the first half of the twentieth century were British. Some of the post-independence sources from the second half of the twentieth century reflect some features of this first narrative as a result of their dependence on the colonial sources from the first half of the century<sup>49</sup>. The second narrative that contests the first colonial-narrative draws mainly from local sources and is interwoven closely with the life story of engineer D. J. Wimalasurendra<sup>50</sup>. Information can also be found to strengthen this second narrative in official colonial sources. However, when they are from colonial

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<sup>48</sup> The Engineering Association of Ceylon was established in 1906.

<sup>49</sup> Fernando (1956) and Phillips (1981) are examples for this.

<sup>50</sup> One of the important sources is the 'inner story' of the hydro electric scheme that appeared in the Ceylon Daily News of December 3, 1930 and reproduced by the same paper on the 8th October 1974. It was the report of the speech given by D. J. Wimalasurendra at a public meeting in Galle convened by the Galle Maha Jana Sabha on the 1st December 1930. The speech contains information that do not appear in the colonial version of the Aberdeen - Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme (Wimalasurendra 1974[1930]). "Wimalasurendra: The Story of Our Hydro Resource" by William Peiris (1976), "Wimalasurendra: Ape Jala Sampathe Katha Puvatha (Shortened Translation of William Peiris (1976)) by C. A. Jayasekara (1982), "Saga of a Man of Vision: D. J. Wimalasurendra" by L. P. Goonetilleke (1976) and "D. J. Wimalasurendra: The Creator of Lankan Hydro Electricity" by E. M. Rathnapala (2009) are biographies of Wimalasurendra that are at the same time the story of Sri Lankan hydro electricity development. "Mr. D.J. Wimalasurendra" by M. Berty De Silva (2013) is one of the series of books for school children on life stories of great people. "D. J. Wimalasurendra (1874-1953)" by Ellian De Silva in "Reverend Lives Volume V" (1994) provides a short biography of Wimalasurendra and hydro electricity in Sri Lanka. The series of newspaper articles by Ruban Wickremaarchchi on the "Birth of Electricity" published in *The Island* in 2011 and 2012 on a weekly basis goes into details of hydro electric development in Ceylon (Wickremaarachchi 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d, 2011e, 2011f; 2011g; 2011h; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d; 2012e; 2012f). "D. J. Wimalasurendra and History of the Laxapana Hydro-electric Scheme" by Thiru Arumugam (2012) provides a comprehensive account of the development of the Hydro Electric Scheme while documenting the prominent role played by Wimalasurendra in all stages.

sources they do not appear in the main text but in the annexes produced by locals<sup>51</sup>. There are also some colonial texts produced by Englishmen that can be used to strengthen the second narrative when they were written especially for the readership of locals<sup>52</sup> (e.g. motions presented for approval of the Legislative Council that was dominated by Ceylonese members).

The important feature that differentiates the two narratives from each other is the place reserved for Wimalasurendra. While narratives that use colonial sources underplay the role of Wimalasurendra, the second narrative highlights it. The year 1910 is given as the date of the origin of the Hydro Electric Scheme in the first narrative. According to this story it was in November 1910, that F. B. Rylands, the Government Electrical Engineer attached to the PWD, reported that sufficient hydropower was available near Laxapana for the total electricity requirement of the government (Lynn 1931). The second narrative, however, marking an extended history takes the origin of the Hydro Electric Scheme further back to the year 1901, and hence transfers the credit from Rylands to Wimalasurendra and to the time when the idea of generating electricity from the Laxapana falls was conceived by Wimalasurendra (Wimalasurendra 1974[1930]). While involved in a government assignment to search for minerals and particularly gold, Wimalasurendra, as an acting District Engineer, is said to have found the new 'mine of gold' in 1901 when he saw by chance the falls of Laxapana and realized their potential to generate electricity<sup>53</sup>. It was this thought from 1901 that had led to his investigation of the hydro electric potential of the island which he published as a technical paper in 1918. Interestingly some of these important years do not appear as milestones in the colonial narrative on the Scheme. While describing

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<sup>51</sup> Rider, the dissenting report produced by D. S. Senanayake, A. F. Molamure, C. W. W. Kannangara, E. R. Tambimuttu and D. B. Jayatilaka, the local members of the Sub-Committee Appointed by the Select Committee on Electrical Undertakings to consider and report upon past administration and excess expenditure at Watawala, Aberdeen-Laxapana construction site is the best example for this (Rider, Sessional Paper XIX of 1929).

<sup>52</sup> In introducing the motion for Scheme B at the Legislative Council on 24th January 1924 J. Strachan, Director of Public Works said, "a great deal of credit is also due to Mr. Wimalasurendra for his energy and devotion to the question of harnessing water power under adverse circumstances and at his own expense, and able way in which he has faced the many criticisms by expert engineers and others was striking" (Government Electrical Undertakings 1929, p. 11).

<sup>53</sup> Even though Wimalasurendra identified 1901 as the year of this invention, the assignment was handed over to him in 1904 according to Arumugam (2012). After being appointed on the 22nd August 1904 as an Acting District Engineer and posted to Diyatalawa, a small town in the central hills, Wimalasurendra was assigned with two tasks; to build camps to house the South African Boer prisoners of war, and to search for prospects for minerals in the island (p. 15). A Boer prisoner Ian Van Geyzel, who was an engineer himself, was selected by the government to accompany him in his excursions in search of minerals. Wimalasurendra gives credit to his companion who had the opportunity of traveling worldwide and experiencing hydro electric power generation for suggesting the possibility of tapping Laxapana for electricity generation (Wimalasurendra 1974[1930], Wickremaarachchi 2011h, De Silva 2013). The waterfall which was known till then as Kiriwan Eliya Falls was renamed by Wimalasurendra as Laxapana to mean "one hundred thousand light bulbs". Arumugam (2012) finds this new name as a proof of Wimalasurendra's engineering genius. Based on the overall water-head (520m) and the installed capacity (100MW) of the present scheme, Arumugam calculates backwards to estimate the possible installed capacity of the water-head (129m) Wimalasurendra must have observed in 1901/1904. The figure 11.6MWs Arumugam derives as the installed capacity is, in fact, equivalent to illumination of 116,000 of 100W light bulbs.



the history of the Scheme Phillips (1950) focuses on 1910 (Rylands report), 1924 (approval of the Legislative Council and commencement of construction), 1927 (halting of construction work), 1934 (decision by the Executive Committee on Communications and Works to restart construction), 1939 (recommencement of construction) and 1942 (relieving the Indian construction company) as important milestones. 1901, the year of origin for the inspiration for hydro electricity and 1918, the year when Wimalasurendra presented the paper formulating a plan to harness and use hydro electric energy on a mass scale, attracting the attention of some of the political and social elite of the island, are missing in the colonial diary. While the local narrative highlights Wimalasurendra's prominent role in developing Schemes A and B (e.g. Rider, Sessional Papers XIX of 1929), the colonial narrative, on the contrary, features the interventions and the recommendations of foreign experts<sup>54</sup> as decisive steps that decided the final shape of the Hydro Scheme (e.g. Lynn 1931). According to the local narrative the superior Scheme B was proposed in June 1923 by Wimalasurendra alone. Scheme B which was highly commended by Evan Parry, the late Chief Electrical Engineer to the Government of New Zealand, for its technical superiority and better economic feasibility (Government Electrical Undertakings 1929) went through slight modifications before approval by the Legislative Council on 24th January 1924<sup>55</sup>.

### **2.3 Hydro electric politics**

Another interesting contrast between the two narratives becomes apparent when the reasons for the delay in construction are discussed. The first narrative avoids discussion by just attributing it to 'various reasons' without further explanation (see Phillips 1981) or just refers to the 'unsatisfactory position' with regard to the status of the Scheme (see Lynn 1931). The second narrative, however, adds clarity to the 'mystery'. While some describe the delay within a framework of a personal conflict between Rylands and Wimalasurendra or between the white colonial government and Wimalasurendra, others point to a larger picture of institutionalised racism at work in the government service at that time. Wimalasurendra took it even further to position the delay in a discourse on the business and economic interests of the British imperialist project.

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<sup>54</sup> Experts involved in the process were J. W. Meares (Electrical Adviser to the Government of India), F. Bolton (representative of Consulting Engineers), A. H. Preece (representative of Consulting Engineers) and Evan Parry (late Chief Electrical Engineer to the New Zealand Government).

<sup>55</sup> For more details see the section on "Hydro Electric Investigations and Work" by D. J. Wimalasurendra in: Hydro Electric Investigations and work in: Public Works - Part V of Administration Reports – 1923.

### 2.3.1 Rylands and the colonial government

While serving in the civil engineering section of the Public Works Department Wimalasurendra made proposals to develop hydro electricity, a subject that came under Rylands' purview and the proposals were not to his liking. According to this narrative the eighteen years of Rylands' service as Electrical Engineer of the PWD were ordinary ones (Wickremaarachchi 2011h). This conflict was displayed in public in 1918 during the discussion time following Wimalasurendra's speech at the Engineering Association of Ceylon. Rylands boycotted Wimalasurendra's presentation and a note he sent questioning and undermining the findings presented in the paper was read by the chair of the session (Wimalasurendra 1918). According to this narrative even the Sri Lankan members of the Association either boycotted the event (Jayasekara 1982) or at least did not participate in the discussion if they were in the audience<sup>56</sup> (Wimalasurendra 1918). Rylands tried his best to show that the Hydro Electric Scheme proposed by Wimalasurendra was not realistic<sup>57</sup>. According to Rylands, Wimalasurendra exaggerated the actually available potential<sup>58</sup> (Wimalasurendra 1918). Hostility against Wimalasurendra was not confined to the Hydro Electric Scheme and the problems came not only from Rylands. When civil construction work on the Scheme started at last in 1924, Wimalasurendra found to his surprise that he was by-passed and not given any responsibility. As a person who had been involved in the hydro Electric Scheme from the very outset and who had developed designs and drawings of the Scheme, and being a Chartered Civil Engineer and a Chartered Electrical Engineer he had expected to be in charge of the project. The responsibility of the project was handed over instead, to B. A. R. Hughes, an engineer much junior to Wimalasurendra (Arumugam 2012, p.42). The colonial government is also said to have called for explanations from Wimalasurendra for producing sample plates and cups manufactured using a locally available variety of sand, in an attempt to push the government to establish an industry to produce ceramic-ware using local resources (Jayasekara 1982). Wimalasurendra's proposal to expand the

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<sup>56</sup> All those who have contributed to the discussion were British engineers (Wimalasurendra 1918).

<sup>57</sup> Rylands was proven wrong later with further studies conducted to estimate the overall potential.

<sup>58</sup> Wimalasurendra's estimate of 200,000 of horse power (150MW) from the island out of which 60,000 horse power (45MW) from the Aberdeen-Laxapana, itself was rejected by Rylands as a gross overestimate. For him the overall potential of electricity that could be generated from the island was just 25,200 horse power (18.9MW) and the power that could be generated from both the Aberdeen and Laxapana Falls was 5000 horse power (3.75MW). Rylands' letter dated 3rd April 1918, just a day ahead of Wimalasurendra's presentation, that was sent to the Engineering Association of Ceylon and read during the question time is a testimony to his dislike towards Wimalasurendra. While excusing himself for not being able to present at the day of the presentation as a result of a "severe chill" caused while "out motoring", Rylands disagreed with estimates produced by Wimalasurendra by arguing that the storage of water used for electricity generation vary considerably "at the height of the dry seasons". Rylands' estimates were far lower than Wimalasurendra's with an overall capacity of 25,200 horse power with the following breakdown: Mahaweliganga (18,500 horse power), Talawakelle (1,700 horse power), Aberdeen Falls (1,500 horse power), Laxapana Falls (3,500 horse power). While arguing that his estimates were based on records kept for several years by the PWD, the Department of Irrigation and the Survey Department in addition to the actual measurements done by himself, Wimalasurendra questioned in return the "scientific" basis of Rylands' claims (Wimalasurendra 1918).

Nuwaraeliya power station in 1912 was initially rejected by the District Engineer from England on the basis that it was not technically sound and the tunnel suggested would cause deaths during construction (Jayasekara 1982)<sup>59</sup>. Another theory forwarded by English engineers was that Wimalasurendra's proposals for generating hydro electricity by building dams across rivers would result in floods (Wickremaarachchi 2012a). It is said that the sceptics from among the engineers of the PWD, particularly those who were superiors, ridiculed his plans by calling them "journeys to the realms of fantasy" (Goonetilleke 1976)<sup>60</sup>.

The Sri Lankan members of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to investigate reasons that halted construction in 1927 went a step further and observed that racism had led to the discrimination of talented Sri Lankans and the promotion of an unqualified British workforce, instead. While referring to the broken promise given by the government to the Legislative Council to appoint Wimalasurendra to "be entirely in charge" of the technical work of the Department of Electrical Undertakings, the group of Sri Lankan members held that "it is not unlikely that racial considerations were responsible for the circumstances which led the Government to make its decision" (Rider, Sessional Paper XIX of 1929, p. 45).

Before moving into a discussion to position the Hydro Electric Scheme within the broader context of the British imperialist project as Wimalasurendra had attempted to do during his tenure as a member of the State Council, it is useful to introduce two more actors who had stakes in the Scheme; Boustead Brothers - the company that had the monopoly of supplying electricity till the Hydro Electric Scheme became operational in the mid twentieth century, and the Consulting Engineers who looked after the financial and commercial interests of the United Kingdom in all the colonies and hence played a role in commenting on designs and estimates of the Scheme provided by the PWD.

### **2.3.2 Boustead Brothers and Consulting Engineers**

Boustead Brothers generated electricity using fossil fuel and coal and had strong business interests that would be undermined by the Hydro Electric Scheme. As the only supplier of electricity it was the main force behind the economic activities of Ceylon by the end of nineteenth century and the first part of

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<sup>59</sup> This task according the English District Engineer was to complete without any injuries to the labour force (Jayasekara 1982).

<sup>60</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, the English science fiction writer and an honorary citizen of Sri Lanka, expressed his frustration over the actions of some of his own fellow countrymen who worked against Wimalasurendra. He considered Sri Lanka to be fortunate to have such valuable natural resources and people like Wimalasurendra who understood the value of them (Jayasekara 1982).

twentieth century<sup>61</sup>. Services of the company started with the provision of electricity for lighting in the city of Colombo, and were extended rapidly by 1899 to operating an electric tram service, also within the city of Colombo. With the gradual increase in demand for electricity in Ceylon and with the emerging necessity to systematise operations, a new company, Colombo Electric Tramways and Lighting Company Ltd., was established in England, with Boustead Brothers continuing to act as the Ceylonese agent. Boustead Brothers had monopoly powers and a ruthless administration by a majority English staff, and was seen as a company interested only in maximum profits when it came to electricity sales and in the operation of the tram service<sup>62</sup> (Wickramaarchchi 2011c; 2011d; 2011e; 2011f; 2012b). By 1924 the price for electricity provided by Boustead Brothers was the highest in the region. The cost of a unit of electricity in Ceylon was 50 cents when the cost of the same in Kuala Lumpur was 20 cents, in Singapore 25-30 cents, in Bombay 12 cents and in Hong Kong 18 cents (Administration Report 1924, p.23; Wickremaarachchi 2012b). The offer by the Hydro Electric Scheme to produce a unit of electricity for 2.5 cents and to sell a unit at 2.75 cents was obviously a threat to the business interests of the company. Boustead Brothers' profit-making capability and ability to get things done was echoed in the process of negotiations conducted by the Government to buy the whole company, except for the tram service. The transaction, which ended up in favour of Boustead Brothers, saw the Sub-Committee appointed in 1928 by the Select Committee of Legislative Council to look into the issues related to the Hydro Electric Scheme note that the company not only "(made) huge profits from its monopoly but when it was threatened with extinction by competition with Government, negotiated very cleverly with its competitor to sell its own undertaking for a very large figure"<sup>63</sup>. The Committee was "thus of opinion that the purchase of the Colombo Electric Tramway and Lighting Company's Plant and Distribution

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<sup>61</sup> Boustead Brothers was registered in Britain in 1891 under United Planters' Company of Ceylon Ltd. With a ten year agreement signed in 1895 with the Ceylonese Government that was extended again and again, Boustead Brothers catered for the electricity requirements of the city of Colombo and outstations (Wickremaarachchi 2011c; 2011d).

<sup>62</sup> There was a regular flow of public complaints against the company. The Mayor of the city of Colombo was criticized by members of the Colombo Urban Council for special favours granted to Boustead Brothers. Disagreements and debates occurred among the lawyers of the urban council, members of chambers of commerce and staff of the telegraph department regarding the activities of Boustead Brothers. The exploitation of tram workers by the company resulted in workers getting organised against the administration. The Ceylon Workers Union led by A. E. Goonasinghe was capable of leading tram workers of the Colombo Electric Tramways and Lighting Company in a strike action in 1929. The Administration of the company rejected the main demand by workers for a higher salary. The effort to suppress the strike by tram workers resulted in the public being provoked to set fire to the Maradana Police Station and five deaths (Wickremaarachchi 2011d; 2011e; 2011f).

<sup>63</sup> Against the offer by the government in 1927 to buy the generation plant and the distribution system for a cost of 150,000 pounds in stages, Boustead Brothers made two alternative offers either to sell for 280,000 pounds as from 1st July 1927 or to sell for 240,000 pounds as from 1st January 1928. The attempt by the Government to go with the first offer and buy both systems from 1st July 1927 for a cost of 250,000 pounds had failed, resulting after further negotiation in the purchase of the plant and the distribution system by the Government at a cost of 245,000 from 1st January 1928, an amount exceeding by 5000 pounds the company's earlier offer.

System has been a great loss to the country without any real compensatory gain"<sup>64</sup> (Rider, Sessional Paper XIX of 1929, p. 44).

The question of whether the Consulting Engineers had business interests in favour of or against the Hydro Electric Scheme has no straightforward answer. Their opinion, however, had a strong impact on the survival of the Scheme as a project under construction. Consulting Engineers were appointed by the Crown Agents whose duties included the preparation of designs, the giving advice on large public works, the preparation of specifications and the purchase and inspection of stores. The firm Preece, Cardew and Rider (PCR) was the Consulting Engineers employed by the Crown Agents on electrical and mechanical subjects. Preece, Cardew and Riders' consultancy services were obtained for all matters related to electrical and mechanical works conducted by the PWD. Overall guidance of all affairs of the Hydro Electric Scheme was considered a part of their job. The opinion expressed by the above mentioned Sub-Committee of the Legislative Council on the conduct of Consulting Engineers provides material to position the interests of PCR within the overall scheme of colonial interests in the colony. The team of local Legislative Councillors questioned the Consulting Engineers on two areas when the Hydro Electric Scheme ran into crisis in 1927: neglecting the general advisory role expected to be played by the Consulting Engineers in the operation of the Scheme; and earning commissions based on an agreement that works against the interests of the Ceylonese<sup>65</sup>. The three point five percent commission they received for all consultancy work conducted in relation to the Hydro Electric Scheme can be seen as a motivation for the Consulting Engineers to see that the Scheme succeeded<sup>66</sup> (Rider, Sessional Paper XIX of 1929).

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<sup>64</sup> In addition to securing a higher price the company was also successful in reaching with the Government a twenty one year agreement to supply electricity for the working of the tramway system at a rate of 5 cents per unit while the price of generating a unit remained between 11 and 12 cents.

<sup>65</sup> The issue of the negligence in their role as consultants surfaced when Consulting Engineers disclaimed the responsibility for civil construction work that ran into trouble resulting in work being stopped in May 1927. Legislative Councilors of the Committee were of the opinion that that "it was all along understood, until the execution of the Scheme was known to be in difficulties, that the Consulting Engineers had to "co-ordinate" the various sections of the Scheme "carry out inspection" and were to do "advisory work generally in connection with the Scheme". During four visits to the site during construction (from April 1924 to May 1927) the Consulting Engineers were said to make no indication that civil engineering work was not being carried out satisfactorily, but extended consent with deviations to the original plans made by Wimalasurendra. According to the members of the Committee "it was expressly stipulated that they should pay periodical visits and satisfy themselves that the work as a whole was proceeding satisfactorily" and by not doing so "have failed in this duty and have thus become responsible for not giving the country a timely warning" and hence are "severely to blame for the present failure" (Rider, Sessional Paper XIX of 1929).

<sup>66</sup> The higher the estimate for which Consulting Engineers looked at and provided opinion, the higher the commission they received. In 1929, members of the Legislative Council were critical of this arrangement of providing commission based merely on the size of the estimate for which Consulting Engineers were supposed to provide opinion. They recommended that special care to be taken "to see to it that the remuneration of the Consulting Engineers is certain, definite, exact and commensurate

### 2.3.3 'Big Business': Business interests of the British Empire

By the time Wimalasurendra reached mid-career as a member of the State Council he attempted to define the grand alliance that worked against the Hydro Electric Scheme that went beyond racial biases and the business interests of the immediate stakeholders. For him the cause of delay was linked directly to the business and economic interests of the British colonial State. Protecting the business interests of the British Empire by not allowing competitors to emerge was a common policy adopted in colonies, in general. The proposal to produce energy mass scale (i.e. power alcohol) using molasses, a by-product of the Indian sugar industry and considered till then as a waste product, faced a similar fate as that of the Hydro Electric Scheme (Nehru 1946). In a series of speeches made at the State Council, especially during 1933 and 1934, Wimalasurendra identified the broad alliance that worked against the Hydro Electric Scheme. He used different names at times to identify this alliance; "Big Business"<sup>67</sup>, "Oil and Coal Combine"<sup>68</sup>, "Almighty Oil Interests"<sup>69</sup>, "Big Business and Alien Combines"<sup>70</sup>, "Imperialistic Element"<sup>71</sup>, "Big Business Element"<sup>72</sup> and "Big Business Party"<sup>73</sup>. While critiquing the broader alliance he referred at different times to different agents who represented different aspects of the overall business interests of the British colonials. He was referring specifically to the oil and coal business interests of the British Empire which were equivalent to annual sales of nine million rupees and which would be under threat if the Hydro Electric Scheme succeeded. While employing delaying tactics, the colonial government tried secretly to sell the partly constructed Hydro Electric Scheme at a deflated price to a British company when the demand by the locals to recommence construction grew. In August 1933 Wimalasurendra named the Whitehall Securities Corporation as a symbol of 'Big Business' which had made a bid to buy the Hydro Electric Scheme for a "mere song"<sup>74</sup>, but failed as a result of the combined effort of a few

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with the duties or responsibilities which they may be called upon to perform or discharge". This comment was made in reference to the commission of Rs. 175,000 the Consulting Engineers received for the Kolonnawa Plant and for the Colombo New Distribution System, over and above the commission of Rs. 240,000 stipulated for the Hydro Electric Scheme B, Stage 1. It is said by the members of the Legislative Council that "the only service that the Consulting Engineers had to perform in order to become entitled to the commission of the New Distribution System considered in approving with very slight modifications indeed, the plans prepared by the PWD; and even if the modifications were not made it was unlikely that any serious consequences would have occurred". The broader issue that was under investigation by the members of the Council was the high expenditure made towards the Hydro Electric Scheme, that ultimately resulted in the suspension of construction in 1927.

<sup>67</sup> State Council debates on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1933 (Wimalasurendra 1933b, p.1662)

<sup>68</sup> State Council debates on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1934 (Wimalasurendra 1934a, p.1161)

<sup>69</sup> State Council debates on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1934 (Ibid, p.1162)

<sup>70</sup> State Council debates on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 1934 (Wimalasurendra 1934b, p.2372)

<sup>71</sup> State Council debates on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1934 (Wimalasurendra 1934c, p. 2910)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> State Council debates on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1934 (Wimalasurendra 1934c, p. 2913)

<sup>74</sup> State Council debates on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1933 (Wimalasurendra 1933b, p. 1662)

influential local members of the Legislative Council<sup>75</sup>. The offer to purchase which was kept confidential was smuggled out and made public by D. S. Senanayake at the Legislative Council, a process in which the colonial government suspected Wimalasurendra to have played a main role<sup>76</sup>. Striking similarities can be drawn once again between the Ceylonese and the Indian experiences. Tata, which in 1911 took the initiative of heavy industry by starting steel and iron works but languished later<sup>77</sup> was in danger of passing into the hands of British debenture holders till national pressure saved it (Nehru 1946, p. 353). Wimalasurendra continued to identify the Minister of Communications and Works as a local agent of Big Business on several occasions. Wimalasurendra used to have a long-drawn conflict with the Minister of Communication and Works for taking sides with the white members of the Executive Committee of Communications and Works and contributing to the delay in recommencement of the Scheme. Describing how the alliance of Big Business operated covertly he said that the "Big Business in this country realizes that [his - Wimalasurendra's] constant vigilance in the public interest has exposed their secret and crafty designs on the national assets of this country" and that it is "a vile conspiracy" hatched with the Minister<sup>78</sup>. Wimalasurendra included several other individuals and groups to this alliance of Big Business at the debate on the Electricity Board of Control in November 1934. He saw the proposal by the Executive Committee of Communications and Works to the State Council to form an 'independent' Electricity Board independent from the influence of the people's representatives of the Ceylonese, in other words the influence of the State Council, as another attempt by Big Business to nullify the influence exerted by the local members of the State Council to push for an early recommencement of the hydro scheme and to keep the scheme in the hands of Ceylonese as a national asset. The proposal was to transfer all matters handled by the Department of Electrical Undertakings including the Hydro Electric Scheme to the control of the proposed Electricity Board. The proposal, based on a recommendation of the Consulting Engineers, proposed that to "preserve the independence of the Board the Executive Committee of Communications and Works and the State Council itself should not be

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<sup>75</sup> In a letter written in 1962 to his grandson Haren Celvadurai, by Prof. C. Suntharalingam, a member of the Legislative Council, informs that the document was secreted away from the safe based on inside information provided by Oliver Goonetilleke, the Sri Lankan who held the post of the Colonial Auditor by then. Naming Wimalasurendra as the best Ceylonese electrical engineer in the island by then, Suntharalingam relates to his grandson that not many realised the trouble they (i.e. D. S. Senanayake, Oliver Goonetilleke and himself) took to save Ceylon's Hydro Electric resources from being made over to European companies and imperial concessionaires (The Suntharalingam Saga, 1964).

<sup>76</sup> According to Jayasekara (1982) the colonial government forced Wimalasurendra to send his papers of retirement suspecting the role he had played to obtain the confidential document and passing it to the hands of D. S. Senanayake (pp. 52, 56-57).

<sup>77</sup> When Tata Steel and Iron Works were in difficulties during the 1920s it was the Congress Party in the Central Legislature that pushed the colonial Government for an aid package (Nehru 1946, p. 403).

<sup>78</sup> State Council debates on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 1934 (Wimalasurendra 1934b, p. 2372)

represented on the Board"<sup>79</sup>. The opinion given by the Consulting Engineers recommending an 'independent' Board was based on incorrect information, argued Wimalasurendra, and therefore indicated a role played by Consulting Engineers themselves in support of Big Business<sup>80</sup>. He then named the British members of the Executive Committee of Communications and Works along with the Minister as members of the Imperialistic or Big Business Element, going on to say it was well known in the country<sup>81</sup>. In the same debate he named two more important agents of Big Business, the colonial government and the British officials. Wimalasurendra attributed the incompetency in handling the Hydro Electric Scheme to the Government and its officials saying that he could "quote chapter and verse to show that it was the Government officers who bungled it" (Wimalasurendra 1934c, p. 2917). Wimalasurendra exposed another element of Big Business during the debate on "The Appropriation Ordinance" in September 1934. It was when he referred to the sale of electricity by the Government to Boustead Brothers in bulk at a cheap rate while selling to the general public at a much higher rate. "When Big Business wanted current [electricity] in lump, it has given at a cheap rate to enable them to show bigger profits to their shareholders, while the poor man who has to pay his hard-earned cash has been mulcted to accommodate Big Business by charging him such a high rate as forty cents per unit for lighting", he said (Wimalasurendra 1934b, p.2375). However, Wimalasurendra's main attack against Big Business was his lengthy speech at the debate on "Diesel Train Units" in 1934 where he spoke at length against the proposal by the Minister of Communications and Works to import three diesel electric trains. Comparing in detail the three technologies, steam engines (fuelled by coal), diesel-electric engines (fuelled by diesel to generate electricity to drive the engine) and electric engines (driven by hydro electricity), and arguing in favour of the cheapest option, electric engines driven by hydro electricity, he saw no point in importing diesel electric trains at a huge cost if the Hydro Electric Scheme could start producing electricity in four or five years time and the railway system could be electrified thereafter to run trains using hydro electricity. According to him the proposal for diesel electric trains represented the interests of Big Business. By warning that the "oil and coal combine that is running amok in [the]

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<sup>79</sup> State Council debates on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1934 (Wimalasurendra 1934c, p. 2913)

<sup>80</sup> Consulting Engineers recommended that the Electricity Board of Control of Ceylon should follow the example of such other Boards in the world and took the Ontario Commission and the Nova Scotia Power Board as two cases to suggest that the Ceylonese Board should also be independent from the influence of the State Councils. However, Wimalasurendra pointed out that both the Ontario Commission and the Nova Scotia Power Board were represented by the members of State Councils of the respective States and hence labelling the opinion of the Consulting Engineers as an attempt in favour of Big Business to misguide the members of the State Council (Ibid, p. 2915).

<sup>81</sup> The four to one vote taken at the Executive Committee of Communications and Works to forward the proposal for an independent Board was hurriedly taken on a date where out of the eight members, three who opposed this proposal were absent. Wimalasurendra saw this move to be engineered by the members representing the Big Business in the Executive Committee (Ibid, p. 2910).



country.. [was] trying to frustrate [the] attempt to develop the Laxapana water power", Wimalasurendra concluded his speech by suggesting, "let the representatives of the people bear firmly in mind that on no account should they sacrifice [their] invaluable national asset of cheap water power on the altar of the Moloch of the Almighty Oil Interests". By referring to the equivalent case of power alcohol in India, Nehru (1946) went on to identify the immediate agent of the 'Big Business', the Burmah Oil Company, the Scottish oil business founded to develop oil fields in the Indian subcontinent<sup>82</sup>. The speech by Wimalasurendra generated interest among members of the State Council<sup>83</sup> and received wide publicity in print media the following day<sup>84</sup>.

The Hydro Electric Scheme, hence, symbolised the desire for industrialisation and development and also the collective frustration and anger against the colonial government which remained an obstacle to the vision of a developmental nation. Shifting priorities of 'Big Business' were recorded in 1940s allowing the British Empire to relax its policy. It was only in 1941, in the third year of the Second World War and the year in which Japanese conquest of Burma resulted in cutting off oil supplies from Burma to India, that permission was granted at last to produce power alcohol (ibid, p. 403). This was exactly the time during which (i.e. 1945) proper construction of the Hydro Electric Scheme was restarted, indicating most probably that the same business interests of Empire were at play in both colonies.

Protectionism and securing the interests of "Big Business" were not confined to energy. Ensuring the continuous supply of raw material from colonies under British occupation on the one hand and using them as markets for England's industrial goods on the other, were the two sides of the imperial strategy. The British market was not fully open for products from the colonies while the market in the colonies was opened to products from industrialized Britain. India provides a good case to understand the wide ranging interests of "Big Business". According to the Cambridge Economic History of India, "interested not in India's financial and industrial development but in Britain's, the colonial government .... followed policies from which British industry and financial institutions were the primary beneficiaries" (Hurd

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<sup>82</sup> See <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/burmah-castrol-plc-history/>

<sup>83</sup> When Wimalasurendra concluded his speech declaring that the Oil and the Coal Combine was behind the scheme to import diesel electric engines, A. E. Goonesinha, the prominent trade unionist, was reported to respond by saying "schemes behind schemes", referring to the scheme of the Big Business representing oil interests of the colonial Government to import diesel electric engines at a time the Hydro Electric Scheme, when completed, promised electrification of the railway system. E. W. Perera named the agents of Big Business as the "Capital Committee". G. E. de Silva communicated his appreciation by saying that "the honorable member for Ratnapura has adduced very important arguments which the Minister might take into consideration" (Wimalasurendra 1934a, pp. 1161-1162).

<sup>84</sup> State Council debates were reported in daily newspapers the following day. G. E. de Silva reminded his colleagues of this fact when he told the Council at the end of Wimalasurendra's speech that the members who were absent and were unable to listen to Wimalasurendra could still go through his arguments published in newspaper the next day (Wimalasurendra 1934a, p.1162).

1989[1983], p. 749). Even though the Indian railway workshops had proved the capability of manufacturing competitively-priced locomotives, for example, the number manufactured in India from 1865 to 1941 was just seven hundred in comparison to the twelve thousand locomotives exported by British firms to India (Ibid). The plans by the Tata Iron and Steel Works to manufacture locomotives locally couldn't be carried out as a result of the colonial government's patronage of British locomotives, observed Nehru (1946, p. 410). He lists a number of possible industrial activities that were affected. Pre-war proposals to manufacture locomotives, railway cars, motor trucks and armoured vehicles were turned down by the colonial government (p. 411). The wartime proposals by the Indians to produce vaccines, medicines and drugs by Indian institutions at a much smaller cost when imports from Germany stopped, too were turned down by the colonial government on the grounds that very urgent medicines could be obtained through Imperial Chemical Industries (p. 412).

#### **2.4 The developmental nation: the Ceylonese case**

The lack of scholarly focus on the Hydro Electric Scheme, a project which was instrumental in mobilising the imagination of Ceylonese for a new future, has resulted in the history of the early twentieth century Ceylon as documented so far, being incomplete. The role it played as a site which cultivated anti-imperial sentiments among a cross section of the Ceylonese population as discussed above, as well as a terrain which helped mobilise the imagination of the Ceylonese for a Ceylonese developmental state as discussed below, is therefore missing. The absence of the Hydro Electric Scheme from the history of early twentieth century Ceylon pushes one to treat contributions made by Marcus Fernando, Anagarika Dharmapala and Cumaratunga Munidasa to canvass for an industrially advanced Ceylon as isolated incidences and not as steps of a process that built up with time<sup>85</sup>. While the ground was in preparation for an ethno nationalist state, the site of the Hydro Electric Scheme had created a new space open to form a developmental state. How the discourse on developmental nationalism emerged around the Hydro Electric Scheme, spread and confronted resistance within a broader socio-political-economic context is discussed below.

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<sup>85</sup> As it is discussed in the rest of this Chapter, both Marcus Fernando and Cumaratunga Munidasa were influenced by the ideas forwarded by Wimalasurendra. The initial ideas of industrialization presented on a ground of Sinhala nationalism for example by Dharmapala, seems to have transformed into a clear narrative of developmental nationalism by 1920s and 1930s, thanks to the contributions made by Wimalasurendra.

### 2.4.1 Background: Early twentieth century Ceylon

The early part of the twentieth century was marked by rifts among different groups and communities for social, political and economic power (De Silva 1973). Social organisation governed by divisions based on classes<sup>86</sup>, castes<sup>87</sup>, ethnicities<sup>88</sup>, religions<sup>89</sup> and regions<sup>90</sup> is identified by Gunasinghe (2011) as a characteristic common to the entire South Asian region (p. 23). It was a time of uncertainty as well as a time of opportunity. The power play among these groups decided the nature of the Ceylonese state to be formed after independence and the features of Ceylonese nationalism that were to emerge. The kinds of socio-political movements that emerged in Ceylon and the kinds that did not, were defined to a great extent by the alliances and the conflicts among different caste and class groups on the one hand and by the ways in which the Ceylonese elite and the non-elites responded to the agenda of British colonials, on the other. The brief description below on "caste and class landscape" and "socio-political movements" is confined to the exploration of the fate of the Ceylonese discourse on developmental nationalism. The low caste background of Wimalasurendra makes the discourse on caste especially relevant.

#### 2.4.1.1 Caste and class landscape

Opportunities offered by the colonial economy and by certain caste groups underscore the instability of the hierarchical caste system that was in place<sup>91</sup> where Govigama was considered superior in comparison to castes such as Karava, Salagama and Durava. Navandanna, the caste Wimalasurendra belonged to, was considered one of the inferior castes. The accumulation of economic and political power by the elites of the Karava caste in comparison to the elites of Govigama and hence the threat posed to the superiority of the traditionally powerful Govigama elites who were not willing to surrender its position of advantage and its widely acknowledged caste primacy makes the early part of the

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<sup>86</sup> Class division between the elites of the traditional land owning class and the emerging capitalist class who responded fast to the opportunities created by the colonial economy was one of the prominent frictions.

<sup>87</sup> Division between the Govigama caste at the top of the caste hierarchy and the other castes that occupied positions below can be taken as an example.

<sup>88</sup> Divisions were among Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

<sup>89</sup> Divisions were among Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Islamists.

<sup>90</sup> The rift between the elites of the upcountry Sinhalese and the low country Sinhalese, even though as not as stark as the caste rift, went to the extent of Kandyan elite demanding in 1927, in the process of constitutional reforms, a federal state for the hilly region in the middle of the island (De Silva 1973). Sinhala elite living in the low country in the coastal regions of the island who were familiar and hence more at ease with the colonial rule from the times of Portuguese and Dutch had easy access to land and business opportunities opened in the hill country when the Sinhala Kingdom at the central hills fell much later to the British in the 19th century.

<sup>91</sup> Friction among castes during the British Rule is well documented by a range of authors such as Ryan (1953); Pieris (1956); Singer (1964); Jiggins (1979); De Silva (1998); Rogers (2004a; 2004b); Wickramasinghe (2014a); Gunasinghe (2007); Jayawardena (2007); Roberts (2007); Silva et al (2009), etc..

twentieth century look like a period governed by a battle between the elites of the Govigamas and Karavas (Roberts 2007, p.133). The Karava elite held ownership of most plantations controlled by Sinhalese and had a strong representation at the Legislative Council by the 1920s<sup>92</sup>. This trend, however, changed with the extension of territorial representation and the introduction of universal suffrage in 1931 bringing majority Govigama back in to dominance in the political sphere (Jayawardena 2007, p. 345; Roberts 2007). For Jayawardena (2007) this early twentieth century phenomenon was in fact a clash between classes rather than castes. Jayawardena argues though it expressed itself in terms of caste and as a rivalry between the elites of Govigama and Karava, it had features that can be better understood as arising from the rivalry between two sections of the Ceylonese bourgeoisie - the old land owning rich (mainly Govigama) and the new-rich merchant capitalists (heavily Karava but including persons of all the major caste groups) (p. 168-9). While capitalism in Europe emerged through primitive accumulation based on commerce and colonial plunder and subsequent investment in strengthening industries, the Ceylonese bourgeoisie, according to Jayawardena (2007), acquired wealth through commercial opportunities made available by the colonial economy (p. xviii). The wealth of the newly rich, earned as renters of different products and services such as paddy, arrack, fish, ferry, gaming, etc. of which arrack renting was by far the most lucrative, was invested quickly in plantations, mines, urban property and the education of the next generations (p. xxii). The relative growth of capitalism the island witnessed resulted in the formation of a class-based society (i.e. emergence of a bourgeoisie, a petty bourgeoisie and a working class) (Gunasinghe 2011, p. 25). Ceylon under colonial rule was seen as an era of transition from a feudal to a capitalist society<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> The restricted voting rights favoured the election of Karava members and Karava presence at the Council was further strengthened by Governor's choice of nominated members (Jayawardena 2007, p. 345; Roberts 2007). This space that was open for the elites of non-Govigama castes for social, economic and political upward mobility had also led a trend of caste campaigns both by the Govigama and non-Govigama caste lobbies to rewrite caste histories to invent high caste status. A list of caste pamphlets and caste literature during 1864-1930 is given in Appendix 3 of Roberts (2007). The "Kara-Goi" debate was one such controversy that occurred between the Govigama and the Karava castes.

<sup>93</sup> Roberts (2007) and Jayawardena (2007) brought strong cases representing the diametrically opposite positions of the debate on the decisiveness of caste versus class. Emphasizing the primacy of caste dimension Roberts was of the opinion that "it would be erroneous to regard the extension of the capitalist mode of production in British times as the root of this social competition". Explaining the nature of caste consciousness spread widely across the Ceylonese society Roberts (2007) considered it to be "equally erroneous to treat it as a purely elite encounter, far removed from the concerns of the 'simple villager'". However, presenting a strong case on how the new rich Govigamas who were considered by the old rich from the same caste as "nobodies", became "somebodies" to join the emerging bourgeoisie of Ceylon, Jayawardena (2007) states that "in order to understand the process of historical change, [it is needed] to turn the caste issues on its head, recognizing the rise of bourgeoisie as a key event of the nineteenth [and the twentieth] century and the consequent shifts in the caste system as secondary" (p. 170). "With the spread of capitalism, caste, which had been openly acknowledged in the public sphere as an accepted form of occupational differentiation and hierarchy, retreated to the private domain where it survived", observed Jayawardena (2007, p. xxxiv). British approach towards caste to consider caste as an expression of backwardness of people of the colonies and to regard caste with abhorrence played a more important role in causing this retreat (Roberts 2007, p. 141).

According to Gunasinghe, both caste and class, continued to exist and distort each other through interpenetration, resulting in a bourgeoisie still riddled with caste distinctions and caste groups further stratified internally along class lines (Jayawardena 2007, p. 170).

#### **2.4.1.2 Socio-political movements**

This time span can best be seen as an important stretch of Ceylonese history where different socio political movements of anti-colonial nature were in action, some taking a more radical position and others of more collaborative nature and some at a mature stage and others just emerging. The degree of influence of these agitations decided the ultimate shape of the nationalism and the nation-state we see today. At the Legislative Council level (till 1931) and from then onwards at the State Council level were the campaigns for constitutional reforms<sup>94</sup>. Campaigns launched mainly by the new rich were of limited scope and were for greater political representation for locals, for equal opportunities for the emergent classes led by the elites of the Karava caste and for limited social reforms (Jayawardena 2007, p.321). The campaign for reforms was not a united front against the British government as signified by conflicts among castes and classes. One of the ongoing battles was for the Sinhalese seat in the Legislative Council between the old rich and the new rich, where the rift began in 1878, and the new rich unsuccessfully fought for it each time the seat occupied by the old rich fell vacant in 1881, 1888, 1895, 1900 and 1905. The constitution underwent reforms only on a few occasions, for example in 1889<sup>95</sup>, in 1911-12<sup>96</sup> and in 1931<sup>97</sup>. In 1911-12 a limited franchise was introduced to elect a few members to the Legislative Council with a special slot to 'educated Ceylonese' which brought the rift between the old rich and the new rich to a new level. Reforms in 1931 which introduced the State Council to replace the previous Legislative Council brought important changes to the old constitution<sup>98</sup>. Campaigns for

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Public expression of caste, therefore, was against the refinement and sophistication the emerging bourgeoisie would like to display as a community of members from all castes.

<sup>94</sup> From the introduction of the Legislative Council in 1833 Ceylon had the most static constitution for the longest time hinting lack of agitation than agitation for reforms compared to other colonies of Britain (De Silva 2005).

<sup>95</sup> The Council of fifteen members consisted of nine senior government 'officials' and six 'unofficials' appointed by the Governor up until 1889 where two more additional 'unofficial' seats were created for Kandyans and Muslims in addition to the low-country Sinhalese (De Silva 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Under 1911-12 Crewe-McCallum reforms Legislative Council consisted of eleven officials to ten unofficials. Of the ten officials six were to be nominated to represent ethnic groups and four to be elected on a restrictive franchise of whom two Europeans, one Burger and one from 'educated Ceylonese' (Jayawardena 2007, p.334).

<sup>97</sup> By following the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission in 1927, a fifty six member State Council was established in 1931 with fifty elected members and six members nominated by the Governor. Election of the fifty members was done on the basis of universal suffrage where all men and women above the age of twenty one were allowed to vote (De Silva 2005; Jayawardena 2007, pp. 345, 347).

<sup>98</sup> Even though the introduction of universal franchise to elect fifty out of fifty six members to the Council was a significant step towards democratizing governance, it was strongly contested by the up country Kandyan Sinhalese, minority castes (Specially, Karava, Salagama and Durava) and the ethnicities (Tamils in particular) who enjoyed broader representation at the Legislative

constitutional reforms didn't cross the boundaries of Legislative and State Councils and become a mass movement aiming at independence. Mass agitation, however, could be seen as a movement of Buddhist revival that took shape in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The movement didn't confront colonial occupation or the business interests of the colonizer head on, but challenged one of the secondary objectives of colonialism, the propagation of Protestant Christianity. Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) identify two sets of historical conditions that led to the formation of this movement (p.203). The Buddhist revival movement which Gombrich and Obeyesekere do not see as a revival of the same Buddhism that existed before the arrival of colonials, but as a transformed version, "Protestant Buddhism", they argue, emerged as a reaction to the activities of the missionaries of Protestant Christianity<sup>99</sup>. What went hand in hand with the movement of Buddhist agitation was the promotion of a new social morality based on the reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrinal values. Anagarika Dharmapala, who had a more radical approach in comparison to most of the political and social elite who were loyal to British at the time, was the leading figure who mixed social morality with Buddhist agitation and was hence instrumental in politicizing the movement (Jayawardena 2007, p. 270). Dharmapala contrasted Buddhist values with the moral failings of missionaries such as meat and alcohol consumption and lack of a norm against killing animals (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, pp. 212-13). This was the foundation on which the temperance movement was built up, the most significant nationalist agitation of the early twentieth century. It was sustained for a relatively long period of time, brought the elite and the masses together and received enthusiastic responses both in the towns and villages. The temperance movement reached its peak in the years 1903-05 and 1911-14 and faded away with the Sinhala Muslim riots where many of the leaders of the movement from the new rich class were murdered or died in imprisonment (De Silva 1973, p.382). The third agitation the island witnessed in the early twentieth century was the emergence of the labour movement through the organisation of trade unions. It started off in 1920s as a series of industrial disputes among the railway workers and then as a major strike in the Colombo harbour. A general strike swept the city of Colombo in February and March 1923 under the leadership of Ceylon Labour Union led by A. E. Goonesinghe (De Silva 1973, pp.403-404). The effort to suppress the strike by the workers of the Colombo Electric Tramways and Lighting Company in 1929 mentioned above, resulted in the public being provoked and setting fire to the

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Council so far (Jayawardena 2007; Roberts 2007; De Silva 2005). Universal suffrage, a tool that favours the simple criteria of majority representation brought low country Govigama Sinhalese to political power.

<sup>99</sup> Establishment of close contacts with the West in the form of arrival of modern knowledge, introduction of western type of education, spread of printing and the increased use of literacy and the rise of a Sinhala middle class and the embourgeoisement of the Sinhala society, the arrival of the conditions of modernity, is seen as the context that facilitated this movement, the emergence of Protestant Buddhism (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). Buddhist monks took the leadership in the Buddhist revival movement which was marked by famous debates between the Buddhist lobby and the Protestant lobby.

Maradana Police Station and also five deaths (Wickremaarachchi 2011d)<sup>100</sup>. The imagination of an industrialised Ceylon that contained roots of a Ceylonese nation and a Ceylonese developmental state also took shape during this same stretch of time.

#### **2.4.2 Developmental nationalism: from Marcus Fernando to Wimalasurendra<sup>101</sup>**

The need for industrialization and the necessity of introducing relevant infrastructure were under discussion in the early twentieth century, years before the possibility of tapping the potential of Aberdeen and Laxapana Falls was first discussed. At the election in 1911 for the newly introduced "educated Ceylonese seat" of the Legislative Council, Marcus Fernando, representing the Karava caste and the new rich, proposed in his manifesto a progressive programme to expand the railway network and improve facilities for industrial education. This is in contrast to the conventional proposals by his opponent Ponnambalam Ramanathan; tax reforms, increased salaries for headmen, and higher education facilities for the country. Even though Ramanathan, the choice of the Govigama elite and the old rich, won, Fernando's manifesto communicated the early roots of a shared desire for industrial development in Ceylon (Jayasekera 1970, p. 181-182 in Jayawardena 2007, p. 336). Marcus Fernando continued his campaign for industrialisation even after he was finally nominated to the Legislative Council in 1917 and re-nominated as an unofficial member to the reformed Legislative Council from 1920 to 1925 (Jayawardena 2007, p.337). Fernando, who closely followed contributions by Wimalasurendra on hydro electricity and sat as a member of the Industries Commission from 1916 to 1921, influenced the recommendations of the final report that was published in 1922 in favour of the Hydro Electric Scheme. With just four local members the Commission was over represented by British

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<sup>100</sup> De Silva (1973) introduced the two categories "constitutionalists" and "nationalists" to identify these trends discussed in this section: 'constitutionalists' who stood for a limited programme of political action which would leave undisturbed the structures introduced by the British; and 'nationalists' who went somewhat further and challenged the colonizer at cultural and religious fronts (p. 381). Constitutionalists who emphasized constitutional reforms as their main goal but avoided the building of mass movements to achieve the goal, tended to reconcile Ceylonese patriotism with loyalty to Britain (Ibid). While agitation by constitutionalists were confined mostly to action at the Legislative and the State Councils, agitations by nationalists even though they reached masses were also narrow in scope and not directed to confront head on the core trade interests of the colonial project and seek total independence. Instead the mobilization was for revival of Buddhism and Sinhala culture in the face of the threat posed by the religion and the culture of the colonizer.

<sup>101</sup> S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the third Prime Minister of Independent Ceylon and the pioneer of Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist politics, is not included in this discussion. He gave mixed signals on the subject of industrialisation as it was the case for many other issues (Manor 1989). While demanding "various other industries both agricultural and otherwise, must be proceeded with as fast as possible", he refers also to the need of avoiding "wasteful and uneconomic industrialisation" (Bandaranaike 1963, p. 460). His approach towards mechanisation was hostile at times. Accordingly, "the whole idea underlying the employment of machine is to do work with greater speed and efficiency that any human being, however skilled, could do it, to eliminate as far as possible that margin of error and inefficiency that is inherent in human nature", and "the vicious circle is indeed complete; the greater the production, the greater the unemployment, and the more unemployed they are, the less the buying power, and consequently the less the consumption, however cheap the good may be" (p. 563). The detailed proposal for the development of cottage industries presented by Bandaranaike during the early nineteen thirties was just an indication of the Gandhian phase of Bandaranaike's early career, according to Manor (1989, p. 95).

officials<sup>102</sup>. The Hydro Electric Scheme provided the ground Fernando was looking for to situate his proposal for industrialisation and identify steps in more concrete terms. Recommendations of the Industries Commission reflected the degree of appeal of Wimalasurendra's presentation at the Engineering Association of Ceylon to the Ceylonese political elite. Fernando was said to have "read the paper with interest" (Wimalasurendra 1974[1930]). While appreciating the contribution made by Wimalasurendra for the scheme to "utilize the waters of Laxapana and Aberdeen catchment area for electrical power purposes", the report of the Industries Commission under the subheading "Factory Industries" concludes that "it cannot be too strongly urged that if Ceylon is ever to become more than an agricultural country, hydro-electric power is absolutely essential". By arguing against the cost of importing fuel and raw material needed that would hamper industrial development the report goes on to declare that "there is hardly a single manufacturing industry which, if developed on a large scale, under existing conditions, could ever give promise of reasonable success". The Commission, however, expected an entirely different scenario for the development of Island's industries, provided the hydro electric scheme materialised and cheap and efficient power was at hand. The Commission's prediction on the development of industries such as spinning, weaving and chemicals for agricultural industries was based entirely on the implementation of the Hydro Electric Scheme (Industries Commission 1922). The proposal for train services worked by electricity is also an indication of the influence of Wimalasurendra's ideas presented in 1918 on the Commission.

The most influential campaigner in the early twentieth century who took the message of industrialisation beyond closed door forums to masses, however, was Anagarika Dharmapala, one of the leading figures of the Buddhist revival and the temperance movements. Dharmapala's call for industrialisation can be seen as the Ceylonese version of the Indian Swadeshi Movement which blossomed in Bengal in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of twentieth century and spread across India from Punjab in the North to Tamil Nadu in the South (Gandhi 1997 in Menon 2012, p. 47). Many similarities can be drawn between Dharmapala's vision for industrialisation and the philosophy of the Swadeshi campaign that was defined by a range of activities such as the promotion of swadeshi sales, fostering and revival of Indian crafts, starting of new industries based on modern technologies, floating of swadeshi banks and insurance companies, organisation of technical education and industrial research and boycotting British products (Sarkar 1973, pp. 92, 96, 125).

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<sup>102</sup> When the Commission was appointed in 1916 with R. E. Stubbs as the Chair four out of thirteen members were Ceylonese (K. Balasingham, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, H. L. de Mel and H. Marcus Fernando). By the time the Commission concluded work in 1921 with Joseph Pearson as the Chair the same four remained in the Commission.



Dharmapala launched a massive attack against the dependency mentality of Sinhalese, using examples to show how far the islanders were dependent on foreign products for their day-today survival and suggesting that "they must learn to stand on [their own] legs and not dependent on alien" (Guruge 1991, p.511).

"Rice, the staple food of the Sinhalese is imported from India, also our curry stuff. Pins, needles, ink, stationary, glassware, crockery, hardware, wearing apparel, shoes, hats, machinery, cutlery, cloths, umbrellas, bentwood, furniture etc., are all imported from abroad" (Guruge 1991, p.535).

During the early twentieth century Dharmapala proposed a broad programme for industrialisation even though his proposal was not properly formulated under the theme of industrialisation. He looked for the revival of the local industrial tradition that had collapsed as a result of the colonial economy, campaigned for a phase of industrialisation based on modern technology and asked for a network of industrial schools and colleges to be established to achieve the above task.

Dharmapala questioned the attitude of people who went for export replacements causing the local industry to collapse.

"We purchase Pears soap, and eat coconut biscuits manufactured by Huntley and Palmer, and sit in chairs made in Austria, drink the purified liquid known as tinned milk, manufactured somewhere near the South Pole, while our own cows are dying for want of fodder, and grazing grounds and our own pottery we have given up for enamel goods manufactured in distant Austria, and our own brass lamps we have melted, and are paying to purchase Hinks lamps which require a supply of fragile chimneys manufactured in Belgium! Our own weavers are starving and we are purchasing cloth manufactured elsewhere!" (Guruge 1991, pp. 509-510).

Even though Dharmapala had issues with the failings of morality of the colonizer, he looked towards the West and other industrialised countries for lessons on industrialisation as was exactly the case with the Indian Swadeshi Movement. According to Bate (2012) "swadeshi leaders formed a number of institutions to raise funds to send workers, students and researchers around the world either on study tours or to receive education in universities in Japan, Germany and California (p. 43). In his 1912 message to young men of Ceylon Dharmapala encouraged them go out and bring back knowledge needed to develop the island<sup>103</sup>.

"I would be good for you and for the country, if a thousand Sinhalese youths leave Ceylon for the United States, Japan, Germany, India, Hongkong, France and England to learn technical sciences and scientific agriculture, irrigation, and return to Ceylon to begin the work of national elevation" (Guruge 1991, p.512).

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<sup>103</sup> Dharmapala wrote this famous message "A Message to the Young Men of Ceylon" in 1912 as a pamphlet published in Calcutta (Jayawardena 2007, p.272).

His frustration about the state of affairs of the island in general was reflected also in his views on industrial education, which he treated as an integral and an important part of education in Ceylon.

"In Ceylon there are no technological schools, no manufacturing firms, no engineering college, no industrial schools, no agricultural training college, no weaving schools where textile industries are taught<sup>104</sup>.... The fees charged at the so-called Royal College, and other colleges are prohibitive indeed and the education the students get in these high schools is a sham. Nothing practical is taught in these schools and to get a higher technical education the Ceylon Government has to send Ceylonese youths to Poona, or Pusa or Madras"<sup>105</sup> (Guruge 1991, pp.532, 536).

A further indication of the spread of the discourse on industrialisation in the early twentieth century was the contribution made by Munidasa Cumaratunga, the leader of the Sinhala language movement, Hela Haula movement. Addressing a meeting in 1927 at the Ananda College, the school attended by Wimalasurendra himself, Cumaratunga declared that the only way to strengthen the national economy of Ceylon was to develop hydro power. Protesting against the colonial government's reluctance to allow the Hydro Power Scheme to go ahead, Cumaratunga, questioned what the meaning of the lives of colonised people would be if they were not allowed to produce electricity on their own using their own water resources (Sooriarachchi 2016). Cumaratunga reiterated the importance of industrial development in a number of editorials of the newspaper *Lak Mini Pahana* of which he was the editor. He found fault with Ceylonese for not taking the initiative to establish industries to produce the basic necessities of day-to-day life. His editorials criticised Ceylonese for not producing their own food, own cloths, own instruments and own vehicles<sup>106</sup>. In his editorial written on 30th April 1935 on "Guru Puraya" Cumaratunga by highlighting the importance of producing for consumption, named the era as the era of production. By going against the early twentieth century sentiments against alcohol, he campaigned for a well established alcohol industry. He saw mass scale production of alcohol from the abundantly available coconut as a key industry that must be promoted. Through this, he suggested that the island could save foreign currency spent to import alcohol and in addition, earn more by exporting<sup>107</sup>. Cumaratunga maintained a consistent interest in the completion of the scheme to produce hydro electricity and expressed his frustration over the delay in commencement in his editorials. He also

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<sup>104</sup> Writing to *Sinhala Bauddhaya* (Sinhala Buddhist) on the 9th October 1909 under the title "Education in Ceylon" Dharmapala expressed his frustration about the lack of opportunities for industrial education (Guruge 1991, p.512).

<sup>105</sup> This comment was made in an article written on "Waste Lands Ordinance" to *The Ceylon Nations* (Guruge 1991, pp. 532, 536).

<sup>106</sup> This critique was carried in editorials on "Ape daasa baaway" (Our Status of Slavery - 24th July 1934), on "Lankawe adyapanaya" (Education of Lanka - 19th February 1935) and on "Honda piliyama" (The Good Solution - 23rd April 1935).

<sup>107</sup> See for example editorials titled "Amadyapa Viyaparaya -1" (Temperance Movement - 1, 12th March 1935), "Amadyapa Viyaparaya - 2" (Temperance Movement - 2, 26th March 1935), "Ena Varshaye Aya Weya" (Next Year's Budget, 6th August 1935) and "Manthevaranaya" (Election).

continued to question the fate of islanders in a context where they were not permitted to produce their own hydro electricity<sup>108</sup>. Cumaratunga recorded his disappointment when funds were not allocated even in the 1935/36 budget to recommence work of the Hydro Electric Scheme<sup>109</sup> (Cumaratunga 2006). Even though it is not clear whether Dharmapala and Wimalasurendra were influenced by each other in imagining an industrialised Ceylon - the absence of cross references does not mean that they were not, the Hydro Electric Scheme did provide confidence to Fernando and Cumaratunga. Wimalasurendra and the Hydro Electric Scheme provided the solid foundation needed to coordinate these dispersed pre-1918 thoughts on industrialisation. Rhetorical claims for industrialization would have meant little without resources on the ground such as the Hydro Electric Scheme, to translate lofty aspirations into material form.

The comprehensive industrial development plan proposed by Wimalasurendra at various stages during the first half of the twentieth century at forums attended by engineers, at the State Council and at public meetings attracted the attention of the political elite at the national and regional levels, print media and the general public. Hydro electricity that could be generated by the Aberdeen-Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme<sup>110</sup> and the rest of the potential sites of the *Mahaweli* and *Kelani* rivers was the ground on which this development plan was constructed. The first intervention towards this was the presentation made to the Engineering Association of Ceylon in 1918. By formulating a comprehensive argument, the paper makes three proposals to improve the economics of power utilization: centralised power generation in bulk as against decentralised power generation by a number of small units; exploitation and development of extensive sources of water power available; and operating some sections of the Ceylonese railway system electrically, especially in the hill sections<sup>111</sup>. Based on records

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<sup>108</sup> Editorial titled "*Ape Daasa Bawaya*" (Our Status of Slavery, 24th July 1934)

<sup>109</sup> Editorial titled "*Ena Varshaye Aya Weya*" (Next year's Budget, 6th August 1935)

<sup>110</sup> The mismatch between the amount of power produced by the Scheme (75,000 horse power) and the demand for electricity in the island (only 40,000 horse power was predicted for the next ten years) was an unresolved debate from 1919 to 1922 (Industries Commission 1922). While those who favoured the Scheme invited conscious intervention to promote industrialisation using excess energy produced by hydro electricity, those who were not in favour expected business as usual and argued for a postponement till demand for electricity grew to match the supply by the Scheme, one day. The expected demand for electricity in Colombo after the introduction of hydro power was an ongoing debate even in 1929. The estimated demand of 8 million units in Colombo in 1929-30 was expected to increase to 23.5 million units by 1934-35 with the introduction of hydro electricity. It was said that "it is not much use trying to argue from the slow rate of growth of demand in Colombo in the past to the probable rate of demand in the future, in view of the fact that the firm which conducted the business before Government took it over did so with the sole object of maximizing profits and that in the pursuit of this policy stimulation of demand by reduction of price played no part" (In reference to the communication by Colonial Treasurer W. W. Woods to Colonial Secretary on 28th September 1929 in Ceylon Hydro Electric Scheme 1930).

<sup>111</sup> Section from Polgahawela to Bandarawela including the branch line from Kandy to Matale were the sections taken for discussion.

kept for several years by the Public Works Department, Department of Irrigation and the Survey Department and also based on actual measurements done by Wimalasurendra himself on the water flow of *Mahaweli* and *Kelani* river systems, he estimated a generation capacity of 200,000 horse power (150MW). His estimate of power that can be generated from Aberdeen - Laxapana system itself was around 60,000 horse powers (45MW) (Wimalasurendra 1918).

Even by 1930, the year in which Wimalasurendra retired after a long period at the PWD, his involvement with the Hydro Electric Scheme and his vision for an industrially developed nation was known and widely appreciated. Proposing a vote of thanks at the end of the public talk given by Wimalasurendra at the public meeting convened by the Galle Maha Jana Sabha in 1930, C. W. W. Kannangara, the prominent national leader who represented the Legislative Council and the State Council, said that "it was a great pleasure and a pride to see that the eminent engineer who hailed from Galle was trying to interest the people of his native town in an industrial renaissance". The *Ceylon Daily News* on 3rd December 1930 reported "loud applause" from the public when Kannangara continued to thank Wimalasurendra for devoting "his leisure to interest the people on the vast industrial possibilities of the Hydro Electric Scheme". Daily newspapers, *Ceylon Daily News* and *Morning Leader* played prominent roles in carrying his message of hydro electricity driven industrialisation to people (Jayasekara 1982). Wimalasurendra, himself, recognized the effectiveness of his campaign on the Hydro Electric Scheme and the industrial renaissance when he told the State Council that "the country now knows too much of the value of the Scheme to barter it away for a mess of pottage to big capital, and allow the people of this country to sink deeper and deeper into the mire of economic bondage" (Wimalasurendra 1933b, p. 1665).

As a member of the State Council and as a member of the Council's Executive Committee on Communications and Works, Wimalasurendra had a simple mission to which he was dedicated to the fullest; to push for the recommencement of the Hydro Electric Scheme that was halted and to broaden the imagination of an industrially developed Ceylon. He used every opportunity he received to express his opinion to campaign for his mission<sup>112</sup>. In his speeches he elaborated in detail the types of heavy industries Ceylon could develop, the need for an industrial development policy that could facilitate such a process, features of mechanisms that could be introduced to coordinate the implementation of the industrial policy proposed and the ways in which the technical labour force required for industrial

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<sup>112</sup> During 1931 to 1936 there were many occasions Wimalasurendra argued in favour of different dimensions of industrialisation. For example, on the 12th February 1932 and under the debate on Customs Tariff, Wimalasurendra argued in favour of increasing duty on imported tea chests and imported liquid fuel (Wimalasurendra 1932a, pp. 527-536).

development could be nurtured through technology training and education. As a part of the campaign he moved private motions at the State Council demanding a national policy for industrial development (Wimalasurendra 1935a, p. 1462). He spent time to devise mechanisms to facilitate a process of industrialisation. Contradicting the view of the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, P. Sundaram that the coordination of industrial development in Ceylon could be handled exclusively by the State Council Executive Committee on Labour, Industry and Commerce with the advice of the existing technical officers of the government when necessary, Wimalasurendra was of the opinion that the Executive Committee on Labour, Industry and Commerce alone was not capable of achieving this complicated task. Instead he proposed a special Industrial Research and Development Committee which required the cooperation of not just one but four Executive Committees of the Council: the Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce; the Committee of Education; the Committee of Communications and Works; and the Committee on Agriculture and Lands (Wimalasurendra 1932d, p. 2234; 1933c, pp. 2233-2239). The development of the labour force needed to take forward the industrialisation drive was an important dimension with which his mind was preoccupied. Wimalasurendra commented regularly on technical education and proposed ways to improve the quality and the standard of technical education in the island to suit the process of industrialisation. The preference was for a workforce that could deal with practical problems. He considered Bachelor of Science in Engineering education as a pure academic or scientific qualification and preferred application oriented technical education to be given at technical colleges as the foundation of industrial development of Ceylon. He was in favour of engineers who were "suitable for employment in the various departments to meet the various engineering requirements of the country" than "training candidates to pass the B.Sc (Engineering) examination of the London University" who, according to him, still have to undergo practical training for three to five years as an apprentice. According to him, the "great difference between scientific and technical instruction is that the former deals with the principles in the abstract without reference to their application, whilst the latter amplifies and applies the principles to a particular purpose, trade or industry". Wimalasurendra highlighted four principles based on which the technical education of the island should be moulded, which he borrowed from the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Technical Education 1881. These four principles highlighted his bias towards application oriented education: specialised technical education should include the teaching and application of principles of science or art connected with a trade or industry and the practical application of those principles; the object of the practical work or workshop instruction was to illustrate the practical application of the underlying theoretical principles to a trade or industry; those attending special technical classes should

be engaged in the occupation for which the classes were formed; technical teachers must have a wide practical experience and a sound knowledge of the scientific or the artistic principles underlying the trade or the industry (Wimalasurendra 1933a, pp. 1115-1118; 1935c, pp. 3218-19).

Wimalasurendra did not accept rural construction, the adoption of measures for increasing production from agriculture and from cottage and home industries in rural areas by co-operative effort of people, as the best way forward for colonies in the region. Rural construction, which was also known as rural development, rural regeneration, rural reconstruction, rural upliftment, etc., was a vision influenced by Gandhian thought and was influential in the island during 1930s and 1940s<sup>113</sup> (Seneviratne 1999, p. 56). In this sense Wimalasurendra deviated from the Gandhian thought by which the nationalist movements in the region were influenced at that time. Rural construction with a focus on agriculture and cottage industries was seen by him as a misunderstanding of the magnitude of task ahead of the colonies that were getting ready for independence from colonizers. With the expansion of the transport infrastructure and the plantation economy, the idea of a rural Ceylon was rapidly changing with urban population increasing more rapidly than the rural, argued Wimalasurendra (1935b, p. 2451).

The Hydro Electric Scheme provided the material ground for Wimalasurendra to come up with a comprehensive industrial development plan. At the 1930 meeting at the Galle Mahajana Sabha Wimalasurendra drew a brief sketch which included weaving, operating electricity driven trains and the manufacture of fertiliser, dyes, explosives, matches, soap, caustic potash, caustic soda, motor car tyres, coconut oil, etc. He, however, improved and nuanced this vision in the following years. Speeches made by Wimalasurendra at the State Council from 1931 to 1935 taken together provide a detailed account of these industries that could be developed in industrial Ceylon (See for example, Wimalasurendra 1932a; 1932c; 1932e; 1933a; 1933b; 1933c; 1933d; 1934c; 1935b). Some of these industries and industrial measures he identified as way back in 1930s have not been developed even now or were developed during the second half of the twentieth century, especially during the 1970s – many decades after other countries in the region had achieved industrialized status. Coconut palm and rubber plantations spread across many parts of the country and Wimalasurendra saw these as sources of raw material for many industries. Margarine, soap and lubricating oils were the products he envisioned being produced from

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<sup>113</sup> Conducting a discussion on the key role played by the monks from the Vidyodaya *pirivena*, one of the two seats of monastic learning in the city of Colombo, in promoting rural construction, Seneviratne (1999) describes how the concept evolved within the Ceylonese context. According to him Anagarika Dharmapala's economic programme was centred on the concept of rural regeneration. However, it was Wilmot A. Perera, the philanthropist, who was influenced by western socialist ideas as well as Indian ideas such as Gandhi's on rural society and Tagore's on education, who first converted the theory of rural development into practice (Seneviratne 1999, pp. 56-65).

coconut palm while rubber could be used to manufacture tyres, floor covering and road surfacing on a mass scale. Railway sleepers, poles for telegraph and electric lines, heavy wooden structures such as jetties and bridge works and tea chests that were made so far out of imported wood were to be manufactured locally with wood varieties available in abundance. Wimalasurendra provided a detailed account of wood varieties suitable to produce different kinds of wood products with estimates of acreages for plantations<sup>114</sup>. Charcoal that drives suction engines was suggested to operate sawmills, tractors and other requisite machinery. Tar and acetic acid too were listed as by-products in the process of formation of charcoal. The large clay beds distributed all over the Sabaragamuwa district with "finest clay... that is of such superior quality that even China has imported quantities of it to be mixed with the clay of that country" was said to provide raw material for a Ceylonese porcelain industry that could replace cups, plates, electrical insulators and various other articles imported from England. Sand and lime deposits spread in various parts of the country could be used to manufacture glass. Plumbago, deposits which were available in large quantities and were exported to England as raw material, Wimalasurendra suggested could be used as dust in foundries and to drive industries such as manufacturing of pencils, making electrodes for the use in electro-metallurgical works, making brushes used in electrical machinery, making crucibles and preparation of paints and lubricants. Commenting on the importing of table salt Wimalasurendra expressed his disappointment, saying that he "fail[s] to understand why the salt available in such immense quantities cannot be refined and put into shape" to satisfy the needs of the local market. He canvassed for the industries of caustic soda, potash that could be used to manufacture soap, which could be produced by electrolysis from soap. The same process, he suggested, could be used to produce bleaching powder. Cotton was another industry Wimalasurendra promoted. The production of textiles and perfumes were also in Wimalasurendra's list of industries that could be established.

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<sup>114</sup> Availability of suitable varieties of timber in Ceylon to produce tea chests was a long drawn debate between the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, P. Sundaram, and Wimalasurendra. With the intention of discouraging imports Wimalasurendra proposed to increase the duty on tea chests to fifteen percent (Wimalasurendra 1932a, p. 527). He argued that necessary timber to produce tea chests locally was available in all parts of the country - namely *Hora*, *Keena*, *Lunumidella*, *Dambu*, etc. - and to last them for several years and the use of proper machinery and proper guidance were all that was required. The Minister, however, thought otherwise and was of the opinion that satisfactory tea chests couldn't be made from the timber available at that time. At the debate on "Industrial Research and Development" on the 26th August 1935 Wimalasurendra reaffirmed his case for locally produced tea chests. He suggested *Hora* (and other varieties of soft timber) as ideal material for tea chests which was available in abundance, especially in areas like Mirigama, Kottawa, Muwagamakanda, and amounting to a total of 18,560 acres. He suggested that the latest technology be used to produce thin slabs of *Hora* "reinforced by the various light metals now available in the world" could be used to manufacture a suitable and inexpensive form of tea chest.

Irrigation and agriculture were not missing in Wimalasurendra's plan. The issue of not getting rain at the right time he suggested could be addressed through artificial irrigation using water pumps driven by hydro electrical energy. He saw no future for agricultural products unless agriculture was modernised using latest developments of science and technology. He predicted that with the implementation of the Hydro Electric Scheme, "every individual working on farm to get water, more water and water at the proper time". The manufacture of artificial fertilizer and agricultural machinery were two other agriculture related industries promoted by Wimalasurendra. Paddy industry that gave small returns was proposed to be highly mechanised and a large area be brought under cultivation if paddy as an industry was to work on a paying basis.

An interesting contrast of the developmental nation imagined by Wimalasurendra to ethno nationalism one witnessed in the early twentieth century that moved Sinhalese and Tamils away from each other, was the incorporation of Jaffna, the Northern capital of the minority Tamil community, in his industrialisation plan for Ceylon. Addressing the Council he declared that "the transmission of the necessary electrical energy ..... to Jaffna to operate the machinery, kilns, and so on, for making cement is within practical possibilities". "Brick and tile, pottery, paper, tanning and leather work, fruit and fish canning, brass work, essential oils, candles and matches are some of the other industries awaiting local development", according to Wimalasurendra. With the provision of tools and plants to skilled artisans spread in areas like "Vannarponnai and Point Pedro in Jaffna or in the South towards Matara and Dondra, or in a place like Negambo", he was of the opinion that the craft industries could be brought to a highly advanced level. "All hinges, bolts, locks and brass-fittings come from Birmingham now ... can very well be produced here", was his view (Wimalasurendra 1932d, p. 2228-32; 1935b, p. 2456).

Infrastructure development was a necessary condition for industrialization envisaged by Wimalasurendra. While electrification of railways was proposed for the main railway lines, rail buses or diesel electric cars were proposed to be introduced for urban railway traffic to run in parallel with road buses. He estimated a cost of less than one cent per unit for railway traction if the trains in the main lines were run by electricity generated from the Hydro Electric Scheme and for diesel electric cars to work at nearly half the cost of steam locomotives (Wimalasurendra 1933b, pp. 1661-62). Electrification of railways would mean, according to Wimalasurendra, electrification of towns along the railway lines giving life to a new wave of small and medium scale town-based industries. He even visualised in his industrialization plan the sale of additional electricity generated by the Hydro Electric Scheme to Southern India.



The first half of the twentieth century offered two possible futures for the island, one represented by the Aberdeen-Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme and the other by the Minneriya Irrigation Scheme, one aiming modern industrial development with a forward gaze and the other aiming the growth of agriculture through the colonization of abandoned land in the dry zone, with a backward gaze of recreating the past glory of the agriculturally advanced ancient civilisations, one by Wimalasurendra and the other by D. S. Senanayake, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands of the State Council and later the first Prime Minister of independent Ceylon.

### **2.4.3 Competing choices: Minneriya Irrigation Scheme**

Senanayake's vision for agricultural development who saw Ceylon "an essentially agricultural country" is detailed in *Agriculture and Patriotism*, the book he published in 1935 (Senanayake 1999[1935]). He summarised his logic when he says that "it is as right for the National Government to make the streams and rivers of the arid regions useful by engineering works for water storage ... The Government should construct and maintain the reservoirs as it does other public works... The object of the Government is to dispose of the land to settlers who will build houses upon it. To accomplish this object water must be within their reach... Our people as a whole will profit, for successful homemaking is but another move for the up building of a nation" (pp. 36-37). Senanayake's strategy consisted of two steps; first to highlight the importance of peasantry in the affairs of the island along with references to the past glory of the agriculturally advanced Sinhala kingdoms and then to nominate himself as the agent of peasant interests. This custodial and paternalistic attitude towards peasantry on the part of the Ceylonese elite to become champions of peasants' cause was a theme that had attracted the attention of a number of scholars. According to Moore (1985) communication in the early twentieth century conveyed the impression of a sense of obligation on the part of the elite to use state power on behalf of peasantry (p. 3). Peasants being converted into landless proletariat and being attracted into plantations was considered unacceptable. As per Samaraweera (1981), "it was in the cultivation of the soil that the people of Ceylon genius at one time achieved its greatest triumphs" (p. 135). Peasantry was considered the 'backbone' of the country and agriculture the truly 'patriotic endeavour'. (p. 136). The Land Commission of 1927 of which D. S. Senanayake was a member, recommended the Crown Land "should be 'mapped out' so that the diverse needs of the society and government could be accurately dealt with, the needs of the peasantry of course being given first priority" (p. 145) Settlement of pioneer colonists in the Minneriya Scheme, first ever large scale colonization project implemented in the twentieth century that fell in line with the vision of Senanayake, was initiated in 1932 as a project commissioned

by the colonial government (Somasunderam 1961). The discourse of developmental nationalism constructed by Wimalasurendra contained a strong critique of this backward gaze.

Wimalasurendra saw this approach, from "every distinguish[ed] British statesman, be he the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies" to "a Minister passing through", to "remind us of the glories of our past in agriculture and irrigation" and to trap the imagination of the colony's population in the past than in the future as a strategy to confine Ceylon as a non-industrialised agricultural nation whose main occupation is to grow raw products "to be shipped by foreign agents in foreign ships, to be worked into manufactured articles by foreign countries with foreign capital, to be re-exported to this country by foreign merchants to their corresponding foreign agents in Ceylon to be redistributed to us" (Wimalasurendra 1932d, p.2232). Attempts by the Ceylonese political elite to chase this dream of ancient glory in agriculture and irrigation "reminded" to the Ceylonese by the British rarely missed comment by Wimalasurendra. He was of the opinion that "ignoring all that science and design can do for us, agriculture conducted on traditional and casual methods practised hundreds of years ago will not help to produce necessary results". "It is quite evident that it is utterly impossible to compete with cheap rice imported from India", commented Wimalasurendra, "unless we improve our methods of cultivation, introduce more fertilizers to give better returns, and also provide cheap transport and cheap power to operate machinery". Rather than relying on reconstructing the past glory Wimalasurendra looked for science and technology to construct the future glory of industrialised Ceylon. By referring to the "tank storage system organized and brought into existence by our Sinhalese Kings" but not in operation any more, he expressed confidence in science and technology to restore them fairly easily and even outstrip them by constructing even larger tanks.

"So, Sir, ignoring all that science and design can do for us, agriculture conducted on traditional and casual methods practiced hundreds of years ago will not help to produce the necessary results.

With a huge outlay, Sir, the tank storage system organized and brought into existence by our Sinhalese Kings can be restored and we can no doubt restore the Sea of Parakrama Bahu. We can no doubt outstrip him in what he has done, and we might even produce a "Sea of Senanayake"<sup>115</sup>. But we have to consider whether after all the capital and energy thus spent it will be possible to restore or re-establish the production that was obtained during the time of Parakrama Bahu with more or less forced labour (A Member: No!) I heard someone say, no. Well, I say if not with forced labour, with the large population that existed in those times. What I

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<sup>115</sup> The sarcastic reference here was to D. S. Senanayake, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands.

maintain is this, that the very agencies that wiped out that enormous population will nullify our efforts again."

(Debate on "The Appropriation Ordinance" (Wimalasurendra 1935b, p. 2452))

The rationale of constructing tank based irrigation schemes in the less populated dry zone in the North-Central parts of the island by transporting and colonizing thousands of people from the other parts of the country while there were more suitable irrigable lands available in the Southern Ceylon was seen by Wimalasurendra merely as attempts by Ceylonese political elite to achieve the glory of outdoing ancient kings.

"And, Sir, what is the remedy? To colonize an area by getting a large force of labourers to live in a place like Minneria, to begin with, we have to eradicate malaria. Until that is done, it is perfectly useless trying to colonise that part of the country. While other areas which are already irrigable exist in large acreages, I fail to understand why we should sink so much capital and so many human lives in this particular zone. Except for the glory of outdoing Parakrama Bahu, I do not see much sense in it."

(Debate on "The Appropriation Ordinance" (Wimalasurendra 1935b, p. 2452))

He was of the opinion that the reasons that caused collapse of the ancient irrigation civilizations in the island, namely the intensive cultivation methods used that degraded fertility of soil and dropped production and the malaria epidemic, should be scientifically studied to identify solutions before completing irrigation schemes equivalent to the scale of Minneria Scheme devised by the Minister Senanayake (Wimalasurendra 1935b, pp. 2452-53).

Wimalasurendra developed his argument for a Ceylonese developmental nation based heavily on the contributions of an Indian, Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, the eminent civil engineer and the state planner who lived at least half a generation ahead of Nehru (Vyasulu 1989). He used to refer to Visvesvaraya<sup>116</sup> in his speeches at the State Council and used to quote sections from his publications. By quoting Visvesvaraya at the debate on "The Appropriation Ordinance" in 1935, Wimalasurendra advocated for three emergency schemes: rapid industrialization by multiplying factories and industrial establishments; establishment of practical training institutes to improve technical literacy among the working population; along with rural construction to increase production from agriculture and cottage and home industries (Wimalasurendra 1935b, p. 2454). Wimalasurendra's entire range of proposals for

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<sup>116</sup> Visvesvaraya was referred to as "Visweswara Aiyar" in speeches given by Wimalasurendra. Interestingly, another case of misspelling of Visvesvaraya's name was observed by Zachariah (2005) when he refers to a letter written by Walchand Hirachand whose reputation as a defender of the rights of Indian shipping had won him his national credentials. For Hirachand, it was "Vishveshva Aiya" (Note 242, p. 287).

industrialisation made during his career can be positioned within these three emergency schemes mentioned above.

#### **2.4.4 Visvesvaraya and Wimalasurendra**

Writing particularly on "Nehru and the Visvesvaraya legacy" Vyasulu (1989) investigates the extent to which Nehruvian developmental nationalism was influenced by the thoughts of Visvesvaraya and concludes that the contributions by him were well known to Nehru (pp. 1700-1704). According to Vyasulu, Visvesvaraya "was a man whose accomplishments at the level of a princely state [of Mysore] which was under indirect British rule may be seen as parallel with those of Nehru on the larger canvas of the nation, fifty years later".

While observing the strong influence of Visvesvaraya's vision on Wimalasurendra's imagination of the Ceylonese developmental nation, one can also note remarkable similarities between the two engineers, who played pioneering roles in sketching the initial drawings of the developmental nations of the two colonies, with one realising his dream and the other not. Both specialised initially in civil engineering. Both had major engineering contributions to their credit. Visvesvaraya designed drinking and sanitary systems of many major cities, made contributions to systems of flood control in Orissa and to the generation of electricity in Mysore and elsewhere, associated with the Tata Iron and Steel Company in Jamshedpur and was the founder of the Vesvesvaraya Iron and Steel Company in Bhadravathi and played an important role in the economic development of Mysore initially as an engineer and later as the Diwan (Vyasulu 1989; Rao 2002). Wimalasurendra too was credited for his contributions in several engineering projects in addition to his involvement in the Hydro Electric Scheme. Wimalasurendra's design for the spiral railway track in Demodara in the central hills of Sri Lanka which reduced the distance of the original design of the extended railway track from Bandarawela to Badula by three and a half miles, is considered a marvel of civil engineering in Sri Lankan railway engineering. The Hiyare Water Supply Scheme and the Kolonnawa power station are two other major projects designed by Wimalasurendra. Repositioning of the twenty four foot tall pinnacle at the top of the three hundred and thirty eight feet tall Ruwanweli Pagoda is also an achievement credited to Wimalasurendra (Rathnapala 2009). Both Visvesvaraya and Wimalasurendra were involved with governance - Visvesvaraya as the Diwan of Mysore from 1912 to 1918 and Wimalasurendra as a member of the State Council from 1931 to 1936. The promotion of traditional industries and state investment in industry were two areas that interested both. As with the case of Wimalasurendra whose views led to controversy, there was considerable controversy around Visvesvaraya's views, notes Vyasulu. References are found to

arguments and clashes between him and the Director of Industries and later with an official whom temporarily succeeded him as Diwan. 'Clear-cut precision' in their views is another characteristic shared by the both (see Vyasulu (1989) for Visvesvaraya's side of the story).

#### **2.4.5 Why did not Ceylon become a developmental state?**

The important question that begs an explanation is why this imagination in an industrially advanced Ceylon that was confidently backed by the Aberdeen-Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme failed to evolve into to a mass movement of developmental nationalism leading to the Sri Lankan developmental state? Why did it not succeed in Ceylon while it did in India? Why did not the quick implementation of the Scheme become the main slogan of a mass developmental nationalist struggle? Why did not nationalism in the island evolve in a direction with a common vision for the future that could have united the Sinhala and Tamil communities against the broad colonial interests as exemplified by Wimalasurendra, but rather evolved in a different direction by looking at past technological glory of the majority Sinhala community and treating the Tamil as a lesser minority? Why are Wimalasurendra as an individual and the Aberdeen-Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme as a national project missing in standard history books or in debates on Sinhala nationalism? Why is it that Senanayakes, Bandaranaiques, Dharmapalas and Kumaratungas appear prominently in the history of the first half of the twentieth century Ceylon and why not the Wimalasurendras? All these are important questions that can be derived out of the discussion conducted so far, but the requirement to treat the Hydro Electric Scheme as a single case study among others limits the space available for me to deal with them in detail, within the context of this study. While indicating that the Aberdeen-Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme is an important text that needs to be used in the study of nationalism in Sri Lanka and demands further scholarly treatment, I would like to have a brief discussion to unearth some possible ways of answering the questions raised above.

##### **2.4.5.1 Personality theory**

Wimalasurendra's defeat at the State Council election in 1936 provides an entry in to this discussion. The reason for the defeat, according to Weeramanthy<sup>117</sup>, a relation of Wimalasurendra, is the fact that he "had no power base in the political sense" even though he was "an outstanding engineer" (Weeramanthy 2010 in Arumugam 2012). This, however, is not an adequate explanation to describe

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<sup>117</sup> Judge C. G. Weeramanthy is a respected Judge in the island who is also a former Judge of the International Court of Justice, Hague.

why Wimalasurendra won the election for Ratnapura in 1931 by 889 votes<sup>118</sup> in the first place and then lost in 1936 by a huge margin, by 7999 votes<sup>119</sup>, immediately following his term at the State Council which can be seen as with a time of historical significance from the point of view of formulating a discourse on an industrial renaissance in the island. Debates at the State Council during 1931 to 1936 and a few sources, a few biographies of Wimalasurendra and a few texts on casteism in Sri Lankan politics, guide us towards two important factors to understand his defeat. Wimalasurendra was more an engineer than a politician who seemed not to have followed the basics of political survival. He made enemies at personal level as a result of his straightforward approach to issues. He did not subscribe to personal favouritism in offering jobs or contracts. Only the capable received special treatment and this quality had disappointed some from his own caste community (Jayasekara 1982). This approach of straightforwardness that had presumably won favour with the Ceylonese political elite during his time as an engineer seems to have worked against him when he entered the territory of politics - the same space occupied by the political elite of the country. Wimalasurendra's contributions at the State Council didn't follow, as it can be observed from his contributions, the rule in politics of forming strategically useful alliances with those who support one's political interests, and defending them in return irrespective of the merit of the case under discussion. Wimalasurendra's responses at the State Council to proposals brought forward by D. S. Senanayake, who played a prominent role in defending the Ceylonese interests in the Hydro Electric Scheme during the 1920s, is an example of this. Voting for estimates forwarded in 1932 by the Executive Committee of Agriculture and Lands and presented to the Council by the Minister, D. S. Senanayake, to strengthen the flood protection bund of Colombo drew lengthy submissions by Wimalasurendra questioning the technical feasibility of such a scheme (Wimalasurendra 1932b, pp. 1073-1098; 1932d, pp. 1299-1319). D. S. Senanayake's frustration was expressed when he told the Council that "the scheme that has been put forwarded by the Engineers would not satisfy my friend the member for Ratnapura" and "he, as a very competent Engineer, thinks there is some other scheme very much better than the scheme put forwarded by our Engineers and he wants me to guess what that scheme is" (Senanayake 1932, pp. 1311-1312). Wimalasurendra spoke again in 1935 against the proposal by the Minister of Agriculture and Lands to establish a special hydraulic laboratory. Training in fundamentals of hydraulic engineering should be given at the Technical College, argued Wimalasurendra, and the training that was required at the Irrigation Department, according to him, was the training to apply such knowledge in fundamentals to solve practical problems.

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<sup>118</sup> Wimalasurendra received 7406 votes against his main rival George R. de Silva who obtained 6517 votes (Jiggins 1979; Ivan 1999a; Ivan 1999b).

<sup>119</sup> Jayaweera Kuruppu who received 16,864 votes defeated Wimalasurendra who had got 8865 votes (Ivan 1999a; Ivan 1999b).

D. S. Senanayake seemed offended when Wimalasurendra commented on the lack of experience of the Director of Irrigation, an official who worked under him. His lack of respect towards Wimalasurendra was clear when he said that "there is not an engineer in this world, according to [Wimalasurendra's] own opinion, who knows engineering, but himself" (Senanayake 1935, pp. 3469-3473). As discussed above, Wimalasurendra's negative opinion about the Minneriya Irrigation Scheme - the major colonization scheme implemented by Senanayake as one of his pet projects, can be considered the hardest attack against Senanayake. These personal traits of Wimalasurendra might have frustrated a few individuals from his caste who looked for undeserved favours, but it can be reasonable to assume that he remained the symbol of the pride of the Navandanna Caste in the highly caste-conscious society of the early twentieth society. This characteristic of Wimalasurendra may also have irritated some of the Ceylonese political elites as it was the case with Senanayake and perhaps damaged to a certain extent the respect he had earned as a reputed engineer before entering the terrain of politics.

#### **2.4.5.2 Caste theory**

Wimalasurendra's defeat in 1936 with a large margin and the failure of his imagination of an industrialised Ceylon to become the foundation of a nationalist movement still demands a better explanation. Wimalasurendra's defeat at the 1936 elections is treated as one of the examples of casteism at play in Sri Lankan elections by a few authors who wrote on the subject. Janice Jiggins (1979) identifies Jayaweera Kuruppu who defeated Wimalasurendra in 1936, as a descendent of high Govigama caste, a close associate of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the emerging leader of the old rich aristocracy, and a founder member of Bandaranaike's Sinhala Maha Saba. Jayaweera Kuruppu was one of the few MPs who left D. S. Senanayake's government in 1951 along with S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and later became the Minister of Local Government and Cultural Affairs when Bandaranaike formed the government in 1956. Victor Ivan takes Wimalasurendra's defeat in 1936 as a leading example of caste politics in Ceylon where Jayaweera Kuruppu used casteism in the election at Ratnapura "by rousing the Goigama people" against Wimalasurendra who was linked with the low-status Navandanna caste (Ivan 1999a; 1999b). According to Jiggins there was a significant presence of Navandanna caste community in the Ratnapura electorate. Rathnapala (2009) writing a biography of Wimalasurendra says that even *kavi - kolas* (scurrilous pamphlets) were distributed against Wimalasurendra. Distribution of such pamphlets during 1920s right up to 1950s election campaigns that were conducted in a vituperative and defamatory manner was a common feature (Jiggins 1979). As Rogers (1994) points out, in general caste had little place in the official colonial discourse since 1830s, but remained an important force in local politics (p.

18). According to Rogers, caste ceased to be an important national issue with the widening of franchise since the 1920s, but did remain a factor in the individual constituencies, where it reflected longstanding rivalries that, however, never showed any sign of coalescing and becoming a significant political factor (p. 18). Did Bandaranaike give his blessings to Jayaweera Kuruppu to use casteism against Wimalasurendra or did he take a neutral stand on the issue? As per Manor (1989) "Bandaranaike has shown himself to be free of caste prejudice which was enough to mark him out as a more progressive figure than most other prominent politicians" (p. 90). What made him take a stand against the Hydro Electric Scheme then? In a booklet titled "The Spinning Wheel and the Paddy Field" which was published in 1933, Bandaranaike refers rather sarcastically to "those who cling foolishly to the belief that cheap power is going to be the salvation of the world". For Bandaranaike "the hydro-electric scheme, for instance, is hailed as the only hope for Ceylon. This is, after all, nothing more than the apotheosis of rationalisation" (Bandaranaike 1963, p. 583).

It is within this context that the impact of caste in the success or rather the failure of the Hydro Electric Scheme and the campaign by Wimalasurendra for an industrialized Ceylon needs to be assessed. The Navandanna caste which is numerically small and also occupied a relatively lower position in the pre-colonial social ladder doesn't appear in the Sri Lankan discourse on the twentieth century caste and class rifts, except on a few occasions<sup>120</sup>. Navandanna did not belong to the group of castes that represented the Ceylonese new bourgeoisie and hence lacked the social power exercised by the Karava, Salagama and Durava castes along with the Govigama caste. Although not a prominent participant of the major caste rivalries of the time there is no reason to think that members of Navandanna caste escaped the inferior treatment lower castes received from the higher castes, except for fact that this treatment was more privately expressed. So caste became more hidden from view and spoken about less publicly even though it remained an important aspect of social consciousness and could be mobilised in public at times of necessity such as in the State Council elections in 1936 where Wimalasurendra was defeated comprehensively. Did caste play a bigger role in the life of Wimalasurendra in addition to his defeat at the 1936 elections? Was Wimalasurendra's caste a factor that worked against his campaign for an industrialised Ceylon? The State Council debates in which Wimalasurendra participated are not associated with caste politics. Most of the biographies of Wimalasurendra also avoid any reference to

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<sup>120</sup> In a caste analysis on "the principle Sinhalese plantation proprietorship in 1927", Roberts (2007) refers out of a list of 161 to Sir T. E. Sampayo as the only plantation owner from the Navandanna caste (p.315). The same source also refers to four pamphlets written in 1909 and 1910 by Dr. A. Emmanuel Ratnaweera Roberts representing the Navadanna viewpoint. A. E. Roberts was introduced as one of the few medical men in his time who attempted to combine ayurveda with Western medicine (p. 340). This was in addition to the reference to Wimalasurendra in relation to the 1936 State Council election for Ratnapura, as mentioned above.



his association with the Navandanna caste. Weeramanthry, the prominent relative of Wimalasurendra, leaves aside caste when he describes the election defeat in 1936. This absence of any reference to caste obviously doesn't mean that the low caste status of Wimalasurendra did not work against his political project. The possibility that it also worked against the mobilisation of the Ceylonese political elite from moving towards an industrialised Ceylon cannot be completely disregarded.

#### **2.4.5.3 Class theory**

Why this imagination of an industrially developed Ceylon grounded firmly on the Aberdeen Laxapana Hydro Electric Scheme failed to become a nationalist movement with a vision towards the future, I believe, still demands a more plausible explanation. Caste most probably played a negative role in alliance formation at the State Council in battles led by Wimalasurendra to move the island towards industrialisation; caste played a role in preventing Wimalasurendra's election to the State Council for a second term and hence prevented his presence from further struggles at the State Council and the Parliament levels; but why did not the emerging bourgeoisie, the new rich, who while representing different castes also shared common class interests, respond favourably to the call for an industrially developed Ceylon? Why did not the individual support extended by the bourgeois political leadership at different times to push for the commissioning of the Hydro Electric Scheme, turn into a collective effort and transform it into a nationalist movement to establish an industrially developed independent Ceylon?

How the elites of the early twentieth century, the new rich and the emerging bourgeoisie, reacted as a group to these trends carrying different futures for Ceylon, may have decided the ultimate success of each trend. Why the campaign for industrialisation of Ceylon initiated by Southern elites like Marcus Fernando, Anagarika Dharmapala and Munidasa Cumaratunga and developed as a viable future for Ceylon by Wimalasurendra, failed to attract the powerful new rich can be best explained in terms of class rather than in terms of caste. According to Jayawardena (2007) the Ceylonese new rich, the bourgeoisie, was an annex of imperialism, a dependent class, whose "creation and continued existence was based on the protection and opportunities provided by the colonial state" (p. xx). They represented rentier and merchant rather than industrial capital and were earning their wealth initially through renting of paddy, arrack, fish, ferry, gaming etc. and then through business avenues opened as a result of the colonial economy. This lack of industrial capital therefore did not provide the Ceylonese new rich the independence needed to challenge the colonial regime up front and form an anti-colonial developmental nationalist movement seeking independence. The revival of indigenous religions, the

expansion of Buddhist, Hindu and Islam education, the promotion of temperance and the agitation for moderate political reform was the extent to which the Ceylonese merchant and rentier capitalists were willing to go (Jayawardena 2007, pp. xx, xxii, xxxii, xxxi, 264). The campaign by Wimalasurendra for an industrialised developed Ceylon that conflicted with colonial industrial interests, therefore, was of little interest to the Ceylonese bourgeoisie, who collaborated with the colonial government on the economic front.