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## **Transformation of Political Culture in Post-Independent Sri Lanka: Conceptual and Empirical Overview**

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**Abstract.** The study examined the concept of political culture especially in relations to meaning, it found out the historical development of political culture and identified factors affecting the formation of political culture in post-independent era in Sri Lanka. Secondary data and content analysis were adopted by the study as method of data collection. The study found that, the formation and transformation of political culture in Sri Lanka mainly followed prevailing political institutions and provisions throughout the entire political history of the country. It also found that, the transformation of political culture in independent Sri Lanka is basically determined by pre and post government and political reforms introduced by British rule and local leaders. Social, cultural and economic factors which came in the post independent era in the country as the study observed, also contributed to the formation of political culture in the country. The study concluded that, political culture during pre-independent era has significantly transformed into a different level mainly due to the political, institutional and procedural changes.

**Keywords.** Political culture, Transformation, Sri Lanka, Post-independent Era

### **Introduction**

One of a striking discourse which many political scientists, anthropologists, development sociologists and development practitioners in post-second world war have been promptly engaged in, is political culture (Huntington, 2000). Such attention was drawn due to many reasons. For instance, some countries which have introduced many progressive political and government policies succeeded while others failed. Some case studies conducted in Latin America as well as East Asia regions provided the empirical evidence in this argument. Based on these findings and as a result of continue attention, many researchers found that, there is a correlation between success, effectiveness of political reforms and prevailing political culture of a country (Harrison: 2000).

Political culture can be explained as a shared views and normative judgments held by people of a country regarding its political system. The notion of political culture, however, does not refer, only to the attitudes toward specific actors, such as a president or prime minister, but rather represents how people view the political system as a whole and their belief in its legitimacy (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-culture>). Political culture is not an independent phenomenon/variable. It is influenced by numerous factors for instance,

geography, culture, economic condition social and political strata and political history of respective countries. **On the other hand political culture is dynamic phenomena in nature. It can undergo changes as well as transformations based on the political, economic and government reforms which can introduced new institutional and procedural changes.** As Denial Etounga-Manguella pointed out that culture is the mother and institutions are the children (Harrison, 2000). **Therefore, many have discussed about the relationship between political culture and political institutions or political system.**

Sri Lanka as a country, has recorded a long historical and cultural inheritance leading to numerous transformations of its political culture during the past two-three centuries. Apart from the internal political changes, colonial rule has mainly influenced the modernization of political culture in the country. Particularly, successive political reforms introduced by British such as colbrook-camaran, Donomore and Soulbery have caused for significance changes of the political culture in Sri Lanka. Therefore, many argues that contemporary political culture in Sri Lanka is a product of pre-independent and post-independent political systems. Thus, the problem of this study is on how political and constitutional reforms together with political changes have served as instruments in the introduction of many institutional and procedural transformations and influenced the formation of political culture in Post-independent era in Sri Lanka.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study are;

1. To examine the concept of political culture especially in relations to meaning.
2. To find out the historical development of political culture in Sri Lanka.
3. To identify factors affecting the formation of political culture in post-independent era in Sri Lanka.

### **Research questions**

The questions of the study include;

1. What is the meaning of political culture?
2. What is the historical development of political culture in Sri Lanka?
3. What are the factors affecting the formation of political culture in post independent era Sri Lanka?

### **Methodology**

The secondary method of data collection was adopted. Electronic and print materials like textbooks, journal articles, newsletters, bulletins, newspapers, diaries, magazines, workshops, conferences and seminars papers were utilized in sourcing data for the study. Archives of libraries in Universities and research centers across Sri Lanka as well as internet facility were also used in sourcing data for the study. The content analysis was adopted in the study.

### **Literature review**

#### **Concept of political culture**

According to Thomas Mayer's "For the understanding of the progress of the modernization of any given society as well as the functioning of the political system, its political culture is of crucial importance. Beside the institutional system of a society, its political culture is the most important single factor determining the development of that society" (Mayer, 1988:

1). In this sense, analysis of the concept of political culture may not only help to review the function of the modern democracies but also to understand the progress of a given society.

As an analytical concept, political culture came forward in the academic arena since mid-1950s. However, according to Dennis Kavanagh 'political culture' is a new term for old idea in which yield multiple instances of thinkers who have contemplated the relationship between regimes and the value systems which underpin them. In his '*The Republic*' Plato (427-347) considered to be the founder of political thought, stated that;

"Governments vary as the dispositions of men vary, and that there must be as many of one as there of the other. For we cannot suppose that States are made of 'oak and rock' and not out of the human natures which are in them" (Quoted from, Rosamond, 1997: 79).

Plato's student Aristotle (384-322), in his book, '*Politics*,' tried to discern the most suitable human government' to achieve this end, Aristotle did not simply focus on institution but also on social structures and their attendant value systems including some virtues of civility, consensus and partnership in politics which in turn associated with a mixture of oligarchic and democratic characteristics and control by the 'middle classes.' In 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), a Genevan Philosopher, wrote much on the importance of morality and custom as the as the basis of political stability. In different direction, Edmund Burke (1729-97), an Irish statesman, political theorist and philosopher and most famous critic of the French Revolution emphasis on the vital importance of tradition and the destructive consequences of well-established political norms (Rosamond, 1997: 79). However, the concept was not clearly stated and transformed into an analytical concept until **Gabriel Almond's** famous article "*Comparative political System*" was published in 1955. The establishment and career of the new concept was due to tow historical facts:

a. The experience that some important democracies in Europe had been destroyed by a Fascism which had succeeded to win a majority support of the population

b. An experience which was made in the beginning of the process of decolonization after World War II that it was by no means sufficient to create a new formal nation or new democratic constitutions in order to bring into being a real nation or a real democracy (quoted from Mayer, 1988: 1).

Within this empirical context, the concept of political culture became the enthusiastic concept in the academic discipline in social sciences.

### **Definitions on political culture**

Defining political culture is a controversial business, because, sometime it is missed with the concept like public opinion. However, political culture is broader than public opinion. It functions as a frame which constrains acceptable political action and discourse. It provides assumptions that guide public life, and, it is more enduring, stable and cross-generational. The essence of political culture is not agreement on issues, but common perception of the rights and obligations of citizenship and of the rules for participating in the political process. However (on the other hand), it can be said that the concept of political culture is more restrictive than the concepts of 'public opinion' and 'national character,' because it relates directly to the explicitly political orientations (Mayer, 1988: 2). In this context, with consideration of the concept of 'culture,' **Gabriel Almond** and **Sidney Verba** define political culture as follows;

'the term political culture refers to the specifically political orientations—attitudes towards the political system and its various parts and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system.'

Dennis Kavanagh (1983) has written widely on political culture. According to him, political culture stands in between public opinion and an individual's personality. His preferred definition seems to be the following:

For our purposes we may regard the political culture as a shortened expression to denote the set of values within which a political system operates. It is something between the state of public opinion and an individual's personality characteristics (quoted from Rosamond, 1997: 78).

According to Thomas Mayer;

Political culture is the attitudes, beliefs and values which underpin the operation of a particular political system. These were seen as including knowledge and skills about the operation of the political system, positive and negative emotional feelings towards it, and evaluative judgments about the system (Mayer, 1988: 2).

Through the process of political socialization, the central values of the political culture are transmitted from one generation to another. And, above definitions show that political culture is a set of distinctive dimensions or orientation of a people towards the political system of a given society.

### **Types of political culture**

The nature and extent of these orientations may vary from society to society as it can be observed great distinctions of values and beliefs between given societies. For instance, there is a great emphasis on individual freedom in USA, while some other countries may be concerned with collective equality or less enamoured with the very idea of personal freedom. These differences can be reflected in the political culture of a given society.

In their book, '*The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*' (1963) based on cross-national survey research on five democratic countries: Italy, Germany, Mexico, US and UK; **Gabriel Almond** and **Sidney Verba** proposed three basic models of political culture; **parochial cultures**, **subject cultures** and **participant cultures**. These three basic models of political culture are determined by three main factors; (a) awareness of government, (b) expectations of government and (c) political participation.

**Parochial cultures** (low awareness, expectations, and participation) are confined to the local and intimate world of his own family or group, hardly identifying himself with the larger political system (e.g., Mexico). In this model; according to **Almond** and **Verba**, citizens have no cognitive orientation towards the political system. Societies characterized by this type of political culture do not expect anything positive of government, not do they expect to participate in politics because it is seen as the elite domain. Government is seen as the enforcer of its own rules and consequently, the realm of politics is seen as one to be avoided whenever possible

**Subject cultures** (higher level of awareness and expectation but low participation) are aware of the political system but more as an object of the state activities (e.g. Italy and Germany). In this model; citizens have cognitive orientation towards only the output aspects of the system. This tends to be manifested in a citizenry that expects positive action from government, but that does not tend to be politically active themselves. They, too, see politics as an elite domain only to be engaged in by those with power and influence

**Participant cultures** (high level of all three) are based on participation, especially in the input functions (e.g. USA and UK). In this model; citizens have cognitive orientation towards both the input and output aspects of the system. Societies which process this type of political culture tend to have citizens with high expectations of government and of personally participating in politics, if at no other time than voting in an election. This type of culture is central to the principles of any democratic society



However, those three types of political cultures are, it is said that, only the ideal types; none of them can be found in its pure form in any society since the all individuals within a political system cannot be expected to be oriented in the same way and to the same extent. This situation gave severe criticism to the **Almond** and **Verba's** three type political cultures. Accordingly, **Almond** and **Verba** themselves list out the following types of political culture:

a. **Parochial-subject political culture:** Here, an individual has knowledge about a variety of governmental roles although he is mostly unaware of the ways in which they can influence the political system. The sense of self as a political force is very much vague and undeveloped and the input structure of the society is relatively poorly defined.

b. **Subject-participant political culture:** This is represented by a society where there are two groups of citizens; some of the citizens are very much politically aware and also active and the rest are relatively passive. The former are naturally found to develop positive orientations to all types of political objects. The average citizens know that he must be active and be a participant, but is given, in fact, little opportunity for sharing in decisions.

c. **Parochial-participant political culture:** Input situations are relatively local like tribal or caste associations although the national output institutions are quite well developed. But, in any case, both the input and output institutions are so much under the pressure of parochial interests that their performance as national participatory organs is greatly affected.

d. **The civic culture:** according to Almond and Verba the civic culture is an **allegiant participant culture**. The civic culture is a participant political culture in which the political culture and political structure are congruent.

In this sense, the civic culture combines all the characteristics of **parochial cultures**, **subject cultures** and **participant cultures**. It represents a synthesis of directive and acquiescent, participant and passive attitudes, and subject orientations and participant orientations are equally strong. Participant orientations allow the elites to function with sufficient initiative and freedom while the latter force those elites to remain subject to popular references. Closest approximation to this is US and UK.

There are many criticisms against the theorization of political culture by Almond and Verba. However, to foster the process of modernization and to make possible the functioning of a real democracy requires a political culture based on beliefs in equality, trust into the fellow-men, in the changeability of the social and economic situation, a basic national consensus to the political procedures and general goals, a belief in liberty and participation and an ability to limit conflicts and resolve them by fair compromises. If the political culture of a polity is far remote from beliefs of this sort, this will definitely create decisive obstacles to modernization and democratization. The necessary changes in the political culture can then be accomplished by coordinated explicit and implicit teachings of the different agents of socialization. But this will be a successful striving only if the performance of political elites and the real participation experience of the masses fit these aims properly and exemplarily.

### **Transformation of Sri Lankan political system and its impact on political culture**

As it is pointed out above, the nature and extent of the orientations of political culture may vary from society to society, because, there are great distinctions of values and beliefs between given societies. In this context, it can be seen that modern political system and political culture of Sri Lanka carries substantial weight of historical, religious, cultural, social and political factors that determine not only the political action of the leaders and people but also of the state's policies, goals and whatever other political endeavours.

### **Historical transformation of Sri Lankan polity up to 1815**

As the existing evidence show, monarchical political system of Sri Lanka started about 543 BC with prince Vijaya who came from western part of India. After subjugating the aboriginal inhabitants, Vijaya encouraged emigration from the mainland India and made himself ruler of the island. The realm (called Sinhala after Vijaya's patrimonial name) was in the dry zone of the island. Members of the dynasty founded by Vijay reigned over the island for several centuries. During this period, particularly after the adoption in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC of Buddhism as the national religion, the Sinhalese created a highly developed hydraulic civilization.

From the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD to the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the island was drawn into conflicts among those South Indian states of the Pandayas, Pallawas and Colas and became an integral element in the power struggles that came in the form of frequent invasions which increased in intensity of impact. The final episode was an unmitigated disaster – Magha of kalinga's campaign of plunder and destruction in the thirteenth century from which the hydraulic civilizations of Sri Lanka's dry zone never recovered. This situation caused to partition the island into a number of petty kingdoms, flowed Sinhalese power to the south-west of the island and made a room for the establishment of a Tamil kingdom in the north of the island which survived from the thirteenth to early decades of the seventeenth century. By sixteenth century, the centre of power of the island had gradually transferred to the wet zone.

There are very few parts of Asia with a longer record of western influence and control than Sri Lanka's coastal regions. In that context, in 1505 AD, firstly Portuguese made their first appearance and they conquered the coastal areas of the island. In 1658 AD, the Dutch ousted the Portuguese and they consolidated their power in coastal areas until British exiled them in 1796 AD. By far the greatest European influence on the country came in the century and a half period of British rule. In 1798, British made the entire island a crown colony except the kingdom of Kandy. In 1815 January 15, British governor of the maritime provinces, Sir Robert Brownrig declared a war against the king of the Kandyan Kingdom, and captured the city of Kandy in 1815 February 14 with the support of the Kandyan chiefs. In February 18, British succeed in capturing King Sri Wikrama Rajasinghe, and, it was the end point of Sinhala monarchs started with Vijaya. March 02<sup>nd</sup> of the same year between British and Kandyan Sinhala Chief signed a convention to hand over the Kandyan Kingdom to the British Crown that ended in 1948. The British period of rule was marked by native rebellions in 1817-8 and 1848. But, the British crushed those rebellions brutally. The establishment of the British rule in the Kandyan region in 1815 marked the end of a long-lived monarchical political system of the island and the beginning of a new system inclusive of novel social, economic, political and cultural characteristics.

### **Political economic transformation during the British period**

The first years of British rule did not made considerable political transformation in the island. Even after gaining control all over the island, the British ruled the low country maritime provinces and the Kandyan Provinces separately. In 1829, British Crown sent W.M.G. Colebrooke to examine and report on all the laws and regulations, customs of the "Crown Colony of Ceylon" and all matters relating to its government. In the next year, Charles K. Camaron was added to Colebrooke to inquire into and report on the judicial councils and traditional of the "Crown Colony of Ceylon." In 1833, with the recommendation of Colebrooke-Cameron report, the low country Maritime Provinces and the Kandyan provinces were integrated so that the whole country came under a single administration. A state Council of five main government officers was set up to advice the governor about the affairs of the king's

budget. A legislative council of nine official members and six unofficial was created. The unofficial members were to be selected by the governor from amongst the leading businessmen and landowners of the country. Three of them were to represent the Europeans while the three others were to represent the Sinhalese, the Tamils and Burghers (Sri Lanka: 50 Years of Independence, 1998).

Colebrooke- Camaron political initiation was continued until the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century with small changes like system of elective elements granted to select the unofficial members to the Legislative Council in 1920. Numbers of voters in this time were very limited as the voting rights being confined to those with high property income and educational qualifications. The number who registered as voters in 1924 was 204,997 or roughly 4 per cent of the total population of the country (Wilson, 1973: 371). During this period, there were some local groups who were demanding drastic political transformation, while there were some other groups who were seeking to maintain colonial rule without any changes. As pointed out by Jayawardena (2000: 302-46), there were three broad trends among the politics of new class of Sri Lanka who emerged during the colonial regime. The first trend was represented by the conservative group, who had close collaboration with colonial regime since the very beginning of British rule and held the high rank post like *Maha Mudeliyar* which was granted to the local aristocrats for their very loyalty to the colonial regime. They consistently opposed even the most moderate political reforms and openly spoke out for a preservation of the status quo. The second trend was exemplified by moderate reformists led by the new rich class. They had achieved economic success initially through commercial activities opened during the colonial regime and later earned their social advance through English language and higher education. This group basically supported British rule, but combined this loyalty with demands for more political and economic rights for their class, however, did not demand radical political reforms like adult franchise. The third trend within the bourgeoisie was represented by those few radicals who were very critical of imperial rule. They had identified themselves with the various political reform movements and working class agitation that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. When the Donoughmore Commission came to Sri Lanka in 1927 to inquire into and report on the working of the system of government, first two groups together opposed the granting of universal adult franchise to the country. The third group who appeared for radical political reforms only demanded granting universal adult franchise to the country.

The year 1931 was a turning point for the drastic social, economic, and political transformation in the island in coming years. Two equally important constitutional reforms were implemented in the country under the Donoughmore political reforms in 1931. First was the introduction of universal adult franchise for citizens over 21 years of age; one of Asia's earliest experiments with universal franchise; the second was the introduction of a new constitution, partly modelled on the structure of a semi-autonomous parliamentary system, publicly known as 'State Council,' with constituency-based election system of representation based on universal adult suffrage. This political innovation simply made up the political crucible of mass politicking on elected politicians; and, therefore, those elite politicians who were ambitious with national politics at that time had to adjust to a new form of mass politics with a view to stabilizing their political existence among the masses.

### **Initiation of modern democratic government system and political party system**

There was no political party system in the country when the first election was held in 1931 to select the members for the 'State Council.' candidates in most constituencies kept trust on the conventional appeals to caste and religious loyalties, apart from other parochial considerations. Vast majority of electors who were casting a vote for the first time could hardly



understand and respond to the election system. As a result, nine of the fifty elected seats returned their members without a contest. Political party organization that could have addressed to entire Island did not keep pace with the Island's remarkably rapid growth of the electorate, and the regular holding of general elections. It was assumed that this was because of the powerful individuals who ran the political ground as their own fiefdoms; it was because these powerful individuals were opposed to a reduction of their influence and authority inherent in a more structured organization (Silva, 1988). In this context, after four years of first State Council election, the first political party in Sri Lanka was formed in 1935 by a group of young men, educated abroad and with Marxist ideas, by the name of 'Lanka Sama Samaja Party' (LSSP) with a considerable working class support base. Even in the election for the second State Council in 1936, there were no political parties except LSSP. The LSSP and the Communist Party (CP), which was formed by a splinter group of the LSSP, posited themselves as alternatives to the UNP in the 1947 elections (Satkunanathan, not dated: 11). However, by the 1952 elections their ability to win seats diminished as the parties of the Marxist left were unaware of how to mobilize local support and their attacks on religion and local culture only served to alienate the mass rural vote.

The inability of the Left parties 'to fuse Marxist philosophy with the traditional culture of the country' played into the formation of centre-right United National Party (UNP) two years before the independence (in 1946). D.S Senanayake, then leader of the State Council formed UNP bringing together Ceylon national Congress, the Sinhala Maha Sabha and the Muslim League, reflecting national unity to take over the future political power of the independent Sri Lanka. The UNP has always positioned itself as the protector of the country against Marxists who it claimed threatened democracy, religion and culture. Economically it espoused a mixed economy policy with a strong focus on fostering the private sector and business community (Satkunanathan, not dated: 11). However, during the initial phase of the party, there was a vast gap between the leaders of the party and the general public.

D.S. Senanayake, who had been the last leader of the State Council, hurriedly organized the representatives of many groups, communal and otherwise, into the United National Party... He had the backing of the British government, of the local Westernized intelligentsia, of the feudal land-owning class and of the capitalist commercial class. His colleagues in the cabinet, though belonging to all communities, were all drawn from the same social stratum and proved to be like the top administrators themselves, not very different in taste and outlook from the former colonial administrators...there was a wide gap between the ruled and the rulers in Sri Lanka and to many it seemed as if no change had occurred with independence (Wijesinghe, 1974: 70-71).

In this context, the most distinctive feature of the UNP was that although it opened membership to various political groups, the party consisted mainly of members of the elite. During this period parties representing the interests of Tamil minority began to emerge. The All Ceylon Tamil Congress was formed in 1944 after the exodus of Tamils from the Sinhalese dominated Ceylon National Congress<sup>98</sup> and the Federal Party was founded in 1949 by a splinter group of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC). The other party was the Ceylon Indian Congress formed in 1939, which later became the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) in 1950. The CWC was severely affected by the disenfranchisement of the Tamils of Indian origin, which prevented it from winning seats until 1977 (Satkunanathan, not dated: 11). In one sense, this situation exemplified the failure of the local political elites to create the ethnic harmony that to be formed during the freedom movement. On the other hand, this was exacerbated by the method of appointment to the Legislative council on a communal basis, which was put in place by the colonial rulers.

Another new party emerged during 1951, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who was a founder member and high level cabinet minister of the first post-independent government led by UNP and, at one time, virtually the heir to the UNP leadership. However, he stood on behalf of Sinhalese sentiments represented by Sinhalese majority. Since early 20th Century, Sinhala Buddhist majority, particularly, Sinhala nationalist forces including the vernacular language oriented intelligentsia, rural level non-official middle class were waiting for the rehabilitation of Sinhala language, culture and religion. Independence did not mark a major breakthrough for them. The UNP did not have direct links with them and, therefore, they continued to be in a position of socio-political isolation. Within this situation, those groups themselves felt that they had become second-class citizens even after Sri Lanka became an independent state in 1948. Thus, since the very beginning of independence, there were criticisms and slogans against the UNP, the ruling party since independence till 1956. When Bandaranaike was his firm conviction that he would not be the heir to the leadership of the party, he broke away from the UNP and gave the leadership to the above forces and formed SLFP in 1951.

### **Political culture in post independent Sri Lanka**

The independent of the Sri Lanka was gained under the Soulbury constitutional provision which was introduced by British colonial rule in 1947. Thus, British way of Westminster political system was established under Saulsbury constitution with effect from 1947. Despite the fact that, dominion type of independence was gained by the Sri Lankan, significant political and government changes were not occurred until first republic constitutional reform came into the effect in 1972. Despite the fact that new government reform was brought under the first republic constitution, it didn't bring significance governmental changes except replacing unicameral legislature into the bicameral legislature which is fundamental element of Westminster system. Therefore, until introduction of second republic constitution in 1978 which was introduced executive presidential system along with proportionate representative system, similar political and government system was prevailed until 1978. However, since after 1978 reform, as an impact of political institutional and procedural changes, discontinuation and transformation of the political culture of the country could be seen accordingly.

### **Emergence of Dual party system and ethnic politics**

The political culture of the eve of pre-independent Ceylon was enriched by influence of political institutions established consecutively under the Colebrooke and Camaron and Soulbury constitutions. The Universal franchise and executive committee system which were introduced under the 1931 laid the foundation for the emergence of party politics, political relations, political behaviours and political value of the country. The Soulbury constitution which introduced as extension of the 1931 government system, further consolidated and enriched the political culture bred by the 1931 constitution. The establishment of LSSP in 1936 as the first modern Democratic Party in the country, paved the way for the emergence of political many parties as discuss above. When it's come to the eve of independent, it required a formation of mass political parties which was required for smooth function of Westminster system. Thus it's resulted to the formation of UNP in 1946. Then, left-wing LSSP and right-wing UNP fill the vacuum accordingly. However, breakaway of the Singhala Maha Sabhawa led by SWRD Banadaranayeke and formation of SLFP become a millstone of the mass politics in country. It created political conditions which were instrumental for formation of dual party system and ethnic politics in the country.

The 1956 elections saw the beginning of divisive ethnic politics and the emergence of a two-party system with the UNP and SLFP, which forced the Left parties to abandon their revolutionary rhetoric and move towards the center. However, as pointed out by C.R. de Silva, two different party systems operated in the country, as in the north and east the contest was between the two Tamil parties, the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, while in the rest of the country the SLFP and UNP battled for seats (Silva, 1990). This death knell for independent candidates led to the consolidation of the party system in Sri Lanka and growth in party loyalty. Even today independent candidates have little chance of being elected. For example, no independent candidate was elected in the 2004 parliamentary elections (Satkunanathan, not dated: 11).

The next significant fact that emerged with the election of 1956 was, as it is already stated earlier, the establishment of the domination of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism on the political culture of the country. In mid-fifties, As it is already mentioned, the SLFP claimed to be the party that protect the Buddhism, Sinhala language and culture while the UNP on the right and the Marxist on the extreme Left. In practice however the policies of the UNP and SLFP were similar on the ethnic issue with both parties resorting to divisive ethnic politics to win seats. For example, the UNP changed its policy on the language issue and supported a ‘Sinhala Only’ Policy when it realized the SLFP had gained electoral advantage through this policy. In the 1960s both the UNP and SLFP ‘not only grew closer ideologically regarding Buddhist restoration but also became alternative choices at subsequent elections (Satkunanathan, not dated: 11). With the adoption of a republican constitution in 1972, state of the Buddhism was further firmed. Chapter II of that constitution stated that: “The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Sector 18(1) (d).” In the new constitution that adopted in 1978, same special status for Buddhism was embodied. One major consequences of this transformation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism for the processes of state-building was the concept of a polytechnic polity ceased to be politically viable any longer. The emphasis on Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalese-Buddhists carried on emotional popular appeal, compared with which the concept of a multi-ethnic polity was a meaningless abstraction (Silva, 1988). The minorities, and particular the Sri Lanka Tamils, refused to endorse the assumption that Sinhalese nationalism was interchangeable with the larger Sri Lanka nationalism. As a result, 1956 saw the beginning of almost a three decade of ethnic and linguistic tensions in the island that claimed thousands of human lives and countless socio, economic and political consequences.

### **State-centred Welfares ideology and its impacts on political culture**

Under the prevailed political context, one of some significant features of State Council which established in 1931 was that its remarkable commitment to implement social welfare activities for the masses. The elected politicians for the State Council were accountable for their political actions for fulfilling demands of the people whom they represented through ward-based majority representative system. Hence, this was the inception of the implementation of extensive welfare services for the socio-economic development of the masses. According to Moor (1985: 226), this situation paved the way for the construction of a welfare state in Sri Lanka after independence along the British model.

Since the independence, successive political parties were favour to implement extensive welfare services. Relatively favourable economic status at the independence allowed to follow mass welfare programs and to introduce new such programs. The re-distributor element became a measure of the ‘progressive’ character of the successive post independent governments. It

appealed to the basic Buddhist sentiment such as equity, *dana* (literally meaning is alms giving) and to socialist objectives of distribution of wealth among all citizens. For instance, in his budget speech in 1948, the first finance minister of Sri Lanka who represented UNP remarked, “Free Ceylon may justly and proudly call itself a social service state” (Marga, 1974: 6). Therefore, implementation of welfare programs were widely accepted and it became as a political ideology, and political value, as the way for the wellbeing of rural masses that represented the great majority of the voters within the electoral political system.

### **Youth uprising -1971 / 1987-89: An outcome of political culture**

Since the beginning of 1970s, Sri Lanka experienced brutally violent political uprising that emerged from the majority Sinhalese and from the minority Tamils. As it is pointed out by Jayadeva, Uyangoda, the over-extension and increasing authoritarianism of the state, invariably led to the alienation of other groups in society. They found the state either unwilling or unable or both, to address their demands and grievances. In effect they believed that the system was weighted against them and that the only alternative left was to take up arms against it. Violence breeds violence and there have been periods in Sri Lanka’s recent political history where violence has become the primary arbiter of political grievance (Uyangoda, 1998). In this context, the first vigorous protest against to the political system that explained here came from the Sinhalese Marxist youth organized under the name of *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* – JVP (People’s Liberation Front) in the very beginning of 1970s.

As a revolutionary Marxist youth movement which was based on Sinhala dominated Southern parts of the country, JVP first challenged the SLFP government in 1971. The situation behind youth uprising of 1971 can be summed up as follows. The youth who joined hands with JVP in this event had benefited from the expansion of distributive welfare policies of the country. Particularly, the expansion of vernacular education after 1956 gave more space to rural youths for their social mobility. Subsequently, with the expansion of nationalized enterprises and establishment of new government departments and other institutions, state sector emerged as the main employment sector for those educated youths. But, there were increasing contradictions between the aspirations of the growing young population and the ability of the state to fulfil those aspirations of the youth because of diminishing economic prosperity of the country. Alailima pointed out “It had ceased to be so by the time growing numbers of educated rural youth, who had benefited from free education, were confronted with stagnant opportunities as a result of economy’s poor performance” (1997: 151). This situation vehemently terminated the aspiration of educated rural youths in rural areas. On the other hand, when political patronage became the main way of dispensation of wealth, power and prestige in rural areas, particularly for the state sector job opportunities etc., these rural youth felt that the governing party leaders of the rural level had ill-treated them. Particularly, by 1970s, the access to decision-making and public sector jobs in village level was controlled by party workers. “By 1970, competitive examination had become a virtual farce and even extremely low positions such as office peon...were appointed by high ranking politicians such as Minister of State” (Obeysekera (1974: 380). In this context, those educated rural youth in southern areas led by the JVP took up the arms against the government in 1971.

However, within three months, the then SLFP government was able to suppress the JVP insurrection in 1971. Most of its leaders were jailed. They were released after the UNP’s victory in 1977. The JVP had come to mainstream politics in the beginning of 1980s. But, again JVP had been forced to go underground and do clandestine politics when it was unfairly and wrongly banned by the UNP government in 1983, accusing of involvement in the July riots in 1983 against Tamil population who lived in Sinhala dominated areas of the country. The JVP came



out to fight against the government in 1987. As we noticed, the UNP's political culture after 1977 in the village level was more corrupt compared with pre 1977. Party political affiliation, politically based revenge, political favouritism, nepotism, political victimization etc. mainly featured in the political culture at the village level after the UNP's election victory of 1977. Subsequently, during 1987-89, governing party leaders of the village level and their allies were the first proximate targets of the JVP attacks. However, within two years, the UNP government wiped out the JVP again through the brutal massacre of JVP members including almost all its high level leadership. After the crushing of the second southern rural youth insurrection, the then president appointed a commission in 1990 to examine the root causes of the youth unrest of the country. This official enquiry into the uprising emphasized the role played by a certain style of politics; the abuses and excesses of politicization which gave rise to a strong perception of injustice, erosion of people's confidence in social and political institutions, especially among the young, and its inability to fulfil youth aspirations which in effect had been the major reasons for youth insurrection of the country (Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth, 1990: 1-2). The report had then recommended the pursuit of democratic criteria to select the people for state benefits.

### **1977 Government reform, Party patronage and the escalation of political violence**

Introduction of government reform by 1978 constitution made the significance political system changes in the country. It introduced executive presidential system by replacing cabinet executive which was introduced in 1947 (Perera: 1979). The president who elects by presidential election was vested veto power under the constitutional provisions while retaining parliamentary tradition, such as prime-minister ship and cabinet of the government. Furthermore, new representative system which introduced preferential voting (proportionate representative) system under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution (Parliament Elections Act No. 1 of 1981).

These changes brought into the government system in the country paved the way for transformation of political culture. The political attitudes, value and behaviours politicians and peoples which were formulated by the parliamentary west-minister system were gradually changed. Many argue that, powerfulness of the presidency and the domination of the political party have caused for the transformation of the political culture of the country. The, district based constituency as well as lists system introduced by the proportionate representation representative system has transformed the relationship between government and voters. Prior to the 1978 government reform voters and politician relationship and proximity was a very close one. Representative were frequently tested by the voters based on their performances under the great majority ward-based system. Thus, after the political institution, procedural and representative changes occurred political party became as a most influential factor rather than political economic ideology and policies.

Apart from that, as a result of increased significance of the political parties, motivated by representative reform, dual party system was transforming into multi-party system with flourishing new political parties in country. In the general election held in 1978 there were seven political parties and few independent groups were contested while all seats of parliament distributed among the four main political parties and on independent groups. However, at the eve of election held in 2020, there were seventy registered political parties (election commission report). Even though, literal objective of the representative reform to bring all minority parties into the concessional politics, it has encouraged the religious, cultural, regional, social and ethnic deviation in the national politics resulting aggravation of unnecessary political deviation.



Thus the attitudes and values regarding the power relations and political affiliation on political parties have changed during past two three decades.

One of the paradigm shift in political cultural spheres could also be seen in post 1978 scenario.

During first two three decades of the post-independence era, the gravity of political behaviours mainly determined by the political economic policies. Victory of the MEP government in 1956 and 1971 elections can be cited as an evidence for the argument. People drew their attention on the national development policies which were produced by the respective political parties. However, that paradigm was shifted by replacing significance of political economic policies of the respective parties by individual political characters. For instance, formation and victory of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksha, in 2020 general election can be shown. Mahinda Rajapaksha was a veteran leader of the SLFP as well as a two time president of the country. Due to the political turmoil inside the party in 2015, he break away from SLFP and formed a government within two year–short period of time. Under this circumstances, people didn't draw their attention on either name of the party or its policies. Everything political actions and behaviours of the great majority of the country was determined by the charismatic leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksha. Similarly, UNP which is the oldest mass political party, also underwent to partitions based on the individual characters such as Ranil Wickramasinghe, Karu Jayasooriya and and Sajith Premadasa of the party.

One of the significant characteristics of the Sri Lankan political system is that violence and intimidation have increasingly occupied a prominent place during and after the election period in recent decades. The causes for this situation should be analysed within the political system that developed during past decades. Since the political transformation in 1956, the emergence of politically motivated mediators from both governing parties (the SLFP and the UNP) for handling state affairs could be seen clearly. And, the interrelationship between politics and masses within distributive welfare mechanism was based on the contending parties' offer of the necessities to the masses to win or retain power through their votes. In this context, organizational party political formation further strengthened the relationship between the voters and politicians. It was significant both from the perspective of politicians and voters. Firstly, it was significant within the framework of mobilizing electoral support for the politicians. Because, with the increasing participation of the masses in the parliamentary electoral system, the Members of the Parliament became the patrons for dispensing favours and amenities for their constituents in return for the votes of the masses. In such a context, politicians were able to assure their support for their own party members through the local party bodies. Secondly, it was significant from the voters' point of view, as followers of both parties they could gain access to the state resources, mostly through their party political affiliation. Therefore, effective connections with party politics became more important as a basis of power to handle and gain state benefits. Since 1970s, politically mobilized dynamic groups sometime barred the politically inactive peoples' access to different kind of state benefits, while they themselves enjoyed those benefits through their political relations with politicians.

The next interesting phenomenon which could be observed in politics during recent decades was the inclination of these politically dynamic leaders to undertake government contracts and other lucrative business. They have been able to adjust to this process successfully as they have effective connections with politics. This situation has become more acute since late 1970s. Sometimes, these dynamic leaders were able to carry out even some illegal business under the protection of their political engagements. Generally, governing political parties gave such chances to their local level leaders as they are the actual agents of both parties. When one

party lost the power, those leaders also lost their chances to gain government contracts and other kind of politically backed lucrative business, including legally dubious business, because members of the winning party used to take over such kind of things. It has been observed that such a situation has been functioning in Sri Lanka since last five decades. The successive governing parties established an institutionalized mechanism for the continuation of such a system. Development of this political structure paved the way for the conflict between the members of governing parties. As it is pointed out by Godfrey Gunathilake (1988);

When a political process perceived and approached primarily as a system of patronage, it engenders its own special political attributes. Political power then become largely dependent, or seems to be largely dependent on a large range of small benefits conferred and favours granted. The system relies increasingly for the operation on personal networks. Rights and obligation based on merit, efficiency and equality, which have to be exercised and fulfilled in a more impersonal setting cannot be easily affirmed and sustained. The abuse of power and discrimination on political grounds becomes almost an accepted part of the system. At the same time, the standards of integrity in public life are undermined; corruption grows and is more readily tolerated by political parties as well as the larger society

Who were victimized within this system criticized the situation when they were in opposition. But, when they came to power, they also followed the same system during their regime and tried to prolong their tenure by force. In this context, elections in past decades have been deeply associated with violence and intimidation. This situation generalized during the elections related with power transition in the national level like parliamentary general election. Although this process was not much apparent before 1970s, it became a stabilized process since the late 1970s including post-election violence.

Post-election violence was never institutionalized in any formal sense until 1977. However, newly appointed UNP government openly gave moral supports for party members to spread violence against the defected party (Perera, 1998; Obeyesekere, 1984a, 1984b). Perera (1998: 20) pointed out, "Immediately after its massive electoral victory of 1977, the newly installed UNP government decreed that police officers were entailed for leave. Usually, in the pre and post-election contexts such leave is cancelled in order to maintain law and order given the known potential for violence. Taking complete advantage of the new government's apparent invitation to engage in violence UNP thugs, many of them roamed electorates setting fire to and looting the properties of supporters of the opposition. The next significant development in this regards has been the prevention of opposition party members from casting their votes in the elections. Particularly this has happened during the parliamentary and presidential elections because those elections mark the power transition between the political parties. The rationale behind this occurrence is vital. The governing parties become apprehensive during the presidential and parliamentary elections time as to what would happen to them in case of a change of government. Due to these apprehensions, members of those parties attempt to prevent the voters of opposition party from casting their votes during those election time using violence and intimidation together with impersonation of others' votes, forced voting etc. However, the above explanation does not mean that other elections like local government elections have been free from violence, intimidations, impersonation of others' votes, forced voting etc. during past decades. It has been well known fact that some of elections too badly looted by governing parties during past decades in order to strengthen their political power. This situation was further worsened when emergency regulation was enacted since the beginning of 1980 as a need to prevent terrorism. From this period, governing parties used these regulations not only to prevent the terrorism but also to suppress the opposition parties in order to sustain the power. Within this context, almost all the elections which held since the beginning of 1980s embraced

with violence and intimidation. Some political analyst used the term ‘criminalization of politics’ (Uyangoda, 1997) to describe this situation, because rival parties have engaged with killing, looting, destroying etc. activities against each other and have mobilized even under-world elements for this purpose.

Until 1980s, except parliamentary general election and local government election, there was not any other election in the country. However, particularly after 1988, frequent elections were very general things in the country because, since 1982, presidential election has been held in every six years. When provincial council system was initiated under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987, the provincial council election was started to be held in every five years. From 1999 to 2006, there had at least one election in every year. According to the reports of election commissioner and election monitoring organizations, it is well known fact that those elections, more or less, have not been free from violence, intimidations, impersonation of others’ votes, forced voting etc. In this context, Jayadeva Uyangoda, has pointed out that recent developments in Sri Lanka’s electoral politics are symptomatic of a deep crisis of democratic institutions. This crisis manifests itself in a form of our democratic institutions and practices being separated from the elementary normative principles of democracy (Uyangoda, 1999). The comment of this writer raised clearly shows the dilemma of the political system of the country that has been faced.

### **Conclusion**

The main objectives of this study are to examine the process of cultural transformation and identify the main factors that affecting the formation of political culture in post independent Sri Lanka. Political culture refers to the specifically political orientations—attitudes towards the political system and its various parts and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system. One of the basic observation on political culture is that it differ to country to country as well as it dynamic in nature. Political culture of a society is determined by different factors respective polity.

This study arrived at several conclusions as below; first, formation and transformation of the political culture of Sri Lanka have been mainly followed *Vis a Vis* to the prevailing political institutions and provisions throughout entire political history. During this long history, it has been proven that political culture of a country is differ to country to country as well as the dynamic process in nature. The transformation of prevailed indigenous feudal political culture of the Ceylon, into a western type of political system mainly during British rule can be proved the above argument.

Second, the transformation of political culture in independent Sri Lanka was basically determined by pre and post government and political reforms introduce by British rule and local leaders. During the first and two decades in post independent era, parliamentarian way of government system introduced by Soulburry, constitution in 1947, prevailed and it has contributed for shaping up the political perceptions, attitudes and values of the people. The perceptions on collective responsibility and accountable governance, significance of development oriented policies have played decisive role in determine the government during that period.

Apart from that social, cultural and economic factors which have triggered after the independent have also contributed to formation of political culture. For instance, political and government change took place in 1956, paved the way for rise of communal politics by changing plural democratic value and inculcating majoritarian politics since 1956.

However, constitutional reform which introduced by the UNP government in 1977 was heavily influenced for discontinuation of prevailed political culture and contributed for the

formation of new political culture in Sri Lanka. The Executive presidential system along with referential representative system which replaced the ward- based majority system by referential representative system have transformed the attitudes and value in democratic politics. As a result of introduction of proportional representative system, the parliamentary political system which was dominated by the duel party system was replaced by multi-party system creating opportunities for emergence of consensus-orient multiparty system. However, instead of creating progressive political culture, establishment of ethnic-based political system has jeopardized the pluralist and democratic political values of the country. The election result of the presidential election (2019) and general election (2021) can be sited as the culmination of the ethnic-based majority dominated politics.

Apart from the governmental changes, the procedural changes brought into the representative system such as district electoral system, nomination list and party dominating popular voting system has created an unnecessary completion among the parties as well as within the parties resulting exaggeration of political violence in the country. Based on above findings it can be concluded that political culture of the pre-independent era has significantly transformed into a different level mainly due to the political, institutional and procedural changes.

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