

of minor British aristocracy and gentry. There is a contrast here with the Nehru family in India, which maintained a public–private dichotomy between an anglicised exterior and a more ‘traditional’ domestic life (Holden 2008, 88).

Following this tradition, young Bandaranaike was educated by a British tutor before going to St Thomas’ College in Colombo, a premier Anglican school, which emulated the British public school tradition. Following his secondary education, Bandaranaike entered Christ Church, Oxford to read classics and obtained a high second, which was a significant achievement for an Asian student at the time (Manor 1989, 36–55). Bandaranaike also became the junior treasurer of the Oxford Union and made a name for himself as a commanding orator. His success at Oxford allowed him to distance himself from the privileges of his birth and claim a sense of achievement based on merit. When he returned to Ceylon, Bandaranaike did not enter the colonial civil service, as envisioned by his father, but entered politics. From a very early stage in his political career, Bandaranaike sought to project himself as an anti-colonial political figure heralding a transition from a collaborationist colonial-elite political system to an independent, representative system of governance. He was one of the first political figures in Sri Lanka to adopt native dress and he later learnt Sinhala and began using the language to address public gatherings. He converted to Buddhism in the 1930s. All three of these marks of authenticity, however, remained somewhat abstract and academic. They may have made Bandaranaike appear more radical and authentic than many other national politicians, but he remained very much part of the political class, which had little connection with the people it claimed to represent.

In the only extended political biography of Bandaranaike, James Manor (1989) reads this turn to authenticity as significantly influenced by an oedipal conflict with Bandaranaike’s anglophile father. Manor’s account of Bandaranaike, though providing comprehensive coverage of his life and the political context he operated in, needs to be supplemented. Written in the tradition of political biography, which positions prominent, powerful and often elite individuals as focal points in the political dynamics of a society, Manor’s study reveals less of the discursive forces that shaped Bandaranaike. The problem of elite leaders, especially in decolonising contexts, being portrayed as dominant agents of change is amplified because of their visibility and accessibility in the available archival material. By shifting the focus from the individual per se to larger discourses within and against which Bandaranaike fashioned his self-identity it is possible to see him as someone who functioned

within a framework of nationalist authenticity over which he had little control. The locations within and through which he sought to authenticate himself delineate what he identified as authenticity. But his notions of authenticity did not always resonate with other elite and non-elite groups on the island.

Bandaranaike entered active politics through the Colombo Municipal Council elections in 1926. The decision to enter electoral politics alienated his father but was nevertheless facilitated by his family's connections and wealth (Manor 1989, 65). It was as a member of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) that Bandaranaike later obtained his first ministerial portfolio and moved up the political hierarchy of the State Council. Styled after the Indian National Congress, the CNC was an elite body of politicians which was politically far more conservative and loosely organised than its Indian counterpart. Throughout his time in the State Council, Bandaranaike was unable to secure the level of power and responsibility he desired. He clashed constantly with the two leading Sinhala politicians of the CNC, D. S. Senanayake, who became the first prime minister of independent Ceylon, and D. B. Jayatilaka (de Silva 1981; Manor 1989, 94). In 1936 Bandaranaike formed his own movement, the *Sinhala Maha Sabha* (SMS), which was based ostensibly on Fabian ideals of gradual socialist reform, but it received little grassroots backing. The formation of the SMS was in part a response to the granting of universal franchise in 1931, which created a need for elite politicians to engage in popular politics. The fact that Bandaranaike chose to form a movement based on Sinhala-majority identity suggests he had some awareness of the growing Sinhala identity consciousness outside his elite political circle; but, as we shall see, this was a vague grasp of the many shades and nuances of this rising Sinhala consciousness.

In 1946, like most CNC politicians, Bandaranaike joined the newly formed United National Party, led by D. S. Senanayake. In 1948 he became a member of independent Sri Lanka's first cabinet under the premiership of Senanayake. Three years later Bandaranaike broke decisively with Senanayake and the United National Party following a series of bitter disputes over socio-economic reform in the country. This rift led to Bandaranaike forming the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which merged with the *Sinhala Maha Sabha* (de Silva 1981, 517). Before this, in 1943, when Bandaranaike had felt no compulsion towards politically mobilising the 'people', he supported parity status for Tamil and Sinhala languages. In this clannish political culture the quasi-feudal elite could easily form inter-ethnic alliances (DeVotta 2009, 39). Bandaranaike began adopting a more visibly pro-Sinhala nationalist stance with the

formation of the SLFP in 1951, but only supported the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy, whereby Sinhala would become the sole official language of the country, as the 1956 election approached (DeVotta 2009: 62). This policy was justified by the view that the Sinhalese were the majority and were the ‘authentic’ inhabitants of the island, given their history, and that under colonialism they had suffered economic, cultural and social deprivation more than any other community.

Bandaranaike reached the pinnacle of his political life with the SLFP-led coalition’s victory in the 1956 general election, after which he became the fourth prime minister of independent Sri Lanka. Before the 1956 election Bandaranaike’s political position had begun to shift increasingly towards representing exclusive Sinhala and Buddhist interests. Soon after the election victory he enacted the disastrous ‘Sinhala-only’ bill to make Sinhala the official language of the country. Tamil political and public opposition to this bill and counter-opposition by Sinhala groups led to independent Sri Lanka’s first instance of ethnic rioting in June 1956. Amidst these inter-ethnic tensions, Bandaranaike moved ahead with his decolonisation programme by closing British air and naval bases in Sri Lanka and moving towards a non-aligned foreign policy. Internally, various subsidies and social welfare programmes were introduced but the pace and magnitude of these reforms were felt to be insufficient by certain groups, especially the Sinhala cultural revivalists who expected a radical transformation in language and culture (Manor 1989, 263–4).

In 1957 Bandaranaike sought to address the language dispute, and the intimately related issue of Tamil demand for greater autonomy, through a pact with the leader of the main Tamil political party, S. J. V. Chelvanayagam. But the idea of devolving power to Tamil-dominated areas was strongly opposed by various Sinhala groups. In 1958 – following a campaign in which public buses carrying the Sinhala letter ‘sri’ were defaced in Tamil-dominated areas – there were widespread protests and pressure, especially from a group of Buddhist monks, for Bandaranaike to abrogate the pact with Chelvanayagam. Capitulating to these demands, he publicly abrogated the pact and also proscribed Chelvanayagam’s Federal Party (Manor 1989, 286–9). The inter-ethnic tensions arising from this conflict led to the worst ethnic violence of Bandaranaike’s tenure, when organised Sinhala gangs attacked Tamil businesses and homes (Vittachi 1958). Emergency rule had to be declared throughout the country to bring the situation under control. By this time, Bandaranaike’s political image had lost credibility and he was viewed with suspicion by many Sinhala and Tamil groups. In 1959

Bandaranaike was shot in his home by a Buddhist monk and later died in hospital. Popular lore holds that the assassination was a plot by Sinhala Buddhist elements dissatisfied with Bandaranaike's commitment to their interests. However, it is more likely that the killing was motivated by petty personal and business rivalries (Manor 1989, 315–16).

After his death Bandaranaike became something of a legend and a martyr. Sinhala nationalists see 1956 as a pivotal moment when a comprador elite was displaced and the true sons of the soil managed to gain at least a tenuous political foothold in a system of governance that had long excluded them. Much policymaking by Sinhala-dominated governments in Sri Lanka since 1956 has been implicitly or explicitly targeted at 'correcting' these perceived historical injustices (Barrow 2014). For Tamil nationalists, 1956 and Bandaranaike represent a watershed moment of political and cultural marginalisation in the newly formed nation state. Bandaranaike's legacy, even in Sinhala nationalist discourse, has remained ambiguous. His clear anglicised identity has prevented him being appropriated as a folk nationalist hero. At the same time, Bandaranaike is too important a figure to be left out of the Sinhala nationalist narrative. As I will explore in [Chapter 5](#), Sinhala nationalist discourse sometimes adopts Bandaranaike as someone who instinctively tapped into an organic and transcendental Sinhala authenticity. However, this appropriation is suffused with irony, since Bandaranaike's writing shows he was someone who laboured hard to fashion an idea of authenticity, thus exposing the constructed nature of the discourse of nationalist authenticity in general.

Oxford memoirs of Bandaranaike – conquering the metropolis and nationalist awakenings

Before I am their equal I must first be their superior.

(Bandaranaike 1963, 14)

Bandaranaike's 'Memories of Oxford' was serialised in the *Ceylon Causeur* magazine between 1933 and 1935. Taken together these Oxford memoirs form a comprehensive narrative of his time at the university in the early 1920s. They were written at a time when Bandaranaike was struggling to establish himself as a significant presence in Ceylonese politics as a member of the CNC. When suffrage was being deliberated in 1927 by the Donoughmore Commission appointed to make recommendations for constitutional reform, a

CNC delegation, of which Bandaranaike was a member, argued that voting should be limited on the basis of income, a literacy test or property, depending on gender. Only the charismatic labour leader A. E. Goonesinghe clamoured for suffrage for the working classes (de Silva 1981, 418–21).

The memoirs were published following a brief overtly Gandhian phase in Bandaranaike's political life. He adopted native dress, advocated civil disobedience and promoted the adoption of a pastoral non-modern lifestyle. These moves gained little traction among his conservative peers, however, and Bandaranaike abandoned this project, retaining only the native dress (Manor 1989, 98–10). The desire to project an authentic image through dress suggests that Bandaranaike was conscious of and felt the need to participate in what Nira Wickramasinghe (2006, 92–111) calls 'dressing and caring for the authentic body', which was part of a larger late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century effort to create an authentic public image for Sinhala men and women. But Bandaranaike's adoption of native dress remained at the level of a change in an outward marker rather than a substantive change in political culture – a limitation reflected in the larger political milieu he operated in and the values refracted in his Oxford memoirs. Placed in this context, Bandaranaike's memoirs can be seen as a guarded document that serves multiple purposes. At one level they establish his credentials within the conservative political culture of the time as a man steeped in British gentlemanly values and someone who had gained the prestigious position of secretary of the Oxford Union. At the same time, the memoirs try to place Bandaranaike in the currents of decolonising discourse of the time – an attempt that a critical reading of the memoirs demonstrates was undermined by its appeal to British values and its unwillingness to go beyond a superficial critique of elite British culture.

Deliberately invoking the schoolboy/varsity adventure genre through references to Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861), Bandaranaike scripts his narrative as an ironic contrast between the naïveté of his childhood reading and the reality of a colonial subject's experience in a bastion of British learning. But the narrative is triumphal and portrays Bandaranaike's victory in proving his worth as all the more significant for the racial prejudices he had to overcome. Three themes dominate the memoirs: how Bandaranaike overcame the racially biased insularity of Oxbridge society; his ambiguous position vis-à-vis other colonised people, particularly Indians; and the emergence of his own nationalist consciousness.

The Oxford memoirs, addressed primarily to a Sri Lankan English-speaking audience, can be seen as providing legitimacy for Bandaranaike's political aspirations. Since Britain, its culture, system of education and governance were held in high esteem by elite social circles in Sri Lanka at that time, Bandaranaike's credentials as a man thoroughly familiar with these aspects of British life are stressed. The figure of an ideal British gentleman aristocrat and a set of positive values associated with this image dominate the Oxford memoirs. The implicit anti-colonialism of the memoirs coexists with this 'liberal' image of British identity. Bandaranaike sees his triumph at Oxford as enabled by this code of gentlemanly liberality – a discourse that, Lauren Goodland observes, was a mid-Victorian resurrection of a quasi-feudal appeal to social hierarchy which in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain became 'a powerful descriptive basis for a myth of disinterested governance by an Oxbridge elite' (Goodland 2003, 26). Bandaranaike presents gentlemanly values as a universal discourse that can transcend the unnamed or unnamable racial bar – because naming racism seems too threatening to his self-identity.

Though the Oxford memoirs begin with a sense of cultural and class-based dislocation, references to Bandaranaike's privileged background interrupt this narrative of marginalisation. For instance, we are told at the beginning that it was 'not just an accident ... [that] my name was entered [by my father] ... in the books of Christ Church, about ten years before I actually went up' (Bandaranaike 1963, 3). Equally revealing is the tone of disdain with which he describes his lower middle-class British landlord Bates's house, effectively identifying himself as the equivalent of the British upper middle class:

Oh! The horror of that sitting-room. Drab, dreary, smug – two smug porcelain figures on the mantelpiece with a square box in the centre, smugly pretending to be a clock, although it had long since ceased to function as such, the smug upright chairs with their dreary reddish upholstery, the dingy curtain – it nearly drove me mad.

(Bandaranaike 1963, 7)

In Oxford itself, among his peers, neither Bandaranaike's wealth nor his privileged background can provide him the acceptance he desires. His marginality is brought home when he finds himself a mere spectator standing outside the inner circle of the Junior Common Room. Observing the jubilant entrance of Edward Marjoribanks – a young aristocrat and a later friend and role model of Bandaranaike's – into the Common Room, Bandaranaike

comments, 'How I envied him ... How sadly I wondered ... whether I would ever be greeted like that myself?' (1963, 8). Such acceptance, as the narrative chronicles, does not come easily, especially given the insidious nature of the racial discrimination in polite Oxbridge society:

With positive rudeness or brutal frankness one might be able to deal more or less effectively ... The trouble was far more subtle and deep seated: in a variety of ways one was always being shown, politely but unmistakably, that one was simply not wanted.

(Bandaranaike 1963, 9)

In the triumphalist trajectory of the memoirs this produces not despair, but firm resolve. The solution Bandaranaike sees to this marginalisation is to achieve fame and recognition at Oxford: 'Before I am their equal I must first be their superior' (Bandaranaike 1963, 14). It is in this narrative of resolve, struggle and ultimate triumph that one sees the idea of British gentlemanly values crystallised in practice. If an insidious racism permeates early twentieth-century Oxbridge society, Bandaranaike conceives gentlemanly values as a universal discourse that can transcend such divisions:

An Englishman is generous in recognising merit in others; it is more difficult to overcome the various barriers to his friendship. Once, however, his respect is obtained, it is easy to become his friend, if one reasonably conforms to his standards. And what a true and loyal friend he can be!

(Bandaranaike 1963, 17)

This is unlike a typical anti-colonial critique that would attempt to construct the nationalist thinker's culture as a superior foil to British culture. It yet again reflects the conservative Sri Lankan socio-cultural milieu. However, in attempting to appeal to a gentlemanly code, traces of a masculinist reaction to the feminisation of colonised people in colonial discourse can be discerned (Nandy 1983). The rhetoric of Dharmapala also carried overtones of such a masculine discourse – projecting the Sinhalese as a historically virile and technologically advanced people descending from Aryan racial stock (Guruge 1991 [1965], 481–2). John Kotelawala, the father of Sir John Kotelawala, the third prime minister of Sri Lanka, and the man whom Bandaranaike succeeded in 1956, was a more aggressive example of this hyper-masculinity. Kotelawala was known for his physical altercations with locals as well as the British and

is sometimes portrayed as an anti-colonial folk hero in popular culture. Dharmapala used to uphold Kotelawala as a role model and spoke admiringly of his antics (Gulawatta 2010).

If the internalisation of gentlemanly values brings Bandaranaike closer to Oxbridge society, it also places him in an ambiguous relationship with Indians and with other colonial subjects of the British Empire. In the debates at the Oxford Union, Bandaranaike regularly represented an Indian position – a role that he seems to have welcomed because it allowed him to claim a transnational anti-colonial stance. Bandaranaike's greatest oratorical triumph at the Union was in a debate on India where he defended the proposition 'that indefinite continuance of British rule in India is a violation of British political ideals' (Bandaranaike 1963, 43). This is not dissimilar to the way Dharmapala presented himself in Japan as a representative of Indian Buddhism rather than as a Sri Lankan; we see again the strategically shifting nature of the 'authenticity' claimed by these individuals.

Bandaranaike (1963, 46) notes that 'I ... interpreted the problems of that country [India] in terms of those of my own'. Privately, though, Bandaranaike seems to have abhorred Indian social life at Oxford. This distaste seems to have been a product of his elitism and insecurity about being marginalised on the basis of race or colour. In the memoirs Indians are presented as culturally deracinated victims, and Bandaranaike notes he kept away from their social functions (Bandaranaike 1963, 47). The memoirs portray a man who has privately remained anglophile while publicly cultivating a persona of anti-colonialism – a contradiction also visible in his longstanding political relationship with the CNC and its conservative brand of politics.

Bandaranaike's sense of elitism and exceptionalism extended to the ways he viewed and interacted with Sri Lankans:

Indian traditions and culture had wilted in the inhospitable soil of foreign rule, while on the other hand, British culture had failed to take any deep root. Many Indians, therefore – indeed, like ourselves – possessed neither the one nor the other.

(Bandaranaike 1963, 47)

This passage refers as much to the anglicised Sri Lankan social circles that Bandaranaike was intimately familiar with as it does to Indians at Oxford. Bandaranaike had a dismissive attitude towards the anglicised elite of Sri Lanka and also the idea of the Brown Sahib – a comical figure of colonial derision that his father, with his penchant for British manners

and lifestyle, in some ways represented (Manor 1989, 10–11, 26, 60–1). This lack of culture – culture here, as in most of Bandaranaike’s writing, signifies an edifying discourse close to an Arnoldian conception of high culture – is seen as producing a number of weaknesses in the majority of Indians at Oxford: dishonesty, servility and lack of character. Though he reads this with some sympathy as a general malaise resulting from the condition of being dominated – ‘nothing rots the soul of a man like slavery, whether it be that of an individual or a nation’ (Bandaranaike 1963, 48) – he sees himself as rising above the effects of such cultural deracination. Bandaranaike claims that ‘[the] iron that had entered into my soul in the earlier period of my Varsity career ... saved me from being more submissive to, and receptive of, the influence of the University; from acquiring, for instance, an Oxford manner and an Oxford accent’ (Bandaranaike 1963, 42). However, he is known to have used the ‘Oxford accent’ to strategic advantage (Gooneratne 1986, 84), and Manor (1989, 11) notes, ‘he never forgot, nor let others forget, that he excelled at the Oxford of Anthony Eden and Evelyn Waugh’ (Manor 1989, 11).

Although moments such as this show how Bandaranaike’s familial origins haunted his Oxford experiences, Sri Lanka as a country and culture is largely absent from ‘Memories of Oxford’ until it makes a sudden and cheesy appearance at the end. As Bandaranaike scripts his departure from the university, the narrative nostalgically reflects upon his time at Oxford. Standing upon Magdalen Bridge, on the very route that the narrative earlier records as the site where his decision to prevail over the insularity of Oxbridge society was made, Bandaranaike (1963, 59) reflects that his ‘life’s mission’ lies in his homeland. The idyllic English scene from the bridge is juxtaposed with a harsher reality of home:

The typically English scene, subdued and mellow in the evening light, faded away from my eyes, and the glare and dust of my own country took its place: blue skies and dancing sunlight, with a white road winding amidst coconut groves and green paddy fields; dark cool nights, with star bejewelled skies ... the pathetic, huddled village huts, the dirt, the poverty, the disease. My country, my people. Aye, it was there my work lay, and Oxford had revealed to me my life’s mission.

(Bandaranaike 1963, 59)

Coming at the end of the memoirs, this passage gathers up the narrative of Bandaranaike’s triumph at Oxford – a narrative that demonstrates his

strength of character and an implicit anti-colonial victory in his conquest of the university – and projects him as someone capable of guiding his homeland in the future.

A footnote to the Oxford memoirs is a very short story Bandaranaike published in the *Island Review* in 1926, a year after he returned from Oxford. The tension between a private anglophile self and a public anti-colonial persona, evident in the memoirs, is foreshadowed in this story. In the story, simply entitled ‘Kandy Perahera’, a young protagonist, John Ratnaike, is watching the annual pageant (*perahera*) of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy – the repository of one of the most important Buddhist relics in Sri Lanka. John, an anglicised youth, watches the pageant from the balcony of the Queen’s Hotel, an exclusive vantage point, while he and his friends play cards. While gazing at the pageant John experiences a moment similar to Bandaranaike on Magdalen Bridge: the pageant disappears from view and he is drawn into the glorious Sinhala culture he believes the pageant signifies. He also begins to identify himself with the ‘common’ people at street level. He is dragged back from this reverie when his friends at the card table call him and he finds himself tugging at his shirt – an outward marker of his westernisation. The story ends here. The anonymous editors of Bandaranaike’s *Speeches and Writings* (1963) note, ‘It is believed that Mr. Bandaranaike was writing about himself in this story’ (Bandaranaike 1963, 466). The narrative illustrates how Bandaranaike approaches authenticity. Unable to project or claim authenticity as something inherent to his self-identity, but at the same time operating in a discourse that saw authenticity as something natural and transcendental, he looks for authenticity in various outward markers in culture and history. A similar theme is echoed in less autobiographical terms in his short story ‘The Mystery of the Missing Candidate’ (Bandaranaike 1963, 467–90), where an aristocratic man who enters politics suddenly disappears close to an election, unable to contend with the populist demands placed on him. He is later found seeking refuge in a Buddhist hermitage and wanting to renounce his wealth and anglicised privilege. In some ways the ambivalence of the two protagonists in these short stories is a metaphor for elite Sri Lankan politics: the lack of an intimate understanding of the people is substituted by a romanticised and essentialist notion of culture and how people ought to be.

The turn to the indigenous in Bandaranaike suggests that he was aware of growing Sinhala and Buddhist identity consciousness among intermediate elite groups. As Dharmadasa (1992, 117–25) notes, much of this activity was tied to the innovative use of the print medium, and there was an exponential growth of Sinhala periodicals from the 1860s

to the 1890s. There were parallel movements in constructing local authenticity in dress, vernacular education, images of the past, and theatre (Wickramasinghe 2006, 73–111). Many like Dharmapala were also bilingual and a significant portion of their ideas appeared in English print. It is possible that Bandaranaike read their work. There is anecdotal evidence that Bandaranaike may have listened to Dharmapala speaking in public (Herath 2011). Although Bandaranaike, and other elite figures may have been aware of these trends and at times have come into contact with them, they do not appear to have had any substantive or affective engagement with them. Whether or not they encountered Dharmapala or his ideas directly, there is a degree of discursive congruence between the elite imagination of a glorious Sinhala past and the ways that others such as Dharmapala, from a different social stratum, saw the country's past and authenticity. One can see this as a contested field where the anglicised elite and educated Sinhala intelligentsia fought to claim custodianship over discourses considered authentic and thereby to stake a moral and political claim to be 'representative' in a broad sense. Bandaranaike staging the Kandy Perahera as a site of authenticity, in this context, is no accident. Orientalist scholars such as Ananda Coomaraswamy idealised Kandyan Sinhala identity as authentic compared with the so-called Low Country Sinhalese, who owing to colonisation of the maritime areas of the island were seen as more culturally 'corrupted' (Brow 1999). As Wickramasinghe (2006, 94) argues multiple discourses of authenticity with different temporal and spatial coordinates coexisted in early twentieth-century Sri Lanka, as is indeed the case today as well. This too points to the inconsistency and mobility of the discourse of authenticity in Bandaranaike's thought – shifting between the distant past and more recent times.

Gandhi, the village and authenticity

In 1933 Bandaranaike authored a short booklet on indigenous economic and social revitalisation called the *The Spinning Wheel and the Paddy Field* (Bandaranaike 1963, 550–609). The village of antiquity is imagined in this project as an idealised vision of precolonial harmony: a site of economic self-sufficiency and moral order. The overtly Gandhian inspiration for this project is evident in the iconic image of the spinning wheel. This is consistent with the revivalist momentum that permeated much nationalist thought not only in South Asia but also in Africa and found its way into, for example, Chinua Achebe's fiction published around the time of Nigeria's independence.

The idea of village revitalisation in Sri Lanka is not unique to Bandaranaike. D. S. Senanayake – independent Sri Lanka’s first prime minister – carried out the restoration and expansion of ancient irrigation works alongside farmer resettlement schemes. From the time he was minister of lands and agriculture in the State Council in the 1930s, Senanayake drew upon historical images of an ancient hydraulic civilisation (Manor 1989; Gunawardena 1971). Furthermore, there was remarkable consistency in how the twentieth-century Sri Lankan elites regarded the peasantry and village life from a custodial or tutelary perspective (Moore 1985; 1992; Samaraweera 1981). The idealised historical imaginary that informed such an attitude, argues Moore (1985, 3, 117–71, 119–20), had a negative impact on policymaking because it propagated misconceptions about the economic and social structure of the peasantry.

Bandaranaike’s visions of spinning and paddy cultivation reflect different aspects of an idealised image of the past. The idea of spinning comes from a Gandhian vision and paddy cultivation from a more locally grounded imaginary, but both serve as marks of the notion of timeless authenticity that came to permeate public culture.

In expressing his vision for Sri Lanka, Bandaranaike integrates an idealistic critique of what he sees as Western models of development. His narrative sees capitalism, industrialism and colonialism as intimately connected forces that produce social disintegration. Capitalism with its need for surplus is seen as driving demand for production, which in turn necessitates, and is enabled by, industrial production. Industrialism is seen as a malign force that alienates workers from their products and creates reliance on what Bandaranaike (1963, 558) calls the ‘Machine-God’. Colonialism, he suggests, is the third party in this destructive project, because as capitalism exhausts domestic markets and resources it has to expand outwards. A stark vision of industrial Europe facing mass technological unemployment pervades this narrative and invokes the horrors of the workhouse. Using a reference to Charles Dickens (Bandaranaike 1963, 559), he compares industrial society to a form of modern slavery. He also quotes Gandhi to illustrate the threat posed by industrialism: ‘Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates. Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin’ (Bandaranaike 1963, 555). While acknowledging benefits created by industrial society, such as low-cost goods and increased employment opportunities, Bandaranaike sees this idea of progress as unsustainable partly on the basis of leftist critiques of capitalism but at the same time because he sees industrialisation as alien to the authenticity of ‘Eastern’ life.

The alternative offered to this bleak future is a return to tradition. Bandaranaike is conscious that such thinking can be seen as naïve and idealistic and says, ‘We are only too well aware of the tendency to praise unduly ... the conditions of life in the distant past ... [W]e are apt to cast longing eyes to a state of things which, dimmed and obscured by time and hallowed by sentiment cannot be appraised with any degree of accuracy’ (Bandaranaike 1963, 553). But he ignores his own call for critical awareness. Providing rather thin historical evidence to establish spinning as an ancient industry in Sri Lanka, Bandaranaike associates spinning with precolonial village ethics:

... the sturdy peasantry, who are admittedly the backbone of this country, lived in simplicity and contentment under our ancient system of village government. And what a fine system it was! The village Pansala [temple] supplying the religious needs of the village community, the village school, often under the guidance of the Bhikkus, providing the necessary education ...

But the stupidity and short-sightedness of foreign rule have progressively frittered away and shaken to pieces the excellent fabric of government. It is said by an historian that if you were to take a Sinhalese peasant from his plough and wash the mud off him he would be fit to rule the State.

(Bandaranaike 1963, 572)

The essence of Sinhala identity in this thinking lies in the village – in its rustic simplicity, in the pastoral moral order of its people tempered by a Buddhist worldview but at the same time moulded by a grander historical vision of an advanced hydraulic civilisation that has long disappeared but has left its traces upon this idealised village. The imagination at work here has some procedural similarities to Dharmapala. While Dharmapala openly castigated villagers, Bandaranaike looks at them with benevolent condescension. As we shall see in [Chapter 5](#), the village functions as a site of national authenticity in Gunadasa Amarasekara’s imagination as well, though the function, emphasis and place of the village there differ from what we find in Dharmapala and Bandaranaike.

Paddy cultivation, the other key element in Bandaranaike’s project, is something that takes inspiration from both empirical reality and historical consciousness. Though paddy cultivation was a long-established agricultural practice in Sri Lanka, it was not as critical to the rural economy as Bandaranaike and other members of the political elite thought (Moore 1985, 87). Mick Moore (1985, 117) also suggests that the elite promoted

paddy cultivation not primarily because it would benefit the peasantry financially, but because it was associated with an idea of precolonial rural harmony. It also allowed the peasantry to be imagined and managed in a politically conservative manner that would not threaten the elite. In an anecdote about his early political career Bandaranaike recounts an old farmer and his son coming to meet him. The father fits Bandaranaike's vision of the authentic peasant farmer, but the son in 'European dress' is the target of ridicule (Bandaranaike 1963, 571).

Though paddy cultivation is not as directly associated with an ethical discourse as spinning, the historical imaginary that informs it derives from a similar idealised vision of the past. One of the major factors influencing this historical imaginary is the possibility of claiming coevalness, or even anteriority, to European civilisation. As in Dharmapala, colonial sociology and history strongly shape Bandaranaike's view of the past. He quotes Ramsay MacDonald – the British Labour prime minister of the 1920s – addressing a Sri Lankan audience:

I, who represent a race which was then small, insignificant, and almost unknown to the world, [stood] there representing the power of my people, reflecting and brooding upon the fall of others. What does it mean? What is its warning? What is its moral? I saw your beautiful temples, your beautiful palaces ... they [past rulers of Sri Lanka] subdued their enemies and then they threw challenges to the world ... yet the jungle has grown where they ruled.

(Ramsay MacDonald quoted in Bandaranaike 1963, 592)

MacDonald's narrative is a cautionary reflection on the decline of civilisation. Sri Lankan people had achieved greatness in the past, long before the English race had gained significance; but the Sri Lankans are now a subject people and the places they once ruled are now in ruins or covered by jungle.

But for Bandaranaike, as for Dharmapala, the antiquity of the Sinhala civilisation provides the inspiration for contemporary national revival. An iconic figure in Sinhala historical consciousness in relation to paddy cultivation is the twelfth-century King Parakramabahu. Parakramabahu's reign is believed to have been one of agricultural excellence. Bandaranaike calls it the 'Golden Age of Lanka, [when] rice was exported to foreign lands as well' (Bandaranaike 1963, 592) The idea of this ancient hydraulic civilisation had already gained both academic and popular currency by the end of the nineteenth century as the twin disciplines of historiography and archaeology combined to produce an

authoritative discourse of Sri Lanka's past. What was read about in texts like the *Mahavamsa* was made physically manifest by archaeology – an imaginative process that, as we shall see in [Chapters 5 and 6](#), persisted well into the 1980s.

As we shall see in [Chapters 5 and 6](#), both post-independence development discourse and the aesthetic imagination were heavily influenced by the idea of ancient Sinhala civilisation and its achievements in irrigation and paddy cultivation. Emerson Tennent's historical writing in the mid nineteenth century notes that the irrigation works and monuments of precolonial Sinhala civilisations 'arrest the traveler in astonishment at their stupendous dimensions' (Tennent 1977 [1860], 270). The power and continuity of this historical narrative is also visible in the work of many post-independence historians, such as K. M. de Silva (1981, 68) and R. A. L. H. Gunawardana (1971), who eulogise the achievements of the hydraulic civilisation and even index the weight of individual stones used in construction.

Buddhism, rationalism and national identity

A somewhat different relationship to authenticity emerges in Bandaranaike's writings on Buddhism. On the one hand, there is a cosmopolitan rationalist understanding of Buddhism which has little to do with local authenticity. On the other hand, there is Buddhism as Sinhala cultural heritage. The negotiation between these two understandings of Buddhism again reflects the tension in Bandaranaike's life between his anglicised background and his need for a public decolonised persona. Bandaranaike's conversion to Buddhism was controversial because of the suspicion that it took place only for instrumental political reasons.

The *Mahavamsa* narrative that links the arrival of Prince Vijaya in Sri Lanka with the Buddha's death, and the idea that the Buddha bequeathed a legacy to the Sinhala people as protectors of Buddhism, played an important role in the late nineteenth-century Sinhala imagination (Dharmapala 1907, 285–6). However, the strong political correlation between Sinhala nationalism and Buddhism is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Given the more politically charged nature of Buddhism in the 1930s, Bandaranaike's conversion to Buddhism was seen at the time (Bond 1988, 91–3), and is still assessed, as a politically opportunistic move (DeVotta 2004, 60). This is partly because Bandaranaike's conversion was part of a pattern of elite conversions to Buddhism spurred by the granting of universal franchise based on the recommendations of