

The Social Dynamics of the Formation of an Anti Sri Lankan Subculture in Department of Sociology in the 1960s

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This paper places on record the social milieu and relationships on the Peradeniya University Campus during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It may shed light on the cultural and social context that would have influenced present day sociologists. The period was approximately 10 years after independence; the Arts Faculty of the University of Ceylon was shifted to Peradeniya in 1952. Most of the undergraduates of this university came from the relatively exclusive public schools of Ceylon modeled on the public schools of Britain. The students by and large belonged to the English speaking upper middle class mainly from Colombo, Kandy, Galle and Jaffna whose predominant cultural occupation was the pursuit of the emulation of a British way of life.

However, two momentous events were beginning to have their impact on the campus. They were a) the free education scheme and b) the change of government that took place in 1956. As described by the English educated middle upper class, it was the dawn of the era of 'Yakkos'. Towards the end of the nineteen fifties the hordes of the siblings of the 'Yakkos' were reaching the portals of Peradeniya. The situation compounded when in the mid-sixties the Sinhala/ Tamil educated hordes landed on the campus. Socially, these new comers came partly from the society that hitherto provided the upper middle class homes with domestic servants and the farmers of their paddy fields.

This disparity created in the minds of the new arrivals resentment towards the 'elites', but since their own numbers were substantial, they began describing the other group as 'Kultur' (German for culture). Kulturs in turn called the 'uncouth' 'Haramanis' which was a common name for their domestics. Academically too the two groups differed. The 'Kulturs' took mainly subjects like English, western classics, European history, law, sociology, philosophy, economics and geography, etc. The 'Haramanis' were more comfortable with Sinhala/ Tamil, Arabic, Pali, Sanskrit, Indian History and also ventured out towards statistics, economics and geography. The category of students who offered Pali, Sanskrit and Sinhala/Tamil were the lowest in the campus social order and referred to as 'Ofac' meaning Oriental Faculty. The writer of this paper was one of them.

Some Haramanises did admire the way of life of the Kulturs and secretly aspired to be 'Kultur'. Some tried to get there by offering the same subjects as the Kulturs. Sociology offered a common platform for this upward mobility. Thus, many an aspirant to social climbing on the campus did avail of this opportunity. Thus, the socio-cultural background of both the Kulturs and, to a lesser extent, the Haramanises would have influenced in shaping their thought including their sociological perspectives. Behind this may be the perception that some sociological writings on Sri Lanka are tangential to Sri Lanka's reality.

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