

TEMPERANCE AND NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA

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Much attention has recently been focused on the 'Temperance Movement' and its place in nationalist activity at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, apart from Kumari Jayawardena who highlighted the complex relationship between temperance activity and religious conflicts and economic and political discontent,¹ other writers have tended to make sweeping generalizations. They characterize temperance campaigns generally as a 'movement' forming an integral part of the Buddhist revival and the 'rallying point of the recovery of national consciousness' with a 'great potential for development into a political movement'.² These conclusions have influenced not only efforts to identify clear stages of Sri Lankan nationalism (as primary, secondary and modern)³ but even analyses of post-independent political developments.⁴ The leadership of the 'movement' was found to have been provided by the 'new elite' who were bent on exploiting the issue to 'establish common cause between themselves and the masses'.⁵ Such over-simplified conclusions are explained by the failure to study temperance campaigns in their concrete historical situation and the inadequate attention paid to their different phases, their tangled web of organizations, objectives and leadership. This article seeks to throw some new light on these aspects of the subject.

Most writers have ignored the vital importance of the nature of the liquor traffic, both licit and illicit, and the strength of vested interest, both state and private, for a proper understanding of temperance activity. The use of alcoholic drinks, particularly toddy from the palms, and even the distillation of spirituous liquor for commercial purposes were not uncommon in Sri Lanka from

1. Kumari Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, Duke University Press, Durham, N. C., 1972, pp. 86-87, 110, 115, 134, 142-145, 157, 192, 214, 256, 362.
2. K. M. de Silva, *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Vol. III, Colombo, 1973, pp. 259-260, 382-383.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 382-383.
4. e. g. 'religious revivalism and temperance agitation demonstrated many of the characteristic features of nationalist activity as it emerged after 1955-56' K. M. de Silva, 'Nationalism and its Impact', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. IV, Jan. - Dec. 1974, pp. 62-72.
5. P. T. M. Fernando, 'Arrack, Toddy and Ceylonese Nationalism: Some Observations on the Temperance Movement, 1912-1921', *Ceylon Studies Seminar*, 1969-70 Series, Paper 6.
Michael Roberts, 'Political Antecedents of the Revivalist elite within the M. E. P. Coalition of 1956', *Ceylon Studies Seminar*, 1970, No. 11, pp. 17-20.
A recent study focusing on temperance activity has been influenced by these assumptions and goes further to identify two parallel 'movements', Christian and Buddhist. R. D. Gunawardena, *Reform Movement and Political Organizations in Ceylon with special reference to the Temperance Movement and Regional Associations, 1900-1930*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Sri Lanka, Peradeniya, 1976, Ch. 1 & 2.

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කැලිෆෝනියා විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය (ශ්‍රී ලංකාව)
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