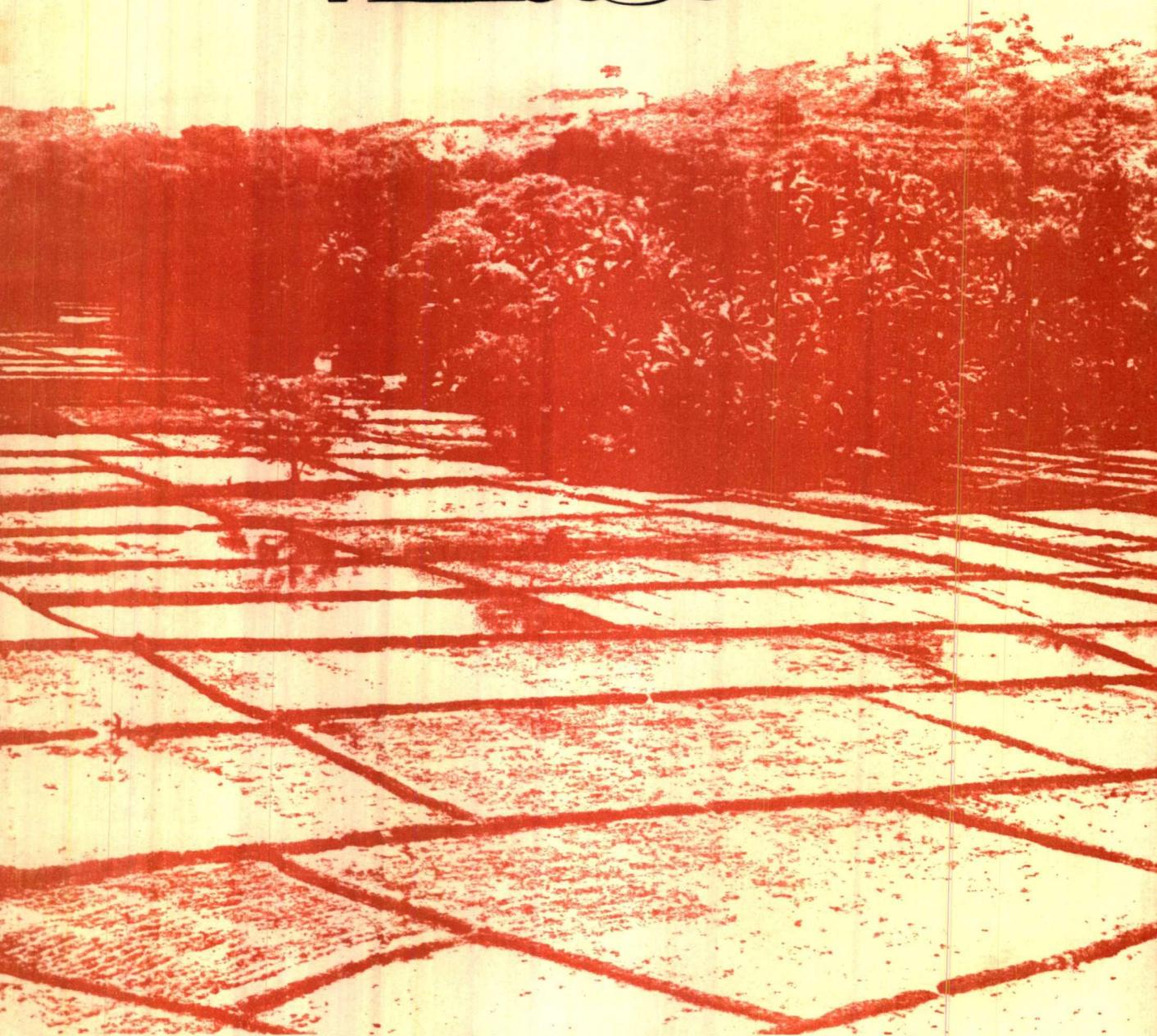


FAMILY DOMINANCE IN A VILLAGE SOCIETY

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mahantegama
village**



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FAMILY DOMINANCE IN A VILLAGE SOCIETY

THE MAHANTEGAMA VILLAGE

BEMINIWATTE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AREA

by

R. D. Wanigaratne



Agrarian Research and Training Institute
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FOREWORD

Land ownership, tenurial customs and the composition and activities of village organisations are treated in the study as indicators of social mobility and patron-client relationship patterns in a Kandyan village. Interest groups in the village were found to have made use of existing tenurial customs, social positions, interpersonal relationships and village-level organisations to adapt to the national political changes and reform movements.

The survey which forms the base of this study was conducted by Mr.R.D. Wanigaratne, Research and Training Officer, assisted by three investigators, between June-July 1975. It is hoped that the findings of this study would be of some use in understanding the contemporary village situation in Sri Lanka.

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October, 1977.

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R.D.W

October 1977

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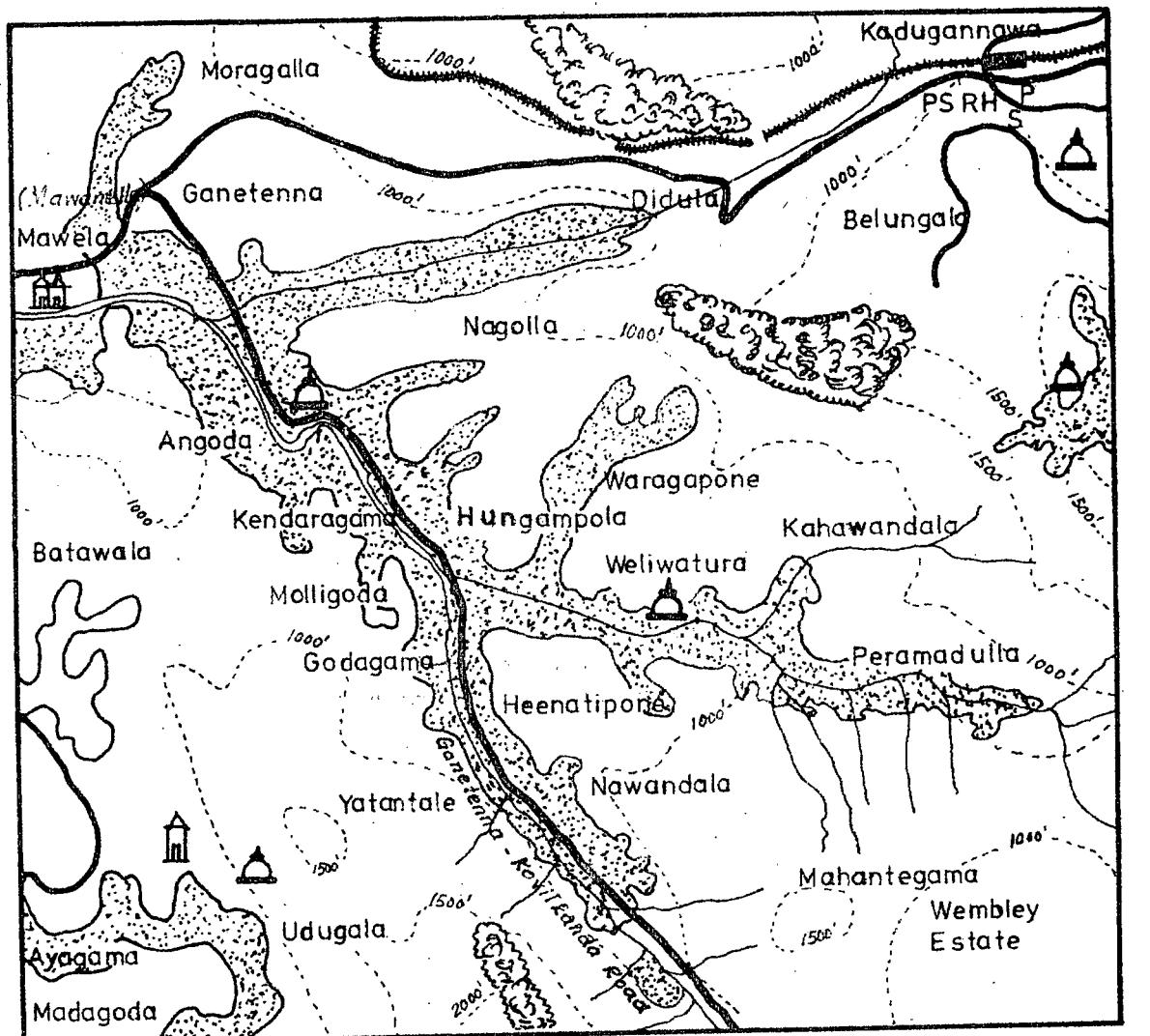
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The names of individuals
referred to in the
monograph are pseudonyms

PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL
ENVIRONMENTS
OF
THE MAHANTEGAMA VILLAGE



Scale of 2 Miles to an Inch

Reference

S - School	— Mosque
P - Post Office	— Road
RH - Rest House	— Stream
PS - Police Station	— Paddy
Rock	— Railway Line
Temple	— 1000' Contours
Hindu Shrine	

Chapter One

THE SETTING

Location and choice of the village

Mahantegama*, the village which is the subject of the present study, lies in the Ganne Pattuwa, Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. It is located about 3½ miles interior from the turn off at Ganetenna — on the Colombo-Kandy road, between Mawanella and Kadugannawa town (Map I, opposite page).

The village rests on the slopes of a narrow trough between the Kadugannawa and the Udugala-Guava Hill ridges. The general elevation of the village ranges from 1,300-1,400 feet. The village area is drained by the headwater streams of the Hingula Oya. The area receives an average annual rainfall of about 100 inches per year. Natural vegetation in the area is secondary, limited to shrubs and illuk grass—on the leeward slopes.

Mahantegama was purposively selected for the study because:

- i. the village falls within the Kahawandale Cultivation Committee No.22/4/2, which forms a part of the area of authority of the Beminiwatte Agricultural Productivity Committee, which is the field laboratory area of the Agrarian Research and Training Institute (ARTI), and where a number of research-cum-action programmes have been conducted since 1972. It is hoped that this study will be useful for future action programmes in the area;
- ii. the village has been the subject of a number of research studies, viz: village planning through the village programme: basic data collection, undertaken by the Kegalle Kachcheri in October 1973; the Maha-Kuda Oya Project Socio-Economic Survey, 1968. The background information provided by these surveys was further up-dated by the Socio-Economic Survey of the Beminiwatte Agricultural Productivity Committee Area (ARTI: December 1975). All of these provided useful background material for the present study.

* The Mahantegama Village is defined as the spatial extent covered by the lands owned, and lived in by the sixty families.

Nature of the project

Surveys done in the Beminiwatte Agricultural Productivity Committee area, notably for the ARTI Socio-Economic Survey, have indicated that fragmentation of lands, low productivity and under-employment affect the living conditions of the villagers. These being mainly baseline surveys, indicate no more than the outward expression of complex interactions deep down in the village society.

This survey attempts to examine aspects of societal interactions, mainly the struggle of individuals and groups to maintain themselves in a commanding position in the village. Land ownership and tenurial customs, village organisations and activities, are treated as indicators of the nature of this process.

Research procedure

The material which formed the basis of this study was collected through a structured questionnaire, and through informal interviewing and other investigation techniques. The research took two months — between early June to late July 1975.

Two investigators were stationed in a private household somewhat removed from the village to prevent them getting over involved personally with the people of the village.

The first two weeks of the field survey were spent in getting acquainted with villagers and gathering data about village life and individuals. The initial householders' lists were provided by the Grama Sevaka (village level administrative officer), was checked back with the households in order to up-date it.

Details of land ownership were obtained from the Village Lands Register kept by the Cultivation Committee (CC). Data was also taken from an earlier resource survey (1973) undertaken by the Kachcheri, Kegalle.

The questionnaire was introduced to fifty-four of the total of sixty families in the village. Only the head of a family¹ was interviewed.

¹ The head of a family is usually a male (the husband). However, in situations where the husband may have died, divorced or separated (in all cases where the husband is permanently removed from participation in decision-making action in a family), the wife is treated as the head of the family. The term "husband" is defined as the socially accepted conjugal partner of a woman. The usual family unit comprised a husband, a wife and children. A single house may have more than one family. In such a case, the head of each family was interviewed.

Informal interviewing covered a large group, which even went beyond the boundaries of the village, to the members of the Rural Development Society (RDS), the Temple Committee, the Janatha Committee (People's Committee), Cultivation Committee--some of whom resided in neighbouring villages. The interviewing towards the latter part of the survey concentrated on specific problems of leadership, organisational activity, tenurial problems and caste characteristics.

Micro details on population and land characteristics, sporadic inter-family rivalries which had no direct bearing on the broad patterns of village life have not been included. The data presented is limited to what is really needed to appreciate the situation in the village.

Population characteristics

The fifty-four families interviewed¹ through the questionnaire had a total population of 339 or 6.3 persons per family. Of the total population, 180 were males and 159 females--a sex ratio of 113.

Children below fourteen years of age account for 37.8% of the total population, an average of three children per family. The population between 15-29 years account for 28.3% of the total.

The average number of children per family, irrespective of their present age is six, with four males and two females. Twenty-five (46.3%) of the families have over five children, while only five (9.3%) of the families have two children each.

Employment status

Thirty-four (63%) of the respondents are farmers, four are agricultural labourers and four are merchants. The rest are employed as teachers, clerks, carpenters, black-smiths, drivers and so on. Two of the respondents were housewives who had become the head of the household on the death of their husbands.

Marital status

One-hundred-and-twenty-eight (32%) of the total population are married. About seventy persons (thirty-nine males; thirty-one females) are unmarried though of marriageable ages. Among both sexes the unmarried persons were mostly in the age group between 15-24. There were no unmarried males in ages beyond forty years or unmarried females beyond thirty years.

The average age of marriage for the village is twenty-seven for males and twenty for females.

¹ Of the six families who were not interviewed, five were out of the village during the survey and one family did not respond to repeated attempts made by investigators to gather data.

Ninety-four (74.6%) of the married individuals were married under the common law of the land. Of this number, eighteen were married to cross-cousins. Thirty-two (25.4%) were married under customary laws of the region. This, coupled with the fact that approximately 25% were married to cross-cousins points to the persistence of traditional values governing marital relationships.

Residential status

Only seven individuals of the total population were found to be temporarily out of the village during the survey. A majority (61% or 211 persons above the age of 14 years) confined their interests and activities to their immediate environment.

Educational status

Some had over ten years of schooling, while others have not had any formal education at all. Forty-two of the respondents (77.8% of the total) had received their education in government schools, five in *pirivenas* (temple schools), and four had received no formal education. Yet, they were literate: they could read and write in the vernacular. Three individuals were classed as semi-literate, due to physical disabilities.

Caste and Kinship relations

Forty nine families belonged to the dominant *Goigama* caste. Since kinship ties among the majority of the population are intimately related to the dominant caste, *Goigama*, kinship terms, *Aiyya*, *Nangi*, *Massina*, etc., have no cross-caste usage, even in free and friendly conversation. Thus, a very real social cleavage exists for example, between the *Goigama* castes and the *Wahumpura* (one family), *Bathgama* (one family) and *Navandanna* (three families) castes of which there is a sprinkling. There is no record up to date in the village of cross-caste marriages between persons of *Goigama* caste and persons belonging to the rest of the caste groups.

At certain household functions of the *Goigama* caste associated with weddings, funerals or puberty ceremonies, members of other castes perform certain functions. However, the inter-caste relationship is less res-trained in functions affecting the entire community, like religious ceremonies or *shramadana* (voluntary helpers) activities. On such occasions all villages get together.

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Introduction

The Mahantegama village had about sixty families. It was however difficult to identify the exact number of families which belonged to the village as a number of villagers had moved into lands given to them by government under village expansion schemes. However, for the purpose of the survey only sixty families appearing in the Lands Register prepared in 1975 were chosen. A brief description of the ownership patterns of the highland and lowland, follows.

Highland

According to the Lands Register, Mahantegama Village has 187 acres of highland under various crops. Of the total amount 85 acres were allotments of land belonging to the Wembley Estate (see Map): 68 acres of this estate land were given as allotments to the landless in the Mahantegama village under a village expansion scheme and 17 acres to two outsiders, namely, P.B. Kiribanda of the Langamuwa village, Kadugannawa, who bought 10 acres and D.N. Sumanawathie Menike of Dattale-pitiya, Hingula, who bought 7 acres. These two individuals are absentee landlords who employ Mahantegama village labour to cultivate a mix of crops, such as rubber, coconut, banana, spices, etc., on their lands. Although the Lands Register includes the 17 acres owned by absentee landlords, the total highland acreage actually owned by the villagers is 170 acres.

Table 1 *Parcelwise distribution of highland*

No. of parcels	Number of families N = 60	Average extent owned per family * (acres)
One Parcel	26	1.26
Two Parcels	14	3.01
Three Parcels	6	3.17
Four Parcels	5	6.05
Over Four Parcels **	9	6.06

* The aggregate size (in acres) of parcels held by families falling under each parcel category were taken into consideration in computing the average extents.

** A breakdown of the "over Four parcels" category showed that one family owned six parcels; another owned seven parcels and two others owned eight highland parcels each.

Of the sixty families who owned these 170 acres of highland, 26 (43.3%) were found to own only single parcels of land—with an average size of 1.26 acres. However, a majority (34 or 56.7% of families owned more than one parcel of land with an aggregate highland extent of over 3 acres per owner. (Table 1).

Most villages own sufficiently large extents of highland. However, the majority of the villages who owned two or more parcels faced the problem that these parcels were not contiguous but widely separated. This was more so in the case of those who had highland holdings of 5 acres or more, than in the case of those who owned below half acre (Table II).

Table II Owned Highland (aggregate holdings)

Size of Holdings (acres)	Number of families N = 60	Number of individual parcels owned	Total acreage	Average extent owned per family (acres)
Less than 1/2	11	12	2.75	0.25
Less than 1 & over 1/2	6	6	3.75	0.63
Less than 2 & over 1	11	15	11.75	1.07
Less than 3 & over 2	10	25	23.75	2.38
Less than 4 & over 3	6	17	19.50	3.25
Less than 5 & over 4	4	15	18.25	4.56
Equal to and over 5	5	55	90.25	7.52

Among the former group a total of 90.25 acres of highland was spread-over fifty-five individual parcels, with an average parcel size of 1.6 acres; among the latter group a total of 2.75 acres was spread-over twelve individual parcels with an average parcel size of .23 of an acre.

While in the case of small-holders the limited size of their holdings was detrimental to production, in the case of the big land owners the problem was one of scattered individual parcels rather than of actual size. The big land owners of Mahantegama have solved this problem by getting close relatives to cultivate their plots in return for a share of the profits. For example, two highland plots (Katukotuwa of one acre and a Wembley Estate allotment of three-quarter acre) belonging to Pamunuwaralalage Sumeda are cultivated by his cousin Pamunuwaralalage Sumanaratne Banda; two highland plots (Asswedduhena of 1½ acres and a Wembley Estate allotment of one acre) belonging to Pamunuwaralalage Yasawathie are operated by a cousin. Pamunuwaralalage Tikiri Banda.

Lowland

Mahantegama village has approximately 43 acres of lowland under paddy, owned by forty-seven villagers, one Buddhist monk (of the Hungampola Temple) and by the Vishnu Devale (a part of the great temple of the tooth relic) at Kandy. The overall picture of the paddy holdings of the village was one of predominance of stamp size paddy holdings owned as scattered plots of land.

A majority (61.2%) owned only single parcels of lowland and that too, usually below one acre in extent. 38.8% owned two or more parcels of land which were usually not contiguously placed, but were scattered over the paddy *gayas* (stretch of paddy land) of the village. (Table III).

As with the highland, the scattered effect was greater in the case of those with bigger holdings than with limited extents. Of the seven families who owned two acres or more of lowland, a total of 15.75 acres was made up of seventeen separate parcels of land, the average size of each parcel being .93 acres. (Table IV).

Table III Parcelwise distribution of lowland

No. of parcels	Number of families N = 49	Average extent owned per family (acres)
One Parcel	30	.43
Two Parcels	14	1.40
Three Parcels	3	1.30
Four Parcels	2	2.00

A majority of the lowland owners (22 individuals or 45%), had their holdings in the "half and below one" size class covering a total extent of 14.74 acres, averaging 0.67 acres per family. The 14.74 acres were distributed among thirty discrete parcels. The average size of a parcel was 0.49 acres. In contrast the seven families who were in the aggregate holding size class "below quarter acre" and who owned single parcels of land had on the average about 0.11 acres per family per parcel. (Table IV).

Table IV Owned Lowland (aggregate holdings)

Size of Holdings (acres)	Number of families N = 49	Number of individual parcels owned	Total acreage	Average extent owned per family (acres)
Less than 1/4	7	7	0.77	0.11
Less than 1/2 & over 1/4	7	7	2.24	0.32
Less than 1 & over 1/2	22	30	14.74	0.67
Less than 1½ & over 1	4	8	4.76	1.19
Less than 2 & over 1½	2	6	3.60	1.75
Equal to and over	2	17	15.75	2.25

The above distribution shows that, (i) the limiting size of individual parcels of lowland is a problem affecting the production among both small and large paddy land owners. It was relatively more acute among the small land owners; (ii) allocating resources to individual paddy plots was much more difficult in the case of large land owners—who usually had more than one parcel of paddy scattered over the area—than of small-holders. In this context, the retention of *ande*¹ cultivators and various tenurial customs by large land owners, to maximise their share of paddy harvests seem economically logical—if for the moment the question of social justice can be ignored.

Present trends of the *ande* system in the village

The data for this section was collected from two administrative secretaries of the Cultivation Committees in the area, from a number of individuals who are *ande* cultivators in the village and from a group of land owners. The Lands Register was also useful.

¹ *Ande* — refers to a system of share cropping.

Madarang

A procedure followed by landless cultivators seeking *ande* rights from land owners. An individual who expects to obtain *ande* rights to a paddy plot from the land owner for cultivation initially takes a *dekum pettiya*¹ to the land owner. A normal *dekum pettiya* would have rice, fish preparations, various sweet meats and a sheaf of betel leaves. When *ande* rights are conferred on the farmer, he is further obliged to offer a cash gift ranging from Rupees 50.00 to 100.00 to the landlord. This entire procedure is called *Madarang*. On instances where a number of farmers compete for tenancy rights the gift box of the losers stand forfeited. Today *madarang* takes a different form. The farmer who offers the highest cash gift is granted tenancy rights for the season.

The paddy fields in the village operate under three systems: On *ande*, on lease, or on rent. To obtain *ande* rights from a land owner, an *ande* cultivator has in addition to *madarang*, to pay half the share of the produce to the land owner. On many occasions the *ande* cultivator also pays for his fertiliser.

Many land owners today prefer to give their paddy lands on rent or on lease for a *kanna* (cultivation season) or two, instead of transferring tenancy rights. There is no fixed system by which the lease money or rent money is charged. Usually the land owner fixes the amount unilaterally. The usual cost of leasing or renting an acre of paddy for two *kannas* (seasons) is about Rs.1,000 - Rs.1,500.00.

To illustrate:

- i. *Dikpitiya Kumbura*² (2 roods, 20 perches)
This paddy field has been given on *ande* to a cultivator. The cultivator has to pay Rs.250.00 per year for the use of the paddy land, besides giving a part share of the paddy harvest to the land owner as land rent.
- ii. *Dimbul Kumbura* (3 roods, 15 perches)
The *ande* cultivator of this paddy field has to pay to the land owner about Rs.500.00 per year, and half the share of the harvest.
- iii. *Getiya Kumbura* (1 acre, 1 rood)
This paddy field has been given on lease for a sum of Rs.1,000.00 per year.

¹The *dekum pettiya* (gift box) was associated with many ceremonies and events in the village. For example, it played an important role during weddings, especially at home-coming ceremonies, during visits to relatives, visits to persons in anticipation of their help and visits to relatives at the conclusion of long-standing family feuds. The monetary value of the *dekum pettiya*, the quality of food contained therein and its variety determines its social value. It indicates the relative affluence and social status of the giver as well as the receiver.

²*Kumbura* - paddy field.

An *ande* cultivator, or cultivator who takes paddy land on lease or on rent is compelled to pay high land rents besides expenditure on agro-chemicals, fertiliser, etc. The profit margin is thus very small. If, due to adverse climatic conditions the harvest is poor the cultivator invariably gets into difficulties.

Owner cultivators attempt through various means to overcome a possible transference of ownership rights on the lands cultivated by his *ande* cultivators.

1. Some owner cultivators do not indicate in the Paddy Lands Register the names of *ande* cultivators who work their fields. The administrative secretaries of the Cultivation Committees connive with the owner cultivators in withholding this information for a variety of reasons. The administrative secretaries are obliged to help because the land owner is either affluent or wield authority in the village, is a friend or blood relation, or hails from the same caste. Occasionally the land owners solicit favours through cash gifts.

On the other hand, the *ande* cultivator does not attempt to rise up against the land owner because of a feeling of subservience towards the land owner and because of the feeling that *ai-hondai-kum* (cordial relationships) need to be maintained with the land owner so that he could continue to derive various fringe benefits from the land owner.

2. Some cultivators in collaboration with the administrative secretaries of the Cultivation Committees slightly alter the names of the *ande* cultivators in the Lands Register, which can be taken up as a point of argument if the *ande* cultivator contests the ownership rights at the courts. An example of this is seen in the Kahawandale Village Lands Register, where the name of the *ande* cultivator, K.M.R. Saranapala is given as H.M. Saranapala.

3. Some land owners keep the yields low by deliberately withholding funds for fertiliser, agro-chemicals and attempts to evict the *ande* cultivator on grounds of inefficiency.

4. *Kumburu Kedeema* (breaking the tenureship)

This is done in two ways in the Mahantegama village:

i. *Ande* rights are given to a tenant cultivator for only one year. In the next year the land owner does not give the cultivator *ande* rights to the paddy field he cultivated in the previous year—thereby breaking the tenureship of the *ande* cultivator in a given paddy field.

ii. The land owner who has several parcels of paddy, transfers the *ande* cultivator from one paddy parcel to another, year after year, or seasonally, thereby creating a break in the tenureship of an *ande* cultivator in one paddy parcel. Thus he prevents the *ande* cultivator from claiming operational rights to the land he cultivates.

5. The paddy land owner takes advantage of the dependent position of the *ande* cultivator to get back paddy parcels cultivated by his *ande* cultivator for a number of years and so breaks the tenureship period of the *ande* cultivator.

According to the Lands Register of the Kahawandale Cultivation Committee, there were only seven *ande* cultivators three *thattumaru*¹ cultivators and sixty-four owner cultivators in Mahantegama. Though only seven *ande* cultivators were mentioned in the Lands Register, in reality many more work and live in the village.

Related methods

Giving out on lease: at present giving paddy parcels on lease is a very popular method in the village. The cultivation rights to the paddy parcel is given to an individual for a certain period, for which he pays back to the paddy land owner a certain specified sum indicated by the owner himself. Usually paddy lands are given on lease for a year or two. Sometimes the village paddy lands are leased out in a special manner. For example, "A" has a paddy parcel, he is in distress and needs Rs.1,000.00 urgently. "A" takes a loan of Rs.1,000.00 from "B". In lieu of the interest on the loan, "A" transfers the rights of cultivation of his paddy parcel to "B" by deed; from then on "B" cultivates the paddy parcel and is entitled to the entire harvest. The deed is annulled after "A" repays the principal sum.

*Koottu Ande*² sub-system

The *koottu* sub-system is a variant of the traditional joint activity associated with paddy cultivation where the services of a cultivator called a "Koottu" labourer is enlisted for cultivation work. Usually the *koottu* labourer is someone on whom a high degree of trust is placed by a land owner. It also has affinities with *ande* forms of cultivation.

In the *koottu* sub-system the land owner is not only the owner of his paddy field but also is a joint cultivator who works alongside his labourer. He receives 3/4th of the total harvest. The decision-making in respect of cultivation and workings of the system is also weighted against the *koottu* cultivator. The land owner decides whether the *koottu* cultivator is to be retained for the next *kanna* or not. Usually the *koottu* labourer is enlisted for the period of only an year. However, on many occasions the

¹ *Thattumaru* is a scheme of rotation of owners on a plot of land. This system is adopted to prevent the progressive fragmentation which generally renders production uneconomic. (Obeysekera G., *Land Tenure in Village Ceylon*, U.K. Cambridge University Press, 1957, pp.18-23.

² *Koottu Ande* - In the *ande* system the land owner does not work together with the *ande* cultivator, in *koottu ande* the land owner also works either fully or partly with the *koottu ande* cultivator. The sharing of the harvest also differs in *koottu ande* from that of normal *ande*.

Ande denotes a share which is received by a tenant cultivator for operating paddy lands belonging to another. For his efforts the land owner gives a certain part of the harvest (usually half the total harvest) to the tenant. The land owner receives half-share of the harvest as *bim kuliya* (land rent). All the activities in the field, namely, preparing, sowing, etc., are done by the *ande* cultivator himself. Several *ande* cultivators may work in a single parcel of land.

owner was found to change the *koottu* cultivator on a *kanna* basis. The *koottu* cultivator, is compelled to accept such rigorous conditions due to economic pressure. He does not have a claim for tenancy rights. Rarely is he consulted on matters relating to cultivation practices and operationalisation of the *koottu* sub-system.

This system prevailed in the Mahantegama village even prior to the Paddy Lands Act in 1958 in a rudimentary form. After 1958, the paddy land owners have begun to adopt this system as a means of reducing the possibility of the tenant claiming ownership to the land.

An influential in the village, M.H. Sirinda, owns both paddy and highland and adopts this method. His *koottu* labourer was U.W.R. Dingiribanda from the same village. The paddy land was jointly cultivated by Dingiribanda and himself. Fundamentally the paddy land owner (Sirinda) is the landlord. If for a *kanna* the paddy land was operated together by Sirinda and Dingiribanda, expenditure for cultivation was shared by both. In some seasons Sirinda worked on a part-time basis leaving the major share of the work to Dingiribanda. Other examples are Wannakumudiyanelege Ranmenika, *koottu* labourer of Pamunuwaralalage Sudumenika in the Gattekumbura paddy parcel of 1 rood and 20 perches; Udagammanagedera Kudabanda, *koottu* labourer of Udagammanagedera Heenbanda in Pahalakelakumbura paddy parcel of 2 roods.

When the work sharing is only partial and especially if the land owner belongs to a higher caste than the labourer, the land owner provides meals to the worker as he does not share the manual work with the *koottu* labourer.

Seeds, agro-chemicals and fertiliser are supplied either by the land owner or by the *koottu* labourer. In return for the expenditure incurred by either of them, the other pays him in kind (a part of the paddy harvest). In dividing the harvest, the first division takes place on the basis of expenditure incurred. Sometimes a part of the harvest is also taken as interest on the expenditure incurred by either the land owner or the *koottu* labourer. The remaining portion of the harvest is divided equally. One part goes to the land owner as land rent. The remaining half-share is divided into two equal parts again, one to the land owner and the other to the *koottu* labourer, for the actual cultivation work. Thus, the land owner enjoys 3/4th of the harvest (if inputs are supplied by him), while the *koottu* labourer receives only 1/4th.

With the rise in the price of paddy many land owners at Mahantegama have suspended the *koottu* system in order to maximise profits. Instead they are turning to hired labour. It is less irksome to hire labourers because they cannot legitimately lay claim to the land they work in. Sirinda is one such example. He has given up the *koottu* system and is now adopting hired labour for his fields. According to Sirinda a number of other villagers still continue to adopt the *koottu* system.

Land ownership among landed elites

An examination of the land ownership patterns by family characteristics of the owners show that much of the lowland and much of the highland was owned by a few powerful extended family groups. For example, 8 acres (19%) of the total paddy acreage of the village were owned by the Pamunuwegedera family group while 6 acres (14%) were owned by the Batuwattegedera family group

and 5 acres (12%) by the *Kandehetanegedera* family group. Similarly, the *Pamunuwegedera* group dominated highland ownership with 38 acres (21%) followed by *Kandehetanegedera* having 24 acres (13%) and *Batuwattegedera* owning 21 acres or (12%). The presence of a few families who dominate the land ownership pattern in the village had political and social status connotations in the Mahantegama village.

To an average villager at Mahantegama, land not only represents a means of livelihood, but serves as an indicator of his affluence and social prominence. The more land one has the more dependent the others become towards him. To the villager this symbolises the importance of his *wansa* (clan) - denoting that he has amassed large tracts of land through generations. The effect of the strength of the *wansa* is seen in the behaviour of the *Pamunuwe* group which dominates much of the organisational activity and provides a traditional form of leadership to the village.

Beliefs and Aspirations

In an agricultural society where many of the people are dependent on agriculture for their day to day existence it is not surprising that their aspirations centre around items of a more mundane character like land. Many expressed the shortage of agricultural land--essentially paddy land as the root cause of their economic woes.

To quote: *H.M. Ranaweera*, who is a tenant cultivator and trader; age 44, educated up to Grade 3; (21 July 1975): "Mahatmaya! (Sir), we are cultivators; we like to cultivate; but we do not have lands. We are at the mercy of others".

U.W.R. Lokubanda, owner cultivator; age 43; educated up to Grade 8: (30 July 1975): "The land we have is too small. How can we get enough to eat from a quarter acre of paddy land? We have eight in the family". (*Lokubanda*, his spouse, his old father and five children).

Though many felt that there was landlessness in the village, very few ventured to state that it was a result of maldistribution--the concentration of lands among a small group of traditional elites in the village. This reticence was due to several causal factors:

1. Many of the respondents too were bound by ties of traditionality to the elites to speak out that landlessness in Mahantegama was partly a result of land concentration in the elites. A number of them were tenants who worked in the paddy tracts belonging to these elites. They thus, felt, that it would be to their disadvantage to openly voice opinions about the root cause of the land problem. Many of them had built up a form of dependency with the elites, for mutual benefits. The granting of tenancy rights to cultivators on the basis of continued loyalty of tenancy towards the elites formed an integral part of this mutual-dependency state. Many of the tenants worked in close liaison with the elites at various village-level organisations, such as, the Rural Development Society (RDS), Janatha Committee, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), which helped to bring together the individual families in the village.

Further, a general feeling in the village was that "outsiders"

should not be made overtly aware of subtle inter-family feuds hinging on land ownership, marriage and other delicate issues was much noticed during the survey, which may be nurtured by the elites themselves to their own advantage.

- ii. A number of respondents had so adapted themselves to the maldistribution of land in the village over an extended period spanning generations that they no longer perceived the lack of land as something which has been caused by concentration of lands in the hands of a few; rather, they thought that it was more a matter of population growth in the village which was only partially correct.

To quote: *U.W.R, Dingiribanda, Koottu-cultivator-cum-rubber tapper; age 52 years; educated up to Grade 2; (21 July 1975):* "Our main problem is the shortage of land for paddy cultivation. It was not so when we were small children. Now the village has too many people and very little land".

- iii. Respondents among the elite families tended to play down the land maldistribution and play up population growth and the increase of anti-social activity in the village--thereby psychologically dissociating themselves from being contributory to some of the social evils in the village. To quote a typical response: *B.R. Ranbanda, land owner and cultivator; age 56; educated up to Grade 9; (12 July 1975):* "Our population is increasing and our former ways of life are disappearing. These lead to anti-social activities like thefts and thuggery. Our *gunandharma* (codes of right living) are being withered away".

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Chapter Three ORGANISED ACTIVITY AND EMERGENCE OF VILLAGE LEADERSHIP

Organised activities of Mahantegama

Mahantegama at various times witnessed the mushroom growth and dissipation of a number of village-level organisations. For example, between 1950-1970, a *Grama Sangwardena Samithiya* (Rural Development Society) existed in the village. Branch organisations of the two major political parties in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP), a Women's Organisation and a Youth Organisation appeared in the village on the eve of the 1970 general election but disappeared soon after. Many of these organisations were created to serve the electoral needs of the two political parties. They ceased to function soon after the general elections.

At present the village-level organisations which show some activity are the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the *Punyadhara Samithiya* (Temple Committee) and the Janatha Committee (People's Committee).

The participation rate was highest in the PTA with sixteen respondents quoting active involvement followed by the Temple Committee with seven quoting active involvement and Janatha Committee, five quoting active involvement.

The salient characteristics of the three active organisations and of the Rural Development Society, which played an important role in village activity up to 1972 are given below:

1. Parent-Teacher Association - Weliwatura-Mahantegama

The present Parent-Teacher Association was established in December 1974, on the initiative of the present Principal, Mr. Suraweera. Mr. Suraweera is also the President of the PTA. The secretaryship of the PTA is held by an assistant lady teacher of the Weliwatura-Mahantegama school. The treasurer is Mr. P. R. Ratnayake of Mahantegama. The post of vice-president has been vacant since January 1974.

Usually the PTA meets once a term. Occasionally, emergency meetings are held to cater to sudden exigencies. The membership fee is Rs. 1.00 per year. However, for special projects an additional fee is charged from members. For example, during the period of the survey a sum of Rs. 5.00 each, was charged from parents towards the construction of a number of new class rooms.

On an average, about forty parents attend meetings of the PTA. The *modus operandi* of informing the parents is through a hand-written notice sent by the President. According to the President only a few parents take

a keen interest in the affairs of the PTA. They are P.R. Ratnayake, M.B. Batuwatte and K.M. Heenbanda - the three of them are from the Mahantegama village. On the whole, the parents show a relatively greater enthusiasm for the PTA than for other organisations at the village-level.

Observations at a PTA Meeting (27 June 1975),

The meeting was held at the Welliwatura-Mahantegama school. The members had received the usual invitation from the President. The meeting was scheduled for 2.00 p.m. Although most of the members were present at 2.00 p.m. it commenced at 2.15 p.m.

Twenty-eight people attended the meeting. Fifteen elderly male members, five youth male members and eight elderly female members. Of the three staff members who were on the committee, only the Principal (President) and Vice-Principal (Secretary) attended this meeting.

The main item for discussion centered on the need to build a number of class rooms. The association discussed the possibilities of staging a drama to collect funds for the project; several factors emerged in the course of the discussion:

- i. The females in the group did not take part in the discussion. They were mere on-lookers. This was probably because the female participants felt that the subject under review (building of class rooms) were more a matter for the males. This tendency for female participants to voice their feelings only when matters such as decorating the school or preparing food for a function, etc., are discussed, may be a desire in them to affirm more of their femininity in front of males, than to assert their views on matters which are of general interest.
- ii. Five young members and five senior members initiated most of the discussions.
- iii. The Principal and vice-Principal conducted the meeting with great enthusiasm, as the subject under discussion was of material benefit to their school.¹
- iv. While the discussions were in progress from 2.15 to 3 p.m. six males and three female members left the meeting. The meeting was conducted in a very informal manner. Many members started chewing betel and exchanging ingredients for the chewing. The betel chewers occasionally went out of the hall to spit. Further, there was much cross-talk and exchange of gossip among the participants while the meeting was in progress.²

¹ The researcher felt that both the Principal and vice-Principal were genuinely happy to see a positive move towards satisfaction of one of their dreams, to enlarge their school so that it could evolve into a *Maha Vidyalaya* (High School).

² The relaxed atmosphere at the PTA meeting made it appear that it served the villagers as an occasion for informal social discourse. The fact that the President turned a blind eye to such tangential activity while the more formal discussions were being conducted speaks for his adaptability to village society. His attitude may in turn explain why the Association is popular among the Mahantegama villagers.

v. Of the people who participated in the discussion, three members were most prominent. They were M.B. Batuwatte (Mahantegama) L. Abeypala (Weliwatura) and K.M. Heenbanda (Mahantegama).

2. Temple Committee¹

The primary place of worship in Mahantegama is the *Hungampola Maha Vihare*, (a renowned Buddhist Temple in the area). A stable temple committee came in association with this temple in May 1974. Prior to this date the Temple Committee was activated only for specific occasions like the *Vassana Pinkama* (a religious ceremony) and disipated soon after. The popularly expressed reason for the setting up of a steady organisation was the felt need for urgent repair work on the main Buddha statue and inner temple walls of the *Vihare*. Persons who were primarily responsible for initiating this committee and some of whom formed its first (and present) office bearers are:

President ..	Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda	(Mahantegama)
Secretary ..	Siyathu	(Warakapone)
Treasurer ..	P.B. Attanagodagedera	(Kahawandale)

Others who were not office bearers, but took an active role in its formation were Kandehetane Ralalage Punchi Appuhamy, Batuwatte Ralalage Heenbanda and M.H. Sirinda, all of Mahantegama. Even in such organisational activity the prominent role played by several of the elite families of Mahantegama (e.g. the *Batuwattegedera* and *Kandehetanegedera* groups) and M.H. Sirinda, the economically powerful *Bathgama* caste villagers was quite distinct.

About five sub-committees were affiliated to the main *Hungampola Maha Vihare* Temple Committee. They were the Temple Committee at Mahantegama, Weliwatura, Kahawandale, Warakapone and Hungampola. At least twice a month all sub-committee members gathered at the main *Hungampola* temple.

The Chairman was invariably the chief incumbant of the temple. At these meetings the Temple Committee submitted the donations they had collected towards the rebuilding of the temple. In villages around the temple, people contributed according to their means or anything over Rs.1.00.

The rebuilding of this temple is almost complete and the cost was over Rs.25,000.00. A few individuals have received wide social recognition because of their generosity towards the temple rebuilding fund. The foremost was M.H. Sirinda of Mahantegama, who had initially contributed Rs.1,000.00 and subsequently gave a monthly contribution. K.N. Kalubanda, Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda, Kandehetane Ralalage Punchi Appuhamy and P.B. Attanagodagedera (from Mahantegama and Kahawandale villages) were prominent donors to the cause. Siyathu of Warakapone, who was the Secretary was noted for his dynamism. He occupied a leading role in a formal and informal capacity at *Hungampola* Temple and was the driving force behind the Temple Committee.

¹ The chief informant about the Temple Committee was Pamunuwe Ralalage Punchibanda, a member of the most prominent family group, the (Pamunuwe Ralalage group) at Mahantegama.

3. Janatha Committee

The Janatha Committee catered to the four villages of Mahantegama, Weliwatura, Kahawandale and Warakapone. It existed from 1970-1973 and the first President was H.R. Kalubanda, Headmaster of the Kahawandale school. The Secretary was R.M. Balasuriya of Weliwatura. When the President and Secretary resigned in 1973 a fresh committee was formed. The present membership is as follows:

President	G. Kiribanda	(Kahawandale)
Secretary	K.R. Heenbanda	(Mahantegama)
Committee	P.R. Heenbanda	(Mahantegama)
Members	W. Rapiel	(Weliwatura)
	P.G. Jane Nona	(Weliwatura)
	P.A. Somapala	(Weliwatura)
	A.W. Appusinghe	(Weliwatura)
	R.M. Balasuriya	(Weliwatura)
	K.R. Tikiribanda	(Kahawandale)
	C.M. Chandra Kumari	(Kahawandale)
	L.G. Ranbanda	(Warakapone)

According to its members the committee hopes to (a) mobilise the support of the villagers and other village institutions in increasing agricultural production in the area; (b) prevent anti-social activities in the village, such as, gambling, illegal paddy transport and sales, brewing illicit liquor and so on; (c) act as "peacemakers" in settling village disputes.

The committee has so far forwarded two notable recommendations to Government: (a) to alienate the Madaruppe Watte (an estate nearby) among landless people in the village for production of highland crops; (b) to expand the irrigation channels associated with the Kehelpath Amuna (a small village reservoir) and to restore its bunds.

The Janatha Committee officials say that though recommendation (b) had been taken up well, recommendation (a) remains unattended. According to H.R. Kalubanda (previous President) and G. Kiribanda (present President) the image of the Janatha Committee had suffered owing to the immature behaviour of younger members of the committee—e.g. in the harassment of political rivals.

An interesting feature is that the influential group in Mahantegama despite their economic superiority and broad UNP tendencies deemed it fit to accept office in the Janatha Committee, a creation of the present government (SLFP).

The two members from Mahantegama K.R. Heenbanda (Secretary) belonged to the Batuwattegedera family and P.R. Heenbanda (Committee Member) belonged to the Pamunuwegedera family — two of the most prominent family groups in the village. It is therefore not surprising to note that the two proposals submitted by the Janatha Committee for the development of the area also brought indirect benefits to the land owner elites in the Mahantegama village.

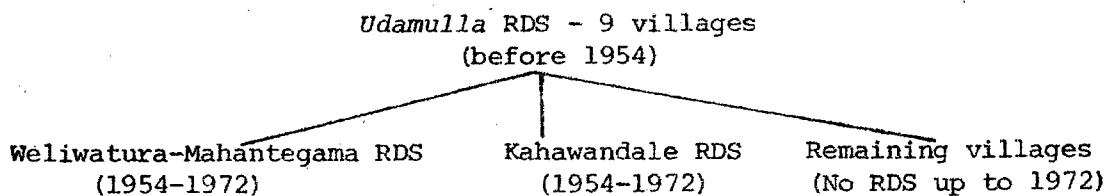
The presence of W. Rapiel a land owner influential from Weliwatura alongside members of the influential families in Mahantegama in this committee further speaks of the representation of landed interests in organisational activity.

Rural Development Society, Weliwatura-Mahantegama

This was a splinter society of a larger organisation namely the *Udamulla Rural Development Society* which existed before 1954. This larger RDS catered to nine villages,¹ in the *Udamulla Arachi Vasama* (Village Headman's area). The President was Muddumabanda Gangodatenna and the Secretary, R.K.M. Abeyratne of Heenatipone village.

Udamulla RDS fragmented into a number of separate RDSs confined to its component villages. (Chart I).

Chart I
Fragmentation of *Udamulla RDS*



The disruption of the *Udamulla RDS* was mainly due to the following factors:

- (a) *Udamulla RDS* appeared to cater only to the home village of the President and Secretary (Heenatipone). It tended to neglect member villages like Weliwatura and Mahantegama. Therefore the RDS members from these villages began to drop out of this society.
- (b) Representatives from Mahantegama, Weliwatura and Kahawandale villages at the *Udamulla RDS* played only secondary roles in its activities. They did not achieve the upward social mobility they strived for by continuing to be members in the *Udamulla RDS*. Hence, they were moved to support the general drive among members to sponsor the growth of splinter Rural Development Societies.

The villages of Weliwatura and Mahantegama are predominately composed of two major castes. The majority of the Mahantegama villagers are of the *Goigama* caste, while that of Weliwatura are of the *Wahumpura* caste. The other two castes *Bathgama* and *Navandanna* have minor representations. The chief reasons for the formation of the Weliwatura and Mahantegama Rural Development Society, were:

- (i) to enlarge the Ganetenna-Kovilakanda Road (see Map);
- (ii) to build and maintain irrigation canals and anicuts, mainly through *shramadana* efforts, to help the paddy production in the area;
- (iii) to draw in more facilities for the Weliwatura school;
- (iv) to improve the sanitary conditions in the two villages.

¹ The nine villages were: *Mahantegama, Weliwatura, Kahawandale, Heenatipone, Warakapone, Yatantale, Hungampola, Peramudulla and Molligoda*. (See Map of Mahantegama village environments for locations of these villages).

For example, during 1954-1972, the RDS was responsible for restoring the Kehelpath Amuna and cutting an irrigation channel to distribute the water collected in the amuna (small reservoir) to the paddy lands in the village.

The initial Rural Development Society committee consisted of:

President	..	L.B. Pamunuwe
Vice President	..	W. Rapiel
Secretary	..	T.B. Batuwatte
Treasurer	..	Y.G. Lokubanda

Due to subsequent personality clashes T.B. Batuwatte gave way to Pallewatte, who became the new Secretary. The need to draw in M.H. Sirinda who had become a Mahantegama influential mainly through his wealth resulted in substituting Sirinda for Y.G. Lokubanda as the Treasurer.

Caste composition of the office bearers:

Rural Development Society of Weliwatura-Mahantegama
(1954-1972)

President	..	L.B. Pamunuwe
Vice President	..	W. Rapiel
Secretary	..	T.B. Batuwatte (former Secretary) Pallewatte (later Secretary)
Treasurer	..	Y.G. Lokubanda (former Treasurer) M.H. Sirinda (later Treasurer)

The President L.B. Pamunuwe and Secretaries T.B. Batuwatte and Pallewatte belonged to the Govigama caste and were from the Mahantegama village. As a dominant caste in Mahantegama the Govigama caste influences all activities in the village. The fact that two of the key posts were held by Govigama persons meant that the RDS would not have had much popular support in Mahantegama if such representations did not exist.

The Vice-President, W. Rapiel, was of the Wahumpura caste and did not belong to the Mahantegama village. Yet, Mahantegama voters preferred to appoint him, as he was a rich land owner in Weliwatura. The higher caste persons of Mahantegama did not encounter a great loss of status by associating with him as he was not a member of their village.

The Treasurer, M.H. Sirinda (RDS Weliwatura-Mahantegama 1954-1972) was also the only man of his caste (Bathgama). However, he was a 'big' land owner. The other Govigama elites, L.B. Pamunuwe (President) and T.B. Batuwatte (one time Secretary), tolerated his presence because he was their parallel in economic status and they gained much by having close dealings with him, despite his caste.

However, not all castes in the Mahantegama village were represented. For example the Navandanne caste had no place, because economically they were a very poor segment in the village society. There were three families who belonged to this caste. A few individuals who belonged to this caste plied their traditional trade, i.e. metal work. Others were casual labourers.

The RDS began to decline in effectiveness after 1972. On the basis of responses the following causal factors were discerned.

- (a) Handing over of the maintenance of the roads, culverts, bunds, etc., to the Public Works Department, removed a major function of the Mahantegama RDS and with that their sense of achievement. It also removed the feeling of responsibility among the RDS for the continued maintenance of Public Works like a road, an amuna and so on;
- (b) Duplication of certain types of work the RDS used to do by other organisations like the Agricultural Productivity Committee and the Cultivation Committee (e.g. gathering people together for weeding, harvesting, etc.,) removed another role the RDS played in the rural scene).
- (c) The villagers seemed enthusiastic about reviving the RDS, but expected somebody else to give the lead. The Rural Development Officer (RDO) who should provide the necessary guidance was criticised by many for being lethargic in initiating such activity. The lack of encouragement and better supervision by the RDO appeared to be one of the principal causes for the decline of the RDS at Mahantegama.¹

Village Leadership

The survey failed to indicate strong formal or informal leaders in the village.

The following causal factors emerged during the survey:

1. A considerable number of villagers in the middle and upper age group had received very little education (68% of the age group were educated up to Grade 5). The very mundaneness of wants dictated by their day-to-day living, the lower aspirations due to lower educational levels, made them disinterested in occupying formal positions and serving as formal leaders.
2. The potential leaders of the organisationally volatile youth group (15-30 years) in the village, have migrated to the cities in search of employment. The youth left behind in the village are mostly "drifters"—those without educational or occupational ambitions. Many of them find occasional employment as tenant cultivators, toddy tappers and agricultural labourers.

Many of them are those disillusioned by unfulfilled promises given to them by politicians who organised them under various mushroom organisations like youth leagues, women's associations, etc., during the general election of 1970. While some of the dynamic individuals who led the youth in these organisations have moved away from the village after obtaining employment, the large mass of youth who expected to benefit by aligning themselves with political parties have sunk into a state of apathy due to unfulfilled ambitions. They view with suspicion

¹ In the post-survey period the RDSS of the Mawanella region were brought under the control of the area political authority. This has resulted in stirring the RDO to show a renewed interest in rural development activity in the region.

all attempts to organise them into groups for development activity.

3. Most people in the village have only sufficient land to maintain themselves, at a low level of subsistence. They cultivate their fields and lead routine, austere lives. Consequently they have neither the time nor the inclination to indulge in community development activity through village organisations.

4. Most villagers are linked with each other through consanguineal ties. Mutual aid forms an integral part of their day to day lives. Close kinsmen tend to live together as groups occupying distinct spatial units in the village. For example, two of the most prominent extended family groups in the village the *Pamunuwegedera* and *Batuwattegedera* families tend to form distinct village neighbourhood groups. Because of the mutual aid factor which is associated with such groups the need for formal organisations in the village is minimised.

5. Competition among various sub-groups in the village obstructs the growth of strong leadership. For example, a form of social evaluation in inter-family rivalry on the basis of caste, material wealth, number of educated children employed in government or private sector, constantly build up waves of envy and dissatisfaction among individual families and across larger family and caste groups. Frequently, such feelings give rise to petty feuds and rivalries, which further prevents the emergence of individuals who could wield positions of influence over the rest of the community.

6. Perhaps, the strongest barrier to community leadership is the presence of a number of powerful extended rival family groups. They are of the same caste, i.e. *Govigama*, yet, they are from different *ge* or *gedera* (family or house) groups. Even within *ge* groups individual family rivalries extend on a social evaluation footing.

However, such families usually unite under their own *ge* when members of rival groups tend to emerge as influentials in the village. An ultimate outcome of this situation is the emergence of rumour and petitions both signed and anonymous, which attempt to ridicule the individuals and families who show a leadership potential in the village.

Nevertheless a few individuals still exert some influence in the *Mahantegama* society. They are:

Lokubanda Pamunuwe - cultivator, age 61; educated up to Grade 7 at the *Ganetenna* Secondary school, married at the age of 25 and has five children (two males and three females). Two daughters and a son are married. He cultivates 4 acres of highland (under mixed highland crops with a predominance of rubber) and 2 acres of lowland (under paddy). He owns two houses. He is one of the fairly affluent members of the village and serves as a spokesman for the *Pamunuwe* extended family group. He is a *Govigama* Buddhist.

Lokubanda Pamunuwe's chief invitees for household functions are members of his family, his sons-in-law (T.B. Dissanayake and B.M. Navaratne, both of *Padiyapalle*) and his brother-in-law H.R. Sudubanda of *Kumbalgama*, *Gonawela*. He employs two *koottu ande* cultivators. His principal informants about intra-village matters are *Abeyratne Pamunuwe* (a cousin) and *H.R. Kudabanda* (a neighbour); about extra-village matters, *Ukkubanda Pamunuwe* (a relative) and *I.G. Kalubanda* (a neighbour), both from the same village and *D.N. Ranbanda* (an acquaintance) from *Kahawandale* village.

He is a sympathiser of the UNP. Besides these individuals, he obtains extra-village information mainly through the radio. Other sources are the newspapers and government officials.

He owns a radio and listens mainly to advertisements and development information. He occasionally reads a newspaper which he borrows from friends. The only film he had seen in recent years were the ones that were exhibited in the village by the ARTI in connection with the present project.

Besides himself, he perceives T.B. Batuwatte, P.B. Attanagodagedera and M.H. Sirinda, as individuals (his neighbours), who take an active role in community activities in the village. In community work he states that he found these individuals to be accommodating and open for suggestions from any quarter irrespective of political caste or family differences.

Though the RDS does not function any more as an effective organisation, Lokubanda Pamunuwe has worked continuously from 1954 (the date of formation of Weliwatura-Mahantegama RDS) to 1972 as its President. His integrity, wide understanding of village problems, wealth and the fact that he was appointed to the Cultivation Committees, notwithstanding his UNP leanings, all contribution to the perpetuation of his position of influence in the Mahantegama village.

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Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda - age 46, educated up to the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) and has a working knowledge of Sinhala, Tamil and English languages. He is a resident of the Mahantegama village. He married when he was 37 years and has a boy and a girl.

Up to the year 1964, he was employed in non-agricultural occupations. He received technical training in 1947 after which he served as a mechanic at Brown & Co., Ltd. In 1954, he changed his occupation to become a tea-maker on an estate in Hatton. After the death of his parents, he came back again to Mahantegama in 1964 to cultivate the inherited lands. He owns about 3/4 of an acre of paddy land and 12 acres of highland, principally under rubber and secondarily under a mixture of other crops.

For weddings, *pirith* (chanting of Buddhist sutras) and other household ceremonies, he usually invites two neighbours P.B. Attanagodagedera and Lokubanda Pamunuwe. In cultivation activities he regularly enlists the aid of Navaratne Bandara Pamunuwe (a neighbour).

He discusses village-level incidents with two of his neighbours, Lokubanda Pamunuwe of the UNP and W. Rapiel of the SLFP. He quotes U.G. Udagamagedera Kalubanda, an ayurvedic physician as the chief informant through whom he obtain an extra-village awareness. Tikiribanda is aware of the RDS, the PTA and the Temple Committee at Hungampola and Weliwatura. He was the Secretary of the Weliwatura-Mahantegama RDS between 1962-1968.

Tikiribanda belongs to the Govigama caste and is a Buddhist. Although he does not hold office in any organisation, he is an active community worker. He belongs to the SLFP and is a Justice of the Peace.

Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda and Lokubanda Pamunuwe were mainly responsible for initiating the RDS. Tikiribanda was a very active participant and played a key role in constructing the Ganetenna-Kovilkanda road. In 1968, he resigned because of a personality clash with the assistant secretary, yet, he helps in all community activities and is respected by most.

According to Tikiribanda the disruption of organisational activity in the village may be traced to the migration of the educated youth from the village to the cities. The young people who are left behind are not capable of initiating group action. He says that the rest of the villagers show no enthusiasm towards such societies.

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M.H. Sirinda - He served as Treasurer in the Weliwatura-Mahantegama RDS, which became dormant after 1972. Although he had a limited formal education (up to Grade 6), he is versatile in both Sinhala and Tamil. A 73 year old bachelor, Sirinda is an early immigrant. He came in 1922 to the village. He has no relatives at Mahantegama.

A paddy cultivator by profession Sirinda has now given up active cultivation work. Until recently he employed a *koottu* labourer to cultivate his land. He now hires labour for cultivation work. He owns about 4½ acres of highland and 1½ acres of lowland which he bought from the villagers of Mahantegama. He is a Buddhist and belongs to the *Bathgama* caste which occupies a low rung in the feudal caste hierarchy. He is involved in all public activities in the village. Owing to ill-health his contribution to community development is confined to monetary donations. For example, in April 1975, he contributed about Rs.1,000.00 for renovations of the *Hungampola Maha Vihare*. He played an active role in forming the Temple Committee of the *Hungampola Maha Vihare*. He does not recognise the existence of a strong leadership base in the village. He observes that if there were such leaders organised activity in the village could have been better placed.

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Batuwatte Ralalage Heenbanda - He is 46 years of age and has five brothers and two sisters. He lives with an elder brother. He received about eight years of formal education at a *Pirivena* (a school in the temple premises). Heenbanda is conversant in Sinhala and Tamil. He first married when he was 22 years of age. He has two sons and a daughter through the first marriage and two daughters through the second marriage. He practises *ek ge kema* (a traditional marriage custom in which two brothers share one wife).

Heenbanda has two employment sources, he is a cultivator and a carpenter. He does not own highland but works in a joint ownership situation with his brothers in small parcels of paddy land. He is a Govigama Buddhist. He is a member of the SLFP and has close links with the regional leadership of the party.

For household functions he regularly visits his brothers and sisters. He is fairly clannish as far as household functions are concerned. On village matters he discusses regularly with Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda and Udagamegadera Lokubanda, who are his neighbours. He obtains extra-village information from U.H. Dingiribanda (who happens to be a marriage broker) and U.G. Kalubanda, both of Mahantegama. He is aware of the activities of a number of village organisations like the Co-operative Society, the SLFP branch at Kahawandale, the Temple Committee and the Janatha Committee.

Heenbanda is the Secretary of both the Kahawandale SLFP branch and the Janatha Committee. He played a major role in submitting two proposals to the Government. He is very popular in the village and is also acclaimed to be a man of high integrity.

Heenbanda is a committee member of the Weliwatura Co-operative Society and has a wide interpersonal network in the area. He obtains his information from three main sources — the newspapers, radio and through hearsay. He considers the newspaper and the radio to be important sources of information. He reads the newspaper occasionally either at a tea kiosk or during his visits to the Mawanella or Kandy towns. He has a radio at his home and listens-in mainly to advertisements and programmes giving information about the country. He rarely sees a film.

He considers Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda to be a most influential person in the village, followed by Udagamagedera Lokubanda, Kandehetane Ralalage Heenbanda Appuhamy, Lokubanda and Navaratnebanda Pamunuwe. However, he does not treat them as actual village leaders but rather as individuals who take an active role in village activity. He states that the individuals he quotes are the ones who rise up to the occasion and are active on special occasions like *pirith*, and *dana* (almsgiving) ceremonies, *shramadana* activities and so on.

Family Dominance in Village Activities

The three extended family groups at Mahantegama, the *Pamunuwegedera*, *Batuwattegedera* and *Kandehetanegedera*, controlled an appreciable proportion of the village land.¹ They practised the *koottu ande* system and had under them thirteen *koottu* labourers working on an aggregate extent of 19 acres of paddy land.

Besides their hold on the economy of the village they also had representations in the village organisations. In the Temple Committee of the *Hungampola Vihare*, the Batuwatte group was dominant (Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda was its President). Another member of the Battuwatte clan, Battuwatte Ralalage Heenbanda, was an active member. The *Kandehetanegedera* group (Appuhamy) was also represented in the Temple Committee.

In the now defunct Weliwatura-Mahantegama RDS, *Pamunuwegedera*, (represented by Lokubanda Pamunuwe, who was at one time its President) and the *Batuwattegedera* (represented Battuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda, who was its Secretary) family groups were very active.

¹ See pages 11 and 12 for details of the land extents held by the three family groups.

Similarly the *Kandehetanegedera* group (represented by Heenbanda), the *Batuwatte* group (represented by Muddumabanda) and the *Pamunuwegedera* group (represented by Ratnayake) were foremost in the PTA at Mahantegama.

The village representative in the Cultivation Committee for the area was Lokubanda Pamunuwe (of the *Pamunuwegedera*) — an organisation enjoying firm SLFP patronage. Lokubanda, however, was a sympathiser of the UNP political causes. The Battuwatte group is also represented in politically oriented organisations in the village. For example, Heenbanda (of the Battuwatte group) was the Secretary of the Janatha Committee and the SLFP branch organisation and a Committee Member of the Co-operative Society. The *Kandehetanegedera* group was essentially dominant in non-political organisations like the Temple Committee and the Parent Teacher Association.

What was, however, unique in the inter-group relationships among the three powerful families in the village was the fact that they were united by strong marital ties. They form a large kinship group with elite tendencies. As far as initiations for household functions like *pirith*, *dana*, puberty ceremonies and weddings are concerned, preference is given to members of each others families than to members of the remaining *Govigama* families in the village. This may indicate the maintenance of a certain social distance between the elite families and the rest.

A point of note in the inter-family relationships among the three groups is that even though the *Kandehetanegedera* group do not hold positions in SLFP political organisations they maintain their positions of influence in the village by active involvement in social welfare work through the Temple Committee and the PTA. This group further manipulate members of lower castes and economically lower groups who are members of politically based organisations like the Janatha Committee. For example, W. Rapiel (Wahampura caste) from Weliwatura, who is an active member of the Janatha Committee was observed to be treated in a cordial and equal social status manner in the home of Kandehetane Ralalage Heenbanda, who is noted in the village for his UNP sympathies. This may be interpreted as an outward granting of social recognition by the Kandehetane group to W. Rapiel, a member of a different and under-privileged caste so that various benefits coming through the positions of power held by Rapiel are drawn into the Kandehetane group.

Another aspect of this exploitation of changing political circumstances was the existence of members of strong UNP and SLFP inclinations within the same family groups. For example, among the Pamunuwe group, Lokubanda Pamunuwe, was one who had high social standing in the village and who was noted for his UNP sympathies. Similarly, the Pamunuwe group also had a strong supporter of SLFP causes in Pamunuwe Ralalage Heenbanda, who was an active member of the Janatha Committee. By these means the Pamunuwe group were able to maintain themselves in positions of importance from which they could exert influence on the lives of the villagers of Mahantegama, irrespective of radical changes in the national political scene.

The lone wedge in this pattern of family authority in the village was the presence of M.H. Sirinda who was of the Bathgama caste. He was a prominent personality in the now defunct RDS (where he was its Treasurer) and in the Temple Committee. He was found to be accepted more or less as a social equal by the three elite families mainly because of his affluence. He lived in a tiled home, and is the owner of 4½ acres of highland and 1½ acres of paddy land in the village. In terms of the prevailing economic

conditions in the village he is affluent. He has no family encumbrances. He is generous with donations to the temple and to villagers who are in distress. With such actions he has not only forced into existence a position of dependence of less affluent sectors of the village on him, but also to some extent even those of the affluent and influential families who, however, cannot be as generous as Sirinda in their donations. When Sirinda provides a donation to the Temple (e.g. Hungampola Temple) members of the influential families in the village like Batuwatte Ralalage Tikiribanda, President of the Temple Committee, hasten to exploit the situation. For example, when Tikiribanda announced over a public address system at a Temple ceremony (which coincided with the survey period), that Sirinda has given a cash donation which he (Tikiribanda) as President of the Temple had *satutin baragaththa* (accepted with pleasure) he (Tikiribanda) in turn became a recipient of derived importance. It meant that for the people of the area Tikiribanda as the President of the Temple Committee would be responsible for the funds collected, that it was to him that funds should be given, and that he held such a position because of his integrity.

Sirinda through his generous donations to the village organisations in which the other elites are active, attempted to divert them towards socially accepting him. They in turn exploited Sirinda's generosity to add to their own social importance.

Either way, the elite families on one hand and Sirinda on the other, maintained a social distance between themselves and the rest of the Mahantegama society.

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Chapter Four

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters describe the socio-economic conditions and analyse the land ownership patterns, tenurial customs, leadership and informal groups and organisations in relation to the ever continuing struggle of the village elite to stay at the apex of power in Mahantegama. This process is viewed against the backdrop of social, political, economic and cultural changes that have been taking place in the rural Sri Lanka as a consequence of the Land Reform Programmes.

The situation in Mahantegama may be fairly common to many of the *purana* villages in the Kandyan uplands. Many of the problems may be traced to a strong tendency among a handful of individuals and groups to adapt themselves to the changing environment in order to reap maximum benefits to themselves.

The retention of tenurial customs such as *ande* (share cropping) and *koottu ande* (variation of share cropping) and the maintenance of traditional customs like *madarang* will seek to perpetuate the bondage of the tenant cultivator to the landlord, seem economically logical for the large land owner, who has to operate within a framework of non-contiguous micro size holdings. Against this economic justifiability of the moves of landlords to maximise their profits, is the concern for social justice for the tenant. The deepening socio-economic crisis faced by the tenant calls in question the anticipated benefits of the measures introduced up to now and brings into sharper focus the need for more forceful ameliorative measures.

In the leadership context, adaptation takes the form of adjustment to political changes to maintain status positions. The elite families in the study village adapted themselves to political changes in a number of ways, (i) by having committed supporters of the UNP and the SLFP within the family group, so that the relevant supporters of a political party which is dominant in the country would help the other members of the family; (ii) by winning over politically powerful villagers, who, however, do not enjoy social acceptance in the village (because of caste and economic factors); (iii) by manipulating consanguineal connections which cut across the three family groups to reap benefits from a particular political change.

The composition and the activities of the informal groups and organisations in Mahantegama provide additional evidence about the strong social cleavages present in the village society.

The village elite successfully manipulate the village organisations in enhancing their status position. Acting either directly or through their agents in the newly emergent sections, the elite continue to dominate the activities of the village organisations in a manner that maintains the customary patron-client base of society. Existing tenurial customs, social positions, inter-personal relationships and village-level organisations are made use of to exploit national political changes and the land reform programme to their advantage.