

A Sociological Analysis of Present Recruitment to the S.L.A.S.

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Administrative apparatuses in countries like Sri Lanka were set up largely for the ends of the colonial masters. Since Independence many changes have occurred in the administrative situation of ex-colonial countries. These changes have varied from complete revamping of the system as in ex-colonial socialist countries to reformist ones like in those of Sri Lanka whilst countries like Pakistan have largely retained the structure of the colonial bureaucracy. In this article a sociologist, as well as a member of the administrative system itself, Sarath Amunugama, looks at some of the changes in the Sri Lanka Administrative System with special reference to the changes in the recruitment patterns.

The study of bureaucracies as formal organisations and of the attitudes and behaviour patterns of officials are an important area of sociological inquiry. This however is a comparatively neglected area of research in Sri Lanka. One can only think of the works of Tambiah (1955), Kearney (1966), Warnapala (1972) Neil Fernando (1973), LaPorte (1973) and Goonatilake (1972 - 1976) as examples of sociological studies of our bureaucracy. There are several reasons why a study of bureaucracy is particularly appropriate at this juncture. Firstly, studies of recruitment policies and value orientations of the public service are a crucial addition to the growing field of studies of elite formation. This is an area of research which has been emphasised in historical and sociological writings in Sri Lanka recently. In most societies senior government officials constitute an important element of the elite. It is particularly so in the case of countries which have gone through colonial domination. The following observations of Milton Esman, though made in the context of the Malaysian Public Service, are valid in respect of most former British colonies which in any case shared a common pattern of administration.

"The administration was the most powerful and most prestigious set of structures in the society. Before Independence Government was the most important institution and, in the absence of politicians, the Administration was the Government. Since Independence that power has been shared with

politicians, but many of the senior politicians were former administrators. They had no desire to undermine the status or effectiveness of the bureaucracy despite occasional grassroot conflicts and the need to lubricate political organisations with patronage. They were prominently in evidence at all official occasions. Their shifts in postings and appointments to higher positions were newsworthy events. They were a highly privileged and protected segment of Malaysian society".

The native elite during colonial times was not a closed group. On the one hand entrepreneurs achieved high status and authority through the acquisition of capital. On the other, there was regular co-option into the ranks of the higher public service and the professions of non-elite personnel who had achieved educational distinction. Thus education became the primary qualification for entry into the professional elite. It was this opportunity for upward social mobility through education which made formal textbook education the most important element of our social welfare structure. The bright student, no matter what his social origins were, was co-opted into the ruling elite by virtue of his recruitment to the public service. It has been suggested by sociologists like Tissa Fernando that this co-option process was a means of maintaining the dominance of the elite in the past.

Today, however, the picture is much more complicated. Firstly, unlike in the past, all the educated youth cannot find employment. Hence the element

of competition is keener than ever before.

Secondly, with the 'democratisation' of education, principally through the expansion of rural education, the changing of the nature of curricula and teaching and examining of candidates in the mother tongue some of the in-built advantages of urban, English-educated, middle class candidates have been eliminated. It is interesting therefore to find out the background of the new recruits to the public service. Have all the traditional inequalities been eliminated? Are there certain patterns discernible regarding new entrants to these elite groups?

Thirdly, the public service at present is called upon to undertake a wide variety of jobs as a consequence of the rapid expansion of the public sector. Unlike in the past where a small 'civil service' constituted the only transferable higher management service amidst a large number of departmental services where at least facilities to obtain "on the job" training existed, today the whole administrative service of about 1,350 persons are freely transferable to all sectors of the administration enumerated in the schedule to the S.L.A.S. Minute.

Further, many S.L.A.S. officers are seconded to posts in the Corporations as well. A study of the top management of Corporations will show that there is a fair percentage of S.L.A.S. officers on temporary release from the Administrative Service. The question then of the basic educational backgrounds and skills of the recruits to the S.L.A.S. becomes important not only for the Administrative Service but for the whole public sector as well.

Finally, most of the direct recruits to the S.L.A.S. were born after Independence. From the days of the State Council successive administrations have emphasised social welfare programmes, often at the expense of capital investment for development. Since Independence various legislative measures have been adopted to induce social transformation and to reduce

social and economic inequality. How have these measures operated at the societal and family levels? What impact have they had at the level of what Max Weber called the "life-chances" of individuals? An analysis of the social, economic and educational backgrounds of the recruits to perhaps still the most prestigious managerial service in Sri Lanka may give us some indication of the impact and the spread of these social ameliorative measures.

The Sri Lanka Administrative Service

The Sri Lanka Administrative Service was established in 1963 with the adoption of the new S.L.A.S. Minute which superseded the old Ceylon Civil Service Minute and the various departmental posts and the terms and conditions of service associated with these posts. Members of the Civil Service, including cadets in that service and members of several scheduled departmental services, were thereby incorporated into a common service. A common system of recruitment, promotion, salaries and other service conditions were recognised. Initially, the S.L.A.S. (then called the C.A.S.) was a five-tiered structure. But by the time the batch of officers under discussion were recruited the services minute had been amended to establish a 3-tiered or 3-class structure. Let us examine the manner and service conditions under which the group of officers who are studied here were recruited.

The S.L.A.S. is divided into three classes. The seniormost class is Class I in which there are 100 officers. Of them 40 are in Class 1, Grade I. They draw a salary scale of Rs. 22,400 to Rs. 24,240. 60 officers in Class 1, Grade II draw a scale of Rs. 20,640 to 21,840. Class II has a cadre of 300 officers and Class III in which we are presently interested has 936 officers drawing a salary scale of 7,800 to 16,800 subject to the passing of two efficiency bars.

There are three modes of recruitment to Class III.

(1) Merit promotion: 20% of the vacancies of a given year are filled by an interview of officers from the Combined Services such as the General Clerical Service, Stenographers' and Typists' Service and other specified services. In

all such cases the officers eligible must have reached a salary point of Rs. 8,280 or above.

(2) Limited Competitive Examination: 25% of the vacancies are filled on the basis of a written examination and *viva voce* from among the combined services and specific departmental services. Here the officers should have had a minimum of 10 years 'continuous permanent service' to be considered eligible to sit the preliminary examination.

In both these instances the tendency has been for older officers with lesser educational qualifications to enter the administrative service. These officers, however, have long experience especially of office procedures and establishments matters. Many of them though not all, have entered government service on the basis of examinations held in the English medium.

(3) Open Competitive Examination: The balance 55% of vacancies are filled through an open competitive examination. Section 13 of the S.L.A.S. Minute states that "appointment to not more than 55% of the vacancies in Class III will be made by the Minister of Public Administration on the results of an open competitive examination, as prescribed by the Ministry in charge of Public Administration". The conditions of eligibility as laid down by this same minute are as follows: the candidate must be a citizen of Sri Lanka who has obtained a degree of a recognised university; and he or she must be within the ages of 22 and 26. In the case of officers who hold permanent posts in the State Service, State Corporations or Local Government Service the upper age limit is raised to 45 years if the candidate has all other qualifications. A candidate is allowed only two attempts at this examination. Also, according to Section 17 of the Minute "not more than 10% of the number of vacancies will be filled from among females".

In 1973, as many as 2,531 candidates sat for this open competitive examination. Of this number 68 were selected. These recruits were given

a nine-month course of Induction training at the Academy of Administration Studies in Colombo. At the tailend of this course, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire which dealt with their social, economic and educational backgrounds. They were also asked for service preferences and details regarding use of spare time. Respondents were not expected to identify themselves by name. Questionnaires were filled quite willingly by the respondents.

Racial and Religious Composition

The racial and religious composition of this intake was as follows: Sinhalese 62 (91%); Tamils 04 (06%); Muslims 02 (03%); while the division according to religion also follows parallel lines, though there is a comparatively large number of Christians in the Sinhala group. Buddhists 45 (66%); Hindus 04 (06%); Muslims 02 (03%); Christians 11 (16%) and unspc.f.d 6 (8%).

Age Distribution

As mentioned earlier, according to the S.L.A.S. Minute, only those within the age groups of 22-26 years were eligible. Those already in permanent service in the public sector had the upper age limit raised to 45 years. In analysing the age distribution here one has also to bear in mind that the applications for this examination closed in 1972. Due to the insurgency there was a delay in finalising recruitment. Also questionnaires were administered after about 9 months of training. Thus one would have to reduce 3 years from the age given here to make a realistic assessment of the age distribution at the time of the examination. The age distribution at the time of response to the questionnaire was as follows:—

	No.	Percentage
25 years	4	6.0
26 "	4	6.0
27 "	5	7.1
28 "	6	9.1
29 "	8	11.8
30 "	6	9.1
31 "	7	10.2
32 "	4	6.0
33 "	10	14.7
34 "	3	4.2
35 "	4	6.0
37 "	1	1.4
39 "	3	4.3
41 "	2	2.8

What is significant here is the comparatively large percentage of respondents who were over 26 years of age

at the time of sitting the examination. This means that nearly 60% of the intake were from officers already in government service. Reasons for this situation are clear.

Firstly, due to heavy pressures, both economic and social, graduates seek the first available means of employment. Unlike in the past they cannot afford to wait and choose. Thus graduates who are registered with the Computer Data Bank for instance are quick to accept employment in the clerical service. But having secured some form of economic and social stability in the context of rampant graduate unemployment they devote their efforts to enter the services which were considered desirable at the outset. The pressure to expand the ratios for limited competitive recruitment to the S.L.A.S. and the Accountant's Service can be understood in this light. This group has also made use of the age concession in open competitive examinations.

Secondly, with the expansion of university education it has been possible for officers already in service to obtain higher qualifications. These figures confirm a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly clear in the public sector and educational scene. There is a very great demand for university-type education from the supervisory and non-management grades of the public service. Some University Campuses have adjusted themselves to this demand by providing facilities such as evening classes. In other cases the conclusion is irresistible that many registered undergraduates are in fact regular Government and Corporation employees though university regulations do not allow it. Apparently these regulations are observed in the breach.

These figures further suggest that contrary to the public image of the recruit to the S.L.A.S. as a young man just out of the university, most of the recruits to the S.L.A.S. are fairly senior in age and have had experience of work in other, perhaps subordinate, fields. If the merit and limited competitive streams are added to these numbers it would be seen that in fact the majority of new entrants to the S.L.A.S. are now fairly experienced officers. This is quite a contrast to the old schemes of recruit-

ment to the Ceylon Civil Service and departmental posts.

Educational Qualifications

One of the distinctive aspects of the "Hailybury Tradition" which dominated the Colonial Civil Service was its emphasis on academic distinction at recruitment. Young graduates of Oxford and Cambridge sat for an examination which tested them for placement in a hierarchy of colonial civil services beginning with the Indian Civil Service. We have read of Civil Servants like Leonard Woolf who having failed to secure the requisite marks for entry into the I.C.S. were offered a place in the C.C.S. which was not, obviously, as prestigious as the Indian Service. Even with the "Ceylonisation" of the C.C.S. this emphasis on academic attainment continued. This same requirement of academic prowess was carried over by the departmental services. Indeed, most of the senior departmental posts such as D.L.O., Assistant Settlement Officer, Assistant Elections Officer and A.C.A.S. were filled from those who sat for the C.C.S. examination and barely missed selection.

In both cases the competitive examination for entrance to the Public Service was only slightly different to the final examination for the Bachelor's Degree. The present open examination for entry to the S.L.A.S. is a radical departure from this system. Now, there is no emphasis at all on academic learning. This examination is in two parts—an Elimination Test and a Selection Test. The elimination test which is compulsory for all candidates is made up of two papers: (a) Comprehension and (b) Intelligence Test. The Comprehension Test is described as follows:

"A paper of one and a half hours duration in which the candidate will be given a set of short passages. In the case of some of the passages, the candidate will be presented with a set of alternative statements one of which fits the content of the passage best. The candidate would be required to pick the most appropriate statement. In the case of the other passages, questions will be set to test the manner in which the candidate is able to grasp the meaning of the passages".

The Intelligence Test is described as a "test of one hour's duration designed to judge the logical quality of thinking of the candidate and the

analytical quality of his mind. This paper will consist of "multiple-choice questions".

The successful candidates have to then face a selection test which includes an Essay paper, a General paper "designed to test the candidate's awareness of the environment in which he lives and works including the political, social, cultural and economic environment of Sri Lanka and matters of current national and international interest as well as scientific and technological developments" and a *viva voce* test.

The selection process was dealt with here in some detail because it has important implications for the educational qualifications of the candidates selected. Unlike the earlier recruits to the C.C.S. Departmental Services and even the first recruits to the S.L.A.S., in this instance the number of graduates with First or Second Class passes were reduced to an almost insignificant number. The following figures depict the type of degree obtained by this group.

	No.	Percentage
(a) 1st Classes	1	1.4
(b) 2nd Class (Upper)	1	1.4
(c) 2nd Class (Lower)	4	6.0
(d) 3rd Classes or General Passes	62	91.2
	<u>68</u>	

This no doubt is a radical departure from the traditional Bachelor's Degree-oriented examination. Several implications follow. Firstly, a wide gap has now opened up between these students who wish to follow a university teaching or other specialist career and a Public Service career. In the past, especially in the arts and humanities, most of the academically outstanding students tended to join the Public Service. There are distinguished exceptions no doubt. But the point to be made here is that the best academically qualified candidates from the Universities, the First Classes for instance, have at this examination failed very badly in the Intelligence and Comprehension Tests. This dramatic incongruity in evaluation of capability and intelligence in perhaps the two most prestigious institutions of the country—the University and Public Service—must raise several disturbing questions regarding the intrinsic values of these modes of evaluation.

Secondly, it seems pertinent to note that the amended scheme of selection has led to the recruitment of an older, more experienced group of cadets than on previous occasions when formal learning was emphasised. It has also led to the selection of a group which had more independent views on social, economic and ideological problems than in the case of the C.C.S. cadets.

University Education

In the survey an attempt was made to identify the campuses, then universities, in which the successful candidates had received their university education. The results were as follows:

Campus	No.	Percentage
(a) Peradeniya ...	30	44.1
(b) Vidyalkara ...	18	26.5
(c) Vidyodaya ...	10	14.7
(d) Colombo ...	09	13.3
(e) Others ...	01	1.4

I also attempted to correlate the campuses with the subjects taken by candidates during their university career. The dominant positions of Peradeniya and Vidyalkara Campuses were largely due to the number of candidates who had taken the popular arts combinations there. The most popular combinations were Sinhala, Economics, Geography, Pali, and History. Of all the subjects offered the most popular by far were (in the following order):

- (a) Sinhala,
- (b) Economics,
- (c) History and
- (d) Geography.

If the subjects listed above are the most popular course options of undergraduates it is only a symptom of the problems of the whole, especially rural, educational system. Till the recent educational reforms this system emphasised the teaching of precisely those subjects. The intelligent rural child who went through the State educational system had no option but to select these subjects because they were the only ones that were taught throughout the country. More specialised subjects, particularly science subjects, were the preserve of the urban schools. This sociological

reality is very nearly brought out in an analysis of the pre-university or secondary education patterns in respect of this group. The figures are as follows:

School	No.	Percentage
(1) Madya Maha Vidyalayas (Cen. Colleges)	16	23.5
(2) Maha Vidyalayas (Senior Schools)	21	30.9
(3) Junior Schools ...	19	27.9
(4) Pirivenas, denominational schools ...	12	17.7

Several features stand out in this situation. Almost all the recruits to the S.L.A.S. in this group have had State-aided education. Secondly, most of them have had their secondary education in rural schools. In a sense the whole human dimension of the democratisation of education is seen here. The bright student who goes to the smallest rural junior school can aspire to enter the university and eventually join the senior professions although the bias towards the arts and humanities cannot pass unnoticed. Such a situation would have been rare even fifteen years ago. If, therefore, the Administrative Service can be considered an elite profession, then the social mobility in our society which permits members of all classes to join that elite is clearly generated by the educational network.

Social Background

Recruits to the Administrative Service are a clearly upward mobile group. Unlike in Western studies of social mobility where factors like class and social background can be easily reckoned, in Sri Lanka this is a rather sensitive area. We therefore began by asking respondents of their father's occupation at present. 12 respondents (17.6% of the group) stated that their fathers were dead. The balance were distributed in the following way:—

Occupation	No.	Percentage
(a) Cultivator ...	18	26.5
(b) Not employed ...	12	17.7
(c) Businessman ...	13	19.2
(d) Pensioner ...	05	7.4
(e) Contractor ...	02	2.9
(f) Mason ...	03	4.3
(g) Co-op Manager	1	1.4

Since we anticipated that some of the parents of the group would now be very old or dead an attempt was made to check this information against the status of parents at the time the recruits took the S.S.C. examination. The result was that while the number of cultivators were increased by only one, the present pensioned and not employed category included the following professions: Teacher; Sub-Postmaster; Driver; Clerk; Mason; Watcher and Police Sergeant.

There may be some bias in the response in this category. As mentioned earlier this is a status conscious, upward mobile group. Also the statements of respondents were taken at face value with no attempt at verification since an assurance had been given about the confidentiality of the investigation. Thus 19.2% of the parent group being described as "Businessmen" seems to be a convenient way of describing no fixed occupation. In spite of these possible deficiencies it is quite clear from the figures given here that a considerable transformation has taken place in our social structure. The social ameliorative measures taken by successive governments have created greater opportunities, especially to rural youth. In my conclusion an attempt would be made to analyse the crisis that has now arisen as a result of the failure of the economy to expand in keeping with this "revolution of expectations". For the present we could note that unlike the public image of the bureaucrat as an affluent person whose personal knowledge of poverty and the "culture of the poor" is limited the young public servant, generally speaking, is no stranger to the inequalities which prevail in our society. They have had to depend on the meagre incomes of their parents, often supplemented by assistance of elder siblings and a kinship network to complete their education. In our group a large number of respondents stated that they had been helped by siblings, relations and teachers to complete their education.

The economic pressures on the educated youth can be seen further from responses to two questions included in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked whether (a) they were employed while studying at the University (b) they were employed after

obtaining their degree and before gaining entry to the S.L.A.S. As regards the first question 39% of the respondents had in a manner of speaking "worked their way" through the University. Of this category 41% had been employed in the Clerical Service and 41% as teachers.

93% of the recruits had been employed after their University career before they entered the S.L.A.S. The posts held by them were listed as Teaching, Clerical Service, Postmaster and Signaller, Assistant Editor of the Encyclopaedia, Storekeeper, Labour Officer, Statistical Officer, University Lecturer, Assistant Engineer and Rural Development Officer. There is also the further implication in these figures that the officers concerned were equipped—personality, motivation and intelligence wise to secure employment in a highly competitive job market even before they were selected to the S.L.A.S.

Perception of Occupational Roles

The final part of the questionnaire dealt with the candidate's perception of posts in the public and private sector. Respondents were given a series of choices and were asked to indicate their preferences. The choices were as follows:

(a) A.G.A.	30%
(b) D.R.O.	20%
(c) Asst. Director Small Industries	11%
(d) Asst. Lecturer of the University	09%
(e) 3rd Secy. in Sri Lanka Mission Abroad	09%
(f) D.L.O.	06%
(g) Executive of private firm	05%
(h) A.G.M. of a Corporation	02%
(i) Assistant Manager of a Bank ...	Nil
(j) Asst. Director Cultural Affairs	Nil

In terms of the present administrative set-up where all D.R.O.s have been made Assistant Government Agents a clear preference (50%) is seen for Provincial Administration. The 11% preference for AD/Small Industries is probably biased because the females in the group expressed a preference for this field. The emphasis on Provincial Administration is probably due to several factors. Firstly, this is still perceived as the primary concern of administration. As viewed by the public, especially the rural public, the posts of G.A. and A.G.A. are considered highly prestigious.

Also, with the recent changes in the field of administration these are the areas where "the action is". A.G.A.s are given a wide area of discretion and independence. It would also be correct to say that this post is attractive to the more socially committed officers as they have to deal with the day-to-day problems of rural people. Finally, A.G.As are usually provided with quarters etc., which makes it attractive to an officer starting out on his career.

The Committee for Administrative Reforms in India has suggested the demarcation of 8 administrative sectors for the I.A.S. Officers joining the I.A.S. are expected to serve the first ten years of their service in one of these sectors. They are identified as Revenue Collection, Land Reform and Land Administration, Personnel Management, Planning Community Development, Social Services and Cultural affairs. This group of recruits were asked to indicate their preferences in terms of these sectors and their choices were as follows:

(a) Revenue Collection	5%
(b) Land Reform and Administration	13%
(c) Personnel Management	06%
(d) Planning	50%
(e) Community Development	16%
(f) Social Services	02%
(g) Cultural Affairs	05%

When these preferences are correlated with the earlier job preferences it is clear that the recruits see the A.G.As function as planning and co-ordination rather than one of Revenue Collection. This is exactly what is expected of them by the Government and this perception of their role is a very healthy one.

Conclusions

On the basis of this survey we may arrive at several general conclusions. They may be briefly stated as follows:

(1) Though the public perception of the new administrative officer, which is frequently articulated through newspapers and other media, is that of an inexperienced elitest person who has no understanding of the problems of the underprivileged, in fact, they are quite experienced and have a good understanding of the problems of the mass of people. They are not persons who have mere book-learning or theoretical knowledge as

it is frequently made out to be. What has brought them into the service is intelligence and experience and not book-learning.

(2) Though they have this experience and sympathy for the underprivileged there is the possibility of transformation into another elite group given the high status accruing to Administrative Service posts, the push towards upward mobility and various norms and standards prevailing in the service. It is very important therefore that training and career opportunities etc. should be used to combat elitism.

(3) In the past, though there was an increasing number of educated people they could be co-opted by the ruling elite especially by means of employment in prestigious professions. Outstanding products of several generations could be induced to exchange their birthright for the backseat of an official job. Today, however, a study of the recruitment policies and of the numbers of people who can find their way into public service and the professions, clearly shows that co-option is no longer possible as there are not enough jobs to go round.

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