

Rise and Fall of Patronage: a study of a maritime fishing community of Southern Sri Lanka

— OSCAR AMARASINGHE

1. Theoretical Approaches to Patronage

A whole series of attempts have been made to understand the socio-political processes at work in agrarian economies of the third world and various theories have been put forward to characterise such processes as well as their direction of change. Among others, relations between different strata of the society—which are commonly called patron-client relations—seem to have attracted the attention of anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and economists alike as these relations are found to exist in peasant agrarian societies of many parts of the third world.

Generally, a patron-client relationship is considered to be a relation between unequals, or in the way Pitt-Rivers (1954 : 140) put it, “a lop sided friendship”. As with kinship and friendship, “the patron-client tie involves multiple facets of the actors involved, not merely the segmented needs of the moment” (Wolf 1966 : 16). The bond between the patron and client is personal and is “contracted and continued by mutual agreement for an indeterminate period of time” (Bremner 1974 : 18). Scott (1972a) is more specific about the unequal status of the actors and their reciprocal obligations. “The patron-client relationship—an exchange relationship between two roles—may be defined as a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron” (ibid : 92). Powell (1970) distinguishes patron-client relations from other rural power relations by the reciprocal exchange of goods and services involved in the former.

What is the rationale behind the formation of patron-client relations? Going through the extensive body of literature available on the subject, one can broadly distinguish between two lines of approaches to patron-client relations; the risk insurance approach and the power approach. Anthropologists (Silverman 1965; Scott 1972a, 1972b, 1976; Bremner 1974; Migdal 1974), political scientists (Weingrod 1968; Powell 1970; Lemarchand & Legg 1972)

and economists (Hayami & Kikuchi 1981; Bardhan 1984; Rudra 1984; Platteau & Abraham 1987; Platteau 1988; Rao 1988) all tend to describe the formation of patron-client relations within a risk management framework.

It is the contention of anthropologists that patrons provide subsistence insurance and protection to clients, while for the patron his clientele guarantee a readily available supply of labour, prestige and power. Despite the fact that political scientists describe patronage along the same lines, their emphasis is more on the mediatory or brokerage functions of the patron. The economists treat patron-client relations as multiplex relations between economic agents and these are usually analysed as interlinked deals devised to substitute for lacking or imperfect markets (most notably, credit and insurance markets). Sharecropping has been cited in many of these studies as one of the most pervasive types of patron-client relations in agrarian societies. In a context of informational asymmetries and transaction costs, patron-client relations (or interlinked deals) serve to reduce transaction costs and guarantee the patron with a readily available supply of labour. For the clients, patronage provides insurance against risky labour markets and access to cheap credit (which is an insurance substitute) in a context of inadequately formed insurance and credit markets. Therefore, in terms of risks and uncertainties, multiplex transactions in the patron-client bond are deemed more beneficial than market transactions.

However, it is worth emphasizing the distinction between the anthropologists' conception of patronage and the economists' interpretation of multiplex transactions. Unlike interlinked deals, patronage is a 'holistic' concept. Patronage involves a continuous flow of subsistence goods from patron to client that guarantees the latter security of subsistence. A continuous flow of gifts between the actors in the patron-client bond has also been identified. As Gregory (1982) has described, gift-giving is directed at establishing strong personal relationships among agents (therefore, it is a form of non-commodity exchange). A gift received by the client may be reciprocated by a counter-gift *not* always on a material plane, but often on a symbolic plane. Wolf (op cit.) identified three symbolic forms of 'counter-gifts' by clients: demonstration of esteem, provision of information to the patron about the machination of others, and promise of political support. Gift-giving may thus be conceived as a way by which patrons accumulate symbolic capital (see Bourdieu 1980). Because a gift creates a debt that has to be repaid, it is also a means by which the patron establishes relations of domination. All these factors lead to an exchange of a 'diffused set' of goods and services between patrons and clients. As for the economists' interpretation of interlinked deals, it involves more "clear cut" exchanges. For economists, the personal relationship serves to minimize information costs and to maximize probability of promise enforcement. They attach less importance to the influence of personal status in determining bargaining power in economic transactions. Therefore, economists do not adequately treat the power motive of the patrons in their analysis of interlinked deals.

The proponents of the power approach to patron-client relations are those who follow a Marxian line of thinking (see, for example Flynn 1974; Bodemann 1982; Soiffer & Howe 1982). For them, patron-client relations are relations of production between two opposing classes, and they are of a transient nature. Patronage provides possibilities for the dominant class (patrons) to appropriate surplus labour from the oppressed class of clients through feudal obligations and 'moral coercion'. It is also a way by which the landed elite prevents poor masses from developing group consciousness. However, even those authors who forcefully argue the importance of class analyses in explaining relations between patrons and clients have not been able to correctly locate the actors in their respective classes. Classes are characterised by contradictions and empirical evidence provided by these authors do not point to contradictions between patrons and clients in village societies.

It is the contention of the proponents of both the above approaches that patron-client relations are dominant in traditional village societies and that these relations may erode with the opening up of village societies to the 'outside'. Several major forces have been identified as responsible for this process of erosion: national integration, market expansion (and the development of productive forces), population growth and expansion of state activities. Anthropologists show that due to the importance of cash in the new urban value system, patrons tend to extract higher cash surpluses from their clients and to reduce their traditional patronage services. Further, in the 'integrated economy', it is the 'economic standing' of the individual that brings in high social prestige rather than one's ability to control a large clientele. Internal forces such as population growth will increase labour supply which will prompt patrons to employ labour on a daily wage basis. All these forces tend to put a considerable strain on patron-client relationships. For patrons, the old risks have either disappeared (e.g., labour is no more scarce) or they can now be insured against in a better way otherwise. For clients, the bond with patrons has become too 'exploitative' to continue to grant them security. Many anthropologists show that this 'opening up' process always works against the subsistence security of the poorer members (clients).

For political scientists, these influences will lead to a transformation of 'traditional' patrons into 'brokers' or 'mediators'. Brokerage or mediatory functions of the patron—providing the link between villagers and the 'outsiders'—become increasingly important. Moreover, along with the erosion of traditional patronage systems, new forms of patronage may emerge with the expansion of state activities and politicization of rural areas, which they term 'political clienteles'. But it should be emphasized that political clienteles differ from patron-client relations in that they are organised by party politicians and form a rationing device through which limited state resources are distributed to those from whom they derive electoral support (see Platteau 1985), while patron-client relationship is essentially a risk insurance device.

The economists explain that the direction of change of interlinked deals or multiplex exchange relations depends on an array of economic and technological factors. A host of studies dealing with transition of agrarian economies have shown the erosion of multi-stranded ties between landlords and tenants/labourers with the advent of more profitable techniques of production along with commercialisation and market expansion (see Collier et al 1974; Parthasarathy and Prasad 1978; Bardhan and Rudra 1978; Byres 1981; Hayami and Kikuchi 1981; Rudra 1982; Dreze et al 1986; Patnaik 1986). Relying on his studies of Kerala fishermen, Platteau (1984 : 96) concludes that gradual penetration of market forces would lead to a transformation of personalised and interlinked transactions to more abstract impersonal and one sided market relationships. At the same time, some studies have shown the increased importance of long-term contractual arrangements between economic agents. These studies emphasize the importance of 'timeliness' of operations and 'skill' of labourers in the cultivation of new improved crop varieties (see, for instance, Bhalla 1976; Bardhan & Rudra op cit.; Bardhan 1983). Contractual arrangements are also influenced by population growth. An increased supply of labour over and above the demand will push down real wage rates and this will lead to a revision of tenant shares downwards and even to tenant eviction (Utami & Ihalauw 1978; Rosenzweig 1984; Kikuchi et al 1984). Mechanisation might lead to low supervision costs and therefore to a shift from sharecropping to owner-farming (Hayami & Kikuchi op cit.; Jose 1984;). Economists emphasize that multiplex relations between agents might still prevail in contemporary societies if transaction costs are high and if credit and insurance markets are inadequately formed.

The advocates of the power approach take the stand that patron-client relations refer to a pre-capitalist category and that they will disappear with the development of capitalist relations of production. These authors are in a strong position when one goes through some empirical studies dealing with changing agrarian relations, along with the expansion of markets and the development of productive forces. As I have already pointed out, evidence from some agrarian societies testifies to the eviction of tenants by landlords and to the transformation of patron-client ties into exchanges of a more contractual, tangible and monetary nature. These studies reveal growing contradictions between landlords (patrons) and landless (clients). But the process did not lead to a bipolar division of the society into bourgeoisie and proletariat. As Hayami and Kikuchi (1984 : 214) have pointed out, peasant differentiation in Asian agrarian societies may take two different forms; polarization and stratification, both of which arise from growing inequalities among peasants. In the first case, the peasant community will be differentiated into large commercial farmers and a landless proletariat as predicted by Marxists. The major cause behind such a process is the declining return to labour relative to land, which induces accumulation of land. In the second case, peasantry will be stratified into a number of subclasses "in a continuous spectrum ranging from

landless labourers to non-cultivating landlords within the social mode of the peasant community in which villagers are tied to one another in multi-stranded personalised relations in contrast to the impersonal market relations which accompany polarization" (ibidem.) According to the authors (ibid), the direction of change of Asian societies will depend on the village social structure (the power structure as well as the degree of social interaction) and the comparative advantage in risk and transaction costs between the impersonal market of the urban type and the personalised "market" of the village type in achieving efficient resource allocation under changing resource endowments and technology.

In this paper, I will make an attempt to understand the formation of patron-client relations and their subsequent erosion in a maritime fishing community, Weligalle in southern Sri Lanka. On the basis of my empirical findings, I will show that patron-client relations and their evolution can be well understood within a framework of 'risk insurance', meaning that, these relations are formed as a device providing insurance to both agents in managing the risks they face, and that they tend to erode when the various exchanges involved in the patron-client bond can no longer provide such insurance or when better alternative means of insurance emerge with the 'opening up' of village boundaries to the 'outside'.

This paper is divided into two main parts. In part II, an attempt is made to elucidate the formation of patron-client relations in pre-1940 Weligalle in relation to the various risks and uncertainties confronted by the actors concerned. I consider pre-1940 Weligalle as a 'traditional' fishing community because before the year 1940 the village remained relatively isolated from the rest of the country. This isolation was broken in 1940 when marketing facilities were developed and when the state took up a 'reformist' role. In part III, I will describe the various forces that were at work in Weligalle since 1940 and the resultant changes in the patron-client relations. Because the study deals with historical development of social relations, evidence related to the past were obtained from a purposive sample of informants (former beachseine owners, beachseine workers and oldest members of the Weligalle fishing village). It should be stressed that this study deals with the evolution of social relations in Weligalle over 3 decades (from 1930's to 1960's), and forms only a part of a more comprehensive study carried out by the author. The name Weligalle as well as names of individuals mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

11. Formation of patron-client relations in pre-1940 Weligalle

Around the turn of this century, fishermen in Weligalle used three techniques of fishing, namely, beachseining, deep-sea fishing using large outrigger canoe with sails, and inshore fishing using small outrigger canoes. Beachseining was the popular technique of fishing in Weligalle until recently providing the means of living to most of its inhabitants.

The technique of Beachseining.

Beachseining is reported to be one of the most common techniques of fishing used in many coastal peasant societies in the world. Alexander (1982) notes its use in Africa, South America, Asia and formerly in Europe and North America. In Sri Lanka, its use has been reported as early as in the latter part of the last century.

An average beachseine (*madela*) consists of a 10 to 15 feet long bag (*maduwa*) of small meshed netting which is attached to the body of the net—a 40 foot long cone with sections of different mesh. Two wide meshed wings attached to the body narrow down to mere strips of netting finally attached to hauling ropes about 1500 feet long¹. After tying one end of the hauling rope of the net to a heavy object on the shore, the crew (consisting of about 8 men) carry the net into the sea by a net-laying craft, encircle a large area of water and bring the other end of the net to the beach. Then the two hauling ropes are pulled from the beach until the *maduwa* with fish trapped in it is fully dragged ashore. Although at the time of net laying only about 10-15 people are present in the beach and engage in hauling the net, by the time *maduwa* is close to the shore, many people gather around the beach and sometimes as many as 30-40 people participate in hauling the net. It is however difficult to say how many people are actually required for hauling.

Beachseines can only be laid in inshore waters with an even bottom, free of stones and other obstacles. Such ecological niches are called *padu*. In Weligalle, only one such *padu* exists and all seines have to be laid in this *padu*. The laying of a net and its subsequent hauling takes about 2-2 1/2 hours so that on a particular day, only a maximum of about 5 nets can be laid. The usual practice has been to lay 4 nets per day. As nets have to be dried after use, a net once used cannot be used again on the same day. This shows that the optimum number of nets for Weligalle *padu* is 4. However, it is interesting to note that around the year 1935, there were already as many as 52 nets in operation in Weligalle.

Beachseine ownership:-

Beachseines have been introduced to Weligalle in the latter half of the 19th century and information on the early net owners was hard to obtain. Only single ownership of nets seem to have prevailed there, but the existence of a share system of ownership, whereby individuals pooled money in building up a net, has been reported by Alexander for some other southern fishing villages (1982 : 141).

Individual ownership of nets points to the presence of an elite group in Weligalle by the turn of the century, who could finance the costly investment which beachseines represent, on an individual basis². In my opinion,

compared to other fishing techniques, beachseining offered a good avenue of investment for the rural elite due to several reasons. First, the majority of them were engaged in tree crop production (especially coconut) which brought in more regular incomes. Therefore, their risk-bearing ability was high (low risk aversion) and the high average expected incomes from beachseining was the determining consideration. Second, beachseining attracts investment by those affluent members in the society due to the low cost of supervision it entails. Moreover, fishing is an activity that carries a very low social status in the predominantly Buddhist society of southern Sri Lanka. But beachseining offered opportunities for the rural elite to supervise seine operations from the beach, without falling into the category of fishermen. The moral hazard problem could thus be controlled quite satisfactorily at a negligible cost for the owner, even though the latter chose not to participate directly in producing operations. Third, the risk of damage or loss to fishing assets is low. Because beachseines are operated in smooth-bottomed *padus* in times of calm sea, there is no danger for the net, craft and the crew.

Column 1a of Table 1 gives the pattern of net ownership in Weligalle in 1935. It is evident that nearly 40 percent of the nets were owned by 3 individuals. The ownership pattern was therefore highly skewed.

Coping with risks and uncertainties in beachseining

Risks and uncertainties are related to different degrees of lack of knowledge about the state of nature. There is little understanding as to the biological characteristics of the fish stock, their migratory habits, the impact of changes in water temperature, and the influence of changing chemical composition of sea waters, etc. on the fish stock.

With regard to fishermen in Weligalle, it would be hard for them to calculate the odds of an event such as the appearance of fish shoals, sudden variations in weather, variations in catch etc. They are confronted with the risk of zero income on a particular day, which may arise from two causes: a. the impossibility to carry out fishing operations due to the roughness of the sea, and b. the absence of fish. Catch variability in beachseining is generally of two types: within-day and day-to-day fluctuations (short-term), and inter-season fluctuations (long term). Within-day fluctuations are those variations of catches among different nets laid within a single day. A net which is laid in the morning gets a higher catch than one laid in the afternoon. But a net which is laid in the morning today may not get the same catch as the one laid the same time the previous day, giving rise to day-to-day fluctuations of catches. Seasonal fluctuations of catches arise due to changes in monsoonal winds. The south-west monsoon of Sri Lanka confines the beachseine activities for a period of 6-7 months (from October to April in the southern coast).

Due to seasonal fluctuations in fish catches (and therefore income), the fishermen are faced with the risk of falling into distress during the 'off-season'. While within-day and day-to-day catch variability will average out over the long-term, fishermen may still face short-term income fluctuations that affect their consumption patterns.

It is known that people living in precarious environments often develop strategies and institutions to cope with risks and uncertainties in their environments which give rise to income fluctuations, and I will elaborate on them in the following sections.

Net-sequence and access to the sea:-

As noted, Weligalle possessed one '*padu*' and all existing nets (52) could not be laid simultaneously because there was a limitation on the number of nets that could be laid on a single day (only 4 nets). Moreover, within a single day, expected incomes per net was dependent on the timing of fishing operations. In order to give every net equal chances in terms of access to the water as well as income opportunities, a turnover system had been elaborated that set rules governing the use of seine nets; which I term the 'net-sequence'³. This system operated as follows:

All nets were numbered; net no. 1, net no. 2, net no 3,, net no. 52. How the 52 beachseines in Weligalle were used in a sequence is explained in table 2 in a simplified form.

Assuming that only 8 nets are present and only 4 nets are laid during a particular day, the net laying follows the sequence 1, 2, 3, 4, and in day 1, four nets are being laid-starting with net no. 1 and ending with net no. 4. In the following day (day 2), net no. 2 which was laid after net no. 1 in the previous day gets the early morning turn, and the net sequence follows 2, 3, 4, 5. A sequence of net laying until the end of the eighth day shows that all nets had equal chances of participating in the morning, noon, afternoon, and evening turns, and at the end of the eighth day, a 'net cycle' is complete. A 'net cycle' can be defined as the period during which all nets had their morning turn. In this net cycle, each net has been laid 4 times during a period of 8 days. The net cycle is continuous, in the sense that, once a net gets its evening turn, it will be continuously laid for 4 days and is then left to idle for another 4 days. As this simplified model suggests, when the total number of nets increase, the time period during which a net is left to idle will also increase.

Additional difficulties arise due to significant inter-seasonal variations in catches. In Weligalle, seine catches are usually high around February and due to the prevalence of a large number of nets, all of them would not have equal chances of laying during this flush period. As a consequence, the annual

returns of a seine net is governed mainly by its position in the net cycle, meaning that most incomes will accrue to those nets which happen to have many turns during the flush period. But, over the long-term these inequalities may even out.

It is clear from the above description that the institution of the 'net-sequence' cannot adequately cope with the risks of income fluctuations when the number of nets exceed the number of possible hauls per day. Fluctuations of fishing incomes would not have a strong influence upon the consumption patterns of seine owners, who could draw upon agricultural incomes when fishing is "bad". But, the same is not true in the case of crew workers. Then how did the crew workers manage the risks of short-term income fluctuations which affect their consumption patterns? It is to this issue I will turn next.

Risk-management strategies adopted by fishermen:-

Strategies of risk management generally fall into three categories (see Dreze & Sen 1987). First, are those 'precautionary strategies' adopted by people to reduce risk. These strategies, which Newbery (1987) called 'self insurance', include accumulation of assets such as grain in storage, livestock, gold, cash, body fat, etc., as well as activity diversification. Second, there are strategies adopted to pool, shift or share risks within wider social entities, which can be called 'risk insurance' strategies. Common examples are reciprocal exchange, sharing within extended kinship network, sharecropping, credit, and patronage. Third, there are steps that can be taken to adapt oneself after the income fluctuations are materialised. These are called 'adjustment strategies' which include reduction of activity, foraging, raiding, and migration⁴.

I have no data to show that the seine owners accumulated assets which could be liquidated easily in times of distress or any other emergency. But Alexander (1992) showed from his studies at Mawella that rich people in fishing villages usually accumulated assets such as 22-carat gold, which is a highly liquid asset. Apart from gold, Alexander also reported that rich fishermen invested heavily in saleable assets such as radios, pressure lamps, sewing machines, wardrobes and sarees. These durable stores of value could be easily converted to purchasing power.

The crew workers in general did not have access to permanent sources of non-fishing income or income surpluses from fishing to invest in assets that could be liquidated in times of distress... However, it was evident that some seine workers have been engaged in diverse activities that brought in complementary incomes.

Precautionary strategies of risk management adopted by crew workers:-

Activity diversification :-

The major reason why crew labourers were engaged in diverse activities was that such activities brought in complementary incomes which guarded them against the risk of falling into distress due to very low fishing incomes.

About 20 per cent of the crew workers have been engaged in inshore fishing as a source of secondary subsistence income. The expected income from this activity was low, but it was characterised by low variability. Two reasons can be given for the low degree of participation of fishermen in inshore fishing. First, entry into inshore fishing requires investment in inshore crafts and many crew workers were short of such capital funds. Second, both these activities (beachseining and inshore fishing) can be considered as 'weather-correlated risks': variation in weather conditions affect both activities in a similar way. Therefore, while incomes from inshore fishing could complement the incomes from beachseining to a certain extent, engagement in inshore fishing was not a perfect hedge against risks inherent in beachseining.

Rope-making is a popular subsidiary activity practiced by southern fishermen. Due to their zero correlation with incomes from fishing, incomes from rope-making could be used to stabilize the intertemporal flow of total daily incomes. But the very low involvement of crew workers in rope making in pre-1940 Weligalle (only 4 percent) could be related to the lack of suitable bodies of water to ferment coconut husks in this area. Coconut landowners have sold most of their husks to villages outside Weligalle.

Fish drying is essentially a form of storage and as such, it is an intertemporal redistributive device directed at stabilizing incomes. Although fresh fish was marketed through *mudalali* (fish buyers), evidence reveal that a good part of the Weligalle catch was also dried during the period under concern (before 1940). More than a third (36 percent) of the crew workers have been engaged in fish drying.

Risk Insurance Strategies:-

These are strategies of risk management directed at pooling, sharing and shifting risks.

Kinsmen:-

Kinsmen form an important group within which individual or specific risks can be pooled. With close personal knowledge of each other and the relations of 'blood' that develop affection among members of kin groups the

problems of moral hazard and adverse selection⁵ can be kept to a minimum. As fishermen do not confront covariant catches, risk pooling can become an efficient means of managing risks in fishing societies. Risk pooling by the way of reciprocal lending of credit is aptly described by Platteau & Abraham (1987) with reference to Kerala fishermen⁶. While their study points to the functioning of reciprocal credit among a wider sphere of the community (rather than its confinement to close kin groups), we are unable to trace such practices in pre-1940 Weligalle from the information available.

Patronage as risk insurance:-

Following my discussions in the preceding sections, I could say that there was demand for patronage in pre-1940 Weligalle due to the following reasons: a. Non-owners of equipment were confronted with high risks of income fluctuations; b. Very meagre possibilities existed for these fishermen to engage in non-fishing activities c. Diversification of fishing activities did not benefit fishermen to the extent that they were weather-correlated. Moreover, engagement in other fishing activities required investment in crafts and gear which the crew workers could not meet.

The seine owners were willing to supply patronage services due to the following reasons: a. Ready availability of labour was important due to the timeliness of seine operations and the necessity to lay the nets quickly when fish shoals were located outside the net sequence; b. Because the large seine nets were stacked in the beach when they were not in use, there was the possibility of theft or damage by rivals. This required that crew workers be provided with sufficient incentives to protect the nets they operated; c. While supervision costs are low in beachseining, the seine owners in Weligalle were uncertain as to whether they would be able to supervise all operations of their seines. It may so happen that a seine owner is compelled to attend to some urgent need in his cropland the day he has to supervise laying of his nets, In such cases supervision costs would be greater; d. As wealth in traditional societies included social categories such as the number of labourers at one's beck and call, having a large clientele brought in a high social prestige and power. Therefore patronage provided a means of accumulating symbolic capital.

Permanent work force and patronage :

A crew of about 18 has been assigned to each net by the seine owners and this crew was solely responsible for laying the nets at its 'turn' in the net sequence, while many 'helpers' (labourers) could join them in hauling operation. As this crew operated the same seines regularly, they were a 'permanent work force' employed by the seine owners. After the expenses (food for the crew and fish for helpers) were deducted, the permanent crew was entitled to a 1/3 share of the proceeds from the catch.

It is worth noting the advantages of using a 'permanent' labour force as against casual labour. When a seine owner resorts to the casual labour market, he would have to incur higher transaction costs in terms of information collection, work monitoring and contract enforcement. A labourer working for a fixed daily wage has no incentive to use his full labour efforts, giving rise to moral hazard problems. The employment of a 'permanent' labour force by the seine owners appear to have aimed at bringing down both transaction costs and problems of moral hazard. The permanent work force guaranteed the seine owner a readily available and dependable labour force. The sharing of proceeds, while it amounted to shifting part of the risks of income fluctuations from seine owners to the crew members, also provided an incentive to crew members to provide higher labour efforts.

This arrangement was welcome by the non-owners of equipment. Such long term labour 'contracts' (or permanent employment) guaranteed them security of employment, a form of insurance against a risky labour 'market'.

It appears that the relation between a beachseine owner and his permanent crew has developed into a very strong bond characterised by multi-stranded ties. These multi-stranded ties imply a flow of several services from employer to employee and vice versa.

Flow of services from Employer to Employee :

a. Secure Employment:-

The permanent nature of the labour contract provided security of employment to crew workers.

b. Subsistence Crises Insurance:-

Crew workers are liable to face crises of subsistence when fishing incomes are insufficient to meet their current subsistence requirements. Risks of falling into distress arise out of low fishing activity during monsoons, extended periods of non-fishing from the time a net is laid until it is used again, and also due to poor or zero catches. At such occasions, the seine owners have willingly lent 'subsistence-help' to their crew workers.

Foregoing rights to his share of the catch by the seine owner:- When the catch was very poor, it was never auctioned, and the seine owner never took his share so that the catch was entirely distributed among the crew members. It would be interesting to assess the advantages of this system over pure share-contracts or wage-contracts. In pure share-contracts, while risk of income fluctuations is shared by both parties, the contract does not guarantee that the crew members will be able to meet their consumption requirements at all times. On the other hand, a pure wage-contract guarantees the crew a regular income

since all risks of fishing have to be borne by the seine owner. At the same time, wage contracts provide less incentives for the labourers to use their full labour efforts and the crew members will be unable to benefit from 'lucky catches' which is common in fisheries.

This sharing system is one in which fishing risks are shared between agents, and at the same time guarantees security of subsistence to the more 'weaker' agent. Thus, it is a mixed contract, providing both insurance and work incentive to the crew.

Short-term credit:- The employer was also a willing lender at times of low fishing activity, especially during the monsoon period and also during non-fishing days within the season. Usually, 'area-wide risks' are confronted by all fishermen in a particular geographical area. These collective risks (or covariant risks) cannot be pooled or shared (Newbery 1987 : 21) and fishermen have to draw on stores to even out consumption during such periods. However, the seine owners were better insured against fluctuations in fishing incomes because of their regular agricultural incomes, and they provided credit to their crew workers whenever they needed distress help. In the absence of insurance for collective risks in fishing, credit given by seine owners to their crew workers amounted to the provision of an "insurance substitute" (see Binswanger & Rosenzweig 1986 : 510).

c. Gifts in kind:-

Flow of gifts from employer to employee has taken various forms and it is hard to specify all. Generally they have mainly been in the form of firewood, other kinds of minor gifts such as used clothes, used furniture, and occasional gifts of rice, jack fruit, bread fruit, and regular gifts of clothes at the new year.

d. Help to meet social obligations:-

Puberty ceremonies, marriages and funerals are all occasions on which the fishermen are forced to spend lavishly. Social obligations or social 'survival' at many occasions imply expenditures beyond the saving capacity of crew members. The employer-seine owner had used these occasions to show his benevolency by giving the crew member in need a 'big' note of money.

e. Protection:-

Frictions among fishermen usually arise in case of delays in net laying and hauling operations, competition between different nets for access to the sea when a shoal of fish is located outside the net sequence, or with regard to improper fences dividing two adjoining compounds, etc. The seine owners with their large crew member force maintained a group of 'chandi' (thugs) who could intervene and protect their crew labourers⁷.

f. Mediatory functions:-

In a relatively 'closed' society, dealings with outsiders always meant insecurity and the presence of a state official, in the minds of the people, meant a great threat to their livelihood. Therefore, many of these dealings were mediated through seine owners, especially by the two patrons, who owned the largest number of seines in pre-1940 Weligalle.

Flow of services from Employee to Employer:-

a. Basic labour services:-

The crew members permanently associated with the nets of the seine owner ensured that when the time came, the job (laying of the nets) was done quickly even in the absence of the seine owner.

b. Subsidiary labour services

The crew members often offered their services to the employer-seine owner in the form of unskilled agricultural work. Help was offered by the wives of crew members in the kitchen of the seine owner during festival times, alms givings, puberty ceremonies, weddings and funerals. However, such services were very diffused and it is hard to identify a 'specified set'.

c. Provision of 'muscle' by the 'chandi':-

Some crew members served as members of the group of *chandi* (thugs) maintained by the seine owners to provide protection to him and his employees, as well as to assert his sheer power position.

d. Provision of 'voice':-

The bargaining power of the fishermen vis-a-vis the merchant (*mudalali*) was partly a function of the number of people present in the beach and the voice they could raise against bidding by the merchant when catches were auctioned. Alexander (op. cit.: 175) noted that faction-controlled nets (nets of large seine owners and their clients) received a higher price for their catches and the merchants hardly 'cut' price for catches of such nets⁸.

e. Social and political gains from having a large clientele:-

Many of the services received from the seine owner were reciprocated by the crew members in demonstrating their respect to the seine owner-employer (in more symbolic forms). This enhanced the social status of the employer. The seine owner's ability to control a large following also meant that he was the one having closest contact with state officials, because the best person to approach from the point of view of the latter is the one exercising a greater control over the village population.

The seine owner as a local Patron:-

It is quite apparent that the relations between the employer-seine owners and the employee-crew members in pre-1940 Weligalle belonged to the category of patron-client bonds. We have already seen that the flow of services between the actors are diffused and it is hard to identify a 'specified set' of services or transactions. There are no written contracts involved in the relation. It is a "whole person" relationship where personal knowledge plays an important role. Personal knowledge and face-to-face contact in the relation develops affection between the actors. There is no set time for the relation and it can continue over an indeterminate period of time.

Going through the various goods and services that flow between the patron and the clients, it is evident that the tie between the patron and his clients also answers the definition of 'interlocking markets' by economists. More particularly, the relation between the patron and the client can be identified as a credit-cum-labour tying arrangement. From the view point of the patrons, the patron-client bond served the purpose of minimizing transaction costs and the problem of moral hazard with respect to both credit and employment transactions. In such a system of multiple contracts, the seine owner could willingly lend to the crew members because dishonesty of the client in his credit transaction will be "too costly for him in terms of its spill over effects threatening other transactions" (Bardhan, 1980: 86). The seine owner resorted to several methods to see that the crew members would keep up to their part of the bargain. He employed the crew on a permanent basis and labour was tied through the provision of consumption credit. Worker incentives were provided by the practice of 'catch-sharing'. On the part of the clients, the patron-client bond provided security of employment and easy access to consumption credit, where consumption credit served as a substitute for hunger insurance. Many lenders are hardly willing to lend to poor crew labourers who have no assets to offer as proper collaterals against borrowing and therefore getting into long-term labour 'contracts' is a way of insuring access to sources of credit. In this case the labour contract itself acts as a collateral; which is a 'collateral substitute' (Binswanger & Rosenzweig 1986).

One must not forget the role of the larger social group that may stand as a guarantor against breaches of exchange. Unlike the agrarian communities of Sri Lanka where farm units are spread over a wider area, fishermen live in houses huddled in close proximity and therefore the latter communities are characterised by a high degree of social interaction. As pointed by Platteau & Abraham (1987:468) with respect to fishing societies in southern Kerala (which is almost an adjacent country to Sri Lanka), the sanctioning power of such societies against breaches of exchange are high. "Social compulsion can be readily used in such circumstances: considerations such as 'loss of face' in the eyes of the entire community, social marginalisation and the consequent loss of social creditworthiness, loss of employment opportunities on the beach, and physical harassment are strong weapons which individuals cannot easily counter".

While the above discussion highlights the exchange relations involved in interlinked deals, it cannot fully account for the wider sphere of exchange involved in patron-client relations. Of course, the close personal relationships established between agents through gift exchange amounted to 'cementing' the ties, which served the function of minimizing information costs and increasing the probability of 'promise' enforcement. But economic interpretation of interlinked deals cannot adequately treat the power aspect of patronage; the accumulation of symbolic capital by the patrons to enhance the size of their clientele which brought in power and prestige in village societies. The higher status enjoyed by the patrons and the power wielded by them would have definitely increased their bargaining power in economic transactions.

III - Erosion of patron-client relations in Weligalle

a. Market Expansion

Although during most of the colonial era the state played a supervisory and regulatory role in the fisheries, its interest in fisheries took a new momentum in the late 1930's. In the southern fisheries, however, the major turning point was the establishment of an ice-producing plant at Matara (26 miles to the west of Weligalle) in 1939, and the establishment of the Fish Sales Union. A second turning point was the establishment of the Department of Fisheries in 1941, which was assigned the task, among other things, of developing fish marketing. What prompted the Government to focus its attention on fisheries was the worsening food situation at the onset of the 2nd war, and the growing population in urban centres. The Government directed that the Department should run a cooperative marketing scheme whereby fish was sold directly to the consumer by the producer at a fixed price, so that the producer might have a steady income and the consumer the assurance that the price of fish would not vary unduly (Goonewardena 1980 : 41).

Marketing advances were issued to selected beachseine owners who undertook to handover the fish, collected or purchased by them, to the Department's marketing organization in Colombo at agreed wholesale rates, for resale through Department's stalls. Issues of foodstuffs (in short supply during war time) were made on credit and transport (in some cases petrol) were provided on credit, to be paid for from the value of the fish supplied. No interest was levied on these advances (ibid : 42). Further, starting in 1944, funds were provided by the Government to build up roads linking fish landing centers to main highways.

With the establishment of an ice plant at Matara in 1939, and the Department of Fisheries in 1941, several problems with regard to fish marketing were solved. The highly perishable catch could now be preserved, and it could be transported easily to areas of high demand. Therefore, by the early 1940's, Weligalle fishing village was integrated into the large urban centers of the country.

Access to large urban markets increased the price of fish⁹. It should be noted that market expansion also worked to dampen the fluctuations of fish prices. As Platteau (1984 : 71) has correctly pointed out, "price fluctuations in a traditional local market are likely to be higher than those observed in a national or international market, due to the more erratic fluctuations to which fish supply is subject in a small restricted area".

With the expansion of market, beachseine catches brought in very high incomes. Alongwith the beachseine fishermen, deep sea and inshore fishermen also benefitted from the opening of the national fish market.

The rise in fish prices in Weligalle, following its integration into large regional marketing networks, led to an increase in the average revenue and seine activities offered a lucrative avenue of investment. To seize upon these new economic opportunities, there have been new entrants to fisheries. The number of seines in Weligalle thus increased from 52 in 1935 to 92 by 1950 (see table 1b). The two largest seine owners who were already engaged in the seine fishery have increased the number of nets they owned approximately twofold during this period.

The increase in the number of nets however did not increase the total catch. I have already mentioned that only 4 nets could be employed in Weligalle every day. Assuming a 8-month fishing season this will permit a maximum of 960 hauls per year and this maximum (E0) could have been achieved with a total of 4 nets (using them every day). E0 can be considered a 'technological constraint' present in the beachseine fishery in Weligalle. Therefore, the higher is the number of nets, the smaller is the share of a single net in the total catch. In such a context, net owners will try to increase their share in the total catch by adding more nets and net construction will gather an increasing momentum.

The net owners increased their share basically in one or several of the 3 methods given below.

- a. Construction of new nets.
- b. Purchasing the nets of those who were forced out of seine fisheries.

Note that when the number of nets exceed a certain margin, some nets will be unable to participate during the flush period. This means that in the short-run all nets will not receive equal returns. The large seine owners had spread their nets over the net-sequence in such a way that some of their nets had their turns (of laying) during the flush period. But small-scale net owners (for example, those who own a single net) were facing more insecurities of fishing incomes due to several reasons. First their nets had less chances of participating during the flush period. Second, a large number of nets meant a smaller

share of the total catch as well as lower frequency of income receipts. Therefore when their share of the total catch was not sufficient to meet the cost of net-maintenance and family consumption requirements, they were forced out of seine activities. The large seine owners purchased the nets of these disadvantageous group at nominal sums.

c. Decreasing the number of non-owned nets by destroying them.

Single net owners have also been forced out of seine operations by acts of violence on the part of the stronger large seine owners. Equipped with their larger clientele and their army of 'chandi', some larger seine owners have resorted to burning the nets of the smaller net owners, or delaying the laying of a net by force or simply by threats. Such acts of violence or threats usually forced the small owners to sell their nets and leave fishery (see also Alexander 1982 : 238-239).

This process can be well understood by looking at table 1c. The total number of nets remained the same (92) after 10 years (from 1950 to 1960). Probably, nets that were lost due to wearing out or burning have been replaced by new nets. Nevertheless, it is evident from table 1c that the large seine owners have been able to increase the number of nets they owned, buying the already existing nets (from those who were forced out) rather than constructing new nets. The support rendered by the clientele of the larger seine owners, by way of violence and threats, was of considerable help to the seine owners, in this process of capital accumulation and concentration.

When fish prices rose in Weligalle, the traditional system of catch-sharing gradually eroded in a direction more beneficial to the seine owners. The seine owner no longer forewent the right to his share of the catch when the catches were low ((because even a low catch brought in a considerable cash income). This amounted to a reduction in the volume of subsistence goods provided by the patron to his clients. Therefore, the earlier advantage of the system over pure share-contracts or pure wage-contracts disappeared. In other words, the catch-sharing process no longer guaranteed subsistence to the 'poor'. Besides, the seine owner patron was interested in a high cash income to consume imported manufactured goods that penetrated the village and to enjoy the luxuries of urban life. In order to participate in the new status system (which was based on the economic standing of the individual), the patron had to extract a higher cash income from his seine operations. This was done by increasing the number of nets he owned, decreasing the number of non-owned nets, and by changing the catch-sharing method in his favour.

b. Growth of population

In a context of widespread unemployment and low level of education, the opportunity cost of fishing labour would be very low or even zero (Panayotou 1982 : 18). In such a situation, growth of fishing population will lead to an expanding labour force - willing to take up fisheries for a 'subsistence share' of the catch.

During the period 1948-1960, the population of Sri Lanka grew at the rate of 2.6% per annum (Snodgrass 1966), one of the highest growth rates in her history. Weligalle would surely have felt the increase in population pressure, which would have raised the pressure on village resources. With increased supply of labour, there were too many people around the beach eager to lend a helping hand in hauling nets in return for a few fish. Most of these people were absorbed in the new nets that were added to the fishery rather than employing the existing labour force more often. It should be stressed that an increase in the labour force does not mean that more labour time is added to the beachseine fishery. Because the total effort is fixed, the labour time necessary for this amount of effort is also fixed. A larger labour force therefore meant that every labourer (crew worker) was working less than before, or one can say that many people were employed in beachseine fishery, but none was 'gainfully' employed. The catch and income was shared by all, and so was employment. This is consistent with Geertz's (1963) idea of 'shared poverty' through work-spreading¹⁰. In fact, this mechanism is equivalent to accommodating more crew in a given fishing unit with a share system of remuneration. Two processes of poverty-sharing was evident. One was what I have discussed above—the use of new crew workers in newly constructed nets. The other was the increase in the number of participants in hauling operations. There was no restriction on the number of labourers participating in hauling a seine net. Labour participation in hauling operations therefore shows many similarities with the *bawon* system of crop harvesting in Indonesia (see Collier et al 1974)¹¹. When a net is hauled, those who participate in hauling operations are given a few fish each for the *curry* (*hodda denewa*) and the rest is auctioned and the proceeds are divided between the seine owner (2/3 of the proceeds) and the permanent crew workers (1/3 of the proceeds). Due to the fact that the number of people participating in hauling operations increased, the marketable surplus (the catch that was auctioned) was reduced.

The overall effect of all these changes was that the same catch was now being shared among a large number of people, and each was receiving a lesser and lesser share of the 'economic pie.'

c. Politicization of rural areas:-

Sri Lanka attained independence in 1948, and the first Sri Lankan national government was formed by the United National Party (UNP) which was founded in 1946, by the fusion of the Ceylon National Congress and the Sinhala Maha Sabha. Both represented the interests of the landowning westernized elite. The new Government ruled by the English-speaking westernized landowning elite spent large amounts of public funds on welfare measures rather than channelling them to development. A rice subsidy, free education, free milk for school children, etc. were granted and many essential food items were sold through cooperatives at subsidized prices. However, the UNP received a big 'blow' when Bandaranaike (the second in command of the party) broke

away on a language issue and formed the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (M.E.P.). With the slogan 'Sinhala only', Bandaranaike pledged that he would make Sinhalese the national language within 24 hours, if he was given the power¹². The poor Sinhalese peasants who represented the majority of Sri Lankans hardly possessed any English education and were thereby restricted in their access to higher education and many outside employment including those in the state sector. The slogan 'Sinhala only' of the MEP appears to have opened up hopes of upward mobility and it was gaining considerable support in the Sinhalese villages of rural Sri Lanka. Weligalle did not form an exception to this rule.

I have already pointed out that most of the large seine owners belonged to a landed elite and, therefore many of them aligned with the UNP. When the new party political machinery was penetrating the countryside, the seine owner-patrons were more concerned with the strength of their clientele. Participation in party politics and establishment of links with politicians brought in many advantages to the local patrons: their children could find better schools in the cities and better employment outside and, above all, they could have access to the numerous resources that the state controlled. At the same time, it also opened up avenues to climb up the political ladder.

In this context, the patrons could enlarge their clientele (political objective) and increase their wealth (economic objective) by increasing the number of nets owned and by supplying patronage services to clients. But note that these objectives of the patron were 'self defeating'. When the seine owner recruits more crew members in order to increase his clientele, the catch has to be shared among a larger number of people. Then a situation will eventually be reached when the total income from beachseine employment would hardly guarantee subsistence to each crew worker family: the poverty-sharing mechanism would reach its critical upper-limit.

The UNP government started distributing food through cooperatives at subsidized prices and such services were distributed under the banner of the patronage of the local patron, linked to the dominant political party at the state level. By taking up chief positions in the cooperatives and other public institutions the seine owners delivered state services under their patronage. For example, Wijesooriya (one of the largest seine owners) took up positions as Chairman of the Paddy Stores and the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society, and the Director of the Multi-purpose Cooperative Stores in Weligalle, during the period 1950-1965. Therefore, they could still maintain their control over the sources of subsistence of the poor fishermen. As political scientists have shown, here we witness the transformation of a traditional patron into a 'broker'. 'Patronage' services are provided by the state and the patron plays 'brokerage roles', providing the link between the state and the villagers.

However, with the collapse of the Korean war boom in 1953, the Government was confronted with falling export prices and rising import prices. In 1953, most of the subsidies were therefore cut: "in August 1953, the rice subsidy was abolished and the price soared from 25 cents a measure to 70 cents. Free midday meals for school children were also abolished, the price of sugar was increased, the public assistance rate cut down, and rail fares and postal rates doubled" (Polnambalam op cit.: 25). The economic crisis faced by the country had a disastrous impact on the patron-client relations in Weligalle.

Indeed, given that food subsidies were abolished and that the share of the catch from beacheseines was decreasing, crew labourer families found it difficult to meet their subsistence requirements during times of low fishing activities. The bargaining position of the clients vis-a-vis the patrons declined and patronage became a less efficient means of hunger insurance for poor fishermen households.

d. State Intervention in Fisheries

Since independence in 1948, all Sri Lankan governments have been concerned with increasing fish production, generating employment and earning foreign exchange through exports. Although changes in power resulted in shifting priorities from one objective to another, there were hardly any radical changes with regard to these basic objectives.

In regard to fish production, reliance has been placed on, i. upgrading the productive capacity of the artisanal fishery through modernization of fishing crafts and diffusion of new fishing gear and methods, and ii. introduction of large and modern fishing vessels with a view to establishing an industrial fishery for exploitation of deep sea resources.

Given that new mechanized crafts designed for fisheries were too expensive for the fishermen to purchase outright, the state designed a loan scheme with a high rate of subsidization. These funds were channelled through fisheries cooperatives. Further, there were other needs with regard to anchorage, repair facilities, supply of new inputs, short term credit etc. Such demands were met by allotting large amounts of money to the building up of harbours, repair workshops and to the subsidization of special credit schemes for fishermen operated through national banks.

Mechanisation of traditional fishing activities and introduction of improved gear

In 1958, the state started issuing large mechanised crafts (3.5 ton boats) through the cooperatives on a 'hire purchase' scheme. The boats were to be worked collectively by the cooperative or the latter could nominate a 'skipper' who would be the ultimate owner. Because of the high initial cost of adoption of mechanised crafts, in addition to the provision of credit facilities, the state provided direct adopter-incentives in the form of subsidies. A 50 percent subsidy on the cost of large mechanised crafts (3.5 ton boats) was granted.

Starting in 1962, fishermen were also provided with loans up to Rs. 2,000, for the purchase of outboard motor engines to be fitted to their indigenous crafts, and also for the purchase of gear. This loan scheme was also designed to help fishermen adopt the nylon net. As cotton and hemp nets (used in traditional fishing operations) were rather less efficient and less durable, the nylon net was increasingly gaining popularity among the fishermen at Weligalle, and by 1970 almost all fishermen (including those who were still using indigenous crafts) were using the nylon net.

Special fishery insurance schemes were also designed to provide insurance for damage and loss of fishing crafts and gear. By heavy subsidization, the insurance premia were kept low for the schemes to be attractive to fishermen.

The state loan schemes for the purchase of mechanised crafts, outboard engines and nylon nets had two important consequences at the village level.

(a). The traditional inshore fishermen who confined their activities within only 2 km from the coast could now penetrate into deeper waters with mechanically powered boats. This helped them not only to have access to rich fish resources, but to migrate to other fishing villages away from Weligalle at times of low fish abundance or unsuitable weather conditions.

(b). The new nylon drift net was far more efficient in harvesting fish and it was increasingly being used by all fishermen. A small-meshed gill net known as the 'bible' net¹³ was becoming popular among the inshore fishermen to catch shore-seine varieties of fish, which were earlier harvested mainly by the use of beachseines.

The position of the beachseine owners at Weligalle was thus threatened by the introduction of the 'bible' net which directly competed with the seines for inshore fish resources.

The rise of the cooperative movement:-

The rise of the cooperative movement in Weligalle dates back to the mid-1950's. By 1954, participation in fishing activities as a crew worker in seine operations hardly guaranteed subsistence due to a number of reasons I have discussed in the earlier sections and many crew workers started protesting against the large number of seines employed in Weligalle *padu*. The result was that in 1955 a large number of crew labourers left their owners and formed a 'Cooperative of Seine Workers' (Madel Samupakara Samithiya).

The MEP was elected to power in 1956 by the masses of the rural poor. The new government recognized the cooperative of the seine workers and endowed it with 5 seines. Moreover, it decided to issue mechanised crafts under a loan scheme through cooperatives and this decision gave rise to the

formation of the 'Fishermen's Cooperative Society of Weligalle' in 1958. The seine owners did not join this cooperative, probably because of the two following reasons. First, the higher social status they enjoyed in Weligalle was partly due to their engagement in land-based activities (therefore they were a group of 'landlords') and their passive role as fishermen. By joining the cooperative they would have fallen into the category of active fishermen and this would have led to a decline in their social status. Second, crafts were only issued to active fishermen, in which case the seine owners would not have received crafts had they joined the cooperative.

For the 'asset-poor' fishermen, the cooperative provided easy access to productive assets (fishing crafts and gear) because they could obtain these assets on credit and group guarantees were accepted as collaterals.

Risks, Uncertainties and State Help:-

It is worth asking how the new services offered by the State could insure the fishermen against risks and uncertainties present in the productive environment.

First, by the provision of crafts to crew workers, the latter could become owners of equipment and thereby increase their security of employment.

Second, during times of low fish abundance, the mechanised crafts could migrate to other areas of high fish abundance. Therefore, the possibility of year-round fishing lowered the 'seasonality' of fishing activities: which amounted to stabilizing the daily flows of fishing incomes.

But unlike in the case of beachseining, where nets are laid in smooth-bottomed *padu*, the mechanised crafts operate in a hazardous environment and this gives rise to a new risk: the risk of damage or loss of crafts and gear. Any formal insurance organisation providing insurance against this risk is faced with the problems of moral hazard and adverse selection. Both problems arise because of informational asymmetries between insurance agents and those who seek insurance. Of course, the insurance agent can reduce the informational asymmetries by collecting information. But the social as well as the geographical distance between the fishermen and the insurance agents is so great that the latter will have to incur very high costs in information-collection. In this case insurance is unlikely to emerge because the insurance premia will be too high for the insurance scheme to be attractive to fishermen. As we have noted earlier, when formal insurance is unlikely to emerge, credit plays an important role as an 'insurance substitute'. But, the assets the fishermen possess (crafts and gear) are not accepted by many lenders as proper collaterals because these assets are fragile and subject to damage and loss (therefore they entail a high collateral-specific risk). The State tried to remedy these inadequacies in credit and insurance markets by issuing crafts to poor fishermen

through subsidy and hire-purchase schemes, and designing special subsidized fishery insurance and credit schemes. Given that fishermen hardly possess proper collaterals, they were requested to provide 'collateral substitutes': 'group guarantees' as in the case of issues of boats to members of a cooperative, or 'third party guarantees', like in the case of individual applicants.

'Fall' of traditional patronage system in Weligalle:-

Market expansion and the growth of productive forces appear to have reduced the impact of fluctuations of fish prices and fish catches, bringing down the cost of fishing risks. Many seine workers left the beachseine fishery to take up mechanised fishing and 'bible netting'. According to seine fishermen, beachseine catches were seriously affected by 'bible netting' in inshore waters and seine owners could not exert pressure on inshore fishermen because these new fishing activities were promoted by the state. The power of the seine owners was diminishing, and at the same time, the opportunities offered by the state and the possibility of organised group action through the cooperative placed the crew labourers in a strong bargaining position vis-a-vis seine owners.

I have pointed out earlier that the importance of the patron is a function of how important are the goods and services he controls for the survival of the clients, and whether the client is able to secure such goods and services elsewhere. So here is a situation where the clients became suddenly able to secure elsewhere the services traditionally supplied by local patrons. Alongwith the penetration of an array of state-designed 'fishery support programmes' into Weligalle, the demand for the patronage services of the seine owners declined.

In fact, the seine owners knew what was coming with the rise of the MEP government and they were gradually withdrawing from beachseining. Wijesooriya, for example, started investing in trade, in a furniture shop in crop lands, in a funeral business undertaking, and in a tourist hotel, while Martinsingho family took up building contracts. Their early connections with the 'outside' world and with politicians helped them to settle some of their children outside the fisheries. Wijesooriya even sent his youngest son to the university.

The outflow of capital from fishing to non-fishing forms of investment has to be understood on four grounds. First, as we have witnessed, the prestige and power enjoyed by the seine owner-patron was diminishing with the intervention of the state in fisheries. Second, their fishing activities were threatened by the expansion of 'bible netting' activities in the inshore area. Third, with national integration and penetration of urban values into the countryside the aspirations of the seine owner was to upgrade themselves to the urban middle class. However, their profession as 'fishermen' was a constraint to realize such a goal. Fourth, new political leaders were emerging in the village who had direct political contacts with electoral-level political authorities: possessing a higher level of education, they were able to interact with outsiders more effectively than 'traditional patrons'. Therefore, their importance as mediators or brokers was diminishing.

With the rise of the cooperative movement, more and more people were joining the 'cooperative of seine workers' and they sent petitions continuously, requesting the state to transfer all Weligalle beachseines to the cooperative. These requests were often made on the ground that there were too many nets so that the fishermen had to wait too long for their turn. Finally, in the late-1960's, this request was granted and all beachseines were taken over by the cooperative: this marked the end of the era of traditional patronage systems in Weligalle.

Conclusions

In the foregoing, formation of patron-client relations was described using a risk management framework. Whilst the patron-client tie guaranteed a readily available supply of labour force to the patron, it guaranteed security of subsistence to the client. The emergence of these reciprocal relations in village societies has to be understood in terms of their relative isolation and inadequately developed insurance and credit markets. The importance of patronage as a means of coping with risks and uncertainties faced by the poor was shown to be related to the inadequacy of other risk management strategies, such as activity diversification and accumulation of assets.

The patron-client relationship is a 'holistic' concept, characterised by various 'diffused' exchanges. It differs from the economists' interpretation of interlinked deals in that, accumulation of symbolic capital and the control of a large clientele give rise to power, which increase the bargaining position of the patron vis-a-vis his clients in their economic transactions. Moreover, in patron-client relationships, no strict accounting is practiced by the agents and the balance of exchange is cleared over an indeterminate period of time.

Patron-client relations seem to erode when 'isolation' of village societies is broken, especially as a result of national integration, market expansion, development of productive forces, and expansion of state activities. Three major factors appear to have been responsible for this process of erosion: a. growing importance of cash in the economy; b. Politicization of rural areas; and c. emergence of alternative means of insurance.

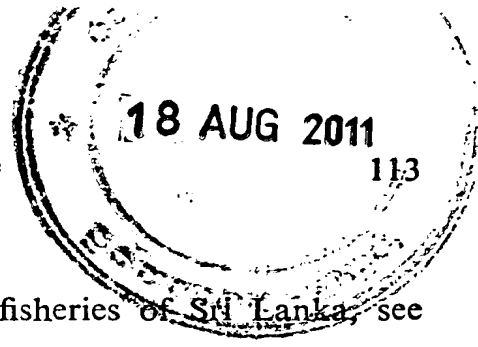
Cash becomes increasingly important in the "integrated" economy and old values are replaced by new values. In the new cash-based economy, prestige and status are associated with the economic standing of the individuals and this prompts many patrons to extract high cash surpluses from their productive activities. The patrons in Weligalle did this by increasing the number of nets they owned and changing the catch-sharing system in their favour. But on the other hand, politicization of rural areas and the development of political parties offer new opportunities to patrons to climb up the political 'ladder'. Participation in party politics requires the patron to keep his large traditional clientele and even to enlarge it. However, when patrons recruit more clients

in an open-access resource in which the total 'product' is fixed and, when they try to increase their cash income (economic objective) at the expense of the subsistence security of their clients, the whole system is bound to collapse. Because the fishery uses a share system of remuneration, a point will be reached where the labour share becomes insufficient to meet the family subsistence needs of the crew workers. The balance of exchange in the patron-client bond would then move against the defenceless clients.

Despite the fact that the 'opening up' of village societies has a negative impact on patron-client relations, one cannot say that such processes always bring in greater insecurity of subsistence to the poor. One must not forget the role of the national state in bringing about radical changes in the economy. Shift of political power at the top (thereby changes in government) might cause drastic changes in state policy, which will have its consequences at the village level. It was due to such a shift of political power in the mid-1950's that resulted in the channelling of large amounts of public funds to the rural sector in the form of institutional help. In this special case study, provision of productive assets (boats) to poor fishermen amounted to lowering traditional fishing risks and increasing their average incomes. Furthermore, in a context of incentive and moral hazard problems associated with the provision of insurance, the state-sponsored subsidized insurance and credit institutions provided the poor with alternatives to the services of the traditional patrons. Such an expansion of state activities might shift the balance of exchange in favour of the masses of clients (the rural poor). This will lead to an erosion of traditional patron-client relations because the clients can secure patronage services elsewhere (in state institutions) and can therefore completely do away with patronage.

On the part of both patrons and clients, withdrawal from the traditional patronage system was not voluntary. The patrons were facing increasing competition from 'bible nets' in inshore waters and the penetration of state institutions threatened their control over the sources of subsistence of their clients. The clients on the other hand were facing growing insecurity when the services of the patron and the poverty-sharing mechanism could no longer sustain their living.

How long a certain patronage system survives, how fast it erodes, and the direction in which the balance of exchange between patrons and clients shifts, all depend on the nature and intensity of the 'outside forces' and their influence on the productive forces, the prevailing value system and, above all, on the traditional risk insurance mechanisms.



Notes

1. For a detailed discussion on beachseine fisheries of Sri Lanka, see Canagaratnam & Medcof (1956).
2. Their emergence could be related to the process of dispossession of many poor villagers from their chena land under the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1840 and Waste Lands Ordinance of 1897 (implemented by the colonial rulers) and the subsequent purchase of such lands by the more affluent members of these villages at very low prices (see Ponnambalam 1980; Shanmugaratnam 1981). As coconut had a good export potential during this time many landowners turned the lands so purchased into coconut gardens.
3. The net sequence in beachseine fisheries was first identified by Alexander (1982) who gave a good description of its working and rationals.
4. See also Longhurst (1981)
5. "Moral hazard arises when an agent who obtains insurance has an incentive to take less care to avoid the contingencies which give rise to claims (e.g. accidents), whilst adverse selection occurs when the insurance company cannot distinguish between agents who have differing probabilities of claims, and hence must offer all the same contract" (Newbery 1987 : 13-14).
6. "Fishermen can clearly improve their situation collectively by transferring current incomes to one another so as to provide a time-pattern of expenditure different from that of income. On any given day, fishermen with surplus income in excess of their current subsistence needs could give or lend money to less fortunate fellow-workers who are in deficit" (Platteau & Abraham 1987 : 467).
7. Wijesooriya, the largest seine owner in Weligalle told me that he maintained a group of about 20 thugs in order to protect him and his employees.
8. Usually when a certain price is agreed upon by the merchant and the sellers, payments are not immediately made. The merchant makes the payment a few days after the catch has been sold. Sometimes, merchants used to pay below the agreed price, saying that they could not sell the catch at a good price. This practice of paying less than the agreed price is called 'price cutting',
9. In a fishing village a few kilometers west of Weligalle, Alexander (op cit., 210) noted "whereas prior to 1940, as much as 30% of the total catch from Gahavalla was being sold to fish driers at a price of less than Rs. 3 per hundred weight, and as much again was preserved within households, by 1944 all of the catch excepting that required for immediate consumption was sold in fresh form at prices that seldom fell below Rs. 15 per hundred weight".

10. With regard to wet-rice (Sawah) cultivation in Java Geertz (1963) described shared poverty as a process whereby the inhabitants of a village shared cultivation rights and employment. Geertz interpreted the cultural norm of the Sawah society as that of dividing the 'economic pie' into greater number of pieces so that everybody had a piece.

11. In this system, the farmers permit all those who want, to join the harvest in order to get a share.

12. The leftist parties existing at that time—the LSSP and the CP—both fought against the English dominated administration, but they pledged equal status for both Sinhalese and Tamil; the languages of the two major communities in Sri Lanka.

13. This small-meshed gill net is called the 'bible net' because it has first been adopted by Catholic fishermen in Negombo, a fishing village in the west coast of Sri Lanka.

References

- ALEXANDER, P. (1982): *Sri Lankan Fishermen - Rural Capitalism and Peasant Society* (Australian National University, Canberra).
- BARDHAN, P. & A. RUDRA (1978): 'Interlinkage of Land, Labour and Credit Relations: an analysis of village survey data in East India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xiii, 6 & 7, 367-384.
- BARDHAN, P. (1980): 'Interlocking Factor Markets and Agrarian Development: a review of issues', *Oxford Economic Papers*, N.S. 32, 1, 82-98.
- BARDHAN, P. (1983): 'Labour-tying in a Poor Agrarian Economy: A theoretical and empirical analysis', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. xc viii, 3, 501-514.
- BARDHAN, P. (1984): *Land, Labour and Rural Poverty—Essays in Development Economics* (Oxford University Press).
- BHALLA, S. (1976): 'New Relations of Production in Haryana Agriculture', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xi, 13, A23-A30.
- BINSWANGER, H. & M. R. ROSENZWEIG (1986): 'Behavioural and Material Determinants of Production Relations in Agriculture', *Journal of Development studies*, Vol. 22, 3, 503-539
- BODEMANN, Y. M. (1982): 'Class rule as Patronage: Kinship, Local Ruling Cliques and State in Rural Sardinia', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 9, 2, 147-175. . .
- BOURDIEU, P. (1980): *Le Sens Pratique* (Editions de Minuit, Paris).
- BREMAN, J. (1974): *Patronage and Exploitation* (University of California Press, Berkeley).

- BYRES, T. J. (1981): 'The New Technology, Class Formation and Class Action in the Indian Countryside', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 8, 4, 405-454.
- CANAGARATNAM, P. & J. C. MEDCOF (1956): 'Ceylon's Beach Seine Fishery', *Bulletin of the Fisheries Research Station*.
- COLLIER, W. L., Soentoro, G. Wiradi & Makali (1974): 'Agricultural Technology and institutional Change in Java', *Food Research Institute Studies*, Vol. 13, 2, 169-194.
- DREZE, J., L. LERUTH & A. MUKHERJEE (1986): 'Rural Labour Markets in India: Theories and Evidence' (Paper presented at the 8th world congress of the international Economic Association, New Delhi).
- DREZE, J. & A. SEN (1987): 'Coping with Vulnerability and Disaster' (London School of Economics, Mimeo).
- FLYNN, P. (1974), 'Class, Clientelism, and Coersion: Some Mechanisms of internal Dependency and Control', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 12, 2, 133-156.
- GEERTZ, C. (1963): *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles).
- GOONEWARDENA, T. P. (1980): 'A Survey of Some of Sri Lanka's State-aided Development Programmes in the Fisheries Sector' (Marga Institute, Doc. SEM/100/80 (4), Colombo).
- GREGORY, C. A. (1982): *Gifts and Commodities* (Academic Press, London & New York).
- HAYAMI, Y. & M. KIKUCHI (1982): *Asian Village Economy at the Crossroads; An economic approach to Institutional Change* (University of Tokyo Press).
- JOSE, A. V. (1984): 'Farm Mechanisation in Asian Countries: some perspectives', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xix, 26, A-97-A-103.
- KIKUCHI, M., A. HAFID & Y. HAYAMI (1984), "Changes in Rice Harvesting contracts and Wages in Java", in Binswanger, H. P. & M. R. Rozenzweig (eds): *Contractual Arrangements, Employment, and Wages in Rural Labour Markets in Asia* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London), 117-130
- LEMARCHAND, R. & K. Lezg (1972): 'Political Clientelism and Development', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 4, 149-178
- LONGHURST, R. (1981): 'Household Food Strategies in Response to Seasonality and Famine' *Bulletin of Institute of Development Studies*, Vol. 17, 3, 27-35.
- MIGDAL, J. (1974): *Peasants, Politics and Revolution* (Princeton University Press, Princeton N. J.).
- NEWBERY, D. (1987): 'Agricultural Institutions for Insurance and Stabilization (Economic Theory Discussion Paper, Cambridge University).
- PANAYOTOU, T. (1982): 'Management Concepts in Small-Scale Fisheries: Economic and Social Aspects' (Fisheries Technical Paper 228, FAO, Rome).
- PARTHASARATHY, G. & D. S. PRASAD (1978): 'Response to the impact of the new technology by farm size and tenure—Andhra Pradesh, India', in International Rice Research Institute: *Interpretive Analysis of selected papers from Changes in Rice Farming in selected areas of Asia*, (Los Banos, Phillippines), 111-127.

- PATTNAIK, U. (1986): 'The Agrarian Question and Development of Capitalism in India' (The First Daniel Thorner Memorial Lecture, Oxford University Press, Delhi).
- PITT-RIVERS, J. (1954): *The People of Sierra* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London).
- PLATTEAU, J-PH (1983): 'The Drive Towards Mechanisation of Small-Scale Fisheries in Kerala: a study of the Transformation Process of Traditional Village Societies', *Development and Change*, Vol. 15, 65-103.
- PLATTEAU, J-Ph. (1985): 'The State Paradox in economically backward countries' (Cahiers de la Faculte des Sciences Economiques et Sociales de Namur, Serie Recherche-No. 66, Namur).
- PLATTEAU, J-PH. & A. ABRAHAM (1987): 'An Inquiry into Quasi-Credit Contracts: The Role of Reciprocal Credit and Interlinked Deals in Small-Scale Fishing Communities', *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 23, 4, 461-490.
- PLATTEAU J-PH. (1988): 'Traditional Systems of Social Security and Hunger Insurance: Some Lessons from the Evidence Pertaining to Third World Village Societies' (Mimeo).
- PONNAMBALAM, S. (1982): *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis* (Lake House Publishers, Colombo).
- POWELL, J. D. (1970): 'Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, 411-425.
- RAO, J. M. (1988): 'Fragmented Rural Labour Markets', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 15, 2, 238-257.
- RUDRA, A. (1982): *Indian Agricultural Economics* (Allied Publishers Private Ltd. New Delhi).
- RUDRA, A. (1984): 'Labour Power and Farm-level Decision-making', in M. Desai, S. H. Rudolph & A. Rudra (eds.): *Agrarian Power and Agricultural Productivity in South Asia* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, New York).
- SCOTT, J. C. (1972a): 'Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66, 91-113.
- SCOTT, J. C. (1972b): 'The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds and Social Change in Rural Southeast Asia', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. xxxii, 1, 5-37.
- SCOTT, J. C. (1976): *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London).
- SHANMUGARATNAM, N. (1981): 'Impact of Plantation Economy and Colonial Policy on Sri Lankan Peasantry', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xvi, 3, 69-80.
- SNODGRASS, D. R. (1966): *Ceylon: An Export Economy in Transition* (Richard D. Irwin, Inc. Homewood, Illinois).
- SOIFFER, S. M. & G. N. HOWE (1982): 'Patrons, Clients and the Articulation of Modes of Production: an examination of the penetration of capitalism into peripheral agriculture in Northern Brazil', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 9, 2, 176-206.
- SYLVERMAN, S. F. (1965): 'Patronage and Community-Nation Relationships in Central Italy', *Ethnology*, Vol. 4, 172-188.

UTAMI, W. & J. IHALAUW (1978): 'The relation of farm size to production, land tenure, marketing, and social structure—Central Java, Indonesia', in *International Rice Research Institute: Interpretive Analysis of selected papers from Changes in Rice Farming in selected areas of Asia* (Los Banos, Philippines), 129-139.

WEINGROD, A. (1968): 'Patrons, Patronage, and political Parties', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 10, 377-390.

WOLF, E. R. (1966): 'Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies', in M. Banton (ed.) *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies* (Tarristock, London).

Table 1. Beachseine ownership—Weligalle (1935, 1950, & 1960)

Seine owners possessing more than 2 nets	1a 1935	1b 1950	1c 1960
1. Wijesooriya	8	16	23
2. Martin-singho	6	13	14
3. Dhanapala	6	8	7
4. Karolis-singho	2	0	0
5. Pantis	—	2	7
All others	30	53	41
Total no. of seines	52	92	92

Source : sample of informants

Table 2. Net Sequence—Beachseine, fishery, Weligalle

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
Morning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Noon	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1
Afternoon	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2
Evening	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3