

An Analysis of Historical and Social Contributions Made by D. S. Senanayake to the Temperance Movement in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the historical and social impact of D. S. Senanayake's contribution to the temperance movement. Under British rule in Ceylon, the production and consumption of alcohol expanded rapidly. This issue had also existed during the Portuguese and Dutch periods. The consumption of toddy and arrack led to several economic and social problems. The British administration modernized the existing excise policy, further aggravating the situation. As a result, the native people of Ceylon suffered severe consequences due to the toddy and arrack industry. In response, patriotic Buddhist monks and laypeople united to fight against this issue. The temperance movement began in 1890 in the Southern Province, organized by P. A. de Silva. However, this initial attempt was unsuccessful. Subsequently, under the leadership of D. S. Senanayake, a meeting was convened with others who opposed the British rulers' promotion of alcohol production and consumption. D.S. Senanayake emerged as a pioneering and active member of the temperance movement. The primary objective of this paper is to analyze D. S. Senanayake's role in the formation of temperance societies. The research problem focuses on identifying both the positive and negative aspects of alcohol consumption among people. Alcohol consumption has caused numerous negative effects on the community. Even women became addicted, which led to widespread social and economic problems within families. At the same time, alcohol production contributed to the emergence of a capital-accumulating class. The temperance movement, organized by D. S. Senanayake and other patriotic leaders, helped to foster an anti-British sentiment among the Ceylonese people. His significant contribution played a key role in the success of the temperance movement in Ceylon.

Keywords: Alcohol, Ceylon, Leaders, Senanayake, Temperance Movement,

INTRODUCTION

Under British rule in the mid-nineteenth century, the toddy and arrack industry generated significant profits for producers. This was largely due to the rapid growth of the coconut industry in the low-country coastal areas. Many local elites owned extensive coconut estates (Jayawardena 2007: 37, 38). Among the capitalists who controlled the toddy and arrack industry was the father of D.S. Senanayake, who was a prominent industrialist of the time. There is reliable evidence to show that not only in this country but also in other British colonies, arrack production and expansion were widespread. This research aims to highlight the valuable contribution made by D.S. Senanayake to the temperance movement. Studying this movement is important as it represents a form of resistance against the colonial government.

METHODOLOGY

Since this research is based on both primary and secondary data, information has been gathered from published books and articles. It follows a qualitative approach. A collection of dispatches, government reports, letters, and leaflets catalogued under Lot 33 in the Archives is particularly relevant to this study. In analyzing the data obtained, conclusions were drawn using the historical-comparative method, thematic analysis, and the case study method. The research methodology involved analyzing data from literature and historical records using comparative and thematic analysis to draw meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Toddy and Arrack Industry

With the inauguration of the mid-nineteenth century under British rule, the toddy and arrack industry emerged as a prominent business that brought significant economic profit. During that time, many local elites who owned extensive coconut plantations emerged in the Low Country areas. In connection with this, the beginning and expansion of the **Renda** industry took place along the coastal belt of the Low Country (Jayawardena 2007: 44).

There is evidence that local capitalists were involved in this Renda movement. R. E. S. De Soyza, who was known as Babyhamu De Soyza, was a well-known Renda businessman and had taken over taverns across the entire province on several occasions (Dharmabandu, 1962: 240). Furthermore, Jeremias Dias, known by the nickname "Robo Sighno Renda Rala" in the Panadura area, and W. P. S. Rodrigo, a wealthy and prominent figure in Panadura (also known as Salmon Renda), were leading figures associated with the Renda movement (Dharmabandu, 1962: 245). In addition, Thomas Amarasuriya, the Fernando family, and the Abaya Sundaras of Galle were also local capitalists involved in the Renda movement (Roberts, 2005: 411,423). Among them, Don Spater Senanayake, the father of D. S. Senanayake, was described in the first part of this book as a notable Renda businessman (Wright, 1907: 647)

Thus, it appears that the Renda movement was widespread in Moratuwa, Galle, Welithota, Koggala, Matara, and the Kandy upland areas, which were part of the coastal belt during that period (Jayawardena 2007: 52-57). Especially in the upland region of Kandy, individuals who owned a significant number of taverns became known as *Rendayas*, engaging in business activities that spanned from the lowlands to the highlands C. H. De Soyza being a notable example (Mel, 1986: 48). This reveals that many local capitalists were involved in the Renda movement. Among local enterprises, the Renda business was particularly lucrative, offering large and immediate profits, which led to the rapid spread of liquor stores throughout the country (Roberts, 1997: 170-71). During this time, especially due to the upland plantation economy, alcohol consumption among the Sri Lankan population became increasingly widespread.

Evidence shows that the production and spread of alcohol occurred not only in this country but also in other colonies during the period of imperialist rule. It is said that after the British conquered America, they introduced a drink called "Fire Motor" to the native population. Furthermore, following the same policy, a type of alcohol known as "kaffir beer" was spread among the African people during this time. It is also evident that the imperialists popularized the drug opium among the people of India and China as part of this strategy.

During this period, the production and distribution of alcohol were widespread in Sri Lankan society to such an extent that there is evidence indicating that many villages were heavily involved in alcohol consumption. Among these villages, Madampe, Karanagoda, Medagampitiya, Koggala, Bentara, Kegalle, Nugathalawa, and Ambepussa were particularly prominent (Sinhala Buddhist, 1912: 9). This can be inferred from the fact that the leaders of the temperance movement had to establish numerous branches in these areas. There is also evidence suggesting that even women in some villages were accustomed to drinking alcohol to a significant degree. Furthermore, clear indications have been found that the expansion of the alcohol industry led to numerous social problems (Governor's Address, 1872:33). According to reports by Thomas Skinner, the revenue controller at the time, some Sinhalese individuals even mortgaged their land to purchase alcohol and became addicted (Dinamina, 1912: 1). Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century, alcoholism had emerged as a serious societal issue in the country (Skinner, 1891: 219)

Temperance Activism After 1912

During this period, not only the patriotic lay Buddhists of this country but also, the missionary priests who were part of the British administration took the lead in opposing the spread of the alcohol industry. There is evidence that these missionary priests submitted a petition containing 32,396 signatures against alcoholism to Governor William Gregory (1872–1877), who held office at the time. Therefore, national religious activities were actively opposing Western rule and its associated customs.

It was a period when the national Buddhist revival movement was led by lay priests who aimed to revitalize Buddhism. In 1890, the first steps appear to have been taken to form temperance societies against alcoholism. Initially, the movement focused on the Koggala area in the southern region, where P. A. De Silva, a devoted Buddhist, clearly played a pioneering role in building the temperance movement (Jayesekara, 1984: 294). Many of the leaders of this movement were Buddhists. Although it began in the south, the temperance movement soon spread rapidly across the country. At that time, many village defense associations, traditional customs-related associations, and rural and urban societies that had been established for various purposes began to merge with the temperance movement, transforming it into a widespread national campaign. The movement saw significant growth in the Southern, Western, Northwestern, and Sabaragamuwa Provinces, where alcohol consumption was particularly prevalent (Jayesekara, 1984: 297).

It was a period when the national Buddhist revival movement was led by the aim of lay priests who led the Buddhist revival movement. In 1890, it appears that the first steps were taken to form temperance societies against alcoholism. Even so, first, focusing on the Koggala area in the southern region, P. A. De Silva, a Buddhist, is clear that the Silva is doing a pioneer mission to build this temperance movement. Many of the leaders of the temperance movement were Buddhists. It seems that although the temperance movement started with a focus on the South, it soon spread rapidly. At that time, many village defense associations, traditional customs relations associations, and rural and urban societies, which had been established for various purposes in this country, merged with this, and the temperance movement was transformed into a large movement. In the Southern Province, Western Province, Northwestern Province, and Sabaragamuwa Provinces, where alcohol consumption was widespread, the temperance movement was growing greatly.

Although the temperance movement began in the late nineteenth century, it became a more organized effort in the early twentieth century. There is evidence that the British derived significant income from the alcohol industry. During the reign of Governor Henry McCallum (1907–1913), a separate Excise Department was established. In 1912, the Excise Act was passed to facilitate the separate opening of Toddy and Arrack Taverns (The Legislative Enactments, 1900-1913: 786-803). It is revealed that after the passing of the preliminary Act, the number of Toddy Taverns increased to 845 (Dinamina, 1912: 12). Moreover, it is stated that by June 1912, when the so-called Act was passed, the number of liquor stores opened across the island had reached 1,072 (Fernando, 1971: 30). This number appears to have increased to 1,167 by October of the same year (Wimalaratna, 1992: 158). Furthermore, due to the preceding Act, the poor common people were adversely affected. It seems that a strong growth of the temperance movement and its agitations took place during this period as a reaction to the aforementioned Act.

The patriotic leaders who led the temperance movement at the beginning of the twentieth century were inspired to make it a national movement due to the work of Sir Anagarika Dharmapala, a strong patriotic leader who provided pioneering leadership in the Buddhist revival movement of that time. He traveled across the island, delivering speeches against alcohol consumption, which played an important role in awakening the public consciousness of the leaders who spearheaded the temperance movement in this country.

The series of lectures he gave under the motto "*Don't eat beef, don't drink alcohol*" greatly contributed to rallying public support for the temperance movement, which in turn paved the way for the Buddhist revival (Sugathadasa, 1986: 108). Moreover, the Sinhalese were deliberately made addicted to alcohol, and in contrast, the *Sinhala Bauddhaya* newspaper, edited under the leadership of Dharmapala, further stirred public sentiment against alcohol consumption. This is evident from the statement: "*The myths that normalize alcohol consumption among the Sinhalese have led to the downfall of our nation.*" Dharmapala began this temperance battle in 1912, and it is clear that there was considerable public support behind it. It should be noted that although this temperance struggle began in the South, which was his homeland, it was Sir Anagarika Dharmapala who transformed it into a temperance movement centered in Colombo (Fernando, 1971: 126). Valisingha Harischandra, C. Batuwantuduwe, and Edmund Hewavitharana—who were leading figures in the national religious movement at the time and are regarded as prominent local Buddhist leaders—also played key roles in this temperance campaign pioneered by Dharmapala (Sugathadasa, 1986: 109).

There is evidence that many prominent temperance leaders emerged during this period, inspired by the pioneering efforts of Sir Anagarika Dharmapala in developing temperance activities. Among these leaders were

the Senanayakas, the Hewavitarana brothers, Walisinghe Harischandra, Piyadasa Sirisena, W. Arthur de Silva, Arthur P. Diyas, Amadoris, and Martin C. Pereira. These patriotic figures played significant roles within the broader national religious movement of the time. Under the guidance of the movement initiated by Dharmapala, a remarkable service was rendered in advancing both religious and national causes. Motivated by the anti-alcoholism campaign led by Srimath Anagarika Dharmapala, the Senanayake family of Botale Walawwa in Harispitigama Korale assumed leadership within the movement. It appears that the temperance movement became a well-organized initiative through the active involvement and pioneering efforts of the Senanayake generation.

Don Spater Senanayake Mudalindu and his sons D. C. Senanayake, F. R. Senanayake, and D. S. Senanayake were all members of the Senanayake Walawwa and played a significant role in the national religious and temperance movements. In addition to the Senanayakes, many prominent individuals contributed to these efforts. Among them were Dr. W. A. Silva, Arthur V. Dies, Dr. D. V. Hewavitharana, Edmund Hewavitharana, Walisinghe Harischandra, D. B. Jayatilaka, Piyadasa Sirisena, M. C. Perera, C. W. Wickramarachchi, Amadoris Mandis, W. M. Perera, G. P. Malalasekara, D. W. A. Samarasekera, Richard De Silva, E. A. L. Wijayawardena, D. S. Wijesinghe, L. L. Gunaratne, A. B. Kure, M. M. Gunasekara, Andrew Perera, and H. L. M. Senanayake. These individuals were instrumental in stirring national consciousness and promoting the temperance cause. Historical records indicate that around 1,500 ordinary citizens also took part in a major temperance assembly organized by these leaders (Fernando, 1971: 126). The assembly was a turning point, showcasing the power of collective action and national awakening. Buoyed by the success of this initial effort, D.S. Senanayake and his colleagues went on to organize further temperance gatherings.

One notable meeting of the Temperance Council took place on May 28, 1912, at the Vidyodaya Pirivena in Maligakanda, Colombo (Dinamina, 1912: 28). This event was presided over by the Reverent Parivenadhipathi Heiantuduwe and was addressed as a General Assembly. On that day, D.S. Senanayake, Sir Anagarika Dharmapala, and Walisinghe Harischandra were hailed as patriotic leaders. D.S. Senanayake, in particular, drew inspiration from his father, Don Spater Senanayake Mudalindu, which propelled him to the forefront of the temperance movement. On that day, D.S. Senanayake, Sir Anagarika Dharmapala, and Walisingha Harischandra were recognized as patriotic leaders. D.S. Senanayake was inspired to step into the forefront of the temperance movement by his father, Don Spater Senanayake Mudalindu.

It is revealed that a resolution was also passed by these patriotic leaders opposing the government's liquor tax policy during the general meeting. These leaders did not limit their efforts to merely passing the resolution. Evidence shows that a delegation, including D. B. Jayatilaka, was sent to England to report the matter directly to the British government.

In addition to the steps taken against alcohol consumption, several other resolutions were passed by the temperance council on that day: (Dinamina, 1912: 21).

1. The opening of toddy and arrack taverns, as planned by the government, should be postponed.
2. Measures should be taken to allow provincial residents to express their views regarding the banning of toddy and arrack, and in the renewal of licenses for such establishments.
3. An order should be issued prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol to women and minors.

Moreover, in accordance with the decisions taken by the Temperance General Assembly, several protest rallies were held across major cities of the island against the liquor tax bill imposed by the imperialist government. Among the cities that took the lead were Nuwara Eliya, Moratuwa, Aluthgama, Mirigama, Ampara, Chilaw, Hatton, Tangalle, Kurunegala, and Matara (Fernando, 1971: 128). A particularly significant meeting was held in Colombo in June 1912, chaired by Sir James Peiris, a prominent leader of the national movement, as part of the protest campaign. It is revealed that several leaders, including D.S. Senanayake, participated in this gathering.

Under the leadership of D. S. Senanayake, the temperance movement evolved into a more organized force. In 1912, the Central Temperance General Assembly was established in Colombo with the participation of

temperance leaders from across the island. During this assembly, it was decided to establish branches of the Maha Sabha throughout the country. As a result, numerous branches of the Temperance Council were formed in various regions of the island.

Following the establishment of local branches of the Temperance Council, its members actively visited suburban villages to raise awareness among the public about the harmful effects of alcohol consumption. Through these grassroots efforts, they were able to educate and mobilize local communities. Although the Temperance Movement, which emerged in opposition to the Liquor Tax Act, had been growing over several centuries, it was under the leadership of D.S. Senanayake that it gained significant traction. His efforts brought together a large portion of the Ceylonese population under a unified cause. At the Maligakanda Vidyodaya Pirivena, Senanayake and other moderate leaders made another pivotal decision: they proposed that the British colonial government should seek the consent of residents before granting permission to open a liquor store in their area. Acting on this principle, D. S. Senanayake and his fellow leaders organized a series of island-wide protests. These efforts pressured the British administration, and as a result, the then-Governor, Sir John Anderson (1916–1918), informed the Temperance Council that the government would only open taverns with the consent of the local populace. This marked a significant victory for the anti-alcohol campaign spearheaded by Senanayake.

However, despite the government's apparent concession, the true objectives of the Temperance leaders remained unfulfilled. The method employed by the British administration in establishing toddy taverns was designed in such a way that it undermined the spirit of the Temperance Movement. Nonetheless, D. S. Senanayake and other moderate leaders remained undeterred by these setbacks.

1. Taverns were to be closed by a vote of three-fourths of the male body-tax payers, or 75% of the provincial population. However, the names of those who had died or left the villages were not removed from the voter lists (Fernando, 1971: 17). These names were still counted among those who supposedly consented to the operation of taverns (liquor houses).
2. When voting in favor of closing the bars, voters had to present the receipt they received after paying the body tax. If they lost their receipt and needed to obtain a replacement permit, they were charged fines. These fines were levied at the discretion of the agent. One agent charged anywhere from one rupee to thirty-seven rupees and fifty cents, while another charged eighty cents. A more sympathetic agent might charge only ten cents (Dinamina, 1915: 2)

Due to the British government's method of approving the opening of taverns, many common people who voted against it faced significant difficulties. For example, people from villages like Kotadeniya, Balalla, and Matale had to travel nearly 30 miles to an in order to cast their votes. Temperance leaders, including D. S. Senanayake, submitted several proposals to the British government regarding this issue (Subscript No. 11).

Under the leadership of D. S. Senanayake, the temperance movement gained significant momentum, causing considerable social and political excitement. This movement influenced the British colonial government to close many taverns during that period. The widespread local support for the movement is evident when examining the voting patterns in rural communities.

One such example is the vote held regarding the Matale toddy tavern:

Matale Toddy Tavern Vote – November 18th in 1919

A public meeting was held at the Attanagalla Dharamshala under the chairmanship of Mr. Obhayasekhara to decide the fate of the Matale toddy tavern (Dinamina 1919: 2).

- Total number of eligible voters: 987
- Number in favor of closing the tavern: 687
- Number in favor of keeping the tavern open: 3

- Number of spoiled votes: 15
- This outcome clearly demonstrates strong public support for the temperance movement, with approximately 70% of voters expressing their desire to shut down the tavern.

Thus, the British government had to close down many taverns at that time due to the excitement caused by the temperance movement of D. S. Senanayake. This seems to have received the support of the local people to a large extent. It is clear when you look at the number of votes cast by the people of those villages. The numbers of votes announced in the following centers are examples of this.

Udagama Toddy Tavern – Consent Proceedings

Consent for the closure of the Udagama Toddy Tavern was conducted on the 18th of November 18th in 1919 under the chairmanship of Ubhayasekara Mudali.

- Total number of eligible voters: 793
- Number of people willing to close the tavern: 63
- Number of people willing to keep the tavern open: 0
- Number of spoiled votes: 1

Therefore, 87% of the total number of voters expressed their consent for the closure of the tavern (Dinamina 1919: 2).

As a result of the temperance campaign organized by the Temperance Council, the number of taverns that were closed during that time is shown in the Table

Year	Number of closed Toddy bars	Number of closed Arrack bars
1918	736	669
1919	667	509
1921	452	452
1924	330	321
1925	218	872
1926	221	228

(Dahanayake, 1976: 24)

During this period, a significant number of toddy and arrack taverns were forced to shut down. Among the key figures in this movement was the renowned philanthropist Arthur P. Diyas, who stood out as a committed leader. He worked closely with the temperance campaign spearheaded by D.S. Senanayake, playing a pivotal role in the effort to eliminate liquor shops (Darmabandu, 1962: 256).

Temperance Struggle in Hapitigam Korale

D. S. Senanayake played a central role in the Temperance Union, particularly in his hometown of Harpitigama Korala. The temperance movement in this region was notably led by both D. S. Senanayake and his brother, F. R. Senanayake. By actively visiting Harpitigama Korala and engaging with the local population, Senanayake helped raise awareness about the dangers of alcohol consumption. This public engagement significantly strengthened the movement, and as a result, the Temperance Society in Harpitigama Korala emerged as a resilient and influential organization.

He did not stop there. It seems that the two Senanayake brothers held the Temperance Conference with Harpitigama Korala as the center, and about 25,000 representatives from different districts of the island participated in that conference (Ceylon Independence, 1912: 11). The conference was addressed by D.S. Senanayake. It is revealed that, as a result of the temperance campaign led by Senanayake in Harpitigama Korala, all the bars in the area were closed (Fernando, 1971: 126). As mentioned below, it seems that not only all the taverns in Harpitigama Korala but also the toddy and arrack taverns across the island were pioneers in closing down. It appears that the annual conference was held at the end of the year. It has been revealed that about 50,000 people participated in the temperance movement in A. D. 1912, which became the center of the movement (Fernando, 1971: 126).

It was possible to gather such a large number of people around the temperance movement because it was well organized. It is clear that harmony was created between urban people as well as rural people under the leadership of D.S. Senanayake through this movement. That was enough to carry on the temperance movement very successfully. It seems that the temperance movement led by D. S. Senanayake also raised public awareness at the time of polling.

An example of the growing interest in the temperance movement can be seen in the enthusiasm shown by a voter in Loluwagoda. During the excitement surrounding the temperance movement on the island in 1913, it was revealed that membership had grown to around 3,000 individuals. According to available statistics, the movement expanded to 120 branches, a testament to the dedication of its leaders (Jayawardene, 2006: 126).

This rapid growth during the early 20th century can, in part, be attributed to the leadership of D.S. Senanayake. He played a pivotal role in awakening the public consciousness and generating further momentum for the cause. His influence extended beyond the public, reaching journalists, poets, and writers, who also became involved in spreading the temperance message. Senanayake personally engaged with these artists and moderated their contributions to the movement. It is evident that Senanayake received significant publicity through the popular media of the time. The temperance campaign was widely disseminated across the island, notably through the distribution of pamphlets and small books. Examples include compilations such as *Amadyapa Mitraya* and *Amadyapa Kavimaldama*, which were printed in large quantities and distributed widely. Evidence of this distribution has been confirmed through historical sources (Fernando, 1971: 126).

Despite its popularity, the temperance movement faced resistance from the British colonial government. Recognizing its growing influence, especially under the leadership of Senanayake, the authorities sought to curb its progress. A notable example is a special circular issued by the Colonial Secretary in April 1913, which prohibited civil servants from participating in temperance activities without explicit permission from their department heads. This was one of several sanctions implemented by the British to suppress the movement's momentum.

1. Prohibition of administrative officials and village headmen from participating in temperance activities.
2. Close surveillance of Anagarika Dharmapala, a prominent leader of the temperance movement.

These were among the notable decisions taken by the British Government at the time (Guruge, 1991: lix). The Inspector General of Police under British rule, Dowbiggin, played a key role in suppressing the temperance movement. The British authorities labeled the temperance movement as one that promoted nationalism and political consciousness among the local population (Jayawardene, 2007: 145). Considering these developments, it is evident that D. S. Senanayake's involvement in the temperance movement was perceived as a significant threat by the British government. Additionally, the Sinhala-Muslim riots that broke out in the early 1910s, particularly in 1915, provided the British with a convenient pretext to suppress the activities of the moderate leaders involved in the movement.

Many powerful leaders who led the temperance movement were arrested by the British government under the pretext of the so-called Sinhala-Muslim riots (Police Riots File, Lot, 4/23). Among them were D. S. Senanayake, F. R. Senanayake, D. C. Senanayake, Dr. C. A. Hewavitharana, A. R. Fernando, D. B. Jayatilaka, Martin C. Perera, C. Batuwantudawe, Dr. W. A. de Silva, A. E. Gunasinha, and W. A. Samarakoon. Furthermore, the

Sinhala Bauddhaya newspaper, published by Anagarika Dharmapala, which gave wide publicity to temperance activities at the time, and the *Sinhala Jathiya* newspaper of Piyadasa Sirisena, another temperance leader, were both banned by the British government. These newspapers played a major role in inciting national sentiment among the local people and supporting the temperance struggle.

CONCLUSION

Although the leaders of the temperance movement were arrested by the British government, the protests continued unabated. This persistence was largely due to the exceptional leadership provided by D.S. Senanayake and other temperance leaders. What began as a campaign against the liquor industry evolved into a broader political movement, contributing significantly to the struggle for national independence. The temperance movement acted as a catalyst, energizing the existing freedom struggle. D.S. Senanayake emerged as a key figure in this movement, eventually becoming the first Prime Minister of independent Sri Lanka. His leadership in the temperance campaign laid the foundation for his rise as a national leader.

As a result of this movement, many toddy and arrack taverns, particularly in Harpitiigama, were shut down by the British government. Despite attempts to suppress it, the movement grew strong, with over 120 temperance society branches established across the island. The unwavering efforts of Senanayake and his fellow leaders were instrumental in sustaining the momentum of the movement. Undoubtedly, his prominent role in opposing the British liquor policies was a major factor that led to his leadership in independent Sri Lanka.

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