

SARADIEL, THE SOCIAL BANDIT

by

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Deekirikāge Saradiel (c. 1832–1864), *alias* Utuwankande Saradiel, *alias* Sūra Saradiel, is one of the best known folk heroes of Sri Lanka. Both Sri Lankans, as well as foreign visitors to Sri Lanka have been fascinated by the legendary life and exploits of this latter-day Robin Hood. Equally fascinating has been his hideout or Utuwankanda, the solitary rocky outcrop which stands sentinel over that part of the Colombo-Kandy road, just before it reaches the township of Mavanella.

E. J. Hobsbawm was one of the earliest to focus scholarly attention on the subject of social banditry with his book, *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1959). Since then others have applied his definition of social banditry and the profile of a social bandit, to the study of concrete examples of this social phenomenon. *Kelly Outbreak* by John McQuilton (Melbourne, 1979) is one such study of the Kelly brothers (1878-1880) of Australian fame. In the present study, I have applied the same formulation of Hobsbawm, to the study of the life and times of Saradiel. Saradiel is not only a legendary figure, but also a bandit of recorded history. What I have attempted here primarily is to take a fresh look at the facts and fiction as presently available to us, and which have been made considerable use of by others before me.¹

Practically in all the references to Saradiel, writers have referred to him as the 'Robin Hood' of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). But no serious attempt was made by any of these writers to examine the social significance and the implications of this all too familiar equation. Up to now whoever has written anything on Saradiel has done so with a view to presenting him as a folk-hero; a penitent thief, outlaw and cold-blooded murderer, seeking refuge like a lamb, in conversion to Catholicism, just before his fatal appointment with the hangman; or as a subject of popular tourist literature.

In writing the history of social bandits of more recent vintage, official documents have often been supplemented with oral evidence, by digging into people's memories. This, however, has not been attempted here, because the events narrated here are too far separated by time to be still lingering in

1. නුවරඑළියේ හේමපාල, සරදියෙල්, කොළඹ, 1967 ; නන්දදේව විජේසේකර සහ කේ. ඩී. ද ලැනරෝල්, සරදියෙල්, කොළඹ, 1949 ; ඊ. ටී. කන්හන්ගර, උතුරින්කන්දේ සරදියෙල් හෙවත් ලංකා රොබින් හුඩ්, කොළඹ, 1959 ; Fr. D. A. J. B. Antoninus, *Saradiel, the Robin Hood of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1964, R. L. Brohier, *Discovering Ceylon*, Colombo, 1973 ; W. T. Keble, *Ceylon Beaten Track*, Colombo, 1951 ; S. C. Nihal Singh, *Ceylon, New and Old* n.d. C.G.R.

the minds of the people living in the vicinity of Utuwankanda, or in the minds of the descendants of those involved in the events surrounding the life and fortunes of Saradiel. One who made too liberal use of such oral evidence was Rev. Keble, an inveterate traveller and raconteur. He recalled his trek to the top of Utuwankande, and his observations of the surrounding area as well as the cave on the top of the rock.

Writing in 1951 in his *Ceylon Beaten Track*, he says, 'So it is no wonder that the ladies loved him. My guide told me some goodly village stories of Saradiel's love affairs which would hardly bear repetition here, but which I feel sure he would willingly repeat to anyone who chanced to stop at the turning that leads off the Kandy road to Utuwankande hill'.

As mentioned earlier, no other serious student of social history has so far seems to have evinced any interest in the name or the fame of Saradiel. The circumstances of his banditry, its social and historical implications, if any, have not been the subject of any close scrutiny. In addition to the standard histories of modern Sri Lanka, including the more recent *University History of Ceylon*, Vol. III (1973), there have been a number of M.A. and Ph.D. theses on 19th century Sri Lanka, especially on economic and social history, and lengthy scholarly communications also on related subjects presented to the Ceylon Studies Seminar, Peradeniya University. But none of these seem to have evinced any interest in the significance, or on any wider implications of the Saradiel saga. Perhaps Saradiel and his fellow-bandits did not appear to these scholars as constituting any form of significant peasant movement, or a violent manifestation of the reaction to the creeping colonialism into the once almost impregnable Kandyan countryside. Nor did they see in this violent episode (interlude) any signs of peasant reaction and uneasiness at the encroaching colonialism and mercantalism. However, this neglect, either deliberate or otherwise, is not confined to our historians alone. As far back as 1959 Hobsbawm lamented the fact that social historians had altogether neglected this phenomenon. Twenty years later, McQuilton introduced his own *The Kelly Outbreak, 1878-1880, The Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry*, with the same thoughts, by quoting Hobsbawm, "Bandits and highwaymen preoccupy the police but they ought also to preoccupy the social historian. For in one sense, banditry is a rather primitive form of organised social protest, perhaps the most primitive we know".

Hobsbawm has identified a whole range of conditions or preconditions for the outbreak of social banditry. Some of his assumptions have been questioned in more recent times, either for their validity or for their contradictory nature. One such critic is Pat O'Malley, who advances two alternative conditions, while agreeing with the former with regard to the other conditions (*The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6/4, July 1979, 489-500).

According to Hobsbawm, social banditry is a rather primitive form of organised social protest, lacking in a clear ideology or any sense of direction, and not interested in the imposition of a new social order. In fact Saradiel himself, like most other social bandits known to history, is not on record to have made any pronouncements of any social or revolutionary significance. Whatever that may be in many peasant societies social banditry came to be recognised as some form of muted social protest, especially by the poor, who consequently assumed the role of protector of the social bandit, and came to regard him as their champion, idealized him and turned him into a myth. The earliest of such bandits was Robin Hood of mediaeval England, who according to recent researches, is more of a composite character, than one single individual. Whatever that may be, most social bandits have been cast in the role of the legendary Robin Hood, either in their own time or subsequently, and sometimes with their knowledge, or even without it. As Hobsbawm remarks, "many do not need to have the role (i.e. of Robin Hood) thrust upon them. They take to it spontaneously". Our own Saradiel for instance is hardly likely to have known that he was cast in that role, but since his death, especially during this century, most writers have called him the 'Robin Hood' of Ceylon or Sri Lanka. Perhaps we may digress here to take note of two significant reports. One is of an English planter who was forced by Saradiel to part with some money and his rifle, which were later returned with Saradiel's compliments. On receiving them back the planter is supposed to have told his astonished retainers the story of Robin Hood, and that Saradiel was very similar to him. A contemporary newspaper (*Colombo Overland Observer*) is also reported to have drawn some parallels between the Italian and Mexican bandits of the time, especially their successful eradication, while their counterpart in Ceylon was having a field day owing to the incompetence of the officials and the police.

Hobsbawm further contends that the social bandit who is cast in this role, often tries to live up to this role, even when he is not a conscious social rebel. What one may ask is this role? Robin Hood, the archetype of the social rebel, is reputed to have taken from the rich and given to the poor, and never killed but in self-defence or just revenge. The social rebel could also be playing the role of a tough man, who unwilling to bear the traditional burdens of the common man in a class ridden society, poverty and meekness, escapes them by revolting against them.

Among those preconditions that could spawn social banditry, Hobsbawm has identified the existence of peasant societies which remain profoundly and tenaciously traditional and precapitalist in structure. When the traditional equilibrium of such societies is upset, either by abnormal hardships such as famine and wars, or when the forces of dynamic modern world seize the static societies in order to destroy and transform them. The march of the

new society throws up the social bandit, who fails to understand it, but tries to fight it and destroy it. After all did not Saradiel himself try to stop the march of modernization, typified by the mail coaches and the railway, by stretching ropes on their path and temporarily stopping them on their tracks? It is also said that the bandits depend for their prey on "slow and cumbersome pre-industrial travel". Along the Kandy road the mail coaches on their way up were both slow and cumbersome indeed, and were easy victims to Saradiel's depredations. The railway which moves very slowly and sluggishly even to this day, after Polgahawela, may have moved much slower, more than a century earlier.

The mid-19th century was a period of dramatic changes in Sri Lanka, mainly in the economic and social spheres. The country was feeling the traumatic effects of many legal enactments passed during this time and some-time previously. The age old 'Rajakariya' had given way to paid labour and to a completely new set of economic and social relationships. Roads and railways were making deep inroads into the sleepy and isolated villages in many parts of the country. The introduction of the railway in itself was a boon to the planters and a partial disaster to the intrepid carters who up to that time had a monopoly of the road-borne traffic in the transport of goods. British capital was finding its way not only into the country but also was filtering into the pockets of some sections of the local population. The white European soldier was being followed by hordes of white speculators and coffee-planters. In their wake came the enterprising low-country Sinhalese, performing many essential services. Next came the South Indian labourers, bringing new ethnic, religious and cultural strains into the midst of the traditional Kandyan population. Christian missionaries were also penetrating into the far corners of the former Kandyan kingdom, and setting up their little outposts there. The traditional education system based on village temples had been disestablished and gradually giving way to a new system. Thus there came about accelerating social, economic and technological changes and innovations. With changing social systems there emerged new social tensions. New laws, radical new land-use systems, new masters, new opportunities, and new wealth seemed to be the order of the day, all brought about within a very short span of time. The underlying tensions in the country were perhaps having a faint echo in the following observation in the *Colombo Overland Observer* of 28 January 1864, "If this little spark (i.e. Saradiel) is not put down in time we may soon have another serious flame in the Kandyan Districts." What the writer had in mind was obviously the rebellion of 1848. Perhaps it is also implied that Saradiel's activities created some awareness of local rural grievances and emerging social antagonisms. However at least for a very short time Saradiel almost single-handedly was able to cause fear and concern among the highest authorities in the country, and to bring almost to a temporary standstill the civil administration in some

parts of the country. Special precautions had to be taken against any sudden armed attacks on the bastions of power in the provincial capitals of Kurunegala, Ratnapura and Kegalla, as rumours began to spread that such was being contemplated by Saradiel and his gang. This in itself would suggest the social and political dimensions of Saradiel's activities, although there was no manifestation of overtly organised, widespread opposition to the government of the time.

Other criteria set down by Hobsbawm were also met by Saradiel and his gang. The ideal setting for social banditry was rural and not urban, and preferably in a difficult geographical setting. The sparse population in Utuwankanda area, the wooded hills and deep ravines in the surrounding area, and in particular Utuwankanda's presumed impregnability at the time, proved a boon to Saradiel and his gang.

There was also an umbilical cord-like relationship and dependancy between the social bandit and his village, and its people. Hobsbawm says that the extent to which the ordinary bandit is tied to his territory—generally that of his birth and of his people—is very impressive. All social bandits invariably lived and died, or were captured, in their own territories. Though Saradiel's father Adasi Appu was a man from the Madampe-Chilaw area on the north-western coast, his mother Pichohamy was from Mavanella. Saradiel himself was born near Mavanella (in the village of Molligoda), and was brought up at the latter place. Therefore Mavanella and nearby Utuwankanda were his home territory. Except for a very short stint in Colombo, Saradiel spent most of his time there, and even when he was forced to flee his territory by his pursuers, it was abandoned only for very short spells, and he was irresistably drawn back to his usual haunts. Bāminiyawatte Rate-mahatmaya in his report to the Government Agent on the steps taken by him to effect the capture of Saradiel says, "In January 1864 the Government offered a reward of £100 for his capture. But since Saradiel never left Utuwankanda as his friends, and relatives were there and he had therefore less chance of being taken . . ."

Saradiel's dependance on his people, both kith and kin in the Mavanella-Utuwankanda area, was proverbial indeed. It is said that the worst thing that could happen to a bandit is to be cut off from his local sources of supply, in which case he would be forced to steal indiscriminately, and face the consequences of being denounced by his compatriots. Though Saradiel had his skirmishes with some villagers, and was sometimes turned away empty-handed by them, he was never without friends and benefactors, who gave him both, food and shelter. His mother and his mistress, Menaka-Menaka among others, were faithful to him to the last.

It has been found that a man becomes a bandit because he does something which is not generally regarded as criminal by his local conventions, but is so regarded by the state or those in authority. His career as a bandit almost always begins with some incident or some minor infraction of the law, which is not in itself grave, but with police excesses, or with too harsh treatment at the hands of the judiciary, he would be soon driven to outlawry. Such a person takes to the bush or to the hills, whichever appears to be the best refuge. He does so also because he does not know what a system which does not know or understand the peasant, and which the peasant does not understand, will do to him. Pasquale Tandeddu, a very popular bandit of Sicily, who reputedly never committed a crime against the poor, and who never allowed himself to be a servant of the lords, claimed that the first time he was charged was for fighting, when he was a 16 year old shepherd lad, "While we were in the sheep-pen one of my mates, I don't know on what pretext, abused his strength and dragged me by the legs into the middle of the room. I found myself with the knife in my hand, and I wanted to frighten him to let me go, so I moved my hand, as he shifted his position, the point of the knife went into his spine. I was arrested and acquitted after 6 months in jail". Thereafter he was a marked man, and an easy victim of police harassment.

Now we shall examine the early circumstances under which Saradiel was gradually drawn into a career of crime and banditry. As a small boy Saradiel went to a nearby temple to learn from the chief priest there. But his social background being of non-Goigama caste, with an itinerant father, of low-country origin, and of doubtful Christian faith, and who was a carter by profession; and a mother who ran a way-side boutique, along the Kandy road, at Utuwankanda, catering to the needs of the carters and other itinerant people, made him the butt of jokes and teasing by the higher-caste and more affluent children. His tattered and untidy clothes, and the lowly work of his parents were taken unfair advantage of by his tormentors, so much so that when he and his friends got the opportunity they beat up the latter and injured some. However the injured were immediately nursed by Saradiel and his gang, having bandaged the wounds with pieces of his own *sarong* (apparel).

Sirimalā, Mohamadoo Marikkār, Samat, Ukkindā, Nasardeen, Hendā and Kirihonda were some of Saradiel's accomplices, with their names betraying either their non-Sinhalese or non-Goigama origin. On the other hand one of those who was beaten up was a Rambanda, son of a rich merchant and a nephew of the local *vidāne*. One of these skirmishes did not end there, because soon after Saradiel and his gang had been rounded up by the *vidāne* (village headman), and accused of causing bodily harm to Rambanda. In addition Saradiel was accused of stealing Rambanda's gold '*havadiya*' or waist-band. While the others were warned and released, Saradiel, still a school boy, had to spend a few days of solitary confinement in a police cell.

Before he was 14 years, he found himself back in jail, again charged with assault. Thus within a short time he had run foul of all the people in authority in the village, or those symbolic of constituted authority, being the rich, the high-caste, the local headman, the police, and the Buddhist monk. With 3 months of hard labour behind him, at the tender age of 14, Saradiel may have decided who his friends and enemies were. Thus the battle lines were drawn at a very early formative stage in his turbulent life, and during much of his remaining life he refused to make amends or make peace with those enemies. Instead he increased his enemies as he sought to avenge the wrongs and injustices done to him.

At this very early stage itself his actions bore the true stamp of the social bandit, when he on his own had decided to take the law into his own hands and to deal with the oppressors of his fellow villagers. As he perceived, Kattu Bawa, a rich merchant from Kandy used to visit the villages and sell his wares of dubious value at exorbitant prices, making most villagers run into debt, or taking the fruits of their toil in unfair exchange for his merchandise. As a result he had become a hated man among the helpless villagers. On one of Bawa's visits to Utuwankanda, Saradiel decided to deal with him, and cornering him in his lodgings, threatened him with bodily harm, took his money and goods and distributed them among those who had been Bawa's victims. Similarly Saradiel is reputed to have distributed among Catholic pilgrims going to St. Anne's Church, Talawila, part of the loot he took from a *chettiyar*. It has also been reported that Saradiel and his gang were in the habit of scrambling on to the moving trains and tossing out bags of rice and other foodstuffs to be gathered by the poor villagers living nearby.

On one occasion having ambushed the Royal Mail, Saradiel had seized a bag full of money. But when he learnt that the money was to pay railway workers, he had turned pay-master and quickly distributed the money among the labourers, saying that it was a bonus from the government which had suddenly realised that it was grossly underpaying them. On still another occasion hearing that he was passing through the area, the people had been in hiding in fear of him. But when an occasion arose to act the good samaritan to an injured boy, who had fallen down from his hiding place up on a tree, Saradiel had called the people to come out of hiding, saying "I am the friend of the poor", and to the astonished crowd that responded to his call, he had tossed silver coins. The jubilant crowd had then broken out with a shout of 'Saradiel Jayaweveva' (success to Saradiel). Equally well known is the good turn he is said to have done to the proverbial man from Moratuwa (or Devundara), whom Saradiel had forced to part with his life's savings, so that he could recoup his own losses at gambling, which was one of his favourite pastimes. Later he returned the money with double the amount so that the latter could give his daughter in marriage with a decent dowry.

Saradiel, like many a social bandit was deeply attached to his mother, and this attachment brought him into further trouble, and said to have given him a bitter taste of the inhuman and inconsiderate nature of the rich and the powerful. Saradiel had, early in his career, spent some time in Colombo, working as a servant in the army barracks, thereby getting acquainted with firearms and ammunition and stealing them whenever he could, and secreting them away to Utuwankanda for future use. One day he was involved in a fight with a soldier, for which he was interned in an army cell. Escaping from this temporary discomfiture, he had secretly made his way back to his village, where he found his widowed mother, very sick and in a poor condition. To help her recover he had gone in search of some milk, first to a *mudalāli* (merchant) and next to a *korale* (local chief) and was chased away from both places by their retainers. However in the process he had assaulted the *korale*'s servant, and he was once again taken by the police and put in the stocks (ඊළු කඳ) thus receiving the hall-mark of the hardened criminal. Escaping from this indignity he sought refuge in the nearby jungle. With that started his career of hide and seek.

During his career as a bandit, Saradiel was responsible for a few deaths, which could hardly be called premeditated, but committed in self-defence, or in trying to evade arrest. This once again conforms to the stereotype of the average social bandit. Among those who were killed by the hand of Saradiel were the following : (1) a Nattukkottai Chettiyar, an Indian money-lender who was killed by stabbing, during an attempted burglary of his belongings. The Chettiyar being aroused from his sleep by Saradiel's movements had caught him securely by his legs. To escape from the clutches of this veritable villain, Saradiel used his knife with deadly effect. His next victim was Panis Kapua, who went to assist the police to apprehend him at Peellawatta, a few miles from Minuwangoda. Panis died later in hospital, having succumbed to Saradiel's stabbing. There are conflicting reports of one or two more deaths of policemen also at Peellawatta, who had tried to block the path of escaping Saradiel. While evading arrest he is on record to have killed and robbed an Arab horse-dealer, who had by unfair means brought a village trader to the verge of destitution and death. In March 1864, once again being surrounded by the police, Saradiel had to shoot his way out, killing George van Haught, a special constable, and his distraught step-father, Christian Appu. Before Saradiel was eventually captured, there was one more death, that of police constable Sabhan, who was one of the police party seeking him at Mawanella. He was gunned down by Saradiel's accomplice, Mammalai Marikkar. Here we see once again the universality of social banditry. Hobsbawm identifies the victims of the bandits as 'the enemies of the poor'—such as police, idle monks, rapacious money-lenders, traders, petty officials, lawyers, foreigners, the rich, the tavern-keepers, etc.

Some more common attributes of the social bandit are his invulnerability and, dexterity in donning different disguises to escape the police, and thus move about freely. Hobsbawm remarks that the peasants often add invulnerability to a bandit's many other legendary and heroic attributes. The public also is enamoured by his 'flashness', open-handedness, the righting of wrongs, the courtesy, the sense of humour, cunning and valour, the ubiquity amounting to invisibility—with all bandits reputedly going about the countryside in public, with the least concern, or in impenetrable disguises. During his short criminal career Saradiel displayed much cunning and cleverness, so much so that to the Sinhalese he was not just Saradiel, but 'Sūra' (clever) Saradiel. However in all cases of social banditry invulnerability is very short-lived, but while it lasts the bandit would perform many spectacular deeds and escapcs, overcome all his enemies, even if they be legion, and evade detection and capture. Part of his invulnerability is also attributed to miraculous drugs, oils or other possessions. This belief is partly buttressed by the fact that most legendary bandits were of very modest physical proportions. Saradiel himself was so small-made and of such inconspicuous appearance that on his capture the people who saw him for the first time were incredulous and indeed disappointed by his physical appearance.

Keble (p. 140) quoting a contemporary says "that Saradiel was a small, almost tiny figure, short, wiry and miserable looking, with prominent eyes and cheek-bones. It was impossible to guess from the outward appearance of the leader of the band what a fierce, daring spirit burned within him."

Hobsbawm refers to Angiolillo of Sicily who was reputed to have worn a magic ring which could turn away bullets. Shuhaj, another European bandit, derived his invulnerability either from a green twig with which he could wave aside bullets, or because a witch had given him to drink a bullet-resisting magic brew. Oleska Dovbush another legendary 18th century Carpathian bandit could only be killed with a silver bullet kept one year in a dish of spring wheat, blessed by a priest on the day of the Twelve great saints, and over which twelve priests had read twelve masses. Our own Saradiel is believed to have derived his superhuman strength and invulnerability from a miraculous oil, called "Henarājathaile", which he had stolen, during his school days, from one of his bhikku mentors, and which he had worn round his neck in a talisman (*Suraya*). His respect for the oil is revealed from the fact that he would remove the talisman while engaged in gambling. On the other hand it could very well be that others would not join him in the game while he had an unfair advantage owing to his talisman. Saradiel's mysterious power was also attributed to an *Anduna* (a magic potion called 'Kālaanjanama'

obtained by force from a Muslim priest in Batticaloa, and also a charmed necklace (*Japakala nārāsti māla*), procured from a monk from Vanni Hatpattu.

Many a time Saradiel was able to either charm his way or make a breakthrough, out of a difficult situation. When cornered he remained cool and calculating, maintaining both a sense of humour and a show of bravado, and weighing his chances of escape, either by bluffing or shooting his way out. Often this paid dividends, and he was able to keep up his elusiveness, till he was betrayed and eventually captured. However his invulnerability and elusiveness were partly the result of the sympathetic fear with which he was assisted by his fellow desperados, or village kith and kin. Towards the end however nearly 7,000 men including police and army personnel were enlisted for the hunt for Saradiel and his gang. On earlier occasions hundreds of people were commandeered by the village chief in trying to apprehend him. In spite of all these odds he was on the loose for quite some time and even constituted a challenge and threat to the provincial authorities in Kegalla, Kandy, Kurunegala and Ratnapura, and for a short time even to the central government in Colombo. Even when apprehended by the police neither chains nor prison bars could secure him. With impunity he was able to escape from police custody, 'dandukandas' (or stocks), remand jails and prisons for hardened criminals. Once he was holed up in a house which was surrounded by the police and curious spectators, but he and his accomplices succeeded in making a spectacular escape, both by the use of firearms and subterfuge (where his dotting mother got some village women to distract the police). Many an intensive hunt, using hundreds of people and led by the village chiefs and armed police produced only negative results. He was a true escape artist indeed.

Saradiel's disguises were legendary too. He had used very subtle and clever disguises not only to escape capture, but also to move freely, go where he wanted, and thereby even taunt his pursuers, and the incensed authorities. It is said that on one occasion he went in a ladies dress to a French play, at a theatre in Kurunegala, sat with the ladies and left a tell-tale engraving on the seat giving his name and the date of his visit. Then during the Sinhala New Year, being in a festive mood, he left his hideout and went to Kandy in disguise. There he had participated in a game of 'Pora-pol' at the Bogambara esplanade, and that same evening sat with a policeman watching a Nādagama (Folk-play). On the way back he dared to pick a policeman's purse, and put inside it a note of greeting, and audaciously sent it back to the victim at the Kandy Police. On another visit to Kandy, also wearing women's clothes, which were those of a woman of easy virtue, he went on his errand, casting coy eyes on the constables he passed on the way. Next

morning he delivered the same clothes to the police with his best compliments. The same *modus operandi* was repeated on still another visit to Kandy, where he even engaged a policeman in lively conversation, and returned the compliment by a gift of the incriminating apparel.

One of the Ratemahatmaya's (local chief) who was entrusted with the task of catching Saradiel and his gang reported to the Government Agent that the former was in the practice of disguising himself as a Malay man, a low-country man, a Kandyan Banda, a policeman, a Burgher, a building worker, or as a trader. Another report has recorded that Saradiel had sent his accomplice Ukkindā to obtain a pair of black trousers and a white jacket, perhaps to go to a party. Looking at the photograph of Saradiel taken after his final capture, it is not inconceivable that he could, among other disguises, easily pass off as a member of the fair sex.

Hobsbawm was also tempted to draw a personal portrait of a typical social bandit, although one could apply the same description to any other bandit too. However this is his pen-portrait: "Normally he will be young and single, or unattached, if only because it is much harder for a man to revolt against the apparatus of power once he has family responsibilities." The social bandit, according to the same authority, could also be an individual living on the margin of his village, attached to it by the threads of kin or support, and kept from them by enmities and the police. "If he joins or forms a band and is thus economically committed to a certain amount of robbery, it will rarely be very large, partly for economic reasons, partly for organisational ones, for the band is held together only by the personal prestige of its leaders". All these attributes Saradiel had in abundance. He was young and died at the age of 32 (some sources put his maximum age at 29/30). He was single throughout, though he had a fleeting affair with Sirimalie, a village lass whom he was supposed to have rescued from the ferocious jaws of a man-eating crocodile. His more enduring affair was with Menakamenaka, the passionate wife of Cader, and who was also the sister of Mammalai Marikkar who was his loyal accomplice unto the last.

In his career of banditry, Saradiel was not a complete loner though. In some of his exploits, he acted single-handed, but more often he was accompanied by a handful of other desperados. Among them were Sinhalese, Malays and Moors, but no Tamils. Some of them were his former school-mates with whom he often played truant and performed many a prank. Many of them continued to be associated with him in his criminal career. Among them were Sirimalā, Mammalai Marikkar, Kirihondā, Ukkindā, Samat and Nazerdeen. Other names that came to be associated with him during this period were Tambiwatte Appuhamy, Pinhamy Rendharāla, Nenu

Vedarāla, Malhāmy and Mainawela korale. The Proclamation of the Colonial Secretary dated 13 January 1864 mentions the following as Saradiel's accomplices : Havadiya, Bayya, Mohamadoo Markan and Samat. By March 1864 however the arm of the law had snatched away many of his accomplices and Saradiel was left with only two, Marikkar and Sirimalā. But the latter deserted Saradiel on the verge of his capture.

When luck begins to desert, the number of loyal accomplices is reduced to a bare minimum, and the combined forces of the law and the state draw the net closer, then it is time for betrayal and thereby ensure one's own escape, and even state a claim to any rewards offered for the capture of the bandits. As Hobsbawm says, "Thus his standard end—for if he makes too much of a nuisance of himself almost every individual bandit will be defeated, though banditry may remain endemic—is by betrayal". Many a reputed bandit was either killed or captured as a result of betrayal by one of the erstwhile accomplices himself. Saradiel's capture itself was no exception, but in fact was too true to form. Ukkindā was an early betrayer, but Saradiel did not fall for his trap. Sirimalā who stayed with Saradiel almost to the last, was looking for a chance to opt out as he realised that the end was drawing near. To save his life, he agreed to turn informer, and on 20th March 1864 successfully inveigled Saradiel and Marikkar to seek shelter in Cader's house by the main highway, and thereby called the police and the army to capture them alive. As the two fugitives with one badly injured, came out of the burning house into the waiting arms of the law-enforcers, Saradiel spied Sirimalā among the crowd, and burst out, "You made us commit murder by being a spy. I wish I had shot you instead of the others".

All social bandits, like any other bandit, carried a price on their heads. In the case of Saradiel, not only the government, made offer after offer, with steadily increasing rewards of money, but the local headmen and traditional chiefs, in their exasperation and frustration, and also in their eagerness to impress upon the higher authorities their loyalty, offered their own rewards for the capture of Saradiel. In spite of these rewards, ordinary people did not volunteer any specific information of a helpful nature. In fact they did the very opposite, or observed the proverbial conspiracy of silence, and they let the police and the headmen perform their tasks without their assistance.

No social bandit who became a serious threat to law and order, and a challenge to the authorities had been permitted to survive very long. How long a bandit would last will depend on how much of a nuisance he would make of himself, or how tense the social situation was, or how complex the internal situation was. No known social bandit lasted more than a few years of intense activity. The Kelly gang lasted barely 20 months. Giuliano of

Sicily lasted a maximum of six years. On the other hand most European examples known to Hobsbawm had not lasted more than two to four years. Saradiel's career was also short-lived, perhaps a little over two years, commencing in 1862 and terminating in March 1864. And in captivity Saradiel played to the last the standard role of the typical social bandit by being penitent and converting to Catholicism, thus confirming Hobsbawm's contention that the social bandits, "generally, converted in jails.....cease to be champions of the poor, and become mere criminals....." Only the ideals for which they fought and for which men and women made up songs about them, survive....."