

LANKA

Tel
28/6/96

GUARDIAN

Vol. 19

No. 2

May 15, 1996

Price Rs. 10.00

Registered at the GPO, Sri Lanka

INDIAN ELECTIONS

LOCKING BJP IN

— *Neeraj Kaushal*

WHICH PATH NEXT?

— *Mervyn de Silva*

EXCLUSIVE

SOCIALIST REFORMS AND INTERNATIONALISM

— *Dayan Jayatilleke*

THE UNITARY STATE

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY — THE LAST DEFENCE

— *W. B. Wewegama*

UNION OF REGIONS

— *Kamalika Pieris*

L.S.S.P. : **THE TROTSKYIST OPTION**

— *Regi Siriwardena*

S.A.A.R.C. : **DEFENDING SRI LANKA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS**

— *John Gooneratne*

SRI LANKA : **DEFINING ANTHROPOLOGY**

— *Sasanka Perera*

NEW FROM ICES

IDEOLOGY AND THE CONSTITUTION: ESSAYS ON CONSTITUTIONAL JURISPRUDENCE

by

Radhika Coomaraswamy

The collection of essays on Constitutional Jurisprudence is an attempt to understand the process of constitutional decision-making and political action from a framework of human rights, democracy and social justice.

Contents

The Uses and Usurpation of Constitutional Ideology
The Constitution and Constitutional Reform
The Civil Liberties and Human Rights Perspective
Legitimacy and the Sri Lankan Constitution
To Bellow Like a Cow — Women, Ethnicity and the Discourse of Rights
Civil and Political Rights — Some Regional Issues
Devolution, The Law and Judicial Construction
Let Fools Contest — Parliamentary Democracy vs. Presidential System

(ICES, May 1996. 178 pp.)

Hardcover: Rs. 300 Paperback: Rs. 200

U. S. \$ 20.00 (Hardcover) for SAARC countries (Airshipment)

U. S. \$ 25.00 (Hardcover) for other countries (Airshipment)

U. S. \$ 15.00 (Paperback) for SAARC countries (Airshipment)

U. S. \$ 20.00 (Paperback) for other countries (Airshipment)

**All orders to ICES, 2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka
Telephone 685085 / 698048. Fax 696618**

WHICH WAY WILL INDIA GO ?

Mervyn de Silva

Although foreign policy is the exclusive preserve of the Central government, no prime minister and/or foreign minister can possibly neglect the interests of a large constituency, whether it be an ethnic group, a large province or a state. India may have only a quasi-federal, rather than a fully-fledged, federal system but the Centre (Delhi) cannot ignore mass opinion in a large state like Tamilnadu. What goes on in neighbouring Sri Lanka and most certainly in the island's Tamil-dominated north-and-east does affect Tamilnadu opinion and consequently, Tamilnadu political parties. A distinction however must be made, since many a Sri Lankan observer assumes far too easily that it is the L.T.T.E. cause that claims the attention of the Tamilnadu media and the political organisations based in Madras. The average Tamil voter in Tamilnadu does identify himself with the Jaffna Tamil and the upcountry plantation worker, a recent migrant to the island. But it takes a massacre or some other tragic disaster to rouse Tamil sentiment across the Palk straits.

This does not mean that an election campaign, nation-wide or state polls, will not produce manifestos, posters or propaganda campaigns that will focus on or draw some attention to events in Sri Lanka. But in the recent polls campaign, Tamilnadu interest in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, was marginal.

Given such a turn of events, we should, I suppose, reconsider an argument presented very forcefully by one school of Sri Lankan opinion in the pre-I.P.K.F. debate; perhaps even much earlier, say from the visit of Mr. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's special envoy, in 1983after the explosive anti-Tamil violence in what this journal described as "Black July". Delhi acted not because it was shocked by the anti-Tamil violence in the streets of Colombo and other southern towns, but because it spotted "a window of opportunity"an opportunity to exert influence on a pro-US Jayawardene regime that had abandoned the Delhi-style nonali-

gnment of the Bandaranaike-led S.L.F.P. The L.T.T.E. was a tool of what the Chinese described as India's hegemonistic policy vis-a-vis much smaller neighbours.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's Congress relied on its alliance with Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalalitha on the assumption that the Chief Minister's AIADMK could deliver. Instead, Mr. Rao had a new problem on his hands — important dissidents, defectors, and a formidable new alliance against him in the South's major (54 million) state of Tamilnadu. With each move or counter-move, Mr. Rao strengthened the opposition. When G.K. Moopanar launched his own "congress" (Tamil Maanila), campaign committee chairman, Pranab Mukerjee got two Central Ministers, P. Chidambaram and M. Arunachalam to "come to his residence where he asked Can you get Moopanar back for us?" But Moopanar had already made up his mind and his Tamil Maanila Congress was soon to sign a pact with Mr. Karunanidhi's D.M.K.

With the anti-Jayalalitha A.I.D.M.K. (and anti-Congress) wave rising, all that the Opposition forces required was a charismatic figure. And in Madras, South India's "little Hollywood", there is a film star who has become a popular personality in the state — Rajnikant. He presided over the new coalition. And it proved a winning combination.

Behind the Congress defeat lies a rather simple truth — mass poverty, and the steady alienation of more and more segments of the vast Indian concourse as the regime in Delhi began to introduce IMF-World Bank structural adjustment policies. Though the not-so poverty stricken Sri Lanka also had to bear these burdens, when it took the same route, the Sri Lankan decision-makers — President J. R., Prime Minister Premadasa and Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel insisted on programs and projects that would not only create jobs but bring money into village and small town. In this, two other ministers, Messrs Dissa-

nayake and Athulathmudali (Dissanayake identified with the massive Mahaveli program) made substantial contributions too.

So what will it be? A Hindu-extremist B.J.P. regime or a Congress-Left alliance in which the radical parties will have quite a decisive role, if the current trend is a fair sign of the final score.

Hindu India exists in an Islamic environment. The partition of India was the direct outcome of Hindu-Moslem antipathies. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's P.P.P. regime is threatened by radical Islamic groups. Will the B.J.P. prove to be a dangerously de-stabilising, if not destructive force in the now-secular, democratic, united Republic of India.

LANKA

GUARDIAN

Vol. 19 No. 2 May 15, 1996

Price Rs. 10.00

Published fortnightly by
Lanka Guardian Publishing Co. Ltd.
No. 246, Union Place
Colombo - 2.

Editor: Mervyn de Silva
Telephone: 447584

Printed by Ananda Press
82/5, Sir Ratnajothi Saravanamuttu
Mawatha, Colombo 13.
Telephone: 435975

CONTENTS

Giving BJP a Chance	2
The Crisis of Marxism: Waiting for Zyuganov (4)	3
Remembrance of Politics Past (2)	5
Participatory Democracy Within a Unitary State	7
Union of Regions	10
SAARC (2)	12
Sri Lankan Sociological and Anthropological Tradition	15

Why it may be smarter to give the BJP a chance

Neeraj Kaushal (Senior Editor, *The Economic Times*)

Every five years, India decides. But in 1996, India is in the most indecisive mood, as most opinion polls on the 1996 parliamentary elections show. If these opinion polls are to be believed, the Indian electorate is unlikely to trust any single party to govern the country for next five years. No political party is likely to get an absolute majority. Most opinion polls also claim that the Bharatiya Janata Party will emerge as the single largest party in the 11th Lok Sabha elections notching between 170 to 215 seats. The Congress (I) is likely to be the distant second, and the third front, the National Front and the Left Front combine, will be an even more distant third.

So, what seemed improbable even a year ago — that the BJP may come to power in New Delhi — appears to be becoming a certainty now. The opinion polls, of course, do not mirror the truth. But when all the opinion polls agree, BJP's coming to power acquires more than a grain of possibility.

The question is whether we should shiver or be happy at the possibility of the BJP coming to power through the 21st century?

For several Indians, including this author, the BJP stands for values and policies which they abhor like Hindutva or Hindu fundamentalism, the concept of a Hindu Rashtra, or Ram Rajya, a traditional bias for the higher caste, a traditional bias against the Muslims. The BJP has the image of a non-secular party which was responsible for the demolition of the Babri mosque and the Bombay blasts. Several of its leaders, of whom Prof Murli Manohar Joshi is one, continue to declare that the temple shall be built. In Maharashtra, the BJP supported Shiv Sena has dissolved the two commissions which were set up to enquire into the Bombay blasts. The BJP has criticised Shiv Sena for dissolving the two commissions; but has not considered it an important enough issue to

withdraw its support from the Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra.

However, in the past few months, the BJP has taken several steps to erase this communal image from minds of the people and replace it with another image. Some of them are: One, the projection of Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the prime ministerial candidate if the BJP comes to power. Vajpayee is the most secular of the BJP leaders. He is one of the few leaders in the party who have expressed anguish over the demolition of the Babri mosque. He is popular and is acceptable to very large sections of the Indian political spectrum. In a recent interview he declared, 'there is no switch to hindutva in my life'.

Two, the BJP has virtually discarded the Hindutva card in its election campaigns this time, though not in its election manifesto. The Hindutva slogan has been raised in UP in a low key; not in Gujarat or Rajasthan, once again in a low key in Maharashtra and not in the South. The expulsion of the Bangladesh refugees, though planted firmly in the manifesto, is missing from the campaign. This is partly because the BJP has realised that 'Hindutva' does not cut with the Indian voter any longer as it did three years ago. Attempts to beat communal passions through the 'Jalabhishek' in Varanasi last year and the party's campaign on cow protection were not very successful. The party has realised that if it wants to rule over New Delhi, it should purge its communal image.

Three, marginalisation of L.K. Advani, the man who spearheaded BJP's saffron brigade since 1991, who was present in Ayodhya when the Babri Mosque was demolished, and until recently, before he was tainted in the Hawala scandal, was a great crowd puller for the party. His Su-raj Yatra, which according to Advani is a political yatra with no religiosity attached to it, has failed to attract the enthusiasm that his earlier

odyssey did. To cut the hawala stained leader to size, the party also reduced the Su-raj yatra from 32 to 19 days.

Four, the BJP is flaunting itself as a nationalist party and is displaying a clear affection for the minorities specially the Muslims in its new image. At several places, it has allocated tickets with class-based, and not caste based, politics in mind. It has, however, not fielded a single Muslim candidate for the Lok Sabha elections.

Five, the BJP is also the most vocal supporter of the economic reforms, privatisation and globalisation; it is not shy of the reforms like the Congress (I). In its rather selective approach in inviting multinationals, the party has made itself the darling of corporate India. On the other side, the multinational corporations are contending that at least the BJP has got the country a new Enron deal although there may not be much of a difference between the new deal and the earlier one. Its manifesto gives them hope that the reforms will not be reversed if the BJP comes to power.

The BJP has come a long way traversing a course criss-crossed with contradictions: 1991-93 high pitched Hindutva vowing to build the Ram temple; 1996 lowering the saffron flag and competing with other 'appeasements', to use the BJP phrase, 'of minoritism'.

Like it or not, the BJP is the second largest political force in the country. In 1992, it was running four states. It has been the opposition leader in Lok Sabha since 1991. So if the BJP is elected by the voters as the single largest party in a hung parliament, is it not entitled to a chance to govern if it can demonstrate its majority in the Lok Sabha?

If the other parties are determined to keep the BJP out, they can cobble up a majority. You really do not need the opinion polls to find that not a single

political party will be able to get an absolute majority in the next elections. So it is possible to deny the BJP of a chance to form the government. By itself it is unlikely to get even 50 per cent seats. And indeed, there will be attempts from several quarters to take a stab at the BJP. The Left and the Congress may get together to form the government with or without Narasimha Rao as prime minister. Perhaps, it is with this kind of a future scenario in mind that the Congress (I) has kept words like reforms, liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation out of its election manifesto. The manifesto will serve its purpose in forming any such alliance between the two parties.

What will be the consequence of such a coalition? Such coalition with the Congress (I) and the third front having less than 150 seats each may be very unstable and won't even last a year. Worse, there will be several contestants for the top leadership. And it is unlikely that after a year of governing in New Delhi, any of them will be able to get enough seats to form a government on their own in the next elections.

It is possible that a coalition led by the BJP may not last for more than a year either. But the BJP denied a legitimate chance may drive the party to extremism. Definitely the younger

members of the party, who adopt a far more extremist posture, with people like Uma Bharati as its leader, will take over the party from the older moderate elements. The moderate leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, will certainly be sidelined, as it happened after the 1991 elections. The party will thus enter into politics of conflict much sharper than so far. Power, on the other hand, may tame the party further; blunt its non-secular edges, make it look both in its behaviour and substance almost a party like the Congress (I). And the country will get a two party system. May be the country has a chance to isolate the BJP extremists from within the party.

THE CRISIS OF MARXISM: WAITING FOR ZYUGANOV (4)

Economics and Internationalism

Dayan Jayatilleke

Lenin's NEP apart, Russian Communism and Russian statist-nationalism seem to have no 'model', no success story or example they wish to point to, except for that of China, which is unfortunate in that the Chinese economy has, over the last several years, evolved into nothing so much as capitalism minus freedom of mobility for labour! If the Russian Left wishes to draw inspiration from China, it is more to the point that they ask themselves why China departed from the path of building a balanced, powerful **socialist** economy.

This departure occurred thrice and the Russian comrades are very familiar with the first two occasions as these deviations figured prominently in their critique of Mao. The first 5-year Plan after the 1949 Revolution put the country on the correct track but this was interrupted by the Anti-Rightist campaign 1957 and the Great Leap Forward 1958. The second course correction took place in the early 1960's under Liu Shao Chi, which was again derailed, massively, this time by the Cultural Revolution. Again in 1973 at the 10th Congress of the CCP, Chou En Lai's report on the Four Modernisations attempted to put the Party back on the correct track of 'Socialist Modernisation', but this had no real manifestation

in the economy as there was a bitter two line struggle under way with the resurgent Gang of Four.

The next chance, the one that we are most concerned with, came after the downfall of the Four and the definitive return of Deng. **Unlike the previous occasions where a basically correct line was derailed by ultra-Leftism, this time it was buried under a Right deviation.**

When the Gang of Four were overthrown, the Party seemed to be back on the correct track, officially endorsing the line on socialist construction that prevailed from 1949 up to and including the 8th Party Congress of 1956. The line of Peng Deh Huai, Liu Shao Chi, Deng Hsiao Peng & Chou en Lai, one of rational socialist modernisation, prevailed — or seemed to have — in matters of economic policy and party history. Deng formed a bloc with Chen Yun, Yeh Chieng Yeng, Li Hsien Nien et al, known in the West as conservatives associated with the Chinese military, but more accurately understood as 'centrists'.

The evolution of China's economic policy turned out to be far from centrist,

winding up in the restoration or more correctly, establishment of capitalism, albeit with a socialist superstructure (China provides the most glaring example of non-correspondence of base with superstructure). It is true that the bloc that replaced the Gang of Four, contained two tendencies, that of the 'central planners' such as Chen Yun and the more market oriented wing of Deng, who derived their inspiration from the economic reforms practised during the period of the New Democratic revolution, specially in the vast areas liberated by Deng's forces. The problem though, is that China's subsequent economic evolution not only by-passed the (allegedly 'Soviet style') central planning faction's model — which took China's first 5-year Plan as its point of departure — **but also was way to the right of the economy of New Democracy as theorized in Mao's writings on the topic and Deng's more liberal practice in the liberated zones!** Mao's own views on the transition are easily divisible into two, the well-known radical outlook from 1958 until his death and the earlier theory and practice of New Democracy and the People's Democratic Dictatorship up to the famous 1957 essay on the "Ten Major Relationships" which was conside-

rably more moderate and nuanced than that of the Stalinist central planners in the CCP.

Why then, with such rich antecedents both in theory and in his own practice, did Deng move still further to the right, until the economy could no longer be said to be socialist? This question is of extreme importance because this failure parallels that of the failure of the Yuri Andropov — early Gorbachev (1985-1987) experiment of modernising reforms **within socialism**, a failure that cannot be simply sourced in Andropov's death. This failure is part of the larger question of the defeat of Third Road experiments **in all its variants**.

Conventionally, the Third Road has been identified with liberal socialist experiments such as that of Dubcek in 1968 and the line of the dissident Left within the GDR at the time of the Wall's fall. Such experiments were either crushed by the Red Army or by the Americans (Chile) or evolved in a rightward direction of marketisation (the most durable experiment — Tito's Yugoslavia). Less conventionally, **Centrist** experiments of reforms **from above** can be seen as a variant of the Third Road. The question is why, be it in post revolutionary Russia, the period of the joint Stalin-Bukharin line, post war Eastern Europe (People's Democracy before the Cold War in 1947), post Mao China or early Gorbachevism, the centrist variant too, polarised either to the Left or to the Right.

Was it the dynamics of the internal class struggle or the external context that provides the answer. I believe it was the latter. Any temptation to interpret the internal as 'class struggle on a world scale' or 'the external dimension of the class struggle' can be avoided when the case of China comes into the picture — as we shall see in a moment.

The rise of Nazism and the need of the Soviet Union to catch up ("we have 10 years" said Stalin prophetically in 1931) could be said to have spurred the break neck collectivisation and industrialisation in the USSR, resulting in the collapse of the Stalin-Bukharin alliance. Even in retrospect, Bukharin's policy would have clearly been inadequate to cope with the challenge. Similarly the West's initiation of the Cold War put

paid to a moderate interpretation and practice of People's Democracy in Eastern Europe, which existed in '45-'47. Subsequently the hegemonic policies of the two super powers crushed the Czech and Chilean experiments within their respective 'spheres of influence' as dissident Left historians such as E.P. Thompson have argued, and deterred any others.

But what of China? Shortly after Deng's return to power, he resolved publicly to 'teach Vietnam a lesson' and invaded Vietnam, in late 1979. As it turned out, Vietnam administered rather than learnt the lesson. The main point here is that **there was a contradiction between a centrist course on the economy and the foreign policy embraced by Deng**. He inherited the perception that the Soviet Union ('social imperialism') was the main enemy and that a united front with the USA was permissible to combat it — and took it to an extreme that it probably would not have been taken to, had Chou En Lai, rather than Deng, succeeded Mao. Deng's policy was to the Right of even the already right deviationist 'Theory of the Three Worlds' that he unveiled at the United Nations in 1977.

Adhering to a centrist course of socialist modernisation required a very different foreign policy, one that would have normalised relations with the USSR. Deng's external policy had feedback effects which cumulatively caused a rightward shift to a policy of **capitalist** rather than socialist modernisation. When there was a brief slow down of foreign investment in the aftermath of the Tien An Mien crackdown and the so-called hardliners reasserted themselves on the wave of the propaganda campaign against 'bourgeois liberalisation', aiming to correct the economic policies that spawned the ideology behind the 'Goddess of Liberty', it was Deng who, with his tour of the South, opened the economic floodgates still further in order to make China utterly irresistible to foreign capital. Once again, the possibility of a centrist course in economic policy was thwarted. With the incorporation of Hong Kong in 1997, the capitalist path of development for China may well reach the point of no return.

In the case of Gorbachev too, he

inherited and developed his post-Stalin predecessors' foreign policy in which relations with various imperialist centres was more important than those with Left forces in or out of office. Had his main alliances been with the existing Communist ruled states on the one hand and the democratic Socialist and Social Democratic forces on the other, rather than with Thatcher, Reagan, Bush & Kohl, then the huge psychological cum ideological push that the latter unleashed could not have so successfully displaced the Perestroika experiment to the right, substituting capitalist reforms ('the 500-day Plan') for socialist modernisation.

The ingathering of the forces of the global Left in Moscow in 1987 on the 70th Anniversary of the October Revolution and the vital strategic prospect that was held out, of healing the historic breach between the Social Democratic & Communist trends, showed that such a possibility existed — but it never achieved mainstream foreign policy status.

My main contention remains that a correct external policy, a correct policy on international alliances, global blocs and united fronts is a vital corollary of a correct internal economic policy of modernisation which does not abandon a socialist perspective. Democratization or '*glasnost*' leads to a bourgeois outcome because attractive (i.e. non-state) socialist ideologies and cultural influences are not strongly present among the forces contending for the hearts and minds of the people.

Such forces have to be consciously harnessed and channelled into the polity, by a policy of international alliances **which privileges left unity**. There is no other way to **countervail** the tremendous ideological and cultural resources of imperialism. Protectionism, in this sphere, does not work.

Internationalism then, is not a luxury, not an ornament or fig leaf, not a sop or an exercise in charity, but a necessity for staying the socialist course, domestically. (If the youth do not get its jazz from Cuba, it will do so from the USA, together with much else!) Let us hope the re-emergent Russian Communists realise this.

(Concluded)

Remembrance of Politics Past

Regi Siriwardena

The Trotskyist theory, on the other hand, said that in colonial countries the bourgeoisie were a class dependent on imperialism who could not be expected to carry through national liberation, and that this task had therefore to be performed by parties leading the proletariat. Whether this was generally true or not, it must have seemed to mirror correctly the political realities of Ceylon. In his presidential address to the LSSP of 1937 Dr Colvin R de Silva had said:

Ceylon is peculiar in that it has a completely cowardly bourgeoisie that never has and never will at any stage provide national leadership against imperialism.

This conviction would have strengthened the movement of the LSSP leadership towards Trotskyism.

It must be noted that the LSSP's resolution of 1940 only condemned the Third International. Neither in that resolution nor in the article of Leslie Goonewardene clarifying the resolution, which is reprinted in the book, is there any comment on the internal political or social structure of the Soviet Union, any critique of the Soviet bureaucracy and the political dictatorship. The LSSP, in other words, was not yet taking the full Trotskyist position publicly, whatever opinions some of the leaders may have personally held. This again confirms my view that it was not that the LSSP leadership split the party in the interests of a theoretical perspective that was far from home; it was the pressures of immediate practical choices that pushed them to a theoretical commitment.

By the time the LSSP detenus were interned in mid-1940, the LSSP had publicly taken positions against the war. It was in fact the statements made by Philip Gunawardena and N M Perera in the State Council on a vote to provide money for an RAF base that provoked the Secretary of State in London to take seriously the anti-war stand of the party and led to the detention of the two State

Councillors. LSSP members and supporters fell in line with the opposition to the war as occasions arose. There are two documents reprinted in the book which concern one such expression of opposition at what was then the Ceylon University College. I should like to offer an eyewitness account of some of the piquant aspects of this episode, going beyond what is recorded in the book.

Soon after the declaration of war, the Amalgamation Club of the University, which was maintained by students fees, voted a hundred rupees to war funds. LSSP students condemned this grant and called a meeting of protest at College House. Professor Pakeman, who was then Acting Principal, banned the meeting. It was then made known that the meeting would be held nevertheless. At the appointed time one student who was functioning as chairman (I shall identify him in a moment, but there was no chair, he was standing like everybody else) was about to open proceedings, when Professor Pakeman appeared. 'You can't hold this meeting,' he barked (he was a Colonel in the army), 'I have banned it!' The student-chairman turned to the crowd and asked, 'Do you want me to go on with the meeting?' There was a chorus of 'Yes!' Pakeman went red in the face. 'You, you, you, you,' he said, pointing to the students in front, 'you are all suspended.' He turned on his heel and left. The crowd of students moved to Queen's Road, just outside, and the meeting went on. Later the Deputy Inspector-General of Police in charge of the CID reported in his periodical confidential report that many of those who organised this protest were 'youths of good family, whose fathers are highly placed in Government Service and the Professions, or possessed of considerable private means'. He was right. The student-chairman on that occasion was Esmond Wickramasinghe, later to be D R Wijewardene's son-in-law and Managing Director of Lake House. It may be said that that confrontation on the veranda of College House was Esmond's finest hour.

In November 1940, a few months after the detention of the four LSSP leaders, Governor Caldecott reported to the Secretary of State that police plans, which would fructify in the course of the month, would 'involve the extinction of the party'. But by that time the LSSP was putting in place an efficient clandestine organisation which during the next two years ran a secret press which produced illegal papers and pamphlets in Sinhala and Tamil, produced, in response to a Government regulation banning the hammer and sickle, an epidemic of hammer and sickle graffiti on walls, bridges and culverts, successfully concealed Leslie Goonewardene, who was wanted under a detention order, and organised the escape of the four detenus in 1942. However, this last-mentioned adventure, even while it captured the popular imagination, was also the beginning of one of the major internal problems of the party. Somebody, parodying the *Communist Manifesto*, once made the wisecrack that 'the history of all hitherto existing Marxist parties is the history of factional struggles'. The LSSP had survived in 1940 its first factional struggle, that between Stalinists and Trotskyists, with little loss; and, in any case, as I have suggested, this was an inevitable split. The second factional struggle, which lay just beyond the period covered in this book, was more bruising; in my view, it led to the seizure of the illegal party press by the police and the arrest of some of the wanted members. But owing to the fact that this division took place while the party was underground, it remained unknown to the public until it burst into the open at the end of the war. This was the breach between Philip Gunawardena and other leaders.

The four detenus arrested in 1940 returned after their escape to a party very different from the one they had known before they were incarcerated. There were new faces, new forms of organisation and functioning, imposed both by the conditions of illegality and by the party's commitment to a Leninist-

style structure. Philip Gunawardena found himself ill at ease in this environment. He tended to the opinion that Rosa Luxemburg, in her advocacy of a more open party, was right against Lenin on this question, though an open organisation would have been impossible under conditions of war-time proscription. However, the future was to show that there was more to this dispute than variant opinions on the style of party organisation. Philip Gunawardena, as his later political history showed, was temperamentally incapable of working in a party on a footing of equality with other leaders: he needed to be the absolute supremo.

This is, however, to run ahead of the story, since Muthiah and Wanasinghe's collection ends with the jailbreak of 1942 and official documents and British newspaper reports relating to it — an appropriate denouement for the romantic and heroic chapter in the history of the LSSP that the book records. It isn't surprising that Mr. Bernard Soysa, writing a foreword to the book, confesses to a certain nostalgia regarding the past, and even quotes Wordsworth's lines on the French Revolution, while admitting the different scale of the events: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven.' I too have allowed myself a touch of nostalgia in titling this paper in the way I have. But Mr. Bernard Soysa's quotation carries with it an irony, whether he was aware of it or not. Wordsworth's recollection of his youthful ardour at the outbreak of the Revolution was made in the context of a rueful contemplation of the distance between the hopes and illusions of that time and the realities that followed. Is it possible to avoid a similar reflection when we compare the LSSP's revolutionary dreams with the often uncomfortable realities of its politics in the era that lies outside the covers of this book? Read Dr. Colvin R de Silva's two presidential addresses included in the book, and you will see that behind the flamboyance of phrase and the resonant periods, there is a view of the world as simple as the opposition between good guys and bad guys in a Wild West film. 'The issue is not between Capitalism and Fascism or Democracy and Dictatorship; the issue is between Capitalism and Socialism.' *O sancta simplicitas!* Who would have thought then that the author of these speeches, for whom everything was so plain and clearcut,

would find himself three decades and a half later mired in the compromises of coalition politics, the pressures of ethnic fanaticisms, the repression of insurrectionary youth, and the framing of a constitution that, in the name of the sovereignty of the people, conferred virtually absolute power on the Cabinet of Ministers and the legislative majority? One can imagine the scorching indictment that the Colvin R de Silva of the 'thirties would have made of the Colvin R de Silva of the 'seventies, if only he could have foreseen the future.

However, if the nostalgia that the book may inspire must, for many readers, be shadowed by disenchantment, it is not

only the loss of direction of the LSSP or of Sri Lankan left politics that are responsible. These are manifestations of the larger, international erosion of the socialist vision. In one of his presidential speeches Dr. Colvin R de Silva said:

Capitalism has not only reached the limits of its development, but already so to speak, turned in upon itself. This system so admirably designed to expand the productive capacity of the world has by reason of its inherent contradictions and dependence on the profit motive proved utterly incapable of utilising that capacity actually to produce in a manner to satisfy the needs of the masses.

Waiting — 22

Peradeniya Junction

*This steel triangle has been cosmodrome
To many arrivals and departures
Ranging over each of our lives
In cosmic gathering of the strands of our early journeys.*

*The glint of night mail head lamps shunting tracks
To link with the Kandy connection into the hills
Talawekelle in the early hours echoing to lonely footfalls
Of boyhood and tea estate holidays.*

*Did I then want the train on the other side of the triangle
Apexed to Matale and you where it was never so lonely?
Or had you already taken another train
On your own separate journey?*

*Now and then we slid the same side of the triangle
To our home town and then we had enough time
To run barefoot together to the stone Kovil in King Street
And run back anointed with the brow marks of another faith.
(Matale was a town of many religions)*

*Was it fore ordained there would come this day
For my last lone touch down on the Colombo side
of the triangle
And you glide in lovely to link on the Kandy connection
To be then apexed together into the mountains
Echoing to the train like the deep rumble of chants
From our many home town temples
Exorcising all loneliness?*

U. Karunatilake

Towards a participatory democracy within a unitary state

W. B. Wewegama

Her Excellency the President and the Government should be complimented for throwing open to the public, the discussion on what is referred to as the Devolution Proposal. Volumes have been written on the subject in the news papers and even books have been published. Very extensive discussions have been going on in the electronic media and at other forums. A consensus does not seem to be emerging as yet. Are the people confused?

Hon. G. L. Pieris, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs made a very apt observation recently in the course of an interview with the "Hindu" paper. He said; "The main difficulty will be the fall-out from the long tradition from the political polarization and confrontation which unfortunately is very much a feature of our political culture".

Hon. Minister has put it in the mildest form and has touched on the very root cause of the present abysmal situation to which the country has been brought down by this political culture over a long period of time. All leaders have faulted.

This polarization and confrontational stance of politics have been the legacy bequeathed to the people over the last few decades. It is the political ambition of political leadership of all parties that has created this situation. The country has lost a large number of leaders and thousands of other innocent people and the whole country is to-day undergoing untold hardships.

It therefore means that every effort must be made by every political party and freedom loving citizen of every ethnic group, to arrest this trend of confrontational, divisive and destructive, politics, to usher in a participatory system of political power structure and a participatory system of Government that can be conducive to a healthy political environment. This is the dream of everybody. Let the political leadership and their followers not continue to bicker over parochial issues and bide their time to ride to political power propelled by social and political conflicts.

The time has come to take a national overview of the present national crisis without continuously arguing on issues

based on individual, party, ethnic or regional group interest.

The time has come to stop running with the hare and hunting with the hound

The 13 year war has added a new dimension to already accumulated, unsolved economic and social problems. Sooner than any more later, theatrics of the political arena should move on to, as of immediate priority, to solving the problems faced by the innocent mass of the society at large, across, ethnic, region or party — particularly the youth who are frustrated by the failure of successive governments, youth who are mentally and physically maimed requiring immediate rehabilitation along with their families many of whom have suffered direct effect of war and many others from the fall out effect. A mammoth rehabilitation programme has to be in place within the context of a broad development programme before a complete break down of the social structure creating a grim situation for the future of this great country. How long will the youth or even the elders have the patience to bear the present environment, rather the system that has criminalized the environment destroying values that all ethnic groups have cherished.

Let us not push the nation to a point of intolerance

The time has come for all parties to search their souls and look at the present crisis away from the fear psychosis created by the terrorists or from self-interest of party, ethnic, region or other group power. The time has come to understand the past and come to terms with the present. The time has come to be magnanimous. In a situation where there are imaginary or created conflicts, no solution that regularizes the conflicts will be a solution. They should be resolved. The barriers that were built should be removed rather than making them permanent.

There appears to be a deadlock on reaching a consensus. I venture to think in this context, the solution should be a simple system that would avoid hard interpretations, but provide for all ethnic

or regional party groups as equal partners in a democratic, participatory power structure and a participatory system of government from the highest level with unbroken continuity of power sharing and involvement down to local level operations.

To achieve this, I conceptualize a political power-structure as follows:-

Recommended political power structure

1. President:

Executive Presidential System to be abolished. A ceremonial Head of State will be elected by the Parliament.

2. Supreme Legislature: will consist of a Bi-cameral Parliament:-

House of Elected Representatives

to be elected on an electoral basis with bonus seats for each District (no nominated members at national level)

Senate:

Consisting of 50 members, 25 to be elected on a District basis by the MPP and members of the local authorities and the balance 25 to be nominated by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Cabinet. Of the 50 members, at least 20 may represent the minority groups. Election or nomination must ensure that members of the Senate should be from independent prominent persons of accepted integrity capable of serving as members of a chamber that can contribute mature wisdom on national issues without fear or prejudice.

3. Prime Minister:

The President will invite the leader of the party that holds a majority vote in the elected House of Representatives to be the Prime Minister.

4. Deputy Prime Ministers:

Two Deputy Prime Ministers will be elected from the two majority minority groups by the two chambers of Parliament from among the members of respective ethnic groups. These two Deputy Prime Ministers

though elected on a ethnic vote they will function as Deputy Heads of Government with attendant National Executive Responsibilities on subjects/areas that will be assigned by the Prime Minister.

5. National Executive:

Will consist of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and the other members of the Cabinet, while the Sub-cabinet of District Ministers (vide 7) will exercise delegated executive powers for each of their areas of authority for which they are the District Ministers.

6. Cabinet of Ministers:

Prime Minister will select a Cabinet of Ministers with up to a maximum of 03 Ministers from the Senate.

7. Sub Cabinet of District Ministers:

It is recommended that the District Ministers appointed for each District from members of Parliament be appointed as a Sub-Cabinet, who will function under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister and will perform its duties as a body responsible to run their respective Districts under delegated authority of the Cabinet of Ministers. This new unit of political authority recommended provides for close, cross-region, cross-party collaboration in the running of the Districts, and a direct link to the National Executive.

8. District Political Authority and District Ministers:

The recommendation is to establish a District Political Authority headed by a District Minister. The District Minister will be appointed from the political party that has the majority of MPP in the District.

The District Political Authority will constitute all the MPP and members of the Senate of the District, the Mayors and Deputy Mayors of Municipal Councils and Chairman of Urban Councils and Pradesiya Sabhas and any nominated members.

District Political Authority is intended to replace the present Provincial Council System (under 13th amendment). District should be the ideal regional unit for effective administration. It is considered most appropriate to delegate all authority to MPP representing each District and the Heads of the Local Authorities of the relevant District to manage all

governmental activities of the District, rather than create an overlapping political authority between Parliament and MPP of the District, in the name of a Provincial Council or the new Regional council System envisaged.

However, the District Political Authority recommended here envisages that this body will have complete Government Authority by constitutional provision to run the District independently within the broad National Policy Parameters set by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The above political system recommended will also provide for the integration of all regions in one single power structure, regional and ethnic representatives to be brought in to the highest level in the political structure, by bringing them to centre as member of the Sub-Cabinet.

The experience of the Provincial Council System if looked at dispassionately has in the main put the entire regional administration in to a chaos, creating conflicts with the centre, devaluing the role of the MPP, and Local Political Authorities particularly Predeshiya Sabas being overrun or made ineffective by the Provincial Council operations. In fact the grass root level services were disrupted, the victims of all this confusion were the people at large, the classic example being the disruption of the services to the farmers. Such examples are many.

9. Local Political Authorities:

Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas.

In the context of establishing the District Political Authority it is envisaged that the role of the local authority be enhanced to a higher level of involvement and operations in the development of their respective areas and the provision of services to the people, under the direction and supervision of the District Political Authority in which the Head of the Local Authorities are members. As grass root political authorities these are the closest to the people and efficient operation of these is imperative to the development of the area, and the implementation of welfare measures within the area.

In making amendments or new provisions to the constitution on the basis of above recommendations, among other things the following matters must receive

due attention for necessary provisions.

1. Removing any concentration of power in an individual resulting in coercion of Democracy.
2. To provide for a constitution that is sufficiently flexible to be changed as desired by the future generations to come except the essential entrenched clauses.
3. Constitutionally guaranteed provisions to integrate the ethnic groups providing opportunity for their participation at every level of political power structure irrespective of their ethnic proportion of population.
4. Re-establish and enhance the role of the members of Parliament in their electorates and Districts.
5. Free the people from too many overlapping political power structures that can lead to confusion and conflicts.
6. Avoid constitutional or any other regulatory provisions that will isolate any ethnic group, region or political party from the main stream of national political power structure.
7. Constitutional provisions that will guarantee equal status to all ethnic groups in language, education and employment opportunity, and do away with the present ethnic stream of education and implement a Trilingual educational system which will be the sound basis for the integration of all communities.
8. Legally recognize and promote the growth of a single Sri Lankan identity while at the same time providing opportunity and environment for the growth and nurturing of ethnic and other cultural distinctions within the mosaic of a multi-cultural society.
9. To make it possible for all ethnic, regional and political groups to look at all problems with a national overview rather than with narrow parochial sectional or regional interests which has led this country to this present unfortunate situation.
10. To minimize the confrontational stance of political parties by providing opportunities for all members to participate not only in political dialogue in the legislature but to participate collectively in the implementation of the collectively agreed programmes at the District levels without political or ethnic prejudices and other reservations.

Let us go forward as one Sri Lankan Nation

A Selection of the Finest International Brands.

HAPPY COW

CHEESE



PRUNES



BOUNTY



TOBLERONE

CHOCOLATES



PURE FRUIT JUICE



DIAPERS

HUGGIES

DIAPERS



DENTAL CARE

Palmolive

PERSONAL CARE



JAMS



DAIRY PRODUCTS



HAIR CARE

Sole Agents



BREAKFAST CEREALS

**Maxwell
House**

COFFEE

Ardmona

CANNED FRUITS

LURPAK

BUTTER



SOUPS AND PASTA



FOODS

Hunt's

TOMATO PRODUCTS

MAMEE

INSTANT NOODLES



CANNED MEATS

833, Sirimavo Bandaranaike Mawatha, P.O. Box 1970, Colombo 14.

Tel: 522871-2, 522830, 522832, 522934, 522155, 522373.

Telex: 21418 Tasstea CE, 21991 Selpro CE, 23426 Seltea CE. Cable: Tasstea. Telefax: (941) 522913.

Quality and Variety within your reach.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation
Available at all Supermarkets & leading groceries

Ethnonationalism, Human Rights and the “Union of Regions”

Kamalika Pieris

The second draft of the pre-empted Devolution Proposals, issued in January 1996, marks yet another significant step in the on-going saga of ethnic politics in Sri Lanka. From the idea of ‘quasi’ federal states, the Peoples Alliance has now taken us to something altogether different and more dangerous. We are now asked to consider a freak, abnormal, possibly short lived political entity which is neither supra ethnic nor ethnically determined.

The ‘Union of Regions’ is not supra ethnic, in that it provides for ethnically determined Tamil and Muslim regions in the North and East. It is not ethnically determined because it provides for multi-ethnic governments in the rest of the country. Thus making nonsense of the opening statement of the Devolution Proposals, that these Proposals were intended to contain the ethnic crisis. If indeed there was an ‘ethnic crisis’ no one would advocate multi-ethnic regions.

These Devolution Proposals are by any standard retrograde. They are economically unviable for all but the North-East and politically no improvement on the existing central government (except for the welcome change of status for the President). There is no indication of the ‘flexible approaches’ ‘multiple styles’ and ‘new’ political structures advocated by the Tamil separatists group.

These Devolution Proposals are directed towards three objectives. Firstly to weaken the central government. Secondly to prevent and effectively negate the creation of a single Sinhala ethnic state. Thirdly, to entrench the minorities throughout all the regions and thus across the whole country. There is also a fourth objective — to take the country for a ride.

Gamini Iriyagolle, in his TNL Frontline

television interview gave the lead in examining possible motives for this manoeuvre. He suggested that these Devolution Proposals were intended as a preliminary to a complete take over of the country, in order to establish a Tamil state with Trincomalee as the base. I would modify this. Linking the North, East and Central regions alone would be sufficient to create a Tamil ethnic state with full control over Trincomalee, always the sought after prize, and thus obtain recognition from India. This would be sufficient to provide the minimal criteria needed for international recognition as a sovereign state, which are: clear boundaries, a permanent population, a central government and the ability to conduct international relations. (Montevideo Convention) The rest of the country is important only for the comfort of those living in the more arid North and North-East. For this a strategically placed Tamil presence in these regions is sufficient. The creation of such an autonomous state could only be achieved constitutionally, not militarily, therefore the understandable anxiety of the Tamil politicians to get their ideas into the statutes, something they have so far singularly failed to do.

The so called ‘ethnic crisis’ is actually three interlinked issues. Firstly, a youth movement in the North, directly related to under development, and stemming from unemployment and caste discrimination.

This was primarily nurtured and developed into a terrorist organisation in order to further the ambitions of the separatist politicians. It has now become a military dictatorship to be militarily dismantled. Secondly there are the genuine problems of the Tamil community as citizens. These include the provision of civil administration in Tamil where necessary, and the exclusion from competition for higher education and for employ-

ment. Here, it is necessary to mention the charge of ‘Tamil action’ in the past, largely with reference to key positions in the administrative and professional spheres. However, the rights of Tamils as citizens must be secured, and this is a good opportunity to do so. The first and second issues outlined above are genuine issues which merit the concern of the country. Thirdly, there is an audacious lunge for territory and the creation of a Tamil state. It is this which the Devolution Proposals seek to deliver and the first and second issues are merely used to muddle the public into delivering the third, which is a spurious issue.

There are certain practicalities which may work against the creation of a Tamil state. Firstly the question of numbers. The Sinhala Buddhist group make up about 6/8ths of the population, while the Tamil ethnic group is about another 1/8th. The remaining 1/8th are busy dissociating themselves from the separatist cause. The Muslims delinked themselves from the Tamils long ago, and now the Borah and Colombo Chetty communities have made it clear that they are distinct minorities. The ‘minority vote’ may be necessary for a political party to come to power, but thereafter it is Sinhala vote that has to be pacified if that party is to continue in power. Hence the desperate call for a ‘national government’. Even with a ruling coalition containing a series of Tamil parties, the going is not smooth for the Tamil cause. When a Tamil commercial service was started on radio recently, the Sinhala channels were left untouched, and an English language channel was taken over. Now if the Devolution Proposals come to pass, there are two counter possibilities. Firstly, a fresh constitution under a later government, displacing the one the Peoples Alliance is about to give us. Secondly the possibility of the creation of a unifying political party

supported by the majority ethnic group. This will roll over the "Union" like a juggernaut, "Regions" and all.

The 'ethnic issue' is presented as the clash between two contending ethnonationalisms. 'Ethnonationalism' refers to those ethnic groups which ask for political separation or for limited self rule (autonomy) from the 'parent' state. Ethnonationalism consists of two elements. Firstly, the 'primordial' element, which emphasises historical links such as blood ties, language, religion, custom, and secondly, the 'instrumental' element where these primordial aspects are marshalled and manipulated to advance the interests and claims of an ethnic group, banded and mobilised as a pressure group. Ethnonationalism as a political movement is a combination of both elements. It is surely obvious therefore, that if you recognise one ethnonationalism, say Tamil ethnonationalism, then you must also recognise other ethnonationalisms, such as that of Sinhala Buddhism. However it is clearly a part of the modus operandi of the Tamil separatist cause to denigrate Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism as 'chauvinist' while elevating Tamil ethnonationalism to that of a just cause. The nation of a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness is negated as a 'constructed' and therefore artificial nation. This approach merely provides conceptual tools which could be easily used to demolish claims of other ethnic groups as well.

Let us now look at the development of Sinhala Buddhist ethnonationalism. The origin and development of Sinhala Buddhist ethnonationalism as we find it today, began in the mid nineteenth century, around 1860 when, there started a confrontation between Buddhism and Christianity, due to the favoured position given to the latter religion by the British. This period saw a series of confrontations between the two religions, culminating in the famous Panadura Debate, where the Reverend Migettuvatte Gunananda made a resounding impression. Colonel Olcott arrived sometime later, and subsequently started the Buddhist Theosophical Society. Wesak came to be celebrated, and a Buddhist flag was adopted. There was a marked rise in

religious fervour, specially among the urban groups. The arrival of the Theosophists was particularly critical in that they provided the Buddhists with a 'lesson in the techniques of modern organisation to match the expertise in this sphere of the missionaries and in doing so they contributed enormously to the self confidence and morale of the Buddhists'. (K M de Silva. History of Sri Lanka' p 341) In the hands of the Anagarika Dharmapala, this religious force was converted very effectively into a political one, set within the framework of the rise of nationalism in Asia. He was an 'unabashed advocate of Sinhala Buddhist domination of the island' and used the Dutugemunu-Elara episode from the Mahawamsa to mobilise the lower classes against colonial domination. (K M de Silva's 'History of Sri Lanka' p 373-4 and Wiswa Wamapala's Ethnic strife and politics in Sri Lanka' p 24).

One significant milestone in the political organisation of the Sinhala Buddhist group is the establishment of the Sinhala Mahajana Sabha in 1919. There were Mahajana Sabhas before this and from the beginning they all conducted their proceedings in Sinhalese and their rules and regulations were printed in that language. They sponsored the cause of Buddhist candidates against the Christian candidates. After this came the Sinhala Maha Sabha of the 1930's and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna of the 1950's. (K M de Silva p 396-397).

There has been no Buddhist political party, but there have been mixed organisations where monks and laymen joined hands to protect Buddhist interests. The role of the Sangha in sustaining Sinhala Buddhist ethnonationalism is well known and need not be recounted here. Their role was particularly significant in the 1940's when the radical monks of the Vidyalankara Pirivena emerged and the Reverend Walpola Rahula wrote his influential 'Bhikshuwakage Urumaya'. The Sangha were politically active in the 1956 MEP victory, too. Buddhism is still a tremendously powerful presence in Sri Lanka. When Buddhist interests are articulated by the ecclesiastical centres of by the Buddhist organisations, they carry weight. The Maha Nayakas

of the three Nikayas still carry weight as the authentic representatives of the Buddhist religion. Wiswa Wamapala is of the view that 'the Buddhist Sangha is not totally outside the domain of the Sri Lankan constitutional structure' in view of the constitutional provision giving special status to Buddhism and the Sangha. (p 8)

The role played by education in the development of Sinhala Buddhist ethnonationalism was quite critical. The BTS looked into education and by 1890 there were about 40 BTS schools. These schools differed from the missionary schools in that they emphasised indigenous values and the country's Buddhist civilization, but they nevertheless provided an excellent secondary education, both for girls as well as for boys, and thus competed very successfully with the missionary schools. These BTS schools integrated very neatly into the national school system which came up after Independence. In addition, the government set up in the 1950's, a large number of Sinhala medium, Buddhist oriented Madya Maha Vidyalayas, which from the 1960's sent out scores of highly motivated, intelligent young people.

Sinhala Buddhist ethnonationalism was not so much Sinhala or Buddhist as it was economic and political. The most illuminating work on this aspect is Kumari Jayawardene's study on the relationship between ethnicity and class in Sri Lanka. She suggests that the various conflicts between the Sinhalese on the hand and the Christians, Muslims, Malayalis, Tamils on the other hand, starting from about 1883, were primarily related to economic tensions. For example, the import-export trade in the 1930's was in the hands of 'alien traders' such as the Sikhs. During this time, the Malayalis were a useful source of cheap labour. Similarly, she suggests that the denial of citizenship rights to Indian labour, and much of the anti-Tamil propaganda of the 1970's and thereafter, could also be traced to economic competition including trade rivalry. ('Sri Lanka the ethnic conflict' p 121, 124)

(To be Continued)

Managing Strategic Issues

John Gooneratne

(c) Is SAARC geared to cope with changes?

As a grouping, SAARC is not able to cope or react to these changes for two reasons. Firstly, the changes that are taking place are primarily of a political and strategic nature. And SAARC, by the nature of its Charter is impotent to react in anyway to these changes. Secondly, existing political irritants among SAARC members are not conducive to joint action of this type.

A policy of pushing for the adoption of market-oriented economic programmes by the states of South Asia was already underway since the late eighties, spearheaded by US and other Western countries both directly and through institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO. The collapse of the Soviet Union, and along with it, its economic philosophy of socialism gave strong validation to the market-oriented policies. Though not openly stated, the collapse of the only rival to the US, strengthened the influence of the US, which was the strongest the free-market economy countries. And this tendency is now much spoken of as the growing globalization of markets.

While there is the obvious economic aspect to the concept of the globalization of markets, there is underpinning it a security aspect also. And these twin aspects are seen in the spate of overtly economic groupings that have already been set up (e.g. Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation — APEC) with other groupings under consideration.

India has applied for membership in APEC. India has obtained dialogue status in ASEAN. And Pakistan has also applied for entry into ASEAN. These countries are adjusting to the changing economic and political environment in the post-Cold War period. Changes are fast-moving, and in the present circumstances waiting for SAARC is somewhat like waiting for Godot.

There is another reason why SAARC

is unable to cope with these changes. The form and format of SAARC is too constrictive compared to the scope of the changes taking place. To take the case of an initiative, which according to recent media reports Sri Lanka has been invited to join — Indian Ocean Rim Initiative (IORI). According to the Principles of IORI “all sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim will be eligible for membership”. Obviously the SAARC framework will be inadequate, although the scope of activity of IORI is in the economic area.

Another instance where SAARC members have to work outside the SAARC framework, even though it is in the area of economic cooperation, is the India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Sub-Continent Economic Cooperation Project. The Sri Lanka Foreign Minister during a recent visit to Myanmar was reported to have discussed the possibility of Myanmar joining this sub-regional group.

(d) Strategic concerns...some other models to follow?

Regional institutions reflect quite unique circumstances in each case so that it is not useful to think in terms of following some other example of a regional institution. In the case of SAARC we see the particular set of circumstances that led to a rather restricted area of operation (economic and social), with still more restrictions on how the organization can operate. An instance of a very successful organization is the European Community (EC), with its accompanying institution NATO for strategic and military activities. Starting as an organization dealing with a very narrow functional area — Coal and Steel Community — it has gradually grown to its present form.

Closer geographically is the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) formed in 1967. It had its teething troubles; but after this initial period it grew steadily. The ASEAN Charter dealt with mainly areas of

economic and social cooperation. In 1976 the ASEAN members adopted a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia, bringing in a whole new area of activity in the form of Pacific Settlement of Disputes. The members have also dealt with disputes involving some ASEAN members and other states e.g. the disputed Spratly Islands, adopting the ASEAN Declaration on the south China Sea (July 1992). Disputes among members are handled through mediation and conciliation within ASEAN.

There are several reasons for this success. There is a sense of a shared security consensus among its members. This is a factor absent in the case of SAARC. Though the members are of unequal sizes and strength, the bigger countries do not engage in hegemonical competition. Also helping ASEAN was the fact that they were located in an area which was of strategic importance to the US and the West. Hence a lot of economic investment was showered on the area. The countries themselves were receptive to such investment in terms of their own economic policies. The impressive growth rates registered in the ASEAN added to the cohesiveness of the group.

ASEAN has developed a mechanism for the discussion of security matters of the Asia-Pacific region (its immediate environment) in the shape of the Asian Region Forum (ARF). India has been accepted as a dialogue partner of ASEAN, which is a step higher than its earlier position of a sectoral dialogue partner. As a dialogue partner India will be invited to the annual ASEAN Ministerial meeting. Other countries so invited include US, EC, Russia, China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand.

It is not only the models and mechanisms of successful institutions that can be examined, but more importantly one should examine the particular political culture that makes them succeed. In ASEAN, the bigger countries like Indone-

sia, aware of past frictions, and the fact that its size may cause apprehension in some, plays a low-profile role, which helps in consolidating the group. It does not throw its weight around. In the European Community, especially at its early stages, countries like France and Germany sought to overcome historical fears; and Germany, both before and after unification, seeks to adapt its strategies and policies to the institutional framework of the EC.

(e) What are some of Sri Lanka's strategic concerns? And how can they be looked after through the framework of SAARC?

In a narrow definition of the term, Sri Lanka's immediate strategic concerns would be connected with its domestic security preoccupation, in combatting a domestic separatist war. It also has external ramifications, where the war materiel to the Tamil separatist group is supplied from abroad, from funds collected from sympathizers overseas.

The SAARC region does have a special importance in a strategic sense for Sri Lanka. For apart from being its surrounding neighbourhood, a SAARC member, India is the closest neighbour, and the country interacting most often with Sri Lanka in a strategic sense. In previous years Tamil militant groups maintained close contacts with India, obtaining military support and assistance from there. The motives for India's actions were complex, to say the least. Intertwined with the ethnic issue were Indian objections to several foreign policy positions of the Sri Lanka government in the period 1977-1987. This phase of events culminated in the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987, which while providing for Indian assistance in meeting the separatist challenge, laid down several ground rules for the future conduct of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. Apart from the fact that India had achieved its foreign policy objectives where Sri Lanka was concerned, India's heightened interest in the Tamil issue later lessened when the whole issue boomeranged on the ruling circles in New Delhi, with the assassination of former Prime Minister, and the LTTE suspected of being the perpetrator of the deed. But present circumstances can change in the future, bringing different responses from India, and posing fresh

challenges to Sri Lanka. Such scenarios need to be kept in mind by defence and foreign policy planners.

Sri Lanka did seek and obtained military assistance from several countries in combatting the separatist challenge, including Pakistan from South Asia. This was done on a bilateral basis. For these reasons, there was no form of recourse possible through SAARC. The possibility of complaining about it at the SAARC forum was precluded by the organizations ground rules.

One can say there were instances where SAARC was, in a way, used positively and negatively in the case of disputes among members. One could say that Sri Lanka used SAARC in a negative sense, when Sri Lanka refused to host a Summit Meeting on the ground that a foreign military force (the IPKF) was on Sri Lanka soil; and on another occasion Sri Lanka decided to boycott a Foreign Ministers' Meeting scheduled to be held in Thimpu, protesting against the intemperate remarks of an Indian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, which Sri Lanka saw as an unwarranted interference in its internal affairs. But, using SAARC in a positive way Nepal, when it said that it would raise a bilateral problem it had with India — over transit trade — at a SAARC meeting scheduled to be held in Islamabad. So, whatever the rules prescribe, SAARC is coming into bilateral disputes and issues. One should try and see how such openings can be used constructively.

One should look closer at the possibilities for SAARC to play a role in such kinds of situations. What is being suggested is not a changes of rules. From a realist point of view, such an effort will run counter to the power configurations of the group, and unlikely to make any headway. There are many other existing openings that one can utilize. First, there are the many regular meetings at official, Foreign Secretary, and Foreign Minister level where 'sensitive' issues can be aired informally. Secondly, there is the annual Summit meeting which provides Heads of State or Government an opportunity to exchange views informally, in addition to whatever they do formally. Thirdly, SAARC is in the process of building up and encouraging other levels of contact — business,

people-to-people, and non-governmental organizations. All this can help build a "regional public opinion". And in such an atmosphere one can visualize a SAARC role as a facilitator or mediator in disputes among members.

Apart from security considerations from a military point of view, one could think of security in a wider definition, taking in a variety of activities in the economic field. Activities that would strengthen the economy of the country, and hence the welfare of its people. In this respect, such concerns will be shared in common with the other states of South Asia. SAARC is already engaged in a variety of such fields — agriculture, communications, education, environment, health and population activities, rural development, science and technology etc. SAARC has taken some small steps in promoting intra-SAARC trade through the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA). In addition to such activities, SAARC could gradually, with the consent of all parties, venture into slightly more complicated areas, where there are difficulties over issues such as management of water resources among India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Such initiatives will enable SAARC to venture into the area of resolving conflict issues.

This brings us back to the point mentioned earlier on the two ways of viewing SAARC — from a realist point of view, and from a institutionalist point of view. If SAARC is to develop into a more rounded organization dealing not only with economic and social issues, but is also to include security matters and concerns of the member states, thought should be given to how these two approaches — realism and institutionalism — can be melded to fashion a more rounded organization able to provide its members with a broader range of services than at present, in the coming decade.

As a final thought, those who have to make decisions in regard to Sri Lanka's strategic interests, that need attention here and now, will not enjoy the luxury of waiting for another decade awaiting a future evolution of SAARC. I am reminded of a saying among Bedouins: *Trust in Allah — But tie your camel.*



OUR MISSION IS TO BE
AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE
FACILITATOR IN CREATING
WEALTH THROUGH
INNOVATIVE FINANCIAL
PRODUCTS AND SERVICES. WE
ENDEAVOUR TO ACHIEVE THIS
BY PROVIDING THE BEST
INVESTMENT BANKING
SERVICES TO BUSINESS
ENTERPRISES, AT THE HIGHEST
PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL
LEVELS, IN AN ENVIRONMENT
OF ENTREPRENEURIAL
SPIRIT.

VANIK
INCORPORATION LIMITED

108, 2nd Floor, W. A. D. Ramanayake Mawatha, Colombo 2.

Tel : 331462(8 lines) Fax : 330815

6, D. S. Senanayake Veediya, Kandy.

Tel : 24912-5 Fax : 24916

VANIK-PIONEERING "FINANCE FOR THE FUTURE".

HOLMES POLLARD & STOTT

In Search of a Sri Lankan Sociological and Anthropological Tradition

Sasanka Perera

Introduction: Identifying Sri Lankan Sociology and Anthropology?

The basic attempt in this essay is to identify the Sri Lankan anthropological and sociological tradition. Clearly, this would be possible only if such a tradition exists. If it does not exist, I would attempt to identify some of the reasons which have contributed to such an outcome. Two incidents, both of which occurred this year prompted me to articulate the ideas that follow. Hopefully this would generate some debate, and allow us to come to grips with the position of Sri Lankan anthropology and sociology. I would refer to these two incidents later as I attempt to locate the central issue that concerns me here — the location of the Sri Lankan anthropological/sociological tradition.

At this stage I would like to briefly address another issue that I think is important to this discussion. That is the manner in which anthropology and sociology are defined in Sri Lanka. Beteille, in an essay attempting to identify the boundaries and similarities between sociology and social anthropology makes the following observation:

"If one wishes to assert the fundamental unity of the two subjects, a particular conception of sociology can be chosen and it can be shown to be the same as the prevailing conception of social anthropology. But by choosing another conception of sociology someone else can highlight not the similarities between the two subjects but their differences"

(Beteille 1982:4).

As Beteille argues in his essay, what is sociology and what is anthropology (particularly social or cultural anthropology) has depended on historical as well as national contexts, particular research orientations and has also changed over time. In the end, and particularly in today's context the recognition of the differences between these disciplines is a matter of perception (Beteille 1982). Even though in Sri Lanka debates regarding the differences and similarities of these disciplines have not occurred, the same merging of identities that Beteille talks about has been a reality during most of Sri Lanka's modern history of academia. Of all the universities in the country only the University of Sri Jayawardenapura has a department that is formally identified as the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. In the Eastern University there is some entity called the Department of Social Science where everything perceptibly social science and socially scientific is lumped together. In all other universities there are Departments of Sociology.

However, if one were to go through the course outlines and the nature of the dominant literature and reference materials used, what is taught in all of these departments could be generally categorized as social or cultural anthropology in the North American sense. Therefore the other components of anthropology, such as archaeology, linguistics and physical anthropology are clearly missing in the Sri Lankan context. This is perhaps another reason why this discipline is called sociology in Sri Lanka.

The point I am trying to make here then is, that at the present moment, as far as I can see there is no conceptual differentiation between these two disciplines in Sri Lankan academic and popular

discourse or imagination. In fact, many students perceptibly trained in sociology would write a dissertation that is supposed to be based on an anthropological analysis of some social phenomenon. Similarly, irrespective of the fact that one's formal training may be in sociology, many academics would identify themselves as anthropologists in different contexts. In a sense this is a rather fluid situation very much like James Brow's perceptive definition of the Vedda identity. A Vedda, suggests Brow, is someone who claims to be a Vedda for whatever purpose. Thus within the rather small social science community of Sri Lanka an anthropologist or a sociologist is someone who defines himself or herself as such irrespective of the nature and content of their formal training.

The point is, that these two disciplinary labels are used almost interchangeably on many occasions. In such a context, and in the general merging of certain major research areas of these two disciplines on a wider international level, it would be almost useless to attempt to define what is sociology and what is anthropology in the Sri Lankan situation. Thus when I am talking about anthropology in Sri Lanka, I am also talking about sociology and vice versa.

Location of the Problem: Where is the Sri Lankan Anthropological Sociological Tradition?

At this point I would like to outline the two incidents I referred to at the outset of this discussion. In February 1995 the International Center for Ethnic Studies in Colombo had organized a small seminar with the participation of Indian scholars Veena Das and Ashis Nandy. In that seminar, in response to Das' discussion of the anthropological discourse on India I was asked to talk

The writer is a lecturer in Colombo University's Department of Sociology.

about the Sri Lankan anthropological discourse. In preparing for that discussion I was strongly reminded of the great volume of the anthropological literature on Sri Lanka. I also noticed, as I had done many times before that much of that literature had been produced by foreign scholars or Sri Lankan born scholars resident in Europe, North America and Australasia. Local residency of course is not a significant factor in the construction of discourse. But the patterns I observed in the above situation have significant bearing on the second incident that prompted me to write these lines.

A few months later a colleague asked me to deliver a lecture on the Sri Lankan anthropological tradition. My immediate response was to ask him to explain the nature of this tradition and to name its pioneers? As one would expect, the reply was prompt and somewhat anticipated. The tradition was defined by listing the dominant textual components of the anthropological discourse on Sri Lanka. The pioneers were identified as Ryan, Obeyesekere, Tambiah and so on. My basic argument was that while Obeyesekere, Tambiah and many other anthropologists and sociologists — most of whom were either foreign or Sri Lankans living abroad — had clearly made significant contributions towards constructing a Sri Lanka oriented anthropological discourse, particularly through the construction of texts as well as initiating certain debates, none of them had contributed towards the establishment of a Sri Lankan anthropological or sociological tradition as such. There is a vast difference between the mere construction of texts or discourse, and the actual establishment of a tradition. At this point I would argue that there is no such thing called a Sri Lankan anthropological or sociological tradition. Here I would also like to define what I call an anthropological/sociological tradition, and attempt to identify pertinent factors which according to my perception has contributed to the non-emergence of this tradition.

Ideally, it seems to me that a Sri

Lankan anthropological/sociological tradition should be a combination of rigorous continuous research, effective teaching, regular and scholarly debate, healthy criticism, writing of texts (particularly in the local languages), regular socio-political interventions beyond the limits of academia, and in the final analysis the construction of discourse within a particularly Sri Lankan paradigm. At the same time universal disciplines such as anthropology and sociology cannot be country-bound to the extent of being parochial. Therefore a part of that tradition should also include an attentiveness to and knowledge of what is happening in the wider anthropological/sociological world.

Generally speaking, to me as a university teacher and as an anthropologist none of the markers I have identified above are visible in the Sri Lankan context. Hence my conclusion that a Sri Lankan anthropological/sociological tradition does not exist.

Non-Existence of an Anthropological/Sociological Tradition: Why?

It seems to me that a number of inter-related issues have led to the non-emergence of a Sri Lankan anthropological/sociological tradition. In a sense one could even argue that in the 1950s, and up to the mid 1960s there was in fact an embryonic anthropological/sociological tradition attempting to make its presence felt. This was the time that anthropologists/sociologists such as Ralph Pieris, Obeyesekere, Tambiah and so on were based in Sri Lanka, engaged in teaching, research, formulating specific theoretical and analytical perspectives, and initiating debate. The initial prerequisites for the emergence of an anthropological/sociological tradition were in fact available at this time. However, this tradition never grew beyond its embryonic stage. In fact it died a premature death when most — if not all — of these scholars left Sri Lanka for a number of reasons. I would suggest that Sri Lankan anthropology/sociology has not recovered from that initial

exodus. We still dream and harp about that short period of relative glory in the past, and have done almost nothing to reconstruct a new tradition from the remains of what is clearly lost.

However, many of these scholars who left Sri Lanka continued to have an intellectual interest in Sri Lanka (and elsewhere) and continued to write and conduct research on Sri Lankan issues. I would also include anthropologists such as Val Daniel, Michael Roberts and H.L. Seneviratne within the same category as above. Elizabeth Nissan traces some of these scholars' intellectual contributions in her 1993 essay *The Work of Anthropologists from Sri Lanka*. Added to this there is a large number of foreign scholars who also have serious research interests in Sri Lanka. Among others, I would include anthropologists such as Stirrat, Spencer, Scott, MacGilvry etc. Within this second category. Together these two categories of scholars have produced a corpus of significant knowledge on Sri Lanka. A few scholars resident in Sri Lanka itself have also produced some significant work. Two names that come to mind in this regard are Siri Hettige at the University of Colombo and Tudor de Silva at the University of Peradeniya. All of this work — particularly the work of the first two categories of scholars — have not only seriously influenced Sri Lanka oriented research, but also South Asian anthropology in general.

Restrictions on Knowledge: The Problem of Language

Thus in general there is no question about the quality (with some notable exceptions!) or the volume of the anthropological and sociological discourse produced in this manner. The problem is that this particular discourse is mostly located in Europe, North America, Australia or some other English speaking location. Almost all of this knowledge is of course produced in English. This then is one of the realities of contemporary academic discourse, and one of the problems that has contributed towards the non-existence of a Sri Lankan

anthropological/sociological tradition. The world of academics — anthropologists or otherwise — is an international one. They have to write in international languages to make their work accessible to a wider audience, not to mention “recognition” and other such considerations. But at the same time, knowledge thus produced, particularly in the Third World, should not become a kind of language imperialism. If this happens such knowledge would be restricted to those who have access to international languages. But currently in the Sri Lankan context, this is precisely what has happened.

Thus the anthropological/sociological discourse on Sri Lanka is largely a discourse to which most Sri Lankans — particularly those studying or teaching in university departments have no easy access to. The intellectual contributions of the anthropologists I have referred to above are largely contributions to the wider anthropological and related disciplines on a global scale. In this context I would argue that these contributions in no way have contributed to the construction of a Sri Lankan anthropological or sociological tradition. That is why we cannot consider any of the well known anthropologists I have mentioned above as having made any serious impact — particularly in terms of their more recent work — in contemporary Sri Lankan academic circles.

Clearly then language becomes a major issue in attempting to understand why a Sri Lankan anthropological/sociological tradition has failed to emerge. This is simply not the language ability of students, but also of teachers. In my definition of Sri Lankan anthropological/sociological tradition mentioned that teaching, research and debate are essential prerequisites of such a tradition. But in a situation where most critical and useful anthropological and sociological literature is produced in English, it is difficult to assume that such inter-related processes would emerge. This is particularly true given the problematic state to our English language education

both at school and university levels. We certainly cannot ask everyone to produce their texts in local languages — given the fact that the wider world of academics is an international one. But need at least translations of the major works. Even these are currently not available despite the fact that sociology/anthropology has been taught in Sri Lankan universities for nearly 40 years.

On the other hand most of the students who enter Sri Lankan universities do not have a working knowledge of English. Then, in the very least, we would need teachers who can read and understand this material which can then be transmitted to their students. Such activity would enrich teaching to a certain extent and initiate some debate. But this does not take place, particularly at the level of younger teachers whose command of English is poor. Many of them simply communicate to students snippets of information from the wider anthropological discourse communicated to them by their teachers years ago. What this means in practice is that much of the empirical and theoretical material being thus communicated today is dated, and riddled with mistakes accumulated over generations of note-taking. Clearly, we cannot talk about constructing a healthy and dynamic anthropological/sociological tradition in a context where the dominant method of teaching is the utterly boring and nonconstructive practice of repeating such “notes” of dubious value. One could call this situation the “note culture” or the “parrotification” (i.e. repeating like parrots) of knowledge. This is of course not unknown to anthropologists. This is very much like the oral histories that they encounter in the field whereby “knowledge” is passed from one generation to another by word of mouth, each generation adding or deleting components.

On the other hand, the lack of English also means that theoretical debates raging in other parts of the world are almost unknown to many Sri Lankan anthropologists/sociologists. Some are still stuck in the theory of residues of

Pareto. A brave few would attempt to discuss what Levi Straus meant by binary oppositions. With some luck, Foucault and Derrida may make an entrance sometime in the middle of the next century when the utility of their theoretical formulations would have been overtaken by more contemporary ones in other parts of the known world. Another problem is the relative unavailability of the anthropological and sociological literature on Sri Lanka or other parts of the world as well as literature dealing with theory. What is available is prohibitively expensive. Thus even for those who have access to international languages, access to texts may be restricted by financial constraints. What this means in real terms is that access to knowledge has been limited by both financial and language restrictions.

The Restrictions on Knowledge and the Dependence on Dubious Interpretations

We have already established that knowledge has been limited as a result of restrictions on language abilities. In a situation where translations, or even regular reviews of literature produced in English do not appear, students, some teachers and the general public tend to depend on the irregular and dubious interpretations of such work some academics produce. It is on the basis of such work that both students and many others form their ideas and initiate debate. Such debates would generally tend to be non-academic and utterly polemical. Let me refer to a few recent examples, Nandasena Ratnapala, in an introductory sociology textbook refers to Nur Yalman's *Under the Bo Tree* (1971) in the following words:

“Nur Yalman wrote a research work titled ‘Under the Bo Tree’ after studying folk religion in Sri Lanka. Through this book, which is written from a sociological perspective, he attempted to analyze Sinhala religion and society.” (Ratnapala 1986: 184)*

* Approximate translation.

The problem with Ratnapala's interpretation is a basic one. Yalman does not talk about religion — Buddhism or anything else — in any significant detail. *Under the Bo Tree* is not a book on folk religion in Sri Lanka as Ratnapala asserts, but an exhaustive study of caste, kinship and marriage. Ratnapala's confusion perhaps is the result of taking the title of Yalman's book too literally. On the other hand, such a mistake could have been avoided if Ratnapala had taken some time to browse through the contents and some of the pages of Yalman's book. Similarly, in a recent article in the *Divayina*, Obeyesekere's and Gombrich's book *Buddhism Transformed* is described as a Marxist interpretation (*Divayina*, 8 January 1995). Unfortunately, I cannot think of too many other Sri Lanka oriented anthropologists who are as distant as Obeyesekere and Gombrich from both Marxist theory and practice.

I would like to refer to another such bizarre interpretation by historian Mendis Rohanadeera, which emerged in the context of the controversy surrounding the publication of Tambiah's book *Buddhism Betrayed?* At a meeting at the University of Colombo he told a mostly undergraduate audience that Tambiah could not have written the book (specifically chapters dealing with the Buddhist revival in the early part of this century) because "he had not lived in this history" (Perera 1995: 29).

The logical extension of this kind of reasoning was that since not many people alive today would have lived in that period, we cannot write about that history. Or else, as I have noted in another essay "we will have to bank on the memories of senile senior citizens" (Perera 1995: 29). In this context, teaching ancient history would be impossible since it would be difficult to locate people who were contemporaries of King Dutugemunu, Devanampiyatissa and so on. Moreover, Rohanadeera's own profession would be threatened with extinction. But then, I suppose we can

always utilize the memories of reincarnated individuals and spirit mediums and make them professors of anthropology and history.

The same speaker also offered a new definition of anthropology. According to Rohanadeera, anthropology is the study of contemporary people and therefore anthropologists have no right to write history (Perera 1995: 29). If this position is to be taken seriously, the world would have to be without many of the anthropological and sociological texts written to date. For the record I should note however, that anthropologists and sociologists clearly have a legitimate right to write about the past as well as the present. In fact, the past is the area of specialization of historical anthropology and sociology.

The point I want to make here is quite simple. Many of the people who would have been exposed to these interpretations would not have been exposed to the original works by Yalman or Obeyesekere and Gombrich which were written in English. Or for that matter, there are no up to date extensive published discussions on general anthropology and sociology in Sinhala or Tamil. But the interpretations of the speakers and writers mentioned above were produced in Sinhala, and widely available. Therefore many people — mostly students and undergraduates — would then bank on these dubious interpretations merely because of their accessibility in terms of language and wide availability. The debates emanating from such interpretations themselves would be rather polemical as the entire "debate" (for the lack of a better word) surrounding the Tambiah controversy amply demonstrated. Clearly, this is no way to construct the kind of anthropological/sociological tradition I had defined earlier.

The "Yes Sir Syndrome" and the Problems of Academic Recruitment

Certain patterns of recruitment in Sri Lankan universities I believe also retards

the emergence of a healthy and vibrant anthropological/sociological tradition. For instance, junior academics are usually hired only with a BA at the initial period of hiring. This system was introduced at a time when there was a dearth of adequately qualified personnel. Today this practice is not at all helpful in the attempted establishment of a dynamic anthropological and sociological tradition. At this time most of these young teachers are not intellectually mature enough or as well trained as they could be to teach advanced courses as well as to supervise dissertation, motivate students and so on. The main reason for this is that their own knowledge is rather restricted due to such problems as inaccessibility to English and non availability of pertinent literature. Thus after they graduate with their BAs it would be better to allow them a period of time to explore and widen their horizons in their selected fields of study. Thus it would be more beneficial to both academic departments and future of Sri Lankan anthropology and sociology to hire people who are better trained (at least with an MA) at the initial stages of hiring itself.

The main problem however is that most departments of sociology/anthropology would prefer to hire their own graduates. This is particularly true at the level of junior members of the academic staff. Therefore Colombo would prefer to hire its own graduates, as would Peradeniya and Sri Jayawardenapura. This rather incestuous practice leads to the emergence of two disturbing trends. First, for obvious reasons of practicality undergraduate research interests revolve around teachers' interests. Among other things, this is helpful when assigning dissertation supervisors. Therefore as far as research is concerned different departments tend to churn out graduates whose research interests are broadly similar to their teachers. When the same departments hire some of these individuals as junior lecturers, the research potential and the theoretical orientations of the departments hardly expand. It is

precisely due to the recognition of this fact that many American universities would hesitate to hire their own graduates. Some have in fact explicitly prohibited such hiring.

Second, such hiring also leads to an even more dangerous state of affairs. This is the emergence of what I would call the "yes sir syndrome." Most of the junior academics hired in this manner have a serious problem in relating to their former teachers who are in the same departments. One has to understand the nature of the teacher-student relationship patterns idealized in the socialization process of the wider society, strongly inculcated in schools and later entrenched even further in the universities. That is, there is a great distance between teachers and students, which is encouraged. According to these values teachers are seldom criticized or questioned (Perera 1992). This is also reinforced in the universities' highly stratified internal hierarchy of teachers. Within this system debate and constructive criticism of the work of senior academics by junior academics almost never takes place. Usually, there is total agreement: the "yes sir syndrome" in operation. What is worse is that this self-perpetuating negative legacy is transmitted to undergraduates as well. This situation most clearly manifests itself in the almost total silence of undergraduates in class. It is very seldom that they ask questions or dare to contradict their teachers in academic matters. Unfortunately, it seems to me that this situation is encouraged, sometimes directly by teachers, but mostly as result of the structural restrictions that we have already discussed.

Moreover, there is very little internal debate or criticism of the work of senior academics even among themselves. This is because even healthy criticism is not usually tolerated within Sri Lankan academic life. People are concerned that their colleagues would get angry or upset. Thus due to this situation of relative self-censorship there is very little

space for constructive criticism and debate. Clearly, all of these trends would severely retard the emergence of any dynamic anthropological/sociological tradition.

Lack of Regular Inter-Institutional Contact and Opportunities to Exchange Ideas

Another serious problem is the lack of regular academic contact between different university departments and other research organizations. Thus there is no regular formal or informal meetings between the anthropologists/sociologists at Colombo and Peradeniya. The main problem here is distance. Given the nature of the Sri Lankan island mentality, many people would consider anything over thirty-five KM or so to be too far away! Contact does not occur with Sri Jayawardenapura and Kelaniya departments because many academics — with a certain degree of intellectual arrogance — consider these places to be intellectual wastelands. There are also very few, if any, formal institutional linkages between university departments and the research agencies in the private or NGO sector.

Moreover, regular conferences where ideas may be exchanged and debated also do not take place within Sri Lanka. When they do occur the participation of junior academics is once again restricted because the language of discussion in most of these events is English. Many of them also cannot attend international conferences due to the same language problems. Even for those senior academics who are invited to attend foreign conferences the bureaucratic rituals are so frustrating that many simply refuse to attend such events. For example, permission must be requested from the government 30 days ahead of time. But many international conferences are put together in much less time, and organizers cannot simply wait until the Sri Lankan bureaucratic procedures unfold in their usual lethargic fashion. Such procedures are also serious restrictions on the academic freedom of intellectuals

and an unnecessary interference in universities' academic activities. The cumulative affect of these restrictions is the retardation of academic activities in general.

On the other hand privately funded research institutes and think tanks, mostly in the NGO sector, do have the resources to organize such seminars and conferences. They in fact organize such events. But once again, most of these are also conducted in English, and more importantly attendance at these events is severely restricted to a small group of selected middle class individuals. Thus it is not unusual for one to run into the same group of people in the Colombo seminar circuit. Such restricted access to knowledge is a form of intellectual imperialism which in no way could contribute to the emergence of the tradition that we are talking about. They can seldom be anything more than middle class talk-shops of which there is quite well established tradition.

Another serious problem that has contributed to the lack of scholarly debate and the non emergence of a dynamic anthropological/sociological tradition is the lack of one or two serious journals which are published regularly. Both NARESA and the University of Peradeniya have their own journals for the social sciences, which in the past have carried some significant papers. Some of these papers have made serious impact on Sri Lanka oriented anthropological and sociological scholarship. But the problem is that none of these journals are regular in publication or distribution due to financial restrictions as well as due to lack of intellectual contributions. The *University of Colombo Review* has a life of its own. No one seems to know when it would appear, and in what kind of pathetic state. Similarly *Marga*, the journal of the Marga Institute has also seriously deteriorated in its content over the last few years. Compared to this problematic situation with regard to our journals, neighbouring India has such prominent journals such

as *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, and the *Economic and Political Weekly* — just to mention two with different orientations. Their standards are high, publication is regular and distribution is quite wide. The main reasons for this success is the commitment of the editors and publishers as well as the ability to generate funds for these ventures within India — including from the government. Some of the most important debates in Indian sociology and anthropology have unfolded themselves within the *Contributions to Indian Sociology*.

Lack of Research Funding and the Hierarchical Positioning of the Social Sciences

Another significant reason that has prevented the emergence of a dynamic anthropological/sociological tradition is the problem of finding research funds and the highly problematic positioning of the social sciences in general within the hierarchy of the fields of knowledge in Sri Lanka. It is very difficult to find significant funding for research from the universities. For that purpose one has to turn to external — mostly foreign — sources which usually means that researchers have to re-orient their research interests in order to suite the research agendas of the funders. Thus an anthropologist interested in political violence may be reduced to undertaking health oriented research for some entity like the UNESCO simply because of availability of such funding. Their real interests will have to be of secondary importance.

There are a number of active Social Science Research Councils which initiate serious programmes to encourage sociological, anthropological and other social science research in the countries of the region. Sri Lanka which touts herself as a future NIC has no such entity. I would suggest that much of its miniscule social science research budget is essentially controlled by such entities as NARESA, which in the final analysis is run by people who have no real understanding of the social sciences or its needs, and its role in the development of the country.

So what we really have are minor social science research funds essentially administered by a bunch of virologists, chemists and medics.

The reason why the social science funding has been restricted and allowed to be dictated by people who are not social scientists is indicative of the relatively low position accorded to the social sciences within the academic hierarchy in this country. The significance of social science research in general (yet alone anthropology or sociology) has not been properly understood any of the post-independent governments which has been perfectly satisfied in allowing non-social scientists to decide the direction of Sri Lankan social sciences. What is worse is the fact that anthropologists and other social scientists have allowed this situation to continue for such a long time. As far as sociologists and anthropologists are concerned this self-inflicted lethargy is infectious and self-destructive. For instance, while an entity calling itself the Sri Lanka Sociological Association does exist in theory with a large membership, in functional terms this association is dead. It does not organize seminars or conferences, it does not publish a journal or even a news letter, it does not even meet regularly to discuss its own professional problems. This state of affairs alone shows the lack of a dynamic social science tradition (not merely an anthropological or a sociological one) in this country which is capable for fighting for its own rights. This situation, I believe has caused serious damage both in retarding significant social science research and in the overall non-emergence of the tradition we have been talking about.

(To be Continued)

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank I.V. Edirisinghe and Ramani Jayatilake of the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo for their comments and help in the formulation of this essay.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Air Mail

Canada/U.S.A.

US\$ 65/ for 1 year

US\$ 45/ for 6 months

* * *

U.K., Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands, France, Japan, Holland, Phillipines, Austria, Norway, Sweden, China, Ireland, Switzerland, Nigeria, Belgium, Denmark, Paris, London.

US\$ 55/ for 1 year

US\$ 35/ for 6 months

* * *

Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Baharin, Arabian Gulf, Syria, Singapore.

US\$ 45/ for 1 year

US\$ 25/ for 6 months

* * *

India, Pakistan.

US\$ 40/ for 1 year

US\$ 22/ for 6 months

* * *

Local

Rs. 250/- for 1 year

Rs. 150/- for 6 months



**Will privatization mean
the end of the union
I represent?
How will the interests
of my members be
protected?**

- Trade Unionist

Privatization will in no way dilute or reduce the powers and rights of your union. British Airways was privatized in 1987, and the unions remain to protect worker interests just as before. Some of the world's largest, most powerful and vocal unions exist in the private sector. For example, the United Auto Workers (UAW) represent over 100,000 workers at the three biggest American car companies, none of which are state owned. In fact, there is every likelihood that working conditions will actually improve in privatized companies, since there will be substantial investments made to upgrade facilities and training. You can look forward to representing a considerably more prosperous union.

It is important to realize privatization is a means to an end. It is a means to improve our living standards, foster technological progress, create employment and take our nation into a more prosperous tomorrow. In order to achieve these aims, privatization has to be executed in the appropriate manner.

That is the task of the Public Enterprise Reform Commission (PERC). Its mandate is to make privatization work for Sri Lankans today, and for generations to come.

Every privatization is a carefully considered decision that takes into account the interests of all sectors of society; the general public, the state employees, the consumers, the suppliers, as well as the country's overall economic vision.

PERC's mission is to see that privatization works. In doing so, your interests are always being well looked after.

With privatization everybody has a stake.



PERC

WATCHFUL IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

PUBLIC ENTERPRISE REFORM COMMISSION,

Bank of Ceylon - 30th Floor, No.4, P.O. Box 2001, Bank of Ceylon Mawatha,
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.

Telephone: 94-1-338756/8. Fax: 94-1-326116

INTEREST FREE CREDIT?
CONVENIENT REPAYMENT TERMS
LOWEST JOINING FEE?

**Yes. All and many more
benefits are yours with the
CEYBANK VISA CARD.**

Contact the Centre Manager,
**CEYBANK CARD CENTRE,
Bank of Ceylon**

No. 4, BANK OF CEYLON MAWATHA,
COLOMBO - 1.

BE WISE. CARD - WISE

BANK OF CEYLON

Bankers to the Nation

TELEPHONE: 447823 — Ex. 4180 & 4185

