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SRI LANKA'S PEACE PROCESS: MORE BAD NEWS TO COME?

Sri Lanka's peace process appears to have entered a period of protracted stalemate, with no credible signs of the negotiations to begin between the new UPFA government and the LTTE. The attempts made by the Norwegian facilitators and the donor community to encourage the two sides to begin talks have not been successful. Actually, the relationship between the UPFA and LTTE is not one of partnership at all. It is now entering into one of adversarial competition, one side trying to undermine the other for positional advantage. While the international community continues to engage in the Sri Lanka's fragile peace process, the two main protagonists to the conflict appear to push for their own separate agendas, successfully disregarding the international dimension. Consequently, the UPFA and the LTTE seem to be moving in separate directions, along their own paths, away from the negotiation table. This indeed is bad news for the people of Sri Lanka.

The re-emergence of violence in the Eastern province as well as in Colombo adds a new context to the continuing crisis in the peace process. This wave of violence is a direct consequence of the split that occurred within the LTTE early this year. It began in Batticaloa, with the killing of civilians by gunmen who belonged to either faction of the LTTE. Although there was no major military showdown between the mainstream LTTE and the Karuna faction in the Eastern province, targeting civilians in intimidatory as

well as revenge violence became a particularly disturbing trend. The suicide bomb explosion in Colombo and the massacre of nine members of the Karuna faction in their sleep in Athurugiriya occurred subsequently, sending a chilling message across the country. It is very clear that this chain of violence has now propelled the LTTE's internal problem to the center stage of Sri Lanka's politics. Moreover, the LTTE's internal problem has now become a major dispute between the LTTE and the government. As a result, the so-called Karuna issue is closely intertwined with the continuing delay in the resumption of talks between the sides.

It now appears that both the government and the LTTE have re-defined their respective strategic approaches to negotiations in the context of continuing complexity of the Karuna affair. The LTTE wanted early return to talks for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, resumption of negotiations was necessary in order to re-assert its claim to be the 'sole representative' of the Tamil people at negotiations in a backdrop where Karuna tried to emerge himself as a parallel leader of the Tamils, representing the Eastern province. Secondly, for the LTTE, the early talks with the UPFA government, which came to power in April 2004 replacing the UNF government, was also necessary to ensure that their status of parity at negotiations would continue, despite the altered strategic equilibrium consequent to the Karuna split.

As far as the UPF government is concerned, the delay in entering into negotiations with the LTTE can be seen as linked to a particular strategic doctrine, shared by the SLFP and JVP constituents of the ruling coalition. This strategic doctrine, which has many adherents in Colombo as well as New Delhi, appears to contain two main components that also distinguish the

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UPFA approach to the LTTE and peace talks from that of the UNF. Its first element is that no Sinhalese government in Colombo should talk to the LTTE on the notion of parity between the two sides. The articulation of this principle of 'asymmetrical negotiations' with the LTTE was clearly evident in the bitter criticism, often made by Chandrika Kumaratunga, Lakshman Kadirgamar and Vimal Weerawansa (the three ablest spokespersons of the UPFA) in 2002-2003 of Ranil Wickramasinghe's approach to negotiations with the LTTE. It is perhaps the case that these three have not forgiven Ranil Wickramasinghe for making what they view as a fundamental political mistake of initiating negotiations with the LTTE on the basis of strategic parity. The second component of the UPFA's strategic doctrine is that a negotiated settlement is possible only with a weakened LTTE, so that the state will have the veto over the agenda, the process as well as the outcome of negotiations.

The UPFA government's delay in resuming negotiations with the LTTE since April needs to be understood against this backdrop. Why is that President Kumaratunga called for early talks in late April, soon after the UPFA government was formed? That call was made as a calculated move to ensure regime survival in a backdrop where the UPFA did not have a parliamentary majority. By resuming talks with the LTTE, Kumaratunga obviously sought the support of the LTTE-backed Tamil National Alliance's support for her regime in parliamentary voting. In the absence of talks with the LTTE, Kumaratunga seems to have dropped the idea of obtaining the TNA's backing for the UPFA regime. Instead the UPFA has begun to actively solicit partnership with the extreme Sinhala nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya. If an alliance develops between the UPFA and the JHU, it will constitute a new alignment of political forces in Colombo that will further restrict the narrowing space for the resumption of negotiations.

This indeed is not a positive sign of the ways in which things are shaping up in Sri Lanka. The inability of the Norwegian facilitators and the international community to bring the government and the LTTE back to the negotiation table also indicates a new dimension that has developed in Sri Lanka's present conjuncture of conflict. The two main domestic

protagonists to the conflict have now acquired a capacity to ignore the external factor and immune themselves to the international pressure. This is a development that stands in sharp contrast to the situation prevailed a couple years ago when both the UNF government and the LTTE had been readily responsive to the internal community. This equation began to change in 2003 when the LTTE began to resist what they understood as the 'excessive internationalization' of the peace process. In the LTTE's strategic calculations, the closer involvement of the international community in Sri Lanka's peace process resulted in altering the power equilibrium in favor of the government. Then the LTTE developed a successful strategy to minimize the role of the international actors vis a vis their own decision-making process. Meanwhile, the UPFA has been ideologically averse to the intimate involvement of the Western powers in Sri Lanka's peace initiatives. Most of the UPFA political thinkers come from the old school of state sovereignty and they view Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict as well as peace efforts as essentially internal processes in which the international actors outside the South Asian region should not be involved. The economic incentives that the donor community has been offering both to the government and the LTTE have not yet succeeded in persuading them to return to the negotiation table, primarily because neither side wants to bargain sovereignty for economic benefits. Contrary to what the international donors might think, the UPFA ideologues do not seem to be ready to trade off what they see as 'sovereignty' for rapid economic growth. They will be pretty satisfied with a low to moderate economic growth rate for Sri Lanka, perhaps in the region of 3 to 5 percent in the GDP.

Thus, the diminishing capacity of the international community in shaping the behavior of the main protagonists to the conflict and the widening mistrust between the UPFA government and the LTTE constitute the fundamental dilemma in Sri Lanka's peace process at present. The UPFA and the LTTE now appear to have begun to walk on their own paths, in diverse directions. Left to themselves, they can only meet in war and not in peace. Sri Lanka in this sense is fast entering an irreversible future that its citizens will certainly not want. **P**

PEACE WATCH – Jayadeva Uyangoda

Crisis of Democratic Institutions

Events that have occurred in April in and outside Sri Lanka's parliament on issues relating to the election of the Speaker have been given various interpretations. For a non-partisan observer, those events quite clearly indicate that the decaying process of our democratic institutions has reached a qualitatively higher phase. The mainstream parties as well as the JVP and JHU, the relatively new actors in parliament, are implicated in many of these incidents that have brought parliament to public ridicule. This indeed should be a matter of great concern for citizens committed to strengthening democratic institutions of governance. In one TV discussion the other day, a viewer phoned into express his disgust in vivid colloquial Sinhalese: "*ape parlimentuwa deke koleta wetila*" ("our legislature has been reduced to nothing").

The reduction of democratic institutions of governance to nothingness – this should not be a philosophical formula of political phenomenology, but a simple political point that should make us think about how to arrest the process of decay of political institutions.

Speaker Election

Even a brief recalling of what happened after the parliamentary elections of April 02 would compel us to re-think our faith, if we had any, in political parties as agents of democratization. After the outcome of the parliamentary election which did not produce a majority government, the election of the Speaker became for both the UNP and the UPFA a prestige issue as well as a key issue in their power struggle. The stakes were so high on that single event of the new parliament that as we now know from the media, the exchange of large sums of money as well as blackmailing has been the order of the day. There were even stories of two monk MPs being abducted to force their vote in favor of one camp. The whole exercise of electing the speaker was such an ugly and sordid episode that many MP's behaved inside the parliament in a manner that totally undermined the public faith in the institution of parliament. Those who came on the TV to explain their positions made it worse.

The way in which some MPs treated those Buddhist parliamentarian monks was simply appalling and disgraceful. That is not the way people committed to parliamentary democracy should treat their opponents. Parliament should be the space where dissent and disagreement is treated with respect and the spirit of right to disagree tolerated without rancor. It was quite clear that a large number of MPs could not just come to terms with the loss of their party's bid to get their candidate elected as Speaker through a simple exercise

of electoral democracy. As one exasperated citizen asked me the other day, why should millions of rupees of public money be spent every now and then to elect MPs who do not seem to honor even elementary principles of democracy.

Public Scorn

The point that one has to make in relation to this continuing behavior of some of our parliamentarians bringing the national legislature to public scorn is that our institutions of parliamentary democracy are fast losing popular legitimacy and credibility. It is because the institutional system of democratic governance is decaying from within. Those errant MPs are mere actors in a process of decaying governance that originated in Sri Lanka some years ago. Recalling the way in which this process took shape may help us to understand how to arrest further decay.

Golden Age

From an institutional perspective, the 'golden age' of Sri Lanka's parliamentary democracy was in the 1950s and 1960s. With all its blemishes arising from ethnic majoritarianism, institutions of parliamentary governance enjoyed universal respect of the citizens. The practitioners of parliamentary democracy, MPs as well as Ministers, behaved in a manner that generated public respect for them as individuals as well as leading actors in the political system. Corruption and abuse of governmental power was at a low level. MP's were constituency MPs, maintaining a close links with their electorates and the voters, often in the spirit of public service. That was the time when we all eagerly awaited newspaper reports of the parliamentary debates to enrich our political education.

Decay

But this system began to decay in the 1970s, particularly after the 1972 constitution and the partisan politicization of public institutions for which the United Front government was directly responsible. In order to make parliament the key instrument of social progress, the coalition leaders gave the MPs of the ruling party enormous political authority and power, making them mini centers of state power. As it happened, this inaugurated a new process of political abuse of power and corruption by the MPs, Ministers and their political agents. The huge electoral defeat of the UF parties at the 1977 election occurred largely against a backdrop of such public perception of corruption, abuse of power and the total disregard for the old ideal of serving the public.

The election of the UNP in 1977 with a massive parliamentary majority did not make any change for the better in this process of institutional decay in governance. The long UNP rule that began in 1977 in fact hastened the process with new dimensions added to it. The 1978 Constitution brought the legislature under the executive branch of the state, making the parliament effectively subservient to the all-powerful President. The 1982 Referendum that extended the life of the exiting parliament elected in 1977 for another term was the ultimate insult to the entire theory and practice of parliamentary democracy in Sri Lanka. Almost all the elections held under the UNP, till 1993, were such exercises in political manipulation that they only added to the increasing public loss of faith in the system of democratic governance. This was also the period in which continuing and large scale political corruption and abuse of political power continued to erode the efficacy as well as legitimacy of public institutions. The fact that two armed insurgencies developed in the North and South, parallel to the decaying process of institutional governance, clearly indicated that Sri Lanka's politics really needed to enter into a post-authoritarian phase, if the system were to survive at all.

Post-authoritarian

The change came in 1994, with the election of People's Alliance to power. That was also the period in which a popular democratic movement had emerged independent of political parties. The PA's electoral victory was the result of a combined and sustained effort made by the forces of democratic civil society and political society to take Sri Lanka to a post-authoritarian transition. One aspect of the democratization challenge in the period after 1994 was the restoration and re-strengthening of the institutions of democratic governance. It is however in this particular task that the PA's post-authoritarian democracy project failed.

The continuing subversion of the role of the cabinet and parliament as institutions of public policy making is perhaps the greatest institutional setback that Sri Lanka experienced under the PA's 1994-2001 rule. Instead of downsizing the bloated cabinet that the UNP had created to satisfy MPs in search of accumulation of capital and power, President Kumaratunga continued to expand its size, with no regard for growing public cynicism. She also continued, with greater commitment, another tradition that Messrs. Jayewardene and Premadasa as Presidents had practiced: deciding public policy outside the cabinet and with the involvement of a very few trusted Ministers, officials, advisors and Presidential task force members.

This practice was quite in accordance with the spirit of the Presidential system of government under the 1978 Constitution and the macro-economic reform process that the PA government faithfully implemented. The economic reform process, linked to the imperatives of economic globalization, enunciated a particularly new framework of public policy making, despite the 'good

governance' rhetoric of the donor agencies and their agents posted in Colombo. In this new framework, major policy decisions are made by an extremely small number of individuals that includes the President/ Prime Minister, treasury secretary, head of the central bank, the resident representatives of the IMF and the World Bank and few experts who are in the presidential task forces. Except the President and the Prime Minister, none of these actors is accountable to the people, or institutions of democratic governance such as the Cabinet of Ministers or the Parliament. They are not elected by the people. Indeed, very often they are contemptuous of the people and their elected representatives. In this regime of governance under globalization, the cabinet and parliament are mere transmission belts for the decisions already made elsewhere, by a small group. No wonder that President Kumaratunga is reputed to have walked into her cabinet meetings after keeping her minister waiting for hours!

Although Prime Minister Wickramasinghe may have been punctual in attending his cabinet meetings, he also carried forward the same process of pushing the institutions of governance for further decay. Wickramasinghe was an institutional builder in a technocratic sense. During his two year rule, he strengthened the Treasury Secretary's office at the expense of the Cabinet. It even led to a public showdown between the Treasury Secretary and the Minister of Agriculture. In his conflict with President Kumaratunga, Prime minister Wickramasinghe often talked about the sovereignty of parliament and re-gaining the role of parliament vis a vis the executive. But he did not indicate at all that he understood the need to revive democratic institutions as a whole. President Kumaratunga's decision in last October to dissolve the UNF-majority parliament and Wickramasinghe's inability to politically respond to President Kumaratunga's undemocratic move were actually two sides of the same coin.

MPs

Taking away from the cabinet and the parliament of the power and responsibility of public policy making is thus one of the key features of the institutional decay of democratic governance in contemporary Sri Lanka. MPs are among those who have immediately suffered from it. They are conscious of their utter irrelevance and uselessness to the task of policy making. They know that although they are technically representatives of the people, they are not consulted in making major policy decisions. So do most of the ministers who belong to a bloated and unhealthy cabinet meetings of which often require a big conference room. The MPs, aware of their impotence as actors in democratic governance, often indulge in abusive behavior in parliament, even investigating sexual conduct of their parliamentary colleagues. Hardly would the MPs prepare for quality contributions to parliamentary debates. As we have been seeing quite often, the parliamentary debates are now reduced to a exchange of verbal abuse across the floor. Hansard reports have long ceased to be reference material for informed citizens.

Task

The challenge in Sri Lanka's democracy in this context is to revive in the South its democratic institutions of governance and resurrect the practices of democratic behavior among those who populate institutions of governance. In the North, it entails the establishment of democratic institutions and practices of governance. This is the unfinished task still valid in the post-authoritarian reform agenda that was inaugurated in 1993-1994. Institution-building and institution-strengthening for democracy is the key task that awaits an effective agency. The JVP and JHU have not so far indicated that they are such an agency. Tragically, they with their youth, vigor and vitality have joined the other mainstream actors to further the process of political decay of our democratic institutions. ■

Peace Process in a Downward Spiral

Sri Lanka's peace process appears to have entered a period of downward spiral. With continuing uncertainty about the relations between the UPFA government and the LTTE, there is no hard evidence to suggest that negotiations will resume soon. Viewed from the perspective of advancing the peace process, almost all political events during the past weeks and months have been rather negative. This is a challenge which the UPFA government, the LTTE, the UNP and the opposition as well as the international custodians of Sri Lanka's peace process should immediately confront. Hopefully, Mr. Erik Solheim's visit to Colombo and Kilinochchi this week will initiate a new process of thinking, reflection and moving forward.

Batticaloa

Let me begin this discussion by referring to a brief visit I made to Batticaloa in May. Although I was in Batticaloa for just two days and I met only a few people, I don't need to either exaggerate or understate the crisis there. A new sense of fear has gripped the Tamil populace in Batticaloa and it is a debilitating fear. I was told by a number of people that this is a qualitatively new fear that did not exist in the past, before the movement's North-East split. The killing of the journalist Nadarajah and the university academic Tambiah by unidentified assassins has really shaken Batticaloa town. The LTTE's split has also fractured the Tamil polity there in a particularly alarming manner. As I was told, even the family members are now split. Friends don't trust friends. Political and personal links are suspect. No one knows from where the firing will come for what reason and when. As I was told, fourteen academics of the Eastern University in Batticaloa have submitted their applications for sabbatical leave. Soon, the Eastern Tamil society will become one without its head. It runs the risk of becoming the metaphorical graveyard of its own daughters and sons. Those who claim to represent the interests of the Tamil nation as a whole as well those who claim to be the saviors of the Tamil

community in the Eastern province cannot do better disservice than this to their own constituencies.

What can be done in this situation? I am no advisor to the LTTE's Vanni leadership or the Karuna faction. But I stand for just, durable and negotiated peace in Sri Lanka. My warning to both factions of the LTTE is that unless they resolve their very serious dispute politically, the Tamil nation will stand to lose, and lose dearly. The imprudent handling of their internal crisis by both the Vanni and Karuna leaderships have cost the Tamil people much of the positive achievements gained during the peace process of the last two years. The issues raised in the Vanni-Karuna dispute are essentially political ones that should be resolved through political means, and not by means of internecine war and violence. Actually, the present crisis in the Tamil nationalist movement is one that will test the capacity of the LTTE as well as its breakaway faction to bring about any degree of political emancipation to the Tamil nation. It is quite an irony that both factions of the LTTE on this particular issue of the split have proved the critics of Tamil national struggle correct.

Resuming Negotiations

Back to the issue of the peace process. As it appears at present, neither the UPFA government, nor the LTTE is seriously committed to resuming negotiations soon. The two sides are increasingly drawn into a mode of positional bargaining. Positional bargaining is both bad and destructive. It does not allow parties to clearly work on their mutual interests and move towards an enlightened compromise. In the months to come, they are more likely to stick to their non-negotiable positions, ignoring the interests that should actually guide enlightened positions. In positional bargaining, as President Kumaratunga and the LTTE appear to be engaged now in their pre-negotiation dialogue, there is the ever present risk of losing one's perspectives on interests. This is exactly where Mr. Solheim and his political bosses should re-think their role in Sri Lanka. Now, it is no longer one of facilitation or mediation. On the contrary, it is one of preventing a long-drawn, unstable and precarious negotiation stalemate. Public mood now is to recognize the emerging reality of an intractable stalemate in the peace process.

That negative public mood is not far from the truth. Sri Lanka is at present running the risk of entering into a period of unstable and protracted stalemate. The immediate characteristics of this unfolding stalemate would be as follows: The Kumaratunga administration and the LTTE, despite their sharp disagreements in public, will agree between themselves that there is absolutely no point in resuming direct talks in view of the incommensurability of their competing agendas. Although they will blame each other for the negotiation delay, they will try to pursue their own interests outside the framework of negotiations. For the UPFA government, the primary course of action in this direction would be to wait for the alteration of the initial strategic equilibrium that provided the

context for UNF-LTTE negotiations. For the LTTE, meanwhile, the immediate task would be to regain the strategic symmetry while thwarting the tactics of the UPFA and re-establishing its politico-military hegemony in the Eastern province. Thus the UPFA regime and the LTTE have the potential of entering into collision courses of action bringing the CFA into sharp crisis. The only deterrence that might prevent escalation of violence is the realization that relapsing to war would be seen as a very, very costly option by both sides. Nevertheless, unless negotiation begins, low intensity violence parallel with a war of words will bring the CFA under continuing pressure.

Pre-interim Dialogue

However, the LTTE's best option would be to refrain from low intensity violence, make a political deal with Karuna and work towards a de facto interim set up in the North and East. This is an option the prudence of which the LTTE might be able to convince President Kumaratunga. After all, the LTTE and the government should behave rationally, act rationally and make rational decisions about their strategies, tactics and options. What it means is that the debate between Colombo and Kilinochchi should move beyond the limited framework of ISGA versus parallel talks for core issues. Meanwhile, the challenge for the Norwegians now is two fold. Firstly, Sri Lanka's peace process needs to be protected from the uncertain and volatile political process. Secondly, the negotiation process needs to be protected from the possibility of the two sides retreating to their own positional shells.

The present debate on the agenda should not be allowed to drag on any longer, because the events in the Eastern Province might take over the entire political process in the coming months. This calls for a new phase of political engagement between the government and the LTTE, in the form of a pre-negotiation dialogue. There is indeed enough that the two sides can explore. For example, on closer analysis, both sides will realize that their present dispute over the agenda for talks is based on that false dichotomy of interim versus core issues. Some of the key proposals in the LTTE's ISGA package are linked to core issues concerning re-structuring of the state on the principle of shared sovereignty. In any serious exploration of an interim settlement based on the LTTE's own proposals, the LTTE will have to deal with core issues. Similarly, the government will realize that interim measures cannot wait until the difficult core issues are settled.

Thus, what the UPFA government and the LTTE should now do, with the assistance of the third party facilitator, is to enter into a pre-interim dialogue in order to unpack their own positions and find a common ground on which a move to an interim settlement can be built. This should take the form of a problem-solving exercise, involving perhaps the Colombo and Kilinochchi Peace Secretariats. Despite their undeniably contradictory positions in the approach to talks, the two sides might also find much in common in their concerns and interests. ■

A Way out from the Present Crisis?

Sri Lanka's peace process has now reached an unmistakable turning point. The suicide explosion in Kollupitiya should not be allowed to mark itself as the beginning of a new process of low-intensity war. Without any further delay, President Kumaratunga's government should take new political steps to revive the negotiations, bring the process of violence under effective control and restore the stability of the overall political process. Otherwise, Sri Lanka runs the immediate danger of relapsing into escalated violence.

Returning to violence in Colombo is indeed not a major surprise to those who followed, with consternation how the political process has been going through a period of instability. The new UPFA regime did not have an effective strategy to revive negotiations, or to manage the political consequences of the LTTE's split. Instead, the government allowed the situation to grow out of hand. Now the UPFA government should take the Wednesday event as a violent wake up call, re-assess its inept political strategy towards the LTTE as well as the peace process and design a new initiative to return to the negotiation table.

Analysis

Returning to negotiations is the best course of action that President Kumaratunga should pursue. But, in pursuing that line of action, her government needs to develop a credible analysis of why it should engage in negotiations with the LTTE at all. On key problem with the UPFA leadership is that they have not taken the trouble of exploring the windows of opportunity available in the process that their political rivals began in 2002. Instead, they have substituted rhetoric for rigorous analysis. The UPFA has repeatedly given the impression that its understanding of why the LTTE has been seeking priority of ISGA over core issues in negotiations is embedded in an old mindset.

That in turn emanates from an inability of the Sinhalese political class to acknowledge its own leading role in shaping a trajectory of the ethnic conflict in which not the war, but accelerated economic development, can take primacy in the North and East under the LTTE's control and management. Many UPFA critics have argued that the LTTE's ISGA proposals are a stepping - stone to secession. But, a government that is serious about negotiated peace in Sri Lanka should also be able to see a negotiated ISGA as the prelude to re-union after years of a secessionist war. Without such flexibility of assessing a broad political process, no government in Colombo could have the courage or capacity to take the peace process any further.

President Kumaratunga can hardly afford now to allow diverse currents in her regime or administration to push the political conditions around the peace process along various contradictory directions. She has to pursue political options to bring the

negotiation process back on track. It requires political, not military, initiatives that should also enable her to stabilize the country's political process that is in disarray at the moment. There are two political initiatives she can take immediately. The first is addressed to the LTTE, and the second to the UNP and the opposition.

Initiatives

In the first initiative President Kumaratunga needs to announce that her government is now ready to resume negotiations with the LTTE on an agenda around the LTTE's ISGA proposals in order to explore a negotiated interim settlement to the ethnic conflict. Dropping the stand on parallel negotiations on core issues should not be seen by her as a political setback. Any serious political gain for President Kumaratunga now rests not on her sticking to positional bargaining with the LTTE, but with her capacity to move forward in the direction of principled negotiations.

The second initiative for advancing the peace process calls for integrating the UNP and the Opposition in the peace process. The UPFA government is now repeating the same political idiosyncy that the UNP government did when in power by harassing and pushing the opposition against the wall. President Kumaratunga does not

need to indulge in this politics of mutual destruction any longer, because in her last address to the nation she herself has proposed a very good plan to make the peace process inclusive and multi-party. Her proposal to set up an apex body of National Peace Council under her leadership, but providing co-partnership to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, is certainly an excellent proposal in the direction of bipartisanship in the peace process.

The proposed National Advisory Council on peace, consisting of representatives of political parties as well as civil society, is an equally good proposal for multi-party process building. Setting up of the NPC would also be a step in the direction of arresting the mutually destructive politics of acrimony between the UPFA and the UNP of which the people are just tired. The UNP should see their involvement in an NPC as constructive from their point of view as well, because it locks both the President and the UNP in a bi-partisan institutional process.

Finally, there still remains a small window of opportunity for President Kumaratunga to take Sri Lanka's peace process forward towards a constructive compromise. Needless to say, losing this moment will be quite costly. ■

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SRI LANKA AFTER ELECTIONS: CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY

Jayadeva Uyangoda

Sri Lanka's parliamentary election, held on April 02, has produced an indecisive outcome, with no party, or alliance of parties, being able to obtain a working majority in the 225-member legislature. While the United National Party (UNP) has lost the election to the newly formed United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), the latter's tally is 105 seats, still nine seats short of the number required to form and run a government. The UPFA is headed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, whose second term of office will come to an end in 2005. Indications are that President Kumaratunga will run a minority government, until some re-alignment of forces is engineered anew. As it is quite evident now, the expansion of the ruling coalition is difficult, due to sharp differences that exist between the coalition members and the smaller ethnic parties that are in the opposition and from whom the new coalition partners have to be sought.

Sri Lanka's is an essentially fractured polity. The composition of the parliament, worked out on basis of proportional representation, dramatically reflects all the major fragmentations. While the UPFA and its allies have received 106 seats, UNP, the second largest combination of parties, has 82. The third largest party in the new parliament is the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) with 22 seats. TNA was openly backed by the LTTE, and its 22 seats represent a clear majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Meanwhile, in a surprising development, a newly launched entity of Buddhist monks, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), has bagged 09 seats in the parliament. The plantation-based Ceylon Workers Congress contested under the UNP and claims eight seats for its members. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), meanwhile, has five MPs from the Eastern Province. The Upcountry People's Front, which also has close political links with the LTTE, has one member in the new parliament. Thus, the opposition tally is 119 seats, as opposed to the ruling UPFA's 106. When the new Speaker to parliament was elected on April 22, this particular distribution of power in parliament helped the opposition to elect its candidate to that high position. This simple parliamentary arithmetic indicates the state of acute uncertainty that the new government of President Kumaratunga will have to grapple with in the coming months.

Backdrop

The circumstances under which the April parliamentary elections were called, within just two years of the six-year parliamentary term of the previous UNP government, intimately linked to some peculiarities of Sri Lankan politics. In 2002 and 2003, Sri Lanka had a divided government, the executive being

headed by President Kumaratunga and the legislature by Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, the two leaders representing the two main rival political parties. For stability of governance, this required an arrangement of cohabitation between the President and the Prime Minister, or more accurately the executive and legislative branches of the government. While such cohabitation never came into existence, Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, with the assistance of the Norwegian government, launched his ambitious peace initiative with the LTTE in early 2002. Even though the real powers of defense were in the hands of a hostile President, he signed a cease-fire agreement with the Tamil rebels. Wickramasinghe also brought in the US, EU countries and Japan to support the peace as well as economic recovery processes. President Kumaratunga and her party resented these developments. In the absence of a cohabitative spirit between the two rival centers of power, President Kumaratunga, on the premise that Sri Lanka's national security had come under serious threat from the LTTE, took over in October last year some of the key ministries of the Wickramasinghe cabinet. This included the all important Ministry of Defense. Attempts to resolve the new political crisis failed and Kumaratunga, unilaterally employing her constitutional powers, dissolved the parliament in February this year, although Wickramasinghe's UNP and the allies had a comfortable majority in parliament to stay on for four more years in their term of office.

Politically quite significant is the reason why the UNP lost the election in just two years in power. On surface, the UNP's record of achievements has been quite impressive. Its peace process has been the most successful for twenty years, with an internationally monitored cease-fire agreement in force for over two years. Wickramasinghe had mobilized wide international support for his peace bid. The donor community had pledged massive financial assistance for Sri Lanka's economic recovery attempts that were linked to the peace process. With the assistance of the World Bank and the IMF, the government had managed to restore most of the macro-economic fundamentals. That included the reduction of the budget deficit through cutting down on public expenditure and the reduction of the inflation as well as interest rates. The annual economic growth rate had reached 5% of the GDP in 2002, which was below zero in the year 2000. In the eyes of the donor community, Sri Lanka under the UNP regime was well in her way to rapid economic recovery. Yet, in the experience of the rural masses, particularly the peasantry, there were no economic benefits that they could share. The peace dividend had not reached the poor and low income groups. As some pre-election polls indicated, the vast majority of the people trusted the ability of the Wickramasinghe

administration to continue the peace process. Yet, a still larger share of the populace did not believe in the UNP's commitment to relieving them of the heavy economic burdens. Wickramasinghe's policy synthesis of the peace process with a right-wing economic reform agenda proved itself to be electorally disastrous.

Multiple Centers

The most dramatic feature of the political equilibrium emerged out of this election is the emergence of three new political forces as powerful centers of power in the legislature. They are Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP-People's Liberation Front), Tamil National Alliance backed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and the Sinhalese nationalist JHU with nine Buddhist monks as its MPs. The JVP is a member of the UPFA coalition and has 40 seats under its direct control. More than a dozen Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) members in the UPFA – the SLFP is the main constituent party of the new alliance -- are closely allied to the JVP. This achievement is the real political coming of age for the JVP which had in 1971 and 1987-88 launched two insurgencies to gain control of state power through revolutionary means. Now the JVP, with its Left-nationalist policy agenda is in the real mainstream, controlling the directions of the new government.

The TNA contested the parliamentary election as the LTTE's political front and it won 22 seats in the Northern and Eastern provinces. In a way, the LTTE is present in Sri Lanka's new parliament through its proxy, the TNA. The strategic goal that the LTTE sought to achieve at this election is to re-establish the claim, through electoral means, that they were the 'sole representative' of the Sri Lankan Tamil people. This 'sole representative' status is crucial for the LTTE in their negotiations with the Sri Lankan state in order to secure the exclusive control of the Northern and Eastern provinces in the event of a negotiated interim settlement. Although the LTTE militarily dominates the Sri Lankan Tamil polity, their sole representative claim is sharply contested by other Tamil groups as well as many Sinhalese political parties as well as human rights groups. The recent split between the movement's Vanni leadership and the Eastern command also provided the context for the LTTE to aggressively prove their 'sole representative' claim at the election. Independent election monitors have reported serious violations of the election law by LTTE cadres during the election campaign preventing their rival Tamil parties from campaigning. Amidst accusations of violence, intimidation and vote rigging, the LTTE has ensured nearly 95% of Tamil votes in the North and East in favor of the TNA.

The nine Buddhist monks of the JHU have added novelty to Sri Lanka's parliamentary politics, with partial saffronization of the legislative chamber. The JHU is a peculiar political formation in the sense that it is led by lay politicians while its parliamentary candidates are all Buddhist monks. It indeed benefited from Sri Lanka's system of proportional representation that, unlike the first-past-the post system, favors small parties. Under the PR system,

any party that obtains a minimum of 5% of votes in a given electoral district, qualify for seats at the expense of major parties. The JHU, committed to a strong program of Sinhalese nationalism, fielded 260 candidates who all were Buddhist monks. The JHU monks, campaigning with the promise of establishing a Dharma Rajyaya (a Buddhist Righteous State) in Sri Lanka, drew their support mainly from the urban, middle-class voters, disenchanted with the mainstream Sinhalese political parties who they see as making compromises with ethnic and religious minorities. The voting pattern also indicates that the many middle class UNP voters, who were opposed to the UNP's peace bid with the LTTE, have also shifted their loyalties to the JHU which presented to the electorate a militant version of Sinhalese nationalism, interspersed with the sentiments of majoritarian insecurity among the Sinhalese and a message of moral regeneration.

Survival and Stability

Against this backdrop, stability of the new government will require immediate changes in the combinations and permutations of the numbers in parliament. For the immediate survival of the UPFA as the new governing entity, it is absolutely necessary for President Kumaratunga to expand the ruling coalition. The options the President has are both limited and full of pitfalls. Actually, the way in which she will broaden the coalition will also re-shape the policies and directions of the new government. As Kumaratunga is now learning, making coalition regimes in a fractured polity is a thankless job, particularly when the smaller entities representing uncompromising agendas have a crucial leverage. The JHU monks initially offered outside support to the UPFA on a set of tough conditions. Among them were the de-merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces as two separate politico-administrative entities, abandoning of regional autonomy with a commitment to preserving the unitary state of Sri Lanka and introducing legislation to ban the so-called unethical Christian conversion. The demand for the North-East de-merger is designed to counter the Tamil nationalist claim that a unified region encompassing these two provinces – the so-called 'traditional Tamil homeland' – should constitute the unit of Tamil autonomy. If the President is keen to resume negotiations with the LTTE, accepting the JHU's conditions to expand the coalition will be politically hazardous.

Kumaratunga's attempt to persuade the CWC and SLMC to join the UPFA Government has not yet been successful either, although even for regime survival, the best option that the UPFA leaders have is to expand the ethnic bases of their coalition. Other than ensuring a majority, such a move will also give a multi-ethnic character to the UPFA that was forged late last year as an essentially Sinhalese-nationalist coalition of forces that were weary of the UNP-LTTE peace bid. However, Sinhalese nationalist groups, who have a strong presence in the UPFA ranks, are not in favor of including either the CWC or the SLMC in their government. Their resentment is also fuelled by the popular belief among the Sinhalese

that the CWC and SLMC are highly corrupt entities that thrive and survive by backing hapless Sinhalese parties in search of parliamentary majorities. Such sentiments of political purism are very much a part of the JVP's political ideology. Thus, if Kumaratunga bring in to the UPFA fold the CWC and the SLMC, in a desperate bid to save the new regime, she will have the added task of pacifying her Sinhalese nationalist constituencies that are prejudiced against the ethnic minority parties.

Challenges

Other than ensuring survival and stability, the new UPFA regime faces two other crucial and immediate challenges. The first is the resumption of negotiations with the LTTE. The other is working towards economic recovery.

President Kumaratunga is keen to resume talks with the LTTE as soon as possible. There are also indications that the UPFA's approach to dealing with the LTTE is substantially different from that of the UNF. In place of Ranil Wickramasinghe's strategy of involving the USA and the Western donor countries in the process, Kumaratunga is under pressure from the JVP to offer direct and greater role for India. However, re-defining the role of the external actors in the negotiation process entails many complexities. The LTTE is also keen about early negotiations, yet will not be in favor of sidelining the Norwegian facilitators in a short notice. They will also resist that any role for India in the peace process without normalizing their relations with India. In India, the LTTE remains a banned organization and the political parties as well as the officials there are quite weary of the LTTE.

Meanwhile, the LTTE is insisting that the new phase of talks should center on their proposal for an interim administration in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The LTTE also argues that the talk should resume on the principle of continuity of the agenda as well as the conditions that existed during the previous UNP regime. The 'continuity of conditions' entails the continuity of the strategic balance that existed between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state. The continuity of agenda means that the discussion on the LTTE's proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) should take priority over other issues.

When the UNP-LTTE talks reached a stalemate last year, the main item in the agenda was the proposal for an interim administrative arrangement to the North and East. The LTTE's ISGA proposals were submitted on October 1, last year. Then, a series of dramatic political events involving President Kumaratunga and the UNP government over took the significance of the ISGA proposals. Negotiations did not resume either. The dissolution of parliament, fresh parliamentary elections on April 02, and the electoral defeat of the ruling UNP interfered with that process. During the parliamentary election campaign, Kumaratunga's UPFA denounced the LTTE's ISGA proposals as a blueprint for separation. The UPFA's position during the election on the question of negotiations

with the LTTE was to continue with talks and the peace process, but from a position of strength and under 'fair conditions.' These are positions that President Kumaratunga now finds difficult to sustain. Making her previous hard line positions flexible, Kumaratunga has now agreed to the LTTE's insistence that the ISGA proposals should be the core of the new agenda. However, Kumaratunga has also proposed to the LTTE through Norwegian facilitators that there should be parallel talks on a political settlement to the ethnic conflict. But, the LTTE has not agreed to this suggestion and that may further delay the resumption of talks.

In the economic recovery agenda, addressing Sri Lanka's acute agrarian crisis along with rapid economic growth will pose a formidable challenge to the new regime. The UPFA's economic development strategy, as offered to the electorate during the election campaign is basically shaped by the JVP's ideology of economic nationalism, social welfare and public sector-led economic development. This stood in sharp contrast with the UNP's right-wing economic program that emphasized the rapid down-sizing of the public sector, sale of public sector assets to big private conglomerates and pushing the competitive market forces every are of economic life. The fact that at the elections former Prime Minister Wickramasinghe's UNP was routed in most of the rural districts demonstrated the gravity of the agrarian crisis as well as the expectations of the vast masses of the peasantry over the new regime. This calls for a radically altered version of the Washington consensus for Sri Lanka, marking a decisive shift from the way in which the UNP handled the economy and social sectors. The UPFA is at least ideologically committed to such a change. But the question is how plausible such a policy shift in the context of a fast-globalising Sri Lankan economy.

Constitutional Reform

Meanwhile, the new government has embarked on an initiative of constitutional reform. The course of action it proposes is to summon a constituent assembly and pass a new constitution through a simple majority in that assembly. The centerpiece of that constitutional change will be the abolition of the presidential system and returning to a prime ministerial government. The new constitutional framework will also alter the existing electoral system. This constitutional reform exercise has already generated much controversy, because of the peculiar method which the UPFA government is adopting to circumvent the legal obstacles to constitutional amendments. The UPFA is a minority government without even a simple majority in parliament. In the absence of a two-thirds parliamentary support, there is absolutely no way for the new government to alter the constitution in a legal way. Therefore, the UPFA has resorted to the method of 'legal revolution.' At the April parliamentary election, the UPFA sought a 'mandate' from the people to change the existing constitution through the mechanism of a constituent assembly. However, the Alliance obtained only about 45% of the total votes cast and 105

parliamentary seats, short of even a simple majority in both votes and seats.

To overcome these legal obstacles, the UPA government has decided to call for a Constituent Assembly, consisting of all members of the present parliament. A draft constitution, passed by the simple majority in the Constituent Assembly will then be presented to people at a referendum. In this 'revolutionary' method of constitutional reform, parliament will be totally by-passed. This initiative is certain to deepen Sri Lanka's existing political crisis. The opposition UNP is certain to stay away from the Constituent Assembly. The Tamil and Muslim minority parties are not in favor of abolishing the existing presidential system of government or the proportional representation system. In their reckoning, these two changes will be detrimental to minority interests. Critics point out that an extra-constitutional, non-inclusivist and unilateralist

constitutional reform process, as envisaged by the present UPA regime, will have little or no chance of success. Even if it succeeds, the new constitution may not enjoy much political legitimacy. In fact, constitutional reform in a deeply divided society like Sri Lanka should be an exercise in bringing the fractured polity together in a spirit of peace, reconciliation and consensus.

In any case, Sri Lanka needs a fresh beginning to address all its major challenges. The verdict of the electorate is for all the political forces to work in consensus, and not through unilateral agendas and strategies. The silver lining of the election outcome is that Sri Lanka now has a parliament which has assured representation to all major political entities in Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim societies. No shade of opinion could now complain of being excluded from parliament. However, inclusivity in governance is hard to come by as yet. ■

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CEYLON

SURAYA JAYASEKERA

CHARLES DARWIN, KARL MARX AND MARTIN WICKRAMASINGHE

Carlo Fonseka

For about 20 years, I had the privilege and pleasure of enjoying the friendship of Sri Lanka's most prolific and fertile writer Martin Wickramasinghe. He was the best read man I have known personally. He was a great admirer of the work of Charles Darwin and Karl Marx. He wrote extensively about their life and work. He spoke so knowledgeably and enthusiastically about their writings that he could not fail to communicate something of his excitement to me. Unlike the vast majority of educated people, Martin Wickramasinghe had actually read *The Origin of Species* and *Das Kapital*, or more accurately, its English translation titled *Capital*. These works were unarguably the foremost intellectual documents of the 19th century. He could talk learnedly and insightfully about the profound influence that the work of Darwin and Marx exerted on humankind. It was under Martin Wickramasinghe's influence that I developed a more than superficial interest in Darwinism and Marxism.

In his book titled *Revolution and Evolution* published in 1971, Martin Wickramasinghe gives an interesting account of his visit to the Darwin Museum in Kent, England, in 1967. Darwin's house was called Down House. As Martin Wickramasinghe recounts it in his essay, in 1952 Down House was converted into the Darwin Museum by the Royal College of Surgeons of England. It was this Museum that Martin Wickramasinghe had visited. In the essay about his visit he has included a facsimile of the title page of Karl Marx's magnum opus *Das Kapital* on which Karl Marx had inscribed the words: "To Mr. Charles Darwin on the part of his sincere admirer Karl Marx". It is dated 16 June 1873. His address is given as 1, Modena Villas, Maitland Park.

The aim of this article is to set the record straight concerning a widely held major misconception about Marx in relation the Darwin, to which I too subscribed. It was my recent reading of a fascinating biography of Karl Marx by Francis Wheen published in 1999 that served to disabuse my mind of several wrong notions I held about Karl Marx. In particular I firmly believed that Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) had devoutly wished to dedicate *Das Kapital* to his senior contemporary Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882) which honour Darwin had politely declined.

Darwin Museum

In his essay Martin Wickramasinghe says that for him one of the most interesting sections of the Darwin Museum was the large room in which, among other things, volumes and books

presented by various people to Darwin are displayed. He states that in this section he noticed the "complimentary copy of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in German with Marx's signature and the dedicative inscription in English". Martin Wickramasinghe then informs us that Dr. S A Barnett, editor of the centenary publication titled *A Century of Darwin*, had roundly declared that the autographed copy of Marx's *Das Kapital* sent to Darwin "remains uncut". Martin Wickramasinghe's interpretation of Dr. Barnett's remark is that Dr. Barnett wished to imply that Darwin cared little for socialism and had not even bothered to read the copy of Marx's magnum opus gifted to him. Concerning this matter Martin Wickramasinghe cautiously wrote: "If I am not mistaken the open copy of *Das Kapital* which is displayed in a glass case at the Down House has *many* cut pages. Darwin's letter to Karl Marx which is in the same glass case corroborates my guess that he read *several* pages of *Das Kapital*. This is Darwin's letter to Karl Marx which I had to copy in a hurry because we were lingering in the Museum after its closing hour" (italics added). He then reproduces in his book the letter which is remarkably accurate considering the circumstances under which he had copied it. The relevant original letter received by Marx in October 1873 goes like this:

Downe, Beckenham, Kent

Dear Sir,

I thank you for the honour which you have done me by sending me your great work on *Capital* & I heartily wish that I was more worthy to receive it, by understanding more of the deep & important subject of political Economy. Though our studies have been so different, I believe that we both earnestly desire the extension of Knowledge, & that this is in the long run sure to add to the happiness of Mankind.

I remain, Dear Sir
Yours faithfully,
Charles Darwin

Complimentary Copy

Martin Wickramasinghe's guess that Charles Darwin had read "several pages" of *Das Kapital* was right. It is now firmly established that only the first 105 pages of the 822 - page volume had been cut open. The pertinent question is that if Darwin had read only "several pages" of *Das Kapital*, how he went

so far as to refer to it as "your great work on Capital". Without undue seriousness, I offer the following explanation. Although we regard *Capital* primarily as a scientific treatise on economics, Marx himself regarded it as "a work of art". On 31 July 1865 i.e. two years before the publication of *Das Kapital*, Marx wrote to Engels: "... I cannot bring myself to send anything off, until I have the whole thing in front of me ... Whatever shortcomings they may have, the advantage of my writings is that they are an *artistic whole*" (italics added). In other words, for Marx *Das Kapital* was more like poetry than like science - or shall we say - it was something like "scientific poetry". Nobel-prize winning poet T. S. Eliot, who ought to have known what he was talking about once said that, "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood". So it seems to me that for Charles Darwin to have intuitively sensed the greatness of *Das Kapital* it was not necessary for him to read and understand all the words in it. What a pity, though, that he had not read Chapter X on "The Working Day" and Chapter XXV on "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation".

At all events, it is a fact that although Marx lived in England from 1849 until he died in 1883, it was in England that he was least known. Writing in the *Contemporary Review* of October 1881 the economist John Rae commented: "His word has gone into all the earth and evoked in some quarters echoes which governments will neither let live nor let die; but here, where it was pronounced, its sound has scarcely been heard". It is on record that when Karl Marx was buried on 17 March 1883 in Highgate cemetery, in the very plot where his wife Jenny Marx had been laid 15 months earlier, only 11 mourners were present. No matter. In 1999 when the British Broadcasting Corporation asked its world-wide listeners to identify the greatest men and women of the second millennium after Christ, the listeners' choice for "greatest thinker" was Karl Marx. Charles Darwin himself was fourth, after Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton in that order.

Dedication

There is no question that Darwin and Marx were the two most original and revolutionary thinkers of the 19th Century. They were contemporaries and for much of their adult lives they lived just 20 miles apart. Even so, there is no evidence that they ever met. There were people who were close friends of both Darwin and Marx. After reading Darwin's *Origin of Species* which was published in 1859 Marx had written to Engels saying that "this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view". When Marx's *Das Kapital* was first published in 1867, it was ostentatiously dedicated to Wilhelm Wolff with the words printed as follows:

Dedicated
To My Unforgettable Friend
Wilhelm Wolff
Intrepid, Faithful
Noble Protagonist of the Proletariat

Born in Tarau on June 21, 1809
Died in exile in Manchester on May 9, 1864

There was a special reason for this fulsome eulogistic dedicatory inscription. In 1864 Wolff had died bequeathing to Marx £ 820. In those days, this was a colossal sum of money. It greatly exceeded all that Marx had ever earned from his writing. It was a windfall for Marx and his family and enabled them to lead a bourgeois life for about 10 years. When the first volume of *Das Kapital* was published three years after the death of Wolff, Marx must have felt impelled to dedicate it to Wolff. After correcting the last proof of Volume I of *Das Kapital* on 16 August 1867, Marx wrote the following note to Engels: "So this volume is finished. I owe it to you alone, that it was possible. Without your self-sacrifice for me I could not possibly have managed the immense labour demanded by the three volumes. I embrace you, full of thanks".

Myth of Rebuff

Thus, there is no reason to suppose that Karl Marx ever wanted to dedicate *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin. If anyone really merited the honour it was Engels his junior partner, for having made it possible at all. But dedicating a book to a junior partner might have seemed an odd thing to do. So the honour went to his biggest one-off financial benefactor Wilhelm Wolff. Charles Darwin was not at all in the running for this honour. How, then, did the widely believed myth generate itself that Karl Marx yearned to dedicate his *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin who politely declined the honour? It had to do with a beautifully written, very widely read biography of Karl Marx by the famous Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin published in 1939. It was titled *Karl Marx, His Life and Environment*. In this book Berlin categorically asserted that Marx wished to dedicate the original German edition of his magnum opus to Darwin "for whom he had a greater intellectual admiration than for any other of his contemporaries". He went on to say that "Darwin declined the honour in a polite, cautiously phrased letter...". How did Berlin reach this conclusion?

Second Letter

In 1931 a Soviet newspaper had published the following letter dated 13 October 1880 written by Charles Darwin.
Downe, Beckenham, Kent

Dear Sir,

I am much obliged for your kind letter & the Enclosure. -The publication in any form of your remarks on my writings really requires no consent on my part, & it would be ridiculous in me to give consent to what requires none. I shd prefer the Part or Volume not to be dedicated to me (though I thank you for the intended honour) as this implies to a certain extent my approval of the general publication, about which I know nothing. - Moreover though I am a strong advocate for free thought on all subjects, yet

it appears to me (whether rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against christianity and theism produce hardly any effect on the public; & freedom of thought is best promoted by the gradual illumination of men's minds, which follow from the advance of science. It has, therefore, always been my object to avoid writing on religion, & I have confined myself to science. I may, however, have been unduly biased by the pain which it would give some members of my family, if I aided in any way direct attacks on religion,- I am sorry to refuse you any request, but I am old & have very little strength, & looking over proof-sheets (as I know by present experience) fatigues me much.-

I remain Dear Sir
Your faithfully,
Ch. Darwin

Perverse Logic

Having presumably perused the two Darwin letters in question, perhaps with the kind of indifference to historical time worthy of the first-rate philosopher he was, Isaiah Berlin had noticed that one of the letters proved beyond any doubt that Darwin had turned down an offer of having a book dedicated to him. With a logic unworthy of a third-rate politician he had jumped to conclusion that the book in question must have been the original German edition of Marx's *Das Kapital*. From the contents of the other letter Berlin had concluded that despite Darwin's rebuff he had presumed, Marx had sent Darwin an autographed copy of *Das Kapital*. Ignoring the dates of the two letters, Berlin fitted the contents of the two letters and the fact of the existence of Marx's complimentary copy of *Das Kapital* to Darwin into what should be dubbed as his "Darwin's-rebuff-of-Marx theory". Because Berlin's biography of Marx was so widely read, his theory became gospel on the subject ever since.

For my part I cannot persuade myself that Isaiah Berlin was as daft or as chronologically insensible as his theory implies. I suspect that the name of his game here was somehow to make those without access to the original documents to believe that the great scientist Darwin had snubbed Marx and yet the rebuffed Marx was toady enough to have sent Darwin a complimentary copy of *Das Kapital*. His strategy worked remarkably well and the myth of Darwin's-rebuff-of-Marx theory was believed by all and sundry interested in Marxology, even after it had been busted by Margaret A.Fay. She did so in an article titled "Marx and Darwin; A Literary Detective Story" which was published in the *Monthly Review* of March 1980. Thus even in 1998, infamous Marx-baiter Paul Johnson wrote: "Unlike Marx, Darwin was a genuine scientist who on a famous occasion politely but firmly refused Marx's invitation to strike a Faustian bargain". I myself believed this foul canard until I read Francis Wheen's book the other day.

Busting the Myth

As we have noted already, of the two relevant Darwin letters, the letter of thanks had been written in 1873, and the letter of declination or formal refusal in 1880. On Berlin's theory, in 1880, Darwin had declined the honour of dedication of the first German edition of *Das Kapital* which was published in 1867. That is to say, the book in question had been published at least 13 years *before* Darwin had allegedly refused the dedicatory honour. Even a dimwit can spot this chronological conundrum. To me the only explanation that suggests itself for this conundrum is a tongue in cheek one based on Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. In the 1930s when Berlin was writing his biography of Marx, Albert Einstein - then at the height of his fame - had visited Oxford and relativity was very much in the air. For simplicity's sake the relativity explanation of the chronological conundrum at issue may be set out as follows:

Question: Could a letter sent in 1880 have reached its intended recipient in 1867?

Answer: Not impossible, according to the theory of relativity
Evidence: (quoted from memory)

'There was a young lady called Bright
Who traveled much faster than light
She set off one day
In a relative way
And came back the *previous* night

Theoretically, therefore, it was not impossible even for a letter posted in 1880 to have reached its destination during a *previous* year.

A more cogent tongue in cheek explanation of the conundrum was proposed by Professor Shlomo Avineri. In a paper published in *Encounter* magazine in 1967, he surmised that the political implications of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence, made it "quite unthinkable" for the great communist to have sought the great evolutionist's imprimatur. Implicitly accepting Darwin's-rebuff-of-Marx theory as gospel, and taking into account the undeniable fact of the existence of the autographed copy of *Das Kapital* sent by Marx to Darwin in 1873, Professor Avineri indulged the desperate speculation that Marx's inscription on it must have been written with "tongue in cheek".

As a graduate student in the University of California, when Margaret A.Fay read Professor Avineri's article in 1974, she found his tongue in cheek explanation for Marx's inscription a little hard to swallow. She decided to research the matter afresh and quite by chance hit upon a slim volume called *The Students' Darwin* by Edward B. Aveling published in 1881. It was known that Aveling had been the lover of Marx's daughter Eleanor Marx. The publication date of *The Students' Darwin* - 1881 - and the date of

Darwin's letter of declination - 1880 - immediately triggered in Fay's mind the question: Could Darwin's letter of 1880 have been written to Aveling and not to Marx? To cut a long story short, she conclusively proved that her hunch was right by the following sequence of steps.

Sequence

1. She established that *The Students' Darwin* was the second volume in a series called "The International Library of Science and Free Thought" edited by the militant atheists Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh. This explained the reference in Darwin's letter written in 1880 to "the Part or Volume of a more general publication about which I know nothing" and his reluctance to be associated with "arguments against christianity and theism".

2. Fay discovered among Darwin's papers at Cambridge University Library a letter from Edward Aveling dated 12 October 1880, attached to a few sample chapters from *The Students' Darwin*. After requesting "the illustrious support of your consent" Aveling had added that "I purpose again, subject to your approval to honour my work and myself by dedicating the former to you". This is the dedicatory honour that Darwin had politely declined.

(The only thing that puzzles me about Aveling's letter is its date: 12 October 1880. The letter expressing Darwin's polite rebuff is dated 13 October 1880. One wonders why humankind had to invent e-mail at all!)

3. Fay demonstrated how Darwin's letter to Aveling ended up in the Marx archive. In 1895, after the death of Engels, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling had sorted out Marx's letters and manuscripts. Two years later Aveling wrote an article about Darwin and Marx. In this he quoted the 1873 letter of thanks from Darwin to Marx. He then went on to say that he too had corresponded with Darwin, without giving my details. Having written this article he had filed all his research materials in one folder. The juxtaposition of Darwin's letter to Aveling, with Darwin's letter to Marx explains how the mystery and myth of Darwin's alleged rebuff of Marx was born.

Conclusions

We can now claim to know the following.

1. There is no evidence that Marx yearned to dedicate his *Das Kapital* to Darwin.
2. Darwin did not write to Marx declining the honour that was allegedly offered.
3. Martin Wickramasinghe's "guess" that Darwin had read *several* pages of the *many* cut pages of *Das Kapital* was spot on. The word "several" means more than two but less than "many". Darwin had read only "several pages" of *Das Kapital* before dashing off his note of thanks to Marx.

Charles Darwin was certainly not the last person on earth to have read only "several pages" of Marx's great work. An Oxford-educated one time Oxford don, who became a Prime Minister of Britain, Harold Wilson, once boasted that he had not read beyond page two of *Capital*. Another Oxford-educated British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is a critic of Marx without providing evidence that he has read him at all. Not all Oxonians, however, have been hostile to Marx. A brilliant product of Oxford Harold J. Laski was perhaps the most influential British Marxist ever. But he was exceptional.

Indeed, during Marx's life-time itself a British barrister called Sir John MacDonnell wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* of March 1875: "Though Marx has lived much in England, he is here almost the shadow of a name. People may do him the honour of abusing him; read him they do not".

Today, those who *do not wish* to understand globalization and its discontents *should not read* Karl Marx.

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A RISING IN THE EAST

Malathi de Alwis

The East has suddenly re-appeared in the cognisance of Colombo, after Karuna's declaration of autonomy from the north, in April 2004. For the Colombo-based media the only issues worth speculating on are who helped Karuna escape to Colombo and which LTTE faction is killing whom. All the while, completely ignored by the media, families wage terrified yet determined battles in the East against the latest drive by the Vanni group to re-conscript children released by the Karuna group. This is a historic moment in the struggle of the Tamil populace in the East and it is imperative that we in the South not miss the opportunity to show our solidarity and support these courageous families in every way we can.

While I continue to remain critical of the fascist practices of both LTTE factions, I have no doubt that this latest configuration of resistance has been enabled by Karuna's rebellion. Karuna's critique that Prabhakaran, and what is now called the LTTE (Vanni group), has consistently discriminated against eastern LTTE cadres and populace, is a regionalist argument that ironically parallels the broader Tamil nationalist argument, most vociferously articulated by Prabhakaran and the LTTE for over two decades now. That is to say, the LTTE demands an autonomous nation-state —*eelam*—for the Tamil populace of Sri Lanka based on the argument that the primarily Sinhala and Buddhist Sri Lankan state has consistently and systematically discriminated against them for many decades. This envisioned nation-state of *eelam* encompasses both the northern and eastern provinces on the grounds that these regions were the original homelands of the Tamil people. Karuna's demands merely extends this argument by calling for a bi-furcation of the North and East which thus enables the East to function independently of the North. Following such regionalist logic, it is only a matter of time before Tamils in Trincomalee, who argue that they are positioned even further down in the pecking order from the Tamils in Batticaloa, seek autonomy as well.

Karuna's complaint about northern discrimination is not a new one or unique to him. During my regular visits to the Eastern Province, these past five years, I had begun to notice this refrain getting louder and louder, the more people began to trust me. A weeping widow would confide that she did not know whether her son was alive or dead because she had not heard from him for over five years, ever since he had been sent off to the Vanni. "Why couldn't 'they' let him serve closer home", she would keep asking, "knowing that he is all I have?" Local peace activists would be more explicit noting darkly that more eastern 'boys' had sacrificed their lives for *eelam* than northern ones. Conversely, a northerner who had decided to take up residence in the East when faced with the incompetence of an easterner would mutter: "these guys would be nowhere if we had not come along and started NGOs and teaching in their university".

Not surprisingly, Karuna's declaration of independence has exacerbated what had previously been mere murmurings and rumblings of discontent. The populace in the East is split into those who are delighted that it has finally been articulated in public in such a dramatic and defiant manner and those who feel that it has led to unnecessary and unfortunate divisions within the community and the liberation movement as a whole (and of course many a variation between the two positions as well).

Besides the intra-LTTE battles and assassinations/counter-assassinations that this declaration has triggered, northerners also point to another significant outcome. Many of them no longer feel welcome or safe in the East and some have actually been asked to leave the East. It is still unclear how many families have actually returned to the North as the numbers increase or decrease based on which side one seeks to support. This is sadly reminiscent of another event of more tragic and gargantuan proportions. In October 1990, Muslims long domiciled in the North were chased out by the LTTE, with barely a few hours' notice. The easterners appear as the villains in the hegemonic narrative of this exodus as well: Such closeness was shared by the Tamils and Muslims of the North that LTTE cadre from the East had to be brought in to drive out the Muslims.

However, what I consider to be the most crucial outcome of Karuna's rebellion, an outcome that has been most consistently ignored by those in the South unfortunately, is that it also provided an unexpected space for parents to vent their anger against both LTTE factions, and reclaim their children. On April 10th, parents who had got word that Karuna was considering releasing most of his child combatants (prior to a possible battle with the Vanni group), went to the Meenaham training camp to claim their children. When Karuna's middle-level cadre started stalling, a large group of parents, and most significantly many mothers, became incensed. They set up a road block outside the camp and proceeded to beat up some of the LTTE cadre with bicycles and whatever else they could get their hands on until their children were released.

It is this collective act of resistance that catalysed the mass release of children from the rest of Karuna's training camps, on April 11th. Children poured out of these camps in their hundreds and thousands, throwing their rifles into the jungle, laughing and joking, jumping onto buses and cadging lifts from whatever vehicles they could stop so that they could get home as soon as possible. This was so unexpected that humanitarian aid organizations in the East are still unclear how many children were actually released that day as they were so ill prepared to adequately tabulate this magical exodus.

When the LTTE (Vanni group) began capturing children who had been released by the LTTE (Karuna group) or had surrendered to them, another group of parents stormed their camp in Kathiravelly, on April 13th, blocking the road with logs and branches and abusing senior cadre. Ironically, it was the subsequent release of children from this camp that earned encomiums for the LTTE (Vanni group) from UNICEF and BBC, neither group mentioning the pivotal role that had been played by parents (see UTHR Bulletin 36 for a scathing commentary on this lapse). But the memory of their heroism continues to strengthen the resolve of parents. One mother who recounted, with flashing eyes and dramatic gestures, how she flung branches to block the road swore: "I will not let my daughter go again as long as I have any breath left in this body".

This is the first time in the history of the Tamil liberation struggle that parents have stormed LTTE camps, en masse, and been able to take possession of their children as well as get all the other children released. The fact that they actually beat up LTTE cadre is even more extraordinary (one severely beaten woman LTTE cadre [Karuna group] had been so shaken by this encounter that she left the movement soon after). What is the reason for this dramatic shift?

For the past several years, Karuna and the eastern LTTE cadre had systematically carried out the mass conscription of children through extortion and force, as has been well documented by UTHR. With these horrific memories fresh in their minds, the parents were now trying to ensure that Karuna would follow through with his signal that he was no longer willing to go along with the exploitative relationship he shared with the northern leadership. In addition, it was becoming clear that the two LTTE factions were getting ready for a major showdown and the parents had no intention of seeing their children becoming cannon fodder in a battle for supremacy rather than one for the liberation of the Tamil people.

It is this kind of reasoning that has also given the parents courage to repeatedly ignore the Vanni group's announcements that they should attend meetings, and quickly destroy personalized letters they have received ordering them to hand over their children on specified dates (the recent Human Rights Watch statement also refers to this). Even those who did attend the meetings called by the Vanni group were bold enough to assert quite adamantly and in public that they do not wish to give their children back and nor do their children wish to return to the LTTE.

Not surprisingly, such resistance has greatly perturbed the Vanni group and they have sought to divide and conquer by promising monetary rewards to those who are willing to reveal which parents are hiding their children and where. Similarly, young girls who were quickly married off in the hopes of attaining some sort of protection or waiver have been asked to return along with their husbands (be they LTTE cadre or not) and offered Rs. 5000 as a reward for their compliance.

As the Vanni group is gradually decimated in the East by the Karuna group's calculated guerrilla attacks and assassinations, they have also begun to use more violent means to re-conscript such as assassinating children who have been sent away to safe houses, abducting children on their way to school, and re-starting night time visits to individual homes – oftentimes burning down homes, threatening parents and beating them senseless when they have refused to give up their children.

It is clear that the space for resistance that had opened up in April 2004 is fast dwindling, in the face of this latest onslaught by the Vanni group. However, what is heartening is that it is also clear that parents are determined to not give up hope and continue to seek every means possible to retain their children with them. Their resolve is further strengthened by the fact that they now actually have their children with them, to feed and fondle and just feast their eyes upon. Previously, the LTTE strategy was to dissipate their efforts to reclaim their offspring by promising them sporadic opportunities of visiting the camps to just catch a glimpse of their children or sending money so that their children would have a few comforts, such as a pillow and mat to sleep on, in the training camps.

Parents are mortgaging land and getting into debt so that they can send their children off to Colombo or India or the Middle East. Others who are even more destitute are desperately seeking the assistance of any humanitarian or UN agency that may be able to offer their children some protection. Yet, they also remain aware that "whatever piece of paper that is issued to our child (noting that the child has been returned voluntarily and cannot be re-conscripted) by UNICEF will be spat on by the LTTE as soon as their [UNICEF's] back is turned." In fact, one family which had requested that UNICEF intercede on their behalf, at their weekly meetings with the LTTE (Vanni group), noted that the intimidation had subsequently increased.

Interestingly, the ineffectuality of these international organizations seems to be what is also spurring these parents to form their own little groups, with the help of some extremely dedicated and committed local peace activists. These groups seek to keep themselves informed of which villages and families are being targeted by the LTTE (Vanni group), how effective or ineffective UNICEF has been in interceding on behalf of individual families, and whether they can come up with some collective strategies to thwart the re-conscription of their children. Efforts are also underway to involve the entire village so that this strategizing can move beyond individual interests and concerns. Or to put it another way, the brutalized peasants of the East are not 'potatoes in a sack', each family a single entity. Nor do these families always need to be represented, they can also represent themselves, when the need arises.

The formation of groups of families and village collectives is a very hopeful sign as all other humanitarian efforts have tended to individualize children and families. Be it in terms of protection,

intimidation, rehabilitation, re-schooling or vocational training, each child is constituted as a separate case. This has also led to a lot of friction within village communities. Those who bartered away all their possessions to the LTTE in order to keep back their children or those whose children are still languishing in a camp in the Vanni are resentful of the undue attention being showered upon the recently released child combatants, by NGOs and INGOs. The wistful comment of a little boy watching a young girl recently

released by the Karuna group riding a bicycle that had been gifted to her by an INGO particularly epitomises this disjuncture: "If I had joined the LTTE I could have got a bike like that too." This is not conducive to producing an environment for collective resistance. The kind of 'capacity building' we need in this country is the support and encouragement of more such collectives for that is the only way resistance can be strengthened and sustained. ■

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INDIAN ELECTIONS: A DEMONSTRATION FOR SOUTH ASIA

Rajan Philips

The BJP's surprising defeat and the smooth transfer of power to a new government of the United Progressive Alliance, with Manmohan Singh as India's first Sikh Prime Minister, have wider implications in the South Asian region. Apart from foreign policy and regional security implications, the Indian elections are also of politically demonstrative significance for all South Asian countries. Unlike most or all of its neighbours, India has been steadfast in its adherence to constitutional democracy. Among India's six South Asian neighbours, only Sri Lanka has held regular elections throughout the post-colonial period, but even Sri Lanka has become notorious for monkeying with its constitution. The recent elections demonstrate India's democratic depth, its reasonably successful transition from dominant-party governance to alliance-based governance, the electoral power of India's poor in challenging the presumptuous march of globalism, and the people's rejection of the BJP's persistent and systematic efforts to undermine the tradition of Nehruvian secularism.

"The Congress is the country and the country is the Congress", declared Jawaharlal Nehru in 1953, six years after India's independence. If it was inevitable that the Congress Party should eventually implode, it was also inevitable that the upshot of its disintegration would be the lack of an all-India replacement to it. And it has been so. Neither the present Congress nor the BJP can pretend to be a national party as the old Congress was. Regional parties have emerged to fill the void, and even parties with a national outlook, like the CPM, have become reliant on their regional bases. A single-party majority is no longer achievable, even without a proportional representation system as in Sri Lanka, and the Indian politicians have been forced to forming alliances to provide stable governance at the centre and in the states. Prime Minister Vajpayee, an enigmatic lone ranger on the right, has been particularly successful in forming and maintaining governing alliances. In him, the BJP found a moderate magnet to attract those disenchanted

with the decadent Congress, but who otherwise would have been repelled by the BJP's extreme Hindu nationalism.

The Congress and other secular political parties finally learnt the lesson of forming alliances and have now beaten the BJP at its own game. But to succeed as a government, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other Congress leaders will need all the political savvy given their inexperience in managing coalition governments. It is remarkable that the Congress accounts for only 147 seats, just over a quarter of the total Lok Sabha seats. Their pre-poll allies bring up the seat tally to 217, still below the half-way mark for a majority and making them depend on the Left Democratic Front for a secure parliamentary majority. The CPM continues to be puritanical in refusing to be part of the new government and the cabinet, but there is no mistaking the Left's resolve to provide a stable and secular alternative to the BJP. The Common Minimum Programme of the governing alliance is at least an indication of the new government's seriousness in identifying and facing what should be its most fundamental challenge in the light of the voters' rejection of the BJP. The same challenge is also confronting other South Asian countries, and it is the challenge of reconciling the imperatives of a global economy that selectively favours only a small section of the population, on the one hand, and the cultural and economic existential needs of others who constitute the majority, on the other.

The *Hindutva* movement in India, and its minuscule *Sinhalatva* imitation in Sri Lanka, are in favour of marrying unbridled global capitalism with a narrowly defined national culture, particularly religion. The two movements derive much of their sustenance from the materially prospering urbanites and the culturally alienated expatriates, neither of whom have any interest in or link to the mass of the urban and rural poor. Nor do they suffer any compunction in championing, on the one hand, Hindu or Buddhist nationalism, as the case may be, and supporting the current lopsided American policy in the Middle East under the most overtly

Christian-right Bush Administration, on the other. An interesting regional contrast is that in India the BJP promotes open capitalism and asecualism, whereas in Sri Lanka it is the pro-business UNP that portrays itself as being secular and minority-friendly. There is also the related difference between the Indian tradition in which secularism is conflated with socialism, and the Sri Lankan tradition where socialism has usually been a subordinate ally of exclusive Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

Viewed another way, the challenge facing the new governing alliance in India is also a great opportunity for reconciling globalism and mass priorities, as well as for accommodating religious pluralism within the framework of political secularism. Even the task of the 'socialists', if one might put it that way, should now be that of challenging global capitalism to address mass priorities and minimize the uneven appropriation of its benefits, rather than a religious pre-occupation with overthrowing a non-existent imperial capitalism. One aspect of globalism is the virtual monopoly over national policies and programmes that the World Bank and the IMF have come to exercise. The Washington policy gurus should be told to follow the logic of their own hectoring insistence on unbundling monopolies and local decision making and allow national governments to decide on national priorities. No other country in the non-western democratic world has the stature and the *gravitas* to do this except India. The BJP obviously listened too much to the Bank and the Fund fundamentalists in creating a whole Ministry of Disinvestment. In the past, India might have over-carried itself in predicating economic development primarily on the state, but there is no need now to blindly overreach in the opposite direction. The difference that the new government could make in this regard would be of benefit not only to India but also to its neighbours.

The second aspect of globalism poses an even tougher challenge. And that is of addressing the priorities of the majority of the population who are involved in agricultural production, again a major problem common to all South Asian countries. There have been no shortage of efforts in India to deal with the agrarian question under different policy regimes - the periodical Five Year Plans, the 1959 Nagpur Congress resolutions, the Green Revolution of the 1970s, and the more recent trade liberalization measures. But hundreds of millions of agricultural workers and the middle to lower stratum of peasants are still the victims of what might be called the 'double squeeze': the squeeze on the agrarian sector relative to other sectors of the economy, and the squeeze within the agrarian sector favouring the landlords and rich peasants at the expense of the workers and poor peasants. It would be anachronistic to envision agrarian reform in 2004, without involving the market, but if the BJP's defeat should mean anything, it is imperative for the government to provide a safety net for the farmers from the vagaries of weather and fluctuations in the global economy. The Common Minimum Programme's proposal to guarantee an annual minimum period of employment at minimum wages for every rural household on asset creating public works projects, appears to be a two-pronged strategy targeting both rural poverty and the need for rural infrastructure. In regard to the latter, the BJP's and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's defeats should be a lesson to other South Asian governments who disproportionately allocate resources to super-highways, tourism, subsidising five-star hospitals, urban enhancement and information technology, and abandon the rural sector to the mercy of the elements.

Needless to say, the prospects for religious pluralism and political secularism have been enhanced by the defeat of the BJP. BJP ideologues never missed an opportunity to challenge the premises and the validity of Nehruvian secularism. Throughout its period in office, the BJP government was persistent in the ideological contamination of India's education system. The Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, Jayaram Jayalalitha and Narendra Modi, enacted ill-advised anti-conversion laws in their respective states. Although the election was not a referendum on anti-conversion legislation, it is not unremarkable that Jayalalitha did not win a single Lok Sabha seat in Tamil Nadu and that the Congress made impressive gains in Gujarat. More importantly, stung by the election verdict, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister is retracting her anti-conversion law. There have been demand for similar anti-conversion laws in Sri Lanka, directed against Christian fundamentalists accused of converting Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity. In India, the anti-conversion campaign targets Christian, Buddhist and Islamic organizations accused of converting lower-caste Hindus to their respective religions. Hopefully, the message from Chennai will not be ignored in Colombo. While deliberately organised conversion efforts should not be condoned, there is equally no justification for enacting anti-conversion laws that will only breed bigotry and intolerance in society.

Secularism in India has its own historical and contextual meaning: it is quintessentially political and constitutional and thoroughly lacks the anti-clerical and de-ritualizing roots of Western secularism. Historically, as well, while Western nationalism arose at least partly as an antidote to official Christianity, indigenous religions became the defining matrices for the emergence of nationalism in South Asian societies under conditions of (Christian) colonial rule. India is preeminently religious and is infectiously ritual in its ways, and it will remain so. But India is also multi-religious, and it has demonstrated that as a multi-religious society it can survive and thrive without ceasing to be religious, but only insofar as religion is not politicised. It is the latter that Nehru sought to ensure through constitutional secularism, and what is more remarkable than the *Hindutva* opposition to Nehru is the passionate avowal of secularism by so many other Indians including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Dalits and the Communists.

Their acclamation of Sonia Gandhi to be Prime Minister was more a part of that avowal, and less an affirmation of dynasty. For her part, by gracefully declining to accept the premiership, Sonia Gandhi has taken the winds off BJP's protest plans and given a major fillip to the stability of the new government. Inadvertently, perhaps, and despite her 'foreign origin', she has also set an example for the dynastic women in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who take to politics more as the residual heirs of their families and less on the basis of their individual merits or political programmes, not to mention their lack of even a modicum of Asian feminist credentials. Not many countries in the world would legally allow a person of 'foreign origin' to be their Prime Minister, and unlike its South Asian neighbours India is back on the secular track - pursuing a vigorous alternative to self-destructing theocratic politics. At least in this regard, 'India Shining', the BJP's election blitz that went awry, has been given a valid meaning. ■

INDIAN ELECTIONS: A TIME TO BE HOPEFUL

Rohini Hensman

Thanks to its electorate, India's reputation as the world's largest democracy stands vindicated. Defying the pollsters and analysts, who with a few exceptions were predicting a sweep by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance even after the first phase of polling, voters took the opportunity to register their outright rejection of the politics of hatred and violence. How can we explain such a reversal of the BJP's fortunes?

Hype versus Reality

There were two basic planks in the BJP's election strategy. One was their 'India Shining' (in Hindi 'Bharat Uday') campaign, on which they spent over four-and-a-half billion rupees of public money: the picture of India as a prosperous, almost-developed country, doing well in every conceivable way. The other was a personal and sometimes extremely nasty attack on Sonia Gandhi, the leader of Congress, who has been an Indian citizen for more than twenty years but is Italian-born. The attacks on her ranged from saying that having her as Prime Minister would be like going back to foreign rule, to scurrilous statements by Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi to the effect that he would not employ any member of the family as a chauffeur, or rent them a house, etc.

Obviously, the electorate was not impressed. Part of the reason was a vigorous counter-campaign spearheaded by Sonia Gandhi, and the introduction of charismatic youngsters, especially Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi and Jyotirao Scindia, into the Congress fold. Sonia Gandhi also learned from the debacle in 1999, when Congress tried to go it alone, and this time crafted alliances with a range of secular parties. But these factors by themselves probably would not have been sufficient to shift the result dramatically. In many parts of the country, Congress waged a lack-lustre campaign. The final result was as much or more a negative vote against the BJP.

Most commentators felt that the 'India Shining' campaign and L.K.Advani's 'Bharat Uday Yatra' backfired. To the overwhelming majority of the population, struggling to obtain the bare necessities of life, these slogans could only seem like a cruel joke, emphasising the fact that they had no place in the BJP's India. And to a large number of activists who regarded the BJP as a threat to democracy, the whole campaign, as well as the unethical use of public money to plug a particular party, were obvious targets for criticism. For example, the 'Vote With Your Conscience' campaign based in Bombay brought together activists from various groups – Insaaniyat, Ekta, Insaf and the Forum Against Oppression of Women – who researched and produced a booklet and factsheets entitled 'Is India Really Shining?' in English, Hindi and Marathi. Widely distributed in Maharashtra but also sent out to other parts

of India, they demonstrated the hollowness of the so-called 'feel-good factor', providing factual justification for those who were not feeling so good and couldn't see the shine. The huge and mounting fiscal deficit and footloose foreign exchange underlying the supposedly shining economy, widespread malnutrition and actual starvation deaths while foodgrain stocks overflowed and rotted, denial of potable water to large sections of the population, systematic destruction of jobs in the formal sector, infant and child mortality rates worse than in many of the Least Developed Countries in Africa, per capita government expenditure on health way below the levels in Mexico, China or even Sri Lanka, high levels of illiteracy, especially among females, and by far the largest number of child workers in the world – as someone remarked, the picture could better be described as Darkness at Noon rather than India Shining!

Clearly, one thing evident from the election results is that people do not appreciate being treated as fools and fed with lies. Telling you that your country is shining after you have been left to starve and die is adding insult to injury, and anger is an understandable response.

Justice and Democracy Undermined

The other major issue taken up by non-party anti-BJP campaigners was the unleashing of communal hatred and violence by the party and its associates such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Much of this was all but invisible to those who were not tracking the movements of the RSS family: for example, inculcating communal prejudice in lakhs of schoolchildren, and taking over educational funding institutions in order to do the same at university and research institute levels. But the visible tip of the iceberg was the genocide in Gujarat which began in February 2002, and whose fallout is still very palpable in 2004. The methods used by the BJP to deal with this range from Narendra Modi's 'gaurav yatra' – a perverted affirmation of pride in the fact that thousands of rapists and murderers roamed free in Gujarat – to statements by Atal Behari Vajpayee and L.K.Advani that the carnage was a regrettable but inevitable consequence of the burning of a coach of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra.

Unfortunately for the BJP and fortunately for the activists campaigning against it, the Best Bakery case hit the headlines right in the middle of the four-phase elections. Fourteen people were burned alive when the Bakery was torched in Gujarat in March 2002. Survivor Zahira Sheikh filed cases against members of the BJP and associated organisations whom she identified as attackers,

but then retracted her charges, and all the accused were acquitted in court proceedings that were a travesty of justice, with prosecutor and judges on the side of the criminals and their henchmen intimidating the witness. Subsequently, encouraged and supported by Citizens for Justice and Peace, this courageous young woman revealed the harassment she had been subjected to, reiterated the charges, and appealed to the Supreme Court to have the case transferred out of Gujarat.

On 12 May 2004, Justices Pasayat and Raju passed a judgement not only granting her request, but also condemning what had happened in Gujarat in extremely strong language: 'When large numbers of people including innocent and helpless children and women are killed in a diabolic manner it brings disgrace to the entire society. Criminals have no religion. No religion teaches violence and cruelty-based religion is no religion at all, but a mere cloak to usurp power by fanning ill feeling and playing on feelings aroused thereby... The fanatics who spread violence in the name of religion are worse than terrorists and more dangerous than an alien enemy.' The police and judiciary were also criticised: 'The justice delivery system was allowed to be taken for a ride, abused, misused and mutilated by subterfuge. The investigation appears to be perfunctory and anything but impartial, without any definite object of finding out the truth and bringing to book those who were responsible for the crime,' and the state-appointed prosecutor was accused of acting more as a defence counsel! Most damning of all, perhaps, were the comments on Modi's government: 'The modern-day Neros were looking elsewhere when Best Bakery and innocent children and helpless women were burning, and were probably deliberating how the perpetrators of the crime can be saved or protected.'

Divergent Interpretations of Hinduism and Indian Culture

As lawyers pointed out, such criticism could easily justify dismissing the state government; the fact that the central government did nothing of the sort, but on the contrary used Narendra Modi in their campaigning, could only mean that the BJP-led NDA government condoned the destruction of justice and democracy that had been perpetrated in Gujarat. At a packed meeting organised by Insaaniyat in Bombay on 24 April to express public support for the judgement, hundreds of signatures were obtained for a statement saying that 'We, the undersigned, welcome the Supreme Court judgement of 12 April 2004 delivered by Justices Raju and Pasayat in the Best Bakery case as an example of all that is finest in our society and our judicial system... The judgement alerts us to the dire danger facing our democracy when 'fanatics who are worse than terrorists' are repeatedly excused not only by the police, judiciary and State Government of Gujarat but also by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of India. Justice is a central pillar of democracy; when the former is destroyed, the latter collapses. We value the Supreme Court's determination to restore the credibility of our judicial system in the eyes of the world and safeguard our democracy...'

The elections have been portrayed as a result of the rural poor voting against the BJP, but this tells only part of the story. The BJP did no better in major metropolitan centres; for example in Bombay and Delhi, where Congress had virtually drawn a blank in 1999, the tables were turned in 2004. The urban poor as well as sections of the middle classes and even the elite rejected the NDA this time, and at least part of the reason is the alarm aroused by the BJP's abandonment of the rule of law. Participants in the Insaaniyat meeting were an unlikely combination of the usual feminist, trade unionist and Leftie suspects, with academics, film actors and directors, artists, legal luminaries and even representatives of the corporate world. Two days later, the largely elite constituency of Bombay South voted out a veteran BJP candidate in favour of a Congress greenhorn. It is certainly true that members of minority communities, especially Muslims, voted almost en bloc against the BJP, but this alone cannot account for the rejection of the NDA by a majority of the population.

Conversely, the possibility that Italian-born Sonia Gandhi might become Prime Minister, which most commentators saw as more or less clinching a BJP victory, does not seem to have bothered most voters. Indeed, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, where Modi and Jayalalita waged a virulent campaign against her, were among the states where the NDA suffered major reversals. As CPI(M) leader Jyoti Basu pointed out, Sonia Gandhi is as much an Indian citizen as anyone else, and the racist definition of citizenship which the BJP and others like Jayalalita endorsed is not Constitutional. Faced with a choice between a foreign-born Indian who was defending democracy and an Indian-born Indian who was undermining it, the majority of voters opted for the former.

There is a clear contrast here between the conception of Indian culture as inclusive and diverse, which was affirmed by the electorate, as against the narrow, exclusive definition of the RSS and BJP, which was rejected. And it is surely significant that a majority of Hindus rejected the violent, communal interpretation of their religion fostered by the RSS in favour of a more broad-minded and humane interpretation. This was a vote for a secular, democratic vision of Hinduism and Indian culture as much as it was a rejection of the callous elitism of the BJP.

Role of the Left

The Left Front played a critical role in the defeat of the BJP by rejecting the idea of a Third Front - which in previous elections had split the secular vote and enabled the BJP to come to power - and by pledging its support to a Congress-led government. Emerging with over sixty seats, it was the third largest alliance, and its ability to work out a feasible programme with Congress will be crucially important to the stability of the new government. One obvious area in which their interests coincide is in stamping out the political influence of Hindu nationalism as much as possible. Clamping down on hate propaganda, for example. And an intervention in schools, where the Left has been curiously inactive,

thus leaving the arena wide open for the RSS. Providing all children with at least a good, secular elementary education and ensuring that secondary and higher education is along similar lines would go a long way towards wiping out the retrograde influence of the RSS in education. The fact that Murli Manohar Joshi (the fanatical Hindu nationalist Human Resource Development Minister in the BJP government) actually lost his seat indicates that there is a democratic mandate for such a step. Having reduced history to myth and introduced Vedic mathematics and Astrology as Science, it was his attempt to take control of the Indian Institutes of Management that finally alerted the elites in the country to what he was doing to education. A systematic reversal of his policies as well as an all-out drive to satisfy the right of all children to a rational, scientific education should certainly be part of any common agenda.

It is in the area of the economy that problems are likely to arise. But these need not be insurmountable, so long as both Congress and the Left are willing to go back to first principles. At Independence, Congress stood for social justice and welfare, and if it returns to these principles, updated to the conditions of the 21st century, it could chalk out a programme which the Left can support. Conversely, the Left parties originated in a Marxist outlook that was internationalist to the core, and if they return to the idea of working for a just and caring global order rather than confining themselves to a narrow economic nationalism, they can fight for a programme that Congress could support. For example, the Public Distribution System needs to be revamped in order to eliminate not only starvation deaths but also widespread malnutrition, and basic healthcare should be available to all: these can be points in a common programme. Laws like the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which embody a violation of democratic rights, need to be repealed. The systematic assault on workers' rights, to the point where even the less-than-seven-per-cent who still have some rights were expecting to lose them if the NDA came back to power, needs to be decisively reversed. If this is done by insisting that workers not only in India but in every country of the world are entitled to at least the rights guaranteed by the ILO Core Conventions, India will not lose investment nor become less competitive as a result. Bringing all workers within the orbit of labour legislation would automatically create employment by reducing inordinately long

working hours (currently estimated at around 12 per day) to the statutory limit of 48 per week, and even more employment could be generated by reducing this limit to 40 per week and assisting the formation of workers' cooperatives, both rural and urban. Constitutional guarantees of equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, caste, religion, or any other difference should be embodied in legislation and enforced meticulously. Very modest changes, none of which are against the principles of either Congress or the Left, and yet, if they are introduced, it would constitute nothing less than a revolution.

This would also be an appropriate time to strengthen and develop regional cooperation among the SAARC countries, eliminating trade and immigration barriers in the region. Perhaps the most positive outcome of the recent India-Pakistan one-day and test cricket series in Pakistan was the number of Indians who came back entranced by the warmth and hospitality of the Pakistanis. One cricket enthusiast who was interviewed on television said that a single day in Pakistan was enough to wipe out twenty-five years of prejudice: 'It's a lovely place,' he concluded. Making South Asia a visa-free zone would encourage far more people-to-people contact, and create an appropriate framework for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. In general, the new government should reorient India's foreign policy to support human rights internationally, distancing India once again from the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide perpetrated by the US and Israel.

In many ways, the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections has been the best that could possibly have been envisaged under the circumstances. Taking this advantage further depends almost as much on the Left parties and non-party Left as on the government. Manmohan Singh has promised economic reforms with a human face, and we might reverse the priorities: social reforms without plunging the economy into crisis. But there is space for negotiation, provided the government practises budgetary transparency and activists take the trouble to specify where the money for social spending should come from. After long years of near-despair, it is a time to be hopeful. ■

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PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AS AN IDEA

Purushottam Agrawal

Peaceful co-existence seems to have caught the fancy of the political establishments in south Asia. We South Asians have been treated to such staple diet of war-mongering and hate-speech within and outside the boundaries of the nation-states, particularly for the last decade, that it is indeed heartening to listen to the peace rhetoric of the “hawks” in the wake of the recently-concluded SAARC summit. So much so that the ruling party in this country has every intention of hard-selling its “peace initiative” in the impending general elections. Obviously this is a result of its own reading of the public support for the idea. Whether they will undertake a peace initiative in domestic matters as well is a different matter.

Such an initiative will, first of all require a credible “justice” factor! (A favourite phrase in the Indian media these days is a so-called ‘feel-good’ factor). The idea of peace minus a sense of justice cannot last. This presupposes a critique of social and governmental systems, as well as of the dominant ideas in any society. Particularly so in south Asia where the international conflicts are clearly connected to domestic issues. Without such a critique, even peaceful co-existence between nation-states can at best be a “controlled” one. Peace initiatives from above are not going to be stable, as by definition these are occasioned by the political calculations of the ruling groups, who wish to keep both peace and war buttons handy – just in case! Thus, while New Delhi’s political leaders were talking of peace with Pakistan, on December 23rd 2003, in Gorakhpur, a meeting of visiting Pakistani farmers with their Indian counterparts was disrupted. The disruptionists were members of the so-called ‘Hindu-Vahini - part of the extended ‘Sangh-paruvar’. Clearly, misgivings persist, and many people thrive on generating conflict by manipulating such misgivings.

Silent or Vibrant Peace?

Any lasting peace between people and nation states depends not on initiatives rooted in the fluctuating interests of the ruling establishments but on building a commonsense in favour of co-existence which simultaneously builds upon and critiques local peace-making initiatives. *This commonsense must be based on a clear distinction between Silent and Vibrant Peace.* Silent peace is based on hegemony and dominance, while vibrant peace implies justice and fairplay. Silent peace can be imagined as co-existence between putative leaders and representatives of the people (“natural leaders of the community as the colonialist rulers named them), wherein all dominant ideas and symbolic structures of power are put beyond democratic enquiry. Such a ‘peace’ also involves threats from the state towards those who want to democratize that *peace – breakers* are violently opposed to the ideals of social justice, the

rule of law and secular citizenship. We need to study their methods and take care of concerns that they manipulate in order to generate conflicts.

Vibrant peace on the other hand does not merely mean the absence of conflict. It involves rational dialogue between contesting viewpoints, a space wherein we appeal to the adversary without intending harm, and fearing it. As a process, this kind of peace is linked to justice as a social goal, and to the institutionalization of social democracy. In other words, vibrant peace cannot be delinked from attempts of transforming political democracy into social democracy.

Co-existence for what? Co-existence of whom?

We must go beyond studying “institutionalized riot mechanisms” and “institutionalized peace mechanisms.” Such mechanisms certainly play a role in social conflicts, but more challenging is the role played by ideas and their propagation through formal and informal channels. Even humane ideas like tolerance of difference, and co-existence with diversity can be manipulated and made to serve the worst vested interests. It will be helpful, then to examine the concept of peaceful co-existence.

We may begin with the simple question: Co-existence for what and of whom? This is one of many ways to approach the present crisis, a crisis felt by anyone concerned with the future of humankind. On one hand we have a one-way flow of capital in the name of Globalization, on the other we have the perceived threat to traditions and cultures emanating (allegedly) from the same process. We have growing contests and conflicts between cultural identities and ethnicities – in some cases even making the nation-state an outdated idea. All aspects of this crisis are underwritten by implicit and explicit violence.

Ideological responses to crises of an extreme nature tend to be extreme themselves. So we have the “clash of civilizations” theory, and we have people who wish to defend ‘traditional’ cultures. In spite of the conflicting political positions of these two approaches, there is an underlying commonality of method here. Both presume ‘essential’ communities and cultures, both deny the possibility of a transformative dialogue between cultures and civilizations. This might also be the result of responding to a crisis in terms of its own logic and language, or of trying to ‘manage’ crises.

An excessive dependence on these responses proves counter-productive even for the “management” approach, to say nothing of radical change or transformation. Most of the time the

perpetrators of the crisis situation find it convenient to respond in a 'piecemeal' manner to its immediate, direct manifestations. The present communal situation in India is a case in point. A situation has deliberately been created wherein every political actor indulges in one-upmanship for proving nationalist credentials. Therefore we need some calm reflection on culture. We need to avoid extreme positions and look for transformative dialogue, to explore new ethics and new ideas about humanity. In other words, we need to face the question: *co-existence between whom and for what?*

This is a question faced by "development workers" as well as by academics. How do we see cultures that we want to co-exist? Can we see these as "inviolable individual selves", best left to develop according to their own values? From the premium put on diversity and difference these days (in the political imagery of resistance to "grand narratives" of modernity), it would seem that the value that we once placed on the classical free-born individual has been shifted to the cultural identity of ethnic groups. This glorification of primordial and constructed identities leads to a politics wherein each culture has a protected space for its identities leads to a politics wherein each culture has a protected space for its symbols and meanings. Co-existence then becomes a state wherein every culture can adhere to its own values without being subject to any critical enquiry. In fact *enquiry as such* is seen as an "authoritarian" attempt to impose alien values on the culture in question.

Power and Culture

Concern for preserving cultural space against euro-centric enlightenment is valid, but the question of tyranny *within* cultures is no less important. Had culture been a matter only of food and dress etc., advocacy an un-interrogated co-existence would be easy for us all. But cultures are also mechanisms of controlling access to resources – not only economic ones but also political, aesthetic, spiritual and moral resources. Most people in any given culture are denied participation and agency. Power structures become accepted by people as something "natural" and normal. Their responses to situations are "borne out of their own volition", but could be the result of dominant perceptions. They are certainly linked to mechanisms of resource control. Someone who has long been denied the intellectual and moral strength to ask questions is not likely to ask for a share in economic resources and for a say in secular matters.

Unlike forms of oppression by the modern state-system that are rooted in instrumentalist conceptions of rationality, the control of resources in cultural systems is made possible by what has been described as "processes of informality" and "the currency of sentiment". *Symbols* become mechanisms for controlling resources among people who share symbols even while they have conflicting interests. Culture becomes a universe of shared symbols which provides a sweet camouflage for conflicting interests and power contests. Thus cultural mask of power is converted into something 'sacred' in a process that is not 'natural' but political. Hegemonic

value systems by which (economic, aesthetic, spiritual) resources are controlled, are turned into something commonsensical, even eternal. In other words, secular power arrangements are made to appear divine, timeless and sacred.

When we talk of peaceful co-existence, are we talking of co-existence between various masks of power? Clifford Geertz has remarked, "What all sacred symbols assert is that the good for man is to live realistically; where they differ is in the vision of reality they construct." (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, Fontana 1993). It is tempting to accord the same validity to all "visions of reality." But is this temptation ethically justified? Should we not interrogate sacred symbols? The democratic idea of co-existence can be made to serve oppressive traditions as well as the interests of the state. We see such manipulation of symbols everywhere. A critique of 'multiculturalism' as advocated by New Labour in the UK puts the same issue succinctly:

For the Asian community in Britain, Labour's decision to extend single-faith state schools among ethnic minorities, especially in the deprived areas, is a continuation of its policy of strengthening the most reactionary elements in the community. By defining 'ethnic minorities' in terms of their religion (as 'faith communities'), the state has unquestioningly accepted the claims of male religious leaders to speak for all Asians in Britain.

Is this not true of Asia even more disturbingly? In India, people who have not been put to any rational test of representation are supposed to speak for entire communities of "Hindus" and "Muslims" – and not only on so-called matters but on issues of crucial import for the political process and civil society

Co-existence and Civil Society

Clearly there is a need to ask some ethical questions. Do we want co-existence between self-appointed representatives of cultural identities and authoritarian values that refuse to submit to questioning from within or without? As Edward Said put it, "Within each civilizational camp, we will notice, there are official representatives of that culture or civilization who make themselves into it's mouthpiece, who assign themselves the role of articulating 'our' (or for that matter 'their') essence." (*Reflections on Exile*, Penguin, 2001) The idea of co-existing cultures free from ethical scrutiny is a beneficial tool for all authoritarian representatives of culture and identity. If we go beyond their claims, it is not difficult to see that each culture contains a hierarchy of values as well as a challenge to the same. The question that arises before advocating co-existence is: what kind of hierarchy of values do we want to see?

It is important to note that much of the current discourse of co-existence seems to privilege diversity in itself. Gandhiji used to say (in a different context) that true economics is the economics of justice. Wonder if we can expand on that and say that true culture

is the culture of justice. In other words, diversity ought to be seen as a pre-requisite for ethical action towards a just social order. It is in this sense that a dialogue between cultures (and contestants in every situation) opens up possibilities of achieving truly humane universal values. These can act as a standard for evaluating practices within and across cultures. The same is true for conflict situations in south Asia, within the boundaries of nation states as well outside.

Civil society initiatives can make this dialogue happen. Such initiatives need democratic institutional structures. What kind of dialogue may we hope for when those who swear by the constitution preside over the breakdown of constitutional machinery? For us to facilitate the emergence of a vibrant peace, we need the sustained advocacy of social democracy. The focus has to shift from silent peace to vibrant peace, from the politics of symbols to the politics of resources. Without such a shift, I am afraid, we might end up advocating a zoological diversity instead of a humane one.

Finally, do we have a credible alternative to Satyagraha to achieve a diversity based on universal values of justice and compassion? As Gandhi put it, "Satyagraha is a method of carrying conviction

and of converting by an appeal to reason and to the sympathetic cords in human beings. It relies upon the ultimate good in every human being, no matter how debased he may be for the time being" (CWMG, Vol 45 in p. 221-222). Defined thus, attempts to resolve conflicts non-violently, with a sense of justice and fairplay, is an act of rational faith – faith that "the universe is on the side of justice", as Martin Luther King put it. Undoubtedly, violent methods bring about changes in the social situation, but more often than not, these changes end up re-inforcing the given power structures. As Hannah Arendt said way back in 1969, "The practice of violence like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world."

If there is a slowly growing climate of peace these days, let us not doubt that it is because various establishments have realized that civil society in South Asia is tired of permanent conflict and is stirring towards civic action. Ours is a small contribution to the evolution of a dynamic and vibrant peace in our country and in our region. We hope this project will help build new bridges, and think fresh approaches towards a just and humane social order. ■

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Seneeli Kuttigoda

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: ILLUSIONS OF GREATNESS

Rajan Philips

America warmed itself for the last time to ‘get one for the Gipper’. The meticulously choreographed state funeral for President Reagan gave millions of Americans a nostalgia for sunshine amidst the dark uncertainties of the Iraq war and nagging fears of a world going terrorist mad against America. In his death, as during his days as President between 1980 and 1988, Ronald Reagan made Americans feel good and be hopeful of good times. Ronald Reagan’s greatness as President, if at all, was in exuding warmth and charming even those who saw through his shallowness to suffer him gladly. He soothed a nation that had gone sore to its core, after Vietnam, Watergate and Iran. That he stared down world communism is bombast at best. The record is mixed in regard to the economic policies that he ‘communicated’, famously known as Reaganomics.

To America and the world, Reagan personified ‘the good, the bad and the ugly’ that America is and can be. For a ‘great president’, his pre-presidential career resume was rather skimpy: baseball commentator, Hollywood supporting actor, ideological preacher for General Electric, and two-term California Governor. The locus, though unimpressive, is indicative of the development of Reagan’s show skills and ideological substance before he came to Washington. The goodness of America is in its scope and opportunities for someone like Reagan from humble beginnings in the isolated Midwest to make it to the top, fulfilling the ‘American dream’. What is bad about the American society is the (Republican) emphasis on ideological celebration and material protection of individual success and unrestricted market economy while leaving to their own devices the victims of inequity and inequality in the sharing of the nation’s wealth. Reaganomics, Thatcherism and the so called supply-side economics share the same bad premise and purpose. American ugliness has usually been more external than internal, but whether passive isolationism or active realpolitik, American foreign policy has always tended to reflect what is good and bad inside America. Perhaps no one after Secretary John Foster Dulles (under President Eisenhower) raised the moral and ideological decibels of American foreign policy rhetoric as President Reagan did.

Mr. Reagan became the 40th President of the United States at the age of 69, the oldest American to take office. This was a major factor in his popularity with the public and even those who opposed his policies could not bring themselves to castigate him as they would have with a younger president. At 69, he was hardly a threat to aspiring Republicans or a source of envy to adversarial Democrats. They could not even make their criticisms stick. He

was the Teflon President, the nation’s grandfather who meant no ill will and could be forgiven for his foibles. His easygoing and laidback acting style was a welcome change after the overserious and detail-driven Jimmy Carter, whose background was in engineering and not acting. In a monarchical democracy, wrote Jennings, the people could cheer the king or queen and damn the government. In Reagan’s America, the people cheered him and damned his staff. Auto-delegation of governmental tasks was inevitable under Reagan, and packaging the President for presentation that began under Reagan has continued with his successors.

Reagan’s great skill in ‘communicating’ is usually attributed to his training as an actor, and his ability to render scripted lines with aplomb and apparent sincerity. He also had another career between acting and politics. After Hollywood and before becoming the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan was the spokesman for General Electric, the giant industrial enterprise. The job had nothing to do with corporate representation but had everything to do with doing a sales pitch for American capitalism. At \$165,000 a year in the 1950s, Reagan’s duties included speaking at GE factories around the country, and introducing the weekly TV show ‘General Electric Theatre’ with his ‘Speech’. It was his own ‘Speech’ that transformed Reagan from hitherto liberal democratic leanings and antipathy to big business (Reagan had been a great admirer of Franklin Roosevelt and considered John F. Kennedy as his favourite President) to become a champion of big business and Republican campaigner. GE’s agenda was to root out the possibility of Americans ever considering alternatives to market capitalism. Although the experiences of Stalin’s communist orthodoxy in the Soviet Union had totally killed the chances of a socialist challenge becoming viable in western democracies (despite early promises in France and Italy), the American big business was not prepared to take any chances.

At a personal level, his biographical accounts have noted that Reagan had developed a mechanism of emotional insularity arising from his troubled childhood experiences under an alcoholic father and an emotionally aloof mother. It has been suggested that beyond scripted performances Reagan was incapable of genuine empathy. He was also a split personality. He is known to have naturally taken to mixing with black boys while growing up at a time when racial mixing was not tolerated, but he could not bring himself to identifying himself with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and President Johnson’s efforts towards affirmative programs favouring African Americans. As well, during the dreadful days of

Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist witch hunt, Reagan did not countenance the strong arm tactics used against Hollywood actors but that did not prevent him from being an FBI informant on alleged communist activities in the film industry. Even as President, it took a while for him to accept that 'acid rain' is not some liberal mumbo jumbo but an actual result of atmospheric pollution. He dismissed AIDS as a problem of homosexual lifestyle and not warranting government resources for research and treatment programs, until his friend and fellow actor Rock Hudson announced that he was afflicted with the disease and he was gay. In a benevolent twist of irony, medical activists are now planning to use the name of President Reagan, the most prominent victim of Alzheimer's, to pressure the Bush administration to allow the use of embryonic stem cells in biomedical research for the purpose of fighting diseases like the Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and the diabetes.

Reagan's political 'greatness' was in uniting the good and the bad in America in the cause of Republican electoral success. He expanded and solidified the American constituency called 'Republican Democrats', a cohort that had already begun to emerge during the 1952 and 1956 elections, in support of Dwight Eisenhower, the World War II hero and the Presidential victor against the more liberally substantive Democratic opponent, Senator Adlai Stevenson. Reagan wooed the Democratic middle and working class voters to vote for him while clobbering away at big government as the nation's biggest problem. His answer during his two terms as President was Reaganomics - the four pronged reductions in income tax, government spending, government regulations and the money supply. He cut income tax by 25% and introduced deregulations in a number of areas, but the claim that tax cuts and deregulation will fuel economic growth is still best described as 'voodoo economics', as President George Bush (Sr) famously put it while running against Reagan for Republican nomination and before becoming Reagan's Vice President. The Clinton administration was more modest in attributing America's impressive economic growth under Clinton's watch more to the electronic revolution than to White House policies. Yet by Reagan's own yard stick, Clinton brought down the budget deficit and started registering surpluses, whereas under Reagan the deficit rose by 86% from the previous Carter administration. For, while reducing

the taxes, Reagan also increased the government expenditure almost entirely in defence. He neglected social programs, while unemployment rose and the minimum wage froze, and for the first time after the war American economic growth began to produce regressive results. The rich grew richer and the poor went poorer. The household incomes of working families stayed stable because women went out to work on menial jobs. Homelessness grew as psychiatric patients were prematurely released from hospitals suffering government cutbacks.

The Reagan followers now claim that it was Reagan's military expansion and economic success that forced the Soviet Union to implode. Between Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan, it was the former who accelerated the end of the cold war with his rapid disarmament proposals. Reagan, on the other hand, egged on by Pentagon and against the State Department advice, was stubborn in his disbelief of the Soviets and slow to respond until American and world opinion forced him to. As for the collapse of communism, even Gorbachev had less to do with it and for all his catalytic efforts he is least liked in his own country. Nonetheless, Reagan's blind spot on communism led him to disastrous overseas blunders especially Central America. The nadir of Reagan's anti-communist crusade came with the Iran-Contra scandal in 1986, when it was exposed that the Reagan administration had been illegally selling arms to Iran and using the money to supply arms to the fight against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The scandal led to Congressional hearings and the resignation (John Poindexter) and firing (Oliver North) of Reagan's staff, but the Teflon President escaped unscathed though blemished.

In truth, Reagan's greatness is less the result of his achievements than the hype of his faithful fans and their Ronald Reagan Legacy Project to have him memorialized not only in every one of the 3,067 counties in all 50 American states, but also throughout the world, and especially in Eastern Europe which they believe he saved from communism. Outside America, they have so far succeeded only in getting a street roundabout named after him in a small Polish town. The truth also is that there have been and there will be other American Presidents better known and respected in the rest of the world than Ronald Reagan. ■

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TEACHING PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN EXPERIMENT IN SRI LANKA

Simon Harris and Nick Lewer

Introduction

In April 2004, twenty students from a variety of backgrounds including the police, military, clergy, local government administration, international and domestic NGO sectors, graduated from the first academic course on peace and conflict resolution to be conducted in Sri Lanka. The *Post-Graduate Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness* is implemented by the Peace Studies Programme of the Sri Lankan research and educational institute the Social Scientists' Association (SSA), and is validated and awarded by the Department of Peace Studies¹, University of Bradford, UK

The PG Diploma was conceived through a recognition that those tasked with the job of actually making peace 'work' in Sri Lanka – such as the middle level decision-makers, NGO personnel, managers, administrators and security forces - generally had no practical or theoretical bases from which to help them address the complex issues that face a transitional society emerging from years of protracted conflict. The course aimed to provide people, especially those living and working in conflict affected areas of Sri Lanka, with the opportunity to develop their understanding of such challenges by developing an informed and applied framework for peace preparedness and conflict resolution.

After two years of operations and the graduation of the first batch of students, the Peace Studies Programme-SSA, the University of Bradford, and the Diploma's funders are assessing the impact of the Diploma against stated purpose and goals. The purpose of the diploma was given as:

To enhance the professional development, awareness and understanding of government, military, LTTE and civil society managers in the field of conflict resolution, peace preparedness and post-conflict planning.²

The broader goal of the course was the hope that this awareness and understanding would ultimately translate into the practical and tangible application of conflict resolution, peace preparedness and post-conflict planning concepts and strategies by the Diploma programme students.

This briefing paper summarises the development, content, and delivery of the *Post Graduate Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness* and outlines the methodology that the programme is employing to assess the courses' peace related impact.

Development

The concept of conducting a peace related diploma programme in Sri Lanka developed through a series of discussions over a number of years between the authors. Both have been involved in research, conflict resolution and peace building initiatives, development projects, and training programmes in Sri Lanka since the early 1990's working with agencies such as Oxfam GB, DFID, Cordaid, Quaker Peace and Service, and Peace Brigades International. This 'hands-on' experience revealed that there was a limited domestic resource base or opportunity for grounded academic peace studies and conflict resolution courses. This was particularly so for local government, military and civil society institutions who were working in the most conflict affected and potentially volatile areas of Sri Lanka. Discussions with Sri Lankan colleagues indicated that there was a great demand for an internationally recognised academic course which would equip people with the knowledge and skills to analyse the potential peace and conflict impacts of their work programmes and activities, to design and initiate measures that would reduce the likelihood of conflict and maximise the potential for peace, and for their personal and professional development.

Although numerous short training programmes and workshops in various aspects of peace building and conflict resolution had been offered by both local and international organisations for a number of years, it was felt that these offered only one-off, isolated and limited introductions to a particular aspect of the peace studies and conflict resolution field. Training workshops covered topics such as negotiation skills, peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) and non-violent communication skills. Whilst these are valuable in their own right, what was missing was a sustained, comprehensive, integrated and well resourced process of learning which combined conceptual and theoretical elements with practice. At the same time it was noted that none of the Sri Lankan universities had yet developed either an under-graduate or post-graduate level stand-alone peace studies or conflict resolution

programme, although elements of conflict resolution and associated subjects formed parts of courses such as law, political science and human rights. Whilst plans were emerging within the University of Colombo it was felt that these were likely to target students within easy access of Colombo. It was evident that there was a gap in the market for a high calibre programme of academic study in applied conflict resolution and peace preparedness which was accessible to people living and working in 'outstation' areas affected by conflict, and who under such circumstances would usually not have access to such a course.

The ensuing collaboration between the Department of Peace Studies (University of Bradford) and the Peace Studies Programme (Social Scientists' Association) brought together over twenty local and international academics and practitioners to design a PG Diploma course appropriate for the Sri Lankan context of conflict and post-conflict transformation. A core curriculum design team developed an outline of eight modules and then invited faculty from Sri Lankan universities and non-governmental organisations to produce a series of comprehensive module handbooks. These modules were:

- Conflict Dynamics and Conflict Analysis (10 Credits, Compulsory)
- Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice (10 Credits, Compulsory)
- Human Rights, Reconciliation and Justice (10 Credits, Optional)
- Peace, Conflict and Development (10 Credits, Optional)
- Gender, Peace and Conflict (10 Credits, Optional)
- Religion and Conflict Transformation (10 Credits, Optional)
- Culture and Conflict (10 Credits, Optional)
- Comparative Peace Processes (10 Credits, Optional)
- Project Dissertation (60 Credits, Compulsory)

Their brief was to construct modules which were of Diploma level standard and whose content supported the purpose of the Diploma as stated above. Whilst importance was to be given to aspects of study which would enable students to critically analyse the Sri Lankan conflict and peace processes, and to conceptually and practically understand the key issues and challenges of resolving conflict and laying the foundations for peace, lessons from international experience and case studies were to be included. The completed modules were subject to the usual rigorous scrutiny by University of Bradford academic committees and quality assurance procedures before being finalised. The result, a *Post Graduate Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness*, registered its first batch of students in April 2003 on fully paid scholarships with the support of the British Governments' Global Conflict Prevention Pool fund.³

Implementation

Under the British university system, it is not necessary for applicants to a PG Diploma to have an undergraduate degree. This was important for the rationale underpinning the programme,

since it was recognised that many of the potential students would not have had access to either local or international higher education due to the restrictions of cost, career and because of living in conflict areas. Careful consideration was therefore given to candidates work experience as well as their academic ability. Selection was based on oral and written English language comprehension and fluency, aptitude to study at a post-graduate diploma level, motivation, residential proximity to teaching sites and likely contribution to peace building and conflict reduction through the candidates work or community involvement. Approximately four hundred applications were received for just twenty places in each of the two teaching locations, Vavuniya and Matara, which are located in outlying districts that have, or had experienced, different dimensions of Sri Lanka's complex conflict. Vavuniya is a multi-ethnic government controlled town in the north central region of Sri Lanka that lies just south of border with the LTTE controlled areas of the Wannu. It is a highly militarised area with a large number of internally displaced people, many who live in IDP camps. Matara is a city located on the south coast of Sri Lanka in an area that experienced much violence during the JVP insurrection of 1988/89. The southern region is still associated with conflictual politics, religious and ethnic tensions. Diploma lectures were conducted on the premises of UNHCR in Vavuniya and a local NGO, INDECOS, in Matara. Both premises were made available free of charge by the respective organisations who recognised the value and benefit of such an educational experience for the local communities.

Of the nine modules three are compulsory for all students (Conflict Dynamics and Conflict Analysis, Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice, and the Project Dissertation) and students were then required to select four of the remaining modules. The Diploma was delivered between April 2003 and April 2004, with each module taught over four consecutive weekends at each site. Modules consisted of 100 hours of study divided between lectures, seminars, guest speakers and directed study. Teams of two lecturers (who had developed the module material) conducted the courses with the support of a number of guest lecturers. Students had access to a comprehensive library offering over two hundred titles, remotely accessed through a weekly mobile service from Colombo in addition to module hand-outs and an introductory package of core text materials. A local tutor was assigned to each student to provide support in study skills, the development of essays, and a project dissertation.

Impact Assessment

To what extent has the *PG Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness* achieved its stated objectives? The full impact may not be known for some years as graduates develop in their careers, and hopefully engage in and influence different aspects of policy and practice in a peace and conflict sensitive manner. Impact assessment was an integral aspect of the diploma programme's design from its inception encompassing three criteria: quality, performance and impact.

- **Quality:** The academic quality of the course as a professional learning experience capable of developing the students' knowledge, understanding and skills in the required discipline.
- **Performance:** The development or progression of the student over the period of the course indicating a conceptual understanding of the material covered.
- **Impact:** The direct and indirect influence of the course and the students' learning on the external environment (peers, workplace, other institutions etc).

These criteria are interrelated. Effective student performance cannot be achieved without the provision of a quality assured programme. Similarly, the basis of a student's capacity to effect some level of external impact will be contingent upon his/her ability to adequately comprehend and apply the learning.

The three criteria are evaluated using nine different external, internal and student self assessment instruments which combine both quantitative and qualitative indicators:

University of Bradford Quality Assurance: Since the Diploma is validated and awarded by the University it is responsible for ensuring that the quality of the Diploma in Sri Lanka adheres to quality requirements and regulations as laid down in University regulations. So, the Diploma and its modules are continually monitored and evaluated through processes such as the school academic committee, a Course Approval and Review Team, and the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). The latter is a key check for the University which ensures that quality assurance and enhancement processes are embedded into operational management. The process of preparing an analytical annual monitoring report enables the Bradford Course Co-ordinator and the SSA to formally:

- identify existing strengths and/or difficulties which may present challenges;
- report on changes that have occurred as a result of monitoring;
- report on actions that have been taken during the course of the academic session under review and
- prepare an 'action plan' to identify planned future developments

Student module and course evaluations: These provide a students perspective on the quality, content and usefulness of the individual modules, the overall course, and the performance of the lecturers involved. The information is used to provide feed-back to the teaching staff and to identify areas of course content and delivery that need to be improved or revised.

Student progression: Academic performance is assessed by module essays and a project dissertation. These demonstrate a students conceptual understanding of the material and their ability to critically apply this to a particular problem or issue. It is expected

that students will improve their grades as their critical intellectual capabilities develop during the course.

University of Bradford assessment missions: The programmes' academic and administrative systems are regularly reviewed by visits from the UoB Co-ordinator. Teaching venues are visited and interviews conducted with the programme managers, lecturers, student supervisors, students and local external examiner.

QAA assessment missions: The British Governments' Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE) regularly conducts assessments of all UK university validated courses at home and abroad. The QAAHE mission investigates all aspects of a course and is regarded as the most rigorous independent assessment of an academic programme. The PG Sri Lanka Diploma was visited by a QAAHE team in May 2004⁴.

Learning impact assessment: Questionnaires and semi-formal interviews with students and a selection of student peers, superiors and subordinates in order to help determine the wider impact of an individual's learning.

Alumni assessment: Graduates from the course are invited to join an alumni which is hoped will provide a platform for continued learning, exchange and development. A follow-up workshop for alumni twelve months after graduation will focus on students' self-assessment of institutional impact.

External Impact Indicators: The delivery of this course in a conflict affected / post-conflict context is a unique and innovative educational experience whose impact may extent beyond that effected by the students / graduates themselves. Through discussions with a wide range of civil society observers and an examination of external developments this component aims to account for the external impact of the diploma programme.

Conclusion

Although the assessment process for the first year of operation has just begun⁵, initial findings are encouraging. Throughout the year the Diploma has received support and encouragement from Sri Lankan authorities and organisations. Students have engaged well with the course material, and at the April 2004 Exam Board, of the original thirty eight students who were enrolled, 20 were awarded the Diploma (five with Merit), three were awarded Certificates, eight were allowed extensions or to submit supplementary assessments, six students had withdrawn from the Diploma throughout the year, and one student failed. The award of a Diploma indicates that, amongst other measurements, students can deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, communicate about their subject to others, have achieved a professional competence in tackling and solving problems in their subject area, have developed and enhanced decision-making in

complex and unpredictable situations, and hopefully will want to continue to advance their knowledge and understanding and to further develop new skills and knowledge to a higher level.

Already graduates have experienced promotions, career moves and other educational opportunities in which their new learning has played a pivotal role. The participation of military personnel on the course has led to the enrolment of fifteen senior army officers on the 2004-2005 Diploma course in Colombo. Interest from within the LTTE has also led to the Diploma being taught at Kilinochchi, where it is the first external academic programme to be conducted since the beginning of the conflict. Sri Lankan faculty members have also drawn inspiration from the UoB-SSA programme and instituted new peace related courses in their own universities. Some graduates talk of the personal changes that the programme has imbued, such as a reconsideration of their own perspectives and understanding of the conflict, the complex peacebuilding, reconstruction and long-term reconciliation work that is needed, and their potential part in this. As the UoB Validator noted in his report:

Whilst in Vavuniya, I had the opportunity of informally meeting three current students on the Diploma. All three were highly appreciative of the opportunities offered by the programme and stressed its value, especially in respect to its relevance to their daily occupations – two are senior policemen and one is a senior army field commander.⁶

Students talked of being more aware of the needs of ‘others’ and the importance of thorough conflict analysis and planning that peace related activities require both in the short and long term. The Diploma has provided an intellectual confidence for students who can now participate on a more equal footing in the current debates

and prescriptions concerning development and peace in their country and regions. As one Vavuniya student commented:

I now know what peace can be and how I can help us get there.⁷

End Notes

¹ The Department of Peace Studies is located in the School of Social and International Studies (SSIS), University of Bradford. It is the largest University Peace Studies Department in the world.

² Harris, S. and Lewer, N., *Proposal for a Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness*, Centre for Conflict Resolution, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford and the Social Scientists’ Association, Sri Lanka, March 2002.

³ The Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP) is a joint fund administered by the British Government’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Department for International Development (DFID).

⁴ QAAHE Report due in August 2004 and will be available to the public on their website.

⁵ The authors will be producing a fuller report.

⁶ Dr Robin Coningham. *Validation Visit to Sri Lanka*. February 2004.

⁷ Course impact assessment interview with student, May 2004.

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MERVYN DE SILVA – A TRIBUTE

Jayadeva Uyangoda

June 22 marks the fifth death anniversary of Mervyn de Silva, a colossal figure in Sri Lanka's contemporary English journalism. As a mainstream journalist, Mervyn had some distinctive and unique qualities. He was a friend of the Left and the trade union movement, with intellectual sympathies towards radical and anti-systemic movements, although he associated himself quite closely with the leaders of the political Right. Mervyn was never an ethno-nationalist, and in fact he showed no mercy towards ethnic chauvinism. Mervyn also had an incredible sensitivity to the trajectories of Sri Lanka's political and social change. Even before the 1971 insurgency, he foresaw the political consequences of the continuing alienation of the educated, rural youth of Sri Lanka's Sinhalese society. Similarly, he had an accurate historical sense of the decisive shift that Sri Lanka's Tamil nationalist struggle would take in the late 1970s through a radical departure from the parliamentary and negotiatory politics. Mervyn was an exceptionally gifted writer in English. He was the stylist par excellence, and the stylistic splendor of his literary idiom accurately reflected the flamboyance of his lively personality. Among the journalists I have known and seen in South Asia, Mervyn was undoubtedly the best-dressed. With personal mannerism of the intellectually sophisticated, he also had an amazing capacity to laugh at others as well as himself.

My personal acquaintance with Mervyn de Silva began with the journal he founded, *Lanka Guardian*. Mervyn launched LG, as Dayan, Mervyn's son used to call it, in 1978, after he found himself unemployed for a couple of years. He lost his then prestigious position as Editor, *Daily News* around 1975 in a battle with the United Front government's strongman Felix Dias Bandaranaike. The legend had it that Mervyn used the compensation money he got from the Lake House to start the LG. It was no accident that the first issue of the LG came out on May 1 of the year 1978.

Interestingly, I began my own 'writing career' in English with the *Lanka Guardian* when I was at Peradeniya University in the second spell as an undergraduate there. Dayan and I were classmates in the Political Science Special degree class with Dr. K. H. Jayasinghe, Professors Wisva Warnapala and Ranjith Amerasinghe as our teachers. I had just resumed my undergraduate career after nearly seven years tenure in what we called at that time 'the Queen's Boarding House.' I was also one of those successful cases of rehabilitation of the 'misguided' *thrashavadi* (terrorist) youth, belonging to the first generation of the JVP. When I went back to Peradeniya straight from Welikada, Professors Panditharatne and Karl Gunawardena, the Vice Chancellor and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, generously allowed me to resume my undergraduate studies. In my class was Dayan Jayatilaka, Mervyn's son, with whom I

immediately established a close friendship. When Dayan brought to Peradeniya the first issue of LG, I was immediately attracted to it because of its Left-progressive outlook as well as the political and interventionist thrust. My first piece of writing that Mervyn published in an early issue of the LG was a letter to the editor. Entitled 'Ugly Scene,' It described how a group of remand prisoners was made to walk across the Kandy town tied to handcuffs and without any concern for their human dignity. A few months later, I wrote a piece on Rukmani Devi after her sudden death, placing her in a socio-cultural context. Mervyn published it in the LG giving it some prominence. He had copy-edited my English essay, giving it some stylistic respectability. Through Dayan, Mervyn had sent me a message encouraging me to write more on art and culture. Then I started writing on cinema and theater. That is how I became an amateur literary critic during my undergraduate days. Later on I wrote political pieces as well, including a series on the JVP and on the right of self-determination of the Sri Lankan Tamil people.

Thus, most of my memories of Mervyn are associated with the *Lanka Guardian*. From the perspective of the intellectual history of Sri Lanka during the past three decades, the LG, which came out twice a month, was one of two important developments occurred in the immediate post-1977 period. The other was the launching of the Social Scientists' Association in 1977 and the Movement for the Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) in 1978. The context against which these three institutions – LG, SSA and MIRJE--emerged was characterized by the triumph of the political Right under the UNP, the serious setback suffered by the Left and progressive forces and the rise of Sinhalese communal violence against the Tamil minority. After the UNP's massive electoral victory of 1977, which also saw the unprecedented defeat of all progressive forces, there was also a distinctly right wing drift in the political process. Liberalization of the economy and the new constitution of 1978 were the pillars of the new Right-ward trend in public policy reforms of the Jayewardene regime which soon turned itself to be politically repressive as well as authoritarian.

During this period of setbacks for the Left and progressive forces, the SSA provided organizational space for the intelligentsia, while MIRJE provided the forum for the activists. Mervyn came to the meetings of the SSA and MIRJE, thereby closely associating himself with the most active intellectual-political formations at the time. The *Lanka Guardian* of the late 1970s and the 1980s developed itself into a mirror of these developments by providing space for debate, discussion and reporting on themes like the political economy of liberalization, the agrarian crisis, emerging crisis in the plantations, trade union politics and more importantly the sharpening crisis animated by the increasingly intractable Tamil

national question. Mervyn also published in the LG papers presented at academic seminars in Colombo. Among the LG's frequent contributors were Regi Siriwardena, Jayantha Somasunderam, Godfrey Gunatilleke, Newton Gunasinghe, Kumari Jayawardena, Nihal Perera, U. Karunatileka and myself. Dayan did a regular feature under the pen name Chinthaka. Mervyn himself wrote the main column on current political developments, with razor-sharp insights into what we saw as the drift towards constitutional authoritarianism under the new UNP. He also regularly wrote analytical pieces on regional and international politics. Mervyn described himself as a self-taught international relationist, notwithstanding the fact that he remained Sri Lanka's best-informed analyst of international politics.

My first meeting with Mervyn was an unforgettable one. Gamini Dissanayake, who now lives in Canada and writes an astrological column to the *Sunday Observer* in Colombo, had joined Mervyn to work on the LG. Mervyn was operating from a small office at the Fort's YMBA building. Gamini had run into a major controversy with Lester James Pieris after he published in the LG an essay sharply critical of Lester as a film - maker. It was Gamini who took me to Mervyn's office at the YMBA building and introduced me to him. Mervyn was smoking a Dunhill cigarette and typing away something on a fairly old type-writer. What fascinated me was the style of his typing. He used only the two forefingers of his hands to hit the typewriter's keyboard. But he was pretty fast. He greeted me, but did not have a conversation as such. He said something which I did not quite understand and then burst into laughter. Gamini Dissanayake responded to Mervyn with an equally loud laughter. I felt totally out of place. I asked Gamini what was it all about. That morning, Mervyn has had a breakfast meeting with JRJ. Mervyn had just read out one of the lines of his Sunday column 'Men and Matters', which he wrote under the pen name Kautilya. In 'Men and Matters,' Mervyn presented deep political analysis in the form of cutting humor. When it comes to political satire in English Mervyn was unrivalled in South Asia, because his writings had wit, humor, penetrating insights and intellectual depth.

On a subsequent occasion, he invited me to a drink with him. This was somewhere in 1979 when the LG office was shifted to Union Place. He took me in his black Morris Minor taxi to the Colombo Golf Club restaurant, one of the greatest shrines of the Colombo bourgeoisie. Amazed and almost paralyzed by the intimidatory class ambience of the place, I sheepishly followed Mervyn and sat at the bar. He offered me a can of chilled beer. This was my first encounter with canned beer, chilled or otherwise. Being an ex-village boy who had some audacity to hang around with Colombo's middle class intellectuals, this was one of my unforgettable experiences of being initiated to modernity and urban, elite culture.

By this time Mervyn had indeed initiated me to one not-so-popular practice in Sri Lanka's post-colonial modernity – writing in English. Later Mervyn invited me to the Orient Club for drinks. At the Orient, Mervyn was often seen in the company of some of the outstanding minds of that period -- Newton Gunasinghe, Ralph Pieris, Shelton Kodikara and Charlie Abeysekera. I would occasionally be a guest of Mervyn, Newton or Shelton. There we used to have intensely engaged political discussions. Mervyn often demonstrated that he had access to the thinking of the leading political actors at the time – J. R. Jayewardene, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Anura Bandaranaike, Ronnie de Mel, Gamani Dissanayake, Lalith Athulathmudali. Newton complemented Mervyn's informative inputs with a sharp sociological analysis of politics. Among those who joined our drinking-cum-political analysis circle at the Orient often as Newton's guests were Quadri Ismail and P. Sivaram, two outstanding journalists of the new generation. When a few years later, I myself became a member of the Orient Club, providing amusement to some of its urbane members, I once treated Mervyn to a cool beer at the bar. At that particular occasion, Mervyn was an unhappy man. President Kumaratunga had repeatedly denied him an interview for the London-based *Financial Times*. That was the time when I was quite close to President Kumaratunga. Mervyn was telling me how close he was to Mrs. Bandaranaike, President Kumaratunga's mother, when she was the Prime Minister. Although I tried my best, I could not fix that appointment for Mervyn. But this episode revealed to me an interesting change in the sociology of Sri Lankan politics. Many people like Mervyn, who once enjoyed the trust and the company of the leaders of the old ruling class are no longer seen useful by the new ruling class led by Chandrika and Ranil. Their advisors, confidantes and allies are now recruited from two sources: the ranks of the subordinate social classes of the Sinhalese society and the circles of intensely loyal personal friends, belonging to their own age group.

Concerning me, both Mervyn and his wife, aunty Laxhmi, demonstrated an admirable and rare capacity to transcend class, social and generational distinctions. He is one of those few people who made me feel less awkward in the not-so charmed circles of the Colombo bourgeoisie as well as the urban intellectual elites. Mervyn, like me, was a village boy who came to the city, worked in the city and lived in the city. Unlike other ex-village boys of his generation who lived in the city as members of the professional elite, Mervyn never played with agrarian romanticism or Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism. He was a secular, non-racist, progressive intellectual who valued human rights, multi-culturalism, political pluralism and left-wing political activism. That was Mervyn de Silva I knew and admired. ■

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SLMC and LTTE-K: Prenatal Pains and Postnatal Problems

Ameer Ali

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) which, in spite of its factional disputes, claims to represent the entire Muslim community in the island politically, and the Karuna faction of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE-K), which broke away from the Prabakaran faction (LTTE-P) and formed a separate political party Democratic Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (DLTTE), are two entities born out of a common fear of subjugation and servitude.

The birth of SLMC in 1986 under its founding leader M. H. M. Ashraff was a calculated response partly to decades of frustration suffered by the Muslims of the East under the urban Muslim leadership from Colombo, and partly to the rising fear among the Tamil speaking Muslims of the East of a permanent subjugation in a Tamils dominated Eelam. The agrarian life of the Tamil speaking Muslims of the East had less in common with the commercial life of the Sinhalese speaking Muslims in Colombo and its surroundings. While the traditional Muslim leadership from Colombo was more worried about achieving unrestricted freedom to practice trade and commerce the Muslims of the east were more interested in access to arable land and facilities for cultivation. For a long time Muslim leadership from Colombo could not grasp the gravity of the situation faced by the rural Muslims in the east. When this frustration combined with the fear of subjugation under a hegemonic LTTE the Muslims of the east revolted.

Likewise, the Tamils of Batticaloa always carried a hidden grudge against their leadership from North. Before the LTTE came into being it was the Tamil Congress under G. G. Ponnampalam and the Federal Party under S. J. V. Chelvanayagam that vied for Tamil leadership. Of these the Tamil Congress remained entirely a northern phenomenon and had almost zero support in the Eastern Province. The Federal Party on the other hand swept the polls regularly in the East except in Muslim dominated electorates. However, the inner caucus of the party remained largely a northern cabal. The most irrefutable proof of this is the fate of Rajadurai, a Tamil parliamentarian and a captivating Tamil orator who was a member of the Federal party and held the Batticaloa seat uninterruptedly for more than twenty-five years but was always sidelined whenever a vacancy arose for the party presidency. There were also others like Rajavarothayam from Trincomalee and Manickavasagar from Paddiruppu, and all of them could at best aspire to become a vice-president and not the president. LTTE-K raises the same complaint now under Pirabakaran's leadership. Karuna's rebellion is obviously a protest against Jaffna hegemony. Thus the SLMC and the LTTE-K are united by similar birth-pains.

Having formed an independent political party can the SLMC remain a dominant force in Muslim politics in Sri Lanka? In spite of the rhetoric of party leadership the fact remains that SLMC is a regional party by birth and growth. The vast majority of its representatives in the parliament have come from the Eastern Province and great many of the issues they raise in parliamentary debates relate to the affairs of that province. Their main concern is about the fear of LTTE power and loss of land and property to the LTTE cadre, which is not that serious a problem to the Muslims in other provinces. The LTTE has already chased out the Muslims from the north and it is unlikely that these Muslims will ever go back to that area in large number. Within the SLMC and with the demise of its founder leader Ashraff the leadership has gone to people who are not native to the Eastern Province. Both Rauf Hakeem the current leader and Ferial Ashraff, the wife of the former leader and a minister in the present government, are from the central districts of Sri Lanka and there are already allegations that they do not understand the problems of the Eastern Province Muslims. It is quite likely that there will be challenges to their leadership from the east. When that happens and if party leadership once again shifts to personalities from the East the present leaders may join one of the national political parties. Changing political parties by disgruntled politicians is an age-old game in Sri Lankan politics. In short the SLMC is bedevilled with post-natal problems.

The same can be said of LTTE-K. Karuna has give up his armed struggle and has opted to fight his cause through the ballot box. However, LTTE-P is hunting for his and his supporters' heads. The bloodbath in the Eastern Province is continuing between the two factions. For the Karuna faction to survive it has to be supported by the government and its military force or there must be a popular uprising against the LTTE-P in the Eastern Province. The government, which has committed to peace negotiations with LTTE-is in a sad predicament. The military would like to strengthen the hands of Karuna but that will be suicidal for the government both domestically as well as internationally. But without military support and guaranteed security for peoples' life and property popular uprising in the east is highly unlikely. Strategically, the rebellion of Karuna faction is a window of opportunity for the government to weaken Prabakaran's forces. From the beginning and even before the rise of the LTTE the governments in Colombo never understood the Jaffna-Batticaloa divide. They treated the Tamils of both provinces (North and East) as homogenous. This led to a major blunder in policy making and it is difficult to rectify now. Having said that the post-natal problems of LTTE-K are not going to away that easily. In fact these problems are relatively more severe in comparison to SLMC. ■

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AT THE WATER'S EDGE

A. Sri-Jayantha
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Pradeep Jeganathan has certainly mastered the art of the short story. Each of the seven stories in this collection is a taut, well-crafted example of the genre. Each is a unique vignette which introduces you to a vivid cast of characters in a problematic chain of events. Jeganathan's style is to end each story without a complete resolution, but with the problem continuing to unfold. This is unsettling to the reader, but does keep one thinking about each story and its possible subsequent events.

The book's editor describes the stories as a life-world, lived and remembered, and indeed one can easily imagine that most of the stories have a distinct autobiographical element. All Sri Lankan Tamils, especially those who live or have spent time in Colombo, will recognize this 'life-world.' Jeganathan has grown up in, and now lives in, that city and has a fine sense of the personalities and relationships of those who inhabit that space.

The sure sense of character is true even for the two stories set overseas. American Tamils will get a particular kick out of the story which describes a senior member of the Tamil community in Boston who is visited for assistance because a student's brother is in jail in Sri Lanka. All of us will recognize the dynamics in this encounter and will laugh at the intimately drawn details which strike a little too close to home for total comfort.

The second overseas story will also be recognizable. An American student 'collects' young men from war-torn countries and prods into memories which are much too painful, without much deeper understanding.

Jeganathan is a social scientist by training and this is reflected in his stories. He has a finely calibrated sense of the dynamics of

power relations. The second story, which describes a hill country girl sent to the city as a maid, reflects this sensitivity vividly.

And we will all cry over the first story in this collection, which provides an archetype for the beginning of the war in Sri Lanka in the mid-1970s, in the dynamics of a Colombo schoolroom. Even though the Tamil boy has converted to Buddhism, his Tamilness is what is held against him. Rohana uses his attack on Krishna to try to take Krishna's earned place at the front of the class. The high society Anura ends up there instead, consolidating his friends' hold on status and power in the class.

The stories range over many issues, times and places, with even a story about a Sinhalese mother who returns home from a stint as a maid in the Gulf to end up in prostitution. There is a surprisingly little reference, however, about the main event in Sri Lanka of Jeganathan's generation - the war. The author Michael Ondaatje is also from Colombo and has a similar perspective. The war is somewhere 'out there,' a black cloud, but has no real relevance to him or the people he is interested. Only the Boston Tamil, originally from Jaffna, makes allusion to 'our struggle,' but the Colombo boy does not want to discuss this. The story about a soldier on a train from Batticaloa, who talks of fighting the Tigers before he kills a crippled beggar, is the closest reference to the war that is made. Is this Jeganathan's archetype of the war and its brutalization of the South? As a Southerner, perhaps this is the main consequence of the war that he perceives.

This small book of short stories joins a growing body of interesting, high quality literature in English about the contemporary Sri Lankan experience. ■

At the Water's Edge

Stories

by

Pradeep Jeganathan

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