

POLITY

Vol. 2 No.4

ISSN 1391-822X

2/4/2005

Rs. 50

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TSUNAMI AND AFTER: FAULT LINES AND SHIFTS IN POLITICS

Three months after the December 26 Tsunami, Sri Lanka's key political actors are still engaged in polemics and bickering about how to handle the re-building process. The UPFA government and the LTTE have not yet been able to agree on a 'joint mechanism' to receive international assistance. Within the UPFA, the SLFP and the JVP are pursuing their own contradictory agendas at the expense of tens of thousands of people who are still awaiting redress. Meanwhile, the government as a whole has not yet been able to work out any systematic plan for meaningful and sustainable initiatives for post-tsunami recovery. Quite clearly the tsunami disaster has laid bare the very deep fault lines of the Sri Lankan polity.

In this background, the political leaders seem to have lost the urgency to rebuild the country that they displayed immediately after the tsunami. In the absence of a sustained commitment to a decentralised post-tsunami recovery process with people's participation and an all-party consensus, the international pledges made soon after the tsunami do not seem to have been translated into actual monetary assistance. President Kumaratunga's rhetorical claim that not even five cents of foreign funds had reached the government is not without some truth. Except humanitarian NGOs and religious groups, the other major global actors, governments and multi-lateral agencies, require that certain ground conditions be in place before they turn their pledges into contributions to Sri Lankan government treasury. Firstly, they want

the government and the LTTE to work together in the post-tsunami process. Secondly, they insist on plans and projects so that assistance will be systematically mobilized. Both these crucial ground conditions are at the moment lacking in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, the government through sheer ineptness seems to be losing the opportunity to make any significant progress in the post-tsunami recovery initiatives. Even as the government-controlled Sunday Observer admitted in one of its editorials, over-centralisation of the rebuilding process is the key to the government's failure. The peculiarity of this centralisation is that all the powers and authority in decision-making as well as implementation are in the hands of the President and a few individuals. This reflects the continuing tendency for excessive centralisation even inside the government, resulting in the exclusion of the cabinet as well as MPs from making decisions. While the World Bank and other aid agencies have been preaching the virtues of decentralisation and people's participation in the post-tsunami recovery process, the government does not seem to pay much heed to such external advise.

Why is the Kumaratunga administration behaving in manner that defies even commonsense logic? One major reason is the negative dynamics of coalition politics. The UPFA is a coalition regime founded on two mandates and with two contradictory centres of power. The President claims that she has her own mandate obtained

independent of the electoral mandate of the parliament. And indeed, in the parliament, the JVP, the second partner in the UPFA coalition, has been acting quite independent of the President's agenda. In fact, the contradictions between President and the JVP as well as the President and her own Prime Minister were sharpened after the tsunami. This situation seems to have pushed the President to design a

POLITY

**Vol. 2 No. 4
March-April 2005**

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Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs. 600
By Airmail:	
South Asia/Middle East	US \$ 28
SE Asia/Far East	US \$ 28
Europe/Africa	US \$ 30
Americas/Pacific countries	US \$ 40
(Please note the revised subscription rates. Cheques in favour of <i>Pravada</i> Publications)	

strategy of centralisation, placing the office of the President over and above the cabinet and parliament. The post-tsunami process only provided a new and powerful context for these negative dynamics of coalition politics to escalate.

There is yet another reason to explain this tendency towards post-tsunami centralisation. It is linked to the ethnic conflict. It appears that the Sri Lankan state has entered a process of re-centralisation, paradoxically, against the backdrop of negotiation stalemate between the government and the LTTE. This is an unintended consequence of the peace process initiated in 2002. In this peace process, the LTTE enunciated a particular framework for a negotiated settlement in which the Northern and Eastern provinces would constitute an autonomous ethno-territorial unit. The LTTE's proposals for internal self-determination as well as an interim self-governing authority have envisaged that this 'federal' unit would enjoy a greater measure of autonomy than a federal unit would be entitled to. In other words, the LTTE's proposals for a negotiated peace see a radical re-structuring of the Sri Lankan state—the outcome of which is seen by the political class in Colombo as a radical weakening of the state.

When the December 26 tsunami hit Sri Lanka, the differences between the Sinhalese political class and the LTTE had reached a stage of tension, as demonstrated in the inability of the two sides to resume negotiations. The December 26 tsunami seems to have reinforced these contradictions. The way in which the two sides politically responded to the tsunami was indicative of how they were moving in two separate directions in their post-tsunami political programmes. While the LTTE sought to use the post-tsunami

process to re-state their argument for shared sovereignty, the UPFA government sought to reaffirm the approach of unified and central sovereignty of the state. The dialectical outcome of these contending perspectives between the government and the LTTE on political handling of the recovery and rebuilding process is the further consolidation of the centralising tendency of the Sri Lankan state.

President Kumaratunga's re-assertion of her commitment to a federal solution to the ethnic conflict in early March did not seem to change the political relations between her regime and the LTTE. President Kumaratunga's notion of federalism falls far short of even the LTTE's proposals for an interim administration. In fact, the LTTE's proposals for a 'joint mechanism' with the government to undertake the post-tsunami rebuilding process rest on some of the key political assumptions on which the previous ISGA proposals were based. Three months of inconclusive bargaining on the joint mechanism would only mean that a compromise is hard to obtain, because the differences between the government and the LTTE on the basic conceptual framework of the joint mechanism are truly sharp.

In brief, the December 26 tsunami has re-defined Sri Lanka's conflict and the peace process. A negotiated settlement now seems much harder than before. A fundamental re-thinking of the political situation is now necessary to bring life back to the peace process. The starting point of such a process of re-thinking presupposes the bringing back of the autonomy debate to the mainstream political debate. **P**

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THREE YEARS AFTER THE CEASE FIRE

Jayadeva Uyangoda

Sri Lanka has now entered the fourth year of cease-fire agreement (CFA) which the LTTE Leader, V. Prabhakaran, and the then Prime Minister, Ranil Wickramasinghe, signed on February 21-22, 2002. This essay is a belated attempt to do some retrospective assessment of the CFA and the subsequent negotiation process between the UNP government and the LTTE.

Indo-Lanka Accord

In terms of its long-term impact on the conflict and peace processes in Sri Lanka, the CFA of February 2002 is second only to the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of July 1987, signed by India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lanka's President, J. R. Jayewardene. Both these documents, although they have not led to the cessation of Sri Lanka's ethnic war, in a very fundamental way redefined some major dimensions of the conflict and pointed towards possible trajectories of settlement. The Indo-Lanka Accord, to begin with, postulated that the Tamil ethnic rebellion was not just a terrorist endeavour as many in Sri Lanka believed at the time, but the manifestation of legitimate political grievances and aspirations of a minority ethnic community. It acknowledged that the Sri Lankan Tamil community constituted a nationality with the right to internal self-determination in the form of regional autonomy within a clearly demarcated territorial space. The Accord was premised on the fundamental assumption that the ethnic conflict did not have a military solution and it necessitated a political settlement involving the state and the insurgent movements. It also introduced the idea of devolution and the institution of provincial councils. All these were radical deviations from the views firmly held by the UNP and many Sri Lankan political parties. The Indian intervention of July 1987 radically altered these positions.

However, the Indo-Lanka Accord did not terminate the ethnic war. Yet, it altered its dynamics and dimensions. No solution to the ethnic conflict can be perceived outside the framework suggested by the Accord. It has indeed re-defined in an enduring way the terms of Sri Lanka's political debate on the ethnic conflict as well as alternatives to it.

CFA's Significance

What is the significance of the CFA of February 2002 for Sri Lankan politics? To begin with, it brought the LTTE into a process of political engagement with the state as an equal partner. Subsequent negotiations demonstrated that negotiations based on conditions of power symmetry could produce constructive outcomes. It is the CFA that gave impetus to this possibility in

2002. In fact, the CFA formalised what many politicians in Colombo would have conceded in private, but never dared admit in public: that there had developed by 2000-2001, a strategic symmetry of power between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. In fact, the CFA gave expression to a military-ground reality that slowly had developed during the People's Alliance regime's war for peace campaign. That ground reality was characterised by a condition of power equilibrium between the state as well as the rebels and a decisive military stalemate in which neither side could proceed towards achieving a military victory resulting in the defeat of the other side. Ranil Wickramasinghe acknowledged this ground reality and the CFA translated it into a bilateral agreement between the state and the LTTE.

This was an extremely courageous step taken by Wickramasinghe who is usually portrayed even by his own admirers as a timid, lacklustre and unimaginative political leader. Chandrika Kumaratunga and Lakshman Kadirgamar, who are always represented in the media as brave and heroic figures in the island's contemporary politics, would not have dared to sign the CFA of February 2002 in its existing form. They would have rejected it outright, or dillydallied with it until the text became obsolete. It is a pity, not surprising though, that even the pro-UNP press has not given Ranil Wickramasinghe the credit to which he is legitimately entitled for his courage in signing this document that brought Sri Lanka its longest period of no-war and relative peace since 1983.

The CFA was in a sense not a 'legal', but essentially a 'political', document in that it gave concrete expression to an existing political reality. Under the Constitution, the Prime Minister had no legal authority to sign an agreement with the LTTE which was waging war against the state. Besides, the CFA had some key clauses that stood outside the pale of the Constitution. Nevertheless, Wickramasinghe went ahead with the CFA, signed and initiated negotiations on the basis of it. Some influential analysts in Colombo called it an act of treason and even suggested criminal proceedings against Wickramasinghe. Why did Wickramasinghe take such a huge political risk?

Part of the answer to this difficult question lies in the way a section of the Sri Lankan ruling class that the UNP had come to represent, appeared to have viewed the ethnic conflict. This stratum of the Sinhalese ruling elite is linked to global capital and it no longer views the state from the outdated paradigm of national sovereignty. It saw negotiated peace as the only way forward for Sri Lanka's further integration with the global economy, a process the UNP had inaugurated as far back as 1978. It had also abandoned the small-trader mentality that the Sinhalese ruling-class had possessed

for many years and the SLFP continues to cherish. Neither does it look at political problems from the perspective of obsolete nationalist ideology. Not being an ideological party and not being blinded by the immediate enmity with the LTTE – an advantage of being in the opposition since 1994 – the UNP leadership could assess the politics of the ethnic conflict in a pragmatic manner and reach its conclusions. One such key conclusion that the UNP leadership seems to have reached in 2001 was that the Sri Lankan state had no other option but to politically engage with the LTTE on the basis of strategic equilibrium. The CFA was nothing but a formalisation of this ground situation.

The UNP also relied on the global state system to provide a safety net in case the cease-fire and negotiations went wrong. The third-party monitoring of the cease-fire, international facilitation and mediation in talks, and the internationalisation of the peace process were indeed novel features that only the UNP could bring in without much hesitation—even as parts of a deliberate strategy. Wickramasinghe also took the pragmatic decision to keep the Foreign Ministry, the ultimate repository of Sri Lanka's small-trader political mentality, in its institutionalised form, somewhat away from this process.

The negotiations that followed the CFA of February 2002 demonstrated the strength as well as the weaknesses of this process that UNP initiated. It is noteworthy that the UNP had maintained a line of communication with the LTTE while in opposition and making preparations to come to power. That is why the signing of the CFA within two months in forming a government appeared a spectacular achievement for the UNP. The initial success of the negotiations in 2002 was also outcome of a certain understanding that the UNP and the LTTE had built up. The single-most important contribution made by the negotiations of 2002 was the LTTE's public acknowledgement that it was ready to review the secessionist goal and explore federalist political options. Here lies the basic parallel of the post-CFA process with the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987. Indeed, the fundamental failure of UNP's political strategy for peace in 2003 was its inability to build on this achievement and work on an interim peace agreement with the LTTE to take forward the federalist discussion.

Limitations

The limitations of the UNP political imagination concerning institutionalising a peace settlement became quite clear when the LTTE challenged them to come out with proposals for an interim administration to the Northern and Eastern provinces. The two proposals that the UNP developed in mid-2003 even fell short of the spirit of the Oslo understanding the two parties had reached in December 2002. The LTTE's ISGA proposals submitted to the government in November 2003 constituted a step further from the Oslo understanding. They were in a way based on the LTTE's own

interpretation of the Oslo wording of exploring federalism on the principle of internal self-determination. But the Sinhalese political class by that time had stretched its political imagination to outer limits. All, including the UNP, had relapsed to the small-trader mentality of defending an old, outdated idea of state sovereignty and unity.

Wickramasinghe and his UNP could not travel beyond Oslo of December 2003, literally and metaphorically, because talks beyond Oslo required them to elaborate the federalist formula in a confederal mould. The UNP was not intellectually ready to move in that direction. And that created the space for the SLFP and the JVP to seize the initiative to re-shape the terms of the political debate. In fact, the period after October 2003 can be described as one that pushed the political debate on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict resolution many steps backward. Even today, there are no signs of the Sinhalese political class attempting to emerge out of the debilitating limits that were reinforced in 2003-2004. President Kumaratunga's recent statement on federalism, though it appeared quite a radical intervention, has not so far inspired much positive response.

The post-CFA events also demonstrated that the role of the international community in Sri Lanka's peace process was quite limited. The UPFA government as well as the LTTE have acquired a remarkable ability to resist international pressure, even in this age of excessive globalisation. This has made it extremely necessary for the domestic stakeholders – Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim political classes – to find a new framework of engagement, although it may not be forthcoming in the foreseeable future.

War and Violence

What has three years of cease-fire added to the progress of Sri Lanka's politics? It has made returning to war quite difficult for both the state and the LTTE, although there may be some temptation in both camps to unilaterally break the cease-fire agreement. It has also demonstrated that the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has reached a qualitatively new phase in which violence and war are no longer necessary to mediate the relations between the state and the Tamil community. But paradoxically, three years of relative peace also proved that Tamil society ran the risk of turning violence inwards, against itself, as the events after the LTTE split in March 2004 have tragically demonstrated. The challenge ahead for Sri Lanka is to contain the spreading violence and prevent it undermining the CFA. There are signs that on all sides the commitment to protect the CFA has been weakening. The CFA gave the Sinhalese political class the necessary breathing space to resolve the conflict in partnership with the LTTE, but they seemed to have squandered the opportunity. Not even the unprecedented natural disaster of the December tsunami has moved them in a constructive direction. ■

PROPOSALS FOR AN INTERIM COUNCIL FOR THE NORTH AND EAST: A WAY OUT

Sumanasiri Liyanage

The idea of an Interim Council for the North and East is not new; it has been in political discourse since 1987, when suggestions were made to set up an interim administration for the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Under the Indo-Lanka Accord, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) agreed to amend the Sri Lankan Constitution to create the Provincial Council (PC) system. The principal stakeholders were of the view that an interim administration be set up until elections for the PC, under the 13th Amendment to the constitution, were held. Thus, it was proposed only for a very short period.

However, the necessity of a long-term interim rule has emerged, since the destruction and destabilization of human life in the war-torn areas, due to intensified conditions of armed conflict, became more serious and, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had set up its own military-administrative structure in some parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Two main parties in the South, the United National Party (UNP) and the Peoples' Alliance (PA) have accepted, wittingly or unwittingly, the need for an interim arrangement, until the final solution to the ethnic conflict is negotiated. When negotiations between the LTTE and the GoSL recommenced in September 2002, everyone expected the parties to immediately start negotiations on the modalities and structures of the interim administration.

However, as Anton Balasingham has revealed in his latest book, Prof G.L. Peiris, the chief negotiator of the GoSL, derailed the whole process with banal legal arguments. As a substitution to the interim administration, it was agreed to set up three committees; but this mechanism eventually failed to achieve the intended objectives and aspirations of the Tamil people. The LTTE proposal for the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) that was presented in October 2003 is a response to the failure of the GoSL to come up with a mutually acceptable set of proposals to meet the immediate demands of the war-torn areas. The ISGA proposals are understandably maximalist by nature; they seem to be oriented towards a confederalist solution.

Both the United National Front (UNF) government and the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government have indicated that the ISGA proposals, as they stand, are not acceptable to them and to the southern polity. According to the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Survey on the Sri Lankan Peace Process (KAPS), conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), only 44 per cent of Sri Lankans think that some kind of devolved system is acceptable as a solution to the ethnic conflict, while an equal

percentage hold opposing views. And the opposition to a devolved system is stronger in the North-Central and Uva Provinces.

If 44 per cent of Sri Lankans oppose a devolved system of governance, it may be correct to advance a hypothesis that the same percentage of people, if not more, would oppose the setting up of an interim administration. This explains, partly, the opposition of the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) even to begin talks on the basis of the ISGA proposals or, to set up a joint mechanism to deal with the tsunami reconstruction. The LTTE earlier insisted that it would not participate in talks, if the ISGA and its formation was not the basis for talks. But now it has changed its position and agreed to start talks on a joint mechanism for reconstruction. Closing this gap between two positions, i.e, positions of the JVP and LTTE, may be crucial to the future of the peace process.

A Proposal

In this article, I intend to propose an alternative path for commencement of talks between the LTTE and the GoSL. This idea may satisfy the needs of the LTTE and at the same time may contribute towards allaying the fears and suspicions of the JVP. When the UNF government announced that it would start negotiations with the LTTE soon, I suggested two things. First, holding a fresh election for the North-Eastern PC. As the second step, I wrote: "After the formation of a constitutionally constituted body, this PC could be given the powers specified in the 13th Amendment, including police powers. Under the UNF government, the police would come under a newly formed interior ministry, so there would not be much opposition in Parliament in passing necessary laws, to hand over those powers to the PCs. Meanwhile, Parliament can also pass the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, amending Article 76 (1), that limits law-making powers of the PCs over devolved subjects. The formal resumption of negotiations between the GoSL and the LTTE could take place along with the process of setting up the North-East PC." The UNF government did not follow this path for various reasons. Prof Peiris might have thought that the 13th Amendment was not his baby; and the UNF government and civil society organizations might have thought that there was a potential for more far-reaching reforms.

I still hold the view that similar measures with some added features would contribute in breaking the current impasse. The ISGA proposals of the LTTE suggest that an interim authority is needed "to promote the urgent needs of the people of the North-East by

formulating laws and policies and effectively and expeditiously executing all resettlement, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development in the North-East". Besides the rhetorical language for their self-satisfaction, the LTTE has, in their ISGA proposals, identified the following needs in order to carry out those tasks. Maintenance of law and order; raising revenue to meet urgent needs; and the control over land.

So it is clear that the powers suggested for the ISGA exceed the powers of the PCs under the 13th Amendment. This gap depends partly on the inherent limitations of the 13th Amendment. First, some of the powers given under the amendment have not yet been transferred to the PCs for unknown reasons, even 18 years after its enactment. Secondly, the concurrent list allows the central government to interfere and intervene in the affairs of the PCs. The Mangala Moonasinghe Committee has identified this as one of the serious weaknesses of the 13th Amendment. The gap between the powers of the ISGA and the powers given to the PCs by the Constitution may be closed without changing the Constitution in three ways.

Implementing, in full, the 13th Amendment, devolving all the powers, including police powers, in the provincial list to the PCs; Delegating to the newly elected Northern-Eastern PC, the powers listed in the concurrent list; Signing a memorandum of understanding between the President and the newly elected PCs for 5 years, that the President does not use the North-East Governor to control the PC and the Governor acts on the advice of the Chief Minister and his/her cabinet.

The first step can be taken with regard to all the PCs, while the second can be applied also for the Southern PC, as this area was badly affected by the tsunami.

Since all these steps are within the Constitution of Sri Lanka, I cannot see the reasons for the JVP or other extremist Sinhala parties, to oppose them. When there is no move for constructional change, it may be difficult for extremist parties to mobilize people, as there is nothing tangible to be opposed. However, there may be many issues that the LTTE and other Tamil parties would want settled. For example, the question of high security zones (HSZ) may be a moot point.

In November 2002, I wrote: "The first strategy is to start resettlement outside the HSZs. In fact, this was the agreement arrived at the fourth round of talks. Secondly, HSZs could be transformed into what I call peace zones, meaning, both the GOSL and the LTTE forces would stop carrying or placing arms, heavy or light, within these zones. This would satisfy both parties, the security forces and the LTTE. When these areas are declared arms-free zones, the security forces would feel less susceptible to threats upon withdrawal from these zones. At the same time the LTTE's demand that people be allowed to resettle could be met." This proposal would be more acceptable, when the areas are placed under the control of the elected PC.

The advantage of this path is it is reformist and does not involve any radical change. One party may think that it is not sufficient but it involves positive gains; the other party may think it is not too radical and it is not losing much. Since it is a transitional measure and lies within the broader constitutional framework, getting popular support may be easier. ■

Sumanasiri Liyanage, is a Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Peradeniya

Available soon

Biography of Edmund Samarakkody

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THE TSUNAMI TRAGEDY ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Osmund Jayaratne

7.10 A.M. December 26th 2004

Precisely at this time my wife had woken up from her sleep and whispered to me, "Ossie, did you feel a moment ago a slight tremor of your bed?" "Oh, go back to sleep Joyce, you must have been probably dreaming." "But I distinctly felt a very slight tremor," she insisted. "Oh, go back to sleep, I exclaimed in exasperation.

Soon after Joyce switched on the television. It was with a sense of horror that we learned that a massive earthquake had occurred a few minutes before Joyce had felt the tremor of her bed. This had apparently occurred close to the island of Sumatra. We had heard from time to time of disastrous earthquakes in different parts of the world. Now, earthquakes are normally measured on what is known as the Richter scale (a scale established by Dr. Charles F. Richter many many years ago). The earthquakes we had hitherto heard of were of the order of 4 to a maximum of 8 on the Richter scale. However, we learned that the Sumatra earthquake measured 9.3 on the Richter scale. By any standards, this was indeed a massive quake. The Richter scale, though built up according to a series of successive numerals, was not additive in character. Between any two successive numerals the interval was very large. In fact it was more exponential in its nature. Thus it can be understood that the Sumatran earthquake, measuring 9.3 on the Richter scale, was massive on a world historical scale.

We later learned that the quake had actually occurred on the deep seabed adjoining Sumatra. The vertical movement of the seabed, resulting from the quake, had flung the waters of the sea almost 60 or more feet up. This had created an enormous wave on the sea which moved in a westerly direction because of land obstructions on the eastward side. I will describe later the consequences of this wave, known as the Tsunami, on coastal regions to the west affecting large stretches of coastline on the Asian continent where 11 to 12 countries had been affected. It finally stopped on the African coastline, devastating Somalia and a part of Kenya.

Next to Sumatra and coastal areas of Indonesia the worst affected was the Province of Aceh, where it is estimated that nearly 70% of the population perished in the waters of the Tsunami.

I have already mentioned that my wife had felt a tremor of her bed around 7.10 a.m. that morning. This was obviously the last stages of the Sumatran earthquake which had sped over sea and land in our direction, exposed as we were to the waters of the Indian Ocean

traveling from the east. We were glued to the television and it was only at about 9 or 9.30 a.m. that we saw the Tsunami waves travelling to our island. While the tremors of the earthquake had taken only a few minutes to reach our land, the Tsunami waves had taken over two hours to travel from its epicentre in Sumatra along the ocean to the island of Sri Lanka. The giant sea waves generated by that Tsunami earthquake were now speedily moving in a westward direction. The southern coast of Malaysia had already been affected and inundated. Wave upon wave of the Tsunami proceeded westward. The southern region of Thailand, including the luxury island of Phuket, were also very badly affected. Thousands in Thailand were missing or their dead bodies discovered near the shore and even on the roofs of buildings which had barely survived the disaster. Over a thousand foreign visitors from Sweden, Germany, France, England and a few from the USA were missing. It must be remembered that these waves were originally generated by the movement of the seabed near Sumatra which clearly lay within one of the earthquake belts of our world. In Sri Lanka people carried on their normal morning routine without any knowledge of the horror that was to come. Hundreds of frail fishing boats, all along from the north, eastern and southern coastline, had already put out to sea in the very early hours of the morning. In a few hours they were due to return to the coast where they would unload their catch. However, on this particular day, long before they could turn their oats homewards, they sensed the tragedy that was approaching our region. Two massive waves were coming in their direction. All their efforts to change the sails of their boats and head towards land were of no avail, particularly in the south and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. Tragically, most of these fishermen were engulfed by the deadly waves. Their boats were shattered and 1,000 fishermen, despite their prowess in swimming, lost their lives. As the massive waves passed on, all that was left upon the sea were floating human bodies who once worshipped the sea for their livelihood and provided the island's fish for the day.

Sri Lanka was in the direct path of the Tsunami and it is not strange therefore that it was the southern and eastern coastlines, facing the oncoming waves, that were most affected. Having done its damage to Sri Lanka, the Tsunami continued its journey westwards. Certain portions of the deadly waves were deflected to the west coast of the island as well. Up to the coastline of Negombo and somewhat further a certain amount of damage was done. However, being a deflected wave, the damage was not anywhere near that experienced by the southern and eastern coastlines of the inland. The main Tsunami which continued in a westward direction was only stopped by the African continent.

In a cursory manner I shall endeavour here to refer to the scientific basis of the tragedy that hit the continent of Asia.

Geologists are well aware of the fact that the crust of the earth, mainly of a rocky nature and extending to depths of several miles, is a dynamic system. Its motions can sometimes be estimated to last from a short displacement to several thousands of miles. Some years ago, a new science was established known as "Plate Tectonics", which estimated from ancient historical accounts to the present time the dynamics of the earth's crust. Earthquake belts of the earth's crust are also associated with these movements.

One particular instance is worth mentioning at this stage. If a map of the earth is carefully perused and the outlines of South America and Africa are cut out and brought together they would seem to fit in a singular manner. This seems to indicate that many millions of years ago, South America and the African continent constituted a single contiguous landmass, which due to tectonic effects perhaps separated over the millions of years, that geologists directed their attention to even our little island of Sri Lanka and the various islets known as Adam's Bridge seem to show that Sri Lanka was once part of India.

The earth's crust scientifically referred to as plates, number between 3 to 5. Once what was known as the Indo plate comprising India and some of its adjacent land was linked to what is known as the Australian plate, forming a large contiguous landmass. Certain geologists and geophysicists are today of the opinion that the vast section of this earth crust underwent a crack in the neighbourhood of Sumatra forming two plates close to one another. Any friction between these two plates or even collisions could lead to the phenomenon of earthquakes. When this occurred we do not know, but it could well be that it was either the friction or the collision between the Indo plate and the Australian plate that might have been responsible for the massive underwater earthquake close to Sumatra. This, however, has yet to be established.

In Hawaii, which is part of the USA there is a Tsunami warning system. However, in the entire Indian Ocean and the continent of Asia there is no such warning system. The result is that country after country of the Asian region was taken unawares by the Tsunami tragedy. The damage done to the coastal regions of Sri Lanka are of such a magnitude that a mere article like this could not possibly do justice to it.

One event arising from the ignorance of our people was that after the first Tsunami wave had done its damage it receded far back into the ocean. The seashore was clear and many people ventured to the shore collecting fish and other natural artifacts left behind, by the waves. Many were drowned, and only a handful of people wounded and in despair survived the second Tsunami wave. The towns of Kalutara stretching down to Galle, Hambantota and Matara were destroyed beyond our comprehension. So too were the towns along the eastern coastline including large parts of the well known cities of Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Also close to the eastern

coastline the region of Amparai was completely devastated. The number of deaths that occurred here could hardly be estimated. The town of Galle, in particular, was a tragedy. Beautiful as it was in its historical setting it was now a scene of utter destruction. Galle was the remaining masterpiece of the Dutch settlers who occupied the land in the 17th century. Fortunately the imposing Dutch Fort was mostly untouched by the waves dating from the protected many residential houses as well as the well-known New Oriental Hotel which was the favourite of foreign visitors to the town of Galle.

The beautiful cricket grounds which had been built some years ago did not seem to exist. It seemed to be now a sea of water. Many a test match in cricket had been played for several years upon these grounds. It was admired and loved by foreigners, visitors and cricket commentators who described the cricket matches played upon it from time to time. Part of the coastline of Galle was enclosed by stone ramparts built originally by the Dutch rulers of our land.

The Tsunami waves rushed along the island's eastern coast, ravaging towns such as Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Mullaitivu. These towns were shown on television. They were horrifying to human eye. Everywhere lay dead bodies of people caught and surprised in their morning routine. Galle and Matara were principally occupied by Sinhala settlers. Trincomalee was a town consisting of a mixture of races such as Tamils, Sinhala and Muslims. Batticaloa and Mullaitivu were principally Tamil in their composition. The cruel Tsunami waves made no distinction of race of community or of religion. Human beings in Galle, Matara and the entire east coast of Sri Lanka were equally devastated irrespective of their racial, ethnic or religious background.

One feature that emerged from the Tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka was the virtual wiping out, at least for the time being, of all ethnic and religious conflicts which had been the bane of our island for at least the past 20 years or so. Never in the history of Sri Lanka, as far as I myself know it, have I seen people rising up irrespective of community or religious differences to help the victims of this tragedy. The government of Sri Lanka consisting of certain parties headed by the SLFP used every means at its disposal to assist the victims. Not only were dry rations distributed but clean water as well. This is the reason why, unlike in many other countries, epidemics did not occur in Sri Lanka due to a tragedy of this magnitude. Thousands and thousands of victims were given temporary shelter in schools or other government institutions. Religious organizations of every creed such as Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims willingly gave shelter to those whose homes had been wiped away. Despite the troubles of the recent past, I as a Sri Lankan felt proud of our people on this occasion.

Despite political differences our country has with imperialism and its allies, aid both in kind and in massive financial terms began to pour into our land from countries of the west and rich countries like Japan and China. Many countries even reduced or wiped out

Sri Lanka's national debt to them. While I retain my political views in every possible way, I join without government and the people of our land in expressing our gratitude to the richer countries of the world. Through their assistance and the determined efforts of our own people, before many more decades have past, Sri Lanka will once again be the beautiful land it was and improve its quality of life. Politics and so-called terrorism apart, it is clear that the human spirit still persists among the peoples of the world.

A Final Note: Not being a geologist or a geophysicist but only a simple physicist, if any small errors there be in my description of Plate Tectonics, I beg pardon from my readers for this.

Post Script

The massive earthquake and the accompanying Tsunami devastated about 11 or 12 countries of the Asian region. As far as possible I have mentioned some of the details of the terrible event. However, almost 3 months later in very late hours of March 28th another massive earthquake occurred in the same region, namely the sea bed near the island of Sumatra. Governments and countries throughout the Asian region prepared themselves for another possible Tsunami. However, despite their fears no such Tsunami ensued. The greatest damage nevertheless was done to

Sumatra and neighbouring island Niyas in Indonesia, as a total of over 2000 are believed to have been killed.

Nobody yet knows the exact cause of this earthquake. Broadly it is said to be an aftermath of the December 26th event. Though not a geologist myself it is my personal opinion that the earthquake of the December 26th was the result of a vertical reaction between the Indo Tectonic plate of the earth crust and the Australian plate which separated in recent times. The result was a massive column of water which proceeded as a wave towards the west. The details of this, the above article as already dealt with. It is my opinion that the March 28th earthquake was caused by horizontal movement of segments of the two broken plates. This is probably why a Tsunami wave did not result in the Indian Ocean but only in parts of Indonesia and their neighbouring islands.

Our ignorance regarding this phenomena is still very great. I agree completely with the government in setting a 100m limit against building on the coast. Arthur C. Clarke says this should be 300m; and the Indian government has in fact set a 500m limit. Much more underwater research has to be done before a proper understanding is possible. Whether the repetition of this phenomena including another possible Tsunami is likely to occur, scientists themselves are unable to predict. ■

Osmund Jayaratne is Emeritus Professor of Physics, formerly of the University of Colombo.

SUPPORT RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY IN NEPAL EXPRESS SOLIDARITY FOR THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN NEPAL

Nepal's King Gyanendra assumed absolute power on February 1, 2005, imposed state of emergency repealed many provision of the constitution of Nepal and curtailed democratic and human rights of the people of Nepal. Leaders of democratic parties have been put under house arrest and scores of journalists, human rights activist and political cadres of various democratic parties have been under illegal detention.

In the name of containing insurgency in the country, the king has actually targeted democracy and people who were slowly developing a democratic culture.

After the Feb 1st royal takeover, arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, and the use of force have been order of the day. Each day, hundreds of pro-democracy supporters are arrested from the streets. Political leaders are barred to travel to outside Kathmandu valley.

Five mainstream political parties are launching street protests, and other forms of protest for the restoration of multi-party democracy, rule of law, a sovereign parliament (by periodic election), and the inalienable human rights of Nepalese people. They represent the Nepalese opinion for democracy. Support this struggle.

The continuous protests in the streets of Kathmandu, Pokhara, Nepalganj, Janakpur, Biratnagar and other urban centres of Nepal are against the autocratic rule of the King and for release of all political prisoners, restoration of press freedom, peaceful solutions of insurrection and for mainstreaming the insurrectionary forces in the democratic polity of the country. Support this movement and help save this beautiful Himalayan nation.

Your support counts: Please show your support for this campaign with signatures or/and please join e-campaign for democracy and write to the office of the Prime Minister and council of ministers: info@pmo.gov.np ■

OLD HABITS DIE HARD: NATIONHOOD IN THE AFTERMATH OF TSUNAMI

Mihirini Sirisena

The disaster of December 26, 04, popularly known as the Tsunami, created the largest impact a natural disaster has come to create in Sri Lanka in the recent past, changing the geography and the demography of the country in a matter of hours. An attempt to interpret such a tragedy in its aftermath had to contend with two key dynamics around which the stories of Tsunami were woven. Namely, the cause – not the immediate scientific cause but the cosmological reason – and its impact in relation to who was affected for what reason and thereby who deserves to be helped. While entertaining cosmological reasoning for the Tsunami, which saw Sri Lanka's two main political parties as catalysts, I leave out these accounts to concentrate on the the impact of the Tsunami as experienced and expressed by individual people. I interpret the explanations of tsunami in the context of post-war Sri Lanka, attempting to focus on the impact of the Tsunami on the Sri Lankan nationalist consciousness, from information gathered through personal accounts and conversations I have overheard at public places.

The devastation that touched almost the entire coastline of Sri Lanka seems to have carried a "lesson." As the President herself stated over the national television, it was the time to learn the lesson that we are all equal. Nature, in its harsh way, has taught that all are. This was accompanied by calls for unity, as "unitedly" we would "brave the devastation" that "has befallen the nation." It was taken for granted that sentiments stated above were resonant of the feelings of the populace of Sri Lanka, with all television stations calling for Sri Lankans to forget their differences and unite for the cause of re-building the nation, of holding out the begging bowl. The extent to which this natural disaster has altered the nationalist consciousness of Sri Lankans seems to remain a question that needs further exploration, as in more private contexts, the impact of Tsunami seems to intensify the division, rather than the opposite.

I saw Sinhala consciousness making itself felt when I heard a person, almost a tourist to tsunami-hit Hikkaduwa even though he was a Southerner, state as he witnessed the damage, "a bomb couldn't cause the same damage." He was distant and removed from both contexts he commented on, as he himself admitted, but built the link between himself and the disaster-struck people through his identification as a Sinhala from the South. His comment on the tragedy in Hikkaduwa had two implications. On one hand, he down-played the death and destruction caused by the two-decade long war in the North and the East as being of minor scale compared to the devastation the Tsunami caused in the South. On the other, his comment claimed a status of extreme helplessness to the South,

thus urging and justifying intense concentration of aid to the area. Many Sri Lankans of the South identified, alternatively, Matara, Hambantota, Galle to be the worst hit areas, even when statistics spoke to the contrary. Thus, claiming the prestigious position of being "worst-hit" for the South can be read as an attempt to channel funds to the South, or rather, to prevent it from being directed to the remote North and East. It could be argued that the Southern Sri Lankan found it easier to grasp the devastation caused by the Tsunami in the familiar Southern terrain, as the images of destruction facilitated their gauging of devastation. For instance, many who witnessed the devastation the tsunami had left behind were keen on describing the exact damage, in which area, to what landmark etc. The damage caused to "New Monis," a landmark popular among local tourists to the South, is one such example upon which such stories about "worst-hit South" were built. Media too aided the building of the discourse of "worst-hit South," especially immediately after the Tsunami, through repeated and tasteless telecasts of images such as the famous "Galle Clip," which was rumored to have been pivotal in bringing in aid to the country. Such concentration on the South along with accompanying stories strengthened or colored the Sinhala interpretation of the impact of the Tsunami.

On the other hand, some who visited the areas struck by the Tsunami, were relatives and friends from the same areas, who wanted to witness with their own eyes the fate that had befallen the South. Such witnessing "with your own eyes" was vital to comprehend the disaster that befell on "people who lived like us," as I overheard one such visitor say to another. Thus, the disaster seemed to have strengthened the bond of the Sinhala, as the need arose among those who were not affected to identify with those who were affected by the tsunami, building a protective net to protect Sinhala against potential threat of being marginalized in relief and reconstruction efforts. The experience of refugee status adds to this bond. The large number of people who were left displaced by the disaster brought to the South a new experience of that of refugees. The South was used to seeing the IDPs of the two decade long war as a distant reality. As far as the South was concerned, refugees, along with homelessness, were experiences exclusive to the North and the East. Refugee category of borne out of Tsunami left Sinhala people awe-struck, as they come to terms with falling into the status of refugee. It is with disbelief that the Southern Sinhala displaced people stated "we *too* are now refugees because of the Tsunami."

The focus of the Sinhala South on the damage to the LTTE leadership by the Tsunami could be read in a nationalist vein. Immediately after the news of disaster striking Muthur reached the South, people of the south tried to gauge the damage to the LTTE, particularly to the leadership and its military strength. These were given validity when media displayed similar interest in the issue, with stories of the death of LTTE leaders. The interest shown in the South in the possible damage the tsunami caused the LTTE was similar to that Sinhala people demonstrated after a major battle. The Sinhala South was keen to know the damage in assessing the extent to which the LTTE would have been militarily weakened by the Tsunami. An underlying theme of the Tsunami's impact on the LTTE was to point out that even nature was against the unjust cause of the LTTE. Nature's scheme against the unjust LTTE is highlighted by stories of incredible survival rate of Buddha statues and statues of gods and goddesses, now belonging to the Buddhist pantheon, in certain instances. The incredulity with which people of the South, mostly Buddhists I presume, spoke of the survival rate of Buddha statues, and those of Gods and Goddesses occasionally, brought forth the sentiment that nature did not rise against Buddhism. This assertion resonated the anti-Christian sentiment implying that nature's wrath was not directed against Buddhism. These people overlooked the survival of other statues in disaster struck areas, among there were statues of Jesus Christ, Mother Mary and many of politicians and other important people.

Tamil nationalist response to the Tsunami seemed to regard the consequences of the disaster of a lower scale compared to those of the two-decade long war. That was what was implied when a Tamil nationalist stated that the consequences of the Tsunami were not as great as that of the 1995 displacement of Jaffna. In the context of massive displacement, deaths and disaster in the South as well as North and East as the result of the tsunami and the large scale response the State and other concerned agents of society, the statement simply implied that the country was not aware of the suffering that the people of the North and East have been through. In other words, his point was that adequate attention was not paid to the sufferings and destruction caused by the war to the lives and property of the war-affected areas.

As a concluding note, it could be said that the entrenched roots of Sinhala and Tamil were such that a natural disaster that treated "all equally" would not result in bringing the divided communities together, despite the unity that was propounded by many almost as a cliché. The tsunami did open a space, in which the adversaries could co-operate politically. There were many individual instances of coming together of divided communities to help each other. However, traditional mutual suspicion colored the sentiment of the key communities, and was fuelled greatly by many of the media institutions both overtly and through unprofessional conduct due to ignorance. ■

Mihirini Sirisena is a Sociologist

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TSUNAMI VICTIMS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BUFFER ZONE IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

N. Shanmugaratnam¹

The government seems to be more interested in enforcing the 200-meter-ban than addressing our needs in a comprehensive manner. The concern it professes about our future security sounds hollow when nobody from the government has so far bothered to engage in dialogues with the victims to find out their views and preferences regarding the future.

- A young university graduate from Maruthamunai (28 February 2005)

We are determined to keep our land but we as a group will consider housing in a safer place only if we can continue with our fishing and farming as we have been doing until two months ago. But we are worried that someone will take our land with the help of the government. We have heard that foreigners want to build hotels on our beach.

- A displaced woman from Komari (28 February 2005)

They were among the first to be hit by the tsunami in Sri Lanka. Yet, two months after the disaster their lives remained shattered and the vast majority of them were being haunted by fear and uncertainty about the future. This message recurred powerfully throughout my conversations with groups of tsunami-displaced men, women and children along the eastern coast from Komari in the south to Verugal on the Batticaloa-Trincomalee border. In two days of field visits, I tried to gather and understand the affected people's perceptions regarding the proposed 200 meters buffer zone (for the North-East) and its implications for their livelihoods. The government's decision was taken under a state of Emergency and without any consultation with the victims or their representatives. It has also come to light that the government had not sought professional advice on this highly complex issue. Recent interventions in the media by knowledgeable persons suggest that the government's decision was ill informed, arbitrary and might even be legally unsound. However, the state machinery has already been directed to enforce the buffer zone rule under Emergency Regulations. In the East, government officials, especially the Divisional Secretaries and Grama Sevakas (Village Officers) are busy advising and instructing tsunami victims that they should abide by the buffer zone rule for their own future security. Many tsunami victims I met were under the impression that the buffer zone had legal sanction. This 'new law' as perceived by the innocent victims has created new concerns among them about relocation and livelihood security. In the absence of a systematic campaign to enlighten the people on the probability of a tsunami occurring in

the future and how to be prepared for it, the buffer-zone-approach seems to have reinforced the fears of the victims. It is in such circumstances of psychological stress and inadequate information that the people are being compelled to take major decisions. In this article I present what I heard from the tsunami victims I met and some of my own personal observations.

Mixed Perceptions

The perceptions regarding relocation to 'safer areas' were mixed. There were persons who believed that relocation would save them from a future tsunami, which could happen any time. The fear of another tsunami occurring in their lifetime seemed to be the sole reason for them to prefer relocation to 'safer areas'. However, the same people had other concerns about the choice of location. There were groups that regarded the whole idea of a buffer zone as unrealistic and unacceptable. These people were keen to go back to their habitats and rebuild their lives, and there were others who were undecided. Moreover, there was widespread suspicion whether the government had a hidden agenda to promote privatisation and commercialisation of the coastal zone resources. Many also feared that the army might be used to enforce the buffer zone and military camps and high security zones might be set up on their lands in the future. It was obvious that the people were in need of more detailed and accurate information and assurances. It appeared that the local officials were not informed enough to provide clear answers to questions the people had.

The tsunami struck this region on top of the ravages inflicted on it by a protracted war. The spatial and socio-economic impact of the latter was uneven in the North-East. However, the war had generated new grievances concerning livelihood security and human development among wider sections of the people including coastal communities. It had already weakened the capacities of many who survived the tsunami to cope with the shock and its after effects. Further, the peculiarities of the political economy of the fishing communities have always kept most of the fishers on the margins of livelihood failure. Small groups of big boat owners and middlemen dominate the sector. Majority of the fishers operate small boats or work for a wage. Most of the small fishers are locked in asymmetrical relationships with middlemen on whom they are dependent for credit to carry on their fishing and to whom they are obliged to sell their harvest. In many cases the middlemen are the real owners of the boats and nets used by small fishermen. This relationship keeps the small fishers in a constant state of livelihood

insecurity. The tsunami has thrown the small and the waged fishers into a world of destitution, which may be seen as a new opportunity by middlemen. And these vulnerable groups found themselves in a state of confusion, anxiety and uncertainty when they heard of the government's '200 meter ban'.

It may be relevant to look at the LTTE's position on relocation as some of the areas I visited are under their control. To my knowledge, the LTTE has not formally rejected or accepted the government's decision. However, an official document of the LTTE (Post Tsunami Reconstruction, Planning and Development Secretariat, LTTE, January 2005), states that a participatory approach should be adopted where relocation is necessitated by circumstances. It would seem that the LTTE is for relocation beyond 200 meters from the sea wherever land is available, as for example in Mullaitivu. In Vadamarachchi in the North, tsunami-displaced fishers told me that it was practically not possible for them to observe even a 50 meters buffer zone and they had made it known to both the government and the LTTE that relocation was out of the question. Among the people I met in the LTTE-controlled areas in the East, many seemed to be in favour of relocation but had more or less the same concerns as their fellow victims in government-controlled areas regarding livelihood security and their lands close to the sea.

Safe housing is a part of livelihood security

A fundamental concern shared by all the displaced groups I interacted with was that relocation could not be seen in isolation from livelihood security, which implied people's ability to achieve decent states of being. Housing is an integral part of a household's livelihood system. The livelihoods of the affected people on the eastern coast were diverse and households often combined different activities such as sea and lagoon fishing, farming, trade, and waged employment. Migration to the Middle East for employment was not uncommon. However, fishing was the mainstay for the majority until they were partially or totally dispossessed by the tsunami. 'We paid a heavy price for living too close to the sea', said a leader of the displaced fisher families from Pasikuda-Kalkuda, 'and now we would like to move to a safer area but that has to be close enough to the sea, our beach and landing sites. The government wants us to move to Kumburumoolai, which is miles away from our coast. Going there is out of the question. If the government insists on relocating us, we will fight to the last for a more suitable location or to return to our village.' There were 115 displaced families from Pasikuda-Kalkuda now living in temporary huts on a land belonging to a local resident. They had lost 208 people, mostly women and children.

The leader had more to say about what he perceived as 'hasty efforts' by local bureaucrats to relocate his community to Kumburumoolai. 'The Divisional Secretary seems so determined to pack us off to that place. She does not seem to know that our chief occupation is fishing which cannot be practised in Kumburumoolai. Nor would it be practical for us to live there, so far away, and fish in Pasikuda. You see we have our rights to fish

in Pasikuda-Kalkuda, land our catch on the beach and keep our boats and dry our nets there. Anyone with some knowledge of fishing will tell you that fishermen need to constantly observe the sea for signs of fish movements and tidal changes. How can we do this if we lived miles away from the site of our occupation? We are especially fortunate to be in Pasikuda-Kalkuda because it is a shallow bay in which we can fish all year round, unlike in other areas where the sea turns too rough for fishing during September to November/December. Of course, Kumburumoolai might have been acceptable if we were farmers. In fact, some families that depend mainly on farming have decided to accept the government's offer and move to Kumburumoolai.'

He went on to say that past governments had toyed with the idea of relocating the fishing communities of Pasikuda-Kalkuda to some other area to clear the beach for tourism development. He wondered if the same idea was behind the current move too. He said that his group had identified a suitable area that meets both the government's buffer zone rule and the community's need. 'It is only 300 meters away and there is enough land for all of us. But most of the land is privately owned, which means the owners have to be willing to sell and the government has to be willing to assist us to buy. We have talked to our MP who has promised to get the land for us. If that fails, we will have no option but to return to our village.' Relocation was not the only issue that worried this group. Like the others, they wondered how to find the resources to revive their livelihoods and move away from humanitarian relief.

Highest Death Toll

The situation was even more acute in highly densely populated Kalmunai and Maruthamunai, which had the highest death toll in the whole country. More than 11,300 died in Kalmunai alone. It did not seem practically possible to find suitable land in sufficient quantity within a reasonable distance from the sea in these areas for the affected fisher families to be relocated. There was no vacant land even to set up a temporary camp for the displaced. 'Settlements have extended right to the edge of the sea because of the lack of land. Here, relocation can only mean migration to an area many miles away. I do not think anyone is prepared for it. I certainly am not', said a displaced person in Kalmunai. The other displaced fishers I met in Kalmunai and Maruthamunai expressed similar sentiments. One of them said, 'we are not opposing relocation blindly. If land were available beyond say 50 meters from the sea, I would consider relocating. The important point is that 100 or 200 meters buffer zone makes no sense here. Perhaps some may have other options, but for most of us there is no option but to return to our coast, start fishing and rebuild our lives.' He said that about 50 meters of land was already lost to sea as a result of the tsunami and complained that it was difficult to do coastal fishing because debris had been dumped on the coast. The fishers of Kalmunai staged a mass demonstration on 24 February, nearly two months after the tsunami, to voice their demands and concerns. They demanded free and exclusive access to the proposed buffer zone and registered their opposition to any

future use of their lands for security camps or tourist hotels and industries. They appealed for financial assistance to rebuild their fishing assets.

The displaced from Kathiraveli, which lies in an LTTE-controlled area, seemed to have reached a consensus to relocate. There were 275 families living in tents provided by an international NGO, which they said was doing things in close consultation with them. There were another 138 families from the neighbouring village of Poochakerni in the same camp. Many from these two groups practised both fishing and farming and some were also migrant workers. 'We have suffered too much to go back to the same place to live. We lost 53 lives. We have decided to move to a safer area. There is enough land for all of us. An international organisation has promised to assist us', said a spokesperson. However, there was a dissenting voice. 'I want to go back to where I have lived for 45 years. My land is just outside the 200 meters limit. It has a well and I have already started putting up a hut there. The land identified for relocation is a bit too far from the coast. I am sure there will be practical problems regarding taking care of the boats and nets, which have to be left on the beach. People will realise only after moving there', said a 60 years old man. 'Of course, we are not giving up our lands. We shall put up *wadiyas* (huts) on our beach to keep our nets and other things and for us to stay. The Grama sevaka (village officer) has informed us that the government in Colombo will not take our land', said the spokesperson. A woman sounded a sceptical note: 'yes but what does the Grama sevaka know about the plans the government may have? Has any government kept its word in this country? We have an acre of homestead with some coconut trees. I did a lot of home gardening and I will go back to our land and start doing it again. My husband is a fisherman and I am a farmer. We must have at least a hut on our land so that we can continue to practise both.' She said that soon after the tsunami when the international NGO asked them what their first priority was they said 'housing' in one voice. The NGO then began to work on their first priority. 'But now, after two months of living on relief, we feel reviving our own economic activities is also equally important. Now we think it was a mistake not to make both housing and getting back to fishing or some other work such as farming as the first priority.'

A young fisherman responded: 'well, we have missed a great opportunity to make some good money because we don't have our boats and prawn nets. This is the prawn season, which began in January and will last till the end of March. A man known to me made 30,000 rupees the other day because he had a big catch of high value prawns. His boat was not damaged because it was anchored in a safe place.' He said that ideally there should have been a scheme to provide them with soft loans to revive their fishing during the prawn season, as it would have helped them recover faster with the high income from prawns. He was not talking of grants but soft loans to invest in the basic capital goods to revive fishing. He was aware that banks would not lend to disaster-stricken, assetless fishers. He talked of a special group credit scheme involving the fishermen's organisation and a willing NGO as

partners. 'But I am not going to wait for it. This is just an idea, which might not interest anyone. Now I am prepared to do any job including farm labour in neighbouring Sinhalese areas until I am able to return to fishing', he said.

Perceptions regarding post-tsunami reconstruction in the South

A widespread view among the people I met in the East was that the government, while neglecting them, was providing a lot of assistance to tsunami victims in the South. 'I have been listening to the radio ever since the tsunami struck', said a displaced man from Thambiluvil, 'everyday a new programme is being launched by some minister in the South. The President opened a big project in Hambantota the other day. Something is happening there everyday but nothing here. Many ministers and powerful politicians are there to take care of them.' It was quite common to hear such statements. Apparently they were not aware yet of the complaints and protests by the tsunami victims in the South. When I told them about this, the immediate response was, 'well we should start our own protests too'. They had serious doubts about the commitment and capacity of the government to address their grievances. However, everyone, Tamil and Muslim, I spoke to remembered with deep feelings the material and moral support they received from fellow Lankans. In Kathiraveli, Tamils recalled with emotions how a Sinhalese from far away Moneragala and some Muslims from a neighbouring area brought cooked food for them.

Need for Rethinking

The government's decision to introduce a buffer zone without consulting the people concerned has created confusion and uncertainty amongst them. Recently, the government has publicised the steps it was taking regarding the enforcement of the buffer zone, housing of tsunami-affected people and tourism development. 'The government', says an official advertisement, 'will set up special Tourism Zones covering all the tourist areas in the coastal belt. These zones will have modern infrastructure with an unencumbered view and access to the coast. There will be special incentives provided to promote sustainable and value added tourism.' (Daily Mirror, March 2, 2005)

The most widespread concern among the coastal communities in the country as a whole is that that the government has framed post-tsunami reconstruction as a programme of privatisation and commercialisation of the coastal zone and marine resources without paying adequate attention to their long-term livelihood security. The fishing communities in particular have valid reasons to fear that they may lose their customary rights to coastal zone resources. An activist in the south of the country told me that, 'the policy of tourism development and large-scale privatisation of fisheries is likely to accelerate the ongoing marginalisation and exclusion of sections of the coastal communities. Tourist hotels and the

recreation industry will effectively privatise long tracts of our beaches. There will of course be some local beneficiaries but many small fishers including women are likely to lose their traditional livelihoods and become displaced and unemployed or under-employed. This is why we are speaking of a second tsunami and the only way to prevent it is to defend the right to livelihood of the vulnerable sections of the coastal communities.’ Campaigns and protests have already been mounted in the South and in the East. The signs are clear that the people are not happy with the government’s policy and its handling of the post-tsunami recovery. In many parts of the North-East, post tsunami reconstruction cannot

easily be separated from the tasks of rebuilding war-torn communities and livelihoods. The government and the LTTE have yet to reach an understanding regarding a joint mechanism for reconstruction. An opportunity to link reconstruction, reconciliation and peacebuilding seems to be drifting away. The use of emergency regulations and militarisation to enforce the buffer zone is ill advised. The consequences could be disastrous if this is not abandoned in favour of a better informed and more realistic approach that would take account of the ecological and socio-economic variations and the views of the affected people in the coastal zones. ■

TSUNAMI

“The fountains of the great deep opened up” (Genesis, chapters 6-8)

It’s a sunny morning
A new day.

Aftermath.

Kites soaring high in the air
with dazzling wings
borne on trapezes of eddying wind.

At our gate a young boy stands, smiling,
green trap net in his hand
to capture the rebel bird that has escaped
from our neighbour’s pet shop

How long will its freedom last,
this leaf camouflaged budgerigar
nestling among the throttling epiphytes
that choke and strangle the rough barked
Bottle Brush tree noosing its torso and
branches with thick, twining lianas
of strong hemp-like ropes.

Will the smiling boy capture the bird?
Will it go back into its prison?
Will the babel of bird cries down the
Single note of piercing grief?

The bird climbs higher and higher,
its tiny wings carry it to the upper
branches, hidden within the recessed shadows.
Disappears.

“It won’t last long on its own,
predators will destroy it,” the searchers say.

Frail, vulnerable bird its fate to us humans
unknown, our own instincts for survival,
blunted.

Frail bird, frail children, frail beings,
For some the yawning sea bed a revelation,
a gasp between life and death,
reminders of Israelite exodus when the wall of
waters submerged the dry land, the horses,
chariots, the horsemen, the Egyptian host
all living beings left dead upon the shore

For others, entangled in vast steel nets of
waves it was the hungry oceans abundant
catch, gorged on, ingested, sucked in,
swept away, beyond, beyond, beyond all retrieval.

The subtle treason of poetry
deludes our senses, colours, sound, movement
create endless metaphors for the sea,

now the azure wave clamps down
clutching with strong tearing talons
the tender flesh cleaving to life,
the strand slipping away
into the breathless seas.

Wiped of the face of creation,
a world of lost maps, lost islands
lost lives, lost minds, blot out existence.

Those who are left escape into a void of
nothingness, walk distraught on nowhere
roads to nowhere destinations,

bedlam echoes on our quiet shores and sanctuaries,
lost faces blur on vanishing horizons
each face tattered wrinkled flag,
pennants of defeat in nature's conquest,
limp bodies spangling the branches of
weeping trees.

pinned down, beneath the fallen walls
the mangled forms of children

Every pore, every crevice of the waking
consciousness overcome by odours of
putrefaction where once this tragic flesh
was warm, instinct with breath and life
Gigantic plumes of surf rise,
stun the air,

Waves swoop down to clutch
the writhing bodies so soon breath-quenched,

the winding sheets of waves are torn
apart, tattered limbs exposed to sun, to wind,

Now the long slow dinge begins,
the mourning of the bereaved waves
keen on and on,

spewed out upon the grooved sand
ridged with bodies, new furrows appear.

The air is alive with invisible ethereal
wings of hovering spirits weighing down

our leaden souls,
beneath our feet, the surf-edged
waves stampede, ride over a fissured
land,
trees, branches, roots plucked up
with manic hands torn and twisted,
piled up the tumult of crushed debris.

Deep trenches close over mass graves
concealing limbs tangled with the
hopeless plunge of riven flesh,

blood seeps into soil,
what plants, what trees, orchards and
fields will grow to feed the pastured
kine and all this orphaned breed.

We alone are left
in this aftermath of Armageddon.

Our Mourning will not cease

In a surreal landscape
massed behind the skyline
lighting up the macabre darkness
the leaping fires of burning pyres,
wrecked boats, twisted rails, carriages
flung haphazardly, all awry,
with sundered bridges.
an eerie silence hangs its pal
over a voiceless night.

Jean Arasanayagam

Available soon from the SSA

A Nice Bugher girl

by
Jean Arasanayagam

LONE WOOLF

Yasmine Gooneratne

On 16 December 2004, celebrations in Sri Lanka and in Britain will mark an important date in the cultural history of Sri Lanka. A plaque will be erected by the Ceylon Bloomsbury Group, and a commemorative tree planted in Tavistock Square, a London locality in which the writers Leonard and Virginia Woolf lived for some years, and where they jointly established their famous publishing house, the Hogarth Press.

Most centenary tributes are dated from the birth- or death-days of notable men and women. In the case of Leonard Woolf, the event we celebrate on 16 December 2004 is neither a birth nor a death, but an arrival. A hundred years ago, on 16 December 1904, Leonard Woolf disembarked in Colombo, a very new recruit to Britain's Civil Service and, according to his own description of himself at that time as contained in *Growing*, the second volume of his autobiography, "a very innocent, unconscious imperialist". (*Growing*, p. 25). The seven years Woolf spent in Sri Lanka changed his life, and permanently altered his outlook on the world. This might not have been a matter of great significance if Woolf had been merely an exceptionally efficient civil servant. That he undoubtedly was. But there were many such efficient civil servants beavering away in the outposts of the British Empire at the turn of the century. Woolf was one among many; and although he was probably unique among his fellows in achieving then what is still considered the ultimate 'mission impossible', actually ensuring that correspondence received at any Government office under his control was answered on the same day, this centenary celebration is special to Sri Lanka for literary reasons. It marks the beginning of a 7-year experience that gave the island its first great English-language work of fiction, *The Village in the Jungle*.

Many of us in Sri Lanka have read Leonard Woolf's 'novel of Ceylon', and some of us may even have studied it in the 1970s, when some unusually enlightened person in the Department of Education decreed that it be set as a text for the A-Levels in Sri Lanka. Not many of us know a great deal about Woolf himself; and this is also true of readers in Britain, where his literary career has been largely overshadowed by the reputation and achievements of his brilliant wife, Virginia Woolf. So let me begin with some biographical facts: Leonard Sidney Woolf was born in London in 1880, into the family of a wealthy Jewish lawyer. He was educated at St Paul's, a leading British public school, and subsequently at Trinity College, Cambridge. Here he met and made friends with some interesting people who could be said, looking back, to have represented a sampling of the intellectual cream of British society

in his time. Some of the friendships he made during his undergraduate years (such as that with Lytton Strachey) were sustained through letters during the seven years he spent in Ceylon; and most of them were resumed by him on his return. These friends formed the nucleus of what would later be called the Bloomsbury Group, and included the philosopher G.E. Moore, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the novelist E.M. Forster, Thoby Stephen (son of the Literature professor Leslie Stephen), and several artists including Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Thoby Stephen's sisters Vanessa and Virginia were not, of course, Cambridge undergraduates themselves: Leslie Stephen resembled many Victorian fathers in his disapproval of formal education for his daughters, and the University had not yet, in any case, opened its doors to women. But Vanessa was an artist and Virginia a budding writer, and as Thoby's sisters they were part of the group of friends Leonard Woolf saw often and fraternized with at Cambridge.

At the turn of the century Britain was at the height of its power as an industrializing and imperialistic nation. Young idealistic Englishmen in their twenties, Woolf being one, were "not deeply concerned with politics". They were much more interested in what they regarded as Britain's obvious moral duty to bring civilization to the backward societies of the colonies. Being by birth and education a member of the ruling class, it was very natural that the young Leonard should decide to join the colonial Civil Service and assume that duty in a colonial outpost such as Ceylon.

At Cambridge there had been scope for the expression of individual interests – as the membership of Leonard's circle indicates, some undergraduates cultivated their brains as well as their brawn. Leonard and his friends occasionally indulged in some fanciful dressing in the pursuit of 'style', and read fashionably revolutionary or dissenting authors, often in German or French. But he discovered as soon as he left Tilbury Docks on the P & O *Syria*, that among British people abroad certain norms of dress and behaviour applied, to which the newcomer would be wise to conform. The dress code on board ship, for example, was strict. The 'Pukka Englishman' – and Englishwoman – dressed for dinner. Several of Woolf's fellow-travellers might have been contemplating months to be spent in wild and remote parts of the Empire, but they took along with them the evening clothes that enabled them to dress correctly, whether they were playing bridge at the Club among fellow Britishers, or dining quite alone on a mosquito-ridden veranda in the heart of a wilderness in Borneo. (Readers of *The Village in the*

Jungle may remember that scene in the novel when jungle-dwelling Silindu appears out of the night to confess to a British magistrate that he has just killed two men in the jungle. The Sinhala-speaking magistrate, having dined alone in his residence, is still in evening dress. Silindu, weary and tired after a journey of many miles on foot, wears only a loin-cloth. The moment in which these two men converse for the first time without the intervention of an interpreter underlines one of the novel's most important themes, as modern civilization encounters man at his most primitive. (It has always amazed me, by the way, that Lester James Peries's film of the novel, made some years ago, missed the opportunity to make this important thematic point on the screen. Arthur C. Clarke played the magistrate: is it possible that the wardrobe department couldn't find a dress suit for their celebrity actor to wear?)

Some slight eccentricities were permitted to the 'Pukka Englishman', perhaps they were even expected! Woolf, who had taken with him on this first journey out of England a personal library of Voltaire's works in 90 volumes, a wire-haired fox-terrier named Charles, and a set of three bright green flannel collars, to assist him in his task of ruling the British Empire, found with amusement that these possessions were noted by his British fellow-travellers and admired. They inspired respect. (As a matter of interest, those green collars still survive: worn with scarlet coats, they constitute the picturesque riding costume of the Ooty Hunt, the last hunt to survive in India.) In general, however, as Dr Kumari Jayawardene points out in a very interesting paper on Woolf which was published last year (1) the young Civil Service cadet found that it was wise to keep in step with the rest of his kind. Woolf, writes Jayawardene,

seems to have very deliberately assumed a carapace of conformity, being to all intents and purposes the 'Pukka Englishman': this was an appearance that he was very careful to sustain during his entire service in Sri Lanka, few of his colleagues probably knowing of his Jewish origins and penchant for certain dissenting tendencies. (p. 157)

Woolf's postings in Ceylon established him successively as an Assistant Government Agent in three outstations: Jaffna, Kandy and Hambantota. In outstations, the local Club played a very important part in the lives of British officers and residents. Woolf could ride and play bridge; he also played a good game of tennis, and these sporting and social activities helped him to fit in with the life of the Club. His love of dogs marked him as an example of the best kind of Englishman, and he managed a spectacular win in a local sweepstake, which raised his reputation even higher. Woolf's letters to Lytton Strachey reveal his scorn, and even dislike of several under-educated Philistines among his British colleagues, but he seems to have kept these subversive feelings under wraps. He did not go to the opposite extreme, by cultivating friendships with local dignitaries (2), and instead kept them at the right official distance.

It becomes evident, in fact, as we read his autobiography and his letters, that here was a man who was playing a part: an actor on the

great stage of Empire. Writing of Kipling at one point, Woolf allows himself to speculate briefly on whether Kipling's characters were drawn from real life as it was lived under the British Raj, or whether he and fellow Britishers in the colonies were, consciously or subconsciously, compelled to model themselves on Kipling's characters!

While on leave in Britain in 1912, Woolf took what he was later to call the 'icy plunge' back into his old life and re-entered the circle of his Cambridge friends. But although the old life might have seemed familiar at first, it was not the same. The world had changed, and so had Woolf. His seven years as a servant of imperialism had disillusioned him about many concepts that he had never questioned in 1904: imperialism, for instance, and even the nature of civilization itself:

The seven years in Ceylon left a mark upon my mind and even character which has proved indelible, a kind of reserve or withdrawal into myself which makes me inclined always to stand just a little to one side of my environment.

That is the mark, in fact, of the lone wolf which separates itself from the pack and hunts apart from it: an animal whose characteristics Leonard Woolf knew well from his reading of Kipling's fiction (3). It is interesting that Richard Kennedy, the artist and book illustrator who worked for a while as a young man at the Hogarth Press, described Leonard as looking 'very like a wolf in human form ... an extremely intellectual wolf ... a very Socrates of wolves' (4). In the last week of April 1912, while still in England, Woolf resigned from his post in the Civil Service. And before the year was out, he accomplished two other things of importance: he married Virginia Stephen, and he wrote a novel that Edward Arnold published in 1913, *The Village in the Jungle*.

This remarkable book preceded E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*, and anticipated the ironic stance taken by Forster (and later by George Orwell) in relation to the British Raj. It is astonishing, therefore, that Woolf's book has never attracted in Britain the critical attention and evaluation it deserves. Its memorable poetic evocation of the terror and beauty of the southern jungle, and its unsentimental but sympathetic understanding of the isolated communities that lived in it in the author's time went unremarked in the literary journals and magazines. Lytton Strachey dismissed it as a book that "had too many blacks in it": a remark that sounds offensively racist today, and surprises any one who is aware that it was made by a fellow-writer and friend who had corresponded with Woolf throughout his sojourn in Ceylon, and who knew better than anyone else in the world Woolf's most intimate thoughts about his life and his work. Strachey's off-hand, casual dismissal of the book was, however, typical of British attitudes in its time. As the years passed, and Woolf became increasingly involved with political developments in Britain and Europe, the public memory of his years as a colonial civil servant diminished steadily. A few of the obituaries marking Woolf's death in 1969 mentioned the novel, but they did so merely in passing, as if it were an exotic aberration

on the author's part that did not really fit in with the rest of his life's work, and could therefore be conveniently overlooked and forgotten. Woolf's major contribution to the arts, remarked one writer, was in the patient devotion with which he had nursed Virginia Woolf through her spells of mental illness, thereby guaranteeing to the world the emergence of its foremost female literary genius.

"For a long time," as Woolf wrote in *Growing*, he had been developing in Ceylon what he called an "uneasily ambivalent" outlook on his life and work, exaggerating an

imperialist, stern Sahib attitude to compensate for or soothe a kind of social conscience which began to condemn and dislike the whole system ... As time went on, I became more and more ambivalent, politically schizophrenic, an anti-imperialist who ... loved the subject peoples and their way of life, and knew from the inside how evil the system was beneath the surface for ordinary men and women.

Writing *The Village in the Jungle* seems to have given Woolf an opportunity to exorcise his demons, in particular the demon of guilt. He would be able, from the time of its publication onwards, to put the imperial experience behind him, and grasp the new challenges presented by his marriage, by British and European politics, and – soon to dominate everything else – by a looming world war.

The Village in the Jungle is too complex a novel for me to attempt to discuss it in any detail here. I would like, however, to consider briefly the manner in which legality becomes symbolic in this book of all that Leonard Woolf, a meticulously efficient agent of imperialism, had begun to turn against during his last years in Sri Lanka. His duties as Assistant Government Agent in the Southern Province of what was then Ceylon included frequently presiding as a judge in the Police and District courts of the region, and the novel was born of his first-hand experience of the way justice functioned and was administered under the Raj. The inadequacy of a legal system that enforces petty regulations while ignoring the moral disorder beneath what is legally admissible, becomes in *The Village in the Jungle* a target of Woolf's quiet, despairing irony:

'I shot him through the back.'
'Where did you get the gun?'
'It was my gun. I had it in my house.'
'Was it licensed?' (p. 140)

It is irony that takes in the stage and scenery of imperialism, and the posturing of the Agent/actor himself, as elements in an unreal farce played out against the vast panorama that meets the magistrate's eye as he hears the case that has been brought against two villagers, Silindu and Babun. The reality of 'the interminable jungle' is 'framed like a picture in the heavy wooden doorway', and confronts the accused, the accusers, and their judge, standing in perpetual and ironic contrast to the 'unreal' voices that argue in the court-house (p. 111). And yet it was to his post as A.G.A. of

Hambantota that Woolf owed the authenticity of character and incident, and the insight into motive that give his novel its solidity. His work kept him sitting hour after hour in a Government office,

watching from his room the perpetual coming and going along the verandah of every kind and condition of human being, transacting with them the most trivial or the most important business, listening to their requests, their lies, their fears, their sorrows, their difficulties and disasters.¹

Increasingly doubtful of his right to function as lawgiver in a subject society, Woolf presents the A.G.A., the Ratamahatmaya and the Korala (local notables enlisted in the service of Government), the headman, the traders, and the middle-men as agents of an order that is hostile to the sources of instinctive life. The corruption of the headman (a minor official) and his henchmen, and the legality that ties the hands of the magistrate, are reflections of an unjust system. No individual who is responsible for any aspect of Government administration can exempt himself from the guilt that attaches to the whole.

The inexorable process by which Silindu and his family, and ultimately the village itself, are destroyed provides the thread of the story. Its inevitability, tragic because of the grace, beauty, inner vitality, and essential harmlessness of what is being destroyed, is enhanced by the fatalism of the victims and the strength, cunning and resourcefulness of the hunters. Silindu fears the jungle, yet loves it

in a strange, unconscious way, in the same unconscious way in which the wild buffalo loves the wallow, and the leopard his lair among the rocks. (p. 10)

Even his stride, animal-like, 'seemed to show at once both the fear and the joy in his heart' (p. 10); his mind 'moves vaguely with hatred', he falls upon his enemy with the wild beast's sudden rage, he loves with the uncomplicated passion of an animal, and thinks of his children and the need to provide for them in much the same way that a leopard hunts for its cubs. This joyous, half-primitive creature, tortured beyond endurance by the headman's persecution, reacts at last with the fury of the cornered wild buffalo. The twenty years' jail sentence that rewards him for the slaughter of his tormentors dooms him to a domestication that to him is a death in life; he becomes the human equivalent of the village buffalo that may be seen threshing paddy on the village threshing floor, plodding patiently upon its endless round:

A wooden mallet was put into his hand and a pile of cocoanut husk thrown down in front of him. For the remainder of that day, and daily for the remainder of twenty years, he had to make coir by beating cocoanut husks with the wooden mallet. (p. 164)

Several critics besides myself have written essays and articles on Woolf's novel. My own critical assessments and analyses of the

book, in its published as well as in its manuscript form, are available in print. I have listed them at the end of this paper (5) for the benefit of anyone who would like to read them. I first encountered *The Village in the Jungle* when my father put his copy of it in my hands. I was twelve or thirteen at the time, and too young, I suppose, to understand either the imperial issues with which Woolf was dealing, or the novel's tragic relevance to our country. Many years later, I read it again, and was overwhelmed. To anyone here who has not read it, I will only recommend that they lose no time in doing so.

In her essay, Dr Kumari Jayawardena speculates as to the extent to which Leonard Woolf was influenced in his future life by his experiences in Sri Lanka, and remarks that many who knew him well observed a certain 'foreignness' in him. (p. 181). His wife's nephew Quentin Bell was amazed, as a child, to find that he could speak English: "The first impression, and it was an enduring impression, was of someone from a distant land." Bell also remarks that Woolf was not "separated from his fellows by a 'superior' Cambridge arrogance. If he ever had that quality he lost it in Ceylon." There he developed a patience and respect for simple people, and learned "how to get on with ordinary persons". Jayawardena considers that this made it possible for him to respond to the problems of working people, and to develop a talent for interacting and successfully communicating with them. As a socialist and active member of the Labour Party, Woolf involved himself in supporting movements for colonial self-rule, and in opposing the imperialist policies of the British government. One such occasion, which probably had deep roots in his distaste for the colonial/imperialist machine of which he had been a part while in Ceylon, was in his work with the press and in the House of Commons following the 1915 riots between Sinhalese and Muslims in Ceylon which had been quelled by martial law.

This occasion is of particular relevance to my theme of Woolf as remote, indeed, a 'lone wolf' in the societies in which he moved. It will be recalled that two Sinhalese statesmen of that time, E.W.Perera and D.B. Jayatilake, visited Britain in order to present the Sinhalese case, and found in Leonard Woolf an active and energetic advocate of their cause. During their sojourn in London, the two gentlemen paid a social call on Mr and Mrs Woolf, and E.W. Perera, following the custom of his country, according to which only a barbarian pays a visit empty-handed, courteously presented Virginia Woolf with a small gift of hand-made lace, presumably from Galle. This custom of gift-giving, a part of everyday life in Sri Lanka that is so familiar to us, was well known to Leonard Woolf too, and was perfectly understood by him, as anyone would agree who recalls the incident in *The Village in the Jungle* in which Silindu is careful to take a present of game with him when he calls on the headman Babehami. And yet, it appears that the Bloomsbury intelligentsia had little interest either in Woolf's Sri Lankan experience, or in the novel that reflects it, or surely Virginia Woolf, unarguably one of Britain's outstanding minds of that era, would not have reacted to the colonial visitors

with the ignorance and insensitivity she displayed on the occasion. For Virginia Woolf did not, apparently, share her husband's sympathy for 'colonials', and she seems to have been indifferent to their culture and ignorant of their customs. These are the words with which she recorded E.W. Perera's visit in a diary entry of 16 October 1917:

We came back to find Perera, wearing his ... diamond initial in his tie as usual. In fact, the poor little mahogany coloured wretch has no variety of subjects. The character of the Governor, & the sins of the Colonial office, these are his topics; always the same stories, the same point of view, the same likeness to a caged monkey, suave on the surface, inscrutable beyond. He made me uncomfortable by producing an envelope of lace – "a souvenir from Ceylon, Mrs Woolf" – more correctly a bribe, but there was no choice but to take it.

Virginia Woolf's views, reflected clearly in her insularity, her colour-prejudice, her racist comments on the Sinhalese visitors, and her quickness to interpret E.W. Perera's courtesy as a bribe, tell us a good deal about the less attractive aspects of the Britain to which Woolf had returned in 1912, and from which he seems to have kept himself remote. The incident helps, perhaps, to explain the failure of *The Village in the Jungle* to find an appreciative audience in Britain, although in Sri Lanka and in Southeast Asia generally, it is regarded as a seminal work. As the first great work of creative art to emerge in modern times from the experience of local living, it has long held a place of importance in the developing English-language literatures of Asia and the South Pacific.

Like other authors, Leonard Woolf has had his share of detractors. He and the British poet Ted Hughes have both been targeted for the parts they are supposed to have played in bringing about the suicides of their respective wives, the American poet Sylvia Plath in the case of Hughes, and the English novelist Virginia Woolf in the case of Leonard Woolf. The most recent attack on Woolf of which I am aware occurred a few years ago when, exploiting the stance and language of feminist criticism, a writer named Irene Coates mischievously published a book with the title *Who's Afraid of Leonard Woolf?* in which her 'case' against Woolf included the charge of having, to all intents and purposes, murdered the brilliant and mentally unstable Virginia. I met Mrs Coates in Sydney soon after the publication of her book, and I was disturbed to discover that she intended to sell her 'story' to a film producer in the United States. Given the contemporary taste for sensation in the film industry, she might well have found someone to finance such a project, and I hope very much that her efforts have been unsuccessful. Part of my interest in publishing a new edition of *The Village in the Jungle* has been to analyse and (I hope) permanently eliminate this and similarly irresponsible attacks on a good man and a great mind: I have undertaken that task in an Appendix to the book. But my chief hope in working on a scholarly edition has been that its publication will help to revive international interest in Leonard Woolf's neglected masterpiece, and bring to

academic attention several Sri Lankan and Australian scholars who have published essays and articles on Woolf that are listed in my Bibliography.

If all goes well, Woolf's centenary will see the publication of a new edition of *The Village in the Jungle*, which corrects misprints and other errors that appeared in the first (1913) edition, and remained uncorrected through subsequent reprints. It also provides, chiefly for the scholarly reader's interest, a number of crucial passages that were excised from Woolf's manuscript at its first printing, and examines possible reasons for their omission. This part of my work was made possible through the generosity of Mrs Trekkie Parsons, Leonard Woolf's companion in his later years and executrix of his Will, who had donated the original manuscript to the Library of the University of Peradeniya, a facsimile copy being retained in the Sussex University Library. The late Ian Goonetilleke informed me of the existence and exact whereabouts of the manuscript, which he and the late Gamani Salgado had been instrumental in securing for the Peradeniya library. During a visit to Sri Lanka in 1979, I was able to read and study it in tandem with my own copies of the printed book. Preparation of a definitive edition, which continued through twenty years of University teaching and the writing and publication of other books, including novels, social history and biography, has taken a long time, during which I had no particular date in mind for its appearance. But I will be more than satisfied if its eventual publication coincides with the centenary celebrations of Woolf's arrival in Sri Lanka.

End Notes

- (1) Kumari Jayawardena, 'Leonard Woolf: A Background Note', in G. Robuchon, ed., *I Want to Speak of Tenderness: 50 Writers for Anne Ranasinghe*, ICES Colombo, 2003, pp. 152 – 187.
- (2) When John D'Oyly befriended local Kandyan chiefs fifty years earlier, he became a target of suspicion and gossip in his own community. See Brendon and Yasmine Gooneratne, *This Inscrutable Englishman: Sir John D'Oyly, 1774 –1824*. Cassell/Continuum, London and New York 1999.
- (3) Many passages of *The Village in the Jungle* have close affinities with Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Especially notable are Silindu's tales of his conversations with wild animals in the forest, which bear comparison with Kipling's story 'Red Dog' in *The Second Jungle Book*. Similarly, the descriptions of the jungle as it gradually overwhelms the village of Beddegama have much in common with Kipling's story, 'Letting in the Jungle'.
- (4) Richard Kennedy, *A Boy at the Hogarth Press* (1972) pp. 17 – 20.
- (5) Yasmine Gooneratne, 'Leonard Woolf's "Waste Land": *The Village in the Jungle*', first published in *New Ceylon Writing* in 1971, later reprinted in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 8.1 (1972) pp. 22-34; Yasmine Gooneratne, 'A Novelist at Work: The manuscript of Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*', in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 18.1 (1983) pp. 91 – 103; Yasmine Gooneratne, 'Leonard Woolf's Novel of Sri Lanka: *The Village in the Jungle*' in H. Antor and K. Stierstorfer, eds., *English Literatures in International Contexts*. C. Winter, Universitätsverlag Heidelberg, pp. 397 – 402.
Courtesy, *The Ceylankan*, Journal of the Ceylon Society of Australia, No. 28, Vol VII, No 4 (November 2004). ■

Emeritus Professor Yasmine Gooneratne's new annotated edition of *The Village in the Jungle* is published by the Edwin Meller Press (UK)

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CULTURE, RELATIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ram Manikkalingam

Human Rights (HR) activists do not like cultural relativism. The success of the Human Rights project both philosophically and practically depends on its commitment to universal human rights standards, i.e., standards that apply to all humans, at all times, and in all situations. Cultural relativists who are ethnocentric reject the possibility there are common standards that apply to all cultures. Philosophically, human rights activists are committed to the belief that all humans, whatever their situation, are endowed with a bundle of inalienable rights. This bundle of rights reflects the dignity as well as the equality of all humans. They believe taking away some of these rights, bargaining over when they should be applied, or acquiescing in not applying human rights to some individuals or groups, not only dis-empowers and impoverishes them, but also detracts from our common humanity.

Human rights activists also believe that the universalism of human rights is critical to its practical success as a tool for improving people lives (not just as a philosophy about the universal standards for improvement). When the powerless or the dispossessed realise they have human rights because these rights are for everyone, they will be empowered to resist their oppressors and struggle for better conditions and improve their lives. And when the powerful realize that human rights apply to everyone, they will be shamed by a human rights report naming them as abusers of others' human rights.² So for human rights to work in practice as a way for improving peoples lives both the oppressed and the oppressors must know that human rights are universal. It is this link between human rights as a strategy to improve the lives of the vulnerable and human rights as a universal philosophy that applies to everyone, that leads human rights activists to balk at any attempt by the ethnocentric to question applying the same HR standards to culturally different situations.

In this brief note I will examine three ethnocentric objections to the Human Rights project and universalist Human Rights responses to these objections. Despite the importance of the challenge cultural difference poses to the universality of human rights, the work of most human rights activists in practice can continue as it does. The support for addressing widespread forms of human cruelty and deprivation - from torture, imprisonment and killings, to lack of food, lack of medicine and lack of housing - cuts across cultural differences. So practically, one might ignore this critique and simply plough ahead - as many human rights activists do. Still, engaging seriously with cultural relativists can have two important results - philosophical and practical. First it reminds human rights activists of human finitude - they are after all only a subset of humanity and can sometimes be wrong. Two it reminds them of "our" common humanity - we are all in this together so we need to

listen very carefully to what the cultural relativists are saying. And listening can have two important practical consequences. Where it is not possible to reasonably reject human rights standards - sincere listening can help human rights activists understand the basis of the opposition and find ways to address sincere misunderstanding. This will help in implementing universal human rights standards. Second - where human rights activists have come to mistaken conclusions about standards, listening can help the human rights community think about how to alter them and/or specify them more clearly.

This will improve the possibility of human rights being accepted and implemented as a universal project. Either way, taking cultural relativists seriously - whether human rights standards are right or wrong - can have the paradoxical result of actually strengthening the universality of Human Rights and the likelihood of its implementation, along with the commitment to a common humanity that is fundamental to its political success.

1. The First Ethnocentric Objection to Human Rights: "This is how we do things around here"

The first and most straightforward cultural relativist objection to the universality of human rights is that each community sets its own standards and that my community should be able to set its own. This objection is seen as adequate for two reasons. First cultural relativists argue that human rights are culturally specific - developed and pushed by a subset of people and cultures (usually Western) onto others. They do not deny that some standards are common. Only that the commonality is accidental, i.e., there is no deeper truth about the shared values of humanity that underlies the fact that some standards may be the same. Their key objection is that where central elements of human life - come into conflict with other people's standards - they have a right to pursue these elements. Where other peoples' standards are presented as universal - it simply reflects a sincere ignorance of how people actually live their lives or an invidious form of domination. By saying that your group's definition of rights is universal you impose your standards on me in order to dominate me.

Human rights activists rightly reject this cultural relativist objection. They do so for two reasons. First, they deny the absence of a common humanity that is implied if not stated in the cultural relativists perception that "this is how we do things around here". Human rights activists do not consider this an adequate response to HR claims of universalism. It begs the question - "so why do you do things like that around here" - that in the HR activists view can lead to universal standards. But for the cultural relativist "this

is how we do things around here” is the conclusion of the conversation. It both contains the reasons and the conclusion – we are different; that’s why we do things differently.

But the unwillingness of the cultural relativist to enter into a conversation about the implications of our common humanity is not all that troubles the HR activist. If that were the case, it would at most be a philosophical distinction. Rather what troubles the HR activist – particularly the one who has covered genocide, ethnic cleansing, and racial discrimination – is that this unwillingness to treat members of other cultural groups as you would your own has been responsible for some of the nastiest forms of human cruelty and indifference. If indeed the standards we apply to our own are different from those we apply to others (and there is no reason for this other than the happenstance that they are our own), then there is nothing to preclude us from disregarding others in ways that we would not our own. So human rights activists see this claim as a blatant attempt by the dominant to retain their power, at worst, or ignorance about human possibility, at best.

Having rejected rightly the ethnocentrism of the powerful – those who can use their power to abuse others and want to do so - HR activists then go on to lecture to the powerless and/or sincere who resort to ethnocentrism.³ They argue against the ethnocentric that cultures are internally diverse. This suggests that there will always be some member of a particular culture (appropriately defined) who will share the position of the human rights activist rather than the representatives of the culture. And even when there may not be such diversity, they illustrate how the boundaries between cultures are blurred. It is hard to say where one culture begins and another ends, given the intermingling of cultures. To the human rights activist, these facts about culture demonstrate an important political reality – cultures are flexible and fluid, not fixed. Practically, human rights activists point to cases where other cultures subsequently adopted practices that they initially considered alien. So human rights activists confidently conclude that human rights standards are universal and the ethnocentric critics who reject this out of ignorance (as opposed to a desire to hang onto privilege and power) just have not figured this out. With time they will.

The self-righteous tone of human rights activists’ refusal to listen to, let alone respect, the argument – “this is how we do things around here” - may turn-off many who sympathize with the human rights community. But, this self-righteousness does have a basis in historical reality. Some of the most egregious forms of human cruelty to other humans, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, and discrimination, have stemmed from the refusal to treat others as you would your own. So human rights activists are confident that insisting we do, and finding the common standards that will enable us to, will on the whole improve the condition of humans everywhere.

2. The Second Ethnocentric Objection to Human Rights: “You do not know everything”

The second ethnocentric objection is that setting and implementing human rights standards is a politically charged task with no clear consensus even within the “human rights community” about what these standards are. In short, Human Rights are no less a political and historical invention than culture. This objection stems from a claim about the limitations of human knowledge. It turns the human rights critique of culture as flexible and fluid around. While the human rights activists may respond that upholding universal standards that apply to everyone will provide greater protection than not doing so, she is still vulnerable to the second ethnocentric objection about human finitude.

The strategy of this ethnocentric objection is to show how human rights standards and their applicability are open to interpretation and debate even among human rights activists, who share the premise of universal human rights standards. When human rights standards are applied to particular situations people disagree. The very fact that we need courts – international and domestic – to adjudicate between competing interpretations of human rights is one indication of this. Consider the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – widely considered the most fundamental international human rights document. This ethnocentric objection argues that the UDHR may have many desirable features, and may even be the most universal rights document in existence. Still, it was created and presented at a particular moment in history and it is easy to imagine a very different set of standards being enumerated by a different group of people, with equal commitment to universal human rights. And the UDHR is just one particular manifestation of universal human rights. To treat human rights as if it were immutable and timeless is wrong. Human Rights will change with time and it might change with place. In short, at any particular moment human rights activists cannot claim to have gotten human rights standards right; human rights activists do not know everything.

This ethnocentric objection is not easy for the human rights activists to refute without becoming fundamentalists. Because to reject this criticism, is to reject human finitude. Sensible human rights activists cannot reject human finitude, i.e., we are all ethnocentric in philosophical terms. Communities contribute to forming our ideals and our values. And how we analyze situations is often derived from our social experience.⁴ But for human rights activists this fact does not refute the desirability, if not the possibility of universally acceptable human rights standards. In fact, for human rights activists it is precisely because we are all ethnocentric, in one way or another, that we need universal standards. We all live in this world and come across each other, and sometimes come up against each other. When we do we may have differences that need to be resolved. One way of doing it is simply to assert our power, and our standards, over each other. But this can exacerbate rather than attenuate the possibility that our differences will lead to conflict. We need some trans-cultural standards to enable us to

live more or less peaceably, if not peacefully, in this world. To the extent that many cultures will come across each other in the world – often simultaneously – common standards that cut across all these cultures will become important to our survival. And for us to adhere to these standards we will need to relate to them, appreciate their importance, and commit to upholding them, i.e., make them ours. So for human rights activists the case of universal standards is independent of the human capacity to know everything. Human rights activists respond that they can simultaneously concede that they do not know everything, while arguing that they need universal standards to enable them to live with others as equals in a common human society. In fact, it is precisely because they do not know everything that they will need these universal standards that are shared by all. Still, this human rights response to the second ethnocentric objection concedes what the first response does not – the potential fluidity of HR standards and therefore its potential fallibility. Unlike the first human rights response to ethnocentrism, this one cannot be self-righteous.

3. The Third Ethnocentric Objection to Human Rights: “Treating me like you would your own can be unfair”

Human Rights standards are set by the more dominant – whether rich, powerful or more articulate – and they are more likely to have a greater influence over these standards than the oppressed. This is especially true at the international level. For small relatively weak groups to have a political impact on international human rights standards is hard at best or impossible at worst. So universal standards and campaigns may be drawn up that inadequately consider the concerns of the very groups they apply to. This may lead to standards that are inappropriate for particular circumstances, however thoughtful or well intentioned. Compelling adherence to these standards can disrupt the lives of people living in vulnerable communities. The sense that human rights standards disrupt lives can also be shared by weaker subgroups such as women within a community, who may be the purported beneficiaries of these universal standards. If indeed groups, as a whole, reject standards that ought to apply to them, human rights as a political project risks becoming a coercive project imposed on those it is meant to benefit. And if human rights activists concede that “they do not know everything” they can never be sure the resistance they face

from a community as a whole when upholding a universal Human Rights standard is due to people viewing it as an arbitrary imposition, rather than a stubborn or ignorant rejection of those who simply refuse to uphold universal human rights.

Once human rights activists concede human finitude, they cannot reject the possibility that the less powerful may be ignored in setting standards. And they must concede that those who reject the universality of human rights need not always be making a play for power to avoid doing what is just. Conceding this possibility is not a compromise of human rights principles with the power of the dominant, but the consequence of accepting human finitude. To ensure that human rights standards are not arbitrary, HR activists must engage in a serious dialogue with groups that are sincere (even if sincerely wrong) in their rejection of particular universal human rights standards. This will improve the possibility of human rights being accepted and implemented as a universal project, along with the commitment to a common humanity that is fundamental to its political success.

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End Notes

- 1 This is forthcoming in Julie Mertus and Jeff Helsing, eds., *Human Rights and Conflict* (United States Institute of Peace, 2005).
- 2 This is the “naming and shaming” on which the success of most international human rights activism tends to depend.
- 3 By sincere, I simply mean those who may be powerful, but whose adherence to this ethnocentric objection does not stem from a desire to retain power.
- 4 Burdens of judgment in Rawls (1993), pp. 56-57 ■

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PEACE & THE NEW CORPORATE LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Arundhati Roy

It's official now. The Sydney Peace Foundation is neck deep in the business of gambling and calculated risk. Last year, very courageously, it chose Dr Hanan Ashrawi of Palestine for the Sydney Peace Prize. And, as if that were not enough, this year - of all the people in the world - it goes and chooses me!

However I'd like to make a complaint. My sources inform me that Dr Ashrawi had a picket all to herself. This is discriminatory. I demand equal treatment for all Peace Prizees. May I formally request the Foundation to organize a picket against me after the lecture? From what I've heard, it shouldn't be hard to organize. If this is insufficient notice, then tomorrow will suit me just as well.

When this year's Sydney Peace Prize was announced, I was subjected to some pretty arch remarks from those who know me well: Why did they give it to the biggest trouble-maker we know? Didn't anybody tell them that you don't have a peaceful bone in your body? And, memorably, Arundhati didi what's the Sydney Peace Prize? Was there a war in Sydney that you helped to stop?

Speaking for myself, I am utterly delighted to receive the Sydney Peace Prize. But I must accept it as a literary prize that honors a writer for her writing, because contrary to the many virtues that are falsely attributed to me, I'm not an activist, nor the leader of any mass movement, and I'm certainly not the "voice of the voiceless". (We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.) I am a writer who cannot claim to represent anybody but herself. So even though I would like to, it would be presumptuous of me to say that I accept this prize on behalf of those who are involved in the struggle of the powerless and the disenfranchised against the powerful. However, may I say I accept it as the Sydney Peace Foundation's expression of solidarity with a kind of politics, a kind of world-view, that millions of us around the world subscribe to?

It might seem ironic that a person who spends most of her time thinking of strategies of resistance and plotting to disrupt the putative peace, is given a peace prize. You must remember that I come from an essentially feudal country -and there are few things more disquieting than a feudal peace. Sometimes there's truth in old cliches. There can be no real peace without justice. And without resistance there will be no justice.

Today, it is not merely justice itself, but the idea of justice that is under attack. The assault on vulnerable, fragile sections of society

is at once so complete, so cruel and so clever - all encompassing and yet specifically targeted, blatantly brutal and yet unbelievably insidious - that its sheer audacity has eroded our definition of justice. It has forced us to lower our sights, and curtail our expectations. Even among the well-intentioned, the expansive, magnificent concept of justice is gradually being substituted with the reduced, far more fragile discourse of 'human rights'.

If you think about it, this is an alarming shift of paradigm. The difference is that notions of equality, of parity have been pried loose and eased out of the equation. It's a process of attrition. Almost unconsciously, we begin to think of justice for the rich and human rights for the poor. Justice for the corporate world, human rights for its victims. Justice for Americans, human rights for Afghans and Iraqis.

Justice for the Indian upper castes, human rights for Dalits and Adivasis (if that.) Justice for white Australians, human rights for Aborigines and immigrants (most times, not even that.)

It is becoming more than clear that violating human rights is an inherent and necessary part of the process of implementing a coercive and unjust political and economic structure on the world. Without the violation of human rights on an enormous scale, the neo-liberal project would remain in the dreamy realm of policy. But increasingly Human Rights violations are being portrayed as the unfortunate, almost accidental fallout of an otherwise acceptable political and economic system. As though they're a small problem that can be mopped up with a little extra attention from some NGOs. This is why in areas of heightened conflict - in Kashmir and in Iraq for example - Human Rights Professionals are regarded with a degree of suspicion. Many resistance movements in poor countries which are fighting huge injustice and questioning the underlying principles of what constitutes "liberation" and "development", view Human Rights NGOs as modern day missionaries who've come to take the ugly edge off Imperialism. To defuse political anger and to maintain the status quo.

It has been only a few weeks since a majority of Australians voted to re-elect Prime Minister John Howard who, among other things, led Australia to participate in the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. The invasion of Iraq will surely go down in history as one of the most cowardly wars ever fought. It was a war in which a band of rich nations, armed with enough nuclear weapons to destroy the world several times over, rounded on a poor nation, falsely accused it of having nuclear weapons, used the United

Nations to force it to disarm, then invaded it, occupied it and are now in the process of selling it.

I speak of Iraq, not because everybody is talking about it, (sadly at the cost of leaving other horrors in other places to unfurl in the dark), but because it is a sign of things to come. Iraq marks the beginning of a new cycle. It offers us an opportunity to watch the Corporate-Military cabal that has come to be known as 'Empire' at work. In the new Iraq the gloves are off.

As the battle to control the world's resources intensifies, economic colonialism through formal military aggression is staging a comeback. Iraq is the logical culmination of the process of corporate globalization in which neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism have fused. If we can find it in ourselves to peep behind the curtain of blood, we would glimpse the pitiless transactions taking place backstage. But first, briefly, the stage itself.

In 1991 US President George Bush senior mounted Operation Desert Storm. Tens of thousands of Iraqis were killed in the war. Iraq's fields were bombed with more than 300 tonnes of depleted uranium, causing a fourfold increase in cancer among children. For more than 13 years, twenty four million Iraqi people have lived in a war zone and been denied food and medicine and clean water. In the frenzy around the US elections, let's remember that the levels of cruelty did not fluctuate whether the Democrats or the Republicans were in the White House. Half a million Iraqi children died because of the regime of economic sanctions in the run up to Operation Shock and Awe. Until recently, while there was a careful record of how many US soldiers had lost their lives, we had no idea of how many Iraqis had been killed. US General Tommy Franks said "We don't do body counts" (meaning Iraqi body counts). He could have added "We don't do the Geneva Convention either." A new, detailed study, fast-tracked by the Lancet medical journal and extensively peer reviewed, estimates that 100,000 Iraqis have lost their lives since the 2003 invasion. That's one hundred halls full of people - like this one. That's one hundred halls full of friends, parents, siblings, colleagues, lovers, like you. The difference is that there aren't many children here today, let's not forget Iraq's children. Technically that bloodbath is called precision bombing. In ordinary language, it's called butchering.

Most of this is common knowledge now. Those who support the invasion and vote for the invaders cannot take refuge in ignorance. They must truly believe that this epic brutality is right and just or, at the very least, acceptable because it's in their interest.

So the 'civilized' 'modern' world - built painstakingly on a legacy of genocide, slavery and colonialism - now controls most of the world's oil. And most of the world's weapons, most of the world's money, and most of the world's media. The embedded, corporate media in which the doctrine of Free Speech has been substituted by the doctrine of Free If You Agree Speech.

The UN's Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix said he found no evidence of nuclear weapons in Iraq. Every scrap of evidence produced by the US and British governments was found to be false - whether it was reports of Saddam Hussein buying uranium from Niger, or the report produced by British Intelligence which was discovered to have been plagiarized from an old student dissertation. And yet, in the prelude to the war, day after day the most 'respectable' newspapers and TV channels in the US, headlined the 'evidence' of Iraq's arsenal of weapons of nuclear weapons.

It now turns out that the source of the manufactured 'evidence' of Iraq's arsenal of nuclear weapons was Ahmed Chalabi who, (like General Suharto of Indonesia, General Pinochet of Chile, the Shah of Iran, the Taliban and of course, Saddam Hussein himself) - was bankrolled with millions of dollars from the good old CIA.

And so, a country was bombed into oblivion. It's true there have been some murmurs of apology. Sorry 'bout that folks, but we have really have to move on. Fresh rumours are coming in about nuclear weapons in Eye-ran and Syria. And guess who is reporting on these fresh rumours? The same reporters who ran the bogus 'scoops' on Iraq. The seriously embedded A Team.

The head of Britain's BBC had to step down and one man committed suicide because a BBC reporter accused the Blair administration of 'sexing up' intelligence reports about Iraq's WMD programme. But the head of Britain retains his job even though his government did much more than 'sex up' intelligence reports. It is responsible for the illegal invasion of a country and the mass murder of its people.

Visitors to Australia like myself, are expected to answer the following question when they fill in the visa form: Have you ever committed or been involved in the commission of war crimes or crimes against humanity or human rights? Would George Bush and Tony Blair get visas to Australia? Under the tenets of International Law they must surely qualify as war criminals.

However, to imagine that the world would change if they were removed from office is naive. The tragedy is that their political rivals have no real dispute with their policies. The fire and brimstone of the US election campaign was about who would make a better 'Commander-in-Chief' and a more effective manager of the American Empire. Democracy no longer offers voters real choice. Only specious choice.

Even though no weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq - stunning new evidence has revealed that Saddam Hussein was planning a weapons programme. (Like I was planning to win an Olympic Gold in synchronized swimming.) Thank goodness for the doctrine of pre-emptive strike. God knows what other evil thoughts he harbored - sending Tampax in the mail to American senators, or releasing female rabbits in burqas into the London

underground. No doubt all will be revealed in the free and fair trial of Saddam Hussein that's coming up soon in the New Iraq.

All except the chapter in which we would learn of how the US and Britain plied him with money and material assistance at the time he was carrying out murderous attacks on Iraqi Kurds and Shias. All except the chapter in which we would learn that a 12,000 page report submitted by the Saddam Hussein government to the UN, was censored by the United States because it lists twenty-four US corporations that participated in Iraq's pre-Gulf War nuclear and conventional weapons programme. (They include Bechtel, DuPont, Eastman Kodak, Hewlett Packard, International Computer Systems and Unisys.)

So Iraq has been 'liberated.' Its people have been subjugated and its markets have been 'freed'. That's the anthem of neo-liberalism. Free the markets. Screw the people.

The US government has privatized and sold entire sectors of Iraq's economy. Economic policies and tax laws have been re-written. Foreign companies can now buy 100% of Iraqi firms and expatriate the profits.

This is an outright violation of international laws that govern an occupying force, and is among the main reasons for the stealthy, hurried charade in which power was 'handed over' to an 'interim Iraqi government'. Once handing over of Iraq to the Multi-nationals is complete, a mild dose of genuine democracy won't do any harm. In fact it might be good PR for the Corporate version of Liberation Theology, otherwise known as New Democracy.

Not surprisingly, the auctioning of Iraq caused a stampede at the feeding trough. Corporations like Bechtel and Halliburton, the company that US Vice-president Dick Cheney once headed, have won huge contracts for 'reconstruction' work. A brief c.v of any one of these corporations would give us a lay person's grasp of how it all works-not just in Iraq, but all over the world. Say we pick Bechtel-only because poor little Halliburton is under investigation on charges of overpricing fuel deliveries to Iraq and for its contracts to 'restore' Iraq's oil industry which came with a pretty serious price-tag - 2.5 billion dollars.

The Bechtel Group and Saddam Hussein are old business acquaintances. Many of their dealings were negotiated by none other than Donald Rumsfeld. In 1988, after Saddam Hussein gassed thousands of Kurds, Bechtel signed contracts with his government to build a dual-use chemical plant in Baghdad.

Historically, the Bechtel Group has had and continues to have inextricably close links to the Republican establishment. You could call Bechtel and the Reagan Bush administration a team. Former Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger was a Bechtel general counsel. Former Deputy Secretary of Energy, W. Kenneth Davis was Bechtel's vice president. Riley Bechtel, the company chairman, is on the President's Export Council. Jack Sheehan, a retired marine

corps general, is a senior vice president at Bechtel and a member of the US Defense Policy Board. Former Secretary of State George Shultz, who is on the Board of Directors of the Bechtel Group, was the chairman of the advisory board of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq.

When he was asked by the New York Times whether he was concerned about the appearance of a conflict of interest between his two 'jobs', he said, "I don't know that Bechtel would particularly benefit from it [The invasion of Iraq]. But if there's work to be done, Bechtel is the type of company that could do it." Bechtel has been awarded reconstruction contracts in Iraq worth over a billion dollars, which include contracts to re-build power generation plants, electrical grids, water supply, sewage systems, and airport facilities. Never mind revolving doors, this-if it weren't so drenched in blood- would be a bedroom farce.

Between 2001 and 2002, nine out of thirty members of the US Defense Policy Group were connected to companies that were awarded Defense contracts worth 76 billion dollars. Time was when weapons were manufactured in order to fight wars. Now wars are manufactured in order to sell weapons.

Between 1990 and 2002 the Bechtel group has contributed \$3.3 million to campaign funds, both Republican and Democrat. Since 1990 it has won more than 2000 government contracts worth more than 11 billion dollars. That's an incredible return on investment, wouldn't you say?

And Bechtel has footprints around the world. That's what being a multi-national means. The Bechtel Group first attracted international attention when it signed a contract with Hugo Banzer, the former Bolivian dictator, to privatize the water supply in the city of Cochabamba. The first thing Bechtel did was to raise the price of water. Hundreds of thousands of people who simply couldn't afford to pay Bechtel's bills came out onto the streets. A huge strike paralyzed the city. Martial law was declared.

Although eventually Bechtel was forced to flee its offices, it is currently negotiating an exit payment of millions of dollars from the Bolivian government for the loss of potential profits. Which, as we'll see, is growing into a popular corporate sport.

In India, Bechtel along with General Electric are the new owners of the notorious and currently defunct Enron power project. The Enron contract, which legally binds the Government of the State of Maharashtra to pay Enron a sum of 30 billion dollars, was the largest contract ever signed in India. Enron was not shy to boast about the millions of dollars it had spent to "educate" Indian politicians and bureaucrats. The Enron contract in Maharashtra, which was India's first 'fast-track' private power project, has come to be known as the most massive fraud in the country's history. (Enron was another of the Republican Party's major campaign contributors). The electricity that Enron produced was so exorbitant that the government decided it was cheaper not to buy electricity

and pay Enron the mandatory fixed charges specified in the contract. This means that the government of one of the poorest countries in the world was paying Enron 220 million US dollars a year not to produce electricity.

Now that Enron has ceased to exist, Bechtel and GE are suing the Indian Government for 5.6 billion US dollars. This is not even a minute fraction of the sum of money that they (or Enron) actually invested in the project. Once more, it's a projection of profit they would have made had the project materialized. To give you an idea of scale 5.6 billion dollars a little more than the amount that the Government of India would need annually, for a rural employment guarantee scheme that would provide a subsistence wage to millions of people currently living in abject poverty, crushed by debt, displacement, chronic malnutrition and the WTO.

This in a country where farmers steeped in debt are being driven to suicide, not in their hundreds, but in their thousands. The proposal for a Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is being mocked by India's corporate class as an unreasonable, utopian demand being floated by the 'lunatic' and newly powerful left. Where will the money come from? they ask derisively. And yet, any talk of renegeing on a bad contract with a notoriously corrupt corporation like Enron, has the same cynics hyperventilating about capital flight and the terrible risks of 'creating a bad investment climate'. The arbitration between Bechtel, GE and the Government of India is taking place right now in London. Bechtel and GE have reason for hope. The Indian Finance Secretary who was instrumental in approving the disastrous Enron contract has come home after a few years with the IMF. Not just home, home with a promotion. He is now Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission.

Think about it: The notional profits of a single corporate project would be enough to provide a hundred days of employment a year at minimum wages (calculated at a weighted average across different states) for 25 million people. That's five million more than the population of Australia. That is the scale of the horror of neo-liberalism.

The Bechtel story gets worse. In what can only be called unconscionable, Naomi Klein writes that Bechtel has successfully sued war-torn Iraq for 'war reparations' and 'lost profits'. It has been awarded 7 million dollars.

So, all you young management graduates don't bother with Harvard and Wharton - here's the Lazy Manager's Guide to Corporate Success: First, stock your Board with senior government servants. Next, stock the government with members of your board. Add oil and stir. When no one can tell where the government ends and your company begins, collude with your government to equip and arm a cold-blooded dictator in an oil-rich country. Look away while he kills his own people. Simmer gently. Use the time collect to collect a few billion dollars in government contracts.

Then collude with your government once again while it topples the dictator and bombs his subjects, taking to specifically target essential infrastructure, killing a hundred thousand people on the side. Pick up another billion dollars or so worth of contracts to 'reconstruct' the infrastructure. To cover travel and incidentals, sue for reparations for lost profits from the devastated country. Finally, diversify. Buy a TV station, so that next war around you can showcase your hardware and weapons technology masquerading as coverage of the war. And finally finally, institute a Human Rights Prize in your company's name. You could give the first one posthumously to Mother Teresa. She won't be able to turn it down or argue back.

Invaded and occupied Iraq has been made to pay out 200 million dollars in "reparations" for lost profits to corporations like Halliburton, Shell, Mobil, Nestle, Pepsi, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Toys R Us. That's apart from its 125 billion dollar sovereign debt forcing it to turn to the IMF, waiting in the wings like the angel of death, with its Structural Adjustment program. (Though in Iraq there don't seem to be many structures left to adjust. Except the shadowy Al Qaeda.)

In New Iraq, privatization has broken new ground. The US Army is increasingly recruiting private mercenaries to help in the occupation. The advantage with mercenaries is that when they're killed they're not included in the US soldiers' body count. It helps to manage public opinion, which is particularly important in an election year. Prisons have been privatized. Torture has been privatized. We have seen what that leads to. Other attractions in New Iraq include newspapers being shut down. Television stations bombed. Reporters killed. US soldiers have opened fire on crowds of unarmed protesters killing scores of people. The only kind of resistance that has managed to survive is as crazed and brutal as the occupation itself. Is there space for a secular, democratic, feminist, non-violent resistance in Iraq? There isn't really.

That is why it falls to those of us living outside Iraq to create that mass-based, secular and non-violent resistance to the US occupation. If we fail to do that, then we run the risk of allowing the idea of resistance to be hi-jacked and conflated with terrorism and that will be a pity because they are not the same thing.

So what does peace mean in this savage, corporatized, militarized world? What does it mean in a world where an entrenched system of appropriation has created a situation in which poor countries which have been plundered by colonizing regimes for centuries are steeped in debt to the very same countries that plundered them, and have to repay that debt at the rate of 382 billion dollars a year? What does peace mean in a world in which the combined wealth of the world's 587 billionaires exceeds the combined gross domestic product of the world's 135 poorest countries? Or when rich countries that pay farm subsidies of a billion dollars a day, try and force poor countries to drop their subsidies? What does peace mean to people in occupied Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, Tibet and Chechnya? Or to the aboriginal people of Australia? Or the Ogoni

of Nigeria? Or the Kurds in Turkey? Or the Dalits and Adivasis of India? What does peace mean to non-muslims in Islamic countries, or to women in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan? What does it mean to the millions who are being uprooted from their lands by dams and development projects? What does peace mean to the poor who are being actively robbed of their resources and for whom everyday life is a grim battle for water, shelter, survival and, above all, some semblance of dignity? For them, peace is war.

We know very well who benefits from war in the age of Empire. But we must also ask ourselves honestly who benefits from peace in the age of Empire? War mongering is criminal. But talking of peace without talking of justice could easily become advocacy for a kind of capitulation. And talking of justice without unmasking the institutions and the systems that perpetrate injustice, is beyond hypocritical.

It's easy to blame the poor for being poor. It's easy to believe that the world is being caught up in an escalating spiral of terrorism and war. That's what allows the American President to say "You're either with us or with the terrorists." But we know that that's a spurious choice. We know that terrorism is only the privatization of war. That terrorists are the free marketers of war. They believe that the legitimate use of violence is not the sole prerogative of the State.

It is mendacious to make moral distinction between the unspeakable brutality of terrorism and the indiscriminate carnage of war and occupation. Both kinds of violence are unacceptable. We cannot support one and condemn the other.

The real tragedy is that most people in the world are trapped between the horror of a putative peace and the terror of war. Those are the two sheer cliffs we're hemmed in by. The question is: How do we climb out of this crevasse?

For those who are materially well-off, but morally uncomfortable, the first question you must ask yourself is do you really want to climb out of it? How far are you prepared to go? Has the crevasse become too comfortable?

If you really want to climb out, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that the advance party began the climb some time ago. They're already half way up. Thousands of activists across the world have been hard at work preparing footholds and securing the ropes to make it easier for the rest of us. There isn't only one path up. There are hundreds of ways of doing it. There are hundreds of battles being fought around the world that need your skills, your minds, your resources. No battle is irrelevant. No victory is too small.

The bad news is that colorful demonstrations, weekend marches and annual trips to the World Social Forum are not enough. There have to be targeted acts of real civil disobedience with real consequences. Maybe we can't flip a switch and conjure up a revolution. But there are several things we could do. For example, you could make a list of those corporations who have profited from the invasion of Iraq and have offices here in Australia. You could name them, boycott them, occupy their offices and force them out of business. If it can happen in Bolivia, it can happen in India. It can happen in Australia. Why not?

That's only a small suggestion. But remember that if the struggle were to resort to violence, it will lose vision, beauty and imagination. Most dangerous of all, it will marginalize and eventually victimize women. And a political struggle that does not have women at the heart of it, above it, below it and within it is no struggle at all.

The point is that the battle must be joined. As the wonderful American historian Howard Zinn put it: "You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train." ■

Arundathi Roy is a writer



"We're looking for someone who's computer literate and won't spend most of the day pawing at the mouse."

CHINA: PROBLEMS OF GROWTH AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Kumar David

The news that is not news

It is commonplace that everything to do with China is talked about in superlatives, for example one is constantly reminded that:

- ◆ China's sustained growth is the most extraordinary economic event on historical record
- ◆ It will be the world's largest economy (in PP terms) in about a decade
- ◆ China is the workshop of the world and on its way to becoming the largest exporter
- ◆ Its GDP is already larger than Japan (PPP terms)⁽¹⁾
- ◆ Its GDP is larger than Russia, India and Brazil combined together
- ◆ China is the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment
- ◆ Its stellar performance is one of the major stabilisers of the world and US economies
- ◆ Its share of global *increases*, during 2000-03, is as follows: World GDP 32%, world imports 33%, world fixed investments 60%, world oil consumption 36%

The normally staid *Economist* seems to have lost its sobriety and proclaims (October 2nd-8th, 2004 – Special Survey on China's Economic Role): "China's ... future prospects remain excellent, built on genuine wealth creation as currently underemployed labour is put to productive use. In contrast American consumers have been living in never-never land, financing their spending by borrowing against illusory gains in wealth⁽²⁾".

China's problems are talked about in equally dramatic hyperbole:

- ◆ Environmental pollution (atmospheric, water and desert formation) on a shocking scale
- ◆ A woeful healthcare system; an utter shame for a country enriching itself so rapidly
- ◆ Rising rural and urban unemployment and underemployment and massive (100 to 200 million) migration to the cities all of which could portend social upheavals
- ◆ Widespread corruption in government and the middle and lower ranks of the Party
- ◆ A growing equity gap – though the GINI coefficient not as bad as many other countries

- ◆ A banking sector in trouble – some estimates put outstanding loans at 140% and non-performing loans at 40% of GDP

Both on the upside and the down side it appears that Napoleon's remark "Let China sleep, for when she awakes she will shake the world" was the understatement of the millennium.

The real news

It is not these quantitative economic indicators, impressive as they are, which tell the real story behind the remarkable events that we are living through. There is, beneath these facts, a more portentous process at work, a process that must make us refocus the very paradigms in terms of which we read the current phase of world history. There are three factors.

- ◆ Demographic: For the first time in history a genuine middle class is emerging in China. Its size will number in the hundreds of millions in the coming decades and whose skill and knowledge will have tremendous significance, not just for China, but for the whole knowledge-based world of the future.
- ◆ Globalisation: The question no longer is what will globalisation do to China, but rather the question of the morrow will be, what will be the characteristics of the globalisation of the future influenced, if not dominated, by the extended reach of the Chinese economy?
- ◆ Society and state: What is the nature of the emerging state in China? The received categories of previous discourse are outdated and inadequate. The post-Soviet era, the extension of capitalism into a new phase in recent decades and the rise of new China as the economic superpower of the 21st Century, must give us theoretical pause.

Discussion

About the middle class

The rest of this paper will simply discuss these three issues briefly. China did not develop a Westernised and modernised middle class during the 19th and 20th Centuries as colonised nations such as India, Sri Lanka, Spanish and Portuguese ruled Latin America, some French territories and the emigrant states of Canada and Australia did. Society remained largely pre-capitalist except for a few pockets, notably Shanghai, and the social classes remained the semi-feudal

relics of the old order – to simplify a little, the nobility and court officials on one side, a huge peasant mass on the other. The great hinterland remained cut-off, eternally unchanging and to use Napoleon's adage, asleep. Revolutionary bestirring appeared, the Manchu's were overthrown in 1911 and Sun Yat Sen's republic was formed, and the momentous Communist revolution began to reshape China from 1949 onwards.

Although the Chinese Communist Revolution was a real social revolution it did not secrete a modern middle class, it merely laid the groundwork. It was China's emergence as a technologically sophisticated, skilled and educated, global economic superpower, that cut loose the threads of high sophistry and rote scholasticism, permitting the old scholarly wealth of that nation to evolve into modern knowledge. This is the process that mediated the rise of the new middle class, already tens of millions strong and perhaps by the middle of this century more numerous than the whole population of Europe or the United States. It will then no longer be a question of American Universities with science and engineering schools populated with Asian PhD students, nor Chinese Americans carrying away Nobel Prizes as they sometimes do now, it will be the coming of age of the biggest pool of cheap intellectual labour in the world. The consequences are profound.

About globalisation

Let us develop the argument about globalisation carefully. The phrase 'China is the workshop of the world' refers to manufacturing industry where Chinese influence, for example in the consumer durables sector is overwhelming. The same *Economist* issue referred to before says that two-thirds of the world's photocopiers, microwave ovens, DVD players and shoes, over half of all digital cameras and two-fifths of personal computers - the last even before Lenovo bought IBM's PC division – are made in China. This list will only grow; refrigerators, TVs, embedded electronics, textiles and apparel, components and machinery are all in the queue.

However, there is something more important. China is not just the premier mass producer of consumer durables, it is also rapidly becoming technologically sophisticated. Optical fibres and photonics, avionics and space technology, drugs, chemicals, biotechnology and nanotechnology are all being pursued vigorously. The state is injecting huge investments in all these directions. Maybe China invests only a fraction of what America does in high-tech research and innovation, but given the wage differential each dollar buys five times more scientists in China! True, in the highest of high-tech area China is still a copier and importer of technology and breakthrough inventions lag far behind the US, but the gap will close. The availability of a large pool of cheap labour actually slows down pursuit of high-tech since China can compete effectively in other ways.

What about China's impact on the global economy? Some of the features of the evolving scenario are already becoming clear.

China's import and export trade has become a major factor in stabilising living standards and economies of other countries, including very significantly the USA. China is not only the world's third largest exporter, well on course for number one place, it is also the world's fastest growing market and, believe it or not, by 2010 China may in absolute dollar terms, overtake the USA in demand growth rate. China's growth is expanding the size of the global market. An economic slow down in China will spread gloom not only among neighbours dependent on exporting to China but also far and wide; Australia, Europe, the USA and Japan. America is sometimes called everybody's consumer market of last resort; China is increasingly playing the role of a complementary engine in respect of industrial production and raw materials demand.

China's growth is boosting economic development in developing countries in strategically subtle ways. As America encircles China strategically from Central Asia and Pakistan through Taiwan and Okinawa, the Chinese counter play seems to be to encircle the US economically. During President Hu's visit to Argentina, Brazil and Cuba agreements were signed for some \$30 billion Chinese investments in industries and infrastructure projects. This undoubtedly is only the start of a process. Discussions have commenced with Venezuela to build an oil and gas pipeline to the Pacific costs bypassing the strategically problematic Panama Canal. The Chinese seem to be cashing in on the leftward political swing sweeping across South America for major economic co-operation and investment.

With its huge current account deficit (\$600 billion by some estimates in 2004) and its currency in decline the US is in no position to go out on an FDI binge. Every dollar it wants to invest elsewhere must be made good by additional inflows into its capital account; that is in addition to the amount required to make good the deficit on the current account. How long and how much more Treasuries is the world prepared to hold in the face of a declining dollar and low interest rates? For how much longer is it in East Asia's interest to finance US profligacy and watch the value of their vast accumulated savings in American bond and equity holdings decline steadily in value? So on the economic front is it going to be set, game and match to China?

Not so easy. Although China has real material growth and real wealth – unlike American asset and housing bubbles – it lacks America's depth of capital markets (though some of this wealth is illusory) and lacks the sophistication of Wall Street in financial markets. Though some argue that much of the wealth criss-crossing the globe in financial transactions is illusory wealth, a mere redistribution of value, it seems to be an illusion that has persisted for a while. This issue, however, is moot to the point being stated here; China's capital export capability is still comparatively small, and it is not savvy with financial market operations and transactions. It has a long way to go before it can challenge American and European wizardry in the world of high finance, FDI exports and investment banking. China will not complete its dominance of the

global market until it extends its knowledge revolution from science and technology to include finance and economics. This will take time. China's FDI outflows are still quite small (\$3 billion in 2003 compared to \$50 billion inflows) and small in comparison with American, European and Japanese FDI outflows, but given China's huge and burgeoning foreign reserves and booming economic performance, outflows are bound to increase substantially.

The question that now arises is, will a process of globalisation co-led by Chinese capital in the coming decades be different in respect of the fundamental exploitation mechanics of globalisation as we know it now? Will it simply be a matter of adding the names of Chinese corporate power-houses to the existing list of Western and Japanese multinationals?

My tentative answer is that there will be significant differences because of the nature of the Chinese state, and consequently, the behavioural characteristics of state controlled economic power-houses (PetroChina, Sinopec, CNOOC, Baosteel, Lonovo, Huawei, Haier, etc). Almost all the big corporations that are going international are, in the final analysis, state owned corporations and this includes listed and partially listed companies. Therefore they carry a political agenda with them in addition to their business interests. Given the geopolitical tensions that now exist this will give rise to significant differences in the impact Chinese investment will have on recipient nations. Although much lamented by liberal economists, and despite the expansion of the private sector in China, when the chips are down the state calls the shots. For this reason, developing countries receiving large Chinese investment inflows are likely perceive a more developmental focus.

Society and the state

This is a vexed question and somewhat outside the more pressing concerns of this Symposium, but it would not be possible to stop without a few comments. None of the old categories

used by yesterday's marxists seems to sit comfortably with Chinese reality; state capitalism, deformed worker's state, bureaucratic state and emerging capitalism all fall short, while socialism and communism overreach. The economy is mainly, and the banking and finance sector almost entirely, state owned or controlled. The foreign owned sector is smaller but dynamic and corners the export and high-tech end of the market. A monopoly of political power resides in the CCP which plays the roles of guaranteeing social stability, mediating a balance of power between the new middle class, the rural population and the urban working class, and driving a stern economic policy.

Society itself is changing with the rise a huge educated and relatively well off middle class which is pampering itself on consumerism. It will be impossible for the Party to continue to enforce strict authoritarianism in the face of the sheer size of the emerging educated classes. It seems to be aware of this and while eschewing Western style democracy there are signs of a slow process of political reform. A new species of animal, a new kind of social formation, is emerging; it would still be theoretical dangerous to make a more specific prediction than to say that neither the term capitalism, nor the old 'deformed workers state' epithet fit.

Notes

(1) Largest 2004 GDP-PPP in \$ trillion: USA 10.3, China 5.7, Japan 3.4, India 2.8, Germany 2.3. The IMF prefers to use PPP in its *World Economic Outlook* since it gives a more realistic comparison of economies.

(2) The same issue of the *Economist* laments: "In recent years many people around the world have found it easier to make money from rising asset prices than from working . . . The surge in share prices in the late 1990s boosted the shareholding of American households by \$7 trillion over four years . . . The value of these shares has fallen but the drop has been more than offset by soaring house prices . . . increased by more than \$5 trillion . . . But much of this new wealth is an illusion". ■

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by
Kamla Bhasin

POST-TSUNAMI RECONSTRUCTION PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

1.0 Introduction

The Sri Lankan Government's *Implementation Plan* (GOSL Plan) released in January 2005, and the *Sri Lanka 2005 Post-Tsunami Recovery Program: Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment* (draft) released on 2 February 2005 by the Asian Development Bank, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, and the World Bank (Bank Report), provide the scope of post-tsunami recovery work along with preliminary cost estimates.

The assessed damages are US\$ 1 billion in physical assets and \$330 m in output losses for 2005 and 2006. The GOSL's total recovery estimate is \$3.7 billion while the Bank Report's estimate is \$1.5 billion. The difference is primarily in regard to estimates of strategic national infrastructure components (in the road, rail, water supply and sanitary and power sectors) which are not connected to the tsunami disaster. The latter are included in the GOSL Plan but left out in the Bank Report.

It is remarkable that within a very short period Sri Lankan officials and organizations in the affected areas and in Colombo have produced a preliminary assessment of the damage and the reconstruction work in each of the damaged sectors in the affected areas. The Bank Report, prepared by a joint staff mission of the three banks, provides a comprehensive narrative of the environmental, economic, socio-cultural, political, institutional and technical issues and challenges involved in undertaking post-tsunami reconstruction.

The report emphasizes what several other national and international organizations have been calling for, namely, the central coordination and decentralized decision making, and the involvement of the affected people and the inclusion of non-government agencies in all aspects of planning and implementation at the provincial, district and local levels. This will have to be so for most of the damaged sectors but especially for resettlement involving housing, community facilities and infrastructure.

While emphasizing the need for decentralization and local participation it is also important to recognize some of the immediate action priorities at all locations. These priorities are identified as follows:

- ◆ Temporary housing and facilities
- ◆ Clearing and disposing of tsunami debris
- ◆ Clean-up of wells and agricultural lands
- ◆ Coastal land use planning through community participation and strategic environmental assessment
- ◆ Resettlement planning through community participation

The purpose of this discussion paper is to emphasize the critical importance of the above-noted priorities based on the sector-based needs assessment and technical information currently being shared among Sri Lankan professionals. It also discusses public consultation and participatory planning processes as well as the need for and the implications of going beyond post-tsunami recovery to build Sri Lanka's major national infrastructure components.

2.0 Tsunami Damage and Recovery Needs Assessment

The asset losses and the recovery costs in the affected sectors included in the Bank Report and the GOSL Plan are tabulated below. As can be seen the difference between the Bank and the GOSL estimates is mainly due to the long term infrastructure (Phase 3) costs and the five (telecommunication, port, industry, enterprise, and law and order) sector costs that are included in the GOSL but not the Bank estimates.

The physical asset loss of US\$ 1 billion amounts to 4.5% of the GDP, while the output-loss estimate of \$330 m in the fisheries and tourism sectors amounts to 1.5% of the GDP. The marginal proportions of the GDP that the tsunami damages account for should not detract from the extent of the impacts on the most vulnerable sections of Sri Lankan society, as well as the impacts on the natural environment of almost two thirds of the island's coastline.

Asset Loss & Needs Assessment Preliminary Estimates (\$ millions)

Sector	Asset Loss (Bank Report)	Needs Assessment						
		Bank Report			GOSL Plan			
		Short Term	Medium Term	Total	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Total
Housing	344	50	437	487	20	500	70	590
Roads	60	25	175	200	15	153	640	808
Water /Sanitation	42	64	53	117	26	169	230	425
Railways	15	40	90	130	1	81	415	497
Education	26	13	32	45		133		133
Health	60	17	67	84		48	70	118
Agriculture /Livestock	3	2	2	4				
Fisheries	97	69	49	118	100	214	16	330
Tourism	250	130		130	5	128	195	328
Power	10	27	50	77	30	48	48	126
Environment	10	6	12	18	16	12	47	75
Social Welfare		30		30		85		85
Other	90	30	120	150				
Telecommunication						12	75	87
Port Development					10	12	10	32
Industrial Dev.							16	16
Enterprise Dev.					25	30		55
Law & Order					24	7	14	45
	1007	500	1100	1600	272	1632	1846	3750

The Bank Report highlights the main aspects of the tsunami disaster and outlines the guiding principles for undertaking the recovery work. The main aspects of the disaster are:

◆ **Social Impacts:** The social impacts include more than 31,000 deaths and 15,000 injuries, nearly 150,000 houses destroyed or damaged, 450,000 people displaced, and damage to livelihoods including 200,000 job losses. Children, women, and the elderly are the most vulnerable of the tsunami victims, with more than 900 children having become orphans or been separated from their parents.

◆ **Economic Impacts:** The fisheries sector suffered the most, socially and economically, accounting for nearly 90% of all deaths, 55% of displaced families and destroyed houses, and 50% of the estimated job losses. 65% of the national boat fleet was also lost. The tourist sector also suffered both property and job losses, along with agriculture, coir industry and small businesses.

◆ **Environmental Impacts:** The impacts on the coastal environment vary from place to place, but generally include severe scouring, impacts on flora, biodiversity, coral reefs and the marine ecosystem,

contamination of surface and groundwater, and the pile up of debris.

◆ **Infrastructure Impacts:** These include damage to water supply and sanitary, power distribution, roads, railway, ports and fishery harbours, and government offices and buildings.

◆ **Regional Distribution:** The affected areas are spread over five of the island's nine provinces, involving 13 of the total 22 administrative districts. Overall, the "North East is the region worst affected by the tsunami", compounding the earlier damages during the ethnic conflict. In the South, the districts of Hambantota, Matara, Galle have "pockets of severe damage". The Report indicates the following provincial distribution of financing needs: North East: 58%; South: 29%; West: 12.6%, and North West less than one percent.

3.0 The eReconstruction Priorities of Post-tsunami Redevelopment

The sector-based reconstruction work has to be undertaken throughout the affected areas. An overall reconstruction work programme should be developed for each of the affected districts,

guided by the implementation principles outlined in the Bank Report (see Section 4 below). In the meantime, priority should be given to undertaking the following activities in all of the affected districts the North, East and South Provinces:

- a) Temporary housing and facilities
- b) Clearing and disposing of tsunami debris
- c) Clean-up of wells, waterways and agricultural lands
- d) Coastal land use planning through community participation and strategic environmental assessment
- e) Resettlement planning through community participation

a) Temporary Housing and Facilities

Temporary housing is likely to be an issue for sometime given the extent of the permanent housing that has to be provided. The tsunami destroyed close to 100,000 houses and severely damaged a further 45,000 houses, representing in all 13% of the housing stock in the affected areas. 160,000 families involving 443,000 individuals were displaced and were immediately housed by extended families and friends or in the 800 welfare centres.

According to the Bank Report, there were already 40,000 families involving 180,000 displaced people living in welfare centres as a result of the ethnic conflict before the tsunami disaster. The Report indicates that about 58% of the housing stock in the conflict areas requires rebuilding or renovation. Nationally, there are an estimated 4.6 million dwelling units, 29% of which are considered "temporary" (built with non-durable materials). It is reasonable to estimate that Sri Lanka requires over 200,000 new housing units, or 5% of the national housing stock, a demand that cannot be easily met in a short period of time.

Temporary housing with amenities therefore becomes a priority to supplement the welfare centres and the hospitality of the extended families, and can be provided within the overall funding estimates. It will prevent the displaced people from putting up shanties on their own and add to the already high proportion of "temporary" dwelling units in the national housing stock. In the Hambantota District, 38% of the dwelling units had been classified "temporary" even before the tsunami. It will also allow the planning and development of permanent settlements to proceed in an *orderly, consultative and participatory* manner. Temporary housing with amenities and basic infrastructure can be provided in a very short period of time, with international help if necessary by undertaking the following steps:

- ◆ Provide immediate temporary living accommodation of an adequate quality standard with a design life of 5 years.
- ◆ These can be similar to temporary facilities that are set up on construction project sites or mobile home sites. There are many organizations around the world with the expertise to mobilize and provide such facilities rapidly.
- ◆ They should be located in estates with sanitary facilities, potable water, transport infrastructure and other essential services.

◆ Upgrading some of the damaged schools and hospitals along with temporary housing will help to restore some semblance of community life.

◆ A resultant benefit will be that these communities will have the opportunity to work on the reconstruction of the permanent settlements thereby gaining new skills and enhancing their livelihood.

b) Clearing and Disposing of Tsunami Debris

The Bank Report comments on the significance of clearing and disposing the tsunami debris in an environmentally acceptable way and estimates a budget of \$1.5 million. The debris includes everything that has been uprooted or upturned by the tsunami: vegetation, building and infrastructure debris, and municipal, hospital and septic-tank wastes.

Dr. A. M. Wasantha Lal, Water Resources Engineer in Florida, has also highlighted the significance of this problem in his report ("Environmental Damage and Need Assessment in Southern Sri Lanka") after a short visit to the affected southwestern coastal areas.

The reported practice of clearing the debris from reconstruction sites and leaving it in adjacent piles should not continue. There has to be orderly removal of debris and disposal at pre-identified waste sites under technical supervision. Failure to do this will impact groundwater sources and lead to community health problems in the long run.

Geethanjalie Selvendran, Professional Geologist in the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, has recommended (see "Tsunami Debris Management") guidelines for the selection of disposal sites, and for collection and disposal of the tsunami debris, to avoid groundwater contamination.

Given the geographical extent of the operation, resources including equipment and technical supervision should be mobilized at the district or local level and work carried out under guidelines prepared by the CEA. The selection of dump sites should be carried out by the CEA with a view to turning them into future landfill sites. CEA should also train local personnel for carrying out on-site inspection and decision making. Even before the tsunami, hospital wastes were becoming a general problem while solid wastes associated with the coastal tourist resorts posed a problem in the southwest coastal areas.

The present opportunity should be used to develop and implement a solid waste management plan for each of the affected local government bodies or districts under the standards and guidelines prepared by the CEA. Where possible, as the Bank Report suggests, the recycling of rubble and building material for future road and other construction should be considered both to save on future material costs as well as reduce the amount of waste disposal.

c) Clean-up of Wells, Waterways and Agricultural Lands

The tsunami waters have increased the level of salinity in groundwater and other inland waterways, as well as agricultural lands. The Bank Report pays particular attention to this problem, while remedial measures for groundwater have been suggested, as for example by Dr. Wasantha Lal in his report referred to earlier. Dr. Lal has also alluded to potentially toxic deposits that the tsunami might have left in its wake. As the Bank Report notes, high levels of salinity will have implications for drinking water and the livelihood of those who depend on land cultivation. It may not be possible to deal with this problem in the short term, but priority should be given to initiating the work at the local level with technical support and coordination from the centre.

d) Coastal Land Use Planning Through Community Participation And Strategic Environmental Assessment

Apart from remedying the tsunami damage to the coastal environment, considerable attention is being given to protecting the coastal environment from human activities. Of particular concern is regulating land use or development activity along the coastline. The Bank Report provides useful guidelines for approaching this problem.

Dr. Janaka Wijetunga of the Peradeniya University has outlined the essential elements of a coastal land use plan in his article, "Future Directions for Coastal Land Use" (*The Daily News* of 27 January 05).

General design guidance is available in the handbook, *Designing for Tsunamis: Seven Principles for Planning and Designing for Tsunami Hazards*, published by the US National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program.

Cameron Sinclair's Architecture for Humanity, a New York based group, provides design services to communities affected by natural disasters, emphasizing local traditions, materials and solutions in redevelopment design.

There is controversy over the stipulation of a construction-free zone along the coast – as reported, 100 m along the southwest coast and 200-300 m on the northeast coast based on the inland reach of the tsunami waves. The enforcement of these controls will have implications for the displaced communities, especially the fishing communities, and the tourist sector. It is not our purpose here to discuss the pros and cons of this proposal but to suggest a general approach to dealing with this issue:

◆ Post-disaster situations are unlike normal land use planning situations. In normal situations professionals can recommend zoning or other restrictive land use regulations based on a reasonable expectation of community consensus. In post-disaster situations, active community consultation and acceptance is

necessary before decisions regarding land use regulation and resettlement are made.

◆ As has been the experience elsewhere, when resettlement is imposed on affected communities without consultation they respond with quiet non-compliance and/or open revolt. There have been signs of the latter already in Sri Lanka.

◆ Durable settlements are better ensured through participation of the affected communities rather than through coastal survey markers and policing.

◆ Professionals should work directly with affected communities at every locality in identifying constraints to coastal resettlement and developing local solutions to deal with them.

◆ The Central Government Agencies should coordinate the identification of constraints at each local level based on flood plain mapping, tsunami 'trails', coastal erosion conditions, and other natural environmental significance.

◆ The Central Government Agencies should develop general directions and guidelines for deciding at the local level the type of land use allowed, shoreline setbacks and building specifications.

e) Resettlement planning through community participation

"We are not beggars" was the recurrent sentiment that the Bank Mission heard from the affected communities (Bank Report: Annex I, Social Impacts, p. 5). That sums up the mindset of the victims and how they would react to any top-down resettlement plan that is imposed on them without prior consultation. The Bank Report's advice is clear and worth reiterating:

◆ Where possible *in-situ* resettlement should be allowed, facilitating affected households themselves to undertake reconstruction themselves with cash grants, loans and other supports. Where relocation is inevitable, the guiding principle is to keep the old community intact while allowing those who want to opt out. Relocation decisions must be made in consultation with the affected communities

◆ Even with relocation, households should be free to undertake the building of their own houses with assistance and support.

◆ Where housing is built for the victims, be they single detached or flats, community input should be obtained in regard to type of housing and construction supervision.

Needless to say, given the dispersed nature of reconstruction and the requirement for community participation there is no alternative to strengthening the state, private sector and civil society organizations at the local level and providing them with resources and technical support.

In regard to the specific nature of reconstruction and the provision of amenities and infrastructure we suggest the following:

◆ As far as possible old and new settlements should be provided with pipe-borne water supply and sanitation. The use of septic tanks should be avoided given their long term implications for groundwater sources. The central government should try to get funding support for sewage treatment plants in urban areas, while open oxidation ponds could be used in rural areas.

◆ Where new settlements are built, grading, drainage, road and underground (water supply and sanitation) works should precede housing construction.

◆ Resettlement should not become a license for low cost housing, which in turn is a euphemism for creating shanties. Low cost and inferior dwellings without basic amenities and infrastructure are proven failures that will incur direct and indirect future costs due to community instability and environmental degradation.

4.0 Reconstruction Strategy

As the Bank Report rightly notes the immediate post-tsunami relief operations were remarkably sustained by the tide of civil society and private sector response within Sri Lanka and the unprecedented response of the international community. The involvement of local civil society and private sector organizations as well as international agencies in the recovery work should continue, but more importantly the affected communities themselves should participate in the planning and implementation of their own recovery. The geographical spread and the multi-sector nature of the recovery work makes decentralization and local decision making unavoidable. The Bank Report also stresses the importance of using the tsunami recovery strategy to strengthen the stalled peace process between the GOSL and the LTTE. These considerations inform the guiding principles outlined in the Bank Report. Some of the key principles are summarized herein:

◆ **Fairness:** The allocation of domestic and international resources should be “strictly guided by the identified needs and local priorities”.

◆ **“Subsidiarity”:** Each reconstruction activity should be carried out at the “**lowest competent tier of government**” – mostly at the District and Pradeshiya Sabha levels. The recovery work provides an opportunity to substantiate and strengthen Provincial and Local Government structures. The Central Government should “play the lead role in setting standards, policies and principles”.

◆ **Consultation:** The recovery strategy should focus on “enhanced and solid consultation with affected communities and stakeholders” to address the medium and long term needs of the victims.

◆ **Communication:** Mechanisms should be strengthened to make information available readily especially to the affected communities and to facilitate feedback from them, regarding recovery plans,

◆ **Coordination:** A coordinated approach is essential and should involve government agencies, donor agencies, all stakeholders and civil society groups, the business community and international NGOs.

◆ **Transparency:** Priority should be given to providing transparent accounting of all receipts and expenditure of funds. There should be full accounting to parliament, development partners, civil society groups and affected communities. There should also be transparent procedures in regard to the award of contracts and contract payments.

According to the Bank Report the \$1.5 billion reconstruction programme is about 7% of the GDP. The Report suggests that the

construction sector will experience 8-10% growth in the next few years, up from 5-5% in recent years. This is expected to push the sector’s GDP share from 7.2% to 8% and also increase its labour force share from the current 5.3%. There will be increased demands for merchandise imports, construction machinery and manpower.

Increased construction activity should be planned to benefit the tsunami victims by providing them both training and employment in the rebuilding of their devastated communities. Civil society organizations are particularly well suited to undertake the actual design and implementation of the new rehabilitation efforts. They would be flexible enough to tailor individual designs to local conditions without being hamstrung by regulations and other constraints that invariably accompany official initiatives.

Of particular importance will be the task of mobilizing the required expert and professional resources, including Architects, Engineers (of various specialisations), Earth Scientists, Planners, and Social Scientists.

Among expatriate Sri Lankan professionals, there is a great deal of interest in participating in the post-tsunami reconstruction exercise. Many of them have previously lived/worked in and are familiar with the affected areas. They could be mobilized to work for reasonable lengths of time on a rotating basis through arrangements between Sri Lanka and donor countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States, where most Sri Lankan professionals live.

5.0 ReTransport construction Plus (Roads and Railways)

The GOSL Plan includes the development of island’s strategic infrastructure components, which are excluded from the Bank Report’s need assessment as they are not tsunami related. There have been criticisms that the GOSL Plan allocates nearly 40% of its assessment to road and rail infrastructure, and that spending such an amount is “immoral” considering that most of the aid is primarily intended for human rehabilitation. This criticism has some merit insofar as it highlights the human dimension of post-tsunami reconstruction.

On other hand, building infrastructure also serves many human purposes, and the purpose of tsunami recovery should be not merely to restore the conditions that preceded the tsunami but to enhance them in every way. Poverty elimination and infrastructure enhancement are legitimate purposes of post-tsunami recovery.

Oxfam calls it *reconstruction* and *reconstruction plus* (others call it *reconstruction* and *redevelopment*), and has placed on record that at the Jakarta tsunami aid conference the developed countries committed themselves to aiding both.

It is therefore perfectly legitimate for the government to put forward a comprehensive needs assessment for national infrastructure components along with the tsunami reconstruction package. The

GOSL Plan should be extended to include the reconstruction of the previously damaged road, rail and power grids in the ethnic conflict areas. Additional national infrastructure work will more than double the demand on the construction industry and cannot be undertaken in a short timeframe.

All infrastructure projects should be subject to environmental assessment (EA) and public participation, in order to identify/evaluate alternatives and select a preferred solution based on minimum (natural and social) environmental impacts and potential mitigations

The projects should be planned and carried out over many years and used as an instrument for economic regeneration in Sri Lanka. Their contribution to the GDP will be in the range of 15-20% and will extend over a long period. Their impact on the pool of unemployed labour will also be quite significant. This challenge offers a unique opportunity to initiate a new style of economic and social development that draws in the efforts of private citizens to supplement government efforts.

In the present international climate, non-governmental groups of citizens have a very good chance of obtaining substantial funds from international agencies, provided they can show competence in the tasks undertaken and the leading members have a

distinguished record of service in the public or private sector. It is also necessary to raise funds locally to show the extent of domestic support; in fact the raising of local funds is necessary before we solicit external funding.

Postscript: Just as we completed this discussion paper on 12 February, the Sri Lankan Government announced the forthcoming release of a revised 3-year reconstruction plan valued at \$1.8 billion that will be consistent with preliminary assessment of the Bank Report. A separate plan will be developed to address the main infrastructure needs valued at \$1.4 billion over the next decade. We welcome the proposed phasing of post-tsunami reconstruction work and national infrastructure development. We would also reiterate the critical importance of the reconstruction priorities discussed in this paper: temporary housing; clearing the tsunami debris; clean-up of water and land resources; and community participation in long-term resettlement planning.

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THE JAPAN COMMITTEE FOR AID TO THE TSUNAMI VICTIMS IN SRI LANKA

The tsunami erupted by the underwater earthquake in Sumatra on the 26th December last year caused a huge damage in seashore areas of several coastal countries in the region. It destroyed the lives of many innocent people and brought hardship to the survivors in Sri Lanka, too. The number of people died and people missing has increased to over 40,000. Especially the people living in the coastal areas suffered the most. It was a severe blow to their fishing industry. Facilities for the tourists have almost all destroyed. Many tourists and workers lost their lives and the survivors have no place to work. This dramatic event took place at a time when people were returning from refugee camps and have started a new life yet uncertain future prospect after a long lived ceasefire in Sri Lanka declared in February 2002. While facing the challenges of rehabilitation from war and ordeal from tsunami, food, medical supplies and clothing were sent to the affected areas. Sri Lanka also received a larger sum of donation from foreign countries. Now the emergency situation has settled and it is now time for all of us to help the tsunami victims to return to their normal life and job.

On the 6th February this year, there was a gathering of people from all walks of life that included citizens, academics, NGO, NPO and several Sri Lankans resident in Japan, where we reported and

discussed about the aid work and its further proposals. It has been a month since the eruption of tsunami, the rehabilitation work is being continued and at the same time, the amount of aid needed has surfaced different level of needs depending on the rate and the place of damages. It has also been reported that provisions were not distributed properly enough to the needs of the people and place. While mental cure of the victims were slow, there were incidents related to the acts of violence toward the victims reported. In addition, it is regrettable to learn that aid and rehabilitation work were used for the benefit of political gains.

In these circumstances and wishing an immediate restoration of normal life of the Sri Lankans, we release the following statement to the attention of governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals involved in rehabilitation work in Sri Lanka.

1. As for the rehabilitation of the disaster victims, their needs and initiative should be respected.
2. Aid should be provided equally without any ethnic, political or regional bias.

3. Violent act on victims should be prevented while women and children must be given priority for safety.
4. It is urgent that action should be taken to restore mental cure of the victims, who have lost everything, immediate and other relations in a long term treatment facility system. Needless to note here of the education of the children.
5. The government of Japan provided a total sum of 50 billion yen for the rehabilitation work. We demand that every NGO and INGO involved including the government of Sri Lanka in distributing aid in cash and kind use the aid appropriately and make their usage transparent.

6. We believe that aid and assistance from Japan for Sri Lanka should be utilized in a way to promote and further strengthen mutual understanding between the two peoples. ■

Japan Committee for Aid to the Tsunami Victims in Sri Lanka.
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O! God of Horror!

Hard to believe, immeasurable it is --
 The love you have for us.

You love to hate us
 Don't you?

And the power behind you
 To cause destruction
 Indeed lies beyond description,
 Turning all our horoscopes
 into 'horror' scopes.

Dividing us into parts
 Once you made us fire at each other
 And got enough for your hunger.

Now...

Thinking about the annihilation you caused,
 All that comes to my mind
 Are the words meaning nothing.

Raising an ugly tongue you came,
 In the form of a tsunami
 You devoured the children of our mother

Using the ink of tears
 On our scarred sky
 Let me write the end of your fate -
 The end of your mad love.

Sajitharan