

Contents

NOTES AND COMMENTS	03
SUSTAINING THE PEACE PROCESS <i>N. Shanmugaratnam</i>	05
TRUTH COMMISSIONS: AN OVERVIEW	07
HOW SOCIETIES REMEMBER: <i>Darini Rajasingham</i>	12
FAMILY HISTORIES AS POST-COLONIAL TEXTS <i>Yasmine Gooneratne</i>	14
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT-A FEMINIST RE-APPRAISAL <i>Mangalika de Silva</i>	18
ESTRANGED STRANGERS <i>Yolanda Foster</i>	21
IN PRINT	26
APPEALS TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LTTE FOR PEACE	29
REMEMBRANCE	32

Pravada in contemporary usage has a range of meanings which includes theses, concepts and propositions.

AFTER THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

The cessation of hostilities (COH) between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) came into effect on January 08. This is a very significant step forward in the peace process initiated by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Obviously, this was a personal political triumph for Kumaratunga and that claim was quite evident when it was first announced in the President's policy statement which she presented to parliament on January 06. The date of the commencement of the COH was also significant; it was the 96th birth anniversary of

Kumaratunga's father, the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. The symbolism of coincidences is as important as the substance of an event.

The agreement for a cessation of hostilities appears to have been reached after much bargaining between the government and the LTTE. When the first round of talks between the two sides took place in January, the complexity of the peace process was not too evident.

Idealistic expectations and euphoria were the dominant sentiments during this first phase of the peace process. When it came to the nitty-gritty of the negotiation, however, issues became clearer and harder. The government and the LTTE approached the issue of negotiations from two perspectives, and of course they were competing perspectives. While the Kumaratunga government wanted to start immediately on negotiations for a political package to solve the ethnic problem, the LTTE took up a different position. Creating the

conditions for peace, according to the LTTE's reasoning, was a fundamental prerequisite for peace talks. Creating such conditions required action on two fronts, argued the LTTE: first a ceasefire and second, a return to normalcy which included reconstruction, rehabilitation and the resettlement of refugees. 'Address the war and its consequences first; this is necessary to create conditions of peace and normalcy for the people; once that climate has been established, then we can begin to address the causes of the war' was a formulation repeatedly put forward by the LTTE.

After a great deal of haggling, the understanding for a cessation of hostilities was arrived at in late December, well in time for President Kumaratunga to incorporate the news of it in her policy statement to Parliament. The agreement had a novel and welcome feature in that it provided for monitoring committees to ensure that violations, if they did occur, were investigated and dealt with without violence to the overall agreement.

This most important development in the peace process was however to evoke scepticism in some quarters. The press in Colombo generally implied that the period of cessation was being used by the LTTE to its advantage. There were numerous reports emanating from the Eastern province that the LTTE was regrouping its cadres, constructing new camps, smuggling in weapons and collecting and storing food and medicine. Some of these reports were clearly exaggerations. Nevertheless, independent accounts from people in

Pravāda

Vol. 3 No. 10
January/February 1995

Editors

Charles Abeysekera
Jayadeva Uyangoda

Pravada is published monthly by:

Pravada Publications
425/15, Thimbirigasyaya Road
Colombo 5
Sri Lanka.
Telephone. 501339

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs. 180
By Air mail:	
South Asia/Middle East	U.S. \$ 26
S. E. Asia/Far East	U.S. \$ 27
Europe/Africa	U.S. \$ 28
Americas/Pacific countries	U.S. \$ 38

the East indicated that tension was slowly building up there, and re-infiltration by the LTTE cadres was indeed a fact.

This is in a way an unavoidable reality, particularly because the mistrust between the two sides has not in anyway been diminished in the process of peace talks. One inevitable dilemma in any attempt to end a military conflict is the fear entertained by the warring parties of an eventual resumption of hostilities and the necessity to be prepared for any such eventuality. In the preliminary stages of a peace process, the general tendency is to subject peace initiatives to ultimate politico-military goals. Consequently, the merits or de-merits of each step may be evaluated by parties to the conflict in terms of gains and losses for their respective projects. This is precisely why Sri Lanka's current COH process needs to be strengthened so that the political process towards peace takes precedence over military matters.

It now appears that a number of irritants are delaying further progress in the peace talks. The LTTE wants three demands fulfilled by the government before new talks can begin. The three demands — opening of Pooneryn - Sangupiddy causeway, the total lifting of the economic embargo and the removal of the ban on sea fishing — are linked by the LTTE to its main argument of improving the day to day life of the people in the North. These demands have become irritants of a sort, because they have some military implications too. Re-opening of the Pooneryn - Sangupiddy causeway implies the removal of the Pooneryn army camp, maintained by the Sri Lankan army for the past three years; the total lifting of the economic embargo has been construed in Colombo as granting military concessions to the LTTE since a free flow of goods to the North will include the transport of cement and fuel, which are supposed to be war-related material; the objection to free fishing off the northern shores is that it will enable Sea Tigers to operate freely. So, the arguments put forward by both sides in this specific instance have equal validity. Hence the continuity of the irritants as irritants.

The government will therefore need to have a fresh look at the whole question of military implications of fulfilling civilian needs in the North. It cannot afford to procrastinate its plans to help the Jaffna population to return to a normal life. Since August last year, a new political dynamic has entered life in the North: after many years, people there are depending upon the government to take positive steps to end the war. And indeed, there has not been any war in the North since August 1994, and the Cessation of Hostilities has further consolidated the no-war situation. When people begin to enjoy a certain measure of normality in life without war, other aspirations also begin to set in. And these are not the aspirations of a consumerist society, but expectations of a decent and tolerable day to day life by a populace which has not had access to the basic needs of life for many years. People in the North actually crave for adequate food, medicine, clothes, electricity, transport and for facilities to rebuild

their war-damaged houses. They are terribly tired of a primitive subsistence economy and a life of a most spartan kind. And, they are looking upon the Colombo government, not the LTTE, as a source of help. Of course, these are the very expectations that the LTTE cannot fulfill.

The LTTE also finds itself in a gigantic dilemma, a credible way out of which they appear to be seeking. The LTTE's traditional and primary role in the North has been to 'protect the Tamil people' by military means, when the war was on. In a no-war situation, such protection has no immediate relevance. People, who no longer require protection from military aggression, have begun to develop other aspirations in life — aspirations connected with their basic needs. The LTTE, which has promised the fulfillment of 'national aspirations' of the Northern Tamil people, finds itself incapable of providing for the social aspirations of their own people. This in fact compels them to seek some way of linking up with the rest of the country. What they now seek is a way of negotiating this link in a way that will also enable them to continue to uphold the hegemony they have militarily established.

Resolving the ethnic conflict and bringing peace to the North will invariably mean re-establishing normal links between the government in Colombo and the people in the North. Throughout the past twelve years of war, the normal links between the government and a section of its citizenry had been torn asunder. Now, that same citizenry has built up hopes for better relations with the new government in Colombo. A meaningful humanitarian aid programme, aimed at alleviating the day to day suffering of the people in the North, will certainly build a North-South bridge and also increase the pressures for peace.

P

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Disappearances and Other Assorted Violations

When subjected to enormous pressure by the local populace and by the international community, the last government appointed a Commission to probe into disappearances. However, they also saw to it that the disappearances of the period of terror in 1988 to 1990 would not be investigated by empowering the Commission to look into disappearances from the date of its appointment, that is, 11 January 1991.

This error has been rectified but the present government which has appointed three new Commissions on a territorial basis to look into disappearances from 1st January 1988. This date, however, poses further problems. It will in effect ensure investigation of the disappearances that took place in the South after this date. This ignores the fact that disappearances began to take place under the conditions created by the enactment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979 and that they became a commonplace in the North and the East after 1983. Are these disappearances not worthy of investigation? Do we not need to know the truth of ethnically motivated disappearances?

Human rights organizations have asked the government to push the date back but there has been no response so far.

These three Commissions have been empowered to receive complaints of disappearances from the public, to investigate these complaints and, wherever evidence is available, to fix responsibility for such disappearances. The Commissions can determine their modes of operation and investigation and use such methods as appear appropriate to them.

This sort of mandate gives rise to certain very important problems regarding the results we expect from these commissions.

At a basic level, we want to find out how many disappeared and who was responsible. The relatives of those who disappeared want to go further: they want those responsible punished. And it is likely that these Commissions will find certain specific members of the security forces responsible for certain specific disappearances; these persons may be punished. However, even these investigations will be selective; it is impossible to expect that every single disappearance will be investigated and culpability fixed. We agree that these things need to be done, but is this all we expect from investigations into past atrocities?

We need to know the truth about these disappearances at this level, but, if we are to prevent similar abuses in the future, we need to know the larger truth.

We need to know the truth about political accountability. We need to know how the state and the regime in power created the conditions under which disappearances were not only tolerated but also encouraged. We need to know the structural characteristics within the security forces which permitted and then hid these violations. It is the "cleansing power of truth" that will arm us to prevent the possibility of such abuses in the future.

It is in this context that we publish in this issue extracts from an article that undertakes a comparative study of Truth Commissions that have been set up in a number of countries that have suffered periods of violations similar to ours.

These are attempts to find out the larger truth. While not ignoring individual cases, they are more concerned with establishing the political and structural factors underlying widespread violations.

Particular attention might be drawn to the Truth Commission established in El Salvador by the UN as part of the peace agreements between the government of El Salvador and the FMLN. Based on a large number of individual cases, it sought to trace and set out the patterns of violence and the socio-political contexts in which these patterns emerged.

There is a further point that is of interest. This concerns a moral issue. What are we concerned with - the punishment of certain individuals guilty of specific violations, a further rendering of the social fabric or a process of reconciliation based on knowledge of the truth? Mandela has set up a Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. He has promised immunity to those who freely confess their crimes; the truth will be publicised, political and social responsibility will be clearly established, but there will be no punishment because punishment in these cases will inevitably merge into revenge. And revenge will work against reconciliation.

Freedom of Expression

One of the main issues of both the Parliamentary and Presidential election campaigns in 1994 was freedom of expression. The issue became manifest in two areas: first, freedom within state owned or controlled media such as the radio, television and some newspapers and second, freedom of expression in privately owned print and electronic media.

In the first instance, the charge was that state owned media had simply been converted into propaganda instruments for the ruling party. In the second instance, private media has been coerced to follow a line sympathetic to the ruling party by harassment of owners and intimidation of journalists.

The PA in its campaign stood firmly for the total freedom of expression. It promised a media policy that would guarantee this freedom for all sections of the media, including radio and television. In November, the PA put out a document outlining its media policy; this was reproduced in the last issue of PRAVADA (vol. 3 Nos. 8 & 9). But the gap between policy statement and practice has now so widened that the Free Media Movement felt compelled to organise a public rally at Nugegoda on February 16 th to ask : "Where is the promised Freedom of Expression ?"

The policy statement said:

The PA government is determined to put an end to the abhorrent practice of intimidating and assaulting journalists, directly or indirectly , by state agencies and others , in response to carrying out their professional duties.

The threats levelled in the recent past against journalists as well as media institutions have largely emanated in response to their attempts to expose and bring to the notice of the public, corruption and the abuse of political power. In order to eradicate one major threat to media freedom, our government recognises the media's right to expose corruption and misuse of power.

Lasantha Wickrematunga, the editor of the Sunday Leader, was pulled out of his car and he and his wife were both assaulted by unidentified persons in early February. He believes that the attack was instigated by elements in the PA who were displeased with his column and his editorial policy. Police investigations into the attack have conspicuously failed to identify the assailants.

Sinha Ratnatunga, the editor of the Sunday Times, has been hauled into the notorious fourth floor of the CID in order to find out the source of certain stories appearing in his paper. The investigations were said to be connected with a complaint of defamation lodged with the police by the President.

These incidents have been taken by media personnel as signals of the government's displeasure concerning the publication of material which may discredit the government.

While these incidents are frightening, some incidents in the state media are even more so. The policy statement was explicit in promising freedom:

Media personnel in the state-sector media institutions will have the freedom to decide the content of news bulletins and news feature programmes based primarily on the newsworthiness of events. We will not use state-owned media for party propaganda.

The state media will also be encouraged to give a place to non-government opinion, be it of opposition political parties or professional or community organizations, in the presentation of news and in the content of other programmes of social relevance.

The New Educational Service of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation took this assurance seriously. They raised and discussed questions of contemporary social significance in their non-formal education programmes. They invited persons to these programmes representative of various shades of opinion across the intellectual spectrum. They involved listeners in these issues by inviting participation through phone-in programmes and other devices. They used the promised freedom to the fullest extent possible.

Unfortunately they could not long survive. After months of harassment on both important and trivial issues, the service was abruptly terminated; on February , a newly appointed director just switched off the service while it was in transmission. The service is now confined to formal educational programmes broadcast during school hours. It is understood that some programmes put out by them were deemed "anti-government".

The conclusion then would be that the state media have no license to deal with material in a way that could be construed as working against the government's interests. State media must continue to serve only the interests of the ruling party.

We find this state of affairs extremely disturbing. The government must quickly retrace its steps and endeavour to practise what it has preached.

P

The review of M.R. Narayan Swamy's book "*Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas*" that appeared in the last issue of Pravada was written by Ketheeswaran Loganathan. We regret our error in not naming him as the author of the review.

SUSTAINING THE PEACE PROCESS AND GOING BEYOND

N. Shanmugaratnam

The fledgling peace process initiated by the People's Alliance (PA) government has yet to move on to a steady course. The Jaffna negotiations have not yet entered the expected phase of a dialogue towards a final political solution. Furthermore, there are some signs of dissonance that can be upsetting to the people who have placed so much hope in the peace to see an end to their sufferings. It would, of course, be too idealistic to expect the peace process to progress smoothly without any mishaps or disruptions in the early stages, given the past record of peace-making in Sri Lanka. At the same time, we cannot afford to forget that if the peace talks fail to lead to a political solution, the inevitable consequence is war again; and this means that we will be slipping back into the same barbarism from which we are struggling to escape.

This gloomy prospect and the ever-present probability of it becoming a reality should make all Lankans-Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims-even more committed to peace and to a political solution that can make the peace permanent. The peace movement in Sri Lanka which originated in the dark days of the UNP rule has been playing a significant role in the South. During the parliamentary and presidential elections, activists of the movement engaged in an intensive grassroots level campaign among the Sinhalese people against the war and for a political solution. They learnt that the Sinhalese people desired peace and were prepared to listen to talks explaining the causes of the war and the genuine grievances of the Tamils. The direct contact with the Sinhalese people gave the peace activists the confidence to openly advocate a solution to the national question based on devolution and autonomy. The activists I know have no problem at all talking openly in the South about a federal solution, something still not so easy for some politicians of the PA to do. We are fortunate to have a politically enlightened peace movement which draws its active campaigners from different political formations, the Buddhist clergy, church groups, women's groups, human rights bodies, trade unions, art and literary workers, and professions such as law and education. Tamils who had the opportunity to join the anti-war campaigns in the rural areas in the South were able to get a feel of the winds of change blowing in the Sinhalese areas.

Today, there is a great need to expand and further intensify the peace movement, and a greater need to take it to the Tamil-speaking people in the North-East. One is not unaware that the LTTE may not permit peace activists to conduct independent campaigns in the North. However, the time has come for the peace movement to make efforts to reach the people in the LTTE-ruled areas on a more sustained basis. There is no doubt that the people in these areas want an end

to the war and to the authoritarian rule under which they live. They are fully conscious that the latter cannot be realised without the former; the former, at least, is a necessary condition for the latter. Ever since the change of government, the people of the North have signalled in their own ways their happiness about the end of the UNP rule and their approval of the peace initiatives taken by the Kumaratunge government. However, due to past experiences, almost all Tamils have deep-seated doubts about any government in Colombo when it comes to a political solution to the national question. On the other hand, Jaffna Tamils living in the South and abroad are also aware of the equally deep-seated doubts their friends and relatives in the peninsula have about the LTTE's commitment to a peaceful settlement. To quote a friend living in Jaffna:

"We cannot trust government even with a new pact until it has really been implemented to a sufficient degree to convince us that the government would not go back on the deal under pressure from Sinhala extremists. On the other hand, we cannot be sure that the LTTE will go through the peace talks until a pact is signed and will finally honour its side of the bargain in the absence of a guarantee to retain its own monopolistic power in the North".

A people haunted by such a twin fear can only be persuaded by a powerful and independent countrywide multi-party, multi-ethnic peace movement to believe in the ultimate feasibility of a peaceful political solution to the national question and of the democracy in the North-East. There is an important message to be learnt from my friend's acute statement that so coherently captures the subjective state of the Tamils. That is, it is not only the government that has to be pressurised by the peace movement to be on course towards a political solution and to honour its commitments, but also the LTTE. Our demands for transparency and accountability from the government should be extended to the LTTE as well, on behalf of the people under its rule in the North and the people in the rest of the country.

In this regard, Tamils living outside the North-East have a major political and moral responsibility to join the campaign for peace and a political solution, and to throw their weight with the forces demanding both the government and the LTTE to eschew war and to stick to the option of reconciliation and negotiated settlement. Lankan Tamils living in the West have not taken any sustained collective action to support the peace process and to lobby for international assistance to sustain it. It seems that, in Europe, it is easier to mobilise Lankan Tamil immigrants to campaign against Western governments' attempts to deport Tamil asylum seekers than to promote the peace process back home.

Tamils should also raise their collective voice against LTTE's authoritarianism in general and its past anti-Muslim actions in particular. They should demand that all Muslims who were driven out of their homes by the LTTE be allowed to return and rebuild their lives as they please. The Muslims should also be compensated for the losses they suffered due to extortion and looting when they were ordered to leave their homes and for the hardships they had to endure during the displacement. The Tamil people are not unaware that a meaningful and workable political solution cannot be achieved without the participation of the political representatives of the Muslims of the North-East in the peace talks. This naturally makes them concerned to know the LTTE's position on the future status of the Muslims in the North-East. To date, the Tigers have not shown any convincing signs of repenting for their past anti-Muslim actions and moving towards repairing in whatever ways possible, the damage they have done to Tamil-Muslim co-existence and harmony and the territorial integrity for autonomy in the North-East.

Tamil intellectuals ought to pay a more sustained attention to the vital ideological question of Tamil nationalism. The dominant form of Tamil nationalism today is a militant ideology of ethnic puritanism and military heroism which has been constructed and disseminated over the past fifteen years or so. Unless we cleanse ourselves free of this ideology and the mythologies of exclusivism and martial traditionalism on which it rests, we cannot move forward as a civilised people in a world. I think that all Lankan communities, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, need to go through an ideological catharsis to be freed of the ethno-centric and fundamentalist world views so as to become equal partners in a multi-ethnic (or multinational) people's democracy. In this regard, the intellectuals in these communities have a major role to play. Of course, such an undertaking begins by deconstructing the currently dominant ethno-communalist identities and reconstructing our nationalities so as to incorporate them into a large evolutionary project of a corporate Lankan identity. Deconstruction of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology has been an ongoing project since the late 1970s, thanks to the perseverance of several dedicated Sinhala intellectuals. However, the challenge of popularising the demand for decommunalising public institutions, secularising the state and creating new multi-ethnic Lankan symbols remains to be faced.

On the Tamil side, many writings critical of the dominant chauvinist Tamil nationalism have appeared over the past ten years in Tamil magazines published abroad. Unfortunately, there has not been a coordinated effort to sustain this trend and deepen the analysis. A debate has begun on Tamil nationalism in the Tamil news paper *Sarinihar* (published by MIRJE). More such debates are needed to work towards a systematic deconstruction of the ethno-centric Tamil Eelamism which has redefined the parameters of Tamil self-determination and nationhood in extremely narrow terms. The works of progressive Sinhalese intellectuals are a great source of inspiration to the Tamil critics of ethno nationalism. However, there is an urgent need to find the means of sustaining and consolidating the efforts of the Tamil intellectuals. Some of the Tamil leftist critics of LTTE's nationalist ideology continue to retain conventional and reductionist theoretical categories based on the formula of "one nation-one state". The problem with this approach is that it is too rigid to permit a conceptual separation between the nation and state so as to treat the relation between the two as a heuristic construct with reference to a given historical context. In the contemporary Lankan situation, the "one nation-one state" formula imprisons its believers in one form of ethno-centrism or another. The invocation of Lenin does not help the Tamil leftists to avoid this pitfall, given the particularities of the Lankan context. Our own experience has shown that the Tamil leftists with all their well-intended defence of the right of the Tamils to self-determination have not been able to prevent the rise of a narrow chauvinistic ideology to hegemonic status in the Tamil society.

Based entirely on the West European historical experience of nation-state formation, the "one nation-one state" formula represents a minority phenomenon in modern history. Indeed, more than 75 per cent of the states that exist today are multi-ethnic or multinational in character. I think we will do well to shift debate to an alternative theoretical terrain where a state need not necessarily be national (in the sense of comprising a single ethnic entity turned nation), or conversely, a national community need not necessarily have its own independent state as an expression of its self-determination. I also believe that such a paradigm shift is a precondition to find a theoretical framework that is relevant to the current realities of Sri Lanka. It will certainly help us see the national question more holistically and explore the meanings of self-determination more creatively. ■

TRUTH COMMISSIONS: AN OVERVIEW

Since the Spring of 1993, publication of the report of the United Nations Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, there has been a marked increase in interest in truth commissions. Partly as a result of the widespread attention brought to the El Salvador report, truth commissions-official bodies set up to investigate a past period of human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law-are being considered for a number of other countries now in the midst of political transition.

Although truth commissions have become increasingly popular, they are still relatively under-studied. Outside of the attention given to the two or three more well-known commissions in Latin America, there has been little comparative research in this area, despite a multitude of questions. No definition or defining parameters of truth commissions have been identified. There has been little exploration of the constraints, limitations, and challenges common to such official truth-seeking bodies, and no serious look at what objectives such commissions can realistically be expected to fulfill. And while new truth commissions are now being developed, there has of yet been no comprehensive survey of past truth commissions.¹

In fact there are many more examples of truth commissions than is generally realized. Through a description of fifteen truth commissions that have existed to date, and a comparison of some of the key issues highlighted by these commissions, I intend to begin to address some of these questions here.

The Commission on the Truth for El Salvador (commonly known as the "Truth Commission") is in many ways a classic truth commission: the commission, established as part of the peace agreement between the government and armed opposition in El Salvador, was given eight months to write a report outlining the extent of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law over twelve years of civil war in El Salvador. The commission staff took testimony from witnesses or victims of violence, investigated a number of cases in great depth, and compiled statistics on the tens of thousands of cases brought to its attention. The commission's final report describes the widespread abuse against civilians by the armed forces and by the death squads and, although in significantly lower numbers, the abuses by the armed opposition. The report also points out parties responsible for the violence, highlights the failings of the judicial system, and recommends measures for reform. As many have noted, the Truth Commission report in the end confirmed what many people, particularly Salvadorans, have long accepted as true, but official acknowledgement of the widespread abuses was important in itself.

The Truth Commission in El Salvador was the first such commission to be sponsored by, paid for, and staffed by the United Nations. The idea for this truth commission was based on the experiences of Chile and Argentina, the most well-known previous cases of national human rights commissions set up to investigate the past. Less well known, however, are at least twelve other such commissions in other countries-a total of at least fifteen such commissions to date. In addition to Argentina and Chile, governmental commissions have been set up in Uruguay, the Philippines, Chad, Bolivia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Germany, and Uganda (where they have two). An international non-governmental Truth Commission reported on Rwanda in early 1993. Two separate truth commissions were established by the African National Congress (ANC) to evaluate the ANC's record of abuses in its detention camps throughout Southern Africa. Table I summarizes these fifteen cases in chronological order.²

Truth Commissions can play a critical role in a country struggling to come to terms with a history of massive human rights crimes. A number of the commissions outlined here have been notable successes: their investigations welcomed by survivors of the violence and by human rights advocates alike, their reports widely read, their summary of facts considered conclusive and fair. Such commissions are often an important step of formally acknowledging a long-silenced past. But not all truth commissions have been so successful. Some have been significantly limited from a full and fair accounting of the past-limited by mandate, by political constraints or restricted access to information, or by a basic lack of resources, for example--and have reported only a narrow slice of the "truth". In some cases truth commission final reports have been kept confidential.

The Context: Defining the Parameters

Truth Commissions, as I will call them generically, are bodies set up to investigate a past history of violations of human rights in a particular country-which can include violations by the military or other government forces or by armed opposition forces. National Truth Commissions are usually sponsored by the executive branch of government, less commonly by the legislative branch. In the alternative, a truth commission can be sponsored internationally, by the United Nations or by nongovernmental organizations. While there are now three examples of non-governmental truth commissions (the Rwandan and two ANC commissions), most non-governmental human rights investigations are not commissions by the definition used here. By "truth commissions" I mean only those bodies that fit a fairly defined, limited mold. ■

Extracted from an article by Priscilla B. Hayner in *Human Rights Quarterly* 16 (1994)

My own definition of a truth commission includes four primary elements. First, a truth commission focuses on the past. Second, a truth commission is not focused on a specific event, but attempts to paint the overall picture of certain human rights abuses, or violations of international humanitarian law, over a period of time. Third, a truth commission usually exists temporarily and for a pre-defined period of time, ceasing to exist with the submission of a report of its findings. Finally, a truth commission is always vested with some sort of authority, by way of its sponsor, that allows it greater access to information, greater security or protection to dig into sensitive issues, and a greater impact with its report.

Most truth commissions are created at a point of political transition within a country, used either to demonstrate or underscore a break with a past record of human rights abuses, to promote national reconciliation, and/or to obtain or sustain political legitimacy.

There have been a number of national non-governmental projects that have served truth commission-like functions—investigating the record of violence and publishing a report—but which have not operated with the authority of the typical structure of a truth commission. The efforts in Brazil have perhaps received the most attention. These projects are not included in the list of truth commissions here, but they provide important alternative approaches to documenting the past, and are thus described briefly below in section five.

Truth commissions must be distinguished from the formal legal accountability achieved through prosecution of individuals responsible for abuses. The fifteen cases here show that prosecutions are very rare after a truth commission report; in most cases there are no trials of any kind, even when the identity of violators and the extent of the atrocities are widely known.³ The very mandate of truth commissions generally prevent them from playing an active role in the prosecution vs. amnesty decision that often follows a truth commission report, although some truth commissions have recommended prosecutions or forwarded their materials to the courts.

Given the intentionally temporary nature and narrow mandate of truth commissions, the decision whether to prosecute is generally a political one, or a reflection of political realities, that is taken apart from a truth commission's sphere of influence.

The issue of prosecution vs. amnesty—what Human Rights Watch refers to as the justice phase, as opposed to the truth phase—will not be addressed here. There is a wealth of literature on this,⁴ debating whether there is an international legal obligation to punish past crimes, the political constraints and limitations of prosecution, the limitations of due obedience laws, and other issues, but I will not enter into that discussion here. This paper focuses only on the truth phase, in the terminology above, which is a separate process from that of taking individuals to court.

Likewise, this article will not address the subject of war crimes trials. Such international tribunals established to try specific individuals charged with human rights crimes can help shed light on the overall extent of abuses during a period of conflict. But such trials are focused on the acts of certain individuals, and do not attempt to investigate or report on the overall pattern of violations. War crimes trials are of an intrinsically different nature from truth commissions.

There has been a sharp increase in interest in truth commissions over the past year or so. This is due to a variety of factors: the attention that the El Salvador Truth Commission report received; a growing consensus that past human rights crimes cannot go ignored during a democratic transition; a perceived need to institute truth commission-like bodies in various conflicts around the world. After El Salvador, a "truth commission" is now a known and attractive entity, thought of as a piece of the solution for places like South Africa, Guatemala, and Malawi. Indeed, it is likely that a truth commission will be established in each of these three countries relatively soon.⁵ In Mexico, South Korea, and Honduras there are also calls for truth commissions.⁶

The efforts of the National Commissioner for the protection of the human rights in Honduras, a government post, may provide a new precedent for a truth commission. Acting on his own initiative, in the last four months of 1993, commissioner Leo Valladares Lanza put together a lengthy report on disappearances in Honduras that occurred between 1980 and 1993.⁷ The report is based on press accounts and other public sources of information, and is internationally subtitled a "preliminary report", calling on the government to establish a truth commission that can undertake a more extensive study and which will have access to restricted information⁸. The report has brought the issue of disappearances to the forefront; the day after the report was published the Honduran military promised to open its secret files on political killings and disappearances in the 1980s, and to allow judges to question accused officers. As the *New York Times* comments, "The decision by the military is unusual in a country where the armed forces have long been powerful and not held accountable for rights abuses."⁹

Truth commissions, indeed, are becoming increasingly more common. Between March 1992 and late 1993, six truth commissions were established. And whereas all nine commissions established between 1974 and 1991 were sponsored by the President or parliament of the country, four of these last six commissions are new, untraditional models: sponsored by the United Nations, by an opposition party, or by a coalition of non-governmental organisations. There need be no fixed model: in the unique circumstances of each country, other new and innovative models for a truth commission may yet be developed.

Why a Truth Commission?

A human rights commission set up to investigate abuses of the past can serve many different, often overlapping,

purposes. The most straightforward reason to set up a truth commission is that of sanctioned fact finding: to establish an accurate record of a country's past, and thus help to provide a fair record of a country's history and its government's much-disputed acts. Leaving an honest account of the violence prevents history from being lost or re-written, and allows a society to learn from its past in order to prevent a repetition of such violence in the future.

But "fact finding" is perhaps an inaccurate description of investigation which often ends up confirming widely-held beliefs about what has happened and who is responsible. In many situations that warrant a post-mortem truth commission, the victimized populations are often clear about what abuses took place and who has carried them out. In many civil conflicts, including both authoritarian military repression and full-blown civil wars with a strong armed opposition, much of the violence is carried out either with explicit acknowledgement of the responsible parties (political kidnappings, public announcements of groups or individuals that are targeted, etc.), or by uniformed personnel who leave witnesses to acts such as disappearances or mass killings. While not true in every case, a general understanding of who did what during a period of violence is usually well accepted by the civilian population within a country.

Given this knowledge, the importance of truth commissions might be described more accurately as *acknowledging* the truth rather than finding the truth. "Acknowledgement implies that the state has admitted its misdeeds and recognized that it was wrong", writes Aryeh Neier.¹⁰ Juan Mendez, then Director of Americas Watch, writes; "Knowledge that is officially sanctioned and thereby made part of public cognitive scene" ...acquires a mysterious quality that is not there when it is merely 'truth'. Official acknowledgement at least begins to heal the wounds.¹¹ An official acknowledgement of the facts outlined in a truth commission report by government or opposition forces can play an important psychological role in recognizing a 'truth' which has long been denied.

Truth commissions are usually set up during or immediately after a political transition in a country which may be in the form of a gradual democratization, as in Chile and South Africa, a negotiated settlement of civil war, as in El Salvador, a military victory by rebels, as in Uganda and Chad, or a rapid democratic opening after repressive military rule, as in Argentina and Uruguay. A truth commission can play an important role in the transition, either by affirming a real change in the human rights practices of the government and a respect for the rule of law in the country, or by helping to legitimize or strengthen the authority and popularity of a new head of state or both.

Of course, a commission can also be set up by a government to manipulate the public perception of its own tarnished image, in order to promote a more favourable view of the country's human rights policies and practices. This is particularly likely when a government is under international pressure to improve its human rights record. Given the mandate of commissions, by definition, to look at the past rather than the present, it is

easy for a new government to justify not being subject to the investigations of the commission, while professing improved human rights policies. Any current abuses are therefore conveniently overlooked by the commission. Given this dynamic, it is not always immediately clear whether a government's commission is more a political tool or an accurate reflection of change. The first truth commission in Uganda and the truth commission in Chad are cases in point. In Uganda in 1974, Idi Amin set up a commission partly in response to pressure from international human rights organisations. But Amin disregarded the commission's report, and continued his brutal rule. In Chad, even as the Commission of Inquiry was finishing its report on the past, the government was accused of trying to whitewash its own abuses.

It certainly is not assured that the existence of a truth commission will make the repetition of similar human rights abuses less likely in the future. Neier acknowledges this point:

I do not claim that acknowledging and disclosing the truth about past abuses, or punishing those responsible for abuses, will necessarily deter future abuses. I doubt there is decisive evidence for this proposition. The same can be said of the contrary view, sometimes argued by proponents of amnesties, that an amnesty promotes reconciliation. While if a government making a transition to democracy attempts to punish those guilty of past abuses, it risks allowing those people to seize power again. Either outcome is possible. Whether the guilty are accorded amnesty or punished is only one among many factors that affect the pattern of events in any country.¹²

But the expressed intent of most truth commissions is to lessen the likelihood of human rights atrocities recurring in the future. This is stated in many commission reports, or even written into commissions' operating mandates. The titles of one governmental and three independent non-governmental Latin American reports reflect this sentiment—the now well known *Nunca Mas* (Never Again). A commission can perhaps help reduce the likelihood of future abuses simply by publishing an accurate record of the violence, with the hope that a more knowledgeable citizenry will recognize and resist any sign of return to repressive rule.

More concretely, truth commissions can contribute to the future with specific recommendations for reform. Not all commissions make recommendations, but commission reports have included recommendations covering military and police reform, the strengthening of democratic institutions, measures to promote national reconciliation, reparation to victims of the violence, or reform of the judicial system. In most cases, these recommendations are not obligatory (with the exception of El Salvador), but they can provide pressure points around which the civilian society or the international community can lobby for change in the future.

Most human rights organisations and activists feel that the contributions of a truth commission process outweigh the political risks involved, or indeed that a full truth-telling is

necessary before real healing can take place. "Self-investigation, self-observations is critical," comments a Chilean human rights lawyer who worked on the El Salvador Truth Commission. "It's always very clear that the government doesn't want to do it, but it is an obligation that they cannot ignore. In Chile and Argentina, they had commissions in order to forget the past, to turn the page afterwards. But the trick is, how not to close the book.... Commissions aren't perfect, but what do you do without them?"¹³

There is disagreement, however, as to whether truth commissions help to promote national reconciliation, or whether, as some argue, they create deeper resentment and exacerbate old issues that have been dug up anew. Persons that are implicated in any report—which may include the military, the political leadership, guerrilla combatants, or judges—might well be expected to argue against revising the past. But neutral parties have also argued that investigating the past can be harmful to the future, and question the contributions of such a "hot" report in a politically fragile environment. There are many examples in history of periods of massive human rights violations that are not investigated and documented subsequently; most interesting nonetheless are those examples where this is intentionally decided for the purpose of national reconciliation.

As far as is known, no truth commission is planned in the current transition in Mozambique—with a full history of atrocities during the war there—nor in Angola, if peace ever returns there. The parties to the Mozambique conflict have insisted that demobilization is their first priority, and have rebuffed international human rights organisations' proposals for a truth commission body. Nor does there seem to be an interest on the part of the general Mozambique population in reviewing the horror of the past. Asking about this, a US Department of State official summed up the reconciliation vs. truth commission debate that continues even to the State Department: "There is a need to empty wounds of all old infections before healing can start", he said. "But in some countries, like Angola and Mozambique, I'm not sure you'd have anything left if you cleaned out all the infection... I used to feel very strongly that truth needs to come out. But there are others here that don't feel that way; they feel that it is most important to focus on the elimination of future abuses, especially in war-ravaged countries."¹⁴

In fact, no truth commission to date has caused a situation to become worse; Zimbabwe is the only case where some suggest that violence might be sparked if the truth commission report were to be released, but this results in part from not releasing the report immediately. In Rwanda, government forces went on killing rampages immediately upon the commission's departure from the country in January 1993. But this reflected ongoing tactics of terror (suspended during the commission's two-week visit) as much as a specific response to the commission's work; only a small number of the several hundred killed during those two days had been involved with helping or testifying before the commission, according to the commission's co-chair.¹⁵ When the Rwandan commission report

was published six weeks later, international pressure on the Rwandan government forced the military to stop its campaign of terror. Even with unexpectedly explicit and strongly-worded reports, the overall impact of each truth commission has generally been positive, often reducing tension and increasing national reconciliation, and perhaps increasing the understanding of and respect for human rights issues by the general public and political leaders alike.

There are, of course, clear limitations to truth commissions. Most importantly, as a general rule, truth commissions do not have prosecutory powers such as the power to subpoena witnesses or bring cases to trial,¹⁶ nor do they act as judicial bodies to pronounce individuals guilty of crime. Those commissions that have publicly named the individuals responsible for certain acts generally state clearly that these are not judicial decisions.

Truth commissions also generally do not investigate current human rights conditions.¹⁷ They do not, therefore, fill the need for a permanent human rights commission or agency responsive to present day rights concerns.

The Right to Truth

Human rights advocates have begun to focus on an inherent right to truth in existing human rights law. International human rights law obliges states to investigate and punish violations of human rights; within this is the inherent right of the citizenry to know the results of such investigations. Frank LaRue of the Center for Human Rights Legal Action in Washington and Richard Carver of Article 19 have been among the first to articulate this right to truth. Carver writes, "Article 19 considers that there is indeed a 'right to know the truth' which is contained within the right to 'seek, receive and impart information' which is guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." He also cites a similar "right to receive information" in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Human Rights advocates also point to the ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the Velasquez Rodriguez case of 29 July 1988, which concluded that the state has a duty to investigate the fate of the disappeared and disclose the information to relatives.

Notes

1. Of the articles or books to date that address truth commissions, some of the better overviews include: *The Justice and Society Program of the Aspen Institute, State Crimes: Punishment or Pardon* (1989); David Weissbrodt & Paul W. Fraser, *Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation*, 14 (4) Hum. Rts. Q. 601 (1992) (book review) (which compares a number of past commissions); Richard Carver, *Called to Account: How African Governments Investigate Human Rights Violations*, 89 (356) AFRICAN AFFAIRS 391 (1990); Juan Mendez, *Review of A Miracle, A Universe, by Lawrence Weschler*, 8(2) N.Y.L. Sch. J. of Hum. Rts. 577 (1991); Aryeh Neier, *What Should be Done About the Guilty?*, THE NEW YORK REV. OF BOOKS, 1 Feb. 1990, at

32; Jamal Benomar, *Confronting the Past: Justice After Transitions*, 4 JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY 3 (JAN. 1993); and Jamal Benomar, *Coming To Terms With The Past: How Emerging Democracies cope with a History of HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS* (Carter Center of Emory University, 1Jul. 1992).

2. This list of fifteen truth commissions is not exhaustive. There are other past commissions that could well be considered truth commissions under the definition used here, and certainly deserve further study. For example, in 1977 the central government of India appointed a "Shah Commission of Inquiry" to investigate abuses that took place under the state of emergency declared 25 Jun. 1975. See *Shah Commission of Inquiry, Interim Report 1* (1978). An International Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Abuses in Burundi since 21 Oct. 1993, a non-governmental commission similar to the Rwanda commission, was finishing its report in June 1994, reporting on the violence that took place in Burundi in late 1993. *Commission Internationale D'Enquete sur les Violations des Droits de L'homme au Burundi Depuis le 21 Octobre 1993* (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1994). There were also a number of municipal or regional commissions in Argentina, in addition to the national truth commission, which investigated abuses under the military regime.

3. In only a few of the fifteen cases looked at here was there an amnesty law passed explicitly preventing trials, but in most other cases there was in effect a de facto amnesty-prosecutions were never seriously considered. Likewise, in only a few cases, such as in Bolivia and Argentina, have there been trials in conjunction with or as a result of the truth commission investigations. Trials are also expected in Ethiopia.

4. see, e.g., Diane F. Orentlicher, *Settling Accounts: The Duty to Prosecute Human Rights Violations of a Prior Regime*, 100 YALE L.J. 2537 (1991), and Naomi Roht-Arriaza, *State Responsibility to Investigate and Prosecute Grave Human Rights Violations in International Law*, 78(2) CAL. L. REV. 449 (1990), and their references to numerous other sources.

5. Since this was written, the government of South Africa has announced plans for a truth commission. See *infra* note 85. For further reference, see the African National Congress' call for a truth commission in *African National Congress National Executive Committee's Response to the Motsuenyane Commission's report* (8th Aug. 1993). see also *Institute for Democracy in South Africa, dealing with the past: Truth and reconciliation in South Africa* (Alex Boraine et al. eds., 1994), a compilation of papers from a Feb. 1994 international conference.

Two weeks after South Africa's announcement, negotiators in Guatemala signed an agreement to establish a truth commission in Guatemala, formally named the "Commission for Clarification of Violations of Human Rights and Acts of Violence That Caused Sufferings to the Guatemalan People". The commission will begin work after final peace accords are signed, expected to be Dec. 1994, and cover the period from 1960 or 1961 until the date the final peace accord is signed. One of the three commissioners will be appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General. The issue of a truth commission has been a difficult, sticking point throughout the negotiations, with the opposition URNG insisting that such a commission was essential to any peace accord. See *Guatemalan Foes Agree to Set Up Rights Panel*, N.Y. Times, 24 June 1994, at A2.

In Malawi, party leaders have agreed in principle to a truth commission. See Article 19, *Malawi's Past: The Right to Truth*, 29 CENSORSHIP NEWS, 17 NOV. 1993, which argues for a truth commission; this statement was adopted by a consortium of human rights and church groups in Malawi to push the issue into the political limelight; see also 19 ARTICLE 19 BULLETIN, Jan./Feb. 1994, at 4.

6. In Mexico, a non-governmental effort which calls itself a truth commission is investigating the 1968 killings at Tlatelolco where the armed forces shot into a crowd of protesting students and killed hundreds. There are calls for an in-depth commission to investigate this event. In South Korea, academics and activists are pushing the government to investigate the killings at Kwangju in 1980, where human rights observers estimate over 2,000 were killed, but no in-depth investigation ever took place. See ASIA WATCH, HUMAN RIGHTS IN KOREA 41-42 (1986). Whether these proposed commissions might study the larger picture of human rights during the period at hand, rather than focusing narrowly on these events, is not clear.

7. *Comisionado Nacional de Proteccion de Los derechos Humanos, Informe Preliminar Sobre Los Desaparecidos en Honduras 1980-1993: Los Hechos Hablan por si Mismos* (1994). The commissioner's original report is over 1,000 pages. This published report comprises major excerpts from the original report.

8. In conversation with the author, Commissioner Valladares insisted that his efforts did not constitute a truth commission, and that the government still held the responsibility to establish one.

9. *Honduras to Open files on killings: Army Says It Will Let Judges Question Officers in Cases of Political Slayings*, N.Y. Times, 31 Dec. 1993, at A7.

10. Neier, *supra* note 2, at 34.

11. Mendez, *supra* note 2, at 583. Mendez cites Professor Thomas Nagel for his articulation of this distinction.

12. Neier, *supra* note 2, at 35.

13. Interview with Sergio Hevia Larenas, Chilean human rights lawyer (12 Mar. 1993) (interview in Spanish; translation by author).

14. Interview with US State Department official (7 May 1993).

15. Interview with Alison DesForges, Co-Chair of the International Commission of investigation on Human Rights Violations in Rwanda Since 1 Oct. 1990 (24 Apr. 1993).

16. The Special Prosecutor's Office in Ethiopia is the exception, as it is both documenting the past and taking individuals to court.

17. The commissions in the Philippines and Rwanda are exceptions: they investigated human rights violations that occurred up until and including the period in which the commissions operated.

18. Article 19, *Malawi's Past*, *supra* note 6; see also Carlos J. Chipoco, *El Derecho a la Verdad: Un Analisis Comparativo*, paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association Conference (12 Mar. 1994).

HOW SOCIETIES REMEMBER: NOTES AND QUERIES ON THE (AB) USE OF HISTORY IN SRI LANKA

Darini Rajasingham

"Tacitus did not see the crucifixion though his book recorded it. The Unicorn because of its anomaly will pass unnoticed."

Jorge Luis Borges in *Other Inquisitions*.

Depending on how one sees it, Sri Lanka is blessed or cursed with an excess of history today. Present historical excesses take many forms: from mythologies about the traditional unity of Tamil Homelands in the North and East, to the presumed unity of Sinhala-Buddhist national identity since the third century, to attempts to debunk or otherwise analyze such stories in historicist terms.

Recently, after the merciful respite that followed a proliferation of election-inspired historical fantasies, our national history fetish was again the subject of mild dispute: this time, in the form of a potted history which purported to give historical reason (and arguably further cause) for our current ethnic misery. The text I have in mind was published on the pretext of reviewing historian Kingsley de Silva's appraisal of "Separatist Ideology in Sri Lanka: the 'Traditional Homelands' of the Tamils", which set out to debunk the LTTE ideologues' claims about the unity of the north and east in the Tamil past. Gunadasa Amarasekera's review of de Silva's essay, published in the *Island* of November 8, 1993 consisted of a potpourri of facts and effects.

What was clear from the style of presentation of both historical discourses—De Silva's essay on the Tamil Homelands Myth and Amarasekera's discussion of De Silva's book—is that our present penchant for history blurs the line between popular and specialist history. It also transcends the ethnic divide. In fact, it is at the interface between popular and academic debate that the question as to whether Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhalese or the Tamils draws the most passionate, fantastic and revealing histories of the island's past. These stories treat as self-evident the assumption that history (and the further back it goes, the better) might shore up the exclusive claims of particular ethnic groups to territory in the present.

The Excess of Sinhala History

The present surfeit of history in Sri Lanka is only partly explained historically. It is often claimed that unlike the majority of once colonized and diversely peopled islands the world over which had to invent pre-colonial pasts

in the absence of literacy, let alone history, Sri Lanka was spared the embarrassment of having to invent its national past. While islands like Hawaii, Fiji or Malagasy which are still commonly thought to have been inhabited by "people without history" (read civilization), prior to the arrival of the Europeans with their linear, historical modes of time measurement and tabulation, Sri Lanka, or to be precise the Sinhala, it is said, had a solid gold history. That is, the Pali vamsas—principally the *Mahavamsa* which provides a more or less chronological if broken narrative of particular royal courts and lineages and their relationship to particular sects of the Buddhist Sangha in Sri Lanka.

The chronologicity of the *Mahavamsa*, after the discovery of the *Vamsattaparakasani* (the text used to decode it) rendered it unique among the literary narratives of South Asia. Thus it came to be used by nineteenth-century European orientalist as the prime source for constructing, not only, the history of Sri Lanka but also that of the sub-continent, at least until the decoding of the Asokan inscriptions in India. For, faced with having to construct a scientific and evolutionary story of South Asian civilization, nineteenth-century European Orientalists awarded Sri Lanka the gift of historical memory over its giant neighbour India, which lacked a continuous and identifiable historical tradition. The *Mahavamsa* or history was presumed to speak the totality of the Sri Lankan and Indian past. In the process the presence of numerous other ethno-religious, linguistic and cultural groups in the country were erased from the historical memory. Sri Lanka came to be equated with the evolution of Sinhala-Buddhist identity.

The European orientalist legacy of reading of the *Mahavamsa* as a more or less true representation of past events in Sri Lanka, i.e. as History with a capital H, is still with us. Ironically, this reading of the Sinhala past, seems to have found its firmest believers among the *Jathika Chinthanaya* pop historians who under most circumstances are the first to eschew all western influences. Oblivious to the fact that positivist history has served to invent the antiquity of modern nation-states, and has legitimated racism and colonialism, Gunadasa Amarasekera insists on perpetuating the same type of ethnocentric oppressive history of Sri Lanka. For him the history of the country is the history of the Sinhala and

their assimilation of all other peoples, cultures, religions that have become part of our landscape. The diversity of histories that might be told of a single land, particularly the places of coastal Sri Lanka with their rich ethnic, religious and linguistic communities, is elided.

The vamsas have been read as a totalizing and more or less accurate window into the past, rather than being viewed as themselves historically produced, partial and interested in order to persuade and/or polemize against other powerful and literate audiences. The Mahavamsa even if it might be called history is certainly not a document which is unbiased, objective and accurate. Be that as it may, the *Mahavamsa* still renders Sri Lanka singular among the world's post-colonial island nations. Perhaps, this singularity, this burden of history, provides the answer to our post-colonial historical excesses.

The Excess of Tamil History

But if the proliferation of ethno-centric history in Sri Lanka was due to the Pali-Vamsas, what of the Sri Lankan Tamils' historical excesses? Do the Tamil nationalists have Sinhala history-envy?

It is indeed arguable that Tamil nationalist historians have been reacting to Sinhala nationalists, that history like identity is dialectically produced. In countering the Mahavamsa story that posits the original unity of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation with the opening account of the three visits of the Thathagatha, Tamil nationalists have rather unimaginatively followed precisely the Sinhala pattern and structure of using history to buttress claims to territory, for example, the claim that the *Mahavamsa* provides evidence of an older or prior Sinhala claim to the country, that there was always a unified Sinhala nation in the island, etc. (What parenthetically of the Vannialatto, better known as the Veddas who according to standard interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* are descendants of the *Yakas* and *Nagas*, to the ownership and lordship over the country as its ORIGINAL inhabitants?)

The Politics of History

While Tamil nationalists' history-envy might be the reason for the Homelands mytho-history, there seems to be a more interesting and finally more telling reason for the recent proliferation of nationalist histories. Mr. Amarasekera himself kindly directs us to this reason, when he queries the reasons for the manufacture and survival of the Tamil Homelands myth and states: "I believe we have to go beyond history and examine the political, economic and social structure of this country..".

What Mr. Amarasekera who applauds de Silva's debunking of "The Myth of the Tamil Homelands" for its scholarship, seems to not notice is that his and De Silva's point about Tamil history are also applicable to Sinhala mythohistories: that it is not only Tamil nationalists who are engaged quite cynically in remaking the past to suit present politics and contingencies. After all, the *Yakhas* and *Nagas*, and the other semi-human

creatures who inhabit the *Mahavamsa* are at least as mythological as Tamil nationalist histories. Yet according to him Tamil history is closer than the *Mahavamsa* stories to myth.

Jathika Chinthanaya and LTTE fictions alike illustrate how history might be and has been used for present political ends. The contemporary surfeit of history in Sri Lanka has less to do with the richness of Sri Lanka's historical record than with present-day politics. This is not, of course, to deny the singularity of the Vamsa myth-histories, but to displace their hegemony in the production of national historical memory.

The production and multiplication of histories in contemporary Sri Lanka is not singular. Rather it is an aspect of the process of nation building, of selective remembrance that enables what Benedict Anderson has termed the "imagined community" of the modern nation. History as most of us know it today, i.e. as national history is *par excellence* the narrative of the modern nation and hence always necessarily a political project. And this is true of ethno-centric histories espoused by ethnic nationalists as well as the subtler erasures and absences contained in recognizably scholarly histories and historical disagreements. That history is the favourite pasttime of nationalists involved in inventing the antiquity of recognizably modern nations, including Sri Lanka reveals the constitutive orders of modern forms of historical memory and nationalism.

Cultural Minorities and Hi-Story Today

While the modern European tradition of past as the story of the role of great white men in the making of the nation-state has been increasingly contested in the Euro-American world where debates over the teaching of national history have reached near "civil war proportions among historians" and resulted in the revision of school history text books so that they incorporate the histories of women, immigrants, and cultural and ethnic minorities, Sri Lankan history particularly primary and secondary school history texts remains steeped in nationalist mytho-histories. At the same time amidst the proliferation of nationalist histories there seems to be a singular silence. Leftist historians with a few notable exceptions have all but abandoned the fight for history at least at the popular level to the nationalists.

Thus the dominant issues of history still pertain to simplistic distinctions between myth and history as if history were fact without interpretation. Thus much of the history debate in Sri Lanka has been about whose history is real History as opposed to myth or fantasy. Both De Silva and Amarasekera have sought to make a clear distinction between history and myth. Yet as Raymond Williams in his instructive etymology of the word "history" in the English language has pointed out:

"In early English usage history and story (the alternative English form derived ultimately from the same root) were applied to an account either of imaginary events or of events supposed to be true". (keywords)

That history has always had an element of myth, and myth an element of history which makes for their different narrative efficacy is an aspect of history and myth (read fact and interpretation) that those who view them as binary oppositions have forgotten.

The fact that there are no simple distinctions to be made between history, story and myth is arguably one of the reasons that specialists of history are hardly agreed about anything, beginning with the historical reasons for our present ethnic conflict. Yet, that practitioners of history seem evenly divided about how to explain our post-colonial ethnic debacle (whether

in terms of the historical animosity between the Sinhala and Tamil, or British *divide et impera*) is not so much cause to despair at history, as cause for recognizing the limits of history, what Borges calls the "modesty of history". More importantly, it makes clear the fact that history cannot and does not in the final analysis provide solutions for present conflicts. What after all, is the relevance of ten centuries of Tamil homelands or the unity of Sinhala-Buddhist identity since the third-century (even if it were true), to finding a solution to the current crisis when such histories have provided fodder for ethnic violence? ■

FAMILY HISTORIES AS POST-COLONIAL TEXTS

Yasmine Gooneratne

The word 'Australia' summoned up in my mind a single picture, one which I instantly recognised as having come straight out of the *Philip's Atlas* I had used as a schoolboy at Royal. On Philip's map of the world, huge areas of the earth's surface had broken out in the rash of washed-out pink patches which denoted British ownership. To the east of India and the island of Ceylon (also pink), south of Borneo and Sarawak, there Australia had been, a blank pink space shaped like the head of a Scotch terrier with its ears pricked up and its square nose permanently pointed westwards, towards Britain.

That doggy devotion to Britain is something that I, familiar with the colonial traditions of my own family, fully understand the reasons for, even though I do not, of course, personally subscribe to it.

A Change of Skies, 1991.

What the principal narrator of my novel calls a 'doggy devotion to Britain' is an imperial legacy that has long survived the end of the Empire itself. It could surface in surprising ways. Falling in love during a colonial adolescence could often be, for example, a quaint and curious thing. Ours being a very conservative society in pre-independence times, a lot of what we thought of as 'love' had its existence entirely in the mind and in the imagination. Most schoolgirls, for instance, collected pictures of their heroes, and stuck them lovingly into albums. A classmate who sat next to me through Junior and most of Senior school took as the objects of her affection most of the members of the British royal family, which meant that her albums were full of photographs of crowns, medals, dress uniforms and corgis. The rest of us had less elevated desires—our dreams were filled by film actors and sportsmen: indeed, one of my classmates fell passionately in love with the entire Australian cricket team, then visiting Colombo on their way to play Test matches at Lords.

At a different level, this peculiarly colonial devotion may be identified in the sentimental affection that made thousands of West Indians answer the Mother Country's postwar call for assistance in running her extensive transport system, and staffed Britain's National Health Service with highly qualified medical personnel drawn from the Commonwealth nations of five continents. In pre-Thatcher times, it ensured that hundreds of university graduates (of my own generation) from Commonwealth countries travelled to Britain—rather than to the USA or to Europe—for their postgraduate education.

The imperial outlook seems to have affected not only the attitude of ex-colonial nations to Britain, but regulated the relationships of their citizens with one another. In an earlier book, *Relative Merits* (1986), an account of the English-educated Bandaranaike family of Sri Lanka, I drew attention to this phenomenon:

Cultivating English modes of living and thinking, the members of my father's clan had imbibed a very proper English prejudice against Jews, 'frogs', 'Chinks', 'niggers', 'Japs', 'Huns', 'fuzzy-wuzzies', 'wops' and 'wogs' of every description. English upper-class scorn of the lower orders in British society was easily translated, in the context of Ceylon, into a whole-hearted contempt for merchants, trades, members of 'inferior' castes, and even of... Sinhalese families such as their own who were not, unlike their own, 'out of the top drawer'. Tamils, Burghers, Parsis and Muslims were, of course, literally breeds apart: acquaintance with them was possible, friendship rare, and marriage unthinkable.

Relative Merits, p. 100

It was inevitable, I suppose, given the intensive nature of the English education with which upper-class 'colonials' were endowed by generations of teachers drawn from Britain's

public schools, that British prejudices should have influenced the attitudes colonial and, later, Commonwealth nations adopted towards one another. In *A Change of Skies*, I had my principal narrator, a Sri Lankan university academic, reflect on his own ignorance of a Commonwealth country that is geographically located much closer to his own homeland than Britain:

Long before I saw Britain for the second time (as a postgraduate student), I knew London, its Dickensian fogs and its murky river, the Shakespearean Tower in which Richard III had had his nephews murdered, Brooke's church clock at Grantchester which stood for ever more at precisely ten to three. I knew, long before I ever ate one, what muffins tasted like. Where Wordsworth's inward eye had been polished by memory, imagination had burnished mine: upon it flashed like images in a video on fast-forward, not just the skittish daffodils of his description but all the meadow flowers of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Keats.

For generations my relatives had been either going to, or returning from, England. And so firmly had their gaze been focused on the metropolitan centre of a pale pink *imperium* that they had never so much as glanced in any other direction. To do so would have seemed the grossest lapse of taste.

A Change of Skies, p. 12

Growing up in post-colonial times has involved, for most thoughtful persons of my generation, cultural re-thinking and, quite often, political realignment. In countries that were once part of empires, British or any other, a gradual but progressive shedding of 'colonial' attitudes has occurred during the latter half of a century that has seen more people on the move-in transit between countries, cultures and languages-than possibly any other period in the history of the world. Some countries, notably the USA, Australia and Canada, have been built on the physical and intellectual labour of generations of immigrants.

The two texts that have, for me, effectively marked off my own world's colonial past from its post-colonial present and future, are V.S. Naipaul's novel, *A House For Mr Biswas* and Derek Walcott's moving poem 'A Far Cry from Africa'. The personal experiences explored in these texts-each so different from the other-and in so many that have come after them, reflect the political and ideological struggles of the former colonies and dominions of the British and other empires as they moved with varying degrees of difficulty towards freedom. But it has never seemed to me that either of these texts was written to a political agenda: I regard them as expressions of human feeling, of small-scale love. The agonizing emotional struggles they depict are instantly recognizable by readers everywhere as recalling similar conflicts in their own experience.

Part of the post-colonial experience, an important part, is the history of exile. It is no accident that Yeats, probably the finest poet of the modern period, and the patron poet of Ireland, chose exile as the theme for the *Dedication* to a book of stories selected from the Irish novelists that he published in 1891.

The following stanzas come from the *Dedication* as Yeats rewrote it in 1924.

Ah, Exiles wandering over lands and seas,
And planning, plotting always that some morrow
May set a stone upon ancestral sorrow!
I also bear a bell-branch full of ease.

I tore it from green boughs winds tore and tossed
Until the sap of summer had grown weary!
I tore it from the barren boughs of Eire,
That country where a man can be so crossed;

Can be so battered, badgered and destroyed
That he's a loveless man: gay bells bring laughter
That shakes a mouldering cobweb from the rafter,
And yet the saddest chimes are best enjoyed.

Gay bells or sad, they bring you memories
Of half-forgotten innocent old places:
We and our bitterness have left no traces
On Munster grass and Connemara skies.

The family histories of post-colonial exiles that seem to me to explore the post-colonial experience are those that, as Yeats knew, combine comedy and tragedy, laughter and loss. The temptation to nostalgia at one end of the scale, and to mere entertainment or bitterness at the other, is ever-present, of course. It has ruined the work of some promising contemporary writers, but part of the discipline of writing is surely the devising of strategies for overcoming such weaknesses and temptations.

For it is not merely aesthetic effect that is at risk, but accuracy, the post-colonial experience being not a simple but a complex one. Paul Scott, in *The Jewel in the Crown* describes the long relationship of Britain and India as an embrace so long-drawn-out and so intense that it had become no longer possible for the participants in that embrace to be certain whether they hated or loved one another. The language in which that relationship is described by contemporary writers is, at its best, correspondingly and appropriately ambiguous. A love story less fraught with politics might be written with simple directness, but a post-colonial love-story calls for something more.

Salman Rushdie refers in *The New Empire in Britain* to a time when half the map of the world blushed a rosy pink as it writhed pleasurably under the weight of the British Empire; and David Dabydeen has stated more recently that The British Empire ... was as much a pornographic as an economic project. The subject demanded a language capable of describing both a lyrical and a corrosive sexuality. This creative ambiguity, by means of which writers are exploring compelling personal and political concerns, is to be found in the great post-colonial texts: and it is one of the qualities that focuses upon them the close attention of today's post-colonial critics.

Writing a family history of my own while working as an academic in the field of post-colonial studies has taught me to

regard sceptically, if not cynically, the belief with which I grew up, and which I held throughout my undergraduate life, that historians-especially-British historians-are the custodians of truth. I now know that the line between what we call 'history' and what we call 'fiction' is so thin as to be almost indistinguishable. This is not only because some eminent historians use figurative language and aural musical effects with the obvious relish that poets do (cf. H.A.L.Fisher's *History of Europe* or Churchill's *History of the English-Speaking Nations*) but because they, like poets and other writers of fictive texts, live and write as men or women in a particular place at a particular point in world history.

It seems to me only natural, indeed inevitable, that given the political situation in which historians (especially Commonwealth historians) compose their 'histories', their view of past events would be coloured by the various aspects of that situation. How objective, how truthful, are some of the eminent and revered historians of the past? How much have they been influenced in what they write by their desire to edit the past so that they produce a work which resembles not what it really was but what it might have been?

However praiseworthy their intentions, however disciplined their methods, are not historians as prone to error and self-deception as other writers?

Family biographies, in which an author seeks to uncover and present the history of his or her own ancestors is a department of historical writing that is surely especially vulnerable to the operation of fraud and fantasy. The English poet William Cowper noted how hard it is for a man engaged in the writing of his own life to write anything who undertake the biographies of their own ancestors of some admired and venerated figure, those people now dead or ageing, to whom their own lives and their outlook on life are inescapably bound.

Some historians, intent on presenting an informative, accurate view of problematic events, cautiously dress their creations as fiction. An outstanding example of this appeared in 1860, in *Max Havelaar*, the classic work in Dutch by Eduard Douwes Dekker, the subtitle of which betrays its real purpose and aspiration: it is a history of "The Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company". The writing and publication of this book followed Dekker's stormy departure from the Dutch colonial service. It is set in mid-19th century Java, and it aims to tell the world 'what is going on in the East Indies' (modern Indonesia). The novel describes the frustrated career of an idealistic, reform-minded Dutch colonial officer who tries to stop the exploitation of Javanese rural folk by their own local chiefs in association with the ruling Dutch. Havelaar doesn't last long-he is restrained in his attempts at reform by his superiors in the colonial bureaucracy, and it is he, not the larcenous aristocrats, who is replaced. Dekker's wit and his colourful language and imagery have caused his book to be regarded as a classic of Dutch literature. Whether we regard it as history or fiction, it is an important post-colonial text for many reasons, among which are: its theme and subject, its intrinsic literary value, and its role in inspiring the contemporary family history-as novel *This Earth of Mankind*, written in Indonesian by Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

Setting down the facts of my own life for this book, I realize how closely they must resemble and parallel the outlines of other ex-colonial lives in my own generation. I was born in the island once known as Ceylon, and went to school and university there, following this with time spent as a Ph. D. student at Cambridge, and in teaching English Literature at my old University, the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya. The latter is an institution that is located in the heart of the hill country that produced the famous tea with which, from British times to the present day, the island is associated in the world's mind; a parallel instance could, perhaps, be found in the establishment (on the site of a former sugar plantation at the Jamaican centre of 18th-century Britain's slave trade) of the University of the West Indies' Mona campus. I have now lived and taught English Literature in Australia for nearly 20 years, at a University that bears the name of Lachlan Macquarie, a Governor of New South Wales who, as a young officer serving in Ceylon, had received from the defeated Dutch in 1796 the keys of the Fort of Galle.

Such parallels, I find, come naturally to the mind of a post-colonial writer.

Throughout my adolescence in a society that actively discouraged education for girls as socially unnecessary (and, possibly psychologically damaging!), I was writing poetry, stories, and sketches for pleasure rather than for publication. As an undergraduate I began to write articles and reviews for local newspapers, proceeding later to write for overseas journals, edit university magazines and, later still, to develop bibliographical skills by practice rather than by formal training.

From 1956 on, the position in Sri Lanka of English language writers such as myself became very problematic. During a period of feverish nationalist 'resurgence', English was officially down-graded and the indigenous languages of Sinhala and Tamil were elevated in what one must regard, however tragic for the country its consequences, as a well-intentioned attempt to redress earlier inequities. (Not unlike the thinking behind Affirmative Action legislation in the USA in the 1960s, except for the important point that the new regulations in Sri Lanka benefited a powerful ethnic majority of potential voters, and not historically disadvantaged and politically powerless minorities.)

My personal response to this was twofold. I tried, on the one hand, to deepen my linguistic skills and my understanding of my mother-tongue and the culture it supported by translating from classical and modern Sinhala poetry, and drawing images from it into my own writing and publishing, my faith in the English language (in the form in which we spoke and wrote it in Sri Lanka) as a medium capable of accommodating a truly national, indigenous Sri Lankan literature.

In 1970 I established, with the collaboration of a colleague in the Department of Western Classics at the University of Ceylon who originated the idea, a literary journal that we named *New Ceylon Writing*. This little magazine came in time to provide a useful forum for English-language writers in Sri Lanka. In the following year I published my first volume of

poetry, *World Bird Motif*. I felt so strongly about both these projects in that it is likely I would have continued and developed interest vigorously in different ways had I remained in the country. But by 1971 I was not only teaching full-time as an academic, but I had become the mother of two young children. While political unrest in 1971 seriously affected schools and universities and disrupted teaching, offers arrived for my husband and myself of academic positions in Medicine and English literature teaching at Sydney University and Macquarie. We decided to live and work for a while in Australia.

So it was that *The Lizard's Cry*, my second book of poems, was in the nature of a farewell. It was published in the week we left our homeland for a foreign one that, like my fictional narrator in *A Change of Skies*, we had never seen and knew really very little about at the time. There followed a period of comparative silence, during while I wrote no fiction and very little poetry, and published only literary criticism, bibliographical essays, and editions or anthologies of poetry and prose.

Then, in 1981, I was awarded Macquarie University's first degree of Doctor of Letters. My children, having grown up in Australia, knew very little about their Asian background, which includes a family in which there were, and are, a large number of writers, translators and artists. I began work on another book, a history of my father's family. It appeared in print in 1986 with the title of *Relative Merits*.

With hindsight I realize that working in the area of biography and family history gave me a push in the direction, once again, of fiction.

This came about because, in presenting family personalities, I had used some of the techniques of fiction-knowing beforehand from family gossip the patterns of certain incidents, I had been filling out characters, taking as my starting point certain known dates, places and events in their lives, and putting into dramatic form conversations in which family legend asserts that they took part. I also took a long, hard look at the biographies that were being published in Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 1980s. In the Sri Lanka of today, biography-especially of politicians-often becomes a self-serving exercise in flattery and image-building. The biographies that came under my eye were mostly eulogies of politicians. I knew I didn't want to write eulogies. I wanted to create-or recreate-real people for my children to think about, not just waxworks for them to admire (and occasionally dust) or icons for them to worship.

Writing *Relative Merits* gave me practical experience in making characters live and move convincingly. It also helped me to see where I stand in relation to the theories of politics, literature and gender that have become part of today's intellectual atmosphere. These perceptions were sharpened when I was invited to direct Macquarie University's new research centre for Post-colonial Literature and Language studies.

According to some critics working in the field, the term 'post-colonial' covers all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. According to another school of thought, the term 'post-colonial' relates exclusively to the contemporary culture of independent former colonies. My personal preference is for the first of these definitions. I prefer it because, as a writer of poetry and now of fiction, I am aware that British culture, no less than that of Britain's colonies, has been deeply affected by the experience of colonization and of imperial domination. In *The New Empire in Britain*, Salman Rushdie drew attention to the manner in which the colonial experience has stained and brutalized the English language. Listing in his essay such words as 'coon', 'nigger', and 'fuzzy-wuzzy', Rushdie pointed out that the raw material of literature-language itself has become stained and diseased by the colonial experience to a point at which it is very nearly unusable.

Coming to the writing of fiction in these post-colonial times, I am forced like all my contemporaries, to devise strategies which will allow me to use the stained and diseased language Rushdie describes as medium and raw material for an art that will, if I am fortunate, outlast my own life. My own interest in writing fiction is not, however, subject to a political agenda, post-colonial, feminist or other. I am interested in exploring human relationships as they exist between men and women, parents and children, teachers and students, leaders of society and the persons they lead. I find fascinating as a subject for fiction the human weakness for self-deception. It creates a gap between what people really are and what they pretend to be (to themselves as well as to others).

The hope of exploring that gap as honestly and imaginatively as I can, in the lives of contemporary figures as well as of colonial personalities, is the lure that draws me to the adventure of writing fiction. Having been born in Asia, partly educated in England, having settled in Australia, and visited and taught in the USA and elsewhere, I share my contemporaries' personal histories of exile and expatriation, just as having been born in colonial Ceylon and having lived through Independence in 1948 and the post-Independence years, I share with writers and academic colleagues in all Commonwealth countries the experience of post-colonialism. The raw material for what writers of our times are presenting as fiction is, in fact, our life-experience, and the 'colonial' past they evoke is our own family history.

Notes

1. 'On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today', in C. Ricks and L. Michael (eds), *The State of the Language*, 1990, p.3.



WOMEN'S MOVEMENT - A FEMINIST RE-APPRAISAL

Mangalika de Silva

"The legacy of patriarchy which, like the culture of imperialism, is a dubious gift that we can only transform if we acknowledge it"

Gayatri Spivak

Feminism informs that the history of all hitherto existing societies; is conceived of as a history of the subordination of women by and to men. This subordination of women to men, collectivities and the State operates in many different ways, in different historical contexts. Patriarchy has always sought to exclude women from positions of authority outside the family. Though ostensibly different, even antithetical cultural and/or political arrangements are merely variations on the common overriding theme of patriarchy. Beneath the apparent discontinuity of transitory historical forms lies the massive continuity of male domination. Arguably, it is precisely this continuity that allows us to speak of "history" rather than "histories". The historical continuity that it takes as its object is not development but domination; a hegemony of a particular form of reason which is shot through and through with the poisonous passion of patriarchy. It also demands a fundamental break with the present, one that involves the construction of a new form of reason and a new form of power. In our localised cultural context, it is crucial, indeed necessary, that such a history be created in the wake of these contradictions, premised on collective lived experiences of women. The task of feminism today is to realise this political programme - a feminization of historiography.

It is theoretically misleading however, to consider gender relations without contextualising them within ethnic and class divisions in the localised context. It has been recognised that one major form of women's oppression in history has been women's invisibility, their being 'hidden from history'. The invisibility of women other than those who belong to the dominant ethnic collectivity within feminist analysis has been as oppressive. Ethnic minority women have been virtually absent in all feminist analysis. Anthropological and historical differences in the situation of women have been explored, but only in order to highlight the social basis of gender relations

in Sri Lankan society. The heterogenous ethnic character of the latter has never been fully considered.

Post modern critics theorising the woman's question using Foucauldian categories expand the argument further, claiming how a pluralism of powers necessarily gives rise to a pluralism of resistances. Foucault insists on the multiplicity of the sources of resistance and refuses to privilege one as any more revolutionary or universal than any other.

But, this is ideologically a wholly unacceptable position in many respects since Foucault refuses the globalising or universalising influence of patriarchy - an influence that enforces silence on female sources of resistance. From a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, Foucault's deconstruction of disciplinary discourse/practice betrays all the signs of its masculine origin. His ban on "continuous history" would make it impossible for women even to speak of the historically universal misogyny from which they have suffered and against which they have struggled. His critique of "totalising reason" condemns as totalitarian the very awareness of the

pervasiveness of male domination that women have so painfully achieved and entails an equation of identity with loss of freedom. In short, as Balbus argues else where, Foucauldian geneology "disciplines women by denying them of the conceptual weapons with which they can understand and begin to overcome their universal subordination". However despite the problematique of such theorising, the likely possibility that these resistances ("where there is power, there is resistance") might eventually combine to create a new form of power/knowledge and thus a "new politics of truth" (a simultaneous quest for a non-authoritarian, politically liberatory discourse) should inspire hope among activists engaged in social transformation and nation creation in the contemporary socius. The success of their efforts would invariably depend on their ability or willingness to integrate

A re-examination/re-conceptualisation of the experience of the terms of women's emancipatory struggles in an urban/rural theoretical grounding would be a "politically correct" position for women in re-defining their roles and identities at this historical juncture (with International Women's Day falling on March 8th) as they stand summoned to making, unmaking and re-making history in shaping and guiding their own destinies.

the difference of perceptions of social reality and the profound differences between the social experiences of women. It must be noted here that the context specific struggles of ethnic Tamil/Muslim minority women have rarely influenced analyses of gender relations. Hence the need to take into account the ethnic diversity.

Virtually everywhere the interests of the 'nation' or the ethnic group are seen as those of its male subjects and the interests of the 'state' are endowed with those of a male ethnic class or not just a class which is 'neutral' in terms of ethnicity and gender. Nation states come to represent this masculinised power constructed and exercised by male agency. How effectively women will challenge this power relation which continues to ideologically de-centre their lives as society's margins, remains a battle yet to be won.

At the popular level of the political discourse, there is positive rhetoric about elevating women's status in society, and recognising their role in social reproduction of mothering and nation building and production of knowledge. At a more personalised political level, however, women are disadvantaged and marginalised solely because they are women. In industrial zones, women as workers are exploited and discriminated against; denial of basic socio-economic rights to food, housing, healthcare, transport; suppression of civil and political rights to organised action and unionise. Women as political campaigners voicing against violence, state repression and systemic harassment and discrimination of ethnic minority communities were hounded out as anti-systemic forces. The increasing number of battered women of domestic violence makes the notion of the sanctity of family a subject of ridicule.

Methodology of Revolt

Differences in the nature of social protest/political mobilisation in the urban/rural dichotomy have put the women's movement in a fundamental dilemma. While the positioning of the "woman's question" in many of the ongoing feminist debates has tended to reflect the urban based middle class women, such a citycentric conceptualisation has led to the further exclusion of the identities and histories of "other" women - those socially active, politically disinclined women concentrated in the suburbs and countryside.

Women's experience of grassroots activism in the last two years, has demonstrated the very Colombo-centric nature of women's political struggles. Obsessed with the idea of a formation of a socialist/democratic social order, women took upon themselves the task of political mobilization demanding a transformation of the anti-democratic authoritarian system. The overwhelming number of Colombo-based middle class women's activists who came to dominate these "campaigns", points to the class base of the women's movement. The ideological battle lines in terms of generalised slogans, placards and banners with captions "your vote is a democratic right", "stop the war" and "no to violence", seem to negotiate a case

in favour of democratisation of society rather than use of the political space for a specific, well-articulated gender agenda to address women's concerns. The culture of appropriation and manipulation of women for a specific political programme based on radical rhetoric and populist sloganeering historically and politically has proven to be disastrous for conscious women, (from the point of view of their empowerment), committed to the goals of social change.

However liberating and empowering the experience of social protest and political activism has been, women will have secured few victories and won few battles if their activism has failed to question/articulate issues of power, violence and rights ideologically and in a manner consonant with everyday practice.

The tendency to publicly mobilise under universal themes and engage in politics of public campaigns acceptable to popular will and praxis helps undermine all other forms of personalised political activism in terms of grassroots organising which sensitively addresses delicate, humane, psychological issues of trauma counselling for abused women and those who have suffered as a result of the general political violence in the aftermath of violent ethnic/civil conflicts. The fundamental problematique of methodology (therefore of discourse) of problem defining tends to feed into a claim of superiority vs inferiority, i.e. hegemonic vs subaltern? Feminist theoreticians and activists of public campaigns are superior with relative political autonomy and freedom while self-sacrificing grassroots women are inferior because they are largely invisible with restrictions on their freedom and therefore disempowered. Arguably, both these two different mechanisms of how women's issues are introduced leave them feeling totally disempowered and peripheralised.

In the ideological practice of re-claiming and re-negotiating rights and power, women who articulate gender issues institutionally are privileged with credibility and integrity, a form that is acceptable to the patriarchal political and social order. This is a dominant feature with regard to the universal discourse of human rights and violence against women. In the localised social context and at grassroots level, rights have yet to take roots and women still to articulate a rights ideology based on their lived experience.

It may be a legitimate argument to point out that with the differential impact of modernity, a legacy left by colonialism and built on by the state, the distinction between rural/urban divide became sharper. Centralisation of power and capital accumulation in urban cultures, in terms of access to information/knowledge, technology, skills, training etc., privileged urban-based social classes who have access to the use and control of these resources.

While the eternal quest for a new women's culture remains unfulfilled, women's capacity to create a cultural space through cross cultural analysis, theatre groups, discussion sessions for social interaction may have the potential of bridging widening gaps that stand in the way of achieving fundamental changes in the lives of women resulting in a new sensibility and new social order.

Backlash

Women's multiple identities which occupy centrestage of many gendered discourses and their image in the patriarchal public gaze (media) which face a gendered-backlash have come to be viewed in a narrow theoretical and epistemological frame which owes its key features to a "masculine" viewpoint. Feminist political activism against the racial repression of ethnic minority women (rape, torture and murder) by forces of coercive power, heightened and intensified unprecedented levels of political consciousness. Assertions of ethnic and nationalist loyalties, attempts to preserve culture from being subverted, collective claims to a historical past and the sense of unity derived from being assimilated into a particular community have affected the way in which women conceive their identity vis-a-vis nation.

Conflicts based on ethnicity and identity politics and the resultant oppression of women within a socially repressive, militarised context, negate women's capacity for expression and resistance. For their bodies have acquired a new power that needs to be regulated and suppressed. Female bodies have been metamorphosed themselves into sites of power where the battle is being crushingly fought. As Sandra Bartky rightly points out to overlook the form of subjugation that endanger the feminine body (be it political repression of female sexuality through modern forms of reproductive technologies or the nationalist appropriation of women in nation building) is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these 'disciplines' have been imposed.

Can the subaltern speak in the actual site of location? What alternative forms of power have women access to in resisting this narrowly constructed hegemony? If hegemonies can be resisted by counter hegemonies can such hegemonies be without dominance? Can women who are symbols of the nationalism of the repressed be able to embrace sisterhood and commonalities in fighting for a common feminist political agenda of change. Are differences and barriers; ethnic, class,

caste, ideological, transcendental? These are some of the complex dilemmas that need to be carefully scrutinised and resolved.

The backlash against women political leaders who have come to dominate the public sphere in South Asia reinforces how hegemonic patriarchy is experienced by women. The ideological construction of women positioned in binary oppositions is based on the morally good/licentious dichotomy. As Malathie de Alwis in a perceptive paper has noted, this moralistic backlash against women leaders, particularly in the South Asian political landscape seem "centrally premised on the fact that if a woman does not conform to patriarchal norms of 'respectability', she is a disgrace". The 'idealised' woman in the patriarchal discourse is also the privileged woman holding high office who conforms to male norms and as Chatterjee argues "is positioned to lay claims to her prerogatives in the public sphere without endangering her femininity".

Insinuations arising from institutional sexism and gender bias such as "women lose their sense of purpose", "widow is incapable of ruling the nation" hurled at women confirm the view that women still live in a patriarchal society that is hegemonic. Paradoxically, women in the public gaze are held up to ridicule and scorn by other women, which adds another dimension to this gendered backlash. Very often women themselves participate in the process of subordinating and exploiting other women. i.e. in the context of national liberation movements, structures of unequal gender relations [power] posit hegemonic women against other [sub]altern women, often resorting to violence as the means, as a 'disciplining' influence in resisting opposition, in creating 'docile bodies'. A counter ideology to overcome hegemonic patriarchy necessitates a complete cultural transformation. Patriarchy is not an isolated part of, but rather a pervasive presence within, any given human society. It is imperative that the struggle against patriarchy be understood as a struggle for an entirely new culture, a culture without domination. ■

Published by SSA

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: AN OBSTACLE TO DEVELOPMENT

by

Roxanna Carrillo

ESTRANGED STRANGERS

Yolanda Foster

I am a British woman emerging out of an intellectual climate which proclaims that metanarratives are dead. Universals have been overtaken by particularities and difference. Contemporary work by deconstructionists scorns the rigidities of Marxists, amongst others. The issue of interpretation has taken centre stage in the Humanities. This wrestle with frameworks and terminology invites the curious to explore the past anew.

How to make sense of women Theosophists in Sri Lanka ?
“historical being is that which never passes into self-
knowledge”

(Paul Ricoeur)¹

“there are more things in heaven and earth, than are found
in our philosophies, Horatio”
(Hamlet/William Shakespeare)

The participation of foreign women in the restoration of traditional Buddhist culture and belief in Sri Lanka deserves exploration. Foreign women have been present in Sri Lanka since colonialism. These women do not form a homogeneous group, there are different groups of “white women”. Some are missionaries, teachers, nurses or memsahibs^{1a}. Some are honoured, others reviled. The group of white women that I am interested in exploring are the Theosophists². However my project is also to make something which seems solid, amorphous. I wish to experiment with the Theosophists’ “identity”. In doing so, I hope to expose the prejudices embedded within definitional constructions of the human subject. I ask the reader to take a journey and liberate their imagination from the theoretical confines of objectified history. Representations of the Theosophists have pinioned them against a particular wall³. I wish to bring out the shadows, the light and shade around the image of the Theosophists. My aim is to challenge a mode of knowing which restricts itself to a “value-free objectivity”.

Marie Museaus Higgins, Florence Farr, Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky and Countess Canavarro are some of the names associated with a group of foreign women who challenged the negative stereotyping of white women in Sri Lanka during the late 19th century. Theosophists were given positive nicknames - “Sudu Ammas” - rather than the negative term “Suddis”⁴. In the Sri Lankan context they were “goddesses” due to their empathy with the political aspirations of the colonized⁵. Yet in other contexts they were “madwomen” who dreamed and dared. They were dissidents in their own societies articulating equal rights for women, campaigning against exploitation and condemning imperialistic practices. As “new women”⁶ they brought with them challenging ideas

and were symbols of the dynamic role women could play in periods of change. Yet how much can we actually “explain” about the actions and choices of these women? If we are critical of their representations does this mean that “reality” can never be fully “reflected”? Or does it mean a bigger challenge, that we need to work towards understanding the meanings that are produced.

What did being a white, female Theosophist mean in late nineteenth century Ceylonese culture? In making sense of women Theosophists we need to explore their history by looking at the inter-relations between their “experience” and the way in which they were “represented”. Representation is a political issue. The way in which culture has represented women, depicted and defined them has contributed to women’s subordinate position. When we try to understand Theosophists, we may be trapped in a regime of representation which freezes the complex human being into a comic book character who conforms to the scriptwriter’s rules. That is why we need to “unpack” the historical context in order to release the real from its reflection.

Another important question to consider is *where* am I in my “distanciation” from events. What is my gloss on history, or in more colloquial language “where am I coming from?” These are not idle questions but force myself/yourself to consider our modes of knowing and reflect upon how knowledge is produced. I could produce potted histories of the Theosophist women, presented in a “packaged” form. This would expose our desire to construct a genealogically useful past, a past from which certain nuances and aspects of a person are obviously missing⁷. I do not wish to do this but will tease out a few ideas about why the Theosophists acted as they did and why they were seen as they were seen. This does not mean that the project of making sense of history is useless but we should tread warily for we tread a *priveleged* path⁸. We must contextualize the social and historical period these women were living in, to make sense of their experiences.

In the late 19th century Britain was in the heyday of Empire building. The practice and attitudes of dominating foreign lands did not meet with a lot of resistance in Britain. This

historical fact makes the ideology of the Theosophists radical. They dared to criticise the “civilising mission” of imperialism. Unsurprisingly “the denial of Christian universalism by Theosophists and their criticism of the pretensions of Christianity to be the one true religion delighted and inspired the South Asian religious and nationalist intelligentsia”⁹. What I would postulate however is that prevailing notions of “Them” and “Us” did not elude Theosophists and it is interesting to note that the Theosophists felt that Eastern religions had degenerated. Blavatsky and Olcott went as far as to urge that even eastern Buddhists did not understand Buddhism any more. Whilst the “degeneration” is attributed to the efforts of Christian missionaries to eradicate it, the Theosophists made it *their* goal to return Buddhism to its proper position. This attitude reflects the claim inherent to colonialism that the colonizers’ project is justifiable due to their understanding of the world. In this context Theosophists felt comfortable in their role and felt it was their role to shape and change Buddhism. This means that even if the Theosophists challenged the imperial project they were not immune to prevailing cultural attitudes of the time. This may help us to understand their ambivalent role in Sri Lanka.

Theosophists’ ambiguity can be understood, if we look at them as *estranged strangers*, who found themselves in a new culture with a different “public traffic in symbols”¹⁰. Speaking in a speculative vein we can imagine that these women, who articulated a feminist discourse in their own countries, found that their words rung hollow in a different culture in which people had different ways of representing themselves to themselves and to each other. This is not to say that there can not be shared conversation between different cultures. Nonetheless there is a certain truth to Wittgenstein’s dictum that “the limits of one’s language are the limits of one’s world”. I do not wish to push cultural relativism, however one’s ontology and ability to share understanding with others comes from certain shared references or a commitment to try to learn the other person’s references. If understanding or commitment is absent then the parties involved will have conversations in the dark. It is in this darkness that cheap gibes about “otherness” (fatness/madness/blacknessec.) are given more weight than if seen in the light of day.

This brings us to the question of where I, the writer, “am coming from”. What is the basis for my understanding of the role of the Theosophists? Am I aloof and detached, able to observe and inform? No. I write from my position - that of a slightly cynical analyst with a disappointment in traditional presentations of knowledge as “authority”¹¹. I write with an interest in how history is repackaged for contemporary consumption and with a feeling of doubt that we can ever fully comprehend the reason for “actresses/actors” efforts in the past, which is not an excuse for being politically passive in *the present*. What remains clear is that gender needs to be put on the agenda as a general structure of experience. It does not mean that the attempt to understand history is useless. There may be no objective canons of historiography, but accuracy varies, there are better and worse accounts of history. Here my attempt is to challenge traditional male-biased views of what makes “good” history. Women’s experiences, their val-

ues and the shape of their lives appear very different depending on whose gaze they are subject to^{11a}.

My gaze is that of a British female post-graduate student. I could be seen as a “white” woman living in a different culture. This affects my understanding of the world. I am perceived as a “white woman” which affects my ways of being. My “estrangement”- real or unreal - affects my values and hurls me into a struggle with what is “culturally appropriate” behaviour. Given that one’s self is partly culturally constructed, we can imagine that Theosophists’ estrangement from their own culture had a destabilising effect on how they saw or interpreted the world. This estrangement is often marginalised in “value-free objectivity”.

I also mentioned in the beginning that I am emerging out of a climate in which post-modernism taunts the prudishness of other theories. Post-modernism celebrates playfulness as a way of understanding the world. One issue we need to clarify is how much relevance does post-modernism have in the “Third World”. How much can we glean if we deconstruct the past? How much relevance is there in using images to assert your difference if you have no access to the media? I would argue that a weakness of post-modernism is that people have their references. What is interpretation without its reference? Is it possible that cherished definitions of situations and political beliefs can metamorphose if one’s usual points of reference move? Is *this* why the Theosophists were less vocal on feminist issues in Sri Lanka? Is it because the boundaries between themselves and others became too impermeable for there to be shared understanding? Is this difference the reason for Theosophists’ dual roles at home and abroad? We will never know since we can only extrapolate from records of their activities and will never enjoy the same “being-in-the world” as they did.

“I am my habits of acting in context and shaping and
perceiving
the contexts in which I act” (Bateson)¹²

To act “in context” as a white woman in late 19th century Sri Lanka would be to accept the political burden of imperialism, to be a “memsahib” and uphold Empire or else to be “loose” - a fiercely sexual being whose lasciviousness glowed next to the “virtuous” Sinhala woman. In other words being a white woman was a difficult act. Eco claims that as subjects we are what the world produced from signs lets us be¹³. This may sound deeply pessimistic to those libertarians in favour of full and free expression however, “being” distinct from the roles ascribed by the dominant discourse takes a certain effort or subversive stance. Ways of “being” that are unfamiliar to us pose awkward semantic questions of naming. Looking at the sticky American debates on politically correct language and the furore over how to name disabled/bodily impaired people, the power of words becomes clearer.

This concern with words, with ways of describing brings us back to our quest - how can we make sense of women Theosophists? What did these women have in common? How would we describe them?

As Hamlet says, “you would play me, you would push my stops like a pipe”. We wish to categorise to pin down. But the Theosophists are not like butterflies who can be caught and have a label attached. If we look at five Theosophists - Blavatsky, Higgins, Besant, Canavarro and Farr - what unites them? Helena Blavatsky travelled to Ceylon in 1889, Marie Musaeus Higgins arrived in Ceylon to be a teacher at the Sanghamitta School and was later the principal of a leading girls school, Museaus College. Annie Besant came in 1893 and Miranda Canavarro arrived in Ceylon in 1897. Each of them criticised Christianity, patriarchy and imperialism. A common focus for their work in Ceylon was to help revive Buddhism and promote Buddhist education. Their articulation of critique against the proselytizing attempts of missionaries provided support for Buddhist Nationalists’ attempts to regain cultural hegemony. Anagarika Dharmapala admired these women due to their opposition to Christian societies. Given their race, their support of Buddhism was radical. Their opposition to colonial domination was a bulwark against the epistemological challenges of modernity, of the West’s attempted imposition of individualisation as the prevailing mode of social organisation.

Yet the Theosophists’ impact on gender identities was not as radical as their opposition to imperial ideas. Annie Besant championed progressive feminist issues at home, such as the famous strike of London Match Factory girls. However her work in India did not involve feminist conscientization of women but focussed on nationalism, on boys’ education and Hindu identity in India. When she visited Sri Lanka (1893, 1906), her acceptance of “Eastern” definitions of women found favour with nationalists. What caused her to be quiet on feminist issues in Sri Lanka and support Buddhist views of femininity? It may have been due to an ideological definition of “Them” and “Us”. The Theosophists may have harboured Orientalist images of “the mysterious East”, even if they were sympathetic to Buddhism. In other words, despite their progressive views at home on issues such as women’s liberation, they may have been romantically seduced by the exotic.

Or perhaps the new situation in which the Theosophists found themselves made them realise, that Ceylon & the Ceylonese made a different sense of the world and it was best to leave new ideas on women out. This “non-interference” is a common guilt which plagues white feminists when asked to speak out on “Third World” issues whether it is genital infibulation, dowry or the strident voices of women writers¹⁴. The same people who would damn cultural relativism, if it applied to the retraction of a global transcommunication network (e.g E-mail, World Service, faxes), are curiously reluctant to let “foreign”/local “bourgeois” women speak out about feminist issues in “their” country, even if those views are articulated to support local, grassroots feminists. Critique as taboo may be why Theosophists chose to be quiet.

Modernisation of the societies the Theosophists left behind had exposed them to processes of individualisation influenced by changing notions of the local and global, pluralisation and the mobilisation of social and cultural orders. It is this process which encouraged Theosophists to “Go to the East”. But

perhaps on arrival the Theosophists saw that their agendas at home were not relevant in Ceylon. However, we should not underestimate late nineteenth century images of the “progressive” West when we analyse the Theosophists’ behaviour. It may be that existential angst was the last thing on their minds and in fact their attitudes may have been guided by prevailing distinctions between “Them” and “Us”. An interview given by Miranda Canavarro draws this image of “Them” and “Us”. Miranda is discussing her searching for peace and says that, “I know I shall find it in India trying to bring light to **those women**”¹⁵. There is no sense that “**those women**” might offer a different way of understanding the world to the Countess. This is not to say that the Theosophists saw Ceylon as inferior but the notion of difference was a stumbling block to overcome in their subconscious. I feel that this notion of difference was bigger in the 1890s than today. At the time when female Theosophists were in Ceylon there did not exist the chorus of subaltern voices demanding their point of view to be respected. In other words the exchange of opinions across gender, race and class was less part of global communication than it is today.

In 1904 Annie Besant declared that the lines of Western female education were “not suitable for Eastern girls”. True, this was influenced by the Ramabai case in India¹⁶ but nonetheless Besant’s stance condoned the “traditional” role of women. This acceptance of women’s traditional role is echoed by Helena Blavatsky who commented, “Woman in Ceylon, like any other Buddhist woman, has always been free and even on a par with man...the Buddhist woman owes her position to Buddha’s noble and just law, the Christian to her intolerant and despotic Church” (Madame Blavatsky 1973: 449-1). This kind of attitude is surprising given the Theosophists’ own quest for self-expression but I think it makes sense if we try to understand the Theosophists’ attempts at familiarity despite which they remained distant from Ceylonese culture.

These attempts to make sense of the impact and motivations of women Theosophists may appear as a chimera. Mere hints. A tentative grasping of the past, the impossible attempt to enter the Theosophists’ imaginings. Nonetheless, this subjective grapple with the past must make us think about how we understand. Why is it that we usually accept packaged information about people and places and accept an objective analysis of history which often sidelines a gendered perspective and stays clear of the muddy terrain of people’s motivations. How we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding of the present. If we step back from objectivity for a moment and wonder why or how or what motivated people, we may be more open to dealing with why we do and act today. The question of cultural difference is still a thorny one. A rose may smell as sweet by another name. The question is which name do you valorize.

What kinds of theory are relevant for making sense of then and now? Several feminist writers have offered a useful deconstruction of the category of “woman”, indicating how important it is to problematize universality and account for the multiplicity of experience. They also highlighted the fact

that understanding has usually embodied the perspective of dominant groups only and demanded that marginal groups be included into mainstream history. Their focus on gender, rather than women's experiences tried to highlight that sexual differences are not "natural" but are another form of social organisation that is historically and culturally produced and given meaning by gender.

"To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see natural and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women's social experience instead of from the partial and perverse perspective available from the 'ruling gender' experience of men"¹⁷.

The reason why I chose the Theosophists was partly to highlight that we must undertake a gendered analysis of history. I may not be any closer to making sense of the Theosophists but I have tried not to offer a closed categorisation of them. I think that the Theosophists would prefer to be represented as potentially fully conscious human beings, struggling with the contradictions of their existence, rather than specimens. The regime of representation which has muted women's experience has "silenced" other histories, those of black women and lesbians &, &,... The grapple with Theosophists should also sensitize myself and others to other marginalised voices.

The use of the first-hand "I" also points out that this writing is only one perspective. It was also an attempt to explore how I saw the Theosophists and why. Self-knowledge should become part of our intellectual projects. As Gramsci notes, "The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of historical process to date"¹⁸. When theorists allow themselves to be moved by lyrics, scared of certain things and recognise the self-discrepancies that crop up in everyday decisions then they will avoid easy answers to questions and refuse packaged histories. Life *is* complicated. Does this mean we should accept the post-modernists' celebration of the self and roller-coast along the free flow of signs. Maybe, if hedonism is your bag. However post-modern irony is not very satisfying in response to certain questions. If I/we're interested in tackling some of the stark differences in peoples' life experiences - Poverty, Violence and Depression - then we must try to make sense. Sense of a world in which the dominant discourse is one which validates Man *vs* Woman, White *vs* Black and North *vs* South and remains curiously unperturbed by the caterwauls of various social movements¹⁹. Caterwauls they remain be-

cause those interested in these discrepancies have not yet invented an articulate way of explaining experiences which would also provide practical alternatives²⁰. This is one reason why, despite my uncertainty about the salience of post-modernism it is difficult to dismiss it a propos of no other theory!

John Mann comments that contemporary political pessimism can not be blamed on the theoretical errors of postmodernism but the improbability of a desirable alternative to capitalism.²¹ I would contend that this improbability is linked to the desperation of theorists to stick to rigid, "objective" accounts of history. "Pragmatists" dismiss the "playfulness" of postmodernism and its celebration of difference by critiquing its lack of a political agenda. My challenge to these critics is to ask how successful the political agenda of liberals, Marxists or existentialists has been. I feel that "Pragmatists" have failed to understand the complex and contradictory patterns of human behaviour. Factory workers resist the easy categorisation of themselves as a proletariat. They indulge in consumption practices to escape their boredom or assert their identity in ways which defy the category of "alienation". Why has Leftist politics failed to enthuse people with resistance. And why have people been uninterested or ambivalent about the types of emancipation on offer. Is it because intellectuals have misunderstood peoples' desires, inhibitions and dreams? I feel that this failure is linked to a fetish to stay within existing modes of knowing which has blunted the emancipatory desire to construct alternative forms of social life.

Caterwauls are not the main act. They are still having conversations in the wings. These conversations have sometimes yielded positive results. In the West, they may give people the confidence to live openly as a lesbian couple. Or in London it may result in the ability of an Asian woman, frightened of the BNP, to go out and vote against it in local elections. In Sri Lanka social protest may lead to a campaign against the VOA or...or...or.²² However these conversations have failed to come up with an analysis of power which would enable people to defuse that power. To push the conversations onto the main stage we must improvise, we need new lines. If we decline from taking theoretical risks we may find that the production of pamphlets and false promises of the problematic "truly existing socialism" will become the subject of derision. A TV Comedy show. Have we become an audience content to watch these hackneyed promises being played out by actors on a show like "Drop The Dead Donkey"²³ Has the armchair and the safety of a universal discourse on rights drained all passion for a politics of curiosity?

That's not all. But it is the turn of the reader.

What interests you now? Why? What did you *expect* from this article ?

Do you feel a gendered analysis is relevant for historical analysis?

Can we use the example of the theosophists to explore how representation works?

Can we understand historical being?

Are you estranged or do you wish to enter the conversation?

Comments on a post-card to:

Yolanda Foster at "Gender Unit"

Social Scientists' Association, 425/15 Thimbirigasyaya Rd, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.

¹ Ricoueur, P, (1981) *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p74.

^{1a} In this context the term "mehsahib" means the wife of a white man.

² The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Olcott. Theosophy was basically a criticism of modern science & philosophy which were held to be distorted forms of ancient knowledge.

³ *Represent*, v.t. 1. Call up in the mind by description or portrayal...3. Make out to be etc, allege that, describe or depict as...5. symbolise, act as embodiment of, stand for, correspond to, be specimen of. Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1989.

⁴ Sudu Ammas means white mothers, a term of respect whereas Suddis is a more derogatory tone meaning "the whites". This distinction was made in Kumari Jayawardena's paper "White women, Arrack Fortunes and Buddhist Girls' education", *Pravada*, Vol. 1, Mo10, Oct 1992.

⁵ For an exploration of this see a forthcoming book by Kumari Jayawardena (1995) "The White Woman's Other Burden" Routledge : New York and London, forthcoming.

⁶ The "new women" defied tradition and social conventions and considered herself to be avante garde in politics & culture & liberated in terms of her sexuality. Bernard Shaw, an English playwright heralded the late 19th century as the time of the "new woman".

⁷ This point is also made by Said, E, 1994, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, p18

⁸ By priveleged I am referring to the aloof role taken by the analyst in prioritising the objective stance of the academic rather than the knowledge of the subject / subjects under observation. Much work now challenges this way of understanding eg. the Subaltern School, feminists like Liz Stanley and a range of other writers.

⁹ Kumari Jayawardena (1995) "The White Woman's Other Burden" Routledge: New York and London, forthcoming.

¹⁰ Geertz, C, 1983, *From the Native's point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding*, in C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, New York: Basic Books Inc. p58

¹¹ Much has been written of the fact that we are all persons of particular age, sexual orientation, belief, educational background, ethnic identity and class and that this difference informs our understanding. I have been particularly influenced by Diane Bell's introduction in "gendered fields / Women, Men & Ethnography" ed. D. Bell, P. Caplan & Wazir Jahan Karim, 1993, Routledge

^{11a} The gaze/le regard is a term coined by Foucault. The gaze refers to a technique of power/knowledge that enabled administrators to manage their institutional population. Here

I use it in connection with analysts attempts to "order" information/the views of their subjects. See Fraser. N. (1989) *Unruly Practices*, p22.

¹² Bateson, G., 1972, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Toronto: Chandler Publishing Company.

¹³ Eco, U., 1984, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, London, Macmillan.

¹⁴ A good example is the case of the Bangladeshi writer, Taslima Nasreen. Many feminists who spoke out against her fatwa were rebuked for defending her Western/un-Bangladeshi approach to sexuality rather than their support of the basic human right to freedom of expression.

¹⁵ This is in an interview with Sinhala and English newspapers "Madam Miranda Upasika" *Sarasavisandesa* 5 Oct. 1897, in Tessa Bartholomeusz's *Women Under The Bo Tree*, CUP, 1993 (p.58).

¹⁶ Jayawardena, op cit. Chapter 8. Ramabai was an Indian Brahmin woman who converted to Christianity. With the help of American funders she set up a school for child widows which included "Christian" education. Ramabai's conversion caused much controversy in India. When Annie Besant visited India she would have been warned that Western female education resulted in conversion & being critical of Christianity; Besant may have thus decided that Western education was problematic.

¹⁷ Harding, S. (1987), "Introduction: is There A Feminist Methodology?" in Sandra Harding, (ed.) *Feminism and Methodology*; Milton Keynes: Open University Press, pp181-90.

¹⁸ From *Prison Notebooks*, quoted in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p25.

¹⁹ Caterwaul / v (I) make a cat's shrill, howling cry. In this context I use caterwaul to denote the varied vocal protest against the status quo.

²⁰ If anyone has read or invented such an explanation please let me know!!!

²¹ *Radical Philosophy* 63 Spring 1993, p43.

²² The BNP stands for the British Nationalist Party which came to power in local elections on the Isle of Dogs in London. Asian voters were intimidated by the BNP until a coalition called the Anti-Nazi League formed and provided election escorts to Asian families. The BNP were subsequently ousted from power.

²³ Drop the Dead Donkey is a British comedy which explores politics on a weekly basis. Opportunism, intellectual distance and media rapaciousness are key themes. ■

IN PRINT

Salman Rushdie has put together a number of short stories under the title EAST, WEST. This was published in 1994 by Jonathan Cape. Speaking of the title, Rushdie says "sometimes I feel like a hiatus between two cultures... a character pulled in both directions, refusing to make a choice between the two... [to be] a hinge between these cultures, or one of the hinges, has always been a gift for me as a writer, I think, to have the possibility of two very different worlds to inhabit and dream about and write from... A journalist asked me whether the title might not also have had a slash instead of a comma, but ... I didn't really feel like a slash, I felt more like a comma".

We publish below some extracts from an interview with Rushdie by Robert Dessaix which appeared in 24 HOURS, a journal published by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in December 1994.

RD: 'Hinge' is a very good word. But how do you feel about the categorisation of writers as 'post-colonial' or 'non-post-colonial'? Aren't you rather sceptical about the usefulness of that kind of term?

RUSHDIE: Yes, I've become more distrustful of the application of political theory to literature as I've gone on writing. Which is not to say I'm not interested in politics-anyone who reads my writing will see that it has political content and always has had. I just don't think it's really the most interesting way of looking at writing...

Writers of my generation, coming from my kind of background, clearly do inhabit a post-colonial world, but ... I don't spend my life thinking about being the child of colonised peoples very much. I just write out of the situation I find myself in... It's fair enough to say it's post-colonial culture that I and writers like me inhabit-indeed, Australian writers would no doubt say they inhabit it as well. But it's only the most obvious way of looking at what's going on in the writing.

RD: Now, in reading these stories, it seemed to me that you had as your thematic core two main concerns: firstly, the manipulation of desire-particularly the desire for happiness-and, secondly, the necessity for complicity [in achieving our desires]. People need to force complicity, or at least invite complicity, in their desires from others, don't they?

RUSHDIE: That's very well said. [And] I think in fact 'desire' is more accurate than 'love', although I have thought about them as various kinds of rather displaced love stories or anti-love stories. In the first story, *Good Advice*, for example, there's a woman resisting an arranged marriage and, as it turns out, the place she wants to be and the affections she has are not what she's supposed to have. She wants to stay in the East, not be sent to the West, as has been arranged for her. And there are other stories about required and unrequited loves or passions, too. But yes, the collection is about desire: for love, but also for home, for power...

RD: And status...

RUSHDIE: Yes, status, and in the case of the story about Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain, there's the desire of both characters for a kind of transcendence, for a transcendence that comes from going beyond the edge of the world, the edge of things, and entering history.

RD: A story that is going to become almost a classic, I should think, is *At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers*, about the magic slippers which grant our every desire. In this story the greedy materialists of the modern world try to manipulate us through telling us what we should desire. What is the way out? Is it not to bid at the auction?

RUSHDIE: I don't know. Each individual reader will have to decide what the way out is. This story is a particular favourite of mine, partly because I've always been very engaged with *The Wizard Of Oz* movie. So in *At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers* you could say that the world of *The Wizard of Oz* is projected into the world of *Blade Runner* and the two come together.

What's interesting for me about any story set in the future, as *The Ruby Slippers* is, is that it should really be a story about the present. One of the reasons I wrote the story in the present tense, even though it's about an unpleasant, futuristic dystopia, is that it's also about a version of the world we live in now. It's about a world in which everything is for sale: the Taj Mahal, the souls of the dead, the Sphinx, the Alps, the Statue of Liberty-everything is for sale.

It's also about a world in which everyone is sick. The ruby slippers themselves become a totem in this world. And one of the great sicknesses of this world is homesickness, a sickness which pervades more than one of the stories in this collection. The ruby slippers give you the power to go home. You click your heels together and you say: 'There's no place like home'. But the story asks: 'What is that any more-home? And how do you get there?' So this story is very much at the centre of the concerns of the collection as a whole: the idea of home, the loss of it, the search for it, the need for it and the need to escape from it. If you wanted to say the collection was about one thing, it would be about the idea of home. I also hope it's a funny story-it made me laugh when I was writing it, anyway!

RD: Well, the tone and the style switch so quickly in these stories-there's such a palette of styles and tones and colours that it becomes quite difficult to adjust yourself to each story as you come to it.

RUSHDIE: It's quite varied, yes. That's deliberate. [I wanted] to put together a very large number of different ways of writing and ways of thinking about writing to see what kind of sparks they made as they rubbed off against each other.

RD: The story I had trouble understanding is Chekov and Zulu, about the old school friends now working in Indian security in London.

RUSHDIE: Well, expatriate communities have always interested me, people who are out of place, in this case affluent Indians in the West in diplomatic circles-something I know a little bit about. The starting point for this story was two Indian diplomats in London who had been schoolboy friends and remained friends, so I partly wanted to write about friendship, a kind of displaced friendship, displaced from India to England.

Overlaid on that was the way Western junk culture permeates Indian life, certainly Indian middle-class life, although by no means only middle-class life. These two characters were childhood addicts of Western pop culture, notably the *Star Trek* television series, and have given themselves nicknames from the series which have stuck with them all their lives. [That's what happens] particularly at very elite boarding schools for the children of the rich and powerful, like the Doon School at a hill station near Delhi these two characters are supposed to have gone to-and, indeed, where Rajiv Gandhi went. One Indian politician is still known in India simply as Dumpy because that's what he was called at school...

[This kind of] East-West permeation is very profound and not just the effect of colonialism now, but of the global village.

And there was a final layer: power structures. The story is bracketed at the beginning and end by assassinations; it begins at the moment of Mrs Gandhi's assassination and ends at the moment of her son Rajiv's. The diplomats [belong to] a layer in the power structure which is of people who do not create policy or rule the world but who enable [others to do it]. Captain Kirk couldn't have done a damn thing, as one of the characters says proudly, if it hadn't been for his crew. They see themselves as servants, but extremely important servants. So the story is about what happens to the servants when the top-the head-is cut off.

.....

RD: Well, to take another example: in the apparently very simple story *The Free Radio* you have a rickshaw driver who has his happiness manipulated-he's been promised a free radio in return for a vasectomy. The radio never materialises, but he drives around pretending he's holding it up against his ear. And then he writes letters from Bombay about how he's becoming a film star. Well, is he mad? Is the narrator-the crabby old man who is reporting all this from a tree in the village square-is he mad? What's happening?

RUSHDIE: The rickshaw driver is trying to combat the wretchedness of his life with imagination. When he holds an imaginary radio to his ear and bicycles around the town pretending to be the broadcaster, it's clear that there's no radio there; this is his fantasy, but it's a fiercely held fantasy ... that is simultaneously heroic and tragic. It's an attempt on the one hand, by a man who has nothing, to imagine something into being, and on the other hand, of course, it's pathetic

because the radio isn't there. I think one can admire the ferocity and passion of the imagination while at the same time being forced to accept the impoverished reality.

I also wanted to do something else in that story... it's hard to write sweet characters in fiction, because they can easily come across as soppy, sickly and sentimentalised ... but I wanted to have somebody who was really a touchingly sweet fellow (the young rickshaw driver) and then to write about him through the eyes of an incredibly nasty fellow, this old retired school-teacher, so that you'd see sweetness through sourness, if you like.

If it worked it would give the story a certain kind of poignancy because the sweet and the sour are in fact connected to each other: however nasty the old man is, he remains interested in the fate of the young man, and however innocent the young man... he can, in the end, see through the old man's nastiness and remain connected to him, still writing him letters when he leaves town. The story's feeling comes from the symbiosis.

.....

RD: And will the new novel about the Moors you're working on take the more historical approach to fiction?

RUSHDIE: It's not actually an historical book at all. It does make some reference to the Moorish period in Spain, but only as something going on in the heads of the characters. In fact, the novel is entirely contemporary, mostly set in India. It's a book I've come to think of as completing a literary project, begun in *Midnight's Children*, and of which I suspect *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* form a part. It's a project not in terms of a continuous story but in terms of an exploration of the world from which I came and the worlds I moved to and between.

I have this feeling, you see, that the India that came into being at Independence in 1947-the vision of India that came into being then, propounded by Gandhi and Nehru and the other leaders of the nationalist movement-that secularist, liberal India is now coming to an end. It is under a kind of double pressure: firstly, from immensely increasing religious sectarianism and, secondly, from the enormous force of the free market economy. On the one hand you have the growth of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious extremism to quite an alarming degree and on the other a colossal economic and cultural invasion from outside.

So it seems to me that the India that I began to write about in *Midnight's Children* is undergoing a sea change; it's the end of one phase of history. This new book is an attempt to write about that sense of an ending in the way that *Midnight's Children* was an attempt to write about a sense of a beginning.

RD: On the subject of India, the writer Bharati Mukherjee, I seem to remember, said that one of your great strengths is that although you have a Muslim background and that Muslim sense of duality, of good and evil-which can perhaps be extended to East and West, you also have the wonderfully Hindu sense of chaotic balance and hybridity.

RUSHDIE: I think that's fair enough. I remember one critic of *Midnight's Children* compared its architecture to the spire of a Hindu temple on which life teems, with figures crawling all over it. I think it's inevitable that anybody formed by the experience of India will be hybrid in that way. All these cultures will rattle around inside you-Hindu, Parsi, Sikh, Western, Muslim- all these cultures become a kind of rag-bag or rattle-bag you carry around with yourself out of which you make the world.

Certainly one of the things that showed me how to be a writer was [India's] superabundance-the multitudes, the cornucopia, the crowds, extreme noise, extreme heat, extremes of all things, excess. Yet I started out as a writer by reading books about India which weren't like that at all-neat books, rather shapely, classic books. And I thought: well, that's not what it's like, it's this huge, messy, dirty, raucous, riotous crowd. So I set about trying to find a way of writing like that-writing like a crowd, writing a crowd of stories. That idea was my guiding light and in a way it's remained so. ■

Now available-Published by the SSA

UNMAKING THE NATION

Edited by Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail

DEHISTORICISING HISTORY

David Scott

MULTIRELIGION ON THE BUS: BEYOND 'INFLUENCE' AND 'SYNCRETISM' IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS MEETINGS

Jonathan S. Walters

UNMOORING IDENTITY: THE ANTINOMIES OF ELITE MUSLIM SELF-REPRESENTATION IN MODERN SRI LANKA

Qadri Ismail

AUTHORIZING HISTORY, ORDERING LAND: THE CONQUEST OF ANURADHAPURA

Pradeep Jeganathan

GENDER, POLITICS AND THE 'RESPECTABLE LADY'

Malathi de Alwis

GENDERING TAMIL NATIONALISM: THE CONTRUCTION OF 'WOMEN' IN PROJECTS OF PROTEST AND CONTROL.

Sitralega Maunaguru

THE EFFICACY OF 'COMBAT MODE': ORGANISATION, POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AFFECT AND COGNITION IN THE CASE OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM.

P.L. de Silva

NARRATIVES OF VICTIMHOOD AS ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE VEDDAS OF THE EAST COAST

Yuvi Thangarajah

Social Scientists' Association

425/15, Thimbirigasyaya Road,

Colombo-05.

Tel: 501339

A number of NGOs and concerned individuals have combined together in a campaign for peace and democratic rights under the rubric "Campaign for Peace with Democracy". The assumption behind the movement is that only a peace settlement that is democratic in ensuring democratic rights for all citizens will be just and capable of lasting.

The campaign commenced with a rally, a march and a concert in Colombo on December the 9th; a few days later a delegation handed over to the President an appeal for peace. Since then the campaign has held 10 rallies and meetings in the principal towns and over 30 small meetings and seminars in other places. Its last rally was at Vavuniya on February 16th.; it was well attended by the citizens of Vavuniya as well as by a large contingent of activists from the south who wanted to demonstrate concretely their wish for peace.

Immediately after this rally, a 17 member peace delegation of activists, intellectuals, politicians and members of the clergy led by Vasudeva Nanayakkara, S.Balakrishnan, Jayadeva Uyangoda and Y.P.De Silva visited Jaffna. The visit was arranged in concurrence with the LTTE and its intention was to submit to the LTTE leadership a peace memorandum listing a series of steps it could take to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The delegation met with a delegation of 5 representatives of the LTTE comprising of Anton Balasingham, Tamil Chelvam, Baby Subramaniam and Balakumar.

They asked the LTTE to present their proposed political package to resolve the conflict. In response the LTTE expressed their willingness to consider a credible alternative to an independent state once the economic embargo is lifted, fishing rights are restored and the Pooneryn causeway is re-opened. They viewed a federal alternative as an acceptable basis for political negotiations.

The LTTE was then asked for a commitment that they would not be the first to breach the current agreement on a cessation of hostilities. They responded that the present agreement was a very general one and that they could only make this assurance after the specific details of a cessation of hostilities are worked out between them and the government. They viewed this as an annexure to the main agreement for the cessation of hostilities.

The delegation requested the LTTE to ensure the immediate and effective functioning of the monitoring committees during the cessation of hostilities. They saw difficulty in the operation of these monitoring committees after the annexure is worked out by the two parties. The delegation also emphasised that the LTTE should be serious and committed to the peace process and negotiations.

The delegation also raised a number of questions with regard to democracy and human rights in areas under LTTE control. On behalf of the delegation Vasudeva Nanayakkara requested the release of four political prisoners as a gesture of the LTTE's willingness to respect individual rights and democracy. They requested the release of Selvi and Manoharan (both former students of Jaffna University), and the release of a Sinhala and Muslim prisoner.

On the 18th, Vasudeva Nanayakkara addressed a massive public meeting held in front of the Kachcheri grounds and the delegates distributed 5000 copies of the Peace Memorandum to the people of Jaffna.

We reproduce below the appeals made by the campaign to the President and to the LTTE.

AN APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA

During the last decade and a half, the people of this country have experienced, a breakdown of democratic practice and peace between ethnic groups. Oppressed by these conditions and desiring change, the people-Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher-have used their franchise in unprecedented numbers to install in power a government of the People's Alliance. This mandate casts on the government the responsibility of re-establishing both peace and democratic practice.

We appreciate the measures that have been taken so far by the government in this direction, but we believe that more needs to be done.

1. We call on the government to dispel all doubts about its intentions by firmly declaring its total commitment to the achievement of peace and that it will not permit its efforts to be thwarted or disturbed by any obstacles that may be placed in its path.

2. We also call on the government to present without delay the contours of the political solution that it is prepared to implement for the resolution of the ethnic conflict; this solution should take into consideration the genuine aspirations of the Tamil and Muslim peoples and affirm to all citizens the full enjoyment of their democratic rights.

3. In the meantime, while negotiations to end the war proceed, there are a number of other measures that the government can take to ease the situation and gain the greater confidence of the minorities:

i. the implementation throughout the country of the constitutional provisions regarding the use of Tamil as an official language;

ii. the reconstitution of national institutions such as the police, the armed forces, the media and local government bodies so that they reflect the multi-ethnic nature of our society;

iii. the appointment of a Commission to look into the plight of those Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people who have been affected by the colonization policies of successive governments, bearing in mind that these colonization policies have themselves served to exacerbate the ethnic conflict; the Commission should consult directly with those affected and also be empowered to make recommendations to resolve this question;

iv. investigations into the mass killings of unarmed civilians suspected to have been carried out by the state security forces in the course of military operations in the north-east and the punishment of perpetrators;

v. accession to the Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Convention relating to internal conflicts and implementation of their provisions, as well as adhering to the norms of International Humanitarian Law.

vi. the extension of the period that has now been stipulated for the Commissions that are investigating disappearances and similar violations to 1.1.79 so that disappearances in the north-east too are brought within the ambit of investigations.

4. People living in the areas affected by the conflict have suffered inordinate deprivations over the past years, facing scarcities of even essential requirements. Urgent measures as outlined below are needed to alleviate their living conditions:

i. embargoes on the transport of goods must be lifted; food, drugs and other essentials should be made available in sufficient quantities;

ii. relief and rehabilitation measures must be expanded to cover the needs of all displaced Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim persons as those well as whose livelihoods have been affected by the conflict;

iii. peace committees consisting of senior army personnel, state officials, representatives of human rights and other non-governmental and civic organizations must be set up in all areas of conflict so that violations of human rights can be monitored and prevented;

iv. difficulties that exist for the free movement of civilians and goods must be removed;

5. Arising from the existence and the continuation of the ethnic conflict, there has been a growing militarisation of our society. To restore normal civil life and to ensure to all people the possibility of a peaceful future, we propose that the following measures be considered:

i. the formulation of measures for the rehabilitation of members of the armed forces, homeguards and others, whose present livelihoods are directly or indirectly dependent on the conflict;

ii. the formulation of measures for the rehabilitation of Tamil youth who have been involved in the conflict;

iii. measures for the speedy rehabilitation of those persons and areas adversely affected by the conflict.

6. Persons who have been detained for long periods under the PTA or the emergency regulations without being indicted or brought before the law must be released. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was meant to be a temporary measure must be repealed.

We, as citizens committed actively to peace, make these proposals to the government and pledge our support for all efforts to achieve peace with democracy. We also call upon all citizens of Sri Lanka to extend their maximum support to the peace process.

We attach to this document an appeal that we are also making to the LTTE to work towards peace with democracy.

AN APPEAL TO THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM

During the course of this conflict, the LTTE has emerged as a principal party, with physical control over a large extent of the north.

Recent public statements by the LTTE that they are for a peaceful resolution of the conflict have been broadly welcomed by the people in the north. We call on the LTTE to take the following steps in order to confirm their commitment to peace and fulfill the aspirations of the people for peace:

i. the LTTE must make public their proposals for a democratic political structure that they will consider as appropriate for a peaceful solution;

ii. it must refrain from any action that will be harmful to the peace process;

iii. in order to alleviate the worst rigours of the war and to strengthen the move towards peace, the LTTE should

a. release all prisoners, hostages, military and police personnel in its custody.

b. allow persons living in areas under its control the free expression of their views on the peace process and the right to free association on that basis.

c. permit state and other organizations freedom to re-establish educational, health, transport, media, power and other facilities.

We also call upon the LTTE to take the following measures to reduce the adverse effects of the conflict on the people:

i. not to place any obstacles in the distribution of food and other essentials meant for civilian use and to ensure their adequate distribution;

ii. to honour and implement the provisions of the Geneva Convention on internal conflicts, and adhere to the norms of International Humanitarian Law.

iii. to permit the freedom of activity of national and international government and non-governmental agencies engaged in relief work in the north-east;

The LTTE must also recognize the fundamental rights of people living in their areas of control, including the freedoms of conscience, expression, association and movement and ensure a climate in which these rights can be enjoyed.

It must accept the right and permit independent organizations to investigate violations of human rights, including the mass killings of unarmed civilians suspected to have been carried out by the LTTE.

The imposition of death sentences and their implementation must be stopped.

Muslims who have been compelled to flee from their homes in the north-east must be permitted to return and their safety and security ensured.

The recruitment and use of minors for military purposes must cease. All minors presently active, militarily, must be returned to civilian life.

It must pledge the right of Muslims and Sinhalese to voluntarily reside in and pursue their livelihoods in the north-east after the resolution of the conflict.

We, as citizens committed actively to peace, make these proposals to the LTTE and pledge our support for all efforts to achieve peace with democracy.

We attach to this document an appeal that we are also making to the Government of Sri Lanka to work towards peace with democracy. ■

REMEMBRANCE

Once again
we stand
by the water of shadows,
the uprooted earth,
by trees that are naked and paralysed.

We stand at the spot
where the bomb went off,
where six dogs whimpered
and birds died like babies.

We stand to remember
that second of sound,
bitter and brutal,
that disturbed our hearts.

We stand,
we stand silently,
all of us,
each with frightened eyelids.

A. M. Macan Markar