SRI LANKA. COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES REVISITED

VOLUME II

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By MICHAEL ROBERTS

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Volume II

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edited by
Michael Roberts

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COMPLIMENTS
Perera Hussein Publishing House
80A, Dharmapala Mawatha
Colombo 7 Sri Lanka
www.ph-books.com

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DEDICATION

The second volume of *Collective Identities Revisited* is dedicated to two individuals who are no longer with us

to one of my mentors and a dear friend,
Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe

and

to a charming acquaintance,
Chandra Soysa of the Marga Institute.

Michael Roberts

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The preparation of the second volume has been enabled by the coordinating work of Messrs. Tilak Chandrasekera and Newton Fernando; and the labours of Gothami Rathnasekara, Saman Amarasinghe, K. Nanthakumar and Sunitha Kariyapperuma. Dr. Neloufer de Mel participated in some of the proof reading.

To all of them the editor expresses his sincere thanks.

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DIACRITICA

Because of limitations in the computer packages available to us at the Colombo end, it has, unfortunately, not been possible for us to insert all the pertinent diacritica. **For instance,**

- the dot below the m in "*vamsa.*"
- the dot indicating the hard t and hard d normally located below such words as "*Mohotti*" and "*kudâ.*"
- the mark below the c in "*Goncalvez.*"

With the exception of a few chapters prepared on disk abroad, the long i, e, and a, which are normally indicated by a hyphen-like dash above the letter, have been indicated by the following code: î, ê and â. Thus, we have "*hâmu*" and "Karâva."

Generally speaking, we have **not** inserted diacritica for well-known proper names and towns, viz. Râmanâthan, Sitâ, Mâtara and Bandâranaike. However, we have not insisted on consistency in this regard.

A NOTE

* What is known today as "Sri Lanka" was referred to in the English language as "Ceylon" till 1972.

* While one of the nationalities within the island was usually referred to as "Sinhalese" in the English writings of the past, in the recent past a number of scholars have adopted the term "Sinhala" and, in the plural, "Sinhalas" as the preferable form of noun. The editor has a distaste for this purist line of political correctness and prefers to reserve "Sinhala" for the language and the adjectival reference, while deploying "Sinhalese" as the noun. However, he has not enforced this perspective on the authors participating in *Collective Identities Revisited.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AR	*Administration Reports*
CDN	*Ceylon Daily News*
CHJ	*Ceylon Historical Journal*
CJHSS	*The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*
CML	*Ceylon Morning Leader*
CNR	*Ceylon National Review*
CO	Colonial Office
C.P., W.P., etc	Central Province, Western Province, et cetera
CSS	Ceylon Studies Seminar
DR: Oral	Special Recommendations on the Constitution of Ceylon, 1927-29; Records of the Oral Proceedings.
DNA Lanka	Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka
G.A.	Government Agent
Handbook CNC	*The Handbook of the Ceylon National Congress 1919-1928* ed. by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Colombo. H.W. Cave & Co.
Jour. DBU	*The Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union*
JRAS CB	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*
MCS	*Modern Ceylon Studies*
MLR	*The Monthly Literary Register*
NMC	*The National Monthly of Ceylon*
PRO	Public Record Office
Rep. Fxd Est.	*Report of the Committee of the Executive Council on the Fixed Establishments of Ceylon*, London: H.M.S.O., 1852.
ROHP	Roberts Oral History Project, carried out between late 1965, and 1967, and involving the editor's interviews with retired British and Ceylonese officers in the Ceylon Civil Service as well as senior politicians. A small tithe of the recorded interviews and the correspondence is available in typescript form at the Library, University of Peradeniya and Rhodes House Library, Oxford. Cassettes of all recorded interviews are now available at the latter institution and the Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide.

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SLS Ind	*Sri Lanka Since Independence*, ed. by K.M. de Silva, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, Calvin A. Woodward, and W. Howard Wriggins, which appeared as *CJHSS*, n.s. vol. 4, 1974
SP	*Sessional Paper*
T.Cent.Imp.	*Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, comp. by Arnold Wright, London: 1907
UCR	*University of Ceylon Review*
UCHC vol.1	*History of Ceylon volume 1*, two vols. published by the University of Ceylon, Colombo: 1959-1960
UCHC	*History of Ceylon, Vol. 3, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to* 1948, ed. by K.M. de Silva and published by the University of Ceylon, Colombo: 1973

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This list encompasses the authors in both volumes
and corrects/updates the information in Volume One.

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MEANDERINGS AMIDST HEIGHTENED MOMENTS: Editor's Preface to the Second Volume

Michael Roberts

The circumstances which inspired the original edition in the 1970s have been outlined in the preface to the first volume. In a selective survey that did not purport to be comprehensive, that preface also delineated the intellectual strands that have informed scholarship in the subsequent decades.

The second volume contains new essays for the most part, although the articles by myself, C. R. de Silva and Arasaratnam are reprints from the 1979 edition (and should, therefore, be evaluated as such) and the essay by Henry Candidus was written at some point between 1849 and 1853. Yes, in the nineteenth century. The inclusion of this piece, in association with that by Charles Sarvan, is intended to mark the contention that literary essays with political implications are contributions to our understanding and can be accommodated within the social sciences. At the same time, the essays by Candidus and Sarvan provide a temporal framework for the two volumes -- that by Candidus marking an early stage and that by Sarvan a late twentieth century stage, that by Candidus written with surging optimism and that by Sarvan in sombre spirit. Given that Sarvan's fiction engages a political assassination that brought about many deaths, it is an appropriate epitaph for the 1980s and 1990s. The cremation grounds in Sri Lanka are billowing with smoke every day these days.

In line with the first volume, the second volume contains an eclectic collection of essays, essays that are not aligned to one political stance or a singular theoretical position. At the earliest point of this project, in 1995, such individuals as Shantha Hennayake, Ram Manikkalingam, Jonathan Spencer, David Scott, Gamini Samaranayake and Shyam Selvadurai indicated that their commitments or interests did not fit into the compass that I had set out. Val Daniel and Qadri Ismail accepted the initial invitation, but pulled out at an early date. As Appendix One indicates, R. Cheran, C. R. de Silva, P. L. de Silva, Bruce Kapferer, Gamini Keerawella, Sasanka Perera, D. Sivaram (Taraki) and Jayadeva Uyangoda were not able to complete their articles in time. Likewise Gerald Peiris and L. A. Wickremeratne, who were signed on at a late stage in mid 1996, have not been able to meet the deadline.

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These names are but one indication of the wide range of knowledges concerning the contemporary or historically pertinent political scene that repose within the intellectual circuits. It is my hope that these skills will be displayed on paper in the near future; and that all these scholars will engage each other's work.

The missing items, then, point to the many areas that are not covered by *Collective identities revisited.* Doubtless, subsequent reviews in the academic circuit will pinpoint critical gaps in the work while evaluating its strengths and weaknesses. Let me, here, point to a subject which requires a solid book-length study: viz, using shorthand, the nature of the interconnections between the political transformation of 1956, the 1971 JVP insurgency and the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom. Such an endeavour, however, requires the support of more detailed studies of the 1958 and 1977 "riots," the 1983 pogrom and the range of transformations that have occurred in the socio-economic order since the 1960s. The 1977 "riots" have been wholly neglected. The best survey of the 1958 riots is a brief one by James Manor (1989: 287-94), which is superior to Tarzie Vittachi's overrated *Emergency '58.* The essays by Piyadasa (1984), Obeyesekere (1984), Thornton and Niththyanandan (1988), Tambiah (1986 and 1997), Valli Kanapathipillai (1990) Val Daniel (1996) and myself (1994b) provide starting points for a study of the events of July 1983, but are by no means comprehensive. Indeed, to date, the coverage on the 1915 pogrom against the Mohammedan Moors is superior to that on July 1983.[1]

The reasons for such a discrepancy provide a lesson in itself. Though the record keeping of the British colonial state in Ceylon was but a pale shadow of the work sustained in British India, the records generated are more extensive than those of the post colonial state of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, contemporary scholars have access to a multitude of living documents: namely, people, whether victims, bystanding witnesses, instigators or assailants. These sources have not been mined as widely as one would have considered feasible.

The value of oral history researches at the grass-roots level are revealed in the work of Kanapathypillai and Daniel in Sri Lanka and that of Amrit Srinivasan (1990), Veena Das (1990 and 1995), Farida Shaheed (1990), Uma Chakravarti (1994) and Sudhir Kakar (1996) in the Indian sub-continent. The nuances and rich specificities of human disputes that can be captured by ethnographic fieldwork are only too evident in Veena Das' writings as well as Pradeep Jeganathan's essay in this volume. Not every scholar is fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to be "on site" when ethnic

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riots or pogroms break out -- as, say, in the case of Liz Nissan (1984) or Carolyn Nordstrom (1991).[2] Nor does every scholar have the horrifying experience of a Veena Das, viz., preceding links with a body of people who were subsequently ravaged. But Jeganathan's *post facto* findings vividly illustrate the rich possibilities that have been mostly missed by researchers engaging ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. These particular illustrations gain in force from the manner in which Jeganathan elaborates upon the fragmentary, incremental and contingent nature of the ethnographic process.

These references to investigations of ethnic/religious violence in India and Pakistan mark the degree to which Sri Lankan studies may profit from comparative research. Paul Brass's edition of *Riots and pogroms* (New York University Press, 1996) is but one mark of the emerging global interest in the analysis of violence through comparative methods. Tambiah's *Leveling crowds* (University of California Press, 1996) is another: his comparative survey of violent moments and violent movements across the Indian subcontinent is of particular pertinence for Sri Lanka because it reviews the material on the 1915, 1958 and 1983 "riots." Tambiah explicitly eschews "a single unifying metanarrative" and attempts to discover "convergent patterns" so as to construct "a number of middle-range narratives" that are organised by his concepts (1996: 33). He also uses the early work of Le Bon and Durkheim as a point of departure-cum-foil to engage the social psychology and "moral economy" of crowd action.

Though his background as a social anthropologist and his personal experience of the 1958 riots at Gal Oya (see Tambiah 1986: 137) inform his discussion, the book is not leavened by the sort of "experience near" ethnographic engagements that one sees in the work of Daniel, Jeganathan and Das. In this sense the book could as easily be read as a work of political science. To note this is to mark the particular character of the work rather than to criticise it. Political science is only too pertinent for the study of ethnic violence; and in our times disciplinary-cross-fertilisations are as common as they are fruitful.

* * *

To those readers who approach this book with an expectation that the essays will be directed towards developing a *modus vivendi* that charts a way out of the present ethnic confrontation, let me observe that they will be disappointed. That has not been the goal. Nor can it be said that the book seeks to provide a thoroughgoing diagnosis of the forces and temporal

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moments which have generated and aggravated the conflict over the years -- a conflict which, I stress, is not simply a Sinhala-Tamil one, but also involves those known as "Muslims"[3] on the one hand, and a number of internal divisions within the categories "Tamil" and "Sinhalese" on the other. At this point of time such a diagnosis would require a book-length study. The absence of such an attempt within these covers, moreover, is conditioned by the existence of several recent publications which address such issues, albeit in partial and controversial ways: viz. K. M. de Silva (1986), Tambiah (1986;1992), Wilson (1979;1988), Hellman-Rajanayagam (1994), Bose (1994), Narayan Swamy (1994) and Sivarajah (1996).

Be it noted, too, that the previous scholarship has already provided solid analysis of the political processes between 1931 and the 1970s which contributed to the sharpening of Sinhala-Tamil competition. I am thinking, here, of the work by Wriggins, Kearney, Jupp, K. M. de Silva and Wilson. At the risk of immodesty I would also point to my 1978 essay in *Modern Asian Studies* (*MAS*), and associate it with Donald Horowitz's 1993 article, in directing readers to brief overviews of the causal factors moulding the ethnic conflict. My *MAS* essay, in fact, was hived out of the rambling introduction to the 1979 edition of *Collective identities*. It was written in a spirit of pessimism. In partisan fashion I believe that the analysis in that article remains valid for its temporal compass. In any event it has remained unchallenged. This, however, is not proof of its acceptability or authority. Most subsequent writings have not addressed its claims, either because the authors have not read the essay or because the arguments were not considered pertinent.

* * *

It is not uncommon for learned middle class persons in Sri Lanka and elsewhere to demand of scholars that their work be "objective." Such an expectation is rooted in the long standing traditions of empiricist positivism that have dominated the Western world, traditions which were disseminated through the imperial and post-colonial educational systems. Recent scholarship has brought this epistemology, and the utopian concept of "objectivity," into question. I do not have the skills in political philosophy to provide a lucid summary of this 'new' position. So let me provide the Sri Lankan middle class with a flat assertion: "there is no such thing as hundred percent objectivity." If they require further elucidation they could begin with the historian, Alan Megill's edited works in several volumes,

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Rethinking objectivity (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1993 *et seq*) and follow its references.

However, I will take a stab at clarification through a personalised anecdotal journey. As a preliminary, let me tell those who have faith in objectivity that every scholar brings to his/her interpretation an implicit or explicit theory of humankind and/or human relations. Thus, my recent writings have a strong culturalogical bias, one that gives considerable weight to the shaping force of ideas and cultural practices (without, I trust, denying the power exerted by the control of resources). Others follow a Marxist line of materialist determination and focus on class forces, or cleave to neo-Marxist interpretations centred on the micro-technologies of power. Yet others stress materialist forces without the Marxist framework: the transactionalist emphases embodied in the work of Mick Moore and K. M. de Silva on Sri Lanka and Paul Brass on India would be, broadly speaking, illustrations of such a line of interpretation. The point, therefore, is that a particular theoretical line skews analysis in a particular direction.

When a member of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie demands "objectivity," however, s/he is usually requiring a scholar to hold the balance between the claims of the principal protagonists, the Tamils and the Sinhalese; and to present an analysis that is as non-partisan as objective. Such expectations operate in a context where, at the everyday level, the bearing of a Sinhala or Tamil name by an author predisposes the audiences to construe the representation as biased in favour of the respective collectivity. Where this does not occur, fireballs are hurled from within: Ram Manikkalingam (1995) is seen as a traitor by Tiger sympathisers; Charles Abeysekera, Kumari Jayawardena *et al* are vilified in the Sinhala newspapers;[4] while Brian Seneviratne's and Adrian Wijemanne's views are retailed by Tamils as "proof" of the legitimisation of the cause -- rendering both into traitors among the more extreme Sinhala activists.

So, what we see here is the powerful implication attracted to one's identification tag, one's name. Names seem to be, so to speak, bloody powerful. And, conversely, bloody dangerous (as so many Tamils as well as de-Tamilicized Tamil householders in the urban areas of southern Sri Lanka in July 1983 would attest).

Given the desire for objectivity in the research on the politics of Sri Lanka, sometimes the further expectation is that a foreign scholar or a Sri Lankan from one of the miniscule minorities would be less partisan and more objective. This expectation is also too simple minded. Several foreign scholars have tended to put their weight behind the claims of people among

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whom they have worked, "their people."[5] As a minority the Tamils have benefited from this proclivity: the last decade has witnessed some publications from non Sri Lankans that seem singularly one-sided in the way they select data, that do not address counterpoints and that are, overall, credulous and naive. Circumspection leads me to avoid illustrative citations at this point, but I nevertheless speak volumes to those tuned into the literature.

In such circumstances, it follows that, bearing the name, Michael Roberts, I have what appears to be a favourable name It is not for me to evaluate whether my writings have been *relatively non-partisan* (as distinct from the unattainable objectivity sought by some). For those readers who may be misled by my name, especially new generations of scholarship/readership, let me note that until 1972 I was a "Ceylonese" by birth, upbringing, choice and heart; and that, thereafter, I have remained "Sri Lankan" by upbringing, choice and heart. I have always held a Sri Lankan passport, though I have recently added an Australian one as a more convenient flag of travel. What requires emphasis here is that all my writings since 1965 have been penned from this position as a Ceylonese/Sri Lankan. It is a form of partisanship which seeks to straddle and encompass the ethnicised divide.

Such a stance, the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan one, was/is only too manifest in the chapters I presented in the 1979 edition of *Collective identities*. One chapter, appearing again as chapter 14 in Volume 1 of the 1997 edition, even has a subtitle reading "Sectional nationalism vs. Ceylonese nationalism." This political position took account of the circumstances inspiring Sinhala nationalism since the early nineteenth century and those promoting Ceylon Tamil communitarianism and/or nationalism from the 1920s; but nevertheless sought to confederate such leanings in a pyramidical scheme within an overarching Ceylonese identity that transcended (rather than displaced) the more particular collective affiliations of the various communities within the island. Such a position was not dissimilar to the hopes expressed by Arasaratnam in the same book (1979: chap. 16 and this volume: chap 11) as well as the argument presented by the All-Ceylon Tamil Conference in 1937 (Roberts ed. 1997: 456). Standing in 1997, of course, such an expectation appears utopian: the 1983 pogrom, the continuing militarization and the ongoing civil war have hardened the sectionalist nationalisms as well as the communitarian identity of the Muslims.

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Standing in the 1970s, moreover, I expressed my opposition to the manner in which the category "Sinhalese" subsumed the category "Ceylonese" in the thinking of Sinhala activists such as Dharmapala. I compared the latter position to that of the Magyar spokesmen in the nineteenth century state of Hungary (one part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) who subsumed "Hungary" within "Magyar" in hegemonic fashion -- thereby generating conflict with such minorities as the Croats (1978: 373-74 and 1994: 263-64). Indeed, in my *MAS* article I stressed that this kind of ideological stance among some (not all) Sinhala activists, rooted as it was in the historical concept of *Sîhadîpa*, has been a major obstacle to accommodative concessions by Sinhala politicians operating within a context of majoritarian power-cum-legitimacy (1978: 361-69, 373; also 1994: 256-65; and 1996)

This was a position that I reiterated forcefully when I analysed a verbal exchange between two local spectators, whom I identified as Laddie (Burgher) and Sinha (a Sinhalese) at a cricket match in Colombo in 1981, repeat **1981** (Roberts 1985; and 1994: chap. 10). On that occasion I had this to say:

> At all international matches played in Sri Lanka, both today and in the recent past, the identity evoked among onlookers has been that of "Ceylonese" or "Sri Lankan." This overarching identity transcends internal divisions and encompasses Tamils, Sinhalese, Moors, Burghers and Malays within one category. This perspective is in keeping with the definition of citizenship in the country, and, as such, it represents a conception that is part of the body politic. But since the late nineteenth century this transcendent Ceylonese identity has coexisted, in an increasingly uneasy and dialectical relationship, with an alternate viewpoint which treated (treats) *Ceylonese* and *Sinhalese* as synonyms and which subsumed (subsumes) the two labels into one identity. This orientation took root within the Buddhist revitalisation movement, notably in the statements of the Anagarika Dharmapala (...). It came to the fore in the 1950s and contributed towards critical political changes. These changes (...) have established the Sinhalese, or Sinhala, in a position of hegemony. For all that, it would not be incorrect to say that the variants of the concept "Ceylonese" or "Sri Lankan" -- the transcendent and composite version on the one hand, and the Sri Lanka:Sinhalese equation on the other -- coexist in an unresolved and conflictual way within the contemporary body

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> politic. Yet, in the world of cricket, this antagonism is normally submerged -- especially in the heat of opposition to visiting teams from other nations. In this sense, the cricket contest that provided the scenario for the incident which is the focus of this essay represented an abnormal order within the body politic of Sri Lanka.
>
> (Roberts 1994: 278; 1985: 411)

It is, therefore, quite astonishing that Qadri Ismail should read my position to be one that "buy[s] into the Sinhala nationalist story" (1996: 20-21). In Ismail's view I have treated Sri Lanka as equivalent to Sinhala via the cricket field and the Sri Lankan cricket team. This is a colossal misreading, a gross one which sets up its thesis by quoting the first five lines of the quotation above and obliterating all that follows. Worse still, Ismail not only fails to tell his readers in an emphatic manner that the incident which I addressed took place in 1981, but also does not clarify one of the main thrusts of my article: viz., (1) that Laddie, a Burgher who happened to be an aggressive teaser, was operating as a patriotic Sri Lankan; (2) and when Laddie pushed his teasing to the limit and questioned Sinha's patriotism, that is, his Sri Lankan patriotism, Sinha retorted by shifting the dialogic context to the encompassing terrain of the body politic. As a riposte Sinha in effect told Laddie: "who are you, *lansi putâ* to question my patriotism?" However provoked by the particular circumstances, Sinha's riposte, as a retort that proved effective, conveyed a particular reading of Sri Lankan history at the same time that it expressed the supremacy and legitimacy of Sinhala power.

That was one of my arguments, though not the only one, in the essay entitled "Ethnicity in Riposte at a Cricket Match" (Roberts 1985 and 1994: chap. 10). This argument, with additional embellishments, now appears as Qadri Ismail's; while I am presented as a Sinhala lackey!!!!! Multiple exclamation marks are justified here to indicate, rather politely in the circumstances, my opinion of the degree of impeccability attached to Ismail's representation of my position.

This said, I do not deny that in recent decades some Sinhala nationalists, lets call them *Sinhalayo*, have utilised the successes of the Sri Lankan cricket team in aid of their hegemonic stance and legitimising claims. An ethnographic analysis of such perspectives would be illuminating and is required before such speculations are established. But as a caveat I would assert a fairly obvious point, viz, that the field of representation is not monopolised by the *Sinhalayo*. There are Sinhalese who enjoy the cricket team's triumphs as ardent Sri Lankans, i.e. as Sinhala Sri Lankans.

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Likewise virtually all those Colombo Chetties, Bharathas and Burghers who attend to cricket do so as Sri Lankans. One of the pertinent ethnographic inquiries in the present conjuncture is the degree to which, and the specific circumstances in which, those Muslims[6] and Tamils who are attentive to cricket favour the Sri Lankan cricket team rather than their opponents.[7] In the particular instance of the match against the Australians under Kim Hughes at the S. S. C. grounds in 1981, however, I have little hesitation in making the assertive speculation that the vast majority of the spectators from all the local ethnic communities were enthusiastic partisans for Sri Lanka.

Qadri Ismail's essay is expressly directed by an ideological position that is non-nationalistic if not anti-nationalistic. He wants to construct "a space for the spectator unmarred by nationalism, for the spectator who would cheer the team but not the nation" (1996:16). This antipathy to nationalism, one presumes, is informed by the extremes to which its protagonists have taken these loyalties in South Asia and elsewhere. It is a theoretical tack favoured by several other young scholars in Sri Lanka, by Pradeep Jeganathan (1995) and Jayadeva Uyangoda (1997) for instance. It is a position I respect. The contemporary world needs such figures -- as elements constraining nationalist excess; or as talented artists straddling the globe through world music. But such a position is generally available only to a cosmopolitan few, whose very miniscule numbers render them patrician, especially when their instruments are pen or computer rather than voice or musical instrument.

While attentive to such a standpoint, I have chosen not to wear that sort of hat. My headgear is the cap of a Sri Lankan nationalist. Therefore, what might seem to be a digression into the politics of cricket through an engagement with Qadri Ismail is not, in fact, digressive. Cricket has been a central part of my subjectivity. It serves to clarify my biography and my bias. And to illustrate my contention that a hundred per cent objectivity is unattainable.

I have played cricket competitively and socially, in verandah, garage, yard and playing field, from around my year 8 to the year 50. I enjoy it, in the same spirit as Qadri Ismail, as an art form. Unlike him I watch the international games as a Sri Lankan patriot, in embodied engagement, an intense commitment that is moderated by aesthetic appreciations and the old fashioned values instilled in us in the 1950s. This sort of engagement has not been restricted to the role of a spectator viewing international games. While playing college and club cricket in England and Australia I was

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always conscious of being Ceylonese/Sri Lankan -- in part because I was viewed as one. The Aussies play their cricket aggressively at all levels and I recall that on a number of occasions I honed my determination as a batsman, as I settled down at the crease, by telling myself silently: "I'll show these bastards that Sri Lankans can bat." For self and country even as I played for the Flinders University Cricket Club.

Ceyloneseness, of course, has been only one part of my consciousness as my adulthood developed and I moved through the roles of student, undergrad and lecturer. In contrast to most Sri Lankans I did not have a specific ethnic identity of the type designated by such labels as Malay, Colombo Chetty, Tamil, Burgher and Sinhalese. I have discovered recently that several Sri Lankans within the intellectual middle class circuit believe that I wrote *People Inbetween* (1989, Sarvodaya Book Publishing Services) because I am a Burgher. Such an interpretation is of sociological import, even while it is comprehensively wrong.[8]

It is erroneous because my parental family has never considered itself Burgher; and, indeed, was not viewed as such by the Burghers of Galle, that is, by the locally pertinent force. My father was a Barbadian who settled in Sri Lanka after serving the British and who became a Ceylonese citizen in 1948. My mother was of Sinhala-Burgher descent with a Sinhala name from the paternal side. Since she divorced my father when I was very young, however, her side of the family had limited bearing on my identity. If someone had pressed me to stipulate my ethnic identity during my teenage and undergraduate days, I suspect that I would have said I was "a Roberts;" or specifically, "an Aloysian" (my school was central to my life); or, vaguely, "a Sri Lankan;" or, vaguely, that my father was a Barbadian (i. e., Bajan). But, as far as I recall, such a demand rarely arose.[9]

In my consciousness, then, the Bajan background was only lightly etched. This was in part because my father did not speak much of his original homeland and in part because there were no other West Indians around to constitute a collective ethnic entity. When the West Indians under Goddard -- a distant affinal relative, I was told-- played an invitation game at Galle in the early 1950s, the one image that remains in my memory is a low trajectory straight six hit by Russell Heyn rather than the flashing blades of Weekes and Walcott. Even then my affiliations were indigenous and Sri Lankan.

Today, my position is most firmly so, no doubt sharpened by life in semi-exile. But the heightened ethnic conflict and the researches which

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generated the first chapter of *People Inbetween*, which is entitled "Pejorative phrases: the anti-colonial response and Sinhala perceptions of the self through images of the Burghers," have led to a new twist: when in a mischievous mood I identify myself as a *tuppahiyâ* or "tuppahi Sri Lankan." For the benefit of those who are not native speakers let me note that *tuppahi* is a derogatory term with multiple meanings. Over the last two centuries it has carried the following connotations:

(i) Westernised degenerate Sri Lankan/Sinhalese;
(ii) low person of mixed parentage;
(iii) outcaste, Rodi;
(iv) Burghers.

Arguably, therefore, the best translation of the sense in which I use the term as an ethnic label is "mongrel."[10] So I am a *Tuppahiyâ* (also see Roberts 1994:333)

But in the everyday world of verbal interaction I do not carry this label on my sleeve. What counts sociologically is my name. To most Sri Lankans my name and my style of English renders me into a Burgher. Thus, sociologically speaking, as I have noted elsewhere (1994: 21), I am a demi-Burgher (demi because I do not subscribe to the identity, but *generally* ride with it).

This sociological location has, in most circumstances in the 1950s to 1990s, placed me in a position of privileged marginality. The privilege derived in part from class power: the advantages accruing to the Burghers and other fluent English-speakers with a particular life style. As I have indicated elsewhere, during the 1960s and 70s this also made me privy to unguarded comments by individual Sinhalese or Tamils when members of the 'rival' body were not present -- a situation rather similar, amidst variations, to that experienced by Val Daniel (Roberts 1994: 19-22; Daniel 1996: 10).

Such incidental moments in the 1970s, two such moments recorded by my wife, a Scot, and an observation made to Jane Russell -- another outsider -- by Tamil youths in Jaffna were among the ingredients which led me to conclude, circa 1972-73, that the Sinhala-Tamil divide was deepening to dangerous levels. Such an interpretation, I should stress, was made possible by my historical training in the British empirical tradition and my developing interest in the phenomenon of nationalism. It was this perception which led me to join hands with others having similar concerns in addressing the issue in October 1973 (see preface to volume one).

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Thus, personal identity and specific subjectivities do mould lines of information, do shape knowledges. A welcome shift in academic conventions has, during the last two decades, witnessed increasing attentiveness to the "subject position" of the author. The old British traditions of authorship which sought to efface the use of the "I" and to build up the idea of objective studies through such a device no longer hold sway -- and, indeed, have become outmoded.

It is because my personal background and biography are pertinent to my interpretations that some details have been presented here for the benefit of readers who are not aware of these circumstances. Fuller details can be located in *Exploring confrontation*, 1994: pp. 43-45, 331-38. The inclusion of such bio-data did not come to me easily. I was pushed by a number of younger scholars. The immediate circumstance for these persuasive acts was provided by my essay "The agony and the ecstasy of a pogrom: southern Lanka, July 1983." The essay was written by me in a particular mood, as a driven man, in what could be deemed a symbolic statement of distress mixed with anger. As such it was -- and it remains -- "a piece of literature" (1994: 44). It was also a considered public intervention.

In an appreciative comment on this essay in its draft form, David Scott indicated that it only provided a glimpse of "the autobiographical stakes involved;" and suggested that I should write myself "more deliberately into the narrative" (1994: 45). Likewise, after that paper was presented as a seminar at the University of Adelaide and we had retired to the staff club for drinks, Sandra Pannell and Lindy Warrell pressed me to include the assorted biographical information that had emerged during our conversation. In *Exploring confrontation* I chose to do so in segments around the agony essay rather than within its text. That experience of narrative contextualisation has informed the work in this preface in support of the thesis that one hundred per cent objectivity is an unattainable goal.

* * *

It will be only too manifest that this preface has been tilted towards the Sri Lankan audience. This is in line with the tilt of the 1979 edition. While these new volumes have a more pronounced international cast, I conclude here by dedicating the second volume to two individuals who had their feet firmly planted in Sri Lankan soil, as Sri Lankans rather than Sinhalese,

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while yet possessing a capacity to reach across the seas to the global ecumene, namely, Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe of the Anglican Church and Chandra Soysa of the Marga Institute.

NOTES

1. For the literature on the 1915 pogrom, see P. T. M. Fernando 1969; P. V. J. Jayasekera 1970, relev. chaps; Blackton 1970; Roberts 1981 and 1994: chaps 7 and 8; Jayawardena 1970; Ameer Ali 1981; Kannangara 1984; Rogers 1987: 189-202; and Tambiah 1996: chap. 3. Also see *Sessional Paper XVI of 1916*.
2. A chance meeting with Nordstrom at Sydney University indicated that she had witnessed the attacks in Matara. As far as I am aware, her experiences have not been written up in detail.
3. Those referred to in the latter half of the twentieth century as Muslims were generally called "Mohammedans" in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The terms embraced those who were identified as Moors and Malays in the census tables on "races" or "nationalities." The Malays were/are so miniscule that Mohammedan/Muslim could often be used as a synonym for Moor. However, in the Sinhala language there appears to have been a distinction between the *marakkala*, or Moors, and the *ja*, or Malays, till recent times. As the miniscule nature of the Malays becomes more pronounced with the growth of population and the decline of Malays in high profile urban jobs as policemen, it seems that newer generations of Sinhala-speakers are less aware of this distinction.
4. For some indications of the vilification directed at Newton Gunasinghe, Kumari Jayawardena *et al*, see Serena Tennekoon 1990. Also see Manikkalingam 1995 and Wijemanne 1993. Recently an university lecturer aligned with the hardline Sinhala Buddhist wing of the SLFP asked me if I knew Adrian Wijemanne. It turned out that the principle ground for this inquiry was Wijemanne's association with Tamil publications.
5. It is a commonplace for anthropologists to stand up for the rights of indigenous aboriginal peoples and, in general, to speak for those whom they study. With aboriginal peoples they usually are speaking for subordinated, and sometimes even endangered, peoples. However, it is striking that few of the foreign anthropologists/scholars who have worked among the Sinhalese have taken up the Sinhala cause in the style pursued in varying measure for the Tamils by Peter Schalk, Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Sumantra Bose, Patricia Lawrence or Margaret Trawick.
6. Among the Muslims the sharpening of communitarian consciousness can also be attributed to the dissemination of purist Islamic ideologies, those identified sometimes in too blanket a fashion as "fundamentalism." One expression of this emphasis has been the garb adopted by some Muslims. For another localised expression, see de Muenck 1994.
7. In the circumstances prevailing in the 1990s the significant occasions for testing the affiliations of the Moors and the Malays are the Sri Lankan games against Pakistan; and for a test of Tamil loyalties the games against India. The emergence of separatist Eelam sentiments from the 1970s was the first stage in

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the dilution of Tamil commitments to the cricket team, but one can speculate that the 1983 pogrom was a critical turning point, especially for the Tamils resident in the Colombo metropolitan belt. But even during the 1990s one has to be cautious about sweeping statements on this point without solid ethnographic work.

8. *People Inbetween* emerged out of my interest in the symbolic dimensions of the history of Colombo. The latter in turn was one part of an Adelaide University project on Colombo which brought me to the city in 1981 and which involved a shanty study as my other component (never written up). During my stay I discovered the Lorenz Manuscripts at the Royal Asiatic Society, Colombo. I persuaded Percy Colin-Thome to join me in editing these papers -- very much as a sideline interest. Eventually a major work emerged and encompassed the expertise of Ismeth Raheem in the process.
9. I have a dim image of one moment at Aloysius College when I was in the primary school, perhaps grade six, when a classmate asked me "what my mother was?" I did not know the answer (she was no longer part of the household anyway). That the image remains, albeit vaguely, is significant. But it would also appear that I tucked it away in the "too difficult" compartment and proceeded pragmatically with my life.
10. It may be pertinent that I am a dog lover and, as one, consider mongrels to be the best species going. Indeed, our house in Galle invariably had a number of mongrels.

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A DESULTORY CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO YOUNG ARISTOCRATIC CEYLONESE[1]

Henry Candidus[2]

I may stand alone
But would not change my free thoughts for a throne ... *Byron*

Preface

The following written in, I think, April 1849, immediately after the annexation of Punjab, A similar favour done to Burmah has induced its publication at present, with however many alternations and additions. But the writer of this conversation does not hold himself responsible for the opinion expressed by his heroes. He has simply in the ensuing pages endeavoured to point out the feelings and sentiments of Young Ceylon. In short he has but 'thought aloud' for them. The educated amongst the Natives (including Burghers) are far from being satisfied with the Government under which they live. Whilst they are thankful for the many blessings, which they undoubtedly enjoy under the protection of the British Flag, they feel and are convinced that England in many respects in wanting in her duty to them. A generous Britain too sprung from the most free and

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1 A small pamphlet of 23 pages printed in Colombo at the Examiner Press. Copies are available in the British Library and the Colombo Museum Library. The quotation from Byron is on the front cover. Despite the opening line in the Preface, this essay was written after November 1851 because it refers to James Stewart's death.

2 We do not know who the author was. He was clearly part of the *Young Ceylon* circle. The writing style and views on caste rule out Frederick Nell. C.A. Lorenz appears to be a likely candidate. Who else would talk of "ki..... girls from North to South"!
The footnotes that follow are those within the pamphlet, not editorial interventions. As so usual in the Victorian era, one also finds a profusion of capitalisations of the first letter of certain words.

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noble Nation on earth will in the abstract sympathise with their internal longing after Liberty - A legitimate feeling of [if?] the mass of the people were better prepared for it, but as it is, the greatest calamity that can befall India would be the dissolution of our connection with Great Britain.

If there is one thing more than another which Young India and Young Ceylon lament, it is the absence of Patriotism and the existence of utter indifference to Freedom among their countrymen.

But any what you will, do what you will, the natural love of Independence, despite their apparent indifference, cannot be easily extinguished in the Human Soul. After all that England has done for us, we yet feel we are not a conquered people, and the mortifying consciousness that we are so is rendered a hundred fold bitterer still by the haughty bearing, or what is worse, the condescending kindness of those who are sent from Europe, from time to time to exchange poverty and obscurity for wealth and power.

But to every Patriotic Indian, we may presume, it must be a consolation to reflect that such a state of things cannot and will not exist long. As education advances and civilization progresses the Native will begin to feel his want for the first time, and, feeling the want, shake off dull sloth and fatal apathy and make an effort, convinced "he who would be free must first strike the blow". How long can a handful of Europeans keep the millions of India in Ignorance and consequent Degradation? Let this thought once earnestly come home to their minds and they will not in vain sigh for Liberty.

I might have made these Young men speak differently, but humble as this work is, it may be of some importance, as depicting the views and feelings of a conquered race and that an Indian race, generally thought to be incapable of such sentiments and aspirations. I had therefore a Historical not, if I may by allowed the expression, a fictitious duty to perform, and it was not my wish or intention to flatter "the Powers that be" or any Sect or Party. If there are people, who could take offence at certain expressions in this Production, let them remember they are not conquered and how they would feel if they were.

There are among many other faults, discrepancies and incoherences apparent here and there and the sometimes abrupt transition from one subject to another cannot fail to strike the Reader, but I hope the very Title would suggest an apology for such defects.

It is but justice to myself to add that when I wrote the preceding part of the Preface I had not read Lord Ellenborough's Speech,

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which goes to confirm my view that enlightenment and civilization would ultimately overcome foreign aggression. As the excellent author of the Constitutional History of England remarks "whatever may be the pressure of a conquerred people there will come a moment of their recoil". It is true (and it is a truth which must humble our pride) a Native of India cannot say to his countrymen in the language of the immortal Poet Snatch from the ashes of you Sires, the members of their former fires; but he could repeat what follows with a slight alteration.

"he who in the strife expires
will expire with a name of fear
That Tyranny shall quake to hear
And leave his Son's a hope a fame
They too will rather die than shame
For Freedom's Battle once begun
Bequeathed by bleeding Sire to Sons
Though Baffled of is ever won".

Henry Candidus

Christmas, 1853

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A DESULTORY CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO YOUNG ARISTOCRATIC CEYLONESE

Wilmot: The Fates have determined that England should be Mistress of the World. They are going on eternally conquering and annexing, and annexing and conquering. Your see what they have done with Punjab.

Henry: Yes, but it is not a matter of joy to us Indians, at least.

W: And why not?

H: Why, for the best of reasons. In the first place it reminds us bitterly of our own slavery, and in the second place, we should not wish any nation in India to lose its Independence, and with it, its spirit and love of Liberty.

W: But then look at the immense advantages which we derive from English conquest--What would you have been but for these very Englishmen whom you seem disposed to condemn,--Peace, Civilization, Learning, Arts, and Sciences.

H: That must be the basest of spirits which will barter Liberty for what you mention and a thousand things more, admitting that we derive these blessings.

W: Your don't mean to deny that, do you?

H: I don't mean to deny. I grant there is the shadow of them without the substance - we are treated like little children with sugar-plums. As for peace it is "the bondsman's peace who sighs for all he lost" or drowns in dull apathy every sense of degradation, and takes no thought but what to eat and drink; as for Civilization it is only of that kind which makes us know better than I, is so niggardly imparted as to suit their own selfish views and nothing more.

W: I understand what you say about peace, it is the inglorious tranquility of a prison house or the quiet of the grave, and you cannot be more sensitive than I on that point. But what is the use of all our futile aspirations and impotent indignation when we are destined by Heaven to acknowledge other masters than we willingly would. It is a humiliating thought, and also we but too plainly see there is not possibility of "tearing our country's name from slavery's mournful page" and of "uncreating our long accustomed bondage" so that as old Horace says Levius fit patientia quidquid corrigere est nefas. But surely I can't see

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what you mean by coupling civilization with discontentment, and Learning with their selfish views.

H: I hope you are not short sighted, if you are, a pair of specs will be no bad companion but joking apart; if you really can't see I shall soon enable you to do so: only hear me with Patience. This same thing civilization so much spoken of is a mere phantom - In what does it consist I should like to know? I can easily anticipate your answer. In imitating the excellent customs and elegant manners of the English nation and in introducing their arts and sciences. Be it so, but has that civilization brought happiness and contentment to us who have well nigh forgotten the good old but somewhat awkward and inconvenient customs of our forefathers - to us who think the more we depart from them the more near we are to perfection - answer me candidly - On the contrary, is it not a fact, the more we strive to imitate these foreigners the more we are dissatisfied with Our Domesticoe res? And such civilization I call worse than downright barbarism.

W: But, my good fellow, we are just emerging from barbarism and every transition has its evils. You always take a gloomy view of human life - I can't understand you and wish you would explain yourself a little further.

H: I perceive you wish me to explain my explanation. But I shall be frank with you and open my mind at once without reserve. Don't you think, standing out in bold relief as the representatives of a new order of things, new views and ideas has made us children of a Moral and Intellectual Revolution rather unhappy. Has not our English education detached our thoughts and feelings from the sacred Altar of home, alienated our affections from those we are by nature bound to love and respect. Has it not, by destroying all sympathy with our own and attaching us to recent importations placed us in a false position. Is not the Language insidiously whispered into your ears. "forget thine own people and thy Father's house for thy thoughts are not their thoughts and thy ways are not their ways?" Just to give you, my dear Wilmot, an instance - As a Bachelor no wonder it comes uppermost in my lips Do we not find the society in which we move sadly deficient in every thing that we with our English feelings would consider absolutely

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necessary for social happiness? Is not the greater charm, nay the very life of society wanting to us? What society and social happiness with our women, the very soul of all earthly enjoyment? We go abroad, mix in European circles, see those bewitching creatures, the innocent idols of English hearts, hear their enchanting conversations, admire their beauty, their talents, their taste, their many lovely and amiable qualities, and we return home with an increased contempt for our females proportional to our increased admiration for them; we suppose ourselves at once degraded from the society of Angels to that (I am sorry uncomplimentary) of wild savages. Is not this to quote the Language of honest neighbour Gosling "going on a fool's errand", going merely to be discontented with what we can get at home? - whilst in England "the Girls have so many hours for French, so many for Italian, so many for English, Geography and the use of the Globes, so many for Botany, so many for Painting, Music, Dancing, Riding, & c." the silly creatures around us divide their time between chewing Beetle, making clumsy and unwieldy jewels, imitating the newest fashions (Mrs. C's polka or Mrs. B's Bonnet) talking scandal, and would any one believe it, however young they may be, in looking out for husbands. They hardly enter upon their teens before they become wives and mothers. The consequence is ere they pass their teens they look pale, wan, wasted and worn out - The angelic charms of the woman have by this time deserted them and they are the parents of a puny, pigmy, sickly race, well described by an Englishman the other day as a "race up and down like a Cow-tail without body and without soul". What a wretched picture this of the daughters of the Cinnamon Isle - But poor things it is not altogether their fault, they are not properly trained by their parents - The face in no class in the Island has yet learnt to appreciate education in the abstract. They value it only for the sake of the Pounds, shilling and pence it brings them; else why it is they don't take half the pains to educate their daughters as they do to educate their sons - But what makes me feel the more indignant is, to hear the natives talk of caste and their objection to allow their daughters to mix with the lower orders. This is, upon my word, most contemptible in those who have no scruples about their sons'

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being not only seated in the same form but about their eating and drinking with the lowest Castes.

W: You have spun a long yarn and I am sorry to be compelled to confess the truth of what you have asserted though I shall presently shew it is all "Now ad rem:" - but surely you don't mean to condemn the Ceylon Ladies wholesale.

H: I beg you pardon Wilmot I don't, there are exceptions and noble exceptions too for instance shall I name your---[3]

W: Upon my word you astonish me - what on earth do you mean.

H: Now, don't humbug me, I know well enough that tall thin saucy laughing Girl who you told me looks so like an angel and to whom you were making love "like fun" (excuse the not over elegant expression) at Mr. D's dinner.

W: Are you mad, when on earth did I tell you any thing of the kind?

H: You seem to have a very convenient memory, but have you forgotten coming running to me with the remark, that if ever you thought seriously what a good thing it was to have a wife by one's side, it was when you saw that amiable Girl Charlotte, and when you heard her talk so sweetly and so softly that you wished "all womenkind had but one rosy mouth, to kiss them all from North to South", -- shall I go on"

W: Quite enough; put off the rest like Dr. Drowsey's sermon till a fitter opportunity. O. Harry, Harry, what a mischievous fellow you are, I will take precious good care before I say any thing to you again. You do remember after Dinner conversations as if they were the stereotyped speeches of the Queen. It is all that nasty wine that did it else I should not have made such a foolish confession; after all Teetotalism is not a bad thing I do assure you.

H: How do you know you spoke under the influence of Bacchus or of Venus, that is, the lusty eyes and luscious lips of your charmer "the Gay little Charlotte", for depend upon my word, wine alone does not make men drunk; money, women, Love of fame, anger, pride, the other passions and even Religion have each a spice of Alcohol in them and madden your Brain far

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[3] I must earnestly request every young Lady in her Teens to consider herself the exception here intended.

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more than the Deceptive Cup; a mischievous Girl makes you do and say ten times more foolish things then all the inebriating Liquors put together.

W: But Alcohol has a peculiar tendency to lead you to excess, has it not?

H: Not a bit of it - Not a bit more than a handsome woman; you look at her eyes "winning where they wander and dazzling where they dwell," begin to admire them, then at her lips and her lovely features, then at this, and then at that, till your passion becomes uncontrollable. You will not therefore recommend a man to give up going into Society and turn a hermit. It becomes us manfully to meet and resist temptations, not flee from them. To fly is to betray moral cowardice, but however I do not condemn Teetotalism. Saint Paul says it is good to marry but better not to. I say the same thing, "it is good to drink moderately but better not to drink at all." Avoid however extremes, in all things if possible and do not lay yourself open to the taunting query "shall there be no more Cakes and Ale because thou are virtuous." - But not to forget your "particular veakness" as Sam Weller would have it. Pray why don't you think of taking in tow one of those same beings of whom you seem to be lost in admiration. You will make a merry partner of one of them, "I guess" as the Yankees say.

W: O Yes, I think I would; but then there is the demon of Pride standing in the way.

W: What the deuce do you mean, why permit the demon of Pride or any other demon to come between you and a fair creature?

H: O But then you know we are in an absurd world, surrounded by absurd men. We have such a thing as Birth and Rank to sustain, and these fair creatures, if they possess both, will not easily throw away their love on us poor Indians. On the other hand, if they possess neither, you know the consequence as well as I, of allying ourselves to one of that description - Why man, we are lost for ever, despised by our countrymen, treated with contempt by highborn European, and, what is worse than all, we shall propagate a most unreasonable despised race of what is invidiously and most stupidly termed Half Castes." Besides prejudice has such a strong hold on my mind that I have with all my Anglican notions and ideas a sort of innate dislike to

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matrimonial alliance with Foreigners, though I very much suspect this has arisen rather from a consciousness that those who hold a corresponding position with respect to Birth in their Society to which I maintain in my own are beyond my reach.

W: That is all well said, but your indictment seems to be different from your charge to the Jury - You began with blaming the English for introducing and end with blaming our countrymen or rather our countrywomen for not availing themselves of the advantages of that civilization, and this is, as I said before, Non ad rem - allow me to add, my dear Harry, you seem to have highflown Notions of Birth and it annoys me to hear a sensible fellow like you talk of a mere silly illusion - and as for your Prejudice against mixture of Races why, I thought the day had gone by when such absurdities were permitted to influence a man's judgment and his conduct. I fear you still have the old leaven in you - I have heard you stick out for caste as if you were a thorough bred Brahmin.

H: Say what you will of the tyrannies and evils of Caste it emanated evidently from a Gigantic intellect - The mind that conceived such a classification could not have been an ordinary mind, and the Genius that carried out a system so complicated in its character, so extensive in its operation and withal, so repulsive to human pride, and a system too that has survived kingdoms and empires, a genius I say, that enforced such a system could not have been any thing but vast, powerful and comprehensive. You must not judge of it as it exists at present, out of its element, so to speak but as it existed in the Hindoo state of Society. The great error is we forget Hindoos were not Englishmen or Christians either when Caste was introduced, but now we see things with Anglican eyes and make up our minds there is nothing good in it. Every nation, my good fellow, has its Caste. Republican America and aristocratic England have their Caste too. They call it Rank but if you probe to the bottom you will find it to be Caste in decent disguise. As far as I am personally concerned why I think Birth a phantom, and Caste a fiction, and I would, if I could, recognize no other distinction but that founded upon merit, but, my dearest Wilmot, we are not prepared yet to defy public opinion - We are too few for the world - A Cobbler's or a Grocer's daughter,

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however handsome or however well educated will, depend upon my word, if introduced into high life be as much sneered at in England as in Ceylon. There is really Caste for you - If Englishmen don't care about Birth, why is it they make so much fuss about a man risen from the ranks? He deserves all the more credit in my opinion, but I have heard a hundred Europeans say he is a low fellow and was only a Private the other day and it is disgusting to see him assume airs and talk of Military etiquette &c.

W: It is true we owe it to our posterity not to corrupt the blood by base mixtures but the blood of a higher and nobler race can but improve the Breed - Besides I would ask you candidly if you do not think me impertinent where the deuce are you to find out a companion who can appreciate and identify herself with your present feelings, predilections, thoughts and habits which is essential to make your worthy self happy in life? No, if you wish to make your Home á Hell upon, earth, go, marry a woman without education, sympathies and sentiments like your own, - all the wealth of India, all the beauty of a Venus will not tempt me to get wedded to one who can't appreciate my favourite authors, who can't love the Books which are the delight of my youth and may be the consolation of my advanced years, should I have the misfortune to survive the bloom of life, who can't bestow an intelligent smile on my intellectual labours, humble as they may be - A sensible wife's admiration is worth a world-wide reputation:

H: Well done my Boy, you are growing quite eloquent, and seem determined to make a speech. Well I like to see a fellow warm after all - Didn't think it was in you. Girls seem actually to communicate a sort of electricity to your nerves, and your tongue too, which at all events they set a rattling. But your long oration has made precious little impression on my mind as to the expediency of upsetting Institutions just now.

W: I don't hope to convince you, for you have taken a crotchet into your head and you will stick to it, but all you have advanced is more ingenious than right; for it is not the fault of the English people if our women are fools, and if you can't or won't marry, which, by the way, is better on the whole for you shan't be breeding slaves and Paupers. Shew yourself a bright example

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of continency and exert yourself on behalf of these degraded, debased, and even by ourselves detested creatures, and perhaps the next generation of them will furnish more agreeable wives to Anglicized youth like yourself and will remember your sweet name with affection and gratitude; and to be loved and admired by pretty women even after one's death is not a bad thing to aim at, you remember Byron or some body I forget who wished to die of consumption so that women might say when dead, "How interesting he looks!" We have digressed too much from the point, but women like wine, when placed before you, draw you away where and how you know not till you find yourself in the wrong box. But what did you say about Learning?

H: Why I say this: They give us a poor English education merely to suit their own selfish views, that is to say, they must have Natives to fill the minor offices, and they train them up to do the drudgery; and those who have by dint of their own exertion exceeded the standard benevolently prescribed by the Gentlemen of the School Commission, all that they get for their trouble is irritation at their present condition and ambition without the means of gratifying it.

W: Pray what is the standard prescribed by the School Commission? I believe it is not so low as you seem to imagine.

H: I don't know what is the Theoretical but the Practical I know well enough - I have heard with my own ears a Gentleman say that the Burghers and Natives should be taught nothing more than Reading, Writing, and a little Arithmetic, and I believe this the case in most of the Schools - just enough to supply the officials with those "somewhat dirty" but indispensable springs of office - as for the famous school which consumes so much of Government money I do not know what it does more than the others, though it has done more; but it's glory has long since departed and "I chabod" has been inscribed on its front now for yours. Don't be deceived by the reports of Examiners and the long list of studies generally appended to them It is, my dear fellow, the clever but execrable policy of the English to "make much ado about nothing."

W: You are perfectly right. It is their policy to keep the children of the soil down, so much so, that though a Christian Nation and has a State Church and far [fat?] priests to thank God for

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victories won over our countrymen and to call upon us to join in their impious thanksgivings, yet we all know how averse many of them are to the spread of education and even Christianity in India.

H: What astonishes me is not that they entertain the feeling ascribed by you to them but in the face of Europe, Asia, and America they dare to give utterance to such sentiments, Do you remember what Lord Ellenborough said in the House of Parliament the other day?

W: O yes I do, Do you refer to this passage "if all were to be done in India which many liberal persons desired, if all the higher and middle classes were instructed as similar classes were in this country, it would of course be as impossible to maintain our dominions there as it would be for the people of England, with their present information and knowledge to bear the constant immigration of Brahmin and Mussalman young Gentlemen if they were sent every year to fill the great offices of this country;" His Lordship proceeds "The extension of knowledge in India as it was desired to extend it was utterly inconsistent with British Dominion and he for one was not prepared to do anything to impair the security with which we now held possession of that country."

H: Strange, you have got up the passage by heart just as I have done. The fact is every educated native of India will remember it with all the bitterness which such cruel sentiments are likely to excite. But still you must admit Lord Ellenborough's Politics is farsighted and comprehensive, whatever may be said of it's morality. Were I an Englishman I would think exactly in the same way Religion apart.

W: It struck me forcibly when I was reading that Paragraph; how little after all the boasted Purity of Christianity there was of Vital Religion in the world. Would Lord Ellenborough have dared to say what he did say before a religious people and what did the Bishops who are not guided by motives of expediency, what reply, I ask, did those good and holy men make? I suppose their thoughts were all in the third Heaven to which St Paul had been caught up when Ellenborough was addressing - I take the Parliament as a fair representative of the views and sentiments of the nation and I conclude there is no such thing as

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genuine Christianity in Great Britain. There may be, and doubtless there are, eminently pious individuals, but as a Nation, selfishness is their ruling principle and exclusiveness their star. It is precisely the case in America, else we should not have slavery there and the Compromise Law, which President Pierce is determined to carry out in all its integrity, a statement which called forth loud cheers from Christian America! But believe it is so in all countries. Man is the same Rascal all over the world.

H: The fact is, my dear Wilmot, the English are a good sterling common sense people, who allow neither religion nor Priests, nor Philosophy, nor Morality to interfere Practically with their Interest. They are right; 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the sons of light". - It is true England loves Liberty and talks a great deal too much of it, finds fault with her neighbours, and prides herself upon the freedom of her people, but are we not Indians her people too? Old Curran was never more right than when he said 'England is marked by a natural avarice of freedom which she is studious to engross and accumulate but most unwilling to impart whether from any necessity of her polity or from her weakness or from her pride." (I should say from all three causes) "I will not presume but such is the fact. You need not look to the East" (Poor fellow he thought of us too) "Nor to the West. You need only look to yourselves' (addressing the unfortunate Irish). The Irish have warm hearts and I love them for it. They claim oriental descent, don't they? Besides are we not fellow sufferers, are not our oppressors the same - and do we not resemble each other in more than one respect; for instance, the language of Curran touching Ireland, uttered many years ago - It is not exactly applicable to Ceylon? "We have here a succession of Governors, differing in their temper and of course in their system of administration unprepared in general for rule by any previous Institution and utterly unacquainted with the people they were to govern, and with the men through whose agency they were to act" - How much truer this of our little Island! We might add unacquainted with the people, their language, their customs, manners, their laws, their peculiarities &c. The young, the gay, the giddy headed Lord Torrington had a policy

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of his own and gave birth to rebellion and many judicial or rather martial murders. His successor advanced in years, cool, honest, anxious perhaps to do good but brought up in the School of Despotism obstinate and utterly unfit to govern a Colony like Ceylon seems to have after all only his Mauritian prestige to boast of the nothing else. He will do well perhaps for our neighbours under John Company's Government and soon may he be transferred to a better country.

W: By the way they are going to hand over India irrevocably for 10 years to the East India Company. Is it possible to pass a Law which even the British Parliament, the highest tribunal we could appeal to, cannot change for years however clearly it might be made to see in the interval its injustice, its oppressions, and its iniquity?

H: I have read the discussion in the British Senate, and if anything could make me breathe a Prayer for the destruction of England like Carthage of old, it is the cruel and unfeeling manner in which they dispose of the interests of the millions of this sunny clime. Ah! England will do well to remember she has a solemn duty to perform towards us and that there is such a thing as retributive justice in the world - Linger it may not, come it will. Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Greece, Rome, where are they? - gone, glimmering through the dream of things that were - First in the race that led to glory's goal they won and passed away - A school boy's tale, the wonder of an hour - O let her take warning and not allow the united voice of millions in the bitterness of their souls to ascend to him, who "putteth down one and setteth up another" crying O, England: England "happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us - Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and dasheth them against the stones."

W: Talking of the Parliament you must admit there are some generous hearted men amongst them, few, perhaps, but still it may prove a country's salvation to have ten righteous at least - Lord Glenelg's noble sentiments which I have almost got up by heart, are worthy of being written in characters of gold. I assure you it is such men that redeem the character of the nation that must otherwise stink in the nostrils of the people of India. With respect to the question of education he says emphatically

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it was not only the duty but the mission of England to India to communicate to Natives the best education which it was in their power to give them. From that duty, he adds, we are bound not to shrink; on the contrary, he goes on, we ought to do it unflinchingly and ungrudging and he believed that, as with Individuals so with nations, it would be found that if we did our duty consulting only our duty, in the doing of that duty we should best consult our safety. The noble Earl had said; he proceeds, but you are tired I suppose.

H: No, go on - Finish that noble speech.

W: The noble Earl had said that vast Empire had entered upon a condition of progress. He agreed with him and would say further that no scruples of any individual Legislator would retard that progress, and that it was in our power to make that progress formidable and dangerous (he ought to have said firm and independant) but that it was altogether out of our power to nullify it and especially was it out of our power to say to education, "Thus far shall thou go, and no further". Therefore he would repeat that it was not only our duty but our best safety to facilitate that progress, that we had no right to pause and scruple and at a certain period of our career to fold our arms and say - "Be this your just circumference and these your bounds", but that we were called upon by all that we owed to God as well as Man, and at any hazard to do that duty. But if the period should ever come when the Natives of India should be placed in the position of governing themselves, it would be the most glorious day in British History. If the separation should only be affected with the mutual affection and good feelings he was sure that the grateful and immortal recollection of our connection with that vast empire would afford a better protection and security against future dangers than anything else which the wit of man could invent? These are ideas worthy of a noble hearted Britain - I am so much in love with Lord Glenelg that I wish I had his portrait to put up in my study and make him one of my household Gods.

H: It is really refreshing to read such liberal views, and, so far from being tired of hearing them, I shall listen to them with pleasure in the fiftieth repetition, and I do assure you, Natives will bless the day England conquered them if she will 'only not

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shrink from her duty' as defined by good Lord Glenelg - But all we deserve to be what we are, for how can our country be free for alas, they love thee least who owe thee most - Their birth, their bolld, and their all; and that is what makes me grieve every time I hear of a fresh conquest. I almost wept when I heard of the fall of the brave Seikhs, for now they are conquered it requires no great sagacity to predict what they will soon become. They have not a noble and generous enemy like Alexander to contend against whose object was not filthy Lucre [but] Glory, and who treated a magnanimous foe as he deserved to be treated, but we have " a company of Shopkeepers" to deal with and we know what is the predominant quality in that respectable class of Tradesmen. You will see now the English are masters of the Country how they will exert themselves to crush their Independent spirit, their love of Freedom and convert them into a cowardly and contemptible race. O noble Powers, if departed Heros could weep, how much reason will you have soon to weep floods of tears over your yet brave but somehow or other unfortunate countrymen. India! "Cold is the heart that looks on thee nor feels as lovers over the dust they loved; dull is the eye that will not weep to see thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed by British hands."

W: I hope we are not over heard - why, we may be talking treason.

H: Confound treason; let them take and hang me if they choose - It is better to die with a noble thought in your breast and a noble Prayer in your lips than live a slave and die a coward.

W: Still it would be black ingratitude to deny that as conquerors they have been generous enough. The evil is their lofty pretensions to a purer faith and their national Church and national watchword. As masters I thank their kindness, as Christians I tell them might is not right, and we do not feel grateful to the Highway Robber for sparing the last shirt because he could have taken that also - I must also add that the English in England are quite a different people from the English in India. It is the latter [who] often tarnish Britain's glories and her fair fame.

H: What you say is true enough as to the National Church. It is in my humble opinion a magnificent concentration of Pride, splendor and hypocrisy. The State Church is a great anomaly

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even in England but greater here; it is here an anomaly in an anomaly, so to speak; it is hard to make Hindoos and Buddhists support a system which in their conscience they believe to be false - Fancy the idea of paying £2500 to the Bishop and some thousands more to lazy Chaplains.

W: Our present Bishop is a venerable man and I do love and respect him; His personal character, liberality, zeal, piety are such that [we] should be sorry to lose him and would consider his loss a misfortune to the Colony.

H: You mistake me; it is not the man that I object to but the Bishop; - I believe that Dr. Chapman is the least selfish and the most generous of all the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, I have ever known, but it is the principle of forcing our consciences to support men who preach a creed not ours that I am so strongly opposed to - Let those who want religion pay for it.

W: Poor Religion, how much it suffers at the hands of men! I do believe that bad Priests of all sects do more harm to the cause of virtue and of truth than all the Deists and Atheists put together. Do you think the Hindoos will ever be converted by Priests such as we have, with perhaps a few exceptions? I tell you what, Ten Daniels will do more good than a thousand proud and aristocratic Priests that roll about in splendid coaches - clad in silk and purple, faring sumptuously every day and think it a condescension (!) to extend their hands to you - sons of Taylors, Shoemakers and Cobblers as some of them are.

H: O yes. Daniel was emphatically a good man and a good Missionary - he made you respect his religion more by example than by precept, notwithstanding you may have differed from him pretty widely. I remember as if it were only yesterday the solemn impression made upon my mind by his death - I was a mere boy when the poor man died and attended his funeral as I used to do his sermons - There was such a crowd, men of all creeds, classes and castes, all testifying to his zeal, his piety and purity of life - Did you ever read Madame Pheiffer's voyage round the world - her account of Missionary life as contrasted with the exaggerated Reports sent to England?

W: O Yes, I did - she is severe but I think perfectly just, for instance, isn't it a fact that they live exactly like the opulent, have fine dwellings, (often finer than the buildings occupied by

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firstrate Civilians) and all imaginary comforts and luxuries? Are not their meetings often mere 'dinner parties; are they not much better off than many Gentlemen in the other professions; and is it not a fact that poor believing souls in Europe and America, who deprive themselves of even the necessaries of life, pay for all this? I must say however that Catholic Missionaries present a noble contrast to their Protestant brethren. In zeal in piety, in holiness of life, in self-denial they are unparalleled.

H: But to let the Missionaries alone, why don't people make an effort to get rid of burdens such as the Ecclesiastical and Military contributions - why don't they represent their grievances to the proper authorities?

W: Who are the authorities they are to appeal to? - We want a representative assembly in Ceylon, and all will go on well, then certainly our Island shall not be made a wretched asylum for old worn out invalids and helpless infants who come to teach before they have commenced to learn, nor should we be paying thousands when as good men could be had for hundreds - Why, Anstruther only the other day declared openly that this country could be governed with half the expence - By the way, what a humbug that fellow is - why didn't he suggest his reductions when he had the power to carry them out? but as old Stapleton would say 'it is human nature' my boy, the members of the Executive Council, who are virtually our Rulers, are utterly unfit for the Exceedingly difficult and diverse duties which now devolve upon them. - M---y [MacCarthy] there is no knowing that man. I believe he is a Jesuit? Heaven only knows his political predilections; his conduct in the Council seems wholly mysterious he has never uttered a sentiment which was not common place and which one should like to remember. - He may be a scholar and a great man in the Athenaum, but as Colonial Secretary he seems a mere cipher, it appears to me his sole object is to get on well with the Governor and pocket his money without troubling his head about anything else. G---n [Gibson] is a thorough man of business but a most illiberal Despot; he could if he would, do better but he is one of the old school and cannot comprehend the advanced ideas of the people as to Liberty, Equality, &c. S---y is a good, clever, well-meaning man, anxious to do good but too timid to make any

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decided move, he had suffered enough for conscience sake under the Torrington administration to sacrifice his Interest to conscientious scruples again; his conduct with reference to the late legal changes is a sufficient proof of this. The Treasurer is a pious man I believe, and the General a brave warrior no doubt. L---d [Layard] is an excellent man and knows a good deal of the country, having long resided among us, but experience and good nature alone are not sufficient to make a good ruler. There is [need for?] an energy, a firmness, a determination to do what is right, an anxiety to meet the wants of the people, to see those wants increased by education and civilization, "for every want repressed is a source of pleasure repressed;" An ardent desire to develop the resources of the country, to infuse into the people a love of freedom combined with a thorough knowledge of their language, habits, manners, customs, &c, are required to govern a nation. These qualities you will in vain look for among the members of the Executive Council, who, as I have remarked are virtually our Governors and Legislators. As for the Legislative Council why, it is a delusion and a mockery. As it is the Queen's Advocate, the 1st legal adviser of the Government in this country, has declared openly that the people of this country are as intelligent as any under the sun; and whilst New Zealand, New South Wales, the Cape &c. have yet their constitution and representative assemblies, we alone are still considered and treated as children under age, unfit to take care of themselves and their property. - Why because we are fools and deserve to be hanged for our indifference, nothing good will come from Downing Street if we don't ourselves: but apathy is our curse.

H: How do you like the unofficial members of the Council?

W: Why, with the exception of two most indebted to Ceylon, who might as well be in the clouds as in the Council room, they are all fine men, though I must confess I like M---n and D---y best. There is a man who is an honour to the country he belongs to --- Had we twenty such in the Council we shall soon have a Government worthy of the name and Laws which will not grind the poor under the disguise of cheap and speedy justice &c. Speaking of M---n [Morgan] suggests naturally the name of his great Rival, - his loss after all is an irreparable loss to the

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Colony. His connection with the Judicial Ordinances made him rather unpopular latterly but the temptations he was exposed to were great; and young, ardent and ambitions, who could have resisted? Let those who condemn S---t [James Stewart] remember the giddy height to which he had been raised and deservedly raised, and the obstinate character of the man on whom his all just then depended! His splendid talents make up for all his faults. Had he done ten times more mischief to his country than he has, I should still honour his name and not wish an unkind thought murmured over his grave!

H: Are not the Judges of the Supreme Court members of the Council?

W: No, they are not; tho' I don't see why they should not be - whilst the Judges in England take a share in enacting the Laws they administer, there is no reason to exclude the Bench here. The fact is they are too independent and Government would never like to have them in.

H: By the way, what do you think of our Judges?

W: Why, it is a difficult and a delicate question to answer. They have been of late rather rudely handled in the Council, but I believe they are all able, honest and conscientious men. S---ke always reminds me of a Scotch Metaphysician, patient, persevering calm, considerate and anxious to do justice. - C---r is a thorough bred English Gentlemen, rather aristocratic in his views and bearing, but, though a little too hasty and severe on the Bench, he is exceedingly civil, courteous and kind at home, at least so they say. - It does one's heart good to see, notwithstanding all they say of his harshness to the Bar, his extreme leniency to the unfortunate Prisoners. He is always for an acquittal. As for the Cf. J---e I won't attempt to describe his character for you know my partiality to him but I must say a nobler heart man never possessed and a more generous soul never inspired human clay. - As a Judge and as a man he is respected, admired and loved by all who know him.

H: Why don't they promote men who have been long in the Colony, instead of getting out raw and inexperienced people from England, for instance such men as the G---t A---t N---n P---e? [G.A., Northern Province, that is Dyke]. They talk a good deal of him. Do you know him at all?

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W: Not personally but I have heard enough of him. He is a man of great ability, great experience, and unparalleled integrity. He would make a good Colonial Secretary but he is cold, reserved and haughty and would surely be hated by the aristocracy of Colombo. Besides there is little chance of his leaving his kingdom - he knows well enough he will dwindle into insignificance in the metropolis, whereas here he is the monarch of all he surveys. They say Jaffna is a sort of Imperium in Imperio. He is Governor of that place and would scarcely wish to quit it even for the Colonial Secretaryship - the other Executive offices were, I believe, quite within his reach but he would not have them. - The natives of the North, at least the generality of them, seem to be greatly attached to him - You have no idea what improvement he has effected in his Dominions. The hospital alone will carry his name to posterity, at least among the Jaffanese. But I wish he encouraged education more. - He is certainly very liberal and subscribes largely towards, educational purposes, but that a man of his position can hardly resist doing. I very much fear he is one of those men who hold views similar to Ellenborough's - He is by far too sensible to give utterance to them but still that may be at the bottom of his Equivocal assistance in the cause of education. It is not enough to subscribe - he ought occasionally to visit the Schools, be present at the Examinations, give out prizes to the most promising, ask them to write essays on given subjects, &c. This surely is not beneath his dignity - he must know Napoleon the Great did not think so nor act as if he did. You can't conceive what vast amount of good he could do by his personal influence - What an impetus such conduct on his part will impart to the advancement of education, what stimulus to the intellectual pursuits of the youth! - He keeps aloof from the Libraries, the clubs and in short from all intellectual associations because he does not consider them worthy of his Royal Patronage. - This may also arise from his desire to avoid mingling with the people, and thus losing the extraordinary respect paid by them; for there is a good deal in shrouding oneself with a sort of dignified mystery. Familiarity does enough upon one's dignity, and a proud spirit always shuns it. But this is a poor excuse and cripples a man's usefulness. - He

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has I confess done a great deal to deserve our gratitude, but all his acts have been of an official nature as it were, except, perhaps, the building of the Hospital. - He ought to do something in his private capacity, and he could do nothing more noble, nothing more generous, nothing more enduring than encourage education, and his name will not only be feared and respected by the mass, as it is now, but esteemed and beloved by all classed and castes now and long after he has ceased to exist. - Has it never struck him that whilst in Colombo, in Kandy, in Galle, and even Trincomalie they have first rate Girls' Schools for the higher classes, there is not one worthy of the name here? - Has it never struck him that it is no great honour to his administration to see the town sink into ignorance, insignificance, misery, and poverty, resulting from the idle habits and apathy of the residents - the natural consequence of want of proper mental culture. - Educate the Women and you will have a better and a more industrious people around you - as long as the women remain those letterless, luxury loving, listless creatures which they now are, the men will be clinging to their homes, poor and wretched, without any sense of honour or self-respect, and without a thought how to make themselves useful, undependent and respectable. Let the women of Ceylon learn to apply 'noble' to 'honest labour,' and they will send forth their brothers, and their husbands, their sons, their fathers, and their lovers to earn a greater title to their love, their esteem and their admiration than a Clerkship with its eternal fears of suspension, remonstrances and dismissal. - Some people say that Mr. D---e has a head but not a heart. This I can scarcely believe of man who is so charitable and so liberal; for I am told there is not a deserving object of charity brought to his notice without relief, and that constant references are made to the Resident Missionaries to prevent imposition. It is true he loves power and cannot bear a brother near the throne. - Go to the Hospital, the Friend-in-Need Society, the Cutcherry, the Fiscal's Office, the Customs, the Engineer's Department, - go where you will in the Northern Province, - he is the main - spring everywhere. He is unsocial and seems to be, for I do not think he really is, a lover of solitude; and solitude you are aware has a decided tendency to illiberalize the heart, and

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makes one misanthropic - The Isolation in which he, by a singular choice (singular in more than one sense) lives, must necessarily contract the heart and make our naturally selfish nature still more selfish and exclusive. - But still all this is not inconsistent with a disposition generous at the bottom. - Do you know that it strikes me sometimes he tries to imitate the Iron Duke and Sir Robert Peel? - His always acting from a sense of duty, his unmitigated devotion to the Interests of the Government he serves, his strict and severe discipline (for I do think he would not forgive his own brother if he thought him in the wrong) in his office, remind me often of Wellington, and his not mingling with the crowd around him, his reservedness, his Toryism, gradually giving way before the advance of civilization and the march of intellect, as the saying is, bear a striking resemblance to poor Peel. - As for his being haughty why I rather respect a proud man, and reservedness, however opposed to my own frank, open and candid nature, is essential to a man in high and responsible office, but his icy, unsocial and apparently repulsive character - the natural result of seclusion from his superiors and his equals, - and of a long residence (he has been longer in this country than I have been in the world) in a land where there is not much to call forth his affections, and "the absence of all who would smile the less if he were not" is what I think one could least love and admire in the man, tho' all this in some way or other enhances his value as a public officer; for he has consecrated his whole life, time, talents and energies to business which is the sole pleasure of his solitary life.

H: A strange character to be sure but read History and you will not want a parallel.

W: Are you acquainted with the present Patriarch of the service, the Dt. J---e of J---a at all, who has been equally long in the North as Mr. D---e.

H: Why I know him tolerably well. He is a good, honest, harmless man; and there is his character for you.

W: What a blessing it is we are permitted to express our thoughts so fully and so fully a privilege, which I would not exchange for a throne. - The liberty of the Press is one of the most glorious things that were ever introduced into the Island. Why,

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we could not exist without newspapers. - By the way, what think you of the Local Papers?

H: I stick to the oldest as the best, tho' I must say unlike wine it has not improved with its age. - We are under great obligations to the Observer; for it infused a love of liberty into "Young Ceylon" and taught them what self-respect was, and what a spirit of independence could achieve. His conduct towards Lord Torrington I for one certainly do not approve, but his opposition to his Government was just and fair and did us a great deal of good - tho' I think he didn't give the Devil his due, - for I verily believe poor Torrington was entirely misled by that "Anguis in herba" as a certain prelate called him. - The Observer was once all for the people, but is now pursuing a temporizing policy. He has been so often charged with Anti-English feelings that of late he has showed a disposition to desert our cause. - Besides he has now more friends among the Officials than ever he had. Since the House of Commons affair they seem to know his power, and dread it too. - The Editors are really good natured men, and, as is generally the case with such persons, are governed more by their feelings, than their judgement. That accounts for their indiscriminately praising their friends and their systematic and unremitting attacks on those who have at any time injured them either in word or deed, tho' I must confess, when not influenced by their passions, they are always fair and honest. Editors are men and have their frailties - If you want one to be above human weakness he would be "an Abstraction, a Being in the clouds, a mind without a Body, reason without passion" as some one somewhere observes. - But where alas, are you to look for such a creature? "The Times" I certainly can't understand, "Now shaves with level wing the deep" then "soars up to the fiery concave towering high" like Milton's Archangel-ruined - Now a Catholic, now a High Churchman, now Evangelical, now holy and pious, indignant at the Government connection with Buddhism, now heartlessly enjoying the heartless jokes of the Yankee actors mimicking the poor Negroes. But with all its faults "The Times" writes well at times, and shaves a good deal of talent. - The "Examiner" is neither cold nor hot - It is of the laodicean caste - But the great fault with all the three

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papers is one sees nothing good in the other - The "Observer" has never a good word to the "Times", "the Times" never a good word to "The Observer" and "The Examiner" do. Now this is very unamiable and almost intolerable, and shews how much our personal feelings prevail over our judgements.[4]

W: Why does not 'Young Ceylon' establish a Paper of its own? I am sure it will do the country a great deal of good.

H: The reason is obvious. - lst. I do not think they have as yet sufficient energy and ability to conduct a Newspaper. - It is not enough to have read Shakespeare and Milton to be Editors. An Editor must be a man of the world, one that has travelled a little at least, one with a mind well informed on general subjects; "the Political, the Literary, the Musical, the commercial or speculative, and the alla Padrida which combine to form the whole." "They must also possess a certain facility of throwing off their thoughts on a given subject and at a moment's notice, which must result only from long practice and familiarity with the work" which we cannot pretend to. They should also be men in whom the Public can confide and will support all these requisites they decidedly want - they might however overcome these difficulties in time, but the most formidable obstacle to the attainment of such an object is the unhappy rivalry and ill-feeling that subsists between the various Island races. Their country, their prospects, their hopes, their language, (at least of the educated,) their religion, their present and their future are all one, and intimately connected, but no two classes, locally intermingled, hate each other more than these do.

W: This is sad but true. - The fact is the old feeling still survives, and it has derived additional strength from the infusion of a fresh spirit of hostility by the English people, whose maxim ever on the continent of Europe, as well as of Asia, is, "Divide et Impera," - Even the Missionaries in their schools teach one class (indirectly to be sure) to look upon the other with jealousy and suspicion. - They condemn the Burgher before Natives, and I dare say they serve us with the same sauce before Burghers. -

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4 Since writing the above the '*Examiner*' has passed into better and abler hands, and it is expected will prove beneficial to the Island.

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You think Sir Emerson did not use the language he was said to have done respecting them?

H: There is no question but that he did, tho' it was shabby to have reported such a conversation. - But, my dear Harry, it is not the fault of Englishmen: they do what their interest dictates them to do; but we are fools for not understanding our interests; we are fools for not bearing in mind the hackneyed Proverb "In union in strength." Let us hope however the future generation will know better.

W: Harry, you are the oddest fellow I ever saw in my life. You love the English people, English society, English language, English habits, and English manners, and, in short, English everything. - I have often heard you say that you will rather be a Porter in free England than a Prince in conquered Ceylon, and here you are running the nation down like fury.

H: I may be odd, but I hope I am able to give you a reason for what I do and say. - I like them because they are the best that have come in my way, with poor dear Byron I repeat, "England, with all they faults I love thee still". - By the way, talking of my love for the English language, you must have heard the silly observation frequently made by Europeans about Natives neglecting their own tongue. - What the Devil they mean by it I don't know. I repeat I love the English language and will stick to it because it is better than my own. - As for its being my native tongue why, I recognize no such thing - It is a stupid prejudice and nothing more; I was not born with a language on my lips. The old Datin Proverb says "Omen solum Forti patria" and I say following it up Every Language is mother tongue to a Citizen of the world, which I am, and which I will soon prove to you by quitting this for countries happier and more liberal, perhaps, never more to return to shame and slavery. - It is precisely this - you put two Girls before me, one a handsome, accomplished, captivating Damsel, with extensive connections, influential, and a large fortune to boot:- and another ugly, ignorant, stupid, poor antiquated witch, without friends and with Tin. I am asked to choose between the two: well, my need I say what I would choose? - what care I about the latter being what is called my countrywoman? Pooh! Pooh! I care a fig about that. Decidedly the former will be mine, and

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with my whole body and soul shall I worship her. I have no inclination, and, truth to say, my constitution not strong enough to divide my time between a wife and a mistress. - One language, and that the English, spoken and cultivated by the largest number and the most civilized, people in the world is quite enough for me. - Let them talk of native tongue and all sorts of absurdities. - I know enough of my own language to serve all practical purposes; as for the rest, both my interests and my inclination lead me to devote all me spare hours to a language, which contains treasures that can never be exhausted. Such remarks comes with a peculiarly bad grace from the English, who really have no tongue of their own. It is a mixture of some half a hundred languages - why don't the Saxon stick to the pure Saxon, the Normany to the French, the Scotch to the ancient Scottish, and the Irish to the Irish? No, no, what a medley will that make? what rivalry, what disunion there will be if there were so many languages in Great Britain? - The English are quite alive to what is best for them, and, depend upon my word, when they (be it Missionaries or Civilians) tell you to study your own tongue in preference to the English, they have a secret motive, a motive which they conceal, but which Lord Ellenborough unblushingly laid open to the world. - The spread of English knowledge is incompatible with the maintenance of a foreign dominion here; here is the secret spring of all their kind Lectures. The multiplication of languages was originally a curse, and the fewer therefore we have the better. Besides India must have a common tongue to achieve any thing great and to be united; and that tongue can neither be Sanscrit, which is all but obsolete, besides being Devilish hard and unwieldy, or Bengalle, Hindostannee, Singhalese, or Tamil (each of which is confined to a particular class, which can find no inducement to study the other) but, for obvious reasons, the English. - Our intellects are "too confined, too weak and too little", and our life too short, "just short enough to look about us and die", as old Pope says, to be studying 50 languages and dissipating our attention.

W: - (Pulling out his watch) It is high time to part, I have one or two things more to say but we will take another opportunity - Good night Harry.

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H: I trust we shall meet again soon - Good night, or rather good morning.[5]

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[5] It is proper to remark that a casual coincidence will be found, here and there, between the thoughts and expressions in this work and a letter which appeared in the '*Observer*' some eight months ago.

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Chapter 2

NATIONALISM IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL THOUGHT, 1915-1945*

Michael Roberts

I

Invariably, the colonial situation influenced the economic and social ideas which attracted the Ceylonese elites in the early twentieth century. A thorough scanning of all the newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets as well as the legislative proceedings and other official records will be required before one can depict these ideas in all their manifestations. A glimpse of important strands of thought can, however, be provided on the basis of more partial surveys. Using the secondary literature that is available[1] as well as some of my own findings, this essay seeks (1) to describe and illustrate significant trends in the economic and social thought favoured by the nationalist leaders and (2) to outline the broad causal factors which produced these trends during the period 1915-1945. The years 1915-18 witnessed sufficient change in the character of the nationalist movement to constitute a convenient starting point, despite important continuities in nationalist demand.[2] Similarly, the emergence of new perspectives and sharpening political conflicts within the Ceylonese elites in the years after the second world war suggest that 1945 could serve as the other dateline. In making this survey, it must be recognised that the nationalist leaders were not a monolith with a uniform set of views on economic and social affairs. Especially after the birth of the LSSP in 1935 and the entry of socialism, significant ideological differences developed, though the differences were not as great as one might think. In general, given the time-span that has been chosen, the emphasis here will be on the tendencies revealed by the reformist nationalists rather than those of radical or radical-socialist disposition. But even among the former there were differences of view which, in any detailed study, would hedge and qualify the generalisations that are essayed here.

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* This article is a reprint from the 1979 edition of *Collective identities*, Colombo: Marga.

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II

The Ceylonese elites, and the national elite in particular, as we have seen,[3] were heavily involved in commercial and plantation capitalism. In their economic activities several merchants worked in association with British mercantile firms and relied heavily on the institutional network of the British Empire. The arrack renters functioned in an arena that was protected by government and legitimised by government regulations.[4] The resources for industrial development were much more limited than those in British India; and with the exception of some graphite mine owners there were no indigenous industrial capitalists to speak of. It follows that the economic conflicts with British interests were not as pronounced as in India where the restrictions on indigenous manufacturing growth were only too obvious. Yet this does not mean that there were no arenas of economic disagreement with the British. If indigenous merchants worked with British capitalist interests, sometimes they only worked in the latter's shadow. Racial discrimination was pronounced; and the Ceylonese merchants and planters were only too conscious of their subordinate role and the overpowering influence of the British mercantile interests. Credit, the dispensation of governmental services and supportive fiscal policies were among the several items valued by capitalists; and these were much more readily available to the white skins and the British firms. It is not surprising, therefore, that a Low Country Products Association was set up by the indigenous bourgeoisie in 1908-09 as a counter to the European-dominated Chamber of Commerce, i.e. in order "to safeguard the interests of the Ceylonese planters [and] to bring about greater co-operation among them in economic affairs."[5] This was a small part of a wider, and very common, manifestation: viz, that a colonial situation gives birth to economic nationalism.

It should be recalled, however, that political subjugation is not the only stimulus for such goals. As noted elsewhere, nationalism has often been generated among a people (not under political subjugation) merely through a "growing awareness" of their economic backwardness in relation to other peoples or states, and by the desire for a strong and modern economy.[6] In Sri Lanka during the early twentieth century the growth of similar sentiments can be witnessed in clear measure. In this case, of course, the condition of economic backwardness was linked to the island's colonial status and attributed to its imperial masters.

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In the 1890s and the 1900s the expressions of economic nationalism which the British authorities encountered *seem* to have been muted. They appear to have been confined (i) to demands for the expansion of the openings for Ceylonese in the higher ranks of the public services, and (ii) to protests against the waste lands policy of the government. Both these issues continued to be of importance in the period under review.

The progressive Ceylonisation of the public services was accepted as a policy principle by the British authorities in the early 1920s. From 1931 the Ceylonese nationalist leaders were in a position to expand these frontiers considerably, sometimes by tactical methods that individual British officials greatly resented.[7] Yet this course was not without setbacks -- as in 1935 when a few British recruits were appointed as Cadets in the Ceylon Civil Service in the teeth of protests from the Board of Ministers and other nationalists.[8]

The question of the waste lands policy had been brought to the fore by the passage of the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance in 1897; and was kept in the forefront by the operations of the Land Settlement Department, several court cases and the developing nationalist sentiments. It was widely alleged that this Ordinance continued a policy that had prevailed in the nineteenth century, whereby the peasantry were deprived of large extents of their land which were then sold to British planters. These allegations were pressed in the Legislative Council as well as the public platform, the newspaper, the periodical and the pamphlet. The 1910s and 1920s witnessed several pamphlets on the subject by political activists of some note; and the subject remained popular fare for political speakers well into the 1940s.[9] In making these allegations, a discreet silence was maintained regarding the extent to which so many Ceylonese planters had been able to purchase such "expropriated" land from the Crown; and an equal silence on the degree to which several Ceylonese had purchased part of their property from villagers through dubious methods. The subject was, after all, a handy instrument to advertise the evil effects of British rule. For our interests here, its greatest significance lies in the populist sentiments it represented as well as evoked, for the criticisms consistently focussed on the fate of the peasantry. In the 1920s this focus had significant repercussions on governmental policy. It confirmed the tendencies towards village protection which had been (contrary to the contemporary nationalist opinion) part of British policy.[10] This outcome was evident in the recommendations of the Land Commission in 1929 and in the introduction of a special form of tenure for all future sales of Crown land through the

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Land Development Ordinance of 1935. It is not insignificant that a key figure in the deliberations of the Land Commission as well as the formulation of this Ordinance was D.S. Senanayake.

The waste lands issue was also linked conceptually with the agricultural policies that were favoured by several nationalist leaders. From the diagnosis of past British policy which it embodied, many Ceylonese politicians felt it to be their duty to undertake acts of reparation. In this view, the past misfortunes of the peasant and the villager entitled them to special favour and special care; hence the restoration of their lands became an important programmatic demand.[11] So did their prevailing conditions of poverty entitle them to state assistance -- the more so after such a traumatic event as the malaria epidemic of 1934-1935 and the economic surveys conducted under Professor Das Gupta had underlined the difficulties which the peasantry faced.[12] In this fashion the goal of distributive justice came to be embodied in many of the nationalist demands relating to agriculture and the peasant sector. It was an ideal that was also sustained by patrimonial norms and by populist sentiment as well as (after 1931) the demands of parliamentary politics under universal suffrage.

There was yet another goal associated with such an ideal: the achievement of self-sufficiency in food production. By this was usually meant self-sufficiency in paddy production. Such events as the food crisis of 1919-20 and the problem of provisions during the second world war served to emphasise this object. But contemporary crises were not needed to maintain this goal in the forefront. Economic nationalism and retrospective romanticism served as adequate driving forces. To most nationalists, it was self-evident that self-sufficiency in food (rice) production was good economics and a contribution to national growth. Besides, the peak of the island's past greatness was invariably linked with the Parakrama Bahu *yugaya* (era) when Lanka was believed to be "the granary of the East." Most good nationalists had visions of recreating the island's ancient autarchic economy. It was typical that such individuals as D.S. Senanayake and D.G. Weerasinghe (a "colonist") should view the extension of rice cultivation as the island's "economic salvation."[13]

K. Balasingham was among the political activists who emphasised the goals of agricultural development and self-sufficiency in the 1910s and 1920s. He wanted the government to provide bounties and to set up agricultural banks, and also to protect local agriculture through tariff walls.[14] Various resolutions accepted by the Ceylon National Congress in the 1920s demanded (i) schemes which would increase the food supplies,

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(ii) an improvement of the institutional structure in support of agriculture, and (iii) the extension of irrigation works; while one resolution objected to the restrictions on chena cultivation and another wanted the government to allocate Crown lands in such a way as to assist the establishment of "the landless on *smallholdings*."[15] From 1931 these emphases received even greater stress. The peasant was, hereafter, not merely an object of pathos and a beneficiary of patrimony, but a potential voter as well. Thus, in 1931 S.W. Dassenaike argued in the State Council for assisted land colonisation so as "to afford work for the surplus population and increase food production;" while the Ceylon National Congress wanted a five-year plan which would increase the local production of food, with particular reference to the improvement of paddy cultivation in the wet zone and its extension in the dry zone.[16] These ideas continued to attract support within the Congress ranks during the 1930s: so that one found requests for a scheme of rural development "for the uplift of the masses of the Country" (1936), demands for price control and tariffs in order to protect producers (1938), and proposals in favour of colonisation schemes and a comprehensive scheme of state-aid for the colonists (1938).[17] Agricultural policy and colonisation was an important policy issue in the State Council in 1938-39 and, in drawing up their programme in 1939, the Ceylon National Congress presented an ambitious agricultural policy with the twin goals of making the island self-sufficient in its food supplies and solving "the acute landlessness of the peasantry." Among the paths it advocated in support of these goals were "agricultural settlements and collective farms," "facilities for easy credit and debt conciliation," state subsidies and state control over the marketing of agricultural produce.[18] The LSSP programme, too, took up specific grievances in the peasant sector: they requested free pasture lands, the supply of seed paddy at interest free rates, the permanent abolition of irrigation rates, the repeal of restrictions on chena cultivation, the prevention of cattle shooting on plantations and the abolition of existing forest and timber laws.[19] These propaganda statements were echoed regularly in the State Council, while several suggestions found expression in statutory and administrative measures as well. With D. S. Senanayake serving as Minister of Agriculture during the period 1931-47, attention to the needs of peasant agriculture was never in short supply.

Economic nationalism, then, pushed the Ceylonese political leaders towards neo-mercantalist ideals. These ideals and that of reparatory and distributive justice were also supported by their populist and patrimonial leanings and by the stimulus of retrospective romanticism. The melange of

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motives, tendencies and goals is illustrated in the analysis incorporated in the programmatic statements put out by the Congress in 1935. It was stressed that Sri Lanka was primarily an agricultural country, that her economic structure was lopsided, that her wealth was concentrated "in the hands of foreign capitalists and a small percentage of the people of the country;" and that "75 per cent of the permanent population were living below the poverty line and were unable to secure adequate employment" because of infra-structural weaknesses and the presence of an alien body of workers in the island; while it was also argued that the smallholdings of the peasantry had become uneconomic, that the credit system was of little assistance to both smallholder and capitalist, and that the malaria epidemic had "pitilessly exposed the needs of the people in matters of health, sanitation, food and housing."[20] E.A.P. Wijeyeratne's platform rhetoric in support of the programme was accompanied by a picturesque and rosy image of the island civilisation's past greatness and its role as "the granary of the east." The restoration of irrigation works was therefore regarded as "the foundation of the new renaissance" of the country; and the Land Development Ordinance of 1935 and the allocation of land "to the poor and the needy" were considered a means by which "the nucleus of a class of peasant proprietors" could be established.[21] R.C. Kannangara echoed this emphasis in 1939 in supporting the Board of Ministers' policy of assisted colonisation: "Our idea is... to put them on the land; and... to make them Mudalalis, Bandaras, and Ralahamies."[22]

The image of a land filled with sturdy peasant proprietors was not new. It had been echoed previously in threads of British official thinking dating from the mid nineteenth century.[23] From other causes, these notions had found resonant responses among the Ceylonese elites in the early twentieth century. Wijeyeratne and Kannangara were reiterating a popular ideal. In the late 1930s, moreover, this specific plank in agricultural policy received a fresh impetus: with the emergence of the LSSP and the prospect of a radicalised urban working class, to D.S. Senanayake (and other reformist nationalists) the peasantry appeared as a stable force in a social order that was being subject to unwelcome pressures.[24] A new political dimension bolstered an older line of agricultural policy.

III

Increasingly, too the indigenous political leaders argued that the European interests within the island were unduly favoured and that a large proportion

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of the economic pie was in European and other alien hands. G.K.W. Perera and Arunachalam Mahadeva were among those who expressed these sentiments in biting language in the mid 1920s. Perera criticised the Ceylonese for permitting a situation in which Sri Lanka was "the happy hunting ground of all the foreign nations in the world" and in which the foreigners had acquired all the trade and were fast acquiring their land, while the Ceylonese were disunited and "at a standstill, allowing exploiters to prosper all round [them]."[25] Mahadeva not only made pointed reference to the island people's backwardness and position of tutelage under a European governance that was "protected by English bayonets," but also attacked the "economic domination of the Europeans;"

> I find the gravest burden we suffer from is the economic burden... [The rising export figures reflect] merely a hollow prosperity... [In] how much of the enormous profits do we share? What proportion of it goes out of the Island? The profits are mostly distributed among absentee landlords and absentee shareholders. We are unable, in the face of the local monopoly that is actually in the hands of the European merchants and the European mercantile community, to contest or wrest from them any share in the commercial development of the Island, or any share in the profits. The profits of accumulating capital are entirely and jealously guarded by a European ring.[26]

Whatever share the Ceylonese elites had actually gathered for themselves, clearly, several politicians were not ready to acknowledge this fact on the public platform. Their cognitive perceptions, or at the very least their rhetorical pronouncements, were in terms of an aggrieved and deprived people under *total* foreign economic and political domination. The onset of the great world depression in 1929 only served to emphasise this view. From hard experience the Ceylonese elites discovered that the economy was "susceptible to the vagaries of markets abroad." The undiversified and lopsided nature of the economy became another bow in the armoury of criticisms which they directed at the British rulers. With the beginnings of the Left Movement in the 1930s, these criticisms received a further impetus. Applying Lenin's interpretations of capitalism, the SamaSamajists and their sympathisers combined these ingredients with others to present a rounded view of British imperialism as a planned and exploitative system.[27] Most of these new ingredients, in turn, were picked up and reiterated by several reformist nationalists.

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Whatever its variants, this body of thought provided the foundation for a definition of Sri Lanka's economic goals. Whether reformist or radical-socialist, most nationalists sought to shift the balance of economic power away from alien interests in favour of Ceylonese interests. They sought to achieve a "transition from a colonial to a national economy," or what was described as "national economic independence." By the 1930s, if not earlier, the latter expression (or some near-equivalent) had become a popular catchphrase. It was, for instance, emphasised by the aging S. O. Canagaratnam as well as H.W. Amarasuriya and the voice of the unknown and educated youth represented in Gunapala Ranasinghe.[28]

This corpus of thought found expression in numerous ways. An early illustration was provided by the clash with the British Government over their budgetary proposals in late 1922. The Government sought to raise certain transport rates and export duties, while increasing the salaries of the Ceylon Civil Service. The Ceylonese leaders secured several major amendments in the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. But the Government used the official bloc to carry out its desires and rejected these amendments in the Legislative Council by 19 votes to 18. This action raised a major constitutional issue and fanned the flames of the prevailing opposition. Fourteen members of the Council staged a dramatic walk-out on the 29th September 1922. The Ceylonese-owned press had banner headlines which emphasised the autocratic nature of the prevailing system of government. Numerous public protest meetings were assembled. Eleven elected Legislative Councillors resigned.[29] While the heated reactions focussed largely on the constitutional implications of the Government's actions, the foundations had been provided by the preceding opposition to the new fiscal proposals. At an emergency meeting of the LCPA on the 20th August, 1922 several resolutions had been accepted in opposition to the increase in the railway transport rates and the inequality in the duties on coconut oil and copra in relation to those on tea. Another of its resolutions ran thus:

> This Association deplores the fact that the Government is seeking to raise further revenue by taxing food, clothing, transport, and agriculture produce for the second time within the last few years, while no steps have been taken to introduce an income tax.[30]

Support for the introduction of an income tax was another expression of economic nationalism and patrimonial welfarism. Indeed, there are suggestions that this proposal carried for the reformist nationalists of the early twentieth century the magic hopes which the cry of

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"nationalisation" carried for the Left-inclined radicals of the 1950s and 1960s. Requests that an income tax should be introduced appear to have been broached in the 1900s, if not earlier. The request was soon converted into a demand. It was the subject of a major resolution at the inaugural meeting of the Ceylon National Congress in December 1919, a resolution proposed by James Peiris, seconded by Armand Souza, and supported by Arthur V. Dias in a Sinhala speech. The resolution itself was couched in general terms:

> This Congress is of opinion that the present system of taxation is unsatisfactory and its incidence inequitable, and urges on the Government the appointment of a Commission to undertake a comprehensive revision of the taxation with a view to lighten the burden that falls heavily on the masses.

But in his speech James Peiris emphasised "the urgent need for the imposition of an Income Tax to support the revenue from indirect taxation" and argued that this was a widely-supported "national demand." He consistently harped on the inequalities in the prevailing system of taxation and employed statistics in his support; and neatly encapsulated his argument in the comment that the poor man's kerosene oil was taxed, whereas the rich man's electric light and gas was not. He argued that the merchant class could easily be taxed more and made a pointed reference to the trading capital of the Nattukoddai Chettiyars at this point. Another of his arguments related to "the great injustice done to the people of the country by allowing outsiders to exploit its resources and carry away large sums out of the Colony without sharing the burden of taxation."[31] In an editorial specifically devoted to the support of this resolution, the *Ceylon Daily News* observed:

> [James Peiris's] lofty idealism is... the most convincing proof that if power is given to the people of this country, it will be employed towards the amelioration of the disabling conditions under which the poorer class of this country live at present.[32]

The request had some support within the Government of Ceylon, but its course towards the introduction of an income tax was, as usual, slow and deliberate. It was not until late 1930 that specific statutory proposals were presented in the Legislative Council. Some European, Chettiyar and Ceylonese trading interests combined with some reformist and conservative politicians to defeat this bill in December 1930. This outcome aroused the anger of the Ceylon National Congress as well as the Labour Party. It was only a temporary setback, however, and the new legislative body under the

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Donoughmore Constitution, the State Council, soon had an income tax ordinance on the statute books by 1932. Throughout the debate on the subject in the period 1919-32, the significant facet is that those reformist nationalists who favoured the introduction of an income tax saw it not only as a measure of equity, but also as a means by which the profits secured by foreign capitalists could be taxed, that is with special reference to the British and Indian capitalist interests within the island.

Inevitably, the nationalists also began to emphasise the need for protectionist tariff policies. The early voices in favour of this course seem to have been rather disjointed. Among the early advocates were K. Balasingham and the Tamil intellectuals responsible for the publication of the *Ceylon Economist* (1919). Mahadeva's acerbic comments in 1926, quoted above, were part of a speech in the Legislative Council in which he wanted "something to be done to develop and to promote our interests, and also to adopt some system of protection for the Ceylonese," and in which he cited the example of the governments of Japan and Mysore, where new industries had been fostered.[33] In December 1931 the Ceylon National Congress advocated "the imposition of suitable tariffs on imported goods which could be produced locally."[34] Oliver notes that the State Council pursued a policy of introducing "bargaining tariffs within the framework of an imperial preference system," particularly with reference to certain minor food products.[35] In 1939 the Ceylon National Congress advocated a food production policy that would "reserve the local market for the local producers" through "decisive measures..., either by way of quotas or prohibitive duties or total prohibition of importation of certain articles."[36]

Such protectionist devices intruded into British imperial interests and occasionally gave rise to some friction with the colonial authorities. The British Government's unilateral decision to impose quotas on Japanese textiles through the Ceylon Importation of Textiles (Quotas) Order-in-Council of the 30th July 1934 produced sharp protests. While attacking the constitutional implications of such laws and drawing the lesson that "complete self-government" was a must, several politicians made it a point to argue that the quota system would have detrimental effects on "the poorer classes" and "the poor of this country."[37] In their concern for the coconut producers after this trade was seriously affected by the Depression, however, the leading politicians had the interests of the plantation capitalists, that is, their own interests, in mind. "An Ordinance to make provision for the relief of the Coconut Industry and for the Marketing and Exportation of the Products Ordinance" was enacted in 1934; and in its

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1939 programme the Ceylon National Congress returned to this charge with several proposals in aid of the local producers, within a subsection which began with the lament that "1/3 of the total (coconut) acreage had already passed or was about to pass into the hands of the creditors, chiefly chettiars."[38]

The policies towards the Indian immigrant labourers that were pursued in the years after 1930 also illustrate the protectionist patriotism of the era. At its annual sessions in 1930, 1931 and 1938 the Ceylon National Congress called for the restriction of labour immigration from other countries and in 1940 sought the prohibition of immigration wherever foreign labour was in competition with Ceylonese labour. Significantly, their resolution on this point in 1931 was linked with that on tariffs (quoted above), and another proposal seeking new labour legislation, under a preamble which ran as follows: "In view of the fact that the inadequate protection of Ceylonese industries and Ceylonese labour has proved gravely detrimental to the true interests of the country."[39] Again, the Congress recorded its views on this subject under the sub-heading, "Ceylonization," when it drew up a "Policy and Programme" in mid-1935. Here, they expressed "grave misgiving(s)" about "the wholesale registration of (the) floating population" of "non-Ceylonese" estate and urban labour (for which, read "Indian labour") as well as this group's efforts to claim political power." [40] Accordingly, too, the State Council took special care to deny to the Indians the benefits of the Land Development Ordinance of 1935 and the Village Communities Ordinance of 1937. These were among the earliest statutes in which a definition of a "Ceylonese citizen," as the State Council and the politically-dominant nationalists saw it, was incorporated. They provided an early indication of a policy that culminated in the Citizenship and Emigration Act of 1949. The central premise behind these statements and actions was the Ceylonese politicians' insistence that the Indian labourers had "no permanent interest in the country."[41]

> In is unthinkable that we should give.... full rights of citizenship to people who have not made Ceylon their permanent home. The vast majority of the Indians in Ceylon consider India to be their home and Ceylon their place of occupation... They do not bring their families here. They are here only to earn and to make money and take it away to India,

proclaimed D. S. Senanayake in December 1940. More pithily, P. de S. Kularatne depicted (1942) the Indians as having "one foot in Ceylon and both feet in India."[42] On the public platform these contentions were

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sometimes retailed in violently anti-Indian and chauvinistic tones.[43] Distortions and half-truths were widely utilised and probably remained unquestioned within the audience they were aimed at. These techniques included the reiteration of deep-rooted fears and a hoary old demonology: "unless we stem the tide of this growing domination of Indians in our economic and social life, our extinction as a Ceylonese nation is inevitable," concluded D.S. Senanayake in a typical instance.[44]

While this line of policy had wide support among many of the Sinhalese-dominated political associations, it was one of the few expressions of economic nationalism that drew no support from the radical socialist groups. To the LSSP, for instance, the Indian labourers were proletarians in downtrodden suffering; as potential comrades-in-arms, indeed, it was considered inevitable that they should, in the near future, become "the main centre of the attack on Capitalism in Ceylon."[45] The radical socialists were not concerned only with the British.

The reformist nationalists also devoted some attention to the need for better credit facilities for local capitalists and cultivators. In arguing for the establishment of a State Mortgage Bank in the 1920s, it was considered that such a bank "would be a major stimulus to commercial, industrial, and agricultural growth and would enable the island's nationals to compete much more successfully with British enterprise."[46] These hopes did not materialise. In 1932, therefore, the State Council appointed a Banking Commission,[47] while support for the establishment of a Bank of Ceylon gathered strength in the 1930s. Again,

> Commerce and trade are the life-blood of a nation and unless a fair proportion of the Island's trade is controlled by Ceylonese, the task of achieving economic independence would appear to be futile,

stated H.W. Amarasuriya in 1937 as a preliminary to the demand for "greater credit facilities and the promotion of limited liability companies."[48] These programmatic wants were obviously in the class interests of the bourgeoisie, from which class many of the nationalists were drawn. As such, they did not find favour among the radical socialist nationalists. The latter were as keen to strengthen indigenous financial institutions in relation to those of the British; but they combined this goal with their inclination towards central financing and central banking. While the Board of Ministers favoured a state-aided Bank of Ceylon, the Sama Samajists argued for a state bank.[49]

In the framework of economic analysis in which the reformist as well as radical nationalists set their proposals, however, there were large

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and important areas of agreement. This is amply demonstrated in the several drafts of the programme drawn up by the Ceylon National Congress in 1939. Echoing the views which had been presented in the 1920s by such individuals as Mahadeva and G.K.W. Perera as well as those retailed by the radical socialists, the 1939 programme (or its drafts) included the following diagnostic conclusions:

> It will be necessary to show [the people of this country] that [they] are exploited, chiefly by the British imperialists, the other Europeans and foreigners.
>
> Not only do British imperialists make money by producing raw products on our land, and with our labour, they make money by importing their goods to our land.
>
> There is... a tremendous drain of wealth from this country into foreign lands and the contribution that those who enjoy this wealth make to the finances of the country is comparatively very small.[50]

It was also stressed that "100% of [the island's] banking functions until recently were in the hands of foreigners," and reference was made to "the stranglehold now exercised by the foreign banks on Ceylonese business enterprise."[51] A similar view was pressed with reference to the island's trade; and the programme advocated nationalisation and state control over the importation and distribution of rice and currystuffs on the ground that the only people to suffer from this step would be foreigners.[52] Taken as a whole, the 1939 programme prompts one to think of Romesh Dutt in reincarnation. Ironically, however, the foreign devils and exploiters were not only the British, but included Indian traders, moneylenders and labourers.

Economic nationalism was also reflected in the widespread support as for a policy of industrialisation. In the 1930s most shades of political opinion favoured such a programme, though the Leftist associations, by political necessity and doctrinal inclinations, revealed perhaps the strongest commitment to industrialisation. For instance, in 1931 the Ceylon National Congress wanted an official report on the state of the existing industries and on the "possibilities of starting new industries." The Ceylon Banking Commission argued (1934) for industrialisation and in 1936 the Congress reiterated the needs for "a well-considered scheme of State-aided industrial development."[53]

An opinion expressed more latterly (1944) by Dudley Senanayake illustrates the type of diagnosis which lay behind this prescription: ".... the progress of a country, its place in the civilised world, is judged by the

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extent of industrialisation achieved," said he.[54] In other words, the intention was to achieve higher income-levels and enhance national strength by these means. The reasoning derived from the observed association between manufacturing and high incomes in certain nations and a simplistic appraisal of the international scene in terms of two polar models: the industrialised imperial powers and the agricultural colonial peoples. Therefore, as Oliver notes, "the economic patterns accompanying major power and colonial status became ... symbols of dominance and dependence."[55] One had to industrialise in order to break free of this dependence.

But there was economic reasoning as well. The Great Depression underlined the need to reduce the level of unemployment, a goal which, in their view, industrial growth could achieve. In general, industrialisation was regarded as a diversification and strengthening of the economy:

> The most urgent problem is the opening up of new industries, both agricultural and manufacturing, with the main object of catering primarily for the home market and thereby rendering the economy less susceptible to the vagaries of markets abroad,

concluded the Banking Commission in 1934.[56] In the State Council in the 1930s majority opinion expected such industrial development to be undertaken by private enterprise, with the role of the state being confined to the supporting institutions and policies, and the establishment of model factories. The radical socialists, however, assigned a dominant role to the state and always had nationalisation as a principal plank in their programmatic plan for a socialist state. In pressing for industrialisation and a programme of public works, they spoke of state and collective farms, wanted the nationalisation of transport services and asked for a national bank as an instrument for the industrial development of the island.[57] Perhaps as a result of their propaganda several reformist nationalists and the State Council revealed a gradual shift to the Left. By 1939-40 the Ceylon National Congress favoured state industries rather than state-aided industries. To quote from the programme they adopted in late 1939:

> The State will promote and assist the development of every industry. All Key Industries will be State-owned. Legislation will be introduced to prevent the floatation of companies, unless there is provision for the investing of Ceylonese money, the employment of Ceylonese labour, and provision for the majority of shares to belong to Ceylonese. We shall also support the development of cottage industries. The importation of all essential commodities

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will be by the State. 95% of our trade is in foreign hands. The measure we suggest will permit Ceylonese to control the distribution of local products in the internal market.

All public transport services will be State-owned.[58]

So too did S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (in 1945) emphasise the great need "to increase the national wealth" through planned agriculture and planned industries; and further contended that such planning implied "a great measure of State control and even nationalization in the case of certain major industries."[59] During the early 1940s, wartime needs as well as the State Council's growing impatience with the achievement of private enterprise led the government to start and operate a number of factories itself. The trend was consolidated in the *Report on Industrial Development and Policy* presented by the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce in 1946, where it was advocated that "basic industries should be State monopolies."[60]

IV

Though demands for constitutional and administrative reform always occupied a primary place in the agitation mounted by the reformist nationalists during the years *before* 1930-31, an interest in social conditions and social welfare was not entirely lacking. In particular, the reformist nationalists called for improvements in the educational facilities and the conditions of labour. The emergence of A.E. Goonesinha and the formation of the Ceylon Labour Union in September 1922 served as an added stimulus to the programmatic attention to labour questions -- for the tiny band of radicals under Goonesinha consistently highlighted the exploitative and difficult conditions to which labourers were subject. With the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931, the Ceylonese politicians were in a better position to convert several of their programmatic statements into positive statutory and administrative measures; and the fact that they had to answer to an electorate with universal suffrage ensured that they did so. At the same time, after 1931, considerable attention was paid to the improvement of health facilities.

Resolutions presented at the sessions of the Ceylon National Congress in the years 1919-28 are among the illustrations of the early interest in educational changes. Several resolutions wanted "a much larger proportion of the public revenue" devoted to education. The aim was to secure "the vigorous promotion of all branches of public education" and to

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"bring education within reach of the masses." In supporting a resolution on these lines at the annual sessions of the Congress held in March and April 1923, Miss Aseline Perera even proclaimed that "the attainment of Swaraj was impossible without sufficient culture in their mothertongue" and drew applause from the conferees.[61] In 1925 it was also proposed that the Government should establish "a sufficient number of vernacular schools in all parts of the country so that the Compulsory Education Ordinance [might] be universally enforced" and that industrial classes should be included in all village schools wherever local conditions permitted.[62]

At the inaugural meeting of the Ceylon National Congress in 1919 a far-reaching resolution seeking to ameliorate the conditions of labour in the island was adopted and placed before the Government. It included demands for minimum wages, the regulation of working hours, the abolition of child labour, the repeal of penal clauses for breaches of civil contract and the recognition of workers' rights to form associations. The commitment of the Congress to these objectives was emphasised at the inaugural meeting of the Ceylon Worker's Federation in February 1920 and Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam also advocated the formation of unions and societies among workers of all categories.[63] A request that the Government should appoint a Commission to inquire into labour conditions and to propose reforms was sponsored by the Ceylon Workers' Federation (an affiliated association dominated by moderates and reformists) at the Congress Sessions of March-April 1923 and taken up by the Ceylon Labour Union in 1923-24. Minimum wages, maximum working hours and workmen's compensation formed the subject of another resolution in 1927.[64] In 1931, as well as the manifestoes it adopted in 1935 and 1939, the Ceylon National Congress advocated legislation to improve the working and living conditions of workers. In the State Council in 1931 Susanta de Fonseka spoke of "the necessity" to introduce "a Factory Act, a Housing Act, a much-needed Workmen's Compensation Act, and such other acts;" and stressed that "contented labour [was] a national asset."[65] The Ceylon Labour Party (formed 1928) under Goonesinha and the radical socialists in the LSSP (formed December 1935) added their voices to this line of programme. Indeed, pressure on this front provided a focal point in the activities of the Left parties; while the political situation and their opposition to Sri Lanka's involvement in the second world war led the LSSP to promote a series of strikes among the plantation workers in 1939-40. In the State Council concrete measures were retarded in the early 1930s by the effects of the economic depression, but an Industrial Disputes (Conciliation) Ordinance

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was passed in 1932 and a Workmen's Compensation Ordinance was enacted in 1935, while the right of workmen to combine was recognised by the Trade Union's Ordinance of 1935. Forward-moving pieces of legislation followed in subsequent years: in 1939 the Shops Ordinance, the Maternity Benefits Ordinance and the Children and Young Persons Ordinance; in 1941 the Wages Board Ordinance as well as a Factories Ordinance.[66]

Social welfarism at its most obvious is illustrated in the decision taken by the State Council in 1936 at the suggestion of its two LSSP representatives to provide a free mid-day meal for needy school children. This step was part and parcel of a continuous attention to the health and educational needs of the country. Ananda Wickremeratne emphasises that "the broad impulse towards social welfare in the Donoughmore period manifested itself in two conspicuous directions -- education and health." These programmes were based on the central premise that the improvement of such facilities would raise "the standard of life among the village poor."[67]

Educational policies in the period 1931-48, according to Wickremeratne, were directed by "the desire to bring about a semblance of equality [in] educational opportunities." "The decision to establish government Central Schools was an attempt to redress the balance" in favour of the underprivileged.[68] Both C.W.W. Kannangara (Minister of Education 1931-1947) and the members of the State Council initiated a programme of establishing schools in rural areas, though their achievements were invariably restricted by financial constraints. The concept of "free education" developed out of this line of interest. At the annual sessions of the Ceylon National Congress in 1934 and 1935 E.A.P. Wijeyeratne echoed this emerging interest when he suggested that "immediate steps [should be] taken to make primary education, both in English and the Vernaculars, free and compulsory all over the country." His proposal developed out of the belief that every voter had to be turned into "an enlightened citizen" in order to prevent a brown oligarchy replacing the "foreign bureaucracy" and in order to enable democratic institutions to function successfully.[69] Yet it would be perhaps closer to the bone if one suggests that these demands derived largely from a combination of two ideological strains: one, the goal of distributive justice, which implied an increase in the opportunities for social mobility made available to the people; and second, indigenist and populist lines of thought which supported the replacement of things foreign with things local. Be that as it may, eventually, in October 1945 the State Council took the decision to establish "free education" and accepted the principle that all education should be in the mother tongue.[70]

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The decision to extend vernacular education was merely one conduit in a series of excavations which were devoted to the re-establishment of the vernaculars and other things indigenous. Attention to these matters had not been entirely lacking in the early twentieth century.[71] The influence of a wider electorate after 1931 guaranteed that they would come increasingly to the forefront and take more specific form. Since English was the language of education, administration and legislative enactment, the mass of the people encountered numerous irritations, besides disadvantages which had deep economic implications. This was quickly realised. In July 1932 G.K.W. Perera presented several resolutions in the State Council that attempted to promote the use of the vernaculars in judicial and civil administration. Two years later at the annual sessions of the Ceylon National Congress, he observed:

> One of the greatest handicaps the people suffer from is the language of Government. It is most absurd for us to fight for rights on behalf of the large majority who compose the agricultural population of this country, when we deny ourselves the rights of conducting our government in the people's languages.[72]

Similarly, when the LSSP called for the use of the vernaculars in recording entries at police stations and in the proceedings of the lower courts, it was focusing on very real irritations.

Though not entirely oblivious to the implications of the language issue, the radical socialists and several reformist nationalists nevertheless do not seem to have grasped its political potentialities. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike did. The formation of the Sinhala Maha Sabha about the year 1934 or 1935 was both a response to the underlying substratum of indigenist revivalism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as well as an attempt to convert it into a political force. The Ceylon National Congress, too, remained vigorously attentive to indigenism. Its 1939 programme not only demanded that Sinhala and Tamil be introduced as the official languages in line with the principle of having "a national language," but also wanted an educational commission that would draft "a scheme of national education suited to the genius... of [the] people;" and expressed its desire to have the University of Ceylon transformed into "a seat of oriental culture rather than an institution imitating the Western models."[73] It is indicative of the manner in which the language issue was associated with nativism that a resolution at the annual sessions of the Ceylon National Congress in 1940 which wanted steps to be taken "to foster the use of the mother tongue" was linked with other demands relating to a swadeshi movement, a national anthem, a

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Ceylon flag and the teaching of Ceylon history.[74] The presence of personnel from the local elite in the echelons of the Congress was sufficient to guarantee the incorporation of the vernacular language issue in the Congress programmes of the 1940s. At the annual sessions in December 1941, the Badulla National Congress presented a resolution which demanded the right to use one's mother tongue in various fields of administration which the resolution specified in detail.[75]

It was one of the Young Turks in the Congress, J.R. Jayewardene,who presented a motion in the State Council in May 1944 which proposed that Sinhala should be made "the official language of Ceylon within a reasonable period of time." Nativism had not been taken to its most exclusive and extremist conclusions as yet, however. An amendment which coupled the Tamil language with the Sinhalese was readily accepted and the State Council approved this policy resolution on the 25th May 1944. Bandaranaike followed this up with a proposal (20th September 1945) which led to the establishment of a committee entrusted with the task of suggesting what steps should be taken to effect this transition.[76] Taken together with the new educational policies, it is clear that a process had been set in motion to improve the status and role of the indigenous languages. Viewed in doctrinal terms, these proposals must also be considered ideological pillars in a structure of thought which had such buttresses as the Antiquities Ordinance (no. 9) of 1940, the Colombo Museums Ordinance (no. 4 of 1933), and the consistent support for the strengthening of ayurvedic medicine.[77] Indigenism and cultural nationalism were on the upswing.

But the language proposals also had deep economic significance. This was widely realised and it was partly, if not largely, as an economic instrument and an attack on privilege that these suggestions were pressed.

> We trust that our efforts will remove the gulf that now divides the people into two classes, and thus not only afford the vast majority of our countrymen better opportunities of participating fully in the life of the nation but also create a cultural and literary renaissance equalling the golden ages of Lanka's historic past,

concluded the select committee of the State Council in the report which it completed in 1946.[78]

In the period under consideration, then, economic and social ideas were characterised by economic nationalism and welfarism. These two facets were also tinged and embellished by populist and indigenist lines of thought and by economic liberalism. More latterly, etatist and socialist

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notions entered this array of embellishments to form an uneasy melange of ideas. The economic thought of many members of the intelligentsia and the leading politicians was, as Oliver observes, "not an integrated or a standardized body of doctrine so much as a shifting mixture of policies representing varying degrees of reliance on individual initiative and state enterprise and control."[79] While the moderates and the reformist nationalists remained committed to the concepts of private property, legal liberty and the profit motive, their thinking was eclectic and adaptive; and they increasingly assigned major economic roles to the state. Indeed, welfarism appeared at an early stage -- in the 1920s if not earlier; and received greater emphasis in the decades before the 1940s than Oliver allows for.[80]

How can one account for these features? In a situation of colonial subjugation the emergence of economic nationalism is only to be expected. One need not dwell to long on this crucial causal force. Its significance is implicit and sometimes made explicit in much of the account provided in the preceding pages.

The class interests of the indigenous bourgeoisie provided another motive force. The economic demands were presented by a Ceylonese elite which included numerous members of the indigenous bourgeoisie. The latter, or sections thereof, found themselves in an unequal position in relation to British economic interests within the island. They also began to perceive that discriminatory fiscal policies were being pursued. In this situation it was not surprising that they should seek to redress the balance through political instruments. It is not insignificant that Mahadeva's lashing criticism of the British in 1926 and his support for protectionist tariff policies should be accompanied by the following lament:

> We lack capital and we find that any venture of ours is unable to meet the competition from the strong, well-backed, influential and rich companies that are in existence and are carrying out of this Island what should enure to the benefit of this Island... We want Government to give us a helping hand, foster our industries, lend us capital, prohibit more than a proportion of share capital being held outside the island and so make us an industrially strong country.[81]

Similar reasoning threaded the policy and programme adopted by the Ceylon National Congress in late 1939.

In this corpus of thought the British were not the only alien and opposing interest. The Indian Chettiyar community, other alien

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moneylenders and the Indian immigrant workers were also treated as hostile interests by several nationalists. This conception was moulded by ancient traditions as well as recent history: by age-old anti Indian sentiments, by the economic power wielded by the foreign traders and moneylenders, and by the manner in which the Indian workers were invariably linked with the British plantations. The collective identity of many Ceylonese nationalists (especially those of Sinhalese identity) did not, quite positively did not, include the Indian immigrants of recent origin within the concept "Ceylonese." Indeed, the latter were among "the enemies" who kept the lines of collective identity clear and firm. In this fashion, therefore, ideological concepts influenced the specific form of economic nationalism just as economic competition consolidated and moulded these very same concepts.

The emphasis on welfarism and distributive justice was obviously encouraged by a competitive parliamentary form of government under universal adult suffrage. While a few territorial constituencies elected representatives to the legislature from the early 1920s, this was under a highly restricted franchise of about 4 percent of the population. The fuller weight of this stimulus dates from 1931 when universal adult franchise was initiated. In competing for the votes of the populace, the members of the national elite and the local notables were forced to nurse their constituencies and to build up an image as "do-gooders."

The pressures mounted by a few trade unions directed by A.E. Goonesinha and, more latterly, by the Sama Samajists *may* have resulted in specific measures of distributive justice. It is not so much that these pressures were an immediate threat (before 1945) to the moderate politicians, but that they would have been induced to look to the near future and to consider the need to divert potential threats. More influential was socialist ideology. Socialist ideas had begun to trickle in through books, other printed media and other cultural channels during the 1920s. With the emergence in the early and mid 1930s of a committed little group of Marxists, many of them after a sojourn in the West, socialist thought was much more widely canvassed.[82] The formation of the LSSP in late 1935 gave socialism a new institutional base and greater thrust, though associational foundations had also been provided in the early 1930s by some of the youth leagues. The economic successes of the Soviet Union and the general emphasis on economic planning in the West tended to give socialism further credence. It must not be too readily assumed that the LSSP leaders were committed Trotskyists in the mid 1930s -- for their open espousal of

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Trotskyist doctrines did not appear till late 1939 and the early 1940s.[83] Be that as it may, till about 1940 they revealed an admiration for the economic achievements of the Soviet Union. The latter's achievements were openly praised,[84] and bolstered the predilection for central planning and for the goal of distributive justice which the Leftists had already acquired from Marxism. And the propaganda of the Sama Samajists began to influence the moderate politicians as well as the educated youth in important ways.

However, one must remember that these causal influences were operative largely in the 1930s and thereafter. Before 1930 the leading political practitioners did not have to work under the pressures of an electorate armed with universal suffrage. There was no "Red bogey" on the horizon. It is doubtful whether Goonesinha and his tiny band of associates were ever a serious challenge to the Congress leadership; and some of his associates were more closely linked with the Ceylon National Congress than with Goonesinha.[85] Yet, in the 1920s, one found some measure of attention to social welfarism and distributive justice. This implies that other factors were at play and were responsible for these early blossoms of welfarist thought. It also follows that these same factors would probably have contributed towards the continuation and further development of welfarism after 1931, though obviously their greater significance lies in the period before 1930. What, then, were these factors?

One point of inspiration was undoubtedly that of Sinhala Buddhist culture with it emphasis on merit accumulation and a requirement that wealth should be employed in "socially-approved ways" -- as manifest in the alms-givings, religious charities and philanthropic aid to fellow-villagers and the poor that was expected from the *radala* landlords and the local notables in general.[86] Bechert is altogether unequivocal on this point: in his view an important "constituent [of] Buddhist political and social thinking is the idea of the welfare state;" and this orientation was epitomised in the model presented by the ideal monarch, King Asoka.[87] This has also been elaborated and emphasised by Sarkisyanz. He has documented the manner in which Asokan "Buddhist social welfare ideals" were professed by several Sinhala kings and continuously emphasised in the island's ancient chronicles, while remaining an undying ideal and expectation in Burma. It would appear that in modern Burma the populace expected the government to be a source of largesse, "in the spirit of the traditional lore about the ideal Buddhist state as a source of plenty and about economic welfare as a prerequisite for institutionalized Buddhism."[88] It was an accepted norm, moreover, that merit (*pin*) could be gathered through good works. Such

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merit influenced one's future *karma*. The urge to win merit, therefore, stimulated "economic activity through public works as well as private endowments." Sarkisyanz concludes that Asoka's social emphasis became a firmly embedded ingredient in Buddhist social ethics, "the ethos of *lay* Buddhism acting within the world of Impermanence in pursuing Nirvana by creating the outward social conditions for such a striving towards the overcoming of Attachment."[89]

It should be recognised, however, that such ideals were not confined to the Buddhist lands of southern Asia. It would seem that patrimonialism has been a longstanding tradition and norm in the Indian sub-continent and neighbouring lands. Accordingly a ruler was viewed as the benevolent father of the people, a "*mâ-bâp*" as the Burmese would say, and was expected to see to popular welfare.[90] In this fashion he was legitimised in his role. As Milton Singer notes for India, the "traditional philosophy of the religious leaders" emphasised that "kings and rich men" must be generous in their charities. And in the practice, from the earliest times "kings and rich merchants [had] ...been the patrons of temples and *mathas*, religious sacrifices and celebrations, schools, pandits, poets, musicians and dancers." In this fashion they could "transform wealth and power into religious merit and social prestige."[91] It was a norm that persisted into the twentieth century. Among the groups that are known to have adhered closely to this norm in the recent centuries are the Chettiyars, a trading community of Dravidian origin.[92] In such a context it might be more precise to refer to Asian patrimonialism, or Asia's "eleemonysary traditions,"[93] as one might also say, as an influential motor-force in the leanings towards welfarism displayed by the Ceylonese elites. In the Ceylonese case, of course, it was powerfully reinforced by Buddhist traditions and concepts.

The populist strains in the thinking of the Ceylonese intelligentsia may also be presented as a factor which led them in the direction of welfarism. The role of this ideology and strategy[94] has been a strangely neglected field in our historiography. Yet the nationalist literature dating from the late nineteenth century, including that propagated by the Anagarika Dharmapala, displays its recurring attractions. The vague egalitarianism and the glorification of "the people" so characteristic of populism was present in substantial measure. There was concern, too, about the gap between the masses and the Western-educated élite. A critique was levelled at the process of "denationalisation" which was believed to have set in and against the *deracines* which this process is alleged to have spawned.[95] It

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was a critique that was not confined to Dharmapala and his followers, or to Ananda Coomaraswamy. It had several adherents among the reformist nationalists. As a concomitant, and stemming from the retrospective romanticism and indigenism of the era, one found an emphasis on the values and interests of the people. "The amelioration of the condition of the masses and the upliftment of the depressed classes," to borrow a phrase penned in 1912, was an important objective for several nationalists.[96] This goal infused the programmes of the temperance movement, the Lanka Mahajana Sabha and the Ceylon National Congress.[97] As we have noticed earlier, the debate on the waste lands question also served to bring out this ideal.

Another factor was the demonstrative influence of social welfare policies in Britain. The nationalists of all shades had been, after all, through an education system which would have inevitably emphasised the virtues of British government and contemporary British policy. A few nationalists had been studying in England during the administrations of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith (1906-16) when several new departures in social welfarism were launched; and others would have read about these measures.[98] What is more, the reformist nationalists consciously sought to outflank the local British administration and the Colonial Office by appealing to Liberal opinion within Britain, and more particularly to the Liberal and Labour parties.[99] Such appeals presupposed an indication of their (the Ceylonese leaders') ability to operate self-governing institutions as well as an adoption of all the ideological paraphernalia of the British Liberal tradition. Indeed, it was partly for this reason that they poured abuse on "communalism" and indulged in rhetoric against the use of caste and religious appeals at the hustings.[100] Whether the product of British Liberal ideology or because of a conscious strategy which sought the support of Liberals and Labourites in Britain, whether by conviction or as a necessary window-dressing, therefore, the reformist nationalists may have been led to include social welfare policies in their platform.

VI

In sum, it can be suggested that age-old patrimonial norms, populist sentiments and strategies, and the example of social welfare policies in Britain explain the early emergence of social welfarism in the thinking of the indigenous political leaders. More latterly, the influence of universal suffrage in a competitive parliamentary form of government and the entry

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of socialist ideas gave a fresh and sharper impetus towards welfare programmes. Throughout, welfarism was associated with, and generally subordinate to, the demands of economic nationalism deriving from a growing awareness of the island's subject political and economic status. Such feelings focused on the share of the island's productive assets and the materially rewarding economic activities available to the "Ceylonese" peoples. As such they involved self-perceptions which defined who was "Ceylonese" and who was not. As such economic nationalism was fostered by the movement of Sinhala Buddhist cultural revivalism and Sinhala nativism dating from the mid nineteenth century. The chauvinistic attacks on Indian, Cochin and Moor traders in the issues of the *Sarasavi Sandarâsa* and in the writing and speeches of Dharmapala, Piyadasa Sirisena *et al*, Dharmapala's hostility to the diffusion of European consumer goods within the island, and his concern for the elevation of the island's economic strength,[101] all these characteristics heralded and illustrated the association between cultural revivalism and the policies of indigenisation (Ceylonisation) and protectionism which were an integral part of the ideology of economic nationalism during the twentieth century.

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* This article is a re-worked and re-organised version of material that is embedded in chapters 5 and 6 of my introduction "Elites, Nationalisms and the Nationalist Movement in British Ceylon" in Roberts (ed.) 1977. It also uses material in Roberts 1974c, 1974d and 1975b.

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11. E.g. Roberts (ed.) 1977, pp. 1124-25, 1146, 1374-75, 1395-96, 1780, 1782 and 1813-15.
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17. Roberts (ed.), 1977, pp. 1190-91, 1266, 1270, 1288.
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I am grateful to Dr. R.A. Ariyaratne and Prof. K.M. de Silva for clarifying certain points.

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93. A phrase borrowed from L.A. Wickremeratne, who, significantly, uses it as a part explanation for the education and other welfare policies in the 1930s and 1940s (in *UCHC*, 1973, pp. 481-84).
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Chapter 3

ETHNICITY, CASTE AND THE LEGITIMACY OF CAPITALISM

Mick Moore

1. Introduction

How have issues of collective identity shaped Sri Lankan politics in the half century since independence? Few of us would hesitate to answer first in terms of ethnic conflict. This paper deals with a less dramatic, but related and equally persistent, connection between collective identities and public affairs: the ways in which ethnic and caste identities are defined in relation to capitalist enterprise, and the impact of this on government's broad economic strategy, i.e. the choice between more or less statist/socialist and market/capitalist economic policies. The central theme is the changing extent to which capitalism has been considered illegitimate because alien to, and exploitative of, the 'core' political community, the (rural, Goyigama, Buddhist) Sinhalese. There are six main components to my argument:

(i) Modern capitalist enterprise is indeed 'alien' to the (rural, Goyigama, Buddhist) Sinhalese in a historical sense.

(ii) The relatively sophisticated structure of capitalist enterprise that emerged in the colonial period was dominated by various categories of 'aliens.' The more alien the group in a cultural and geographical sense, the greater their role in capitalist enterprise. The pattern was, and is, more continuous than dichotomous. The best metaphor is that of the layered onion. At the heart lies the ('Goyigama,' Buddhist) Sinhalese villager. Each successive population layer is more involved in capitalist enterprise and more alien in terms of ('Goyigama,' Buddhist) Sinhalese nationalist identity and imagery: other Sinhalese, including 'minority castes,' Christians and an important group of (Buddhist and Christian) Sinhalese capitalists; other communities associated to some degree with capitalist enterprise that are admitted to have some historic claim to residence in the island (Sri Lanka Muslims and Sri Lanka Tamils); members of a number tiny 'Indian Trading Communities' (my term), who have long had a local presence, but are sometimes still viewed as outsiders (Bharathas, Bohras, Chetties, Indian Muslims, Memons, Parsis and Sindhis); and then the British, who dominated the more formal sectors of the economy, especially

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plantation production and associated activities, for some time after independence.

(iii) There was a structural tension between political and business power that was expressed ideologically and in terms of caste and ethnic identity.

(iv) Independence and the gradual decay of British economic dominance did not put an end to this tension, because there were several other layers to the onion in addition to the British outer skin.

(v) The statist-cum-socialist economic policies pursued during most of the post-Independence period were legitimated partly in terms of the alien and exploitative nature of the private sector.

(vi) Changes in the character of the private sector have over time alleviated this tension between political and business power. It is for this reason easier for contemporary governments to pursue 'free market' economic policies without generating stronger internal political opposition.

Parts of this argument that are documented elsewhere are not repeated here. In particular, I do not here explore in detail the ideologies of Sinhalese nationalism, the ways in which they create a rural, Buddhist, non-commercial image of the essence of Sinhalese culture, and the connection with statist, anti-capitalist economic policies (Moore 1989, Samaraweera 1981, Spencer 1990:chapter 5). It is important to note the substantial convergence between these Sinhalese nationalist arguments for statist economic policies and arguments of a proletarian-consciousness nature rooted in Marxism. This convergence reflects the long history of cooperation and coalition in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s between the more militant Sinhalese Buddhist political party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and the Marxist-trades union movement.[1]

It is also important to mention that I am not arguing that the steady shift from statist to capitalist economic policies that began in 1977 and continues today is primarily the result either of internal political changes or, more narrowly, of the changing connection between caste-ethnic identity and capitalist enterprise. I argue only that these latter changes have made a contribution. The causes of the shift in economic strategy are complex, and closely bound up with Sri Lanka's unhappy experiences with 'socialism' during 1970-77 and with changes in: the international economy; the pattern of economic growth in Asia; elite perceptions about the viability of a private sector led strategy; dominant ideologies; the relative power, worldwide, of capital on the one hand and states and organised labour on

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the other; and the role played in Sri Lanka by aid donors and international financial institutions.

The paper falls into three main parts. I first draw some parallels between Sri Lanka and other Asian countries in relation to the issue of the contrasting identities of political and business elites. Then I put some flesh on the 'onion' imagery mentioned above by explaining the way in which various Sri Lankan ethnic and caste groups have related to political and business power. The third part of the paper explores four processes through which this tension between political and business power has abated: the very success of statist and nationalist economic policies in inducting more Sinhalese (Goyigama) into larger scale business; the ways in which minority business has adapted to threats and constraints; the changing structure of the private sector; and the capacity of the new, 'corporatised,' share-market oriented capitalism that has arisen in recent years to both disguise the ethnicity of capital and to generate a positive image of private enterprise that has cultural power and some attraction for the middle classes. I conclude with some observations on the difficulties faced in trying to understand whether differences of interest between sets of businessmen expressed in terms of collective identities have played a significant role in generating ethnic conflict.

2. Business and Political Power in Asia

It is no surprise that in Sri Lanka the processes of defining, confirming and re-defining collective identities have been closely related to patterns of involvement in, and political responses to, capitalist enterprise. The same is more or less true of most societies most of the time. And, because European colonialism was a system of political and economic domination within a capitalist framework, the point applies with special force to most of what was until recently termed the Third World. Within the Asian Third World, Sri Lanka belongs in a class with Bangladesh, Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. All these countries underwent a common experience as exporters of primary commodities under direct European colonial rule until the great wave of post-World War Two decolonisation.[2] They also shared a similar commercial structure: beneath the formally-organised European firms that occupied the peaks of the economy, especially the international trade sector, there was a layer of informally organised enterprises controlled by 'business communities' rooted in one or other of the two dominant cultures of the region, China

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and India.[3] Often caricatured as 'compradors' subordinate to European commerce, these business communities had a long history of enterprise outside their homelands, and had often been engaged in independent large scale, long distance trading before the establishment of the European colonial economy. They were simultaneously victims and beneficiaries of colonial rule. On the one hand, the Europeans cut deeply into their established activities. On the other hand, the rise of the commodity export economy provided new opportunities for entrepreneurship and profit (Ray 1995).

The patterns of involvement of these Chinese and Indian business groups with European commerce were complex, partly collaborative and partly competitive (Ray 1995). The consequences for the post-colonial political economy were broadly similar in all cases. The end of European political rule, and the partial withdrawal of European capital,[4] left Chinese and Indian capital occupying a position that varied from conspicuous to dominant (notably the Chinese in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia). There was a direct and highly visible tension between the continued prominence of foreign capital, European, Chinese or Indian, and the nationalist sentiments that suffused political discourse in the newly-independent polities. Fred Riggs, a prominent 1960s American modernisation theorist, captured the essence of this tension in his writings on 'pariah capitalism.' He applied the notion to Southeast Asia generally, but derived it mainly from Thailand, where Chinese capital was unusually ascendant, facing little competition either from abroad or from ethnic Thais (Riggs 1966). Riggs argued that successful capitalist development was unlikely because of the perverse equilibrium that existed in the relationship between these pariah capitalists and the 'indigenous' political, bureaucratic and military elites. The capitalists, being alien, had no political power independent of their economic muscle, and little prospect of obtaining it. They were essentially held to ransom by the political elite, and were obliged to pay off the elite as a condition for being permitted to remain in the country and do business. The elite in return had no incentive to try to create the conditions for successful private sector development -- they did not want business to be too successful and become independent -- and every reason to 'interfere' in markets and price setting, and to expand the public sector, as a means of extracting continual 'ransom' from pariah business.

Riggs' analysis may have been correct for the period when he was writing. It did not, however, remain valid for all time. In all the countries that I have grouped together with Sri Lanka, capitalism has either triumphed

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in a political sense or is in the process of doing so. Government ideology and policy is now based on the idea that the private sector is the main 'engine of growth,' and that the economic role of government is complementary or supportive. The 'nationality of capital' is no longer a major policy consideration or a widely used legitimation for statist or nationalist economic policies. The reasons why Riggs was wrong in the long term are too complex to detail here. The most fundamental is that he generalised on the basis of a partial and static model of a complex and interactive political and economic process. More things were going on than the simplified Riggs' model allowed, domestically and internationally.[5] The paths to the political rehabilitation of alien capital have differed between the various countries listed here. In Sri Lanka, as in all but one of the other countries (Malaysia), this (partial) rapprochement between political and business power has been the product of events, arguably even of capitalism as a system, but not in any significant degree the result of the intentions of those holding state power. There is no Sri Lankan analogue of the conscious attempt by the Malaysian ruling elite, especially the current Prime Minister, Mahathir, to remould the culture of the putatively-indigenous Malays to make them more like the putatively-commercial and enterprising Chinese.

3. The Onion: Ethnicity, Caste and Capitalist Enterprise

Long distance commerce and capitalism are indeed alien to Sri Lanka in an historical sense, especially to the Sinhalese. In the pre-colonial era, long distance trade was mostly in the hands of the Moors, Arabs and commercial groups based along the coast of modern Gujarat in India (Bose 1990). European colonial rulers, Portuguese, Dutch and above all the British, constructed the plantation sector and the modern commercial economy that largely grew up around it. The prosperity of the colonial economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century attracted members of Indian-based trading communities. The wealthiest were the Dawoodi Bohras, well established long distance traders from Cutch-Mandivi on the Gujarat coast who included merchant princelings in their number and specialised initially in importing food from India;[6] and the Nattukottai Chettiars, a trading caste from Tamil Nadu who became very large scale merchant bankers in Sri Lanka, Malaya and Burma (Rudner 1994, Weerasooria 1973). Others included Sindhis -- Hindus from what is now Pakistan who specialised in textile trading; Memons from Cutch-Mandivi; and various South Indians.

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The figures in Table 1 illustrate that, at the end of the colonial period, these 'Indian Trading Communities' were well represented even in what the British called the 'mercantile sector,' i.e. that part of the formal, organised sector not directly involved in plantation production. At that time it was estimated that 85% of the capital in the island was owned by foreigners (Wickremeratne 1973: 483); this figure can be no more than an approximate indicator.

Table 1: Ethnicity and Ownership of Companies in the 'Mercantile Sector,' 1940*

Ethnicity of owners	% of firms
British	50
Other 'Western'	5
'Indian Trading Groups' **	19
Sinhalese	17
Ceylon Muslim	5
Ceylon Tamil	2
Burgher	1
TOTAL	100

Notes

* - The figures apply to the 169 firms in the Mercantile List of 'Fergusons Directory,' 1940. The allocation was done by Dr. Tara Coomaraswamy, mainly on the basis of the names of senior staff. Where more than one ethnic group was involved in a company, the ethnicity of the most senior figure(s) was used.

** - These include Indian Muslims, Bohras, Gujaratis, Sindhis, Parsis, Colombo Chetties and various South Indians.

Among those groups that are classified as indigenous to Sri Lanka, three smaller communities were significantly involved in commerce and capitalism. The Sri Lanka Moors (Muslims) were the nearest to an indigenous 'trading community,' although they included large numbers of agriculturalists in the Eastern Province. The Sri Lanka Tamils were often viewed as traders because of the widespread presence of Tamil retailers and produce buyers in the Sinhalese areas. However, trading and commerce were not central to the ethos or organisation of the community. Sri Lanka Tamils were much more visible in education and public service. Few

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members of the community made great fortunes through capitalist enterprise. The most important 'indigenous' contribution to capitalist enterprise was made by a small Sinhalese caste, the Karâva.[7] The Karâva are often identified with fishing, although their own origin stories focus on military prowess and they have long been characterised by occupational diversity. The story of the rise of Karâva entrepreneurship has been told in detail by Michael Roberts (1982). Two factors appear especially important in explaining this rise, and the fact that Karâva came to own the lion's share of that proportion of the plantation economy controlled by Sinhalese.[8] One is the strategic location of the Karâva along the southwest coast, and their involvement in coastal trading and shipping before land-based transport of bulk commodities became possible. The Karâva built up a strong economic base in the timber trade and thus in furniture making, and in the liquor (arrack) distilling business, also concentrated along the'Karâva coast.' The other factor is that the Karâva, to a large degree originating in recent immigration from India, were marginal to the mainstream Sinhalese caste system. Along with the Salâgama and the Durâva, two smaller castes located along that coast with whom they are sometimes bracketed as the KSD's,[9] the Karâva were relatively independent of the dominant land-owning and ruling caste, the Goyigama. The wealth of the Karâva capitalists permitted the caste as a whole to assert equality with the Goyigama from the later nineteenth century onwards. The Karâva were however not a 'trading community,' in the sense that the majority of members were not involved in business, and many remained extremely poor. Very much like the Sri Lanka Tamils, the Karâva converted to Christianity in large numbers, became heavily engaged in formal education, and thus were strongly represented in formal sector employment, public and private.

Here then are the barest of outlines of the 'onion model.' At the core lie the Goyigama Buddhist Sinhalese, associated with land, subsistence agriculture, the staple food, rice, and notions of 'traditional,' pre -- commercial village based society. Socio-cultural distance from this core is generally associated with scale of capitalist enterprise. It requires only a modest effort at ideological construction -- an effort that plenty of people have been willing to make -- to represent capitalism and business as the antithesis to the Sinhalese tradition and cultural essence.[10] The 'onion model' is my own projection; it simplifies a complex reality; is somewhat ahistorical -- relating mainly to the post-Independence decades and especially to the views articulated by ideologues claiming to speak on behalf

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of the Kandyan peasantry (Moore 1985: 73-76); and ignores in particular (a) the Indian Tamil plantation proletariat, who are also often represented in term of the antithesis of Sinhaleseness; and (b) some regional differences between the Kandyan (or Up-Country) Goyigama and the more numerous and influential Low Country 'Goyigama.'[11] The image, however, permits us to go to the heart of the political issue: the ethnic and caste dimensions of the divergent locations of political and business power.

The figures in Table 2 almost certainly understate this divergence. The data in column (b) on the ethnicity and caste of leading businessmen were originally collected in the mid-1980s by Tara Coomaraswamy, who asked 15 knowledgeable people to list the wealthiest business people in the country. In the course of my own fieldwork in the late 1980s and early 1990s I obtained more detailed and accurate information on some of the individuals named. I also became convinced that the list is biased in favour of public prominence. There are low profile businessmen, who deal mainly in money and in the import of major commodities, such as sugar and paper, and belong on the list by virtue of their wealth. They probably all belong in the category 'Indian Trading Communities.'

However, even the figures we have illustrate very clearly the contrasting loci of political and business power. The Goyigama Sinhalese rule, as they have since Independence, but are, even in the 1980s after real advances (see below), much under-represented at the peak of business. Among the Sinhalese, the Karâva, Salâgama and Durâva are collectively over-represented in both spheres; and the other castes, notably the numerous Vahumpura, are grossly under-represented in both. The 'Indian Trading Communities' are very prominent in business, but have no direct political power. And the non-Sinhalese minorities who have become involved in recent tensions and conflicts with the Sinhalese -- the Sri Lanka Tamils, the Sri Lanka Muslims and the Indian Tamils -- are neither markedly over or under-represented in business. Among these minorities, only the Muslims enjoy parliamentary representation and -- more arguably, positions of direct political power -- proportionate to their numbers.

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Table 2: Representation of Main Caste and Ethnic Groups at Top Levels of Business and Politics, 1980s

Caste and ethnic group	% representation: in total population, 1981	among 50 'most wealthy' business-men, early 1980s*	among all Members of Parliament, 1986	among all Cabinet Ministers, 1970 and 1986
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Sinhalese - Goigama	37	26	60	55
Sinhalese - KSD's**	7	28	12	20
Sinhalese - Others	30	8	9	6
Sinhalese - (Total)	(74)	(62)	(81)	(82)
Sri Lanka Tamils	13	12	11	6
Sri Lanka Muslims	7	8	7	8
Indian Tamils	6	4	1	2
'Indian Trading Groups'***	neg.	4	-	-
Others	neg.	-	-	2
Total	100	100	100	100

Notes:

* - For details, see main text.

** - KSD's = the Karâva, Salagama and Durava castes; for details, see main text.

*** - In this case, Bohras, Sindhis, Parsis and Chettiars are included.

Sources: For column (a), see main text; column (b) is from 1981 Census, General Report, p. 111, with estimates of the distribution of the Sinhalese by caste from Jiggins, p. 35; column (c) is from Coomaraswamy, p. 239 and p. 344; and column (d) from Coomaraswamy, pp. 267-8.

Any understanding of the role in business of particular communities will be dependent on underlying assumptions, implicit or explicit, about what factors in general lead some groups to become or remain prominent in business. There is no consensus on this in social science. Indeed, in relation to the prominence of 'business minorities' in much of Asia and Africa in particular, there is an emerging debate. Since my interpretation of the Sri Lanka material is shaped by a particular perspective -- happily one to which I was converted in the course of doing research with Sri Lankan businessmen -- it is worth briefly outlining the contrasting views.

One view, implicit in a great deal of nationalist discourse, is that business position and profit essentially stem from political power. The

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British dominated in business because they had political power; the various minorities did well in business because they were sufficiently skilled and lacking in scruples to hang onto British coat-tails. I believe there is an important core of truth in this argument in relation to the origin and structure of British colonial business (see below), but do not otherwise find that it explains anything significant.

The established approach to this question, both popular and social scientific, is to search within the culture, attitudes and religious values of particular minority business groups for the motivating force that originally led them to reject 'traditional' values of non-commercial society, and strive after material success. The model and inspiration, especially for social scientists, is Max Weber's attempt to explain the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of 'modern' capitalism in Europe in terms of the ethos of a particular group, in that case the Calvinists. Arguments of this nature are widespread in Sri Lanka: 'Muslims do well because they help one another;' 'Tamils do well because they don't waste money and are single-minded;' 'Sinhalese do badly in business because they are too keen to show off their money and because they can't trust each other.' While I believe that these stereotypes are significant and interesting in their own right, they are as unsuccessful as the 'group attributes' approach has been elsewhere in explaining anything.

There is another approach to the question that is fast gaining ground among social scientists. This focuses less on why any particular minority should have specialised in commercial activity -- that may be in part random -- and more on way in which the dense social linkages that can exist between individuals within small communities can contribute to business success. Two concepts are central: information and trust. Participation in a social network provides information and trust through two mechanisms. One is 'pure' information: the knowledge from other people that W has never failed to live up to his word in 30 years; that X has a large outstanding debt to Y, and probably cannot be trusted with further credit; or that Z was seen in a hotel last week talking with the chairman of the Korean company that is bidding for the power station contract. The other mechanism is the inbuilt sanctioning capacity of networks, through their impact on reputations: the fact that P knows that, if he does not play fair with Q, then this will quickly come to the ears of R, S and T, and they may not be willing to do business with him again -- or may otherwise respond in ways that will harm P in the long term.[12]

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The social organisation of small communities like the Dawoodi Bohras, numbering perhaps a million people worldwide and about 2,500 people in Sri Lanka, is highly conducive to business success: a great deal of routine interaction for social purposes that serves to diffuse information about individuals; a worldwide web of business links and information; tight community control through the Syedna -- the Grand High Priest of the sect, located in Bombay -- that provides some sanction against unfair dealing within the community and an informal but effective means for reconciling business and intra-family property disputes; and a cohesive culture that is successful in preparing most young people to enter the family businesses. The Dawoodi Bohras are a polar case. So too are Sri Lanka's big time Muslim gem traders, who are closely related, intermarry, and mainly resident in a small area called China Fort in Beruwala. Levels of knowledge and trust within this community are very high. One (larger) trader will entrust another to sell very valuable gems as his agent, and have faith that the price realised will be the one reported. The more general point is that, especially under Sri Lankan conditions where politics can be predatory on business, much business activity has been to some degree illegal, and where the judicial system is an ineffective means of contract enforcement, business success is dependent on the resources that stem from social links, and is therefore 'sticky' within families and social groups. Connections and reputations can be built up, but some people start life with big advantages.

Popular prejudices about the key role of 'the Pettah' in Sri Lankan business contain some truth. There is centred in the Pettah -- the old informal, non-European wholesale and retail centre of Colombo -- a vast volume of business transactions that are almost invisible to people outside the business world. In particular, there are enormous informal financial markets built largely around post-dated cheques. These cheques are fully tradeable, and traded frequently. Reputations are measured by the extent of the discount offered when post-dated cheques are traded. The cheques of businessmen believed to be financially sound and honest will trade at a small discount; more risky or murky characters will pay a higher premium for the privilege of issuing a post-dated cheque in the first place. Knowledge of these discount rates is in turn valuable information about the reliability of individuals. Those with the best information about the reliability of other businessmen will be best able to make decisions about how much credit to advance to whom on what terms. Few social scientists or popular commentators realise the extent to which business lives on credit,

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and the importance of making the right decisions in order to make one's money work hard. The language of these informal financial markets and information highways is mainly Tamil. The main participants still tend to be Muslims, Tamils and members of the 'Indian Trading Communities.'

To explain why minorities continue to play a prominent role in Sri Lankan business, we do not need conspiracy stories about abuse of political power or cultural stereotypes about what, for example, Muslims are good or bad at. Their prominence reflects history and their advantageous position in relation to the informal social institutions that help solve the persistent problems of trust and information in business transactions. For example, when Sri Lanka began to develop a garment export industry in the late 1970s, a significant share of the industry went to members of two very small 'Indian Trading Communities,' the Sindhis and the Memons (Table 3), who had the advantage of a long history in international textile trading and thus of privileged links, often within their communities, to overseas markets and to suppliers of textiles and capital investment. Faced with such powerful but intangible barriers to participation in business, it is not surprising that many Sinhalese (and, where they can, Tamils), have tried to use political power to compensate. One ironic result, however, is the view among non-Sinhalese that Sinhalese may not be reliable business partners simply because they, the Sinhalese, are more likely to have the option of calling upon political support for business purposes, e.g. refusing to pay their debts when 'their' party is in power, knowing that their creditors can do little.

4. The Rapprochement between Political and Business Elites

The ethnicity of capital is not such a salient political issue in the 1990s as it was in earlier decades, especially the 1940s to the 1970s. The caste dimension too appears less intrusive, although the taboo on public discussion of caste in Sri Lanka, combined with the strong undercurrent of awareness and interest in the issue, makes accurate judgement difficult. There are a range of reasons for this partial rapprochement between political and business elites. I summarise some key processes under four separate headings.

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Table 3: Distribution of Garment Exports by Value According to the Nationality/Ethnicity of Firm Owners, 1987*

Nationality/ethnicity of firm owners	% of exports
Firms completely foreign owned	29
Firms entirely or partly locally-owned; ethnicity of local owners or partners:	
'Indian Trading Groups'	34
of which: - Sindhis	(15)
- Memons	(8)
- Others **	(11)
Sinhalese	17
Sri Lanka Muslims	12
Sri Lanka and Indian Tamils	4
Mixed or unclassifiable	4
Total	100

Notes

* - The figures apply to the 113 firms recorded in Customs data as being the largest garment exporters. Because of the various devices used to manage and evade the US import quota allocation system, these data may not be entirely accurate. Identifying details of firm owners was a major undertaking, for which I obtained help from several people connected with the garment business who prefer not to be named. The details are no doubt inaccurate in some cases.

** - These include Indian Muslims, Bohras, Parsis, Chetties, Bharathas and others.

The achievements of statism

Many Sri Lanka specialists, myself included, have observed that in 1948 the British handed over power to a capitalist elite. While it is true, in general, that members of the Goyigama caste are relatively uninvolved in capitalist enterprise, the interlinked (Goyigama) Senanayake-Kotelawala-Wijewardena families that provided the political leadership of the independence movement and the first three Prime Ministers were capitalist, and much involved in plantations, graphite mining and newspaper ownership. There is, however,

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no contradiction between this political leadership being capitalist and the fact that it often took a relatively radical nationalist stance in relation to the established, British-dominated private sector, and to the prominent business role of the 'Indian Trading Communities' and other minorities. This radicalism was partly a matter of the differing interests of different sections of capital, and partly a reflection of the strength of grassroots pressures antithetical to capitalism in general, including an electorally powerful Marxist opposition.

The first major blow against foreign capital preceded Independence, and was partly the work of the British. The victims were the Nattukottai Chettiars, a small caste group based in Tamil Nadu, South India, who ran a large and sophisticated set of merchant banking operations in Sri Lanka, Malaya and Burma. The 1930s depression led many of their borrowers to fail, and to the foreclosure of mortgages on land and property belonging to local people. In Sri Lanka, as in Malaya and Burma, the popular protest against 'foreign moneylenders' led to legislation on property transfers that restricted the capacity of the Nattukottai Chettiars to collect debts. The British banks that on-lent large sums of money using the Chettiars as intermediaries called in their debts precipitately. The Chettiars wound up their business, and had largely disappeared from the local scene before World War Two (Rudner 1994, Weerasooria 1973). They were effectively replaced in the post-Independence period by new state banks, the Bank of Ceylon and the People's Bank. These state banks have not been pro-Sinhalese in their lending, and have been criticised for this reason.[13] The effective domination of the local banking scene by somewhat unenterprising state banks however left space for other players, the finance companies, to develop a major business in deposit taking and high risk loans to small clients, above all loans for vehicle purchase. Finance companies grew fast in the 1970s and 1980s when passenger transport was opened to the private sector. It is striking that, in terms of ethnicity, caste and geographical location, owners of finance companies are much more representative of Sri Lanka's population than is the more established business sector: the Goyigama and other non-Karâva Sinhalese are well represented.[14] To a limited extent, finance companies have formed the basis on which their owners have diversified into other finance-related enterprises, including banking.[15]

One of the first acts of the 'conservative' post-Independence government was to slap heavy export taxes on the mainly-British owned plantation sector. It also began to tax business profits heavily (Rote 1986:

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59-62, Snodgrass 1966: 115-9). These export taxes remained in place in one form or another until the early 1980s, by which time the goose that had laid the golden eggs was severely shrunken and enfeebled. The same 'conservative' government acted on other parts of the nationalist economic agenda, reserving some activities, especially importing, for nationals and local firms; and firmly encouraging British and other foreign firms to Ceylonise their management.[16] Policies shifted more in the statist direction after the election of the first radical nationalist-cum-Marxist coalition government under SWRD Bandaranaike in 1956. In particular, state trading became more prevalent. The building up of a dense network of (state-controlled) 'cooperatives' at local level to distribute rationed rice and flour and other basic consumer items cut into the retail trade of Muslims and Tamils. These more statist economic policies, in place from the late 1950s to 1977 in particular, had a complex impact on the ethnic and caste profile of business enterprise. In many cases, and most dramatically with the nationalisation of the plantations in the early 1970s, foreigners were driven out. (When the management of the plantations was re-privatised in the early 1990s, prior to a fuller privatisation of ownership that began in late 1995, Sinhalese-controlled companies were dominant.[17]) Conversely, Sinhalese capital was hit by plantation nationalisation and by earlier nationalisations of bus transport and insurance. It was, however, the Karâva capitalists who were most adversely affected.[18] In other spheres statist economic policies had the opposite effect, helping to build Sinhalese capitalism. Perhaps the one most quoted, but never researched in detail, is the way in which the previous Muslim dominance in trading and exporting valuable gemstones was further eroded in the early 1970s with the help of the state-run Gem Corporation. This had been a very long-standing Sinhalese political demand, associated in particular with the (Marxist) Lanka Sama Samâja Party (LSSP), that had a strong local base in the gem-rich Ratnapura district.[19] A significant number of Sinhalese from Ratnapura have built up fortunes in the gem business.

The assistance given by the Gem Corporation to private Sinhalese business was probably replicated on some scale throughout many sectors of the economy. In the early 1970s, almost all foreign trade and a high proportion of all economic activity were in state hands. In such circumstances, connections of some kind to the state apparatus were important to business success. For example, one of the fastest growing 'new' tea exporting companies of the late 1970s and 1980s, Stassens, that was later to diversify into a range of other activities, was founded by a

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small group of people who had learned the tea exporting business -- especially the new Middle East and North African business -- while working in the 1970s for Consolexpo, a state exporting company.

The promotion of local, Sinhalese, or 'bhumiputra' business was never a formal policy goal of any government in Colombo. It however seems likely that there was some rough proportionality between the distribution of political power and the distribution of the business opportunities to which this gave rise. And political power was in the hands of the Goyigama in particular. It is not surprising that the 13 Goyigama listed in Table 2 among the wealthiest 50 businessmen in the mid-1980s had a more political flavour than most others on the list. Five of them were closely connected by family to the political elite of the Independence period (and since);[20] another four, at least, had clearly used political connections in becoming wealthy. Relatedly, out of the 31 Sinhalese appearing on the list, 12 had become prominent since about 1970, and of these seven were Goyigama, including all those whose rise had been unusually 'political.' In a survey of directors and managers of industrial business concerns conducted in 1961, Evers found that, of 117 posts occupied by Sinhalese, Goyigama accounted for only 30% of posts in the private sector (compared with 66% for the Karâva), but for 57% in the state sector (compared with only 40% for the Karâva).[21] Such fragments of evidence support the impression that, insofar as statist economic policies and interventions have helped some business people become wealthy, the Goyigama have done better than other groups.

Adjusting to realities

The obverse of the partial success of Goyigama Sinhalese political dominance in changing the personnel composition of the business sector is the way in which the various minority business groups have adjusted their behaviour and business strategies to avoid provocation and conflict. This is not new. Minorities have always tended to keep their heads down. One principle that members of the 'Indian Trading Communities' in particular have tended to follow is not to get involved in the ownership of land or agricultural production, as this threatens to trigger Sinhalese sensitivities about who controls the land. These groups also avoid direct involvement in politics, but constitute an important source of funding for all major political parties. Probably the most substantial change in recent decades is that the Sri Lanka Muslim community, many of whose members have done

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well in business, has tried to keep a low profile. There has been a relative shift away from the more 'traditional' wholesale and retail trading, that tends to draw attention to itself, in favour of investment in property and industry. The gem trading business has been further opened to Sinhalese (see above), and there is substantial cooperation between leading Muslim and leading Sinhalese gem merchants in business associations, in organising trade fairs, and in advancing the industry's case to government. In a rather different sphere, some of the largest local branches of transnational corporations involved in the production and/or distribution of consumer goods, notably Lever Brothers and Ceylon Tobacco, have established elaborate distribution networks of Sinhalese traders.

Changes in the structure of the private sector

The macro-economy of Sri Lanka and the character of the formal private sector in the half century from the 1920s to the 1960s were shaped by the plantation export sector, above all by the tea industry.[22] This sector was, and appeared to outsiders, as exclusive and collusive in several dimensions. The history of the tea business explains a great deal about Sri Lankan attitudes to private sector enterprise in general.

Sri Lankan nationalists have long been distrustful of the tea business: critical of the impact of plantations on the economy, environment and culture of the rural areas in which they are located;[23] wary of the alleged 'white sahib' culture of the Sri Lankans who eventually took over the management of the plantations and the agency houses, and the brokering, shipping, banking and insurance companies that thrived on the tea business; and suspicious that the brokering, buying and shipping companies have somehow 'sewn up' the international marketing of tea to their own benefit, and to the detriment of Sri Lanka. Such suspicions have survived, for example, the change in the location of the tea auctions from London to Colombo (in the 1950s); the transfer of most equity in the agency houses and brokering firms from British to Sri Lankan hands, especially since the 1960s (Government of Ceylon 1974: 23 and 171); the nationalisation of tea production in the early 1970s; and the gradual replacement of most British-owned tea buying, exporting and shipping companies by Sri Lankan firms (see below). There are still recurrent complaints in the Colombo newspapers that the complex and apparently-arcane rules governing the transport and storage of tea, as well as the

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auctioning process, are exploited by those 'in the know' to siphon off value and profit from producers and from the nation.

In Sri Lanka, as in other plantation economies,[24] these suspicions generated considerable research into, and critical writing on, the plantation export industry. Different authors have asked different questions and reached different conclusions. For example, those who have focused on compliance with the exchange controls introduced in 1959 have, predictably, found evidence of the illegal export and repatriation of capital (Government of Ceylon 1974). Marxist scholars have asked more 'profound' questions about modes of production and fractions of capital and concluded, to cite the most weighty volume on the subject (de Silva 1982), that colonial plantation enterprise aborted the economic development of the island because the industry was dominated not by production capital, but by mercantile capital, as embodied in the local agency houses that managed the bulk of the tea estates on behalf of their ultimate owners.[25] Others have focused on the 'oligopolistic' structure of the local tea industry and the consequent potential for the use of market power (Rote 1986).

I believe that we can obtain the best insight into the character of the 'colonial' tea business and its impact on attitudes to capitalism in Sri Lanka by (a) paying due regard to the global character of the industry and (b) adapting a concept that has elsewhere proved fruitful in the study of comparative capitalisms: the notion of 'organised capitalism.'

There are differing conceptions and operational definitions of 'organised capitalism.' Working mainly in the spirit of the work by Lash and Urry (1987), I consider a sector or economy to be 'organised' when it (a) has a stable structure, (b) is dominated by a relatively small number of large stakeholders (normally firms), and (c) is subject to a regime of cooperation and regulation -- formal or informal, private and associational or state-supported -- that effectively reduces internal market competition and encourages joint action in relation to actors outside the sector. There are technical and economic conditions that are conducive to 'organised capitalism.' It tends to be found in industries with high capital requirements and long term gestation periods for investments. This is a generic feature of tea production: high initial investments, high operating capital requirements and long-term payback periods. Other factors conducive to the 'organisation' of tea business within the context of the British imperial economy were: (a) the fact that tea, as a relatively uniform, easily classifiable and (largely) non-perishable product with a very stable pattern of consumer demand, is suitable for 'organised' marketing; (b) the generic

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nature of tea as a consumer product, that encouraged producing companies to cooperate in sponsoring generic market promotion; (c) the concentration of tea production in three small areas (in Sri Lanka, South and North India) and of consumption in the UK itself; and (d), in the Sri Lanka case in particular, the fact that the need to organise the import of labour from South India encouraged cooperation among plantation companies and between them and the state.[26]

I provide the evidence of the 'organised' nature of the tea industry, globally and within Sri Lanka -- and over the late colonial and early Independence decades, say the 1930s to the 1960s -- under five headings: vertical integration, control interlock, oligopoly, muted competition, stability and political cooperation. The first five relate to economic structure and relations (ownership, control, firm organisation, market relations, etc.), and the sixth to political activity.[27]

(i) Vertical integration

The global tea economy was characterised by substantial vertical integration between different stages such as production, transporting, storage, shipping, wholesaling, insuring, shipping, blending and retailing.[28] The major firms retailing tea in Britain -- notably Liptons, the Cooperative Wholesale Society and Brooke Bond -- purchased large estates in Sri Lanka between the 1890s and the 1920s; and the latter also owned a tea shipping firm (Rote 1986: 35-6). Within Sri Lanka, the agency houses that managed the majority of the island's tea estates on behalf of their UK-based and local owners[29] also imported and purchased production inputs, were heavily involved in the 'downstream' activities of shipping and insurance, and were involved in the tea auctions as both buyers and sellers (FAO-GATT 1967: 17 and 33, Government of Ceylon 1968: 11, Government of Ceylon 1974: chapters 4-5, Rote 1986: 120-3).

(ii) Control interlock

The number of independent firms in the tea industry was less than it appeared because of interlocking relationships in the form of cross-shareholdings among firms and interlocking directorates. At the global level, interlocking directorates among the larger companies engaged in the tea business were relatively common, and appeared to give considerable influence to a small number of people (Jeyapalan and Jayawardena 1968: 26-63, Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission 1956: 6-7). We

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have more detailed evidence on these phenomena within Sri Lanka, but need to tread carefully in using it, for much of it was generated and interpreted for highly instrumental political reasons. The central issues that have caused controversy have been (a) the extent to which the agency houses, the firms that acted as managing agents for plantation companies registered in London ('sterling companies') and in Colombo ('rupee companies'), were effectively in control of those companies; and (b) the consequences, for the tea industry, the national economy and the balance of payments, of the ways in which the agency houses have used their influence over the plantation companies. In Sri Lanka, as in Malaya (Puthucheary 1960: chapter 2) and India (Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission 1956: 7), many plantation companies were originally established at the initiative of the locally-based agency houses, who possessed management expertise and local knowledge but lacked capital. It is therefore not surprising that the agency houses exercised a great deal of influence over the plantation companies, despite owning very small amounts of their equity (Government of Ceylon 1968: 9, Government of Ceylon 1974: 68). The controversies have been about the extent, legitimacy and use of influence.

The most detailed and authoritative source of information for Sri Lanka is the report of the 1974 Commission of Enquiry into Agency Houses and Brokering Firms (Government of Ceylon 1974) that was set up as part of the land reform process. One problem in interpreting this report is that the Commission obtained only limited cooperation and information from the agency houses (Government of Ceylon 1974: chapter 1). Another is that the Commission was dominated by Marxist and nationalist intellectuals and politicians, who organised a very searching enquiry process, but had very clear prejudices and objectives. The facts presented in their report are in some cases more informative than their views and conclusions.

The Commission identified 30 agency houses. They comprised four local branches of London companies, some cases of mixed local and British ownership, and a larger number of fully locally owned firms, the latter generally small in scale. The data provided by the Commission suggest a radical difference in the characteristic pattern of relationships between the agency houses and (a) the sterling companies and (b) the rupee companies whose estates they managed. There was some evidence that directors of Colombo agency houses also held equity in sterling companies (Government of Ceylon 1974: 57), but no indication of how prevalent this practice was. Overall, it appears that the sterling companies were not generally subservient to the Colombo agency houses: the sterling companies

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sometimes changed their managing agents (Government of Ceylon 1974: 63); and in other cases exercised considerable direct control over their local enterprises despite having appointed an agency house to manage them (Government of Ceylon 1974: 57-61). The situation with the rupee plantation companies was very different, with considerable evidence of direct control by the agency houses. It was rare for rupee companies to change their managing agents (Government of Ceylon 1974: 63). The chairmen of the boards of rupee companies were "invariably" directors of their agency houses (Government of Ceylon 1968: 9); and chosen by the board, not in a shareholders' meeting (Government of Ceylon 1974:64). There was every indication that agency house personnel dominated the boards of the companies they managed. The Commission of Enquiry into Agency Houses and Brokering Firms examined the relations between (a) 13 large agency houses supervising 87% of the total tea area managed by agency houses and (b) the directorates of the 130 rupee plantation companies managed by these same agency houses in 1971. Directors of agency houses alone were a significant presence on the boards of the companies they managed, providing half or more of the company directorates in 32% of cases (Government of Ceylon 1974: 65). However, when the Commission added in other categories of people they felt likely to be influenced by or allied to the agency house directorates -- non-directorial executives of agency houses; superintendents of estates managed by the agency houses; and other persons connected with other agency houses and brokering firms -- they found that the agency house 'coteries' provided half or more of the directorates of 79% of managed rupee plantation companies (Government of Ceylon 1974: 66-67).[30]

The significance of these figures is less clear than the Commission implies. Such an apparently high 'control ratio' reflects the fact that it was very common for directors of agency houses to sit on the boards of rupee plantation companies managed by other agency houses.[31] There is no prima facie reason to expect that executives from one agency house would necessarily collude with executives of another on the board of the same plantation company. There was very little interlocking of directorates among agency houses themselves (Government of Ceylon 1974: 186). Directors of 'outside' agency houses could have been placed on the boards of managed plantation companies precisely to act as a check on the directors nominated by the managing agency house. Whatever the truth on this point, there is clear evidence that the agency houses did exercise strong influence over the rupee plantation companies.[32] There is similar, partly overlapping

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evidence of close relationships among nominally-independent firms in the Colombo Stock Exchange. I refer to the columns relating to 1951 in particular in Table 4. At that point, 86% of the companies quoted on the Exchange were plantation companies. A mere 14 people, 5% of those holding any director positions in quoted companies, accounted for 28% of all directorships; virtually all were in tea. As in the tea industry globally (see above), the interlocking of ownership and control involved the concentration of a large number of directorships in a few hands. This situation was later to change radically (see below).

Table 4: Distribution of Directorships of Quoted Companies, 1951, 1971 and 1988

	1951	1971	1988
Number of quoted companies	189	153	176
Number of quoted plantation companies	162	97	5
Total number of company directorships	718	824	1256
Average number of directorships per company	3.8	5.4	7.1
Average number of directorships per director	2.8	2.2	1.6
% of directors holding only 1 directorship	55	67	75
Number of directors holding 10 or more directorships	14	12	4
% of directorships held by persons holding 10 or more directorships	28	17	4

Sources: Rupee Companies Handbooks, 1951, 1971 and 1988

(iii) Oligopoly

'Oligopoly' is used here in the loose sense: markets being dominated by a small number of (large) players. There are few precise data for most of the stages through which tea passed between production and consumption. As the previous section demonstrates, the effective number of enterprises at any level was often far less than the formal number because of interlocking control. The only precise data relate to the UK consumer market in 1954, when Britain was still the major tea market in the world: four large distributors then accounted for 70% of the market (Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission 1956: 15).

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(iv) Muted competition

The UK Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission ruled that, despite being dominated by four distributors, the British retail tea market was basically competitive (Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission 1956: 43). A 1967 UN investigation into the worldwide primary market for tea was more sceptical about the degree of competition (FAO-GATT 1967: 37). Even more scepticism seems valid in relation to British imperial business in general in Colombo. I have been informed by several people who were active in the formal business sector in the 1950s that there was a great deal of market sharing and limited competition between firms engaged in the same activities. To quote one British national: "You can't really engage in cut-throat competition with the people you meet at parties several times a week." Relatedly, there was "no real recruitment" of British nationals to executive positions: "People just turned up with letters of recommendation, and you took them on if you needed someone." And it was not the done thing to 'poach' executives from a competing company: the Managing Director of one tea exporting firm told me in 1990 how, when he had changed jobs under the earlier regime, the Chairman of his would-be-employer first approached his existing employer to inform him that an offer was to be made. The high profits generated from tea (Rote 1986: 40 and 71, Snodgrass 1966: 66, Wickizer 1944: 122-4) underpinned this 'gentlemanly' approach to business, and helped to confirm the self-image of British businessmen as commercially successful because of trust and integrity -- and not because of any aptitude for the kind of 'haggling' and 'hustling' that are in many quarters viewed as the essence of entrepreneurship, but were in colonial Sri Lanka viewed as the characteristic weakness of local businessmen. In his address to the Centenary Dinner of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in March 1939, Sir Thomas Villiers, a leading figure in the mercantile sector, felt it useful to offer the following advice: "Let the Ceylonese who wish to embark on a commercial life, come with clean hands and an open mind...." (Ceylon Chamber of Commerce 1939: 6). At the annual general meeting of the Chamber of Commerce nine years later, the first after Independence, the Chairman noted that Ceylonese were becoming increasingly involved in business enterprise, and provided them a few tips of his own: "A temporary advantage gained by a smart deal can never compensate for the resulting loss of trust by a good customer. If there is one thing more than another which has built up British Commerce, throughout the world, it is the

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reputation justly earned for business integrity" (Ceylon Chamber of Commerce 1948: 4).

This concern with integrity was not purely image polishing. Dependent as it was on long-distance trading without modern methods of communications, the British imperial economy, like other exchange networks of the time,[33] was based on 'agency:' on the willingness of an agent in the colonies to trust his principal in Britain, and vice versa. Trust, integrity and reputation were major business assets. Where, however, they were embodied in well-paid Brits, such virtues were both exclusive and expensive. Asians were much less costly. The profitability of the sterling plantation companies began to decline significantly in the 1930s because of the cost of employing so many Brits at various stages of the production and marketing processes (Ramachandran 1963). The owners hung on, in large part because of the influence of the agency houses, who continued to make good profits (Rote 1986: 71-4). The structure of the tea industry thus remained more stable -- until nationalisation in the early 1970s -- than the underlying economic forces might have justified.

(v) Stability

A stable, protected product market, high profits and muted competition were inter-related, as cause and effect, with a high degree of stability in the enterprise population. This is not so surprising in relation to the plantation production companies. It was, however, true even in the potentially-more-risky downstream and upstream activities, such as input supply, product trading, insurance and shipping. Let us start from the observation that, in Nigeria, only 7% of the non-mining expatriate companies that existed at some point between 1921 and 1936 maintained an unbroken existence over the whole period (Forrest 1994: 15). Depression killed many firms. One can make an equivalent calculation for Sri Lanka by looking at expatriate members of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Membership was virtually automatic for any established and reputable business in the mercantile sector, and confined mainly to British firms. The Chamber did not represent plantation companies: they were organised separately in the Planters' Association. Of 145 expatriate firms that were members of the Chamber of Commerce at some point between 1921 and 1936, 73 (50%) were members throughout the period.[34] The stability of the firm population reflected and made possible the characteristic career of British businessmen in the island: travel out from Britain (especially Scotland) in their twenties, usually without immediate family links but with some less direct personal

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connection or recommendation; employment in the lower executive ranks in plantation production or the mercantile sector, with reasonable expectations of gradual promotion. In the case of the mercantile (i.e. non-plantation) sector, promotion might well lead eventually to a partnership or directorship, and to eventual withdrawal to England, either to retire or to play a role in the tea trading firms clustered in Mincing Lane, many of which had equity links with Colombo-based companies (Government of Ceylon 1974: 28). Those who went initially into plantation management might end up on the same path after joining the staff of an agency house. Accordingly, before Ceylonisation became an urgent issue after Independence, the directors and partners of mercantile firms tended to occupy their positions for long periods of time.[35]

(vi) Political cooperation

The political organisation of tea producers was a marked feature of the British imperial economy.[36] It reflected in large part the spatial concentration of production in India and Sri Lanka and of the export market in the UK, all organised by an interlocking network of British firms, with only the Dutch East Indies export production formally located outside the Empire. Producers banded together to promote tea as a generic product and to organise the immigration of estate labour, as well as to advance their other interests.

Within Sri Lanka the local branches of the Planters' Association wielded great influence at local level in the 'planting districts' into which they were organised. This is, however, little documented. Much more information is available on organisation at the 'national' and 'international' levels -- a distinction that is often difficult to apply in practice.

The Sri Lankan tea industry, organised by the Planters' Association, began generic promotion of tea in overseas markets in the 1880s, almost as soon as the industry was established and had begun to replace China as the main source of tea for the UK market (Rote 1986: 37). Funding was from 1892 obtained from an export levy (cess) administered by the state. Public funds were also used to establish the Tea Research Institute in 1925 (Wickremeratne 1973: 444-5); the tea producers exercised major influence over its activities.[37] Estates in Sri Lanka relied on Indian immigrant labour, that was often scarce. Early recruitment was unorganised, but in 1904 the state established the Ceylon Labour Commission, that thereafter worked closely with plantation management in organising the recruitment and travel of labour to and from South India

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(Wickremeratne 1973: 477).[38] In the period just before and after Independence, the overlapping tea industry, British and mercantile sector interests in Sri Lanka were especially highly mobilised within a group of associations that worked closely with one another: the Planters' Association (tea production); the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, the Colombo Tea Traders' Association, the Colombo Brokers' Association (the mercantile sector); the Ceylon Employers' Association and the Ceylon Estate Employers' Association (formal sector employers); and the Association of British Interests in Ceylon (formerly the European Association).[39]

Cooperating with, but standing above all these Colombo-based associations was the Ceylon Association, founded in 1888, and representing London-based Sri Lanka tea industry interests. Along with its fellow associations in Mincing Lane -- the Indian Tea Association and the South India Tea Association -- the Ceylon Association played a prominent role in the international regulation of the tea industry. Once tea production for the world market became concentrated in British hands in Sri Lanka and India in the 1890s, producers had succumbed to the clear temptation to regulate and limit supply to the world market to stabilise and increase returns (Wickremeratne 1973: 431). They had little success. The first effective International Tea Agreement was made in 1933, not by governments, but by five associations representing producers, among them the Ceylon Association.[40] The 1950 International Tea Agreement was first signed by the associations and then ratified by governments (Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission 1956: 21).

The British imperial tea economy appeared to most politically-aware Sri Lankans as collusive and exclusive -- economically, politically and socially. Because of the tight interlinking of the institutions and practices of the imperial tea economy, British faces lingered long in Colombo's mercantile sector. The last British Chairman of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce did not leave office until 1964. It was the land reforms of the early 1970s and the socialist policies of the United Front government of the time that squeezed out most of those Brits remaining in the mercantile sector. For some years thereafter almost the only British businessmen based in Colombo were a few senior executives of British transnationals that had incorporated local manufacturing companies in the 1950s and 1960s to duck under import controls.[41] The impression of social exclusivity, however, survived the replacement of British by Sri Lankan faces in ownership and management posts. Partly because the ethos of the British mercantile sector placed such a high value on a notion of

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trustworthiness based on social background, rather than individual ability or exemplary performance, the Sri Lankan-owned private sector recruited its executives either from family members (see below) or from the graduates of the elite secondary schools.[42]

The consequences of the localisation of British business for the popular image of the private sector were to some degree ambiguous. Localisation was in many respects positive. There did at least appear to be more opportunity for Sri Lankans. The private sector clearly became more competitive. This was in part a simple consequence of the relative decline of the heavily-taxed plantation industry and the rise of new economic activities. In 1950, a fairly typical year for the period, tea exports alone accounted for 19% of GNP, and tea, rubber and coconut exports collectively accounted for 37% of GNP; in 1991-4 they collectively averaged 6%.[43] There was also change within the tea sector itself, notably in exporting. Sri Lanka's tea markets have diversified widely: the UK now accounts for only a small fraction of exports, and the Middle East for more than half. This has created opportunities for a large number of new entrants to the business. For example, foreign tea exporters accounted for 44% of tea exports by value in 1972, and only 23% in 1988. In 1972 there were only eight Sri Lankan private firms that held 1% or more of the export market; five of them were former British companies now controlled by Sri Lankans, and three were Bohra family firms. By 1988 there were 14 firms in this category; two of them were former British companies and others were essentially family firms, six owned by Bohras, four by Sinhalese and two by Tamils.[44] This opening up of the market has been accompanied by a degree of cut-throat competition that would appear to confirm some of the prejudices expressed by Sir Thomas Villiers in 1939: the incidence of copying trademarks from competitors appeared, for example, to increase considerably in the 1980s.[45] Because some of the major contracts to supply the Middle East market are with state trading firms there, there are widespread allegations that under-the-counter payments are required.

The figures in Table 4 on trends in the distribution of directorships in quoted companies illustrate another dimension of the disintegration of the tightly-knit organisational structure of the British imperial tea economy in favour of a more competitive system. There are no longer, as there were in the 'imperial' era, a small number of business executives controlling a significant proportion of directorships.[46]

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Our story is, however, not one of a simple, linear shift from an exclusive and closed British-model private sector to an open, competitive Lankan owned private sector. The pattern is more complex: in some respects, the disappearance of British businessmen led to more 'closure' in the private sector. British colonial enterprises were generally not familial: young men came out from the UK, found a place and, if they were lucky, were eventually made a director or partner of their company, and were assisted to buy into their share of the capital. It was, however, the norm that this capital had to be re-sold to the firm and re-allocated to successors at the point of retirement or soon after. The 'new blood' that continually flowed into the British firms was new, even if not very rigorously selected. There were scarcely any British settlers in colonial Sri Lanka. Almost the entire British population followed a life-cycle based on formal, bureaucratic employment of the males. Whether planters, businessmen or civil servants, the men came out while young, found a position, moved up the ladder, and retired to Tunbridge Wells (or thereabouts), leaving few roots behind in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan businessmen who bought up the former British companies or established their own packed the boards with family and friends.[47] To the extent that company control became even more familial, the departure of the British did not end the exclusivity of the private sector, but rather changed its nature. This close familial control has survived even the recent embracing of the stock market discussed in the next section. Of a total of 203 companies quoted on the Colombo Stock Market in 1993-4, I examined the ownership of the 98 companies that had post-tax profits of more than 10 million rupees. The largest five shareholders controlled more than half the equity of 73% of these companies, and less than 40% in a mere 12% of cases.[48]

The new corporate sector

Although the Colombo Stock Market attained its centenary in 1996, until recently its reach was in every sense very limited. Market capitalisation and turnover were very low. Investors were few in number. And share price movements were almost totally disconnected, in perception and in reality, from the wider economy. All this has begun to change very suddenly, especially since about 1990, when the second JVP uprising could be seen to be crushed, the new government under President Premadasa embarked on a more vigorous programme of economic liberalisation and privatisation, and international portfolio investors began to develop a

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craving for 'emerging markets.' In Sri Lanka as in many other countries, the stock market 'took off' in a big way. Share prices soared and new share issues came thick and fast. It was claimed that in 1994, for the first time ever, the stock market became the largest single source of new capital for the private sector. Share prices peaked in 1993 and then sagged as international portfolio investors withdrew from many emerging markets and inexperienced local investors realised that the boom had driven share prices to unsustainable levels.

However, the more fundamental changes in the shape and image of the local private sector that are associated with the rise of the share market continue. It seems likely that they will have a significant impact on the issues under consideration here, and will probably further help to legitimate capitalism politically, although this is not a foregone conclusion: 'casino capitalism' is always politically vulnerable. These changes are inter-related, but can for present purposes be presented as three separate points:

(i) Large numbers of middle class people have for the first time become actively players in the stock market and in the fast expanding range of other new personal financial options: a much wider variety of banks accounts, insurance policies and pension policies; and even the opportunity to engage in margin trading in foreign currencies and to invest in treasury bills. The financial sector has in general grown very fast, as has advertising of personal financial services and the degree of competition among banks. In general, the number of people who may perceive themselves as having some kind of 'equity' stake in the profitability of the private sector has greatly expanded.

(ii) Share market trading and related activities have acquired a cultural attraction and power that they did not exercise previously. Substantial numbers of new jobs have opened in share trading, in mutual fund management, in share market advising and commentating, in the advertising of personal financial services on TV, radio and the print media, and in the fast-growing institutional finance sectors, notably leasing and merchant banking. Almost all firms in these sectors have overseas collaborators. Many of their staff are young recruits, often educated in North America and Europe, who are given high levels of responsibility and are very well paid by Sri Lankan standards. Partly because the regulation of the stock market and other sections of the finance sector, notably merchant banking, remains weak, the prospect of 'making a killing' is always there. For some sections of the middle class at least, including those who may not have been too

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successful in the long grind through the education and certification processes that were previously crucial for a professional career, this new finance sector is very attractive.[49] It has an aura of glamour and modernity, and appears to offer the prospect of getting rich quickly. The share market business is all the more attractive because its inhabitants appear to have achieved a new ideological hegemony in relation to government and economic policy. The commentators on the share market and those who help shape 'business confidence' by pronouncing, often to ill-informed but influential overseas portfolio investors, on the state of 'business confidence,' have become important to government and, especially since the election of a leftist coalition government in August 1994, increasingly influential as economic advisers. The need to 'maintain business confidence' has become paramount. The most visible symbol of this situation was the new appointment to the chairmanship of the powerful Board of Investment in September 1995. Previous occupants had been political and bureaucratic figures. The new appointee, aged 36 years and with three American degrees, came direct from the post of Chief Executive of Asia Capital, one of the more prominent and aggressive new capital market operators, that is largely owned by Hong Kong based interests.

(iii) Finally, the new prominence given to the stock market and to the related concept of a firm as an anonymous, public corporation helps to de-personalise images of individual firms and the organised private sector generally. Virtually all Sri Lankan companies, including those quoted on the share market (see above), are closely held, and controlled by individuals, families or, in a few cases of some of the better performing and fast-growing quoted companies, by a small number of senior executives. One can almost always talk of firm ownership, control and strategy in terms of the individual or family with which it is associated. A share market quotation, and active, publicised share-trading, can, however, disguise these individual links. This is convenient to the extent that most large quoted companies are controlled, substantially or completely, by members of two particular non-Goyigama indigenous minorities, the Sinhalese KSDs (Karâva, Salagama, Durava -- see above) and Sri Lanka Tamils. The facts are fairly clear. Let us take the 13 (non-state) quoted companies controlled by Sri Lankans that earned the largest post-tax profits in 1991. Five of these companies were effectively controlled by members of the KSD group, four by Tamils (including one loss-making company that made exceptional accounting profits in that year), one by a KSD-Tamil combine, one by a mixed non-Goyigama group, one by members of another non-Goyigama

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Sinhalese caste, and only one by Goyigama. One can approach the same conclusion from a different direction by looking at the degree of stock market involvement of the 'top 50 businessmen' appearing in column (b) of Table 2. I classified each as 'significantly involved' or 'not significantly involved' in the share market on the basis of a range of information collected while conducting research. The results are as follows: five out of seven Karâva were 'significantly involved;' three of six Tamils; three of 10 Goyigama; three of seven other Sinhalese; two of seven members of 'Indian Trading Communities;' and none of the four Muslims.

How is this kind of 'close control' of quoted companies possible? The answer is that company owners almost always put only a minority of their equity on the market, often the minimum required to take advantage of the substantial tax concessions available to quoted companies. It is still felt very important to maintain close control. The more substantial question for present purposes is why members of the KSD castes and Sri Lanka Tamils are so prominent in the ownership of quoted companies -- much more so than in business in general. There appear to be three reasons:

1. First, members of other groups are more likely to be dependent for their business success on personal socio-political resources that might be neutralised or thrown into question if their owners had to meet the increasingly high standards of accounting and information disclosure required for share market quotation. These 'personal socio-political resources' include both (a) political connections, that are likely to be especially important to Goyigama businessmen; and (b) the advantages of being a member a 'business community' in a sociological sense (see above), that may be more consequential for Muslims and members of the 'Indian Trading Communities.'

2. Second, Tamils in particular may feel that working through a publicly quoted company, with large numbers of shareholders, helps provide cover and political protection.

3. Third and most tangible, members of the KSD castes and Sri Lanka Tamils have benefited from their higher standards of education and superior representation in most white-collar and professional fields. The gradual liquidation of British colonial investments, and the fact that company management and share market trading were poorly regulated over a long period of time, provided opportunities for variants of 'insider trading:' the gradual acquisition of substantial blocks of company equity by people who knew which British or other shareholders wanted to sell, and had substantial

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knowledge of company affairs by virtue of being executives, lawyers or auditors. Company law was barely enforced, and there were frequently long delays in the submission of reports to shareholders and the Registrar of Companies. In some cases, groups of friends and colleagues working in the mercantile sector pooled information and resources to run collective share-dealing accounts. The companies acquired in this fashion were generally the ex-British trading companies that bore colonial names, and continued to enjoy valuable reputations with overseas trading partners and/or substantial real estate holdings in Colombo.[50]

5. Business and Ethnic Conflict

The fact that business and political power have been located in distinctively different ethnic and caste groups has helped shape group identity, politics and government policy. I have suggested above that this differential is lessening, both objectively and cognitively. On an optimistic reading, this leaves government more free to pursue the only economic policy option that currently appears viable -- the private, open, market strategy -- without too much concern about political backlash. There is, however, a more critical view: that conflicts of interest among different sections of business have played a significant role in igniting ethnic conflict in the past, and could therefore do so again in future. I refer in particular to the series of articles by the late Newton Gunasinghe, published in 1984, in which he strongly suggests that the anti-Tamil pogroms of July 1983 were stimulated by the resentments of Sinhalese businessmen about the adverse impacts of the import liberalisation begun in 1977 (Gunasinghe 1994).

The essence of Gunasinghe's argument is that there was a category of small Sinhalese businessmen who had built up enterprises, with state support, during the earlier years of statism and import control, only to see them wiped out by economic liberalisation. These resentments, it is argued, were channelled against the Tamils, who were seen as benefiting from the open economy by virtue of their links with larger, foreign enterprises and their involvement with importing. The only evidence that Gunasinghe provides related to the match industry and even then, not surprisingly in the light of the sensitive nature of the topic, the information he provides is sketchy. His argument is certainly very plausible. There is a long history of Sinhalese rioters expressing resentment at the 'commercial minorities.'[51] One may question why the targets in 1983 were Sri Lanka Tamils, given their relatively modest role in business. Here the broader context and the

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role of human agency come into play. There is evidence, not cited by Gunasinghe, that the government Minister who played a key role in inciting and organising the pogroms had been a regular advocate of the plight of small Sinhalese businesses hit by the open economy. He both exacerbated and aggregated a range of resentments against Tamils, few of which were intrinsically related to commercial rivalries, into a general anti-Tamil programme. That was a particular conjuncture. One can tentatively agree that the resentments of the Sinhalese business 'victims' of the open economy probably played some role, although one might question the extent to which they actually were victims, and call for more evidence -- evidence that is unlikely ever to become available given the controversial nature of the topic and the fact that it is virtually impossible now to identify how many enterprises actually were wiped out as a result of the 1977 import liberalisation. The more knotty intellectual problem arises from the notion that there is some structural or inherent connection between free market policies and ethnic conflict in business, i.e. that what is alleged to have happened in 1983 is likely to recur.[52] My own attempts to research this issue have been rather frustrating and lead me to the conclusion that the question is unanswerable. Ethnicity in Sri Lanka is a political resource. Business is a very political activity much of the time. Businessmen -- normally Sinhalese businessmen given the Sinhalese domination of the polity[53] -- frequently play the ethnic card when they want to mobilise support, either with government or some other powerful constituency. It does not follow that they are 'anti-Tamil' or 'anti-Muslim' in their personal life or in their more general political attitudes and activity. Whenever ethnic conflict occurs, one can find evidence that some businessmen appear to have stoked the fire at some previous point. But sequence and cause are not the same. Whether business rivalries expressed in ethnic terms make any special contribution to the outbreak of ethnic conflict is a question more easily, if less definitively, answered through recourse to doctrine and faith than appeal to the kinds of scanty, ephemeral and contested 'facts' that are available to researchers.

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1. Jayawardena (1987: 257) cites extreme instances of this convergence in the 1960s. It was frequently embodied in a special hostility towards the plantation sector, since this target neatly encapsulated capitalism, imperialism, and 'alien' groups -- Indian Tamil labourers and British owners and managers -- who had allegedly deprived the Sinhalese peasantry of land, forest resources and irrigation water (Moore 1985: 65-84, Samaraweera 1981: 154-5). See also Roberts (1979: 68-69), and the work of K. M. de Silva cited there.
2. Thailand was not a colony in the formal sense, but was very much so in its relationship to the international economy and international politics.
3. I refer in particular to Marwaris in Bangladesh, Chettiars in Burma, and to Chinese in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.
4. The extent of withdrawal was greater in the 'revolutionary' cases, notably Burma, Indonesia and Vietnam, and, at the opposite extreme, relative rather than absolute in the Malaysian and Thai cases.
5. For an excellent exploration of these issues in relation to Chinese business in Southeast Asia, especially the significance of successful capital accumulation by bureaucratic and political groups, see McVey (1992). Jesudason (1989), Robison (1986) and the various contributions to McVey (1992) are also very useful.
6. Dawoodi Bohras, numbering only around a million people scattered almost worldwide, engage almost exclusively in business, and have a long tradition of large scale trading. For some history, see Chopra (1982: chapter 5), Misra (1964: chapter 2) and Ray (1995: 535-50). The official directory for the Dawoodi Bohra community in Sri Lanka lists 375 households and 276 companies (Anjuman-e-Saifi (Sri Lanka) Trust 1986). In 1907, a leading Colombo Bohra trader, Mr. Carimjee Jafferjee, ran a fleet of six ships; maintained branches in Galle, Tuticorin, Calcutta, the Maldives and Mauritius; and retained agents in seventeen cities in Asia and Australasia, including Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kobe, Yokohama and Adelaide (Wright 1907: 492). Hebtulabhoy and Co., still one of the largest Bohra businesses in Colombo, began shipping tea to Britain in the same year (Forrest 1967: 150).
7. The standard ethnography of caste in Sri Lanka is Ryan (1953).
8. The remainder of this paragraph is my own simplified interpretation of Roberts' work, especially his chapter 8. He estimates that in 1917 Karâva owned 62% of the plantation area owned by the highest echelons of Sinhalese plantation owners, and 72% of the tea area (Roberts 1982: 311). Among "the Sinhalese rich," the Karâva also owned the largest share of urban property in Colombo early in this century (Roberts 1982: 318-9).
9. K(arâva), S(alâgama), D(urâva). This convenient acronym is Michael Roberts' invention (Roberts 1982: 3). The more conventional term is "Low Country Sinhalese castes."
10. See, for example, Hettiarachchy (1982).
11. The Kandyan Goyigama/Sinhalese have traditionally been rural, and less involved in business, education and public service than the people of the Low

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Country. There are no Kandyans in the list of the fifty wealthiest businessmen summarised in column (b) of Table 2. See also Roberts (1982: 226). The most radical and statist governments of the 1960s and 1970s were led Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, a member of the elite Kandyan Goyigama 'feudal' aristocracy. Her attitudes in many ways reflect a 'feudal' rejection of business and markets. The Kandyan Goyigama have not otherwise enjoyed a great deal of political power.

12. This issue is examined in detail in Moore (forthcoming), where an extensive bibliography can be found. Important recent theoretical and conceptual work bearing on this issue includes Ben-Porath (1980), Granovetter (1992), Landa (1994) and Raub and Weesie (1990).
13. To the contrary, the state banks have generally followed existing business opportunities, and have therefore been open to criticism for 'favouring' minorities. The 1968 Commission of Enquiry into the Bank of Ceylon reported that at that time 18% of outstanding advances were to 'nationals by registration' (rather than 'nationals by descent') -- implicitly members of the Indian Trading Communities. This was held to be justified "due to their being engaged extensively in the import/export trade and the new industries" (Government of Ceylon 1968: 133). It was widely alleged that, in its early years under a Sri Lanka Tamil chief executive, the Bank of Ceylon favoured Tamils.
14. For example, 11 of the 13 largest finance companies in early 1990 were Sinhalese controlled; among these, five were run by Goyigama and three by members of other non-Karâva castes. Out of the 13, three were originally and/or currently based in Kandy: a high figure for a country where larger business is virtually all Colombo based. This pattern may reflect the fact that finance companies grew to a large extent as the result of personal connections and trust, particularly with depositors. In addition, the fact that finance companies operated without regulation or supervision from the time the first was founded in 1940 until 1978 (Government of Sri Lanka 1992: 3) may have provided opportunities for entrepreneurs from outside the ranks of established business.
15. The prime example is the large and growing Ceylinco group, that now includes the Seylan Bank. The original base was The Finance Company, established in 1940 by Justin Kotelawala, a scion of the elite Kotelawala family, and now controlled by his son Lalith Kotelawala. The Mercantile Credit finance company was also the original base of N. U. Jayawardena's financial empire, that for sometime involved his chairmanship of a bank, the Sinhaputra Bank. C. Wijenaike, the owner of the third largest finance company, Central Finance, has been more conservative, but has also expanded to some degree in financial services. The new and fast-growing merchant banking company, Vanik Inc., recently took control of the fourth largest finance company, L.B. Finance.
16. For an account of the relative radicalism of this nationalist agenda in relation to business, see Roberts 1979a.
17. Of the 22 companies that were awarded management contracts, 15 (i.e. 68%) were Sinhalese controlled, three were Tamil, two belonged to other groups, and two had no clear ethnic profile. Among the 46 companies that pre-

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qualified, Sinhalese companies had a much higher success rate (56%) in the final round than did others (37%). It is likely that, because of the well-known political sensitivity about non-Sinhalese getting control of land, non-Sinhalese companies anyway had been reluctant to bid in the first place.

18. Some members of the Karâva caste felt that these nationalisations, conducted by Sri Lanka Freedom Party governments under Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, were designed to strike at Karâva capital. This appears consistent with Mrs Bandaranaike's attitudes on caste issues.
19. See, for example, a 1939 report of a gem sub-committee of the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce, chaired by N. M. Perera, later a leader of the LSSP (Government of Ceylon 1939).
20. Upali Wijewardena (Upali Group), Ranjit Wijewardena (Lake House Printers and Lake House Investments), the late C. A. Harischandra and family (Harischandra Mills), Mallory Wijesinghe (Bartleets), and Lalith Kotelawala (Ceylinco).
21 Evers (1964: 169-70), cited in Roberts (1982: 320).
22. Rubber played a secondary role: it was quantitatively less important than tea, and less distinctive in an organisational sense, being less capital intensive, less enmeshed in a distinctively British-imperial economic network (see main text), and, to a greater extent than tea, owned by Sri Lankans and smallholders. For some details, see Moore (1985: 70-1). Most of what is said here about the tea industry applies also to rubber, but to a lesser extent.
23. For a summary of these arguments, see Moore (1985: 65-76). Note that they are directed much more at the tea plantations, mainly located in the Kandyan heartlands, than at rubber estates.
24. See, for example, Puthucheary (1960) on Malaya.
25. De Silva always insisted that his book was about plantation economies as a generic category, and that the material on Sri Lanka was purely illustrative of a more general pattern.
26. Most of these general arguments were made by Wickizer (1944: 5-8).
27. It is also worth noting that, unlike in the case of most other globally-traded commodities, the London companies and organisations dealing with tea have been distinct and specialised in tea alone (Macrae and Cairncross 1985: 205).
28. Jeyapalan and Jayawardena (1968: especially 26-63) provide considerable detail on this. See also Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission (1956: 7).
29. In 1970, agency houses managed estates that accounted for 62% of total tea production (Government of Ceylon 1974: 13).
30. Similar arrangements held in the Indian tea industry (Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission 1956: 7). The most evident difference was the agency houses were more likely to be registered in London. The reason is that in Sri Lanka the 1937 Companies Ordinance provided tax incentives for the registration of companies in Colombo; and this led many British owned enterprises to establish themselves as rupee companies (Rote 1986: 39-40).
31. In the same year, 1971, the directors of a marginally different selection of 12 agency houses held 386 directorships in the 89 plantation companies managed by their own firms, and a further 218 directorships in plantation companies

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managed by other agency houses. The figures are calculated from raw data in Colombo Brokers' Association 1971.

32. The relative importance of sterling and rupee companies in the management portfolio of the agency houses is not clear. The 13 agency houses examined in detail by the Commission of Enquiry into Agency Houses and Brokering Firms managed 86 sterling companies and 130 rupee companies in 1971. Since sterling company estates were generally larger and more productive than rupee company estates, it is likely that the sterling company business was the more important. No data are given by the Commission.
33. See, for example, the importance of agency and trust among the Nattukottai merchant bankers (Rudner 1994: chapter 5).
34. Data from Fergusons *Directory of Ceylon*, various years.
35. Using data from Fergusons *Directory of Ceylon*, I calculated the average period of service of directors or partners of the 30 mercantile firms for which information was consistently available from 1920. Those people who first became directors or partners of their firms in the 1920s served in those positions an average of 15 years before they retired or deceased. The figure for the 1930s was 12 years, and for the 1940s 10 years. Thereafter, because of Ceylonisation, the average period of service began to decline more rapidly, reaching 2 years in the 1970s.
36. See, for example, Forrest (1967: chapter 5) on Sri Lanka, and Griffiths (1967: *passim*) on India.
37. In 1968, 12 of the 19 members of the Board of the Tea Research Institute were "representatives of planting interests" (Government of Ceylon 1968: 126).
38. For the planters' perspective on how this system worked in the 1920s, see Nicholas (1926: 57-68).
39. (Government of Ceylon 1974: 28-29). Evidence on the degree of political cooperation between these associations recurs in the annual reports of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce.
40. These were the three London-based associations mentioned above and two representing the Dutch East Indies (Griffiths 1967: 547).
41. These included Lever Brothers (Unilever); Ceylon Tobacco (BAT); Chemical Industries (ICI); James Finlay; and a few pharmaceutical companies. Not all, however, maintained British executives in the island.
42. Without bothering with a university education.
43. Data from Central Bank of Ceylon, Annual Report, various years.
44. Figures calculated from data supplied by the Tea Board.
45. My source was a leading international commercial lawyer interviewed in Colombo in 1990.
46. And those people who did hold multiple directorships in 1988 were either: (a) directors of one of a small number of conglomerates that had floated several of their subsidiary or associated companies on the stock market; or (b) prominent businessmen or accountants who were placed on a large number of company boards because of their recognised abilities and integrity.
47. A snapshot of this process can be unearthed from data provided by the Commission of Enquiry into Agency Houses and Brokering Firms on the composition of boards of directors in 1971 (Government of Ceylon 1974: 18,

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24-5, 173 and 187). Of the 30 agency houses and seven "leading" brokering companies listed, there are 28 firms (including all the brokering companies) partly or wholly owned by Sri Lankan nationals for which there is relevant data on board composition. The 16 firms that were wholly Sri Lankan owned had 64 directors among them. Of these, 47 (73%) had one or more relatives sitting on the same board. The 12 firms that were partly foreign owned had 81 directors, of which only nine (11%) were related.

48. Data from Colombo Stock Exchange (1994).
49. There are no good studies of the class structure of Sri Lanka since Independence, especially studies at the supra-village level, to inform and provide context for these kinds of observations.
50. Note that most of the Karâva currently prominent in business have little or no connection to the wealthy Karâva families that were so prominent in the development of indigenous capitalism in the nineteenth century (see above). Successor generations have often preferred to enjoy their wealth rather than struggle to accumulate more.
51. E.g. Roberts (1994: 190-1).
52. See Moore (1990) for an analysis of the political implications of economic liberalisation in Sri Lanka.
53. And, during the Presidency of R. Premadasa, Sinhalese businessmen of non-Goyigama castes.

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THE IMPACT OF NATIONALISM ON EDUCATION: The Schools Take-Over (1961) and the University Admissions Crisis 1970-1975*

C.R. de Silva

Education in the sense of "formal instruction and training in organised institutions" achieves a number of purposes.[1] The weightage given to such purposes varies from community to community, but there is one key function that education performs in all modern societies: it works as a selective process whereby a relatively small elite is chosen to man the top administrative and technical posts in the land.

In a plural society such a function easily leads to conflicts among the different groups which compose the society, especially if there is an imbalance in the provision of educational opportunity. This is especially so in Third World countries such as Sri Lanka where unemployment is high and rising, with no immediate prospect of being lowered, and where academic qualifications carry great weight in selection for lucrative appointments. Access to educational opportunity often makes the difference between poverty and affluence and education is increasingly viewed as a means -- indeed the primary means -- of social and economic advancement.[2] In this context it is not suprising that in popular democracies the ruling group is often pressurised to take decisions on education largely from the point of view of its fellow-members.

By the early twentieth century the society of Sri Lanka was a complex one, being composed of various religious and ethnic groups -- Buddhists (or various denominations), Hindus and Muslims as well as Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, Malays and Burghers.[3] A key factor here was the circumstance that the largest ethno-religious group, the Sinhala Buddhists, found themselves in the early twentieth century as an educationally underprivileged group. This situation could not last very long especially as the introduction of universal suffrage in 1931 and the winning of independence by the mid-century placed them in a politically dominant

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This article is a reprint of chapter 15 in the 1979 edition of *Collective identities*, Colombo: Marga.

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Table I
Population of Sri Lanka by Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	1901		1946		1953		1963		1971	
Low-Country Sinhalese	1,458,320	40.9	2,902,509	43.6	3,469,512	42.8	4,472,340	42.4	5,445,706	42.8
Kandyan Sinhalese	872,487	24.5	1,718,998	25.6	2,147,193	26.5	3,045,410	28.8	3,700,973	29.1
Sri Lanka Tamil			733,731	11.0	884,703	10.9	1,170,310	11.1	1,415,567	11.1
Indian (Plantation) Tamil	951,740	26.7	780,589	11.7	974,098	12.0	1,122,850	10.6	1,196,168	9.4
Sri Lanka Moor			373,559	5.6	463,963	5.7	661,590	6.3	824,291	6.5
Indian Moor	228,034	6.4	35,624	0.6	47,462	0.6	27,290	0.3	29,416	0.2
Malay	11,902	0.3	22,508	0.3	25,404	0.3	24,130	0.2	41,615	0.3
Burgher & Eurasian	23,482	0.7	41,926	0.6	45,950	0.6	46,050	0.5	44,240	0.3
Other	19,989	0.5	53,814	0.8	39,550	0.5	20,090	0.2	13,957	0.1
Total	3,565,984		6,658,339		8,097,895		10,590,060		12,711,143	

Source: *Census of Ceylon* 1901, 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971.

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Table II
Population of Sri Lanka by Religion

Religion	1901	1946	1953	1963	1971
Buddhists	2,141,404 (60.3)	4,294,932 (64.5)	5,209,439 (64.3)	1,020,780 (66.3)	8,567,570 (67.4)
Hindus	826,826 (23.8)	1,320,352 (19.8)	1,618,561 (20.0)	1,945,210 (18.4)	2,239,310 (17.6)
Christians	349,239 (9.8)	603,235 (9.1)	724,461 (8.9)	883,900 (8.3)	986,687 (7.7)
Muslims	246,118 (6.9)	436,556 (6.6)	541,506 (6.7)	730,840 (6.9)	909,941 (7.1)
Others	2,367 (0.0)	2,264 (0.0)	11,928 (0.1)	9,330 (0.1)	7,635 (0.1)
Total	3,565,984	6,657,339	8,097,895	10,590,060	12,711,143

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position. In fact one of the themes of the history of education in Sri Lanka in the present century is the successful attempt of the Sinhala Buddhist leaders to change the educational structure of the country so that their group would have at least equal opportunities with those of other religious and ethnic groups.

The improvements in the position of the Sinhala Buddhist group to one bordering on privilege in the field of education in Sri Lanka involved two important conflicts. The first was a long battle waged against the Christian mission school system, dating from around 1880, gathering strength after 1931, becoming particularly intense after 1951 and eventually resulting in the take-over of almost all private schools in 1961.

The second was related to an effort to gain greater educational opportunities for those whose mother tongue was Sinhalese. The initial stages of this struggle involved a successful effort to replace English with Sinhalese and Tamil as the medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary educational institutions. However, this early stage, set in the 1940s and 1950s, was one which united ethnic groups rather than caused tension amongst them, for both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists united to persuade their English educated leaders and educators to accelerate the change-over.[4] Conflict did come soon after. In the years 1970-1975 the mode of access to higher education was altered in such a way as to benefit the Sinhalese -- largely at the expense of Ceylon Tamils.

The two episodes -- the schools take-over of 1961 and the university admissions crisis of 1970-1975 -- are best examined in turn.

Buddhist opposition to Christian mission schools had a long history. A few decades after the British conquest of Sri Lanka the colonial rulers began a policy of keeping state schools to the minimum and of granting state aid to private schools that conformed to certain specified requirements. The Christian missionaries who had contacts with British officials were able to use these grants to build up a school system in a way the Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims were unable to. Thus, from early on Christians were far better served with educational facilities than those of other religions. In 1899 of the 1963 aided schools only 120 were Buddhist controlled, while 1082 were Christian controlled. Among of the recorded 2280 un-aided schools as many as 1516 were run by Buddhists and only 60 by Christians. The 489 government schools which catered largely for Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim children[5] hardly compensated for this imbalance, which was clearly reflected in the contemporary literacy rates.

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Table III
Literacy Rates by Religion and Sex
(Literacy rates in English are given in parenthesis)

	1901		1911	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Christians	55.2 (16.2)	30.0 (9.5)	60.3 (16.8)	38.8 (10.0)
Buddhists	34.9 (1.5)	5.2 (0.2)	41.8 (1.6)	9.1 (0.3)
Muslims	34.4 (3.0)	3.3 (0.1)	36.2 (3.0)	3.2 (0.2)
Hindus	25.9 (1.7)	2.5 (1.8)	29.6 (1.8)	4.0 (0.2)

Source: *Census of Ceylon* 1901, 1911.

The Buddhist revival of the late nineteenth century, and the subsequent rise of a Sinhalese literature which aggressively defended traditional Buddhist values, in time stimulated the growth of nationalist sentiment among the Sinhala Buddhists.[6] Their leaders became increasingly restive about what they felt were Buddhist disabilities in the sphere of education. Increasing hostility from Buddhist and Hindu leaders made the Christian missions slow the expansion of their schools by about 1920, but the official date was perhaps 1930/31. In 1931, when the Donoughmore Constitution became operative, the control of several subjects including education was handed over to a legislature dominated by local politicians elected on the basis of universal suffrage. Although the Christian hold on the elite was strong enough to enable them to secure 48% of the seats filled, 31% of the seats went to Buddhists, who thereby obtained an element or representation in the political sector that they perhaps did not possess in the higher reaches of the administration or in the professions. The proportion of Buddhists in the legislature rose gradually through successive elections to reach 57% in 1952 and 66% in 1960, while that of the Christians declined to 24% in 1952 and 16% in 1960.[7]

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The change in the political balance had immediate effects. The expansion of the number of missionary schools ceased. Indeed, between 1930 and 1960 the number of Christian schools declined from 1353 to 1170.[8] In the same period the number of schools registered as Buddhist rose from 240 to 1121. As significant was the heightened activity of the government in providing schooling facilities. In 1930 only 1490 out of 3959 schools, or 37.6 per cent, was run directly by the state. By 1960 the number had risen to 4390 out of 6986 -- a proportion of 62.83 per cent.

Nevertheless, the Buddhist leaders were far from being satisfied. The Christians continued to lead in the quality of equipment and facilities offered and thereby also continued to enjoy proportionately higher grants from the government. In the 1939 budget for aided schools 75.2% of the funds were allocated to Christian schools, while the Buddhist schools received only 19.3%. Even as late as 1959 the 735 aided Christian schools received a grant of Rs. 28 million or Rs. 118 per pupil, while the 1257 aided Buddhist schools received Rs. 20 million or Rs. 64 per pupil.[8] Moreover, the bulk of the leading English medium schools, which till 1959 provided the sole mode of access to the university and the professions, remained in Christian hands; and although many Buddhist children were educated in such institutions this did not eliminate the Christian lead in education. This lead was reflected in third-level education as well. In the years 1943 to 1945 there were more Christians than Buddhists among the undergraduate population of the newly established University of Ceylon.[9] From at least the early 1930s Buddhist leaders began demanding a take-over of all schools by the government and the ending of the grants-in-aid system. As an immediate measure they also called for the teaching of their religion to all non-Christians in Christian schools.[10]

Faced with these demands the Christian minority fought back. The various Protestant mission school organisations were, however, in a weak position. The number of Protestants was small and their schools, organised largely as an aid in the work of conversion, contained large numbers of Buddhists and Hindus. In 1958, for instance, there were 77600 Buddhists and Hindus in Protestant schools as opposed to only 16000 Protestants.[11] The Catholics, on the other hand, while they did use their schools for purposes of spreading their faith, had very high proportions of Catholic children in their schools in districts such as Colombo, Chilaw, Jaffna, Mannar and Puttalam. Thus the Catholic leaders were able to make a case that their schools were necessary to ensure the provision of education for Catholic children in a religious atmosphere.

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In the last day before independence the Buddhist lobby seemed to have gained an important victory. In the Education Act of 1947 it was specified that in the case of all religious schools established after 1 July 1947 the state would pay grants "only in respect of pupils whose parents profess the religion of the proprietor of the school." This clause led to considerable opposition among Christian missions because it reduced their opportunities to open up schools in non-Christian areas. Eventually Christian pressure was successful in having this particular clause repealed in 1951.[12]

At this stage the campaign against the grant-in-aid system was intensified by the leadership of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress. The ACBC had been formed in 1918 to promote the revival of Buddhism and to protect the interests of the Buddhists. In 1952 its President, G.P. Malalasekera, a leading university don, outlined Buddhist dissatisfaction in relation to the system of education.[13] One and a half years later the ACBC, disappointed at the Government's response to their demands, set up a Committee of Enquiry to investigate the state of Buddhism in the island. The *Eksat Bhikkhu Peramuna*, an organisation of Buddhist monks set up soon after this, tried to pressurise the UNP Government which had been lukewarm in intervening against the Christian lead in secondary education. The publication of the report of their Committee of Enquiry in both Sinhalese and English in 1956, amidst the commemoration of the 2500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha, was a stimulus to greater self-awareness among the Sinhala Buddhists and contributed to the electoral victory of the opposition coalition led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, a group pledged to implement the recommendations of the Committee of Enquiry.

One of the key recommendations of the Committee was the take-over of all state-aided schools[14] and this was strongly urged by several members of the Committee in subsequent public statements. Prominent among the Buddhist propagandists were L.H. Mettananda, P. de S. Kularatne, D.C. Wijewardene and C.D.S. Siriwardena. The few Buddhist leaders who had doubts about handing over their schools to the state failed to make themselves heard effectively, while the proponents of the take-over gained the support of the left-wing parties. The left-wing was attracted by the proposal to have a 'national' system of education -- partly for egalitarian reasons. The Buddhists were able to represent their movement as an attack on privilege -- a movement for equalising opportunity. But the Leftists were also perhaps attracted by the prospect of demolishing another of the centres of ideological resistance, namely the Catholic schools. Thus

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was built up a powerful political coalition which effectively isolated the Catholics. It was only the language controversies of 1956-1959 that postponed action. The take-over was achieved, despite resolute Catholic opposition, during the S.L.F.P. government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No. 5 of 1960 and the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961 provided for the transfer of the ownership and administration of all schools and training colleges to the state, except in the case of those which opted to continue as non-fee levying institutions. All training colleges and all but 38 of the assisted schools were handed over to the state under these laws.[15]

The evidence regarding the campaign against Christian mission schools seems to indicate that the Buddhists were concerned with two principal issues: to prevent state-aided institutions from being used as instruments to spread Christianity and to eliminate the special advantages available to Christian children by the presence of a more developed system of schools funded largely by the state. The opposition to the move also stemmed largely from desires to protect the religious identity of each of the Christian minorities and to secure educational advantages for its members. From time to time other arguments relating to educational theory, expense, fundamental rights and individual freedom were brought in by both sides, but these were clearly introduced to bolster the position of each side.[16]

F. Houtart argues that schools take-over and the struggle which preceded it had "a symbolic rather than a factual significance."[17] He argues that since the Sinhala Buddhists had already secured political dominance as a majority group, the question as to who would manage the institutions of secondary education was of little real significance. But this was hardly the case. To the Buddhists in particular the schools were more than a symbol. They were regarded as a means of advancement. The report of the Buddhist Committee of Enquiry claimed in 1956 that "A Christian child may be computed to have 1 in 200 chances of gaining admission to the University. A Hindu child's chances are 1 in 500. The chances of a Buddhist child are one in one thousand, of a Muslim one in two thousand."[18]

Yet the schools take-over did not contribute greatly to the greater educational advancement of the Buddhists, The schools that were taken over continued to operate with the same teaching staff and often with the same principals. Many such schools, especially the Catholic ones, being located in areas where there was a substantial Catholic or Christian

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population, continued to serve the same clientele. Thus, the proportion of Buddhists entering the more prestigious science-oriented facilities increased but slowly. As late as 1970 Christians accounted for 21.7% of admissions to the engineering course and 19.8% of admissions to medicine.[19] Viewed from this point of view, the results of the schools take-over appear to have hardly justified the expectations placed upon it.

This indeed could explain why the tension between the Buddhists and the Catholics, which had risen to a peak with the schools take-over, subsided relatively quickly. Most Christians came to regard the decision on the school as well-nigh irreversible. Moreover, there was no immediate restriction of opportunities of higher education as far as the Christians were concerned. Indeed, the number of Christians entering university also rose steadily in the years 1960-65, though their proportion in the total student population dropped somewhat. The Buddhists themselves had reason to be satisfied. Their schools take-over campaign had been crowned with success and other developments seemed to favour them. The switch-over in the medium of instruction from English to Sinhala and Tamil in the university arts faculties from 1960 onwards gave greater opportunities to the less Westernised rural Buddhist children. The simultaneous rapid expansion of the arts faculties, which expanded their students numbers by 450% between 1959 and 1965, also enabled large numbers of Buddhists to enter the universities, so that between 1960 and 1965, the proportion of undergraduate students who were Buddhists rose from 55.9% to 71%. The Buddhists were prepared for the time being to rest content with such gains; and recommendations that university admissions should be determined by quotas according to religion did not elicit widespread support.[20]

Yet significant changes which affected educational opportunities open to the various groups in Sri Lanka were under way in the 1960s. In the first place the tremendous growth in secondary education in the period 1950-1960 (during which time the number of students enrolled in Grades 9 to 12 rose from 65,000 to 225,000) began to have its effects. Increasing numbers sought entry to the universities, especially as employment was difficult to find with only a school leaving certificate. The number of those seeking admission to the universities rose from 5277 in 1960 to 30445 in 1969/70. The number of places available to them hardly doubled: from 1812 in 1960 to 3451 in 1969/70 and of this expansion the bulk related to that of the arts faculties. By about 1966 the production of arts graduates

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Table IV
Admissions to Universities 1970

Course of Study	Buddhist	Hindu	Christian	Islam	Other	Total
Bio.Sc./Phy.Sc./Architecture	265 (58.8)	105 (23.3)	71 (15.7)	8 (1.8)	2 (0.4)	451
Engineering	66 (43.4)	50 (32.9)	33 (21.7)	3 (2.0)	-	152
Medicine	114 (46.1)	78 (31.5)	49 (19.8)	6 (2.4)	-	247
Dental Surgery	17 (41.4)	21 (51.2)	2 (4.9)	1 (2.5)	-	41
Agriculture	23 (53.6)	12 (27.9)	6 (13.9)	2 (4.6)	-	43
Vet. Science	14 (66.6)	5 (23.8)	1 (4.8)	1 (4.8)	-	21
Total Science	499 (52.2)	271 (28.4)	162 (17.0)	21 (2.2)	02 (0.2)	955
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding law)	2121 (86.4)	144 (5.9)	107 (4.4)	82 (3.3)	-	2.454
Law	18 (37.5)	13 (27.1)	11 (22.9)	5 (10.4)	1 (2.1)	48
Total Arts	2139 (85.2)	157 (6.3)	118 (4.7)	87 (3.5)	1 (0.0)	2.502
Grand Total	2638 (76.3)	428 (12.3)	280 (8.1)	108 (3.1)	03 (0.1)	3.457
Total students number in 1965	7615 (71.0)	1609 (15.0)	1274 (11.9)	219 (2.0)	6 (0.1)	10.723
Total students number in 1960	2060 (55.9)	768 (20.9)	774 (21.0)	69 (1.9)	13 (0.3)	3.684

Source: D.L. Jayasuriya 1965: 148; Senate House, University of Sri Lanka

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had increased to such amounts that a backlog of unemployed graduates began to build up. This, in turn led to greater competition for entry to the science-oriented faculties. But schools which provided a science education up to Grade 12 (the university entrance level) were few and even in 1972 of the 209 such schools 98 or some 47% were in the Northern and Western provinces, areas populated largely by Tamils and Low-Country Sinhalese respectively. These two provinces in 1969 provided over 70% of the total admissions to science-oriented courses in the university. In the prestigious engineering and medical faculties Tamil students gained almost as many places as the Sinhalese in 1969/70 and of the Sinhalese a great majority came from the Low-Country Sinhalese group.[21]

But such a distribution of educational opportunity was greatly at variance with the distribution of political power at the time. Political power in Sri Lanka since 1948 has resided primarily in a House of Representatives (since 1972 called the National State Assembly) elected on universal suffrage.[22] According to a provision in the 1948 constitution (also incorporated in that of 1972) the delimitation of constituencies to the legislature was by allotting one member for every 75,000 persons and one for every 1000 square miles. At the outset the procedure has resulted in a fairly equitable division of seats among the various ethnic groups, but with the disfranchisement of the "Indian Tamils" (Plantation Tamils) in 1949 the Sinhalese representation shot up to about 80% of the seats. More significantly, since the Plantation Tamils continued to be counted for purposes of delimitation despite the fact that they had no vote, the Kandyan Sinhalese in whose regions the Plantation Tamils had primarily resided received weighted representation in Parliament. Indeed, by the 1960s they were able to gain about as many seats in the legislation as the Low-Country Sinhalese, although their numbers were considerably smaller. The Kandyans who had gained very limited benefits from the existing structure of education were inclined to view it with a more critical eye and their hostility to the Plantation Tamils living in their midst made them somewhat less tolerant of the lead in education.

An expansion in secondary education in science in the under-developed areas might have been an answer and indeed this course had been pursued since at least the early 60s. The number of schools teaching science up to Grade 12 had risen from 50 in 1958 to 146 in 1967 and 209 in 1972. Nevertheless, progress was slow as equipment was expensive and science teachers competent to teach in Sinhalese were difficult to attract to the relatively ill-paid teaching profession. By the 1970s, moreover, the

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stagnating economy made it necessary for the government to reduce expenditure on social welfare. By 1969/70 education already accounted for 16.2% of the budget and in the context of a shortfall of revenue there seemed to be no prospect of obtaining extra funds, as in the 1950s and 1960, to alleviate problems of unequal opportunity.[23]

Thus, despite past triumphs, by the end of the 1960s the Sinhala Buddhists, especially those from the Kandyan areas, found themselves confronted by a continuing lead by another group -- the Ceylon Tamils -- in the crucial spheres of tertiary and technical education. Conflict was inevitable and it was sharpened by two developments.

In the first place the elections of 1970 brought in a coalition United Front Government, of which the main constituent party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, had a powerful Kandyan contingent. The Kandyan interest was represented in the Ministry of Education by the Permanent Secretary to the Minister, Dr. Premadasa Udagama, a long standing party member. It might not have been entirely a coincidence that soon after assuming office the new Minister of Education, a Muslim, expressed his intention of reserving 25% of the places at the University at Peradeniya to students who lived within twenty miles of it.[24] It was clear that the new hands at the Ministry were willing to consider substantial changes in the mode of admission to post-secondary educational institutions.

Secondly, there was the completion of the switchover in the medium of instruction from English to Sinhala and Tamil. This switchover was completed in the arts faculties by the early 1960s, but the corresponding transfer in the science oriented faculties was delayed by about ten years. As long as students sat for examinations in English complaints of favouritism were muted though not altogether absent, but when scripts in different media were evaluated by examiners of different linguistic groups the cry became strident.

The question came to a head when it was rumoured that one hundred out of one hundred and sixty two students selected for the engineering course were Tamil medium candidates. Complaints of unfair selection, though unsubstantiated, fell on receptive ears and a lower qualifying mark was set for Sinhala-medium candidates seeking admission to science based courses so that a 'politically acceptable' proportion of Sinhalese candidates could be selected. In the case of arts courses where the Tamil medium candidates had for years performed less well, a lower qualifying mark was set for them.

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Table V
University Admissions 1971

Course of Study	Medium	Minimum mark for Admission
Arts - All Universities	Sinhalese Tamil	187 170
Engineering - Peradeniya	Sinhalese Tamil	227 250
Engineering - Katubedde	Sinhalese Tamil	212 232
Medicine & Dentistry (Peradeniya & Colombo)	Sinhalese Tamil	229 250
Bio-Science (all Universities)	Sinhalese Tamil	175 181
Physical Science (all Universities)	Sinhalese Tamil	183 204
Architecture (Katubedde)	Sinhalese Tamil	180 194

Source: C.R. de Silva, 1974.

In the uproar that followed the government found it difficult to defend the concept of different qualifying marks, especially as a committee of investigation set up to investigate discrepancies in marking standards between media failed to produce any evidence of this. The Tamil politicians protested vehemently and the University of Ceylon Teachers' Association (Peradeniya) pointed out that a scheme of grading schools and introducing weightage on this basis would be a fairer system.[25]

In the event the advantages that accrued to the Sinhalese group at the expense of considerable rancour proved rather limited. It is true that the Sinhalese gained 62.4% of places for engineering in 1971 as opposed to 55.9% in 1970. Their total share of places in science-based courses rose

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slightly from 60.6% in 1970 to 63.6% in 1971. The percentages gained by the Tamils fell correspondingly from 35.3% to 33.6%, but the total places gained by them in fact rose from 337 to 359. The real significance of the move, however, did not lie in these figures. For the first time, Sinhalese pressure, including a threat of violence in the universities, was successful in forcing the government to abandon 'open competition' and introduce a system of weightage for the performance of different groups of candidates at public examinations. The government and particularly its representatives at the Education Department were too conscious of Sinhalese pressure to yield to opposition and go back to 'open competition.' They began a search for a 'more acceptable' and 'more defensible' formula. In the next four years four different schemes for university admissions were put into operation and, until opposition to these measures crystallised in 1975, each successive change brought further gains for the Sinhalese, or at least for substantial sections of that group.

The schemes introduced were as follows:

1973 - standardisation.
1974 - standardisation and district quotas with modifications.
1975 - standardisation and 100% district quotas.
1976 - standardisation and 70% on marks, with 30% on district quotas.

In virtually every case the change in admissions procedure was not due to educational reasons, but to political pressure from various groups and it is worth examining the implications of each scheme.

The admissions in 1973 were made according to marks standardised both subject-wise and media-wise.[26] Subject-wise standardisation aroused little opposition. Even that was for technical and academic reasons and it may be safely ignored for our purposes. It was the media-wise standardisation that aroused the greatest controversy. The object (and consequence) of media-wise standardisation was to reduce sets of marks in all media -- English, Sinhala and Tamil -- to a uniform scale so that in the end the number qualifying from each medium would be proportionate to the number sitting for the examination in each medium.[27] In other words, it would neutralise the superior performance of the Tamils in science subjects and that of the Sinhalese in arts subjects. The justification advanced for this measure was that any discrepancies in the performance of Tamil as against Sinhalese students must be attributed

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to differences in equipment, teaching or marking and that standardisation would counteract the imbalances in such matters between different media.

The application of the system resulted in considerable gains for Sinhalese and won support among several sections of this group. The share of the Sinhalese in places for engineering courses shot up to 73.1% and that for medicine to 58.8%. The Tamil share in places for engineering dropped precipitously to 24.4% and the absolute number of Tamils entering science-oriented university courses fell slightly from 359 to 347 despite a rise in the intake from 1069 to 1177.[28]

Nevertheless, not all sections of the Sinhalese were content with the situation. The powerful Kandyan lobby saw no significant gain for their group in the new structure. The five provinces in which they predominated or lived in substantial numbers contained over 47% of the total population of the island, but they gained only 19% of the places in science-oriented courses even with standardisation in 1973. In fact, although the intake to science-oriented courses rose by 214 between 1970 and 1973 only 53 of the places went to these five provinces.

The Moor/Malay group too had no reason for satisfaction. Their educational backwardness had long restricted their number in the universities. Since most of them were educated in Tamil they were in addition adversely affected by the system of differential qualifying marks and by standardisation and the Minister of Education, Al-Haj Badi-ud-din Mahmud, was by no means insensitive to their grievances.

It is, therefore, not surprising that when several senior officers of the Department of Education suggested a "District Quota System" it found ready support. The essence of the District Quota System was the allocation of vacant places in the universities to different districts according to the percentage of the total population resident in that district. Separate quotas were to be fixed for the following disciplines: medicine and dental surgery, engineering and applied science, physical science, biological science and arts. The quota for each district was to be filled only if there were 'qualified' candidates in that district; otherwise the places were to be proportionately distributed among the other districts. A qualified candidate was supposed to be one who had passed three out of four subjects at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination and obtained a minimum of 25 marks in the fourth. It is understood that the original proposal from the officials was to restrict the District Quota system to a proportion of the vacant places and to leave the rest to be filled according to the standardised

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marks, but when the proposals went up to the politicians it generated sufficient enthusiasm to be implemented for all admissions.

The District Quota System affected the Sri Lanka Tamils most adversely. Most of their students were concentrated in the Jaffna District, which, according to population statistics, became entitled to only 5.54% of the university places. In other areas the working of standardisation tended to operate against them in science subjects. In 1974, however, the impact of the District Quota System was muted -- for it was implemented with a key modification. When a quota for a particular district remained unfilled due to lack of qualified students, these places were not distributed proportionately among other districts according to the quota, but were allotted among those left out according to the order of merit as depicted by standardised marks. This enabled some 93 students from Colombo and Jaffna -- many of them Tamils -- to gain entry into the universities.

Nevertheless, the restriction to Tamil admissions was severe. Their share in admissions for engineering fell to 16.3% and that for medicine to 25.9% of the total. The total share of Tamil admissions to science-oriented studies fell to 20.9% (from 25.9% in 1973 and 35.3% in 1970). There was also for the first time a substantial reduction in absolute numbers of Tamils entering science-oriented studies despite a continued expansion in the total intake for these disciplines. Worse was to follow in 1975, when the District Quota System was operated without modifications. The figure for the 1975 admissions have not been officially released, but the provisional figures of admission relating to the Peradeniya and Colombo campuses seem to indicate that the total Tamil admissions to science-oriented courses fell to about 15% and that Tamil entrants to medical studies fell to under 20% of the total.

In contrast the Sinhalese emerged as the main beneficiaries. Their share in admissions to science based courses rose to 75.4% in 1974 and to over 80% (estimate) in 1975. Since they have consistently had over 85% of the admissions to arts-oriented studies for many years, their representation in all fields of study within the universities rose to proportions well above their percentage of the population. Among the Sinhalese, however, some benefited more than the others. In the highland regions where the Kandyans lived, for instance, the District Quotas were swollen by the inclusion of Plantation Tamils in population statistics. Since the Plantation Tamils possessed extremely limited schooling facilities, especially at the secondary level, this meant that the students in these areas had large quotas reserved for them. In contrast, students in some Low-

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Country Sinhalese areas, notably Colombo, found entry into science-oriented courses more difficult than before.[29] This difference of interest proved to be a key factor in the subsequent campaign against the District Quota System. The proponents of the system, however, found ready support among the Moors/Malays whose share of university admissions rose steeply after its introduction.

By the end of 1974, however, opposition to the District Quota System and to standardisation was gathering strength. The presentation of an official report on standardisation to the National State Assembly on 19 September 1974 was a stimulus for further criticism.[30] University dons continued to criticise the system in national newspapers.[31] More important, a number of educated and influential Sinhalese became convinced that the scheme was iniquitious. Although the differences in the performances of candidates who entered the university from different districts were not revealed officially (they are published for the first time in this paper in Table VII), they were known to be fairly large. The spectacle of students with lower performances successfully entering the university, while those with better gradings in the same school were left out merely because the fortunate students had their earlier education in 'undeveloped districts,' alienated many.[32] The government at last became conscious that the university admissions system might well become a political liability.

The issue was therefore placed before the Sectoral Committee on Social Overheads, Housing, Mass Media and Transport of the National Planning Council. This was on the whole a welcome move, for it enabled the question to be examined in all it's aspects.

Members of the public and representatives of various associations were encouraged to send in memoranda and quite a number did so.[33] The Sectoral Committee submitted its report by the end of September 1975. The composition of the committee, chaired as it was by Pieter Keuneman, Minister of Housing and Member of the National State Assembly for Colombo Central, and including Mr. C. Kumarasuriyar, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications and the only Tamil in the Cabinet and Mr. K.B. Ratnayake, Minister of Sports, Member of Anuradhapura and a spokesman for Kandyan interests, had made certain that all points of view would be given full consideration.

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Table VI
University Admissions in 1975: Distribution of Students by their Districts of Origin

District	Population Percentage	Medicine & Dental Surgery		Engineering & Sciences	
		Actual Selection on District Basis	Hypothetical Selection According to order of Merit	Actual Selection on District Basis	Hypothetical Selection According to order of Merit
Colombo	21.03	110	132	70	129
Kalutara	5.76	15	11	20	16
Kandy	9.34	24	17	31	11
Matale	2.49	8	03	8	3
Nuwara Eliya	3.57	2	02	6	-
Galle	5.80	29	18	20	24
Matara	4.63	8	05	15	20
Hambantota	2.68	1	-	8	-
Jaffna	5.54	29	61	20	56
Mannar	0.61	1	01	1	-
Vavuniya	0.75	-	-	-	-
Batticaloa	2.03	6	04	7	2
Amparai	2.14	-	-	1	1
Trincomalee	1.51	3	01	5	5
Kurunegala	8.09	12	03	26	9
Puttalam	2.99	3	02	10	2
Anuradhapura	3.06	2	01	4	1
Polonnaruwa	1.29	1	-	1	-
Badulla	4.84	2	01	7	2
Moneragala	1.51	-	-	2	1
Ratnapura	5.21	11	07	10	5
Kegalle	5.13	8	06	18	3
Sri Lanka	100.00	275	275	290	290

Source: Planning and Research Unit, University of Sri Lanka

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Table VII
University Admissions 1975
100% Selected on District Quotas

District: Highest mark of candidate/candidates failing to get selected in Colombo and Jaffna and the lowest mark of candidate/candidates qualifying for selection in other Districts: Standardized Marks.

District	Medicine	Engineering
Colombo	262	289
Kalutara	226	273
Kandy	229	259
Matale	220	263
Nuwara Eliya	260	246
Galle	232	278
Matara	237	284
Hambantota	245	240
Jaffna	268	294
Mannar	262	218
Vavuniya	-	-
Batticaloa	227	256
Amparai	-	303
Trincomalee	221	276
Kurunegala	225	248
Puttalam	250	248
Anuradhapura	240	244
Polonnaruwa	248	268
Badulla	231	244
Moneragala	-	229
Ratnapura	211	231
Kegalle	246	237

Source: Department of Education

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Table VIII
New Admissions to Universities (classified by ethnic group and course of studies)

1969-1970									
	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Science, Bio Sc. & Architecture	235	69.7	93	27.6	7	2.1	2	0.6	337
Engineering	77	51.7	72	48.3			-	-	149
Medicine	112	48.9	112	48.9	2	0.9	3	1.3	229
Dental Surgery	11	52.4	8	38.1	2	9.5	-	-	21
Agriculture	17	44.7	18	47.4	2	5.3	1	2.6	38
Vet. Science	5	27.7	12	66.7			1	5.6	18
Total Science Group	457	57.7	315	39.8	13	1.6	7	0.9	792
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2035	89.1	158	6.9	91	4.0	1	-	2285
Law	30	57.7	18	34.6	3	5.8	1	1.9	52
Total Arts Group	2522	88.4	176	7.5	94	4.0	2	0.1	2337
Grand Total	2979	80.6	491	15.7	107	3.4	9	0.3	3129

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1970-1971									
	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Science, Bio Sc. & Architecture	307	68.0	129	28.6	8	1.8	7	1.6	451
Engineering	85	55.9	62	40.8	3	2.0	2	1.3	152
Medicine	132	53.5	101	40.9	6	2.4	8	3.2	247
Dental Surgery	17	41.5	23	56.1	1	2.4	-		41
Agriculture	23	53.5	17	39.5	2	4.7	1	2.3	43
Vet. Science	15	71.4	5	23.8	1	4.8	-		21
Total Science Group	579	60.6	337	35.3	21	2.2	18	1.9	955
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2200	89.7	171	7.0	81	3.3	2	-	2454
Law	26	54.2	16	33.4	5	10.4	1	2.1	48
Total Arts Group	2226	88.9	187	7.6	86	3.4	3	0.1	2502
Grand Total	2805	81.1	524	15.2	107	3.1	21	0.6	3457

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1971-1972									
	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Science, Bio Sc. & Architecture	299	67.0	139	31.2	5	1.1	3	0.7	446
Engineering	171	62.4	95	34.7	5	1.8	3	1.1	274
Medicine	124	56.1	87	39.3	5	2.3	5	2.3	221
Dental Surgery	21	42.8	26	53.0	1	2.1	1	2.1	49
Agriculture	48	58.6	32	39.0	2	2.4	-		82
Vet. Science	17	63.0	10	37.0	-		-		27
Total Science Group	680	63.6	359	33.6	18	1.7	12	1.1	1069
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2031	92.7	102	4.7	53	0.4	4	0.2	2190
Law	42	85.8	5	10.2	1	2.0	1	2.0	49
Total Arts Group	2073	92.6	107	4.8	54	2.4	5	0.2	2239
Grand Total	2753	83.2	466	14.1	72	2.2	17	0.5	3308

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1973									
	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Science, Bio Sc. & Architecture	356	73.1	115	23.6	10	2.1	6	1.2	487
Engineering	201	73.1	67	24.4	5	1.8	2	0.7	275
Medicine	150	58.8	94	36.9	6	2.3	5	2.0	255
Dental Surgery	25	51.0	23	46.9	1	2.1	-		49
Agriculture	41	46.6	45	51.1	2	2.3	-		88
Vet. Science	20	87.0	3	13.0	-		-		23
Total Science Group	793	67.4	347	29.5	24	2.0	13	1.1	1177
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2019	91.8	128	5.9	45	2.0	13	1.1	2199
Law	34	77.3	8	18.1	2	2.3	1	2.3	44
Total Arts Group	2053	91.5	136	6.1	46	2.0	8	0.4	2243
Grand Total	2846	83.2	483	14.1	70	2.1	21	0.6	3420

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1974									
	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Science, Bio Sc. & Architecture	495	75.1	145	22.0	18	2.7	2	0.3	660
Engineering	223	78.8	46	16.3	14	4.9	-	-	283
Medicine	184	70.0	68	25.9	8	3.0	3	1.1	263
Dental Surgery	34	69.4	14	28.6	1	2.0	-	-	49
Agriculture	83	83.8	11	11.1	5	5.1	-	-	99
Vet. Science	23	71.9	9	28.1	-		-	-	32
Applied Science	16	94.1	1	5.9	-		-	-	17
Total Science Group	1058	75.4	294	20.9	46	3.3	5	0.4	1403
Arts Oriented Studies	1934	86.0	226	10.0	84	3.7	6	0.3	2250
Grand Total	2992	81.9	520	14.2	130	3.6	11	0.3	3653

- Includes the number admitted to follow the course in Mathematics and Statistics at Jaffna Campus.

Source: Planning and Research Unit, University of Sri Lanka.

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The Sectoral Committee report pointed out that the Commissioner of Examinations and the Superintendent (Data Processing) of the Examinations Department had held that "organized manipulation of marks in one whole medium in a deceptive manner is neither possible nor probable and that while the possibility of correcting examiner variability through standardisation was slight its contribution both to deepening and indeed institutionalising suspicions between communities and promoting distrust in the fairness or impartiality of public examinations" was considerable. It therefore recommended the end of media-wise standardisation.[34]

> The report also commented on the District Quota System at length. The arguments in favour of retaining the District Quota System as it operates at present, apart from those which were solely concerned with the comparative advantages that one or other racial community could hope to obtain from it, were that it would (1) reduce the tendency for children to migrate from peripheral districts to developed urban centres; (2) provide an impetus for the improvement of schools in peripheral areas; (3) give greater opportunities for youth from rural areas to received higher education and (4) produce a more "national minded" intelligentsia who will resist the temptation of the Brain Drain.
>
> Such arguments undoubtedly have a strong emotional appeal but it is open to question whether they are objectively correct or significally valid.[35]

Nevertheless, the Sectoral Committee did not feel itself obliged to reject the District Quota System altogether. It successfully resisted the efforts of a Committee of (Sinhalese) officials[36] to induce the acceptance of a system based on 70% "District Quota" and 30% "Open Competition"[37] and opted for a somewhat more complicated system by which from 1976 onwards 70% of students would be chosen on the basis of their marks and 30% on District Quotas. Of the 30% places in the District Quota, however, half were to be reserved for the backward districts of Amparai, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Hambantota, Mannar, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. Colombo and Jaffna Districts were not to get any places at all on District Quotas as they were considered educationally developed districts well able to compete with others.

These proposals were eventually submitted to the Cabinet which accepted the suggestions relating to the District Quota, but opted to retain media-wise standardisation.

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The Tamils considered the benefits of the new system comparatively meagre,[37] but the extreme Sinhala Buddhist nationalists were not minded to grant them even that. The Sinhala Tharuna Sanvidhânaya, an organisation whose professed aims include "the regaining of the lost rights and privileges of the Sinhalese," launched a publicity campaign against the departure from a hundred per cent District Quota System. The organisers of this movement were able to obtain the public support of the Samasta Lankâ Trinikayika Sangha Sabhâ and the Mahânâyakas of the Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters of the Siamese sect.[38] However, despite a determined campaign the government remained unmoved. More significantly, Mr. J.R. Jayewardene, Leader of the Opposition and of the UNP, indicated that if and when elected power his party would reject both standardisation and the District Quota System. The issue is as yet (1977) far from being settled, but it seems that at length the Sinhala Buddhist public and their leadership are beginning to look at the problem from a perspective wider than a narrowly communal one.

On the other hand the damage already done by discriminatory measures against the minorities is considerable. In contrast with the struggle for the schools take-over, the hostility and suspicion between the Sinhalese and the Tamils is unlikely to die away even if the university admissions issue is resolved to the satisfaction of both parties.[39] Unlike the Roman Catholics whose religion was the only factor which distinguished them from the rest of the Sinhalese (or Tamils), the Tamils of Sri Lanka have developed feelings of nationalism on their own and the question of educational opportunity only aggravated the conflicts that had risen owing to questions of language and employment. Nevertheless the question of university admissions is clearly one which mobilised the youth in Jaffna and prodded the Tamil United Front leadership to declare in favour of a separate state. The removal of this feeling of discrimination is a prerequisite for the continued peaceful co-existence of the Sinhalese and Tamils in a united Sri Lanka.

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19. D.L. Jayasuriya, 1965, pp. 147-148; Information from Statistics Branch, Senate House, University of Sri Lanka.
20. Recommendations of the *National Education Commission (Final Report)*, Sinhalese version, Colombo: 1962, p. 164.
21. C.R. de Silva, 1976, pp. 419-429; C.R. de Silva, 1974, pp. 154-55.
22. A second chamber existed from 1948-1971, but it was largely ineffectual.
23. J. Hallack, 1972, p. 75; C.R. de Silva, 1974, p. 155.
24. *Report of the National Council of Higher Education for the Year 1969-70* November 1971, p. 114. It so happened that the Minister's constituency Gampola, also lay within this radius.
25. *Memorandum on admissions to Universities. University of Ceylon Teachers Association (Peradeniya)*, July 1971, (mimeographed).
26. On the formula for standardisation, see C.R. de Silva, 1974, pp. 157-162.
27. See Table IV.
28. See Table V.

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29. See Table VI. In some Kandyan areas there were substantial numbers of Low-Country Sinhalese settlers and they too benefited from the District Quota System, but the Low-Country leadership concentrated in Colombo turned strongly against the system.
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33. For instance *the Memorandum of University of Sri Lanka, Colombo Campus Science Teachers Association*, (see CDN of 1/2/75) *Memorandum of the All Ceylon Muslim Educational Conference* (see CDN 13/3/75) *Memorandum of the University of Ceylon Science Teachers Association (Peradeniya); and Memorandum of Northern Province Principals Association.*
34. *Standardisation of Marks and District Quotas in University Admission. Report of the Sectoral Committee of the National Planning Council on Social Overheads, Housing, Mass Media and Transport*, memo, pp. 4-6.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
36. The Committee was made up of U.D.I. Sirisena, E.L. Wijemanne, and K.D. Ariyadasa, all senior officials of the Education Ministry, Dr. K. Karunanayake, Registrar, University of Sri Lanka, Prof. P.P.G.L. Siriwardena, present Vice-Chancellor, University of Sri Lanka and Prof. C. Dahanayake, Professor of Chemistry, Colombo Campus.
37. *Tribune*, 8 October 1975 and 15 November 1975.
38. *Ceylon Observer Magazine Edition* 12 October 1975; CDN 8 October 1975 and 14 October 1975. The *Sinhala Tharuna Sanvidânaya* is a relatively small organisation. It runs a monthly news sheet entitled "Sinhala Tharunayâ" and numbers among its members Mr. Walter Wimalachandra, Dr. Bhuddhadasa Bhodhinayake, Dr. T. de Silva, Mr. Y.W. Kularatna and Mr. N.S. de Silva.
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PUSHING POSON: The Politics of a Buddhist Pilgrimage in Postcolonial Sri Lanka*

Jonathan S. Walters

> The arrival of the 'Eternal Law' with the Maha Arahath Mahinda, prince, saint, and son of Asoka was the event that shaped and signalized the nation's destiny.
>
> *Surasena Gunatilaka, 1967*

Introduction

It would be the unusual publication about Sri Lankan history and religion which failed to begin with the story of Arhant Mahinda, whom modern Sinhala Buddhists honour with a massive festival held all over the Island on the full moon day of Poson (lunar month of June-July, the day Mahinda supposedly arrived in Sri Lanka). Mahinda, 3rd century B.C. Buddhist saint and son of India's famous Emperor Aśoka Maurya, is believed to be the founder of Sri Lankan Buddhism. Leaving Sāñchi (near Bhopal in central India) he, being an accomplished saint, supposedly flew through the air and landed atop Silākūta, the highest peak on Mihintale Mountain's highest plateau. (Mihintale, which means "Mahinda land," is about eight miles from Sri Lanka's ancient capital, Anurādhapura). According to a story which has been repeated in all its details since at least the 4th century A.D., on that particular day the Anurādhapuran king, Devānampiyatissa, had convened a festival, and together with 40,000 men he had gone to Mihintale Mountain for a hunt. A deity, disguised as a deer, led him to the feet of the saint then disappeared. The king was quickly converted and the rest -- we are told -- is history.[1]

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* An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the annual conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October, 1995. I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities and Whitman College for significant travel grants which made possible the primary research upon which it is based.

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The telling of this tale is not limited to scholarly books and lectures. The story of Mahinda is ubiquitous in modern Sri Lanka, especially during the month of Poson/June. It is repeated in tourist literature, in the popular press and the state-run newspapers, over the radio and on television, in the devotional literatures and oral histories of Sinhala villagers and in the pop songs on Colombo cassettes. Nor is Mahinda's fame limited to his religious achievements. At least in the official statements found in scholarship, newspaper specials and presidential speeches, Mahinda is made to be the emissary of a more advanced Indian civilization who brought Sri Lanka an entire cultural package in addition to Buddhist books and practices. This Mahinda is Promethean: he brings art, education, farming, medicine, literature, politics, crafts and architecture along with him, simultaneously founding and epitomizing Sinhala Buddhist culture.[2] These tales inevitably add the colophon that this cultural package, Sinhala Buddhism, characterized Sri Lanka until the arrival of European imperialists, and was fully reinstated at Independence (1948), after the long colonial hiatus.[3]

The present paper is part of a much larger book in progress on the history of the legend and cult of Mahinda. Unlike most historicist studies of the last century, my interest is not in Mahinda himself. The plain fact is that we have no historical evidence for talking about an "historical Mahinda." Rather, the pertinent epigraphic evidence began to appear about a century later than Mahinda, while the extant literary evidence was first composed only six hundred years later still. Bracketing questions about "the historical Mahinda" (the lack of evidence does not preclude the possibility that he really existed), I focus instead upon the history which *can* be reconstructed on the basis of primary evidence, namely the history of making this pilgrimage and telling this story, from the 2nd century B.C. to the present.

Although on its surface this history appears to be very repetitive, my work shows that both the literary and liturgical representation of Mahinda and his significance for then-contemporary Sri Lankans changed radically over the centuries. The specific story and ritual have remained remarkably unchanged, it is true. But the changing socio-historical and political circumstances in which the Sinhala kings found themselves made each repetition of the story and pilgrimage highly original and unique in context, resonating with the problems and prospects of each generation as was significant and possible only at those very points in history.

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During the course of this progress, Mahinda has been many things for Sri Lankans. In the last centuries B.C. and first centuries A.D., Mahinda was portrayed as an imperial emissary, constituting the reality and centrality of the Anurādhapura kingdom by locating it within the imperial formations of India's Śunga and Sātavāhana emperors. Beginning around the fourth century A.D., after the Sātavāhana empire had ceased to exist, he was transformed into a sectarian ideologue, championing particular Buddhist disciplinary orders against the others that thrived in late antique Anurādhapura. During the 10th century A.D. he became the "Second Buddha," propelling Anurādhapura into previously unheard of imperial significance on the subcontinent. But by the 13th century A.D. he had become a gentle temple preacher, no threat to the Theist overlords from the mainland who crushed Sri Lankan imperial ambitions with force and finality at that time. By the 19th century he had been transformed again, this time into a "missionary" filled with "missionary spirit," a model for Buddhists ready to compete with colonial Christian missionaries whose presence was fully realized during the British Period (1796-1948). Yet for all these different Mahindas, the modern Mahinda -- Mahinda the Prometheus of Sinhala culture, especially insofar as he is made a proponent of nationalism and development -- belongs solely to the 20th century.

In the present paper I focus on the most recent transformation of Mahinda, into the modern Mahinda whom I call Mahinda the Nationalist. I demonstrate that during the early postcolonial years, especially the 1950s, the story of Mahinda and the festival held in his honour were reconceived by members of the postcolonial Buddhist elite, in light of the issues and concerns which confronted them as men (and sometimes women) of the 1950s. This complex remaking of the story and ritual of Arhant Mahinda -- by prominent postcolonial historians, archaeologists, politicians and civil servants, Buddhist monks and newspaper editors -- was not merely the revival of an unchanging Sinhala Buddhist essence (which it usually portrays itself to be). Rather, it represented an attempt at constructing a national identity and mobilizing Sri Lankans around that national identity, and therefore played no mean role in shaping and symbolizing the realities that Sri Lankans have subsequently faced. But this modern Mahinda, Mahinda the Nationalist, is no more permanent than his predecessors. In official speeches and writings of postcolonial Sri Lanka, Mahinda has been repeatedly remade as specific political, economic and social conditions have demanded. Mahinda simultaneously articulates and encourages the ever changing present.

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Nineteenth Century Mahindas

Though Mahinda the Nationalist has been championed only during the 20th century, primarily since Independence (1948) and especially during the last two decades, still he must be understood against the backdrop of 19th century Mahindas. This is true on the one hand because the unique characteristics of Mahinda the Nationalist become clearer once we understand the Mahindas out of whom he was developed. On the other hand, even today Mahinda the Nationalist has not fully displaced earlier Mahindas, neither in popular consciousness nor, for that matter, in official discourses. Rather, Mahinda the Nationalist competes with his predecessors by encapsulating them within himself. We must know of what these competing, encapsulated forms consist, if we are to understand the manner in which that competition and encapsulation has been pursued in the construction of Mahinda the Nationalist.

During the 19th century, at least two Mahindas coexisted among Sinhala-speaking Sri Lankan Buddhists. The older of these was Mahinda the Temple Preacher, who had been invented after the disastrous 13th century defeat of the ancient Sinhala kingdoms by the imperial Cholas of southern India. Mahinda the Temple Preacher, as portrayed in the literature of the 13th-19th centuries, does virtually nothing except to explicate the Buddha's teachings, and with no purpose except to bring about sublime achievements on the part of his parishioners. He is docile, properly respectful of the king because properly respected by the king, and he speaks in the vernacular because he addresses a local audience alone. His skill at preaching, and the details of the circumstances within which his preaching was carried out, preoccupied writers concerned with Mahinda the Temple Preacher.

The other 19th century Mahinda was Mahinda the Missionary, an invention of the 19th century itself. This Mahinda, though based on the same story, differed radically from Mahinda the Temple Preacher. Rather than preach sermons in local temples Mahinda the Missionary, filled with "missionary spirit" to convert Sri Lanka to Buddhism, journeys to the Island in order to infect Sri Lankans with this same "missionary spirit" for the conversion of the world. He uses the vernacular because his missionary field is universal. Far from docile, Mahinda the Missionary is aggressive, challenging political authority and non-Buddhist religious orientations with a transformative, "civilising" Buddhism.

Mahinda the Temple Preacher was admired by less Westernized, and especially rural, 19th century Sri Lankan Buddhists. He was invented

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in literature which had been composed for such Buddhists and which during the 19th century remained especially popular material for temple sermons among them (as did the actual sermons Mahinda the Temple Preacher is believed to have preached to Devānampiyatissa and his entourage).[4] Distinctive evidence of Mahinda the Missionary belongs, on the contrary, almost exclusively to the discourses of colonial and colonialized elites (largely from the urbanized low country, and mostly composed in English). Because there was no pre-19th century Sinhala, Pāli or Sanskrit term for a Buddhist missionary, it is not surprising that the earliest evidence of Mahinda the Missionary -- of the very concept "Buddhist missionary" -- is found in British scholarly accounts of Sri Lankan history. British scholars, especially Christian missionary scholars, were the first people in known history who saw in the story of Mahinda evidence of "missionary spirit." During the nineteenth century, "missionaries" were a major concern of Christians, not Buddhists (except insofar as the former pestered the latter in the "Asian field"); early British missionaries in Ceylon were exasperated by the "dormancy" of Buddhists, whom they portrayed as so docile in their concern with temple preaching that even when prodded they would not engage in debates. But by the end of the nineteenth century Buddhists among the colonialized elite, instructed in British and/or mission schools and conversant with learned discussions of Sri Lankan history and religion in English, had begun to emulate the missionary who had inadvertently been invented for them: Mahinda the Missionary.

The rise of Buddhist missionary activity in urbanized, colonial Sri Lanka, beginning with the establishment of the Mahabodhi Society in Colombo (1892), was part of a larger process by which Buddhism emerged among colonialized elite Sri Lankans as a powerful platform from which to combat the Christian empire then actively pillaging their resources by usurping their sovereignty. Buddhism, in the guise of an aggressive missionary religion, was being mobilized for nationalist opposition to the colonial British and their Christian mission in Ceylon.[5] In this context of defiance, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Buddhists began celebrating Poson by parading images of Mahinda through the streets of the colonial cities of the low country and hill country, holding him up as a "missionary" -- *our* missionary.[6] And they named schools and temples there in honour of Mahinda, charging them with "sending Buddhist young men abroad as missionaries acting in the wake of the noble princely Apostle of Lanka."[7]

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The late 19th and early 20th century emergence of these Mahinda processions, in cities including Colombo, Kandy, Matale, Badulla, Kurunegala, Kegalle, Dambadeniya, Gampaha, Negombo, Wattala, Chilaw, Kalutara, Bentota, Ambalangoda, Dodanduwa, Galle and Tissamaharama, was remarkably innovative. As far as I have been able to determine, there is neither archaeological nor literary evidence that a single image of Mahinda had been constructed in Sri Lanka since the tenth century A.D., let alone processed through major cities. If Mahinda the Missionary was a recovery of precolonial traditions, those traditions had been abandoned by Sinhala-speaking Buddhists long before the advent of European colonialism. And this late 19th century re-invention of the cult of Mahinda, in colonial cities and on the basis of colonial understandings of Buddhism, occurred far from Mihintale, site of the ancient -- and modern -- festivals. Though there certainly were some pilgrims from the low country who made the arduous journey to Mihintale, during the 19th and early 20th centuries the Poson festival at Mihintale remained mostly a local affair.[8] The number of pilgrims journeying to the mountain and climbing it was comparatively quite small, and they came primarily from the villages of the North Central Province where Mihintale is located.[9] Indeed, even in the colonial cities, until the 1950s Poson was at best a second sister to Vesak, the April-May full moon under which the Buddha is believed to have been born, enlightened and achieved *parinirvana* (Vesak celebrations became especially popular in British Ceylon as a sort of Buddhist Christmas, complete with Vesak cards and Vesak carols).[10]

The site of Mihintale was still mostly uncleared jungle at the time of Independence (1948); no town of Mihintale yet existed, and there was but a single motorable road (the Anurādhapura-Trincomalee Road). Said to have been infested with wild elephants, snakes and bandits, with the stone staircase unrepaired and an utter absence of the lights and loudspeakers and hawkers that characterize the Poson festival today, the pilgrimage was largely limited during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the especially pious among the local peasants, whose associations with the site, my fieldwork suggests, were as much grounded in the exigencies and exaltations of the journey itself, as in remembering Arhant Mahinda. The Mahinda they did remember was the temple preacher, not the missionary; Mahinda the Missionary is absent from the traditional Sinhala texts and oral traditions that dominated 19th century learning in the Mihintale region.

During the nineteenth century, local pilgrims had to travel to Mihintale by oxcart or on foot, carrying all necessary provisions and

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making the climb under these conditions; the lack of ease and lack of pilgrims were mutually-constitutive. My historical studies of the cult suggest that it had largely been abandoned when Anurādhapura itself was abandoned, in about the eleventh century A.D. Though the story of Mahinda continued to be told in vernacular literature and the truly intrepid no doubt sometimes made the journey, kings stopped making improvements at Mihintale altogether. As a result, those pilgrims who did make the journey were not greeted by the archaeological preserves and excellent facilities of today. Archaeological excavation and restoration at the site had hardly begun prior to 1935; the mountain of monuments that now overwhelms the pilgrim was unearthed and rebuilt only during the past four decades.[11] Until the 1960s facilities were extremely limited: Mihintale had neither electricity nor light nor telephone, nor adequate food and lodging, medical facilities nor public toilets, nor archaeological markers, shoe caddies, drinking fountains, pilgrim rests, shops selling hot tea and cold coke and other amenities which facilitate the modern festival. The Mihintale Rājamahāvihāraya, paralleling most ancient temples located in this part of the Island (many of which maintain local legends associated with Arhant Mahinda and his times), consisted of no more than a large cave equipped with plastered walls and a door, in which all the resident monks dwelled together.

The roots of the modern Poson festival, of modern Mihintale and of Mahinda the Nationalist, clearly lie in the emergence of Mahinda the Missionary during the late nineteenth century. The first known permanent additions to Mihintale since the tenth century were a now partially indecipherable inscription dated 1888, which records a pious donation to clean up the ancient water tank on Mihintale Mountain, and an image of Mahinda, dated 1914. Both were the gifts of colonialized Colombo elite patrons and indicate the very beginnings of the process by which the culture of Mahinda the Missionary infiltrated and transformed Mihintale and the Poson pilgrimage.[12] These early pieties betray the spirit of the then-popular image processions of Mahinda the Missionary; Mahinda becomes a symbol uniting all those separate Mahinda processions into a single national procession, a procession in the footsteps of the ancient kings. Like the missionary, and quite unlike the temple preacher, Mahinda the Nationalist is aggressive about change, mobilized in the streets for political ends.

But the missionary belonged to the colonial city, not to the rural North Central Province. And championing him was directed against an enemy -- Christian missionaries -- who would rapidly dissipate after the

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British abdication of power. It was only under new circumstances -- the recovery of national sovereignty, transformation of the colonial elite into the postcolonial elite, archaeological excavations and restorations at Mihintale, and the conscious mobilization of resources -- that the modern Poson festival, and Mahinda the Nationalist, emerged.

From Missionary to Nationalist

At least in part, marching Mahinda the Missionary through low country city streets was an act of defiance against a colonial administration justifying its exploitation of Ceylon with liberal Christian platitudes. Indeed, the status of the full moon day itself was politicized in colonial Ceylon as a challenge to the Empire's official Christian holidays (Sundays, Christmas, Easter, etc.) It was within this context that Poson emerged to rival Vesak as Sri Lanka's most important full moon festival. The very idea of pitting these specific full moon days against each other in this way was as far as I can tell quite foreign to pre-20th century Sri Lankan thought about the significance of full moon days.[13]

During the early twentieth century the celebration of Mahinda exploded throughout the Island. As Mahinda processions proliferated, so too did associated sorts of Poson activities: the provision of charity booths;[14] contests for the best *pandals* containing portrayals of *Missaka Pawwa* ("Mihintale Mountain," i.e., stylized scenes of Mahinda, Devānampiyatissa and the deer-deity);[15] special Poson programs at important modernizing temples such as the Vajirārāma Temple in Bambalapitiya, Colombo, and, later, special radio programs; various carnival aspects such as "haunted houses," special foods, block parties, etc. This growth in Poson's popularity in the twentieth century cities produced increasing numbers of pilgrims from the cities who wanted to travel to the ancient capital itself for Poson. This was facilitated by the opening up of the Anurādhapura rail line and the improvement of roads, on one hand, and by the increasingly politicized opposition to British control of the ancient ruins, on the other hand. Indeed, it was on Poson day, 1903, that anti-British riots broke out in Anurādhapura.[16] By the first decades of the twentieth century, tens of thousands of pilgrims were reportedly in Anurādhapura for the Poson festival annually.[17]

Although in its ruinous condition Mihintale itself was still rather difficult of access, once Anurādhapura had become *the* place to champion Buddhist culture during June, the improvement of nearby Mihintale became

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inevitable. Increasing numbers of pilgrims eventually necessitated what is now called "the former Mihintale town," a few permanent shops (*kadê*) at the mile marker along the highway from which a crude dirt road to the mountain itself had been cleared at some point in the last or present century. The sheer number of pilgrims made the actual pilgrimage safer, and conscientious pilgrims were doing enough to clean up the site that by 1935 the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon felt compelled to take responsibility for excavation and restoration, under the indefatigable S. Paranavitana and in cooperation with the former chief incumbent of Mihintale, Rev. W. Ratanapala (1910-1991).

As the popularity and complexity of the Poson festival increased, both in the colonial cities and at Anurādhapura and Mihintale, it registered on the official scope (as indicated by English-language newspapers) primarily as a problem, if at all. Though the Anurādhapura correspondent for the *Ceylon Observer* in June 1920 could praise local sanitation and medical officers for keeping everyone in "best of their health," this report is especially significant only because it reports on Poson at all.[18] Of the pre-1940 Sri Lankan newspapers (in English or Sinhala) that I have yet been able to locate -- including those at the National Archives and Lake House in Colombo -- this is one of very few official indications that anything was happening at all during Poson. Although the 1940s witnessed increasing coverage of Poson in Sri Lankan newspapers, it still received far less press than the King's birthday celebrations or war news received in the same issues of the *Ceylon Daily News* or *Ceylon Observer*. And here too writers (reporting and constructing government concerns) were preoccupied with all the problems and potential problems huge gatherings of "natives" might portend: worries about traffic, sanitation, food and water, social order.[19] Special police forces and special regulations became necessary.[20] One cannot help getting the impression from colonial reports of the 1940s that the more the government tried to control and discourage the growing Poson festival at Mihintale, the more popular it became. Thus in 1944 pilgrims, defying war-time quota limitations on rail travel to the festival, crippled the internal railway system by booking tickets through Anurādhapura on the pretense of travelling to distant stations.[21]

Poson's relative insignificance as "news" in the newspapers of the 1940s and earlier is especially remarkable in light of the proliferation of Poson in newspapers since Independence (1948). Thus, it is striking that *The Buddhist* -- official mouthpiece of the Colombo Young Men's Buddhist Association (Y.M.B.A.) -- and its two editors during the 1940s through

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1960s, leading nationalists G. P. Malalasekera (1899-1973) and W. S. Karunaratna, had virtually nothing to say about Poson prior to Independence. Though year after year Vesak was championed by *The Buddhist* -- which sponsored Vesak illumination contests in addition to providing extensive programming and coverage of Vesak programs around Colombo -- the Y.M.B.A. sponsored no Poson activities at all. Reflecting a changing heart, however, one of the editors mused in 1954 that

> Poson day is in a sense the greatest day in Lanka's story and I wonder why more emphasis cannot be given to it by all and sundry. It is the anniversary of Lanka's coming into light from darkness and should be commemorated by all Sinhalese at any rate.[22]

More emphasis certainly came to be given to Poson in subsequent Poson/June issues of *The Buddhist*. The June 1957 issue of *The Buddhist* contained an unprecedented cover photograph which took Mihintale as its subject. It included equally unprecedented photographic plates illustrating recent archaeological finds from Mihintale as well as an entire series of articles about Poson that articulated the Buddhist nationalism of the 1950s. The 1956 Buddha Jayanthi celebrations (of the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightement) and the enthusiasm it produced, in addition to other causes, had clearly brought Mahinda into the limelight in a new way. Beginning in 1957 the lead-off special article on Poson became a standard feature of the periodical. And in these articles, and in similar articles in newspapers, and on radio shows and in temple sermons, Mahinda the Nationalist has been born, nurtured and set to task leading Sri Lanka into the future.[23]

The Buddhist was not the only urban periodical which cast new attention on Poson, and Mahinda the Nationalist, during the 1950s. The same explosion of coverage is clear in the *Ceylon Daily News* and related publications of Lake House, the postcolonial nation's largest press which at the time of Independence was owned by one of Sri Lanka's wealthiest and most powerful families, the Wijewardenes.[24] This new explosion of media interest in Poson, centered on Lake House, left a permanent record for historians of the massive surge in popularity which Poson garnered during the late 1950s.

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Archaeologists, Newspapers, Politicians

Part of this explosion in the popularity of Poson during the 1950s can be explained as a mere continuation of colonial period trends; the steady increase in Poson's popularity during the first half of the twentieth century simply continued during the second half. Additionally, there was no doubt a reaction to former British restrictions, a swing in the opposite direction as an exercise of newly-won independence. Moreover, as is well known, the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist fervour which focused on the 1956 Buddha Jayanthi celebrations and general elections mounted throughout the early 50's and continued well after. Part too of this explosion in Poson's popularity must be accounted to newspaper coverage and governmental hype, as I suggest below. But underlying all of this interest, I believe, was new attention that S. Paranavitana and his Department of Archaeology were directing at the site of Mihintale.

As mentioned, archaeological conservation at Mihintale began in earnest only in 1935, when Paranavitana and others made preliminary plans for excavation. At that time, the Mahāsäya and Ambasthāla Dāgäbas were in ruins (the pillars of the Ambasthāla were only repaired during the 1980s); the small stupa to the west of the Mahāsäya, now believed to be Mahinda's tomb, was an unrecognizable pile of bricks and earth; the Kanthaka Caitya's magnificent carved Vāhalkadas were completely buried under earth, unknown. Mihintale's fortunes turned when, in 1951, Paranavitana made a fantastic discovery within the ruins of the small stupa to the west of the Mahāsäya, including presumed relics of the Arhant himself.[25] Paranavitana strategically waited to announce the discovery until shortly before Poson; the relics and other objects recovered from the stupa were first exhibited to the public at the Mihintale Poson festival itself. Unprecedented crowds thronged to the site that year; the furore surrounding the event was both reported and catalysed by the national press, including *The Buddhist* and *The Ceylon Daily News*.[26] Additional discoveries -- and exhibitions of them made to correspond with the Poson festival at Mihintale -- were forthcoming, including the discovery of relics purported to belong to Mahinda's teacher, at Mahiyangana (1957) and the discovery of a second Mahinda stupa in the distant Batticaloa region (1962). The collaboration of archaeology, Buddhist nationalism and the media first became clear in Poson, 1951. But from that time to the present, in nationalist discourse and the press the story of Arhant Mahinda has been narrated archaeologically, on the basis of the newly reconstructed and newly identified "ruins,"[27] while

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the ruins themselves have been (re)constructed to facilitate the ever-increasing crowds.

Poson's growing popularity was reported and created by growing press coverage of the festival. By the late 1950s special articles, poetry, illustrations and (from 1959 on) entire "Poson special supplements" were published annually in the major English and Sinhala newspapers. Though the postcolonialists continued to be preoccupied with facilities, traffic problems, special trains and police forces, these were now not so much attacks on the practice of Poson as areas demanding sympathetic improvement.[28] And now the papers did not limit their reporting to the consideration of such technical matters; they began to supplement the details of the celebration with lengthy expositions of the story and history of Mahinda, drawing regular conclusions about its implications for the then-present. In these pages emerge Mahinda the Nationalist, though there are unmistakable traces of earlier Mahindas too. These pious eulogies of Mahinda further entrenched the significance of Poson.

The power of the press in making Poson into *the* national Buddhist festival is especially evident in the fact that since 1963 Lake House has financed the "Honouring with Light" (*āloka pūjā*) at Mihintale, funding electrification and illumination of the whole mountain, providing loudspeakers, toilet facilities, a "lost and found" and other amenities, sponsoring previously unprecedented contests and performances of pop devotional music, subsequently composed expressly for the Poson festival, in addition to numerous special projects year after year at the site and in nearby Mihintale "New Town."[29] Originally conceived in honour of the late founder-director of Lake House, D. R. Wijewardene, the annual Poson *āloka pūjā* literally places control of Poson in the hands of the media. In cooperation with numerous governmental and private agencies, Lake House officials organize and supervise all the various aspects of the festival, from the stringing of lights and loudspeakers to the performance of liturgical rites for the Buddha, the Mihintale monks and the gods. Each year a strategically-placed news stand sells lakhs of copies of the special Poson issue of *Budusarana* magazine, which is continually advertised in regularly hung banners and loudspeaker announcements. The periodical itself reinforces the construct of Mahinda the Nationalist, and of the centrality of Poson to the national agenda. Lake House participation in and publicity about Poson has only increased since the corporation was nationalised under the former Bandaranaike government (since which time, explicitly beginning

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in 1978, the national government itself has financed the illumination of Mihintale).

Even before Independence, eminent Sinhala Buddhists were apparently involved in the burgeoning Poson festival.[30] Don Charles Senanayake, member of an important colonial and postcolonial political family, as mentioned, dedicated the earliest extant Mahinda image at Mihintale. But it was only during this phenomenal growth in Poson's popularity during the 1950s that Sinhala Buddhist politicians really set their sights upon the festival.

Thus in 1957 Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike inaugurated the Dharma Jayanthi (2500th anniversary of the Buddha's first sermon) celebrations at Mihintale by holding a public rally in Independence Square (in Colombo). A motorcade of the new nation's most important Buddhist monks left directly for Mihintale with a decorated chariot carrying the Mahiyangana relics of Mahinda's teacher (Moggaliputtatissa) and a crystal pinnacle donated to the Mahiyangana stupa by the Burmese at their head, chanting *pirit* all the way. Neither Bandaranaike nor then-former U.N.P. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake ended up attending, as had been promised in press reports a week earlier, but recorded speeches by both leaders were played over loudspeakers at a mass meeting at the Ruwanvälisäya Dāgäba in Anurādhapura. During the meeting, reportedly attended by more than 100,000 pilgrims, the Minister of Local Government and Cultural Affairs arrived by helicopter to hand over the Mahiyangana relics, which the Minister of Transportation carried on his head to the podium. In connection with these ceremonies, the Buddhist mission to Germany was inaugurated at Mihintale.

In 1960, now again Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake (together with several important members of his cabinet) participated in Poson festivities at Anurādhapura including the inauguration of an island-wide *sil* campaign (between 13,000 and 50,000 of a reported 200,000 pilgrims in Anurādhapura participated, while the temples in Colombo "were completely filled"), ceremonial completion of the archaeological museum in Anurādhapura, an exhibition of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallāna (chief disciples of the Buddha), an exhibition of Buddhist art from around the world and a tree-planting scheme (in Colombo and environs) sponsored by the Y.M.B.A. For Poson, 1961, government officials sponsored an exhibition of a tooth relic of the Buddha, on loan from the Chinese, at Mihintale; beggars were cleared from the streets; and an estimated 300,000-500,000 pilgrims attended.

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In 1962 Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike made her first, and only, official visit (as Prime Minister) to Mihintale at Poson. She led 50,000 pilgrims (of a total estimated 300,000) in taking *sil* for the day. But Mrs. B. was conspicuously absent from the 1963 celebrations, when Lake House first illuminated the whole mountain (and relics of the Buddha and Mahinda were exhibited) Mrs. B's subsequent distance from Poson is remarkable in light of what came before and after her. Though the root cause may have been no more than Mrs. B's distaste for the Wijewardene family who were sponsoring Poson at Mihintale, disinterest in that festival appears to have become virtual S.L.F.P. party policy -- some minor government official would be sent. Of course a major Buddhist leader could hardly ignore Poson altogether in 1963, so that year Mrs. B. initiated the Poson procession and celebrations at Veyangoda, as part of a mass rally held jointly by the five leading political parties in her coalition. She attended the same festival in 1964, but then apparently did nothing at all during Poson, after losing power to Dudley Senanayake and the U.N.P. (1965-1970).

During this U.N.P. hiatus (1965-1970), not a beat was missed in affirming U.N.P. commitment to Mihintale at Poson, to Mahinda the Nationalist. Whatever ambiguity about the role of the government may have existed during the Bandaranaike regimes, there is no question that the U.N.P. was self-consciously eager to pursue this path. Thus in 1968 Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake presided over the re-enshrinement of the Mihintale relics in the newly-rebuilt ancient stupa of Mahinda. As part of the same festival he handed over the Tissārāma to the Atamasthāna Committee. This highly symbolic gesture literally re-enacted the events supposed to have occurred on Poson day, 247 B.E., and foreshadowed the manipulation of historical and religious symbols that would characterize the next U.N.P. government in power (1977-1994).

At the beginning of her second term as Prime Minister (1970-1977) Mrs. B. and the members of her cabinet again attempted to refocus attention away from the on-going Lake House *fête* at Mihintale, by sponsoring and performing a special Buddha *pūjā* at Gal Vihāra in Polonnaruwa. In 1971, following the bloody first J.V.P. uprising, the Bandaranaike government officially cancelled Poson celebrations at Mihintale (portrayed in press releases as due to an epidemic of conjunctivitis); the people were beseeched not to attend (though *pūjā*s were held on a more limited scale). Though in 1972 Lake House reported that once again about 500,000 pilgrims attended, the government was represented by no greater a personage than the Minister

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for Irrigation, Power, and Highways. Between 1973 and 1977 the national government was not represented at all; the biggest whig at the party was the Government Agent for Anurādhapura. In 1974, for no stated reason, the government even cancelled the C.T.B. special buses to Mihintale, inconveniencing the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who nevertheless attended the festival that year.

But with the collapse of the S.L.F.P.'s United Front, and the 1977 advent of the U.N.P. under President J.R. Jayewardene, Poson was restored to its special place in the state's liturgical year, a promise manifested by Prime Minister R. Premadasa's 1978 declaration that henceforth the government would guarantee to finance the illumination of Mihintale for Poson. As part of the 1978 Poson festival J.R. Jayewardene participated in the exhibition of Buddha relics brought from Kapilavastu to Mihintale, among other pious activities. In 1979 Premadasa presided as the Kapilavastu relics (which he took credit for securing) were exhibited again; J.R. crowned the Mihintale Mahāsäya with a crystal pinnacle for its already golden *kotha*. In 1980 the newly identified ashes of national hero King Dutugemunu were exhibited at Mihintale under direct supervision of the Minister of Cultural Affairs. In 1981 J.R. attended personally, declared Tantirimāle (associated with Mahinda's sister) a sacred area, sponsored mass *pūjās* in Anurādhapura and introduced a new element to Poson: an agricultural exhibition.

In 1982, J.R. opened Devanampiyatissa Road to Mihintale Mountain, lining it with statues of Mahinda, Devānampiyatissa and other figures from the Mahinda story; simultaneously, Premadasa opened the Mihintale New Town. Henceforth, it was indeed Premadasa, not Jayewardene, who took the lead in demonstrating the central government's commitment to Poson. In 1984 Premadasa launched the Mihintale Āloka Trust, a special permanent fund intended for the provision of Poson amenities; J.R. wrote a Poson special supplement article about Aśoka and the effect of Buddhism upon his life. In 1985 Premadasa led a mass *sil* campaign, and personally switched on the lights illuminating Mihintale. In 1987, Premadasa enshrined relics in the ill-fated Mirisävitiya Dāgäba, led the *sil* campaign, switched on the lights, and inaugurated a new road in Anurādhapura.

After the U.N.P. had weathered -- and ruthlessly suppressed -- its own J.V.P. rebellion, and Premadasa had succeeded Jayewardene as President (then self-declared Executive President), in 1991, he once again switched on the lights, and ceremoniously opened the new Dinamina-

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Budusarana Library (a Lake House donation). In 1992 Premadasa began championing what he dubbed the Mihindu Jayanthi (2300th anniversary of the Arhant's arrival, based on a now discredited date of 308 B.C.). For Poson 1992, the President opened the Mahatissa-Fahien cultural complex opposite the Abhayagiri Dāgāba and built the Nawaloka Hospital in Anurādhapura. In collaboration with the Ministry of Buddha Sāsana and the Mihintala Āloka Trust (a huge mobilization of people of all classes and occasionally all ethnic and religious communities), he arranged to have the Mihintale Mahāsäya whitewashed. Premadasa was the chief guest at an unprecedented Poson *perahära* (elephant procession) in Mihintale, which brought the Poson festival full circle back to its nineteenth century roots, and he personally unveiled the new Mahinda statue, commissioned in Thailand for use in this new procession.

Throughout these years of direct liturgical participation the U.N.P. government simultaneously constructed Mihintale, almost *ex nihilo*. In a complex history directly paralleling the liturgical one, Jayewardene and Premadasa sponsored the construction of roads, schools, electricity stations, telephone lines and multinational corporation funded pay phones, federal buildings, stalls for shops in Mihintale "New Town" and a tourist hotel: the site was reconstructed, whitewashed, at the same time that the town, today a major outpost of urban Colombo for the North Central Province, was invented.[31] The underlying unity of the two projects is manifest in the characteristic engraved granite plaques of the U.N.P., which dot both the religious/archaeological site and "New Town" Mihintale. Some of these are only in Sinhala, others in all three national languages; in any event they use florid style to record the benefactions of the central government in an imitation of the ancient kings as obvious as it was effective.[32]

1993 was to be the crown and glory of the contribution to Mihintale's development: celebration of the so-called Mihindu Jayanthi. Premadasa planned elaborate festivities including souvenir coins and stamps; special scholarly publications about Aśoka and coffee-table books about Mihintale, in English and Sinhala; the highly symbolic construction in the middle of Mihintale "New Town" of a full-scale replica of Sāñchi Stupa #1 complete with repro ornate *toranas* and an innovative internal museum which was to become the permanent home of the Mihintale, Kapilavastu and other relics, itself directly opposite a model of the Federal Parliament building at Kotte and thereby indicative of an unbroken tradition from Mahinda, who originated at Sāñchi, to Premadasa, governing modern Sri Lanka from the capital; numerous special liturgical features such as 84,000

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lamp *pūjā*, *perahära, sil* campaign, *bhakti gi* and essay contests, etc. Most important, in 1993 Mihintale was to be the site of Premadasa's Gam Udāwa festival, celebrating the modernization of Sri Lanka's villages, a *tamāsha* rivalling that of Poson itself. The annual Gam Udāwa celebration was held on Premadasa's birthday, which conveniently fell in the month of June (Poson).

But Mihintale never got its chance. Ranasingha Premadasa was assassinated 1 May 1993, just one month before Poson, and the residents of Mihintale "New Town" that summer (including shopkeepers, drivers, postal employees, tourist touts and the sweepers at the repro Sāñchi Stupa) were the only Sri Lankans I met anywhere in the Island who seemed genuinely sad about the assassination of a leader whose zeal for pieties was matched by his zeal for self-aggrandisement and brutal repression of all opposition. Gam Udāwa was cancelled; the Sāñchi Stupa remains an empty shell, the Federal Parliament building is unfinished, and the souvenir coins were never released. But the Poson festival went on, with all of the remaining members of Premadasa's cabinet running to take over the liturgical functions he was to fulfill himself. President D. B. Wijetunge performed the ceremonial openings of the Anurādhapura-Mihintale railroad, of the international Buddhist meditation center in Mihintale, of a new clock tower (characteristic of the Premadasa years) and of the unfinished Sāñchi Stupa #1 (named "Mahinda the Second Buddha Great Stupa"); he also switched on the Mihintale lights. Minister of Housing and Construction B. Sirisena Cooray unveiled a special canopy for Premadasa's Thai Mahinda statue, unveiled another new pinnacle for the Mihintale Mahāsäya, officiated at the clock tower unveiling and pledged to continue Premadasa's commitment to the religion. Future Prime Minister Ranil Wikremasinghe switched on the lights the second day, and Minister of Tourism and Rural Industrial Development S. Thondaman declared open the Mihintale Hotel and an industrial settlement at Mihintale. All these pieties were recorded on the typical granite plaques of the Premadasa era, the final additions to a city of inscriptions.

Lame-duck President D. B. Wijetunge arrived at Mihintale on Poson, 1994 to deliver a speech, and the government provided a much more modest array of special features for the day. But the President did not participate in any liturgical functions -- he arrived in a motorcade minutes before his speech, along a paved road up to the Mäda Māluwa that Jayewardene had constructed for this very purpose, then drove away immediately after speaking -- and completion of the unfinished projects was

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not even mentioned. His successor, President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (1994-present), daughter of Prime Ministers S.W.R.D. and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, following the precedent set by her mother, did not attend the festival at all during 1995.

Yet in 1995, as in earlier periods when the big whigs did not participate (during the early 1950s, 1963-1965, and 1970-1977), Poson continued along without them as a collaboration of lay trustees and monks with lesser government officials from the Marketing Board, the Ceylon Transport Board, variously-named cultural and religious ministries, the Department of Archaeology, the Ceylon Electricity Board, the police, the army and ministry of defense, the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation, local government officials of Anurādhapura and Mihintale and, of course, the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Ltd. (A.N.C.L. = Lake House in its nationalized form). This "official" collaboration sponsoring and advertising Poson -- with or without Chandrika's participation -- is supplemented and entrenched by public social and philanthropic organizations including Saukyadāna (medical) groups, providers of *dansäl* (charity booths) across the entire country, the Boy Scouts, the Y.M.B.A., the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress (A.C.B.C.), the All-Ceylon Women's Buddhist Association (A.C.W.B.A.), the Mahabodhi Society and others in addition to a vast array of private hawkers and merchants ranked by their place in relation to Mihintale peak.[33] The complex agency constructed through the cooperation of these public and private institutions provides the modern festival a life of its own. The effects of this collaboration are manifest in the popularity Poson has enjoyed every year since its inception (during the 1950s). Attendance estimates for 1994 ranged between 500,000 and 2.5 million pilgrims through Mihintale in three days, or between about 3% and 16% of the entire population of Sri Lanka.

Mahinda the Nationalist and Modern Sri Lanka

In the midst of all those special supplements and devotional songs and presidential speeches, composed and published and performed over the last four decades, a fairly consistent picture of Mahinda the Nationalist emerges. Neither the temple preacher nor the missionary, Mahinda the Nationalist preaches in the vernacular, Sinhala, because he supports the sovereignty of Sinhala Buddhist government. He founds Buddhism as the Sri Lankan national religion (which in fact it became only in 1972!) and can become the occasion for diatribes against non-Buddhists (Christians in the 1950s and

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1960s) and against non-Sinhala-speakers (the Tamil Tigers from 1980 to the present, who are chastised for failing to heed the great Arhant's non-violent message) in addition to just about any perceived or real threat that might confront the nation (including avarice in the face of the terrible shortages of the Bandaranaike years, greed in the no-holds-barred capitalist exploitation of the Jayewardene-Premadasa years, and violence during the 1971 and 1987-89 J.V.P. rebellions). But Mahinda the Nationalist's commitment to the nation is not exclusively political. He also supports national development, if not explicitly then at least implicitly through his portrayal as the island's Prometheus (purveyor of more advanced culture and technology) and his situation within the Mihintale Poson carnival and associated Gam Udāwa rhetoric. Mahinda the Nationalist stands for the modern Sinhala Buddhist nation, a commitment that changes in its details only as the nation itself responds to threats during times of unrest and engages in development during times of peace.

Marvelously enough, these characteristics of Mahinda the Nationalist, like the distinctive characteristics of his predecessors right back to the imperial emissary, are portrayed as mere explanations of the age-old story -- Devānampiyatissa and the deer-deity -- ever-repeated in all its details to dominate quantitatively, if not ideologically, all texts about Arhant Mahinda right up to the present. Thus the original contribution of Mahinda the Nationalist is made in the very process of repeating the story of his origin, of embellishing the telling with explicit and implicit references to issues and concerns of the day.

But it is precisely the activities of Mahinda the Nationalist that make him unique against the backdrop of earlier Mahindas -- support for Sri Lanka in its guise as a modern nation, support for Sinhala as national language and Buddhism as national religion, commitment to "development" in its manifold connotations -- which simultaneously make this new incarnation of Mahinda problematic. In a word, Mahinda the Nationalist embodies the contradictions implicit in the very notion of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism: all citizens of the nation are not Sinhala Buddhists; national development in both its twentieth century forms (capitalist and socialist) is neither rooted in nor especially compatible with Sinhala Buddhist traditions. Although the emphasis on Sinhala language might be able to embrace Sinhala-speaking Christians and Muslims, it is not easy to see Mahinda the Nationalist, nor the Sinhala Buddhist nation he supposedly founded, as a model for Tamil-speaking Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Although industrial development can be portrayed as an act of Buddhist compassion

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(as was often attempted by the Jayewardene and Premadasa regimes), the underlying consumerism cannot be reconciled with other Buddhist virtues any more easily than unmixed Sinhala can accommodate the flood of U.N. technology, science, scholarship and diplomacy.

This is not to say that there have been no attempts to draw Sri Lankan Tamils into Poson and the nation it indexes. Periodically, Poson special supplements, especially from the 1950s and 1960s, contain articles by Tamils about the Buddhist contribution to south Indian Tamil culture[34] or the Tamils who are imagined to have been among the 40,000 converts of Devānampiyatissa's retinue.[35] More strikingly, as early as 1950 the Mahabodhi Society had a Jaffna branch sponsoring Poson rallies complete with a Mahinda image "placed in a decorated car and taken in procession along the main roads of Jaffna, re-entering the temple premises at night."[36] Mr. C. Ponnambalam, Mayor of Jaffna, accepted an invitation that year to unveil the statue of Mahinda in a ceremony at the Nāga Vihāra, Jaffna; in his speech he recalled that Sanghamittā Theri, sister of Arhant Mahinda, is supposed to have come through Jaffna on her way to Anurādhapura with the Bodhi tree sapling sent by Aśoka Maurya. The president of the Mahabodhi Society in Jaffna, Upali Gunaratne, "said that the very fact that the Buddhists of Jaffna wished the mayor, a non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhist, to perform the ceremony, bore testimony to the esteem and affection in which they held him." Though the communalist tone offends today, in context this seems to have been quite innocently meant, and apparently taken, as a compliment to the Tamil mayor. The newspapers published a captioned photograph of the smiling mayor's speech.

However bizarre the occurrence of a Poson festival in Jaffna may seem -- one need not wonder what would have happened to the "decorated car," and the mayor, if they processed an image of Mahinda through the streets of Jaffna forty years later! -- still, in the context of the new nation, 1950, it is believable that Sinhala Buddhists then living in Jaffna might have expected their Tamil brethren to be swept up in the surge of Mahinda's popularity already underway at that time. Mahinda the Nationalist was after all supposed to be the patron saint of the entire nation, and the implication of that equation for citizens who were neither Sinhala-speaking nor Buddhist was perfectly compatible with the motives of the Mahabodhi Society, which had a Jaffna branch in the first place because it was continuing the work of Mahinda the Missionary in attempting to nurture Sinhala Buddhism throughout the island and win converts from among non-Buddhist citizens. During the 1950s and 1960s, a similar pattern is clear in other, smaller,

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Tamil dominated towns. Mahinda processions, organized by Sinhala residents but appealing to Sri Lankan Tamils there too, were held in towns in the North and East, including Amparai, Batticaloa, Gal-oya, Trincomalee, Kankesanturai, Nagadipa and Nallur. Likewise, they were held in the hill country, where they could appeal to "Indian Tamils," in towns such as Nawalapitiya and Nivitigala. As late as 1982 the national radio sponsored Poson sermons in Tamil.

Yet there are, and no doubt were, at least two ways of reading this "appeal" to Tamils. However well-meaning, each of these Mahinda processions, parading the symbol of a Sinhala Buddhist state to the groups of people excluded by its ideology, no doubt had the same double edge implicit in the Mahabodhi Society's compliment to the mayor of Jaffna, quoted above. Mahinda processions and festivals in Tamil dominated towns drew them into the larger nation (in Sinhala areas such processions and festivals had been happening in virtually every town for decades). But such processions and festivals had been mobilized in Sinhala areas at least in part as Buddhist acts of defiance against the dominant non-Buddhist political power; though the enemy and the circumstances of the Sinhala Buddhists were new, something of the spirit may well have obtained. Processing Mahinda through Tamil dominated streets at best set the Sinhala Buddhist standard of human excellence as *the* standard against all possible contenders; at worst, it was a flagrant demonstration of the new order to those who were expected to suffer for its advances.

At any rate, the practice of Mahinda processions in Tamil dominated areas appears rather less innocent in light of the rhetoric which began appearing in Poson specials during the late 1950's:

> Till the 13th century, this monastery [Mihintale] of the 3rd c. B.C. flourished amidst various vicissitudes that the Buddhist Sāsana underwent during these 1600 years ... In the 13th century when Polonnaruwa also came under the dominion of the Tamils ... [t]he Tamils plundered the riches from the monuments [of Mihintale].[37]

Even when the attack on "Tamils" is not as explicit as this, the attempt to encapsulate this multicultural nation within a monocultural symbol is implicit in every claim made every year about Mahinda's special significance to the nation as a whole. Although presidential speeches and media pieces about Mahinda the Nationalist often call for unity, it is more often the uniqueness of Mahinda's contribution -- Sinhala Buddhist culture -- which gets championed. Yet Mahinda does not explicitly condemn

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Tamils; he speaks of Buddhist virtues, of non-violence and cooperation, even as the civil war rages.

In the same way, there have been attempts to make Mahinda sit comfortably with the "modernization" of the island but here, too, the attempt has been fraught with difficulty. Though development has a natural affinity with the Promethean Mahinda who brings superior culture to the nation, and Poson discourses thus have no trouble making Mahinda explicitly support national development in a general sense, there is a big gap between the Buddhist art and literature of the past and the pesticides and Kubota tractors of the present. As Pradeep Jeganathan has helped me to see, Mahinda's contribution -- the Sri Lankan nation -- ceases to be unique if modernization (Westernisation) is taken as his very essence, and so in the speeches and newspapers Mahinda the Nationalist quite regularly condemns, in the name of the nation, the very consumer-oriented capitalism that most actively supports him. Thus the marriage of Mahinda with modernization is rocky at best.

Until the advent of the U.N.P. in 1977, advertisers in the special supplements made no attempt to incorporate Mahinda himself into their advertisements; the placement of the ad in the Poson special supplement was sufficiently daring. After 1977, when aggressive capitalism became the rule, major Sri Lankan corporations, especially those directly involved in Premadasa's Mihintala Āloka Trust, began to convey Poson imagery in their Poson advertisements quite explicitly. Still, these never baldly cheapened Mahinda into a salesman. Likewise, Mahinda supported by implication the development programs of the often-simultaneous Gam Udāwa celebrations (held on Premadasa's birthday during the month of Poson) insofar as the symbols were juxtaposed. Thus, in 1991 Premadasa built a model of Mihintale's Ambasthāla Dāgāba for the Gam Udāwa in Kamburupitiya, celebrating the regulation by capitalism (and force) of that former J.V.P. hotbed; in 1993, as mentioned, Gam Udāwa was intended to overlap with Poson at Mihintale itself. But here too, Mahinda is never made to champion Gam Udāwa explicitly; he stands aloof, counterbalancing Westernisation (the loss of national uniqueness) with an affirmation of the religious tradition that is supposed to constitute that uniqueness.

Afterword: the Limits of Political Discourse

In 1994 my friends at Lake House invited me to sit on the platform in the Mäda Māluwa during President D. B. Wijetunge's speech. I had been

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talking with young monks at the donation booth on the Uda Māluwa, and let the time get away from me. When I realized that I had to get to the platform in half an hour, I began descending the roughly 1000 feet of stairs separating the two plateaus. The thronging crowd forging up the mountain made the passage impossible; I did not make it to the platform before armed special services guards had sealed it off. But from the ground, standing at this major junction in the path up the mountain and trying to listen to the speech, barely audible over the din of the pilgrims despite the loudspeakers that amplified it, I gained a perspective that would not have been clear from the platform: a perspective on the limits of political discourse. Those pilgrims whose pilgrimage prevented my descent were, afterall, moving *away* from the President's show. And on the ground I was struck by the disinterest of the pilgrims who continued to stream past me. Only a handful of people stood at the edge of the roped-off area listening to the speech; in the course of things I learned that many of them were plainclothes police officers (who approached me, one after the other, to find out what I was doing there with a camera and a notebook). The comments I heard from passing pilgrims were not words of awe and respect; they were complaints about the enormous inconvenience the President was causing by roping off most of Mihintale's middle plateau during the busiest moment of Poson Eve, making the crowd that much more crowded.

Politicians rightly see in Poson a golden opportunity for political discourse, with so large a number of citizens so actively involved in celebrations at home or at Mihintale. But my fieldwork at Mihintale suggests that among the vast number of motives that drive the pilgrims, a desire to hear political speeches ranks rather low on the list. Rather, pilgrims consistently suggested other motives to me: sheer enjoyment of the journey and carnival, physical exercise, an opportunity to taste and buy treats and souvenirs, a festival of lights and music, an opportunity to earn merit, an opportunity to see awe-inspiring archaeological monuments, an opportunity for friendship and flirting, family and village comradery, an opportunity to observe the eight Buddhist precepts in a holy place. As became clear during the Bandaranaike years, and may become clear during the Kumaratunga years, the absence of national politicians at Mihintale for Poson hardly spoils the festivities.

This insight is on one hand a warning that it is not possible to extrapolate from "official" discourses to the masses of pilgrims who attend the Poson festival at Mihintale, and who pay attention to "official" discourses, or not, according to their varied dispositions. Here the limit of

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political discourse is realized at the level to which it is ignored. On the other hand, political attempts to manipulate the symbol of Mahinda are not entirely misdirected; the popularity of Poson continues to animate Mahinda as a central national symbol ripe for manipulation, and surely the barrage of ideology across newspaper columns and radio broadcasts and loudspeakers has at least partially constituted the way in which many modern Sinhala Buddhists conceive of him. Indeed, Poson, with its many different sorts of pilgrims and other participants -- a genuine cross-section of Sinhala Buddhist (and a surprising number of Christian) men and women and children -- united together for that carnival on that ancient mountain, enacts the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist program in its very occurrence, with or without the political rhetoric. In this context it is important to remember Bourdieu's dictum that unless the *habitus* is consciously remade, it will be unconsciously reproduced.[38]

The character of Mahinda has been consciously manipulated by the leaders of countless generations who have imagined and honoured him. In a generation suffering the devastating results of the ideology which appropriated Mahinda as a major symbol of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and "development," it is no more appropriate to continue reproducing that ideology or dispassionately watching it reproduce itself than it would have been to reproduce Mahinda the Second Buddha after the Cholas had crushed Anurādhapura and Polonnaruwa. The 13th century Mahinda the Temple Preacher emerged to find Sinhala-speaking Buddhists a new place of pride and dignity and cultural fluorescence within a political situation that made any grander claim to power unrealistic. If Arhant Mahinda is to remain viable in post-Premadasa Sri Lanka, he must be remade anew as the cipher for a Sinhala Buddhist culture that exists within a multicultural nation (this might be possible through a fresh look at Mahinda the Imperial Emissary, Mahinda the Sectarian Ideologue and Mahinda the Temple Preacher, each of whom facilitated larger associations of Sinhala-speakers with various sorts of southern Indians), and for a national development which affirms the well-being of all classes in Sri Lankan society and a heightened level of environmental consciousness (this might be possible through a new look at the sermons of Mahinda the Temple Preacher). If such remaking proves impossible the final realization of the limits of political discourse could be the eclipse of Mahinda altogether, in favour of different symbols from Sri Lanka's rich history that prove more relevant to the island's current political, economic and spiritual situation.

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1. The story is first found in Sri Lanka's famous *vamsas* ("chronicles"), the *Dipavamsa* (ca. 303 A.D.) and *Mahāvamsa* (ca. 475 A.D.). These accounts in all their salient details have been repeatedly paraphrased since, and even in the modern newspaper tellings I discuss below, there is very little variation in the story itself. For a critique of modern historicist readings of these texts, and a reconstruction of the social history of their production and use, see my "Buddhist history: the Pāli vamsas of Sri Lanka" in Ronald Inden, ed., *Post-Orientalist approaches to the study of South Asian texts* (forthcoming).
2. E.g., W. S. Karunaratne, "Anuradhapura -- the home of Buddhism in Ceylon," *The Buddhist* XXVIII,1 (May, 1957), p. 72: "...the apostle Mahinda introduced Buddhism to Ceylon -- a religion that moulded the character of the people and brought about the development of the art and architecture of the Island;" "Buddhism and Ceylon," *The Buddhist* XXIX,2 (June, 1958), p. 106: "Not only was this flow of Indian ideals encouraged in the religious and spiritual planes but every effort was made to derive the best benefits from the achievements of the Mauryans in Art, Architecture and literature." Cf. "A national tradition," *Ceylon Daily News*, June 20, 1959, p. 6: "Poson is a day which is not only of importance to Buddhists in Ceylon ... The event which is recalled by this anniversary has profoundly affected the history and national traditions of Ceylon."
3. E.g., G. P. Malalasekera, "The significance of Poson," *The Buddhist* XXIII,2 (July, 1952), p. 47: "Thus on a day before this full-moon day of Poson, 236 years after the passing away of the Buddha, Buddhism gained official recognition in the Island. From this day, for two thousand years up to 1815 when the Sinhalese lost their independence, Buddhism was the state religion of Lanka."
4. I make these claims on the basis of the handful of nineteenth century palm leaf manuscripts (*pus kola pot*) which I have rescued from the cupboards of Sri Lankan antiques dealers, especially in and around Kandy. In these books -- most likely produced for use in temple sermon ceremonies (*bana*) -- the sermons (of the Buddha) which Mahinda is believed to have preached are regularly included. An untitled fragment of an otherwise unknown description of Mahinda's coming to Sri Lanka is a quintessential example of the "Temple Preacher" motif: so complete is the focus upon Mahinda's preaching (including details about the chair he sat upon, his specific daily routine before and after preaching, and the precise canonical location [and alternative names] of the specific sermons he preached), that no other details are provided at all. Even the connection to Aśoka Maurya is omitted in this account! The text is transliterated and translated as the appendix to my Rethinking Buddhist Missions, University of Chicago Ph.D. thesis in the History of Religions, 1992.
5. Of special relevance in this context is the Buddhist demand for control of sacred sites, especially Anurādhapura, which led to riots there on Poson day, 1903. For a contemporary account see Brahmachari Walisinha Harischandra, *The sacred city of Anuradhapura* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services,

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1985/1908). For recent analyses of the politics of the ancient sites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Pradeep Jeganathan, "Authorizing history, ordering land: the conquest of Anuradhapura," in *Unmaking the nation: the politics of identity and history in modern Sri Lanka* ed. Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995), pp. 106-136 and Elizabeth Nissan, "History in the making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist nation," *Social Analysis* 1989, 25: 64-77.

6. Colonial newspapers, as noted below, did not make much record of Poson activities; they may well have been oblivious to the political point of them (or, if they grasped the political ramifications, perhaps they simply did not want to give them any press). My evidence for the late 19th and early 20th century origin of these various processions is reports about them ("39th annual procession" and so on) during recent decades. Though these agree in dating the various processions to the late 19th or early 20th century, there is often contradiction and I have not tracked down the exact dates of origin. Thus *The Times* reported June 7, 1960 that the Pushpadāna Samitiya's 60th Mahinda procession was being held that year, yet the *Ceylon Daily News* reported on June 10, 1957 that this society had begun its procession only in 1918 (p. 8); whereas (according to a contemporary inscription) this very society erected the earliest extant Mahinda image at Mihintale in 1914! The exact dating has little relevance to the argument of this paper, though details of these early processions would be most illuminating of incipient Buddhist nationalist protest against the British, and I would certainly be grateful to readers who might supply information about them.
7. "Mahinda College," *The Buddhist* IV,22 (Colombo, 8th pura Poson 2436/June 3, 1892) p. 173.
8. See "Poson Eve reverie," *Ceylon Daily News*, June 21, 1961, p. 9 for references to 19th century pilgrims' chants tracking the route from Matale to Anurādhapura.
9. This is spelled out on the basis of extrapolation from contemporary fieldwork in the Mihintale region; my search for primary sources has been quite unfruitful thus far. But a diary excerpt reprinted in *The Buddhist* (June, 1967), said to be from L. Lieschling, Asst. G.A., Nuwarakalawiya, March 1869-August 1873 records "about 20,000 people come here [to Anurādhapura], remain a few days, and then leave;" they are "from all parts of the country and go annually without a single policeman being here." The same passage is quoted, at length, in Harischandra, *The sacred city of Anuradhapura*, pp. 66-67. This account probably exaggerates the numbers, in some sort of anti-government pitch by the author. It does not specify that this is part of Poson, nor indicate what (if anything) the gathering was about beyond visiting "what are called the sacred places." But it may be that the reports I have garnered from my informants at Mihintale are unreliable or misinterpreted.
10. E.g., "Mahinda's visit is fourth Buddhist mission to Lanka: Bhikkhu Kassapa calls it so because the Buddha came here thrice before," *The Buddhist* XVIII,3 (July, 1947) p. 47: "The Poson Full-moon anniversary, second only to Vesak, will ever be remembered by every loyal Sinhala heart. We remember all it means to us, the things we learnt at our parents' knees, and all we owe to the

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Mighty Thera, who, alighting that day on Mihintale's Crest, brought the blessings of Dhamma to Lanka." Cf. G. P. Malalasekera, "The significance of Poson," *The Buddhist* XXIII,2 (July, 1952): "To the Buddhists of Ceylon, the full-moon day of Poson, which falls in the month of June, is one of the most important dates in their religious calendar, rivalling even that of the Vesak Full-moon." Though the "second only to Vesak" theme survived into the 1960s at least (e.g., G.D. Weerasinghe, "Buddhist festivals of Ceylon," in D.T. Devendra, ed., *Buddhist Annual 2509/1965* [Gunasena, 1965]:53), the editor of *The Buddhist* would change his mind on the relative significance of Poson within the next couple years, as discussed below.

11. For an intriguing and revealing description of the archaeological progress at Mihintale, see S. Paranavitana, *Glimpses of Ceylon*, 59-76 (and plates).

12. The image was dedicated on Poson in 1914 (B.E. 2458) by Don Charles Senanayake (brother of Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake and uncle of Prime Minister Dudley S. Senanayake), representing the Pushpadāna Samitiya in Colombo Fort.

13. Full moon festivals (*poya*) -- during which the especially pious (traditionally including kings and courtiers) adopt a pseudo-monastic regimen for 12 or 24 hours, using the time to study and meditate on the Buddha's teachings -- have a long and well documented history in Sri Lanka (and throughout at least the Theravāda Buddhist world), including the regular weekly sabbath (new moon, half moon, full moon, no moon, every month) as well as specific full moon days (such as Vesak, Poson, Kathina, etc.) singled out for specific historio-religious reasons. But when we look closely at the constitution of these practices and the agencies practicing them it becomes clear that at different times and under different circumstances Sri Lankan Buddhists have accorded different interpretations to the significance of both the regular weekly observance and the special, singled out full moon days. The colonial and postcolonial politicization of *poya* days has extended beyond Buddhist communities to groups of Muslims and Christians who have been prosecuted for defying *poya* day bans on alcohol sales, the slaughter of animals, etc.

14. This was apparently an old custom in the North Central Province, where groups of villagers still independently arrange to establish temporary roadside offerings of food, water and tea for pilgrims. Prior to the middle of the twentieth century this was a virtual necessity, if there were to be any pilgrims at all; today, when the roads to Anurādhapura are sufficiently provided with small towns and permanent roadside shops this practice continues more as a source of great fun, village pride and sensed duty. In more recent years it has become a major part of Poson festivities in the cities as well, where the *dansäl* are not provided for pilgrims at all, but for fellow residents of the neighborhood and larger city. At Mihintale, some annual *dansäl* organizations begin preparing months in advance, circulating through the villages in trucks with mounted speakers, collecting donations. These "meal charity booths" and "tea charity booths" serve tens of thousands of pilgrims each over the three or four days of the main festival at Mihintale.

15. In all the examples I have seen, as well as all posters, newspaper illustrations and book illustrations that I have located, Mahinda stands on Silākūta with his followers single file behind him; King Devānampiyatissa stands on the plateau

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below, looking up, bow and arrow in hand, surrounded by his entourage of 40,000 men; the deer-deity runs away nearby. The oldest template I have been able to discover for this ubiquitous depiction is a painting at Dambulla, restored in the 18th century but probably much older.

16. See Harischandra, *The sacred city of Anuradhapura*, for details (and cf. above, n. 5). That the emergence of Mihintale *per se* as the center of Poson festivities was still in its infancy at this time is clear from Harischandra's account, which, despite much reference to the sacred history of Mahinda and Mihintale (*passim*) has precious little to say about the site of Mihintale itself. The short chapter on Mihintale (11-12) stresses its unimproved condition, and highlights the very beginning of an attempt by the "three or four Bhikkhus" there "who, with the co-operation of a pious Upasaka, are improving the holy place out of the collections received from the pilgrims" (12). There is a footnoted attack on the scandalous presence of a liquor tavern near "the foot of the holy rock" (66, n.), but otherwise Anurādhapura (especially the Bodhi Tree), and not Mihintale, absolutely dominates Harischandra's chapter on "Buddhist Grievances" (61-104), which focuses upon, in addition to taverns, the presence of meat stalls, Christian missions and arrogant/violent colonial officials at Anurādhapura as offensive and intolerable. Yet Harischandra does note that "thousands of people assemble annually for religious purposes" at the foot of Mihintale (66, n.) which, as I suggest below, eventually necessitated improvement of that site.

17. *Ceylon Observer*, 10 June 1903 (cited in Harischandra, *Sacred city of Anuradhapura*, p. 87) indicates the presence of "thick crowds" in Anurādhapura for Poson that year; Harischandra himself estimates the number at 20,000 (p. 86). *Ceylon Observer*, 12 June 1920, p. 14 gives the number "about 65,000 pilgrims" for that year. Cf. "Poson pilgrimage to Anuradhapura," *Ceylon Daily News*, 6 June 1944, p. 1: "The Poson is the largest festival in the Island and in pre-War years over 40,000 pilgrims used to be attracted to Anuradhapura for the celebration."

18. "Anuradhapura," *Ceylon Observer* 12 June 1920, p. 14. I searched in vain for additional references to Poson in the Lake House collection of the *Ceylon Observer*, not complete but dating back to 1879.

19. E.g., "Pilgrim traffic for tomorrow's Poson: taking the chance of reaching A'pura," *Ceylon Daily News*, 16 June 1943, p. 1 and "Poson pilgrims in Anuradhapura: heavy traffic expected this year," *Ceylon Daily News*, 5 June 1944, p. 7.

20. "Poson pilgrimage to Anuradhapura," *Ceylon Daily News*, 6 June 1944, p. 1: "This year restrictions have also been placed on pilgrims travelling by bus on pilgrimage to various shrines. This action has been taken as it has been found that when railway restrictions are imposed on travelling pilgrims have chartered busses for their pilgrimages. The Police have been requested to be on the lookout for such pilgrim parties and put a stop to the practice."

21. "Poson pilgrimage to Anuradhapura: tickets purchased to distant stations," *Ceylon Daily News*, 6 June 1944, p. 1 and "Poson pilgrims held up at A'pura: sequel to travel without heeding restrictions," *Ceylon Daily News*, 8 June 1944, p. 1. It is interesting that despite this mass defiance, the same issue of the *Daily News* gave much more extensive coverage to the centenary

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anniversary of the Colombo Y.M.C.A. than to the Poson festival, which was reported *only* in the above-mentioned article as a problem of sneaky travellers, and then in the small follow up article two days later.

22. "The passing show, by Buddhist bystander," *The Buddhist* XXV, 3 (July, 1954) p. 118. On p. 117 the same author muses that taking *sil* (the eight Buddhist precepts) is the only way to curb the murder rate in Ceylon; the Y.M.B.A.'s *sil* programme for Vesak, he reasons, is so productive that it ought to be extended "even on austerity lines," to "other major poya-days such as Poson, Esala, Unduwap and Duruthu all of which are Public Holidays upon which many people are able to spare the time for *Astanga Sila*." He goes on to celebrate the fact that "the [1954] Poson celebrations like the Vesak were marked by a large increase in the number of those taking *Astanga Sila*." Here we see, in its very nascence, the transformation of Poson from being one of several important full moon days that ought to be as important as Vesak, to being the full moon day that *is* as important as Vesak. The quoted passage takes this one step further: Poson is *the* full moon day which is *more* important than Vesak.

23. Malalasekera himself evidences the transition from missionary to nationalist. He champions both Mahindas, and in his works one sees a movement back and forth between the two images, hinging on the ambiguity of "civiliser" as an epithet of "missionary" as well as a synonym for "nationalist." Sometimes the focus is more on the evangeliser (whose "civilising influence" is the product of missionary zeal); sometimes it is more on the civiliser (whose missionary zeal is primarily constituted as civilising). The nationalist grows up in and out of the missionary. Cf. G. P. Malalasekera, "The significance of Poson," *The Buddhist* XXIII,3 (July, 1952), pp. 45-47; note that this was one of Malalasekera's popular radio talks.

24. On the political significance of the Wijewardenes' patronage of Buddhist institutions cf. my *The history of Kelaniya* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1997, forthcoming), especially ch. 5.

25. The relics included a unique black earthenware reliquary unlike any known in Sri Lanka (but comparable to several from ancient India); a gold foil reliquary in Sātavāhana style, embossed with pearls; miscellaneous gems and precious objects; and a tiny quantity of human bone and ash encased in gold.

26. In fact, *The Buddhist* published Paranavitana's, "The Dāgāba newly discovered at Mihintale" in the June 1951 issue (Vol. XXII, 2: 18-20), in which he concluded of the relics that "we may be having before us what Time has spared of that portion of the bodily remains of Saint Mahinda enshrined at Mihintale."

27. See for example W. S. Karunaratna, "Mihintale -- the centre of Buddhist pilgrimage in June" in *The Buddhist* XXVIII,2 (June, 1957), pp. 113-116. In the June 1963 issue *The Buddhist* published "Mihintale in a flash," a fast-food tour of Mihintale's major archaeological sites: "All these can be seen in a day ... let us rapidly roam over it, for Poson Poya lasts a mere twenty-four hours, a large part of which has to go on travel and eating and rest -- we are not living in the leisurely years of the bullock-cart!"

28. E.g., "100,000 pilgrims expected for Poson in sacred city," *Ceylon Daily News*, 7 June 1957, p. 7; "Big crowds in sacred city," *Ceylon Daily News*, 20

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June 1959, p. 1; "Anuradhapura gets ready for Poson," *Ceylon Daily News*, 8 June 1962, p. 3; "Poson precautions," *Ceylon Daily News*, 16 June 1962, p. 6; "Railway prepares for Poson rush," *Ceylon Daily News*, 1 June 1965, p. 7; "Poson Pilgrims," *Ceylon Daily News*, 11 June 1965, p. 4; "Sacred city and Mihintale all set for Poson," *Observer*, 16 May 1966.

29. The publications of Lake House gave elaborate attention to the illumination of Mihintale during Poson, 1963, including a revealing list of "thank you's" for 1963 (*Ceylon Daily News*, 11 June 1963, p. 3; something similar appears every year subsequently, even in the same font!) which illustrates both the wide network of collaborating agencies and the centrality of Lake House in organizing them.
30. I have not yet attempted a social history of Poson processions in Colombo, because I have been able to discover very little evidence and have not had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork on the topic.
31. Next to Anurādhapura, today Mihintale is by far the most important city for residents of this part of the N.C.P., site of the headquarters of the electricity board for all villages currently electrifying in the rural district between Kekirawa and Tantirimāle.
32. J.R. Jayewardene erected an inscription at the site of Mahinda IV's famous slabs in Mihintale, past which the pre-Premadasa pilgrim's path passed. Subsequently Premadasa had a new staircase (re)constructed from the Mäda Māluwa, put his own inscription at its base, and diverted traffic away from the traditional pilgrim's path (and J.R.'s inscription)!
33. The *kadê* on top of the peak belongs to a relative of the current chief incumbent monk; space for *kadês* below it on the mountain is more expensive to rent (from the temple and the city council) than space at the foot of the mountain, except for local residents who sometimes get special rates; those spaces are more expensive than spaces along Devanampiyatissa Road, and so on.
34. E.g., S. Thillainathan, "The Buddhist contribution to Tamil," *Observer*, 17 June 1962, p. 9.
35. E.g., A. Theva Rajan, "Did Ceylon Tamils embrace the new faith?," *Times*, 2 June 1966, p. 6. Needless to say, the author answers his own question in the affirmative!
36. "Mayor recalls Sanghamitta Legend," *Observer, 1 June 1950, p. 3.*
37. W. S. Karunaratna, "Mihintale -- the centre of Buddhist pilgrimage in June," *The Buddhist* XXVIII,2 (June, 1957), p. 116, my brackets. Note that this article was part of *The Buddhist*'s pioneering stab at pushing Poson (the June 1957 issue, described in some detail above).
38. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

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Chapter 6

PRAXIS, LANGUAGE AND SILENCES: The July 1987 Uprising of the JVP in Sri Lanka

Jani de Silva

Introduction

The July uprising[1] of the Janatâ Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), which occurred between 1987-90 in the Sinhala-speaking South, is perhaps one of the most pivotal events of Sri Lanka's post colonial history, and certainly one its bloodiest episodes. Even more significantly it took place against the backdrop of the open militarization of the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict. Events such as these cannot be analytically separated in any post colonial context today, where the politics of national aspiration have become inextricably intertwined with that of social liberation. At the same time, both strands of political praxis involve the re-negotiation of collective identity among the Sinhala and Tamil peoples in Sri Lanka in the modern period.

Consequently, a study of the JVP uprising and its engagement with Sinhala nationalist ideology is important to an understanding of a range of collective identities in Sri Lanka. This article was begun during a period of fieldwork conducted in the Matara district between 1991-2, in the immediate aftermath of the *bhîshana samaya* or "the massive repression" of 1988-90. During the first year of fieldwork I developed an exploratory paper on the ethics of political struggle among young persons (de Silva 1993). At the same time, a significant feature of the *bhîshana samaya* was the vast array of literature generated by various insurgent factions that flooded the countryside during these critical years; and it seemed apposite to attempt a systematic analysis of this discourse. Such a project seemed all the more urgent in a political climate where those found with any kind of anti-UNP[2] literature were still being taken in for "subversive activities." As such the life-span of such materials seemed doomed to be nasty, brief and short.

Further, even as my fieldwork progressed, it seemed to me that this event, despite its bloodiness and drama, was still not the final episode in the history of the JVP. As such, the immediate need seemed to be to capture and record social history while a plurality of voices and source-

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materials still persisted to tell their stories, before they were overcome and overwhelmed by the larger narratives of officialdom.

This essay, then, is a preliminary effort in this direction, and largely based on pamphlets, leaflets, letters, recorded tapes of Wijeweera's[3] speeches, posters, communiquès, secret broadcasts and so on. A serious problem is attached to such data: many of the pamphlets and leaflets are undated and it is only possible to have an approximate idea of the date of publication and period of circulation. This material is further supplemented by information gathered through conversations, arguments, discussions and interviews with those I met in the course of my fieldwork, the names of whom I have for the most part withheld in accordance with their wishes.

A great deal has been written on the second uprising of the JVP in recent years and this is indeed an encouraging trend. Most welcome have been the critical reviews by Uyangoda and Samaranayake who write from a position of advantage issuing from their long association and familiarity with JVP politics. Their main preoccupation, understandably enough, is with the JVP's ideological shift from a stance of "revolution through class struggle" in 1971 to one of "liberation through patriotic struggle" in 1987. As political scientists, both writers are centrally concerned to identify and chart the JVP's changing political positions over the years as exemplified by shifts in their approach to the ethnic Tamil community.

In his brief essay Uyangoda (1989) traces the political developments on the national and international arenas which led up to such an ideological shift. Samaranayake (1987) provides a useful and detailed discussion of the JVP's shifting position with regard to the ethnic Tamil minority. The implication of both studies, however, is that such a shift was both inevitable and irrevocable, and that it marked a dilution of the "socialist" aspirations of the early years. Against this, I contend in this essay that the shift towards a "patriotism" platform did not necessarily preclude a concern with issues of social class; indeed, that class remained a primary category of JVP commitment and identity.

Another of the more serious efforts to grapple with the second uprising is that by Chandraprema (1991). Chandraprema surveys the literature put out during this period, provides a narrative of the dramatic political events of 1987-90 and goes on to explore some of the ideological issues that arise from these developments. Nonetheless, as his own preface indicates, the move to put together such a narrative was made at the behest of the editor of the *Island*, a pro-UNP tabloid. It is understandable that in the wake of an extraordinary and protracted quelling operation mounted by

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its state agencies, the UNP leadership should wish to record their version of events. Thus, while Chandraprema's grasp of the way in which the anti-JVP thrust gathered force is excellent, his handling of the JVP material is more problematic since here the analysis is subsumed by a marked political bias. It becomes a narrative of a remarkable security operation rather than an uprising.

Gunaratne (1990) also provides a vivid picture of the events of 1987-90; however, some of this interesting empirical material is not adequately sourced, and a consistent analytical focus is missing. Alles, himself a member of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC), a tribunal set up to address the 1971 uprising, writes with more authority (1990), particularly with regard to the first insurgency. However, he depends on Chandraprema to a marked extent for his analysis of the second uprising.

Matthews (1989), Spencer (1990) and Moore (1993) all provide useful information about the fateful second uprising. Yet this uprising was more than a military event; and what is absent in the work of the above writers is a serious engagement with the discourse that accompanied it: the linguistic virtuosity; the extraordinary and audacious forays into the ideological arena that captured the imagination of the middle classes and the intelligentsia. It was precisely this capacity to persuade the middle classes and the intelligentsia of the validity of its project that made them such a dangerous force: it must be remembered that at the height of its political campaign (i.e. 1987-1988), despite the JVP's deadly "assassination politics" virtually **no** critical voice emerged from within the group, outside the regime-in-power. Today, as the March 1997 local elections display, the JVP is once again resurgent, and an analytical grasp of this most significant episode in its brief history seems more important than ever. This essay, then, is a preliminary step in an ongoing analytical project.

Conceptual framework

How then does one capture an ideological project in motion? Is it possible for the political actor wishing to lead an ideological enterprise to choose at random elements from the external world which s/he feels are desirable, such as "a Stalinist Marxism" or a "Cuban-style insurrection"? Clearly, such an endeavour cannot succeed if it does not find some resonance within its potential support-base; if it did not reflect some aspect of collective identity (class, ethnicity, religion, gender) already latent in the wider cultural milieu. I would maintain, then, that the Five Classes[4] of the JVP

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would have had no return in political terms, if they had failed to touch a chord within those who participated in them -- if those who listened were unable to relate what they heard to their own lives.

It is Althusser who argued that a structural feature of all ideology is the interpellation of individuals as subjects. Yet such a process of interpellation requires a certain recognition on the part of the individual concerned of herself as a subject (of the ideology concerned). But this sense of recognition is also at the same time a process of misrecognition. It is a misrecognition in the sense that the individual, in slipping into the position of subject, imagines it is s/he who is the author of the ideology she is expressing. Nonetheless, it is the subject who remains conditioned by the ideology.

Ideology, then, is here seen as a collective social phenomenon which the individual subject subscribes to. Such a notion of subjectivity, however, allows no scope for human agency: and indeed cannot account for human agency, for the way in which the human subject expresses herself creatively within the parameters of ideology. Individuals, after all, seek to express themselves through language and praxis. It was specifically to address the power relationship between subjectivity, language and social practice that Foucault introduced his notion of a discursive field.

The notion of a discursive field assumes the presence of many voices or discourses, rather than one monolithic discourse. The discursive field may further be structured by some fundamental premise which links it together, and upon which the collective cultural edifice is predicated -- a premise which has become hallowed by the passage of time.

In the field of public education in Sri Lanka, for instance, the notion of the value of education as a status symbol par excellence is perhaps one such basic premise. Thus, ideas on how public education programmes should be organised, such as the validity of a centralised system, a regionally based system, or a system where some aspects of the curriculum are centralised, while others are not, and so on constitute different discourses within this field. It is, of course, likely that in any given society one set of discourses are ascendant and reflect particular values, and particular class, gender and ethnic interests. But one must allow for the likelihood that this hegemony is an unstable one, constantly threatened from below.

I would suggest, here, that in the field of contemporary Sri Lankan politics the concept of a "just society" forms one such basic premise. In the Sinhala, the term "justice" is glossed into many associated

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notions: *yuktiya, sâdhâranatvaya, dharmistatvaya.* The positions taken by the principal political parties regarding the contours of the "just society," and the way it should be organised, differ widely. For the conservative pro-capital UNP, such a society is a *dharmista ṣamâjaya*, where social justice is relevant, but may be achieved only through political stability and strong leadership; a society which assigns to each member his given role according to his merits and virtues. Egalitarianism may not necessarily play a dominant role in such a society. Political dissent is seen as subversive.

In its ascendent 1956-77 phase, the social democrat-oriented Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) espoused a *samâjavâdhî samâjaya* or "socialist society" where indigenous small proprietors are nurtured but transnational capital is not. In their lexicon "social welfarism" is a key concept, but it was attached to an authoritarian style of leadership which desired political dissent to be confined within the democratic framework.

Alternately, for the Trotskyite-dominated traditional left, the "just society" assumes the form of a *sama samâjaya* or an egalitarian society, one inspired by Western-rational doctrines of individual rights. Here, social justice prevails in that the citizens' basic needs in terms of food, health care, education and employment are met and his/her democratic rights are not contravened. This focus on individual rights allow for a discourse of principled internationalism and the championing of minority group rights even if these may not always be realised in practice due to political contingencies. Political dissent is confined to the parliamentary arena, even though the perceived bounds of this system are not defined for all time.

Against these frames, the JVP projects its image as a force committed to establishing a *ṣadhârana lova* or "a world where justice prevails." The fundamental prerequisite for this is social justice in terms of an acceptable standard of living for the masses, universal adult education and full employment. Violent dissent against a reactionary state is necessary, but not against 'the party.' Leadership styles are necessarily authoritarian, leaving the individual with little or no space for personal agency.

The JVP discourse, then, is merely one voice in the political arena, though a powerful one. In this ideological project it is clear that the JVP built up a particular discourse through its words, its praxis and also its silences. The next four sections will explore these aspects of its discourse in greater detail.

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The JVP Discourse

The main elements in this discourse would appear to be a focus on social justice, patriotic duty and the legitimation of violent dissent, elements held together by an authoritarian style of leadership. It is arguable that many guerilla projects entertain these ingredients in their ideology. Yet in every such project each element is also articulated in a way that gives specificity to the discourse; the ideologue attempts to build creatively within the confines of structure, namely by manipulating the social/cultural content within this given frame. In this instance, then, what is significant is the specific form of social justice advocated; in terms of the areas of civil life where change was seen as necessary as well as areas where changes to the status quo were seen to be a dangerous trend. Similiarly, the particular brand of patriotism espoused, and the strategies deployed to legitimate anti-systemic violence in a largely Buddhist ethos, is what is at stake. Finally, though many underground movements display explicit authoritarian tendencies, the way in which total control was achieved and the treatment of dissidence within the JVP are equally important particularities which require analysis.

(a) Social justice

One of the persistent preoccupations of the leadership between 1977-89 was with the need for social justice for the "downtrodden masses." Much of their rhetorical energy throughout the '80s appeared to be directed towards this end. But it was social justice of a particular kind, arrived at by the deployment of specific strategies. For, if a discourse is constructed through both language and praxis, in the realm of social justice the JVP's political practice was quite as indicative of their position as the linguistic tools deployed.

The policy statement of 1977 laid out their political and economic agenda for the fashioning of a *sadhârana lova* or "a world where justice prevails." It envisaged a monopolistic statist presence in the spheres of foreign trade, internal wholesale trade and heavy industry. National and international transport would also be state-controlled. Further, bank and credit institutions were to be nationalised without compensation. Retail trade would be carried out on a cooperative and collective basis. A radical land reform programme is envisaged, but no redistribution is spoken about; rather land would be collectivised. Thus a neo-Stalinist (as opposed to a

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Maoist) scenario of almost classical dimensions emerges, two decades after the historic 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union CPSU. In this discourse, the role of the individual and the bounds of his/her agency becomes couched in ambiguity. The individual is, of course, entitled to social justice in the form of an acceptable standard of living, education and employment. But the way in which this is achieved should be decided from above.

And it is evident from his speeches in the 1982 presidential campaign that Wijeweera, the leader of the JVP, did take very seriously his perceived role of liberator of "the downtrodden masses." Clearly, these downtrodden masses stand in a specific class relation to various kinds of capital; and such a notion is interesting in the light of the post-1987 focus on patriotism as a basic category of collective identity. Yet if the identity of the 'un-propertied' masses is an unproblematic one, that of the capitalists in this discourse is not. Throughout the crucial 1982 presidential campaign, for instance, Wijeweera railed time and time again against the rise in the cost of living, which he said the government did nothing to control. At a meeting held in Armour Street, the quintessential urban-proletarian environment, he argued that

> ... the government can develop the country by utilising the millions of rupees which are now in the hands of non-national capitalists and those engaged in international trade within the country. But the government does not want to do this, since it does not wish to alienate its allies ... (*Ätta*, 16 September1982).

In this discourse, such capitalists are doubly delegitimised: they are alien, and they engage in international trade. In other words, they do not actually manufacture goods, rather they are engaged in distribution or trade. This allows them to inflate prices and raise the cost of living. They are, then, what is popularly described in left circles as "comprador elements," elements who are seen as an incubus on the nation. But unlike other left groupings in Sri Lanka, the JVP did not identify the social-democratic position advocated by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) as indicative of the latter's association with the "progressive" national bourgeoisie. For the JVP leadership, then, private entreprenuership, whatever its form, is illegitimate by definition.

Thus, self-expression for the individual, whether through the market or in terms of independent intellectual activity, becomes irrelevant. The state alone, in the form of the party, is able to make important decisions on production and distribution. Social justice for the worker,

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construed as an acceptable standard of living, is secured by the party. In this vision of an alternate society, the intricately stratified social order of Sinhala society is flattened out and turned upside down, but not destroyed. Broad cleavages remain. At the top of the new order, of course, is the politburo of the Party with its undisputed head. Next in line, there are the "oppressed masses," who in the late '80s became the "patriots," and then, finally, the (ex) capitalists, feudal elements, traders, non-nationals and so on who have few rights and little legitimacy in the new social order.

One of the most important aspects of this discourse on social justice is the approach to education. As products of universal mass education programmes, education was viewed by party ideologues as a fundamental human right. As many observers have noted, a significant feature of the JVP mobilisation strategy was its dependency on the student and undergraduate population. Both the April uprising of 1971 and the July uprising of 1987 were controlled by activists who were either students or ex-students, though the rank-and-file spilled over the bounds of the university system.

The quintessential image of the young revolutionary that was projected was that of an intellectual turning the weapons of the ruling class, i.e. ideology, against the despised capitalist system itself. Yet, as observed above, such a notion of the ideal revolutionary does not appear to be based on the need for independent intellectual activity, but rather from the status given to education in the Sinhala cultural ethos. Education was valued not so much for what it equipped the revolutionary to do, but as a status symbol in itself.

Moreover, this focus on education found the support of a range of social groupings, significant among whom were large numbers of young monks. Such monks were attracted to the party credo by its stress on the need for social justice. By the mid-1980s, the Sangha already constituted a significant proportion of the undergraduate population. The pirivena or temple-based tradition of education remains a strong feature of the Buddhist monastic ethos. Nonetheless, with free universal education, the universities have increasingly taken on the task of providing tertiary education for the Sangha. Further, such education is now no longer confined to religious learning. This trend has also had negative consequences for the Sangha as an institution. As Newton Gunasinghe observes

> ... a percentage of young monks leave (their robes) in order to be laymen, but only after having obtained some educational qualifications. Senior monks are well aware of the hazards involved

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and ensure by enrolling and training a large number of young men that the high drop-out rate will not necessarily eliminate all possible successors (Gunasinghe 1986:9).

Thus the disrobing of young monks in the third and fourth years of campus life is not an unusual feature. Interestingly enough, while such seemingly opportunistic and secular use of the monastic order is harshly castigated by the more middle class and conservative elements of the intelligentsia, almost none of those I interviewed in the field spoke in such terms (see also Jani de Silva 1993). Such a response is perhaps in keeping with the traditional Sinhala ethos which tends to grant a high place to education.

Thus, free education, particularly tertiary education, appeared to be viewed as almost sacred. Consequently, the attempts of the post-1977 Jayewardene regime to effect the further privatisation of the educational framework was met with strong resistance, resistance that was largely sponsored by the JVP. As early as 1981, the controversial White Paper on Education, which advocated a new "cluster-based" system,[5] became the focus of much agitation. The White Paper was seen as a move to legitimise the existing hierarchisation of schools, a measure which would be in turn be a precursor to the levying of fees and the privatisation of state schools.

For the first time in the history of Sri Lanka, then, such agitational movements succeeded in incorporating secondary school students, and ultimately the White Paper was withdrawn by the government of the day. However, in the late '80s, it was the government's move to permit the new and privately-owned North Colombo Medical College (NCMC) the right to offer the MBBS degree which served as a focus for much of the agitation and violence which overwhelmed the educational sector during these critical years. And while the role of the JVP was pivotal to this reaction, their task was made easier by the fact that several social groups were antagonised by this measure. In this instance, then, the state was seeking to contravene an area of tacit agreement among a range of social classes: that is, the inviolability of the concept of universal mass education.

Consequently, a chain of events was precipitated. By mid July 1987, in the wake of the Indo-Lanka Pact, the prestigious General Medical Officers Association (GMOA) protested against the move to allow the NCMC to deliver the MBBS. 1,500 medical officers struck work. They were immediately joined by large segments of the student body at the University of Colombo, and a "month of protest" was declared. This became the precursor to recurrent protests over this issue. In February 1988, for instance, a number of the more radical opposition parties,

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including the Sri Lanka Mahâjana Pakshaya (SLMP),[6] the Communist Party, Mahajana Eksat Peramuna (MEP), Eksat Lankâ Janatâ Pakshaya (ELJP)[7] and the Nava Sama Samâja Pakshaya (NSSP), staged another agitational campaign, supported by the GMOA and the Medical Students Association (MSA).

The NCMC issue served to radicalise even the traditionally conservative medical faculty which had thus far managed to stand aloof from mainstream student politics. Many students who were radicalised during this campaign subsequently joined the JVP (Gunaratne 1990, Chandraprema 1991) Here, then, was the realisation of discourse-through-praxis. It was this ability to coopt and further radicalise popular disaffection to its own purpose -- so that it seemed as if the entire intelligentsia was firmly behind it -- that became a significant feature of JVP practice.

Another related welfare issue on which the JVP discourse is very clear is on the right to employment. Here, again, it was not so much the belief in the concept of full employment -- which they shared with broad sectors of the electorate -- that defined this discourse, but the extent to which they were ready to defend it. It was the fear of future unemployment and the social degradation that was the lot of the educated unemployed which was the motivating sentiment behind the activism of many a *swabâshâ* student (de Silva 1993). And unlike the April 1971 uprising the July movement sought to operate via the trade union sector, by infiltration, by persuasion and by coercion. By the end of 1988, the JVP had shifted it's focus to the trade union arena. The unexpected success of the "day of protest" conducted by the JVP in November 1988 encouraged them to take the step of setting up a National Workers' Action Centre (*Jâtika Kamkaru Satan Madyastânaya*) to organise and control further political action in this promising sphere.

By mid-1989 the transport sector was simmering over wage disputes and the public sector Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) decided to strike work. At this point, the JVP moved into this domain by banning private omnibus transport in order to sharpen the impact of the SLTB strike; and a week later the port and railway workers had also been persuaded to strike. In consequence the state of emergency which had been relaxed with the coming in of the new UNP administration of January 1989 was again re-imposed. At this stage, other sectors joined the strike: the public sector postal and telecommunications workers were also prevailed upon to come out, and a general strike was declared by a JVP front organisation, the Dêshaprêmi Eksat Peramuna.

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Nonetheless, following the assassination of two key JVP negotiators, the government was able to contain the situation -- temporarily -- by addressing the wage demands of the transport workers. A short period of quiet ensued. But by mid-August the JVP once again precipitated strike action in the health sector over the arrest of two employees taken in for putting up posters. Even according to the state-owned media, up to nine people died before the health sector strike was settled.

Thus, while it did succeed in paralysing the transport and health sectors for a period, what was significant about these JVP-sponsored strikes was the extent of coercion deployed to sustain them. Though the JVP clearly appreciated the right of the employee to adequate wages and conditions of work, they were at the same time unwilling to grant workers the freedom to desist from strike action, the decision for which was not always democratically arrived at. Rather, they chose to engage in the time-honoured Rousseaunic formulation of forcing the people to be free. Yet it cannot be gainsaid that the JVP leadership clearly saw it as their role to ensure social justice by strengthening the hand of working people against capital and the state.

(b) The role of patriotism: a Caliban/Prospero model

> Within the past two decades of its existence ... the JVP has transformed itself into a nationalist political formation. Its metamorphasis into a movement of militant patriotism, with a clear de-emphasis on socialism is a recent (i.e. post-'83) phenomenon ... (Uyangoda 1989: 63)

By the late '80s, military activity in the North and East had escalated. The heavy flow of Tamil refugees across the northern coastline into the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu was now beginning to destabilise this Tamil-speaking state, prompting increased concern about the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict in Delhi. Consequently the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord was signed in July 1987. This Accord allowed for the withdrawal of the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan armed forces from the disputed territories of the North and East, and the deploying of Indian Peace-Keeping Forces for the maintenance of law and order in these areas.

It was the presence of Indian forces, of the "historical enemies of the Sinhala-speaking peoples" (*aitihâsika saturo*) on Sri Lankan soil that was seen as an outrage (*nindâva*) demanding a "patriotic" (*dêshaprêmi*) response from the people. Thus, by early 1987 the JVP, having realised the extent

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of political mileage to be gained by mobilising anti-Indian sentiments, shifted their platform from "socialism through class struggle" to "liberation through patriotic struggle."

This shift was a success. Even critical voices, such as that of ex-Politburo member, Nandasiri Galappathi, were to admit that the decision to use the presence of the Indian Army to win over the people was at least a partial success.[8] The Dêshaprêmi Janatâ Vyâpâraya (DJV) appears to have been created as a military arm of the JVP expressly for this purpose: the DJV epitomised the patriot taking to arms to save the nation.[9]

The concept of the *dêshaprêmi* or the patriot that was espoused was one that had legitimacy across the political spectrum, including the traditional Left. But it was, of course, a patriotism of the Caliban-Prospero model. The basic postulate becomes difference: the monkey-like, Calibanisque figure of the native valorises violence and raw emotion, or un-reason, and like the patriot is intimately bound to the soil. Against this, the cold and colonizing figure of Prospero stands for clinical reason and manipulative control.

In the post colony, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized that such a frame yields is replaced by the privileged, urban, English-speaking elite who are juxtaposed against the rural masses, the 'patriots.' Ironically, the leadership of the traditional Left, with its pluralism and internationalism, is rendered as suspect as the infamous 'capitalists.'[10] Such a perspective, furthermore, is hostile to the minority communities, especially the Indian Tamils, whether capitalist or plantation worker.

Such a discourse leads, logically, to notions of the patriot-as-martyr. The construction of a rhetorics of martyrdom became an important aspect of this emerging JVP discourse.[11] This was at times extended to the actual creation of martyrs: comrades who died in action were sometimes enshrined as martyrs in order to inspire heroism among the living. Most of these individuals were those who died in the 1971 uprising, but there were a few martyrs selected from those who died subsequently. Thus, a pamphlet put out in 1988 to commemorate the 17th anniversary of the first uprising speaks in eulogistic terms of Kamalabandu, an area leader of the Hambantota district killed in 1971:

> Beloved comrade Kamalabandu, you have become for us the symbol of heroic resistance against the enemy, even until death. Imbued with your faith in the class struggle, you resisted the enemy magnificently, heroically, until the last breath in your body was gone. Your life evokes in us memories of the *Shântivâdhi*

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Jâtakaya[12]... even as his limbs were torn apart one by one, the *bôdhisattva* evoked the *Shântivâdhi Paramita*. Did you not evoke the revolutionary *paramita* as your own limbs were torn off...

Interestingly, direct references to Marx or Lenin do not occur in these communications; "revolution" here appears to be used more in the sense of 'national liberation' from imperialist rule (with which, of course, local capitalists are associated).

Consequently, many of the *balakâya* or military cells of the DJV were often named after dead cadres.[13] Some of them, such as the Nimal Gunatilleke, Karunaratne, Gunasena Patabändi, Padmasara, Ranjith Parakrama and Wimalaratne Munidasa *balakâyas*, were all named after activists now dead. The *balakâya* for Kandy, however, was named after Keppetipola, a famous Sinhala resistance fighter against the British, an illustration which again links in with the ingrained anti-imperialism of JVP ideology.

Further, an attempt was even made to mobilize militarily the Sangha. Thus one of the *balakâyas*, the Kudahâpola Balakâya was comprised of *bhikkhus*, and named after a famous monk who is widely believed to have revolted against the British. This, then, was a radical step. For while the Sangha is frequently seen as a symbol of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, their role is also viewed, ideally, as an other-worldly function. Thus, the social acceptance of the legitimacy of their active involvement in conventional politics has still not been completely resolved. Regardless of such reservations among the community-at-large, many *bhikkhus* continue to be active in politics, but their involvement in military activity in and through the JVP took the issue a step further.[14]

In this instance, the JVP appeared to have succeeded in converting what were popularly seen as the most stabilising elements in Sinhala-Buddhist society into active militancy. The full efficacy of this strategy becomes evident only when one perceives that the JVP very rarely seemed to have attempted to clarify their stance on Buddhism. While for many Sinhalas, Buddhist religiosity tends to form an important element of their identity, the JVP brand of patriotism appeared to be almost entirely confined to political and cultural nationalism. In the tradition of many "Protestant Buddhists"[15] Wijeweera was easily able to "intellectualise" Buddhism. When interrogated about his religious convictions by the CID in 1971, he observed:

I don't accept Buddhism as a religion; but as a philosophy. Of course I definitely accept it. It is a progressive philosophy ...

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(statement given to the CID in 1971, unpublished, p. 275, quoted in Samaranayake 1987).

But, in the light of the subsequent repression of 1988-9, perhaps the most startling feature of the JVP discourse was their appeal to the patriotic sentiments of the armed forces. Alles argues that the most serious of the infiltrations that were attempted by the JVP into various sectors were those conducted among the security forces and the police because:

> Infiltration into the security forces was made possible as a result of the large numbers of uneducated Sinhala youth from remote rural areas being recruited to the services without proper screening from 1983 [onwards]... The large numbers thus recruited made it possible for several JVP sympathisers to join the armed serves, receive a military training and desert with their arms and ammunition to swell the JVP cadres and furnish its armoury with modern weapons (1990: 310).

But weapons were clearly not the only goal. In June 1987 the JVP appealed to the "patriots of the armed forces," pointing out that they had one enemy in common, viz, the Tamil militants: "... as a soldier who loves the motherland, your duty is not to protect a murderous tyrant ... you should be protecting the patriots ... you should join the patriots." One DJV communication, dated 5 October 1987 and circulated a few months later, reiterated: "we do not have any quarrel with the Sri Lankan armed forces ... Turn your weapons against the traitors and save the motherland."

This line of emphasis gained in vigour and stimulus from the events of mid 1987, specifically the signing of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord and the entry of Indian troops into the north eastern districts of Sri Lanka as a peace keeping force. As a result the political crisis within the UNP government intensified. At the same time, the Accord also alienated large sectors of the electorate, including powerful sections of the Sangha. By December 1988 in a desperate attempt to stem growing popopular disaffection in the south, the UNP decided to hold presidential elections. However, by the late '80s the systematic crushing of democratic dissent over the years had created a climate in which the holding of elections became in itself a precarious political exercise: all kinds of oppositional forces sought to use the occasion to express their unhappiness with the regime-in-power. The government now found itself trapped on the horns of a serious dilemma: on the one hand, the purpose of the electoral exercise was to restore the legitimacy of the regime; on the other, untrammelled self-expression on the part of the electorate could not be counternanced if

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the regime was to survive this crisis. Thus, it became necessary to deploy increasing numbers of troops in the southern zone in the build-up to the elections in order to contain the status quo.

The JVP was at this time one of the groups urging a boycott of elections. This, together with the escalation of violence that had by now become a feature of every pre-election phase, resulted in the level of sanctions effected against political opponents of the UNP in general, and JVP party cadres in particular, increasing dramatically. Both the police and the armed forces became the vehicle through which the regime realised its repression of political opponents. This caused an angry shift in the JVP's stance vis-a-vis the forces of law and order. Thus an article in the party publication *Ruhunê Ranabima* circulated around this period exclaims passionately that the

> demonic and murderous armed forces thrash the people like cattle on the way to a slaughter-house and force them to vote for the elephant (the UNP symbol) even as the dead, scavenged by dogs, line the roads on every side. The peoples' boycott of the elections has enraged them; houses are set on fire and destroyed.

This heightened mood resumed in the aftermath of the general elections of February 1989. By early April 1989 the JVP was cautioning the public against anti-JVP propaganda issued by the state against them. A communique dated 2 April 1989 targets specific paramilitary groupings that the public should be warned against, such as "the mercenaries of the Gajabâ Regiments' I Section" and the "STF (Special Task Force) dogs." Inasmuch as the Gajabâ Regiment is one of the more prestigious in the Army, this indictment is perhaps an index of the intensity of the onslaught on JVP cadres.

This antipathy towards specific targets is soon generalised as the level of repression fails to abate. By late April a publication titled "Massacre for Massacre!" argues

> We understood that many of those in the armed forces are not killers, but are only trying to earn a living. We have no intention of killing soldiers and policeman as the Northern Separatists have done ... but now, we have been forced to abandon this policy ... the only reply to massacre is massacre.[16]

By August 1989, as the intensity of the repression showed no sign of easing, the JVP took a most important decision: it decided attack was the best form of defense. Consequently, the party took the unprecedented step of issuing death threats to the families of armed service personnel. This

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decision was, as Gallappathi points out, the one that turned the tide.

Such a decision, then, was the result of both a sense of desperation on the part of the JVP and a misreading of the political situation. For the JVP leadership appeared to have imagined that those of their cadres who had in fact infiltrated the armed forces would have contributed towards raising the level of sympathy for the JVP cause. At the same time, they had no means of gauging the precise extent of a shift in their favour. On the other hand, many infiltrators themselves were unaware who their fellow-infiltrators were. Consequently, while some segments of the armed forces were susceptible to propagandising by infiltrators, others tended to resent such approaches from within their ranks. The success of such strategies were therefore uneven across the target group. Yet the JVP leadership appeared to be insulated from any awareness of political realities such as these. Their inability to think in the long term and tendency to be seduced by quick-fix solutions led them to expect this dual strategy of persuasion and infiltration to yield full results within the space of a year.

Ironically enough, it was in fact the very success of such a strategy of persuasion that later worked against the JVP, whose leadership thus threw into motion a process, the logical conclusion of which they were too impatient to await. It was perhaps precisely those segments of the armed forces who had been most beguiled by the DJVs' blandishments and appeals to their common Southern roots and so on, who were particularly outraged by the threat to destroy their families, that is, to extend the struggle into civilian territory. Consequently, the armed forces responded with an anger that rose to ferocious heights: hell hath no fury like a patriot scorned.

(c) The role of violence in social struggle

The discourse on what constitutes legitimate dissent and the role of violence in such dissent also appeared to be subject to shifts as the JVP responded to the situation on the ground. It has been argued that traditional Sinhala Buddhist society is inherently violent (Kapferer 1988). It is popularly assumed that what electoral politics actually achieved in Sri Lanka in the early post colonial decades was the channelling of such traditional antipathies along UNP/SLFP party lines. Against this, as elsewhere in the world, factional in-fighting among the largely urban-based Left groups is significantly higher than among the mainstream parties, even though it frequently adopts a verbal rather than physical form.[17]

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Following the orthodox Marxist tradition, in 1971 the JVP appear to have put together a long list of "counter-revolutionaries" who were to be eliminated, mostly located within the old Left. However, their emphasis on the need for physical elimination was a significant break from the prevailing norms of Left politics. Nonetheless, this plan was never really put into practice due to the failure of the April uprising.

By the late '80s, the situation had changed: between 1986 and 1989 a large number of Leftist activists were eliminated by the JVP. Further, the number of ex-party colleagues who were assassinated was equally significant.[18] Those so targetted were classified as party-enemies. But even within the party those who were themselves committed Marxists appear to have been disturbed by the viciousness of this particular trend. In his letter to the Central Committee, Galappathi pointed out that no matter how one defined the assassination of political opponents, it was still contrary to the principles of the party, which was to create among the working classes, a real awareness of their plight under a capitalist system:

> the assassination of political opponents illustrates the influence of the Eelam movement on the JVP;... Of what use is it to the JVP if people are intimidated by this vindictive campaign and pressurised into supporting the Party?

Lionel Bopage, another ex-politburo member and subsequent critic, also pointed out that the policy of assassinating "informants" only encouraged surviving members of their families to join the anti-JVP front. Even in early 1988, then, the issue of the extent of violence admissible against those who were seen to stand in the way of the JVP enterprise was not resolved. Indeed, such policies appeared to have alienated senior members of the party and contributed to their subsequent resignations.

Nevertheless, the JVP leadership appears to have taken steps to address this perceived disaffection. The DJV responded with a very persuasive pamphlet aimed at strengthening the commitment of lower-level cadres. This undated communication (perhaps distributed between late '88 or early '89) begins with a somewhat evocative quotation from Fidel Castro:

> In these times, there are only three places for a true revolutionary. He should be either among the dead, in a dark prison cell or in the battlefield...

In this discourse then, a true revolutionary must come to terms with violence: he either commits it; or it is perpetrated against him. In the first instance, his actions are vindicated in all situations, and in the last, it is his

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fate. In such a situation, the Cuban revolutionaries, it would appear, "...never blamed the guerilla movement for the disasters they had to suffer." The pamphlet goes on to relate the rather moving story of a "very young revolutionary," who died trying to prove himself to Che. But Che, on the other hand, is said to have "never felt perturbed by his (the young guerillas') death ... for this is the rule of the revolution."

The implications of such a statement are profound. In this discourse, then, it is not necessary for the death of a guerrilla to have any larger significance; s/he may die needlessly, without contributing in any material way to a political or military goal. But once dead, the revolution imbues his or her life with meaning, for has s/he not died for the revolution? This particular reading of the Latin American contribution to revolutionary theory is perhaps reminiscent of the ideology of messianic religious wars. The revolution demands ones' all. Moreover, the revolution demands that the true revolutionary overcomes any aversion to the taking of human lives.

And undoubtedly, many did kill. Yet, as many of the young persons I spoke to pointed out with much bitterness, the leadership did not display an equal willingness to die for the party. As one young man, an 18-year old science student, remarked:

> ... Everybody knows both Wijeweera and Gamanayake talked freely once they were captured. In fact, according to the newspapers, isn't it supposed to be HB Herat and Piyadasa Ranasinghe (both senior politburo members), who finally revealed Wijeweera's whereabouts to the police ...?

Against this, as one young girl pointed out, many younger leaders chose to remain silent and died with dignity. Thus, many of the younger men and a wide range of the women I spoke to appeared to feel that there was a sense of differential commitment to the cause. Wijeweera did not seem to feel it his duty to maintain silence in the face of possible torture. Yet he had high expectations of his cadres, and sadly enough, many of them appeared to have lived up with them. As one young woman pointed out, they believed in the famous slogan "though we may be killed, the cry we raised will live for ever."

At the same time, it appears that many JVP activists were not particularly disciplined in the direction of their violence. Throughout the Southern Province, where there was marked instability during this period, indiscipline among grassroots cadres became a serious problem; many of them engaged in activities that were seen to be politically indefensible. In

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his "Statement to the Central Committee," Nandathilaka Galappathi traces this development to the deterioration in the ranks of the JVP during the period leading up to the 1982 presidential elections, when a concerted effort was made to expand recruitment. He complains that, as numbers began to increase, "party discipline deteriorated rapidly ... members indulged in immoral activities shamelessly ... there was no respect for party discipline."

Chandraprema (1990) has argued that the JVP, particularly after July 1987, went out of their way to arm what he calls "lumpen elements" in their efforts to intensify the patriotic struggle. And, particularly in the south, there was clearly an increase in the level of recruitment between 1988-89. Many of those I interviewed observed that a large number of school-leavers and the unemployed did appear to have been taken in during this period. But could they all be described as "lumpen elements?" It is pertinent that Wijeweera himself, writing to the *Sunday Times* on 13 November 1988 announced that if there were any "protection rackets and personal vendettas [being conducted] in our name," the public should inform the JVP through posters etc and that appropriate action would be taken.

Yet others, it would seem, were forced to be unsung martyrs. They were victims of another unprincipled strategy, one described by an old ex-trade unionist as "the forced demonstration," where the DJV/JVP intimidated the people in a given locality and demanded that they take to the streets and march for some specified distance or towards some target. In several instances the security forces responded by shooting rounds of live ammunition into the crowds, thereby causing hundreds of deaths. One of the more notorious of such incidents was perhaps that which occurred on 14-15 September 1989 in the Manikhinna area in the Kandy district. In this incident, hundreds of civilians were reported to have been killed, though the state-controlled media and the opposition parties do not agree on a figure.[19] Although the Manikhinna area was said to have been a 'JVP area,' in this case those who engaged in these demonstrations did not have a political choice with regard to their participation.

Thus, those who defied the DJV's strike calls, or even lesser demands such as not turning out lights at nightfall, or wearing some item of clothing of Indian origin, were often either given humilating public punishments or killed. Sometimes detailed instructions would be given with regard to burial procedures, which also had to be complied with. Yet, though men, women and children were all targeted with equal impunity, as many school girls and young women pointed out, it would appear that the

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insurgents did not go out of their way to sexually violate or rape women. This was, they observed, in marked contrast to the approach of the security forces and many paramilitary groups who sometimes appeared to have percieved women linked to the insurgents as in some way sexually deviant, thereby demanding an appropriate response on their part.

A constant theme that recurs in the JVP and DJV literature, then, was the need to punish (*danduvam kirîma*) the transgressors of their edicts. This tendency appeared to stem from an almost religious conviction of the 'correctness' of their moral/ideological stance vis-a-vis the perceived depravity of capitalist society. At the start of their campaign in the aftermath of the 1987 July Accord, numerous posters appeared on city walls which announced somewhat threateningly that informers will be sternly punished *(ottu dennanta dädi danduvam pamunuvanu äta)*. The term "stern punishment" in time became an euphemisn for the death penalty. And it will be remembered that in the course of 1988-9 bodies of "informers" were discovered at public places with placards attached listing their transgressions: "they did not obey ..."

Further, when the JVP secured power, all traitors who cooperated with the regime-in-power were to be punished:

> All promotions and decorations bestowed upon the traitors in the armed forces and the police through whom the government carried out assassinations will be removed ... but those who have been denied promotions due to their non-condonance of such crimes will be promoted to appropriate positions.[20]

In this discourse, the JVP undertakes to restore the proper balance between good and evil.

The killing of senior members of the JVP was also a deep offense. Subsequent to the death of Sumith Athukorala, a politburo member, the Nimal Karunatilleke Balakâya of Kurunegala which conducted the infamous raid at the Pannala National Auxiliary Force Training Centre on 1 November 1988 issued a statement. This observed, among other things, that the raid was carried out to "punish all those involved in the torture and brutal murder (of Sumith Athukorala)... We have all the information required to identify those responsible for this act."

Clearly, personnel at the Training Center were thought to be responsible for Athukorala's death sometime previously. But this subsequent military encounter is presented in terms of personalised revenge. Though revengé politics is certainly not unknown in Sri Lankan politics, in this instance, revenge is elevated to the level of an ideological position.

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Alternately, while such threats did remain an underlying feature in their communication with the public, diverse tactics appeared to be deployed for different social groups. For strategically placed strata such as the judiciary for instance, the approach was admonishing in tone, but still relatively courteous. A communique dated 10 September 1989 distributed by the DJV to "All Judicial Officers" begins politely, addressing them as "Learned Gentleman" and observes somewhat sardonically that "...In this unjust society *(asâdhârana samâjayê)* where there is a market value on everything, even justice *(yuktiya)* has become a commodity." It goes on to ask the judicial officers addressed if they could examine their past conduct and honestly claim to have lived up to the principle of an impartial and independent judiciary? In this regard three specific incidents are cited where the judiciary variously took short-term decisions without regard to their future consequences and meted out differential justice. Here the tone is chiding and ironical rather then threatening. After laying down four conditions for restoring the situation, in the final paragraph the tone suddenly changes: those who do not conform to these requests will be served "heavy punishments" *(anishtavû danduvam)*. Thus, the main ideological struggle at this point appears to be against the executive arm of the state, and the judiciary is seen as a potential JVP ally.

The language deployed in the literature, particularly during 1988-89, is also inherently self-righteous. In a pamphlet titled "O Patriotic People, Awaken" the JVP describes itself in pious terms as "steadfastly, unhesitatingly, courageously, correctly and in accordance with its principle of providing leadership to the peoples' struggle..." In the same pamphlet, the incumbent regime is described (in two different places) as the "illegal, treacherous, murderous, fascist Jayewardene-Thondaman government." It ends with a call to the patriotic people to "rally round the JVP and to defeat all conspiracies." The world is increasingly portrayed in black and white terms as the struggle of the righteous against the forces of evil.

Further, all of society is seen as coming together to conspire against the JVP. The most disparate social groups are categorised together as forming a front against the JVP, ie "the anti-patriotic Jayewardene-Thondaman-Dissanaike coalition" and "the Rajiv-JR-Karunanidhi clique."[21] In this process, one by one, various political groups are delegitimised because of their affiliation to other groups deemed degenerate. Thus, in this discourse, the JVP and DJV become the only legitimate patriots, with the entire political spectrum ranged against them. Society, then, becomes depicted in terms of binary opposites, i.e. the 'patriots' and the 'others'

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against whom any form of sanction is vindicated.

Violence is also legitimated through the language of martyrdom against a treacherous state. Pamphlets distributed during 1988-9 abound with extravagant language, which sometimes amount to an incitement to meaningless violence. A statement released by the Matara District Committee of the DJV, for instance, observed that

> the patriots who seek to protect the independence and autonomy of the motherland are sacrificing their lives. Their blood moistens the motherland ... the reactionary imperialist forces of the capitalistic class ... have betrayed the motherland ...

In this rhetoric, whatever the actions of the patriots are, then, they are correct, since the state is always in the wrong. Against this, formal letters written to the President, the US Ambassador, and so on are comparatively matter-of-fact in tone and rational in argument, pointing out the real-politik advantages the party concerned would have in acceding to the JVP's requests. Statements such as these are remarkably different to those put out between 1977-83; such as the "Self-Criticism" published by the Ginipupura Group in April 1979, which is written in very orthodox Marxist-Leninist idiom, depicting the world in terms of "Menshevik elements" and "neo-Menshevik tendencies" which are then juxtaposed against the true "Bolshevism" of the JVP position.

As discussed in the previous section, the most effective strategy deployed was the infiltration into the ranks of the security force, which was conducted in a much more serious fashion than during the 1971 uprising. On this occasion, their task was made easier by the fact that the war in the north and east had entered a phase where the level of casualties suffered by the state security forces was unprecedentedly high. This, in turn, created a need for the recurrent recruitment of new cadres. Thus, as Alles (1990: 310) observes, this made it possible for a large number of Sinhala youth from the countryside, many of whom were in fact JVP functionaries, to allow themselves to be recruited into the services without proper screening techniques from mid-'83 onwards. These cadres were thus able to join the armed forces and recieve military training and then desert with their arms and ammunition. By mid-March 1988, the total number of deserters reported since 1984 were thought to be 2,250 (Alles 1990: 310). Many of the DJV military cells that emerged in the late '80s were popularly thought to have been started or trained by army deserters.[22]

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(d) Notions of leadership: vanguardism

Leadership style was an important factor in defining the way in which particular strategies and tactics were chosen against other possible alternatives. The JVP began as a conspiratorial vanguardist organisation and though there was a brief period of openness between 1977-83 thereafter it resumed underground politics. In such a context, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect it to reflect the relatively democratic environment of other parties in Sri Lankan politics. Alles (1990: 33) observes that even at the national level, appointments to the politburo were often made unilaterally by Wijeweera.

Wijeweera's role as leader of the JVP appears to have beeen unquestioned. Alles further observes that

> The Commission of Enquiry constituted to enquire into the insurrection has held that JVP was responsible for the events of April 1971, and had it not been for Wijeweera's forceful leadership and guidance, even though he was incarcerated in the Jaffna Prison at the relevant time, the events of April 1971 might never have taken place (1990: 1).

Yet it is possible to argue that his position as undisputed leader did not come easily at this stage and was achieved by persuasion and manipulation, and, frequently, by downright intrigue. Arguably, it was a dominance secured by the silencing of dissent.

In particular, between 1967-9, as the early discussions in Akmeemana and Kalattawa appear to suggest, and in the prison years, his position was not always unchallenged (Chandraprema 1991 and Gunaratne 1990). This is perhaps a common feature of many conspiratorial organisations where infighting is a constant feature. But it would appear that what in fact distinguished the JVP in the early stages was the extent of personal animosity and rivalry among members of the politburo and the trivial nature of the issues over which they rose.

Wijeweera, it would appear, consistently attempted to expel all strong personalities with views contrary to his own, rather than engaging in constructive dialogue. The first serious split was due to his antagonism to G I D Dharmasekera, a flamboyant student leader at the Vidyalankara campus (Alles 1990: 24). Subsequently, further splits transpired between Wijeweera and the Sanath-Loku Athula faction in the months before the 1971 uprising, and it was this that had the most serious implications for the JVP.[23]

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Though there appeared to have been some debate within the politburo on the 'correct' political strategy, by 1970-1 the polarisation of debate throughout the organisation was such that the efficacy of Wijeweera's policy of capturing police stations as a military strategy was not even questioned by the rank and file (Alles 1990: 45-6). In many cases, once district level leaders had captured the police station concerned and duly hoisted the red flag, they seemed to be at a loss about the next step. They didn't seem able to conceive how the areas captured should be administered.[24]

Yet it cannot be gainsaid that, at least in 1971, the JVP was reputed to have recruited the cream of rural youth. Extreme care was given to the recruitment process itself (Alles 1990: 32.) As Lena Irene, feminist poet and ex-activist observed of the early years:

> They chose the best...They chose the students who topped their class, the most promising ones, those who wrote [poetry] well, the most talented. We were all the poorest of the poor in the countryside, it's not like in Colombo. But poverty was not the main criterion ...[25]

How then were intelligent young men and women persuaded to believe that the capturing of police stations could enable them to seize state power? How could the physical elimination of one site of local power (who, from within their own theoretical stance, were merely representatives of the capitalist class) have achieved this? Lena had no answer:

> ...It never occurred to us to question issues such as that. In any case, there was no forum for that kind of open debate -- we hardly knew who else (on campus) was in the movement.[26]

It was precisely this silence, this refusal to seriously address the problem of how military success could be converted into political power, that allowed the rank and file to imagine that the leadership would somehow resolve these inexplicable questions for them; and that their own role was largely an instrumental military one.

The disinclination of the leadership to come to terms with the realities of political change and transfer of power appeared to have created in the minds of lower-level activists a misty utopian vision of a world where justice could be made to prevail. In this perception a *sâdhârana lovak* would simply emerge. Nonetheless, both the courage and the commitment of many of these district level cadres of the first uprising cannot be questioned. That their natural initiative had not been nurtured or clearly channelled by the JVP was equally evident.

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As many ex-activists I have met over the years agree, the period in prison (that is, 1971-77) appears to have been a time when Wijeweera was able to consolidate his position as undisputed leader. Divisions between apologists and dissidents appear to sharpen progressively. The former consistently maintained that the uprising had failed because of the "adventurist" policies of the Sanath-Loku Athula group. The dissidents did not think so, but were not agreed in their view of why failure ensured. Nonetheless, the polarisation between those for and against Wijeweera intensified over the years, expressing itself sometimes in overt violence. In time, large segments of the dissident faction appear to have gone over to Wijeweera, frequently in the interests of survival.

Still, as an ex-activist, now himself principal of a central school in the Southern Province, informed me, this process of transferring loyalties was not a simple and unproblematic one. In time, a curious ritual emerged, in the form of *janatâ adhikarana* or 'People's Courts,' which were required to legitimise the penitent status of the ex-dissident:

> ...the dissident who is to become a loyalist is brought before the *adhikaranaya*; and then, the presiding official (who is elected for this purpose) calls out a list of his transgressions. The people then respond by indicating what his punishment should be.

Such punishments were often humiliating. A climate of intolerance seemed to prevail; dissidence was not seen as an honourable activity. As my friend the school principal observed: "loyalty had a high premium, in a situation where the entire capitalist class was -- metaphorically speaking -- ranged against you outside the walls of the prison." This spirit of intolerance seemed to intensify in the post-77 phase. By 1983, most of the original politburo had left the party, often after disagreements of a personal nature. Strong personalities, such as Nandana Marasinghe, were successfully marginalised within the party, thereby precipitating their departure. Others left due to political reasons. H N Fernando of the Lankâ Guru Sangamaya left in the wake of the debacle of the 1980 General Strike.[27] By 1982 Bopage had also left the party with a large faction after a disagreement on "the National Question." This trend of factions joining, becoming disenchanted and leaving was to become a significant feature of the JVP between 1977 and 1987. In the process, with this constant purging of its diversity, the party discourse tended to grow increasingly monolithic.

Another fundamental feature in the JVP discourse was a tendency to overestimate its own strength and extent of political support. This feature was evident from its very inception. Initially this tendency arose

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from the leaderships' tendency to manipulate lower-level cadres, and pressurise them to accept political decisions, in the making of which they could not participate. With reference to the April 1971 uprising Uyangoda (1981) observes that Wijeweera's main strategy here was to convince each district leader that every other district was highly organised and in a state of battle readyness. As another ex-leader from the Moneragala district pointed out somewhat bitterly

> ... at that point we (i.e. district-level cadres) had no reason to doubt what we were told, and therefore, we, like fools, simply drove ourselves harder and harder in order to catch up with the other districts ...

Such strategies necessitated a leadership style that distanced itself from the party, and this inevitably led to a lack of communication between those operating on the ground and the leadership.

Consequently, Wijeweera's decision to contest the presidential elections of 1982 indicated his belief that the JVP had now indeed evolved into a mass party less than four years after its post-77 regrouping. There was no open questioning of this decision from within the politburo, though some members later came to feel it was a mistake. In his letter of resignation, Bopage admits that it was "a mistaken decision on my part ...[to give] my unstinted support for the move to offer Comrade Rohana as a candidate for the presidential elections." There is no doubt that in the post-77 years the grassroots cadres worked extremely hard. Political meetings were exceptionally well attended. Alles comments that its rallies exceeded those of other parties and were gaining popular support, especially among the youth (1990: 276). But there appeared to be a general conviction among the leadership that this evidence of support could be easily converted into votes, a mistake which more battle-hardened strategists in the mainstream parties would perhaps not have made so easily. For though the JVP did poll 2.5 lakhs of votes in October 1982, which was more than the old Left did, they were, in fact aiming at millions of votes. Consequently, after the elections there appeared to have been a mass exodus in the membership. Similarly, in the late '80s, though the JVP was prepared to launch a more protracted struggle than that of 1971, they appeared to have confidently expected a seizure of power by 1988. The strategies of the leadership were clearly directed on this premise.[28]

Such a confidence could only have sprung out of the apparent effectiveness of their hartals, strikes, demonstrations etc. Yet this success was only achieved by sheer intimidation. In his letter of resignation,

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Galappathi refers somewhat despairingly to the futility of using a strategy of "terrorism as a means of expressing the rage of the intelligentsia," when one does not have the support of the people. The crippling of transport in the Kandy district, for instance, was effected through the killing of around 35 drivers and conductors. So, too, was the closure of shops and boutiques achieved by the killing of numerous small traders.[29] Galappathi's despair is indicative of the price of such policies, their counter-productiveness from the viewpoint of a party seeking to speak for the people. How, then, could such strategies have yielded political support? This, then, is one of the most pivotal silences in the JVP discourse. The party leadership consistently refused to address seriously the problem of political legitimacy in revolutionary struggle.

The level of personnel recruited also appears to have deteriorated. At an early stage, in 1984, Bopage complained of the blind faith of members in the leadership.[30] At the maiden General Assembly of the Party in 1980, he contends, almost all resolutions were unanimously passed; this he attributes to the "blind faith" and "uninformed nature" of those who participated. Even the central committee members, he remarks bitterly, were not of a very exceptional standard; and after 1983 he was convinced that the central committee ceased to function as an independent institution.

Bopage goes on to identify what he feels were specific moments when Wijeweera deliberately passed up the opportunity to democratise party control and inject some dynamism into the level of debate. He identifies important issues ranging from the decision to collaborate with the SLFP in the 1988 presidential election campaign; the decision to engage in the robbery of firearms and the question of the possible consequences of this course of action for the party rank-and-file, all decisions which were not open to necessary discussion even at the politburo level, but appeared, amazingly, to be arrived at in ad hoc ways.[31]

This tendency seemed to have worsened during 1988-9 when the politburo appeared to have had direct contact with the military area leaders of the DJV, frequently waiving the central committee altogether. In time, towards the last stages, mililtary leaders seemed to act quite autonomously (Chandraprema 1991, Gunaratne 1990). Thus, when he was interrogated, D M Ananda, a senior member of the politburo, was to complain that the leadership had "lost control of the military wing." Their initial success in the post-July 1987 period appeared to have convinced the latter of the 'correctness' of such a military-dominated strategy. More to the point, military leaders seemed to have been entirely persuaded of their right to

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make decisions which impacted on the life of large numbers of lower-level cadres, who died in their thousands.

In retrospect, once the chains of communication had been smashed by the intensity of the repression, there was no way in which the leadership could have retained control of the activities of lower-level cadres, who in turn were not equipped physically, psycholgically or ideologically to deal with the reality of the repression on their own steam. Thus, Bopage's assessment that the organisation built up in the post-'77 phase could not face up to the bourgeois repression proved prophetic.

Concluding Remarks

As many political analysts have pointed out, the relative success of the July 1987 uprising vis-a-vis the April Uprising of 1971 hinges on the dramatic shift of political platform from "socialism through class struggle" to "national liberation through patriotic struggle." But a closer inspection of the discourse displays that while the rhetoric did indeed appear to shift in favour of patriotism and against socialism, the content of such categories endured over time. The "patriot," as much as the "downtrodden masses," stood in a class relation to capitalists and comprador elements of all kinds. Consequently, party ideologues were equally at ease with the new category as they had been with the old; it was the form that changed rather than the substance.

This contention on my part runs counter to the stance taken up by serious critics of the JVP programme such as Uyangoda and Samaranayake. It is informed by a postmodern perspective which provides for highly complex post colonial configurations where the non-modern is constantly engaging with the modern within every site of discourse, creating a rich context in which it is impossible for any group to adhere to one-dimensional identities based only on class or nation. Contemporary collective identities are of necessity multi-dimensional, involving class, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, caste and a host of others. To emphasise these syncretic currents within an ideological context is not to deny that one element or strand may be dominant: in a period of civil war, for instance, national identity may be dominant; other aspects of the self remain dormant but not extinct. This fluidity of social identity, its ability to wax and wane as the external world changes, or as we change, is perhaps its most significant feature, and the reason why it is so hard to capture analytically. Therefore, a strong class identity is not necessarily coterminus with a weak national identity, as

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orthodox Marxists would have us believe. Indeed this is the great 'paradox' of fascism, a force which Marxist theory had failed to address and which it is inclined to pigeon-hole within the category of "false consciousness."

In military-ideological terms, the JVP leadership's most effective strategy appeared relatively straight-forward. First, the identifying of areas where an ideological consensus across a range of social groups prevailed, such as that of free universal education and the right to employment; then, the intensifying of popular struggles on these fronts by deploying violent tactics, thereby using the validity of the cause of dissent to legitimate the mode of dissent.

Yet, the downfall of the JVP leadership was again due to contradictions inherent in its style of leadership and the refusal of leaders to face political reality. The refusal to address seriously the basic problem of how military success is to be converted into political power, and the role of political legitimacy in revolutionary struggle, encouraged lower-level cadres to imagine that the leaders would somehow resolve these problems for them. The lack of internal communication also created a situation where the party was unable to make a realistic appraisal of its political and military capability and persistently tended to overestimate its strength.

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2. The UNP or the United National Party was the party-in-power during this period, and would still appear to be deeply associated with the repression in the public mind.
3. Wijeweera was the leader of the JVP from its inception in the late '60s until his death in 1989.
4. The programme of ideological indoctrination conducted by the JVP both in 1971 and in 1987 was done through the famous "Five Classes" which were a series of five lectures critiquing various aspects of Sri Lankan history, economy and society. While the order in which they were offered, and even the substance of the lectures, was subject to adjustment over the years, some elements appear to have endured; these included a critique of the colonial plantation economy, the role played by the old Left in Sri Lankan politics and the occupying role played by India throughout Sri Lankan history,
5. In this system, state-owned schools were to be regrouped into "clusters" according to region. Each cluster was further to be focussed round a "central school" (i.e. regionally-based schools with highly developed facilities on par with national-level schools), thus giving rise to fears of a new hierarchisation of schools where central schools would be further built-up and others systematically ghettoed.
6. The SLMP is a breakway faction of the SLFP.
7. The ELJP is a splinter group of the UNP.
8. See Nandathilaka Galappathi's Statement to the Central Committee on the politics of the JVP. This statement amounts to a letter of resignation, and is one of the best sources on intra-JVP politics.
9. Though the JVP leader Wijeweera himself was reported to have maintained until the end that the JVP and the DJV were separate entities, senior politburo members such as Gamanayake and DM Ananda admitted that they were dual branches of the same organisation (Gunaratna 1990).
10. This political attitude is well captured in Tennekoon's (1987) study on the symbolic refractions of the ethnic crisis as illustrated in the debates on ethnic identity which raged across the columns of the *Divaina*. While the precise social background of the participants of this debate cannot be deduced, their political orientation is clearly very much in line with some aspects of the JVP discourse.
11. This is a tactic deployed by many insurgent groupings, such as the Sikh militants, the Iranian Hisbullah, Irish militants and the Tamil Tigers among others. It should be observed, however, that the unlike among the Tamil Tigers, the concept of cyanide-capsule toting 'suicide fighter' never emerged in JVP practices and discourse. What evolved was a slightly different notion

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of martyr: a notion of matyrdom-as-rhetorical-device rather than the matryr who self-destructs as a pragmatic means of retaining confidential information.

12. The *jâtaka* stories describe what are thought to be the 550 previous births of the Buddha.
13. Such *balakâyas* were the military organs which implemented the action programme of the DJV.
14. Against this, SWRD Bandaranaike, founder of the SLFP, was assassinated in 1956 by a Buddhist monk; this was the first occasion in post colonial Sri Lanka that a member of the Sangha had played such a role. It should be mentioned here that though the JVP consistently focussed on the cultural and political aspects of Sinhala national identity, they never appear to have made any special attempt to woo the not insignificant Sinhala Catholic constituency, or to make any concession whatsoever to any kind of minority sentiment for that matter.
15. See Gombrich and Obeysekere (1988) for a discussion of this phenomenon. "Protestant" in this context is used to describe both the shift of religious authority away from priestly and onto lay elements of the community; as well as the move to 'sanitize' and 'intellectualise' Buddhism by down-grading the role played by spirit and demon propitiation and emphasising its 'rational' aspects, such as the philosophical teachings of the Buddha. It is to this latter phenomenon that I refer.
16. *Bulletin of the Ruhune Ranabima*, dated 21.04.1989.
17. This trend evidences itself in the large number of minuscule 'new left' parties that dot the political landscape; the JVP itself is a new left groupings that broke away from the Stalinist Communist Party after the Sino-Soviet split. The Sri Lankan Left, as elsewhere in the world, is riven with 'irreconcilable' ideological animosities.
18. Some of the more significant members were Nandana Marasinghe, Mahinda Pathirana, and perhaps Vaas Thilakaratne.
19. The *Island* of 8 September1990 suggests that "at least 80 persons were killed" and mentions DIG Udugampola, a Senior Police Officer as commenting that these deaths were the action of the EAGLES, a vigilante group. Still, it is difficult to see how such an operation could have been conducted over two days, when a curfew was supposed to have been in place, and road blocks maintained by the security forces, without the knowlege of the latter. In any case, these shootings were popularly held to have been the hand of the police.
20. In the initial statement of the Programme of the United Front for National Redemption, distributed around August 1988. This Front was hurriedly created with the intention of coming together with other oppositional parties in order to offer a common candidate for the impending 1988 presidential elections.
21. Rajiv here refers to Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India. Karunanidhi was the incumbent Chief Minister of Tamil Nad in India.
22. In some of the attacks on service camps such as that at the Pannala Training Camp and the Katunayaka Air Base, some of the attackers were clearly identified as ex-serviceemen (Alles 1990: 311).
23. Wijeweera maintained to the end that it was the "adventurism" of the Sanath-

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Loku Athula group which resulted in the 5 April Uprising which took place when he was already in jail. The Sanath-Loku Athula group in turn maintain that they were merely carrying out his orders given from prison. The April Uprising failed because a pre-emptive attack on the Wellawaya Police Station in the Moneragala district served to alert the government of the impending uprising.

It is still not clear why the Wellawaya cadres chose to make this pre-emptive strike, and the argument that they were simply misinformed is not convincing. The alternate theory is that they were disenchanted with the sharp factional rivalry within the party and wished to precipitate an onslaught by the state which they could counter by a long drawn-out guerilla campaign from the jungles, as opposed to the one-day attack on police stations espoused by Wijeweera.

24. Alles observes that when they did capture power in areas such as Elpitiya in Galle district, and in the Anuradhapura and the Polonnaruwa districts, they merely adopted the prevailing pattern of the appointment of Government Agents (GAs) and District Regional Officers (DROs) and the creation of courts of law in the same manner. It would apppear that only Lionel Bopage had some notion of forming administrative committees.
25. Personal communication, a few months before her death in late 1988.
26. *Ibid.*.
27. The decision of the JVP **not** to participate in the 1980 General Strike was seen by many analysts at the time to be the main reason for the failure of the strike.
28. See pamphlet put out by the Viplavîya Janatâ Sanvidhânaya (VJS), 1989, p 43. The VJS is a breakway faction of the JVP which regrouped in the post-'77 years.
29. *Ibid.*
30. See his letter of resignation, dated 1984.
31. *Ibid.*.

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AGENT OR VICTIM?: The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum[1]

Neloufer de Mel

"Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi" is the title of a short story by Sri Lankan author Charles Sarvan which constructs for us the thoughts of Dhanu, the woman LTTE suicide bomber, as she spends a restless night before she assassinates Rajiv Gandhi. The woman in Sarvan's story is unnamed, but from news reports we know her to be Dhanu. In Sarvan's fictional story of the assassination, in which Dhanu eventually ignites the plastic explosives tied to her waist to kill Gandhi at the Sriperumbudur stadium in Madras, she looks upon this transformative moment as a wedding, a marriage in which she embraces death as she garlands her bridegroom. Like other brides in her hometown of Jaffna, the Tamil heartland of northern Sri Lanka, she too will be dressed as a bride with care, but this time not by older women relatives and friends, but by men who will wire her up for death. As she waits for the day to dawn, the woman looks back at her childhood in Jaffna and its customs:

> My great grandmother's funeral, the earliest I can recall. Waves of lamentation subsiding into half-taken breaths, sobs, murmurs and then surging again. The climax was when the men, till then in the background, came to take charge, close up and carry the coffin away. Climax because we were not allowed to accompany the body to the cremation grounds. Our uncontrolled weeping, even hysteria, must not be allowed to spoil the dignity of the last rites...Death must have its solemnity...But I, I will be allowed to walk, to attend my funeral to its very end though, at least here following tradition, no women will accompany my walking body. The world will think me ugly in what it'll call my fanaticism. Wild, lunatic-eyed and with dishevelled hair or frightening in my cold control, my cruel composure. Dressed up for a wedding or festival, with flowers in my hair, I have pretended not to notice male eyes looking at me, but have felt warm in my womanhood; felt happy, felt even a touch of pride and power. I may not be a beauty but I was, have been, a woman. My heart and pulse; my breasts and full thighs have told me so unmistakably. But now I feel neither fear nor courage. I no longer know or care whether I am beautiful or ugly; good or evil. On this morning of marriage and death, I can't seem to make them matter...'

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This woman's act of terror is an empowering one. Through it she will break with an oppressive tradition. Unlike the usual arranged marriages, *she* will choose her bridegroom; unlike the traditional virgin bride, she will be touched by men before her 'wedding'; unlike the decorous identity prescribed for Sri Lankan women whose modesty bids them avoid the public gaze, her photograph will be flashed in the world press; unlike other Hindu women, she will walk to the site of numerous funerals including her own. And within the ambit of Sarvan's story, in his juxtaposition of the woman's childhood reminiscences with the ruthlessness of the present, the 'cold-blooded terrorist' is given her individuality.

But even as the woman militant transcends the bounds of traditional female identity, is there a price, other than death of course, to be paid for such 'freedom'? I hope to show that there is a price -- an immense loss located in significant ways within the domain of gender constructs and in particular, the forms of female sexuality and reproduction that are valued within it. And that this in turn reflects the wider issue of a terrorist's loss of individuality -- whether male or female. For the terrorist's individuality can only be creatively fictionalized as in Sarvan's treatment of Dhanu's story, glimpsed in the discursive contradictions of his/her martial poetry or caught at a moment of hesitancy in conversation. The politics of self-representation otherwise denies the militant a personality and emotional expression of his/her own, and the reality of his/her driving impulses lies in the complete obedience to the will of the militant leadership s/he struggles on behalf of. These losses in turn mark the paradigms and cornerstones of the anticipated state, government and social order that militant groups like the LTTE and JVP struggle for.

Shifting Sites

Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers (Jaffna: 1989) is a book by Adele Ann, the Australian wife of LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham. She is a regular spokesperson for the women's wing of the LTTE, and her function as such is not unconnected with her foreign nationality which gives the LTTE cause a certain credibility, particularly in the eyes of the Western media. As in Sarvan's short story, it is the breaking of new ground for the women of Jaffna that is stressed in Adele Ann's book, and it is particularly in the projection of the LTTE women cadres as equal with those of its men that this is constructed. In a chapter which describes the military training undertaken by the women, its rigorousness is emphasized and the endurance

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of the women admired.[2] The woman combatant is presented as no different to the male even in terms of the combat situations she is chosen for, and the ideology and attainment of martyrdom that sanctifies a LTTE combatant's death, is within her reach just as it is for the man.

In the struggle for the anticipated state of Tamil Eelam, then, the socio-cultural role of its women has undergone and continues to undergo a radical transformation. From the ideal of a conservative, protected 'femininity', the LTTE woman combatant is transformed into a public figure, engaged in 'manly' activities, repudiating patriarchal norms of womanhood. In the historical construction of a Tamil identity peopled by men as male warriors, leaders, poets and philosophers, the LTTE struggle offers the women a chance to take their place with these men. Rajani Thiranagama, co-author of *The Broken Palmyrah*, points to the attraction of this change for the women of Jaffna:

> One cannot but be inspired when one sees the women of the LTTE, two by two, in the night with their AKs slung over the shoulder, patrolling the entrances to Jaffna City. One cannot but admire the dedication and toughness of their training, seen in the video films put out by the LTTE. One could see the nationalist fervour and the romantic vision of women in arms defending the nation. This becomes a great draw...our social set up, its restrictions on creative expression for women and the evils of the dowry system are some of the social factors that led to their initial recruitment.[3]

This dedication to change, which, in this phase of the struggle for Eelam, is almost surely a call to death is borne out in a poem written by Captain Vanathi of the LTTE women's wing who died in 1991 in the battle at Elephant Pass at the age of 27. The poem is entitled 'She, The Woman of Tamililam!':

> Her forehead shall be adorned not with
> *kunkumam* (but) with red blood.
> All that is seen in her eyes is not the sweetness
>
> of youth (but) firm declarations of those
> who have fallen down.
>
> On her neck will lay no *tali*, (but) a
> Cyanide flask!

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Her legs are going and searching,
not for searching a relationship with relatives
(but) looking towards the liberation of
the soil of Tamililam.

Her gun will fire shots.
No failure will cause the enemy to fall!!
It will break the fetters of Tamililam!!
Then from our people's lips a national anthem
will tone up!![4]

While the bridal imagery of traditional poetry remains, the parenthetical emphasis in this poem makes it clear that the LTTE woman has rejected the world of protected 'femininity' and embraced a language of death and militancy where there is no place for squeamishness, coyness (the 3rd stanza is remarkable for its sexual explicitness) and family affiliations.

It is a shift Adele Ann is eager to stress. She writes:

> The very decision by young women to join the armed struggle - in most cases without the consent of parents - represents a vast departure of behaviour for Tamil women. Normally young women remain under the control of the father and brother. Male control follows them throughout their lives. The decision to break-out of this cycle of suffocating control is a refreshing expression and articulation of their new aspirations and independence. It could perhaps be one of the biggest decisions of their lives. Such a decision makes a social statement about the characters of the young women. It tells society that they are not satisfied with the social status quo; it means they are young women capable of defying authority; it means they are women with independent thoughts...Such young women fly in the face of tradition, but they are the women who are the catalysts for social change. Entering into the military programme represents an extension of the social challenge that young women have made by making a decision to join the national struggle.[5]

The implication of this statement is clear. There can be no emancipation for all Tamil women without the attainment of a new state and social order in the first place. The state as they know it today, administered by the Sri Lankan government, is inadequate, repressive. It has to be re-drawn and women have the potential and will to be central in that recasting.[6]

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Growing up in the JVP

Juliet, a pseudonym, is now a 40 year old woman who, as a schoolgirl of 13 joined the JVP movement in 1969. The JVP or People's Liberation Front was a group comprised largely of university and school-going southern youth. Its inaugural meeting was in May 1965 and it came into prominence in the late 1960s with an agenda directed towards the establishment of a socialist state. It has had two phases of militant uprisings to date. Starting in April 1971, the first JVP attacks were on police stations until it was defeated by government forces around June that year. The second phase was from 1987-89 when the JVP took on the UNP government of Ranasinghe Premadasa in a particularly brutal fashion with summary killings of key officials -- a tactic through which it was able to call successfully for stoppages of work which almost brought the government down.[7]

Despite these violent campaigns there are many differences between the JVP and the LTTE that must be noted at the outset. Such an emphasis helps us to guard against a flattening out of all militant groups into a homogeneous set, while serving as an illuminating line of entry to the self-appraisal and representation of the women cadres within the two groups. For instance, the early JVP never saw itself as a nationalist movement unlike the LTTE and so, a JVP woman member like Juliet would inevitably see and represent herself differently, and less militantly than Captain Vanathi. Again, the JVP never saw itself as an army in its own right, unlike the highly militarized LTTE which has waged a war with state forces since 1983.[8] The 1970s JVP insurrection was fought with relatively less loss of lives and property -- an indication of the fact that it was quelled more easily than the on-going ethnic war. The JVP cadres that did survive were easily 'rehabilitated' into the mainstream even after prison sentences, and its leaders now hold important positions in the state and NGO sectors. The LTTE combatant on the other hand is often killed in battle or, when captured, bites on a cyanide capsule s/he wears round his/her neck. The ferocity of the LTTE challenge and its dedication to the ideology of violence, then, cannot be matched in the efforts of the JVP. And because of the high visibility and efficient organizational structure of the LTTE, the like of which the JVP never had, its women cadres too have more visibility than the JVP women ever had.[9] In any case, as Kelly Senanayake points out, although there has been a tradition of significant women's participation in militant left-wing anti-colonial campaigns such as the Suriya Mal

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movement, and the 1953 'hartal' and other trade union protests in Sri Lanka, the JVP failed, because of its patriarchy, to foster and enlist such large scale female participation for its cause. The JVP had only five or six women at action committee level. There were no women JVPers on the district committees or the decision making politbureau.[10] No woman militant sits on the LTTE politbureau either, but as a movement of the 1980s and '90s, the LTTE is alive to the political potential of a women's wing and its ability to capture international funding available for women's struggles.

A full-length feminist study of the JVP movement in Sri Lanka is yet to be written and the experiences of its women cadres yet to be recorded. But Juliet's voice within the first phase of the JVP struggle is instructive. For her experiences, although by no means representative of all JVP women cadres, can be read nevertheless as symptomatic of the JVP's attitudes towards gender and the place of women in society.[11]

Juliet's family belongs to the Sinhala speaking bourgeoisie (although her father, a businessman, was conversant with English and Tamil as well) domiciled in the town of Kegalle about 52 miles from the capital, Colombo. Her involvement with JVP politics and recruitment to the group took place through her brother Sarath Wijesinghe who was the JVP district leader for Kegalle. After the JVP's first strike on the Wellawaya police station on 5th April 1971 and the subsequent rounding-up or killing of its cadres by government forces, Juliet regrouped with other JVP members in the jungles of Wilpattu. She lived in and around these jungles for five years helping with the JVP re-organization. In fact, for about a year after the April insurrection, lawlessness continued in the North Central Province that encompassed these jungles. Public transport was disrupted, communication lines destroyed and banks were robbed. Much of these disturbances were credited to the JVP. But Alles also points out that there were other gangs and thugs who took advantage of the situation for their own ends.[12]

In an interview with me about her experiences during those five years, it was the breaking of new ground that Juliet stressed. She enjoyed a new found freedom through her involvement with the JVP. She had been one of 7 women chosen to retreat into the jungles because of her adaptability, and although in one sense she was on the run, a fugitive from the law, in another sense she enjoyed the communal living. We were a group of young people she told me and "everyone helped with the chores, so it was enjoyable."[13] The relaxed tone of such reminiscences reflects of course the differences of the JVP then and the LTTE of today. But the lack

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of ferocity revealed by the early JVP campaign when compared to the LTTE should not take away from the resistances of women like Juliet. The spurning of middle-class cultural norms Juliet took on when she joined the JVP, actively recruiting for the movement at the University of Peradeniya, later retreating to the jungles, living with men, against the establishment, switching dress codes -- wearing trousers where previously she would have, in public, worn the frock or skirt and blouse usually worn by young Sinhala women, was pathbreaking in its own right.

Empowerment and Containment

The taboos and impositions of female identity these women turned their backs on are those that acquire particular significance at times of national crisis. It is ironic that at a time of upheaval, "when in reality social norms are being broken and old values begin to crumble, a stronger effort is made to visibly and vocally reiterate faith in the old morality."[14] This of course reflects the fight back of the established order which digs its heels in when challenged and in doing so reinforces the most conservative aspects of its cultural and political praxis. But what is of interest is also how, on the terrain of gender, those fighting the establishment also conform to a patriarchy, despite their pronouncements to the contrary, that hardly distinguishes them from the order they seek to dislodge.

For in the interregnum, as they engage in armed struggle towards the anticipated state, there is a containment within the LTTE and JVP of women even at the moment of their most innovative empowerment -- a containment that does not portend well for their rights in the future. This containment is most deeply seen on the sites of female sexuality and reproduction. Much feminist scholarship has been done on the powerful configuration of the mother figure as a signifier of national and communal identity in South Asia and I do not need to reiterate it here.[15] My interest, rather, is in outlining the salient points that make such a figure a recurring motif. For in this continuity lies the control of women by patriarchy in the name of combating a larger terror that is called state repression, separatist nationalism, or revolutionary anarchy; in this trajectory can be found both an internalizing of the ideals of 'femininity' by women and resistance to them; and, most importantly, to be found here is also the complex and *protean* containment of women that reflects the shifting goal posts and resilience of patriarchy itself. The central question then is, is the woman denied agency even as she functions as an agent and instrument of terror?

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Partha Chatterjee's understanding of nationalist discourse in the Indian arena as formulating oppositional domains through which it articulates a framework for modern society is useful to my analysis of gender containment. Chatterjee makes the point that the discourse of elite Indian nationalism constructs a framework of the material and spiritual -- which becomes analogous to the outer and inner domains -- in its forging of an independent modern society. In the context of early de-colonisation, if the West, because of its technology and political practice has superiority in the material or outer domain, it is in the spiritual or inner spheres that the East and its indigenous cultures enjoy primacy and therefore sovereignty. In the way gender operates in society, while the public is typically the domain of the male, the home or inner space which "must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world" is represented by women.[16]

So, where sovereignty has been ceded elsewhere, women have to compensate for this acquiescence by becoming the symbols of the inner, independent terrain. As such they are constructed by patriarchy in *relation* to the moral corruption and materialism that the public sphere is invested with. Given a woman's biological and gendered role of motherhood in which she nurtures a younger generation and imbues it with specific cultural values, it is the trope of the mother -- mother as fertile nurturer, mother as chaste, mother as dutiful housewife -- that women are most often co-opted into when symbolising this inner and sovereign cultural space of the emerging nation.

A brief reference to a medium of popular culture -- the Sinhala theatre -- and two significant temporal moments within it illustrates this point. John de Silva was a Sinhala playwright and theatre director who, in the early decades of the twentieth century, made his domain the Tower Hall stage in Colombo. It was a time of crisis. The anti-colonial struggle had commenced, there was communal unrest such as the Sinhala-Muslim 'riots' of 1915, nationalist leaders were jailed or in exile. John de Silva was at the vanguard of the cultural nationalism that was central in this process. He set out to forge a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness that would rehabilitate the indigenous culture in the face of denigration by the British coloniser; and in doing so take on the colonial regime and its bureaucrats and educationalists who were identified with an immoral Westernization and Christianity. In line with this task de Silva dramatized the Buddhist *jâtaka* stories and the lives of great Sinhala kings who had served the cause of Buddhism well. In doing so, de Silva was also sowing the seeds for the

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eventual hegemony of Sinhala Buddhism in the modern Sri Lankan state and its consciousness. This was reinforced by the fact that de Silva's anti-colonial struggle was not only aimed at the British. In an effort to build a political constituency from the expanding working class coalescing in Colombo at that time who constituted his audience, his depiction of the Sinhala Buddhist heritage also resonated with a populist antipathy for the 'foreign' Tamil and Muslim workers and traders who were presented on stage as a threat to Sinhala jobs and cultural values.

It is in the forging of a symbol that carries the purity, courage, achievement and honour of the indigenous culture which can be posited against such an illegitimate foreign presence that the construction of the Arya Sinhala woman in de Silva's plays assumed significance. Dutiful Sinhala queens who nurture strong sons to defend the motherland, metonymic now for Sinhala Buddhism, feature prominently in his work. These women are chaste and obedient unlike the Westernized 'Singili' ladies lampooned in the plays for not eating rice and curry, but drinking whisky and claret, wearing bonnets instead of the native dress of cloth and jacket and writing letters with quills -- i.e. education -- instead of cooking.[17] In contrast to the latter is Ehelepola Kumârihâmy, whose husband, a Kandyan chieftain, connived with the British to bring about the downfall of the Kandyan Kingdom and the island's sovereignty. He is, of course, in keeping with the identity of the male who, by coming into contact with the outer, material world becomes contaminated, while she, contained inside the domestic space, remains incorruptible. She is first presented in the play *Sri Vikrama Râjasinghe* (1906) singing a lullaby, a marker of her role as mother to both her children and the nation. In this lullaby she extols the necessity of developing, through a knowledge of the Sinhala language, the ancient arts and skills of the Sinhalese. Here is the woman pressed into a symbolic motherhood that nurtures the nation in 'authentic' indigenous values and confidence.

Despite the radical changes that have taken place in the Sri Lankan socio-political structure since the heyday of John de Silva and the anti-colonial struggle he was participant in, the depiction of the Sinhala woman on the Sinhala stage has remained fundamentally unchanged, illustrating thereby how significant a symbol of authenticity and nation building she is, particularly at times of crisis. Amarakeerthi Liyanage's play *Bhashmantaragata* ('In the Ashes') (1993), was a response to the Sri Lankan civil war and systematic Sinhala-Tamil communal tension. It is the story of a young woman, Pavithra, who lives in a refugee camp guarded by

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a Sinhala soldier with whom she falls in love. Once again it is the role of mother that this young woman is invested with. She is made into "a mother of us all" and her maternalistic aim is to unite her family. It is significant, however, and entirely symptomatic of the contemporary Sinhala theatre, that this family she refers to excludes the Tamil and Muslim communities, for these do not figure in the play. With this effacement, the implication is that the family this woman wants to collect and protect is wholly Sinhala.

As an object of appropriation as a mother figure Pavithra is characterized by three key elements that underline all such co-options. First, she is enlightened, and this is related to the relatively high educational aspirations modern Sri Lankan women have. Through her insights Pavithra is able to lay bare the oppressive structures of society. In this play she accuses the state and its entrepreneurs for being dogs of war. Secondly, she is de-sexualised. Her love for the soldier is coded in the usual de-eroticized discourse of courtship in which male and female refer to each other as brother and sister which, perhaps, has its roots in the common marriage alliances between cross-cousins that takes place within Sinhala Buddhist families. It also reflects the influence of Buddhist ethics which advocate restraint. The chastity of a woman, then, like the so called purity of language, becomes in nationalist discourse a code for the nation's honour. The protection of this chastity is so important that Pavithra -- her name itself projects her sexual cleanliness and therefore virtue -- is shown to reject the sexual advances of another soldier and pay the supreme sacrifice for her chastity -- her life -- as she is killed by the spurned soldier.

Thus thirdly, and most importantly, women like Pavithra are shown to be interestless in themselves. They do not seek self-preservation and advancement, but are maternalistic and altruistic. Because of this they are in a position to elicit sacrifices on the part of the other characters and the audience for the well-being of the nation, religion and cultural values they embody.[18]

In the interregnum, a period in which there is a suspension of normalcy, gender roles challenge the type of containment that Chatterjee, John de Silva and Liyanage delineate in their formulations. The LTTE and JVP woman combatant who is willing to both kill and be killed for her cause, participates in the public domain in a way which flies in the face of traditional patriarchal containment designed for her. It is this exigency of the interregnum the LTTE was responsive to, when, with the war taking its toll on males, the Tamil militant groups in the 1980s actively campaigned for the recruitment of women. The campaign very interestingly combined

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the role of mother with that of the warrior woman, an easy elision given the gendering of nationalist discourse. The LTTE publication "Women and Revolution: The Role of Women in Tamil Eelam National Revolution" (1983), for instance, carried a prominent photograph of a Palestinian woman holding a gun with one hand and a baby in the other.[19] But the notion of warrior mother did not displace the more deep seated images of female identity which, through popular culture, the media, educational texts and family conditioning, continue to instruct the Sri Lankan woman on her symbolic value as a sexually chaste, enlightened, altruistic and maternal being. Perhaps the most bizarre manifestation of such containment was the so called 10 commandments for women pasted on the walls of Jaffna in late 1984. Their order was that all young women should wear traditional dress, that married women should not be seen in public in housecoats -- Jaffna housewives often buy fish early morning from a vendor on the road and come out to do so in their housecoats -- that women should wear their hair long and not ride bicycles which has traditionally been the mode of transport in Jaffna, all the more important because in the war situation there has been an embargo on fuel. Women who did not abide by these commandments were threatened with being whipped.

The LTTE denied responsibility for the poster. It was signed by a group that professed interest in Tamil culture (it should be noted here that such a guise of collective authorship is a strategy whereby the impression of popular support for the dictates is created). Despite the LTTE's denial, these commandments were entirely in keeping with a statement issued by the LTTE in *Mukamoodikal Kilihinrana* two years later (1986) which declared:

> It is important for women to take care in their dress, in their *pottu* and make-up. It doesn't mean that we are enslaved if we dress according to tradition. Some married women say that it is expensive to wear saris. This is not acceptable. Women should dress simply, and they should not attract men by their way of dressing. Some women say that it is difficult to maintain long hair. These pretensions are wrong...We are engaged in a struggle for national liberation. But, the changes which have been taking place in our culture will only demean our society.[20]

What is significant about this statement is its reflection of a growing unease on the part of the LTTE to the changes taking place in society and therefore a real ambivalence towards some of the social forces which itself has unleashed. For it is important to keep in mind that women contested these imposed identities and fashioned their own resistance as

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well. The 10 commandments were not taken too seriously. But what they stood for was serious enough for the Jaffna Mother's Front which, modelled on the Mother's Fronts of Northern Ireland and Plaza del Mayo had formed in July 1984,[21] to protest against them through a written submission published in the Jaffna daily newspapers. The concern of the Jaffna Mothers Front was that if such impositions of female identity were not challenged and nipped in the bud, they would grow to form the basis of a dangerous fundamentalism which would be particularly inimical to women.[22]

If, then, the women who joined the JVP and the LTTE as armed combatants were able to shift the parameters, it is abundantly clear that within these groups patriarchy responded by shifting its goalposts too. For instance, the LTTE tack of combining the roles of mother and warrior, thereby creating a kind of supernatural woman liberation fighter as seen in their use of the PLO poster, is an illustration of such a shift. But such shifts also always incorporate the continuing subordination of women even as they are invested, as political participants and combatants, with an agency that is unavailable to them in conventional society. And there are many antecedents of such containment in the heritage of the Indian subcontinent.

A particular narrativization of a mythological tale illustrates my point. *The Catakantarâvanan Katai* is an anonymous Tamil prose version of Sita's battle against the demon Satakantharâvana, or Râvana of the hundred heads.[23] Sita, the epitome of the chaste, pure, dutiful and beautiful Hindu wife of King Rama takes on, in this episode, a martial role and battles the devil on behalf of her husband. She has to seek permission to do so. She tells Rama

> We must seek a means of slaying Catakantaravanan. There is no need to be sad. With your grace I shall destroy the Raksasa Catakantan and his sea of armies. Give me the boon of achieving victory over him!

As she makes this request Sita "(falls) at the lotus-feet of Srîrâmâmurti and, bowing low with her hands raised above her head, asked this boon."[24]

Rama's reply is, not surprisingly, benevolent and paternalistic:

> Listen, Lady Sita. Because you are a woman, you do not know the tricks of the Raksasas. Moreover, when Ravana kept you prisoner for ten months in Lanka, what did you do then? This is folly, or ignorance; how could you kill that Raksasa Catakantan? (p.109)

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Sita does go to war however, for Rama, "by the eye of wisdom" knows that she can slay the enemy. (Note that foresight, wisdom and rationality are here invested solely in the male). The tale continues with descriptions of Sita's feistiness and violent appetite for the utter destruction of the devil's kingdom which mark what David Shulman sees as a significant dialectic informing the worldview of the folk tale. For even as Sita unleashes her power, elsewhere the image of her locked in a box, house or shrine that recurs in many South Indian folk traditions signify that her "fiery power has to be somehow circumscribed and contained if it is not to bring about an unbearable destruction -hence the box motif" (p.118). Shulman goes on to state that,

> If we attempt...to extrapolate a conceptual scheme from such data, we find a vision of the world as dialectical and dangerous, a world in which powerful forces are constantly breaking through the barriers erected against them. But this state of continuing conflict reflects not only opposition but also a form of tense, productive symbiosis between container and contained, consuming energy and enveloping boundary. (p.119)

This agonistic and complementary encounter of female power and sexuality, and male dominance which seeks to contain the former, is explicit throughout the *Catakantaravanan Katai*. Sita's verbal and gestural supplications to her husband and master have already been noted. Although Rama remains outside of the battleground, as Shulman points out, "he is still the ultimately powerful validating agency: he sees the outcome of the battle with his eye of wisdom...Sita conquers with *his* weapons and mantras, and in the name of his kingship. His presence is clearly necessary, even if others must do his fighting for him" (p.120). After victory in battle the text concludes with Sita's return to Ayodhya where "Rama reigns virtuously" and therefore supreme. Hanuman the monkey, ally of Sita in war, asks for the title of a Brahman in return for his services, something which Rama promises to confer on him when the present Brahman reaches the age of one hundred. There is no mention of Sita. She is, then, the woman, full of powerful potential, at times agent of terror and destruction, but reined in when the need for such militancy is over by a patriarchy that also demands of her the dutifulness and chaste loyalty of a wife, a secondary position to Rama which she never questions.

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'Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time
future,
And time future contained in time past'
Eliot, 'Burnt Norton'

These parallels are there to see in both the LTTE and JVP. The epithets of female containment within these militant groups have been, and remain, discipline and chastity. A militant guerrilla group by its nature physically exists isolated from the larger community and stricter disciplinary codes are applied to behaviour within it. Sexuality is seen as the contaminator of discipline and strictures come into place that 'police' both male and female sexual desire. Both the JVP and LTTE inculcate a notion of group kith and kin. The leaders are elder brothers -- figures of authority in both Sinhala and Tamil cultures, and the comrades younger brothers and sisters. This immediately forecloses sexual relations between the combatants. Marriage was banned on the orders of both Prabhakaran and Rohana Wijeweera (the then JVP leader) until they themselves wanted to marry.[25] The move is to 'purify' the group and make it distinct from what happens outside of it. Such control becomes all the more important in a terrain in which the usual social boundaries that keep male and female apart do not apply. Within a guerrilla group the close proximity of men and women 'requires' such a sexual containment. What we have here is an exact replication of the sexual taboos that exist in the outside world despite the militants' denunciation of those very norms. As the Stree Shakti Sanghatana observed of the Communist Party in the Telangana struggle:

> The metaphor of the family constantly used to describe the Party reinforced aspects of a feudal culture that continued to assert itself within the organization and perhaps served to keep women in their roles which were extensions of their roles in the private sphere.[26]

This is borne out in Juliet's story. Hers was also a symbolic role within the JVP as she functioned as a symbol of her dead brother, the district leader whose death the group mourned. "I had always to set an example" she said, "as my bother's sister. I understand now that I was nothing more than a symbol of my dead brother. I felt burdened by it, but I also accepted it."[27] When persuaded, she said, into a relationship with a man because only then would he agree to be recruited into the JVP, Juliet said the relationship meant a certain "attachment" -- they were seen as "belonging" to each other -- but there was no physical contact, not even

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kissing. "In those days" she said, "we were very naive. The revolution was everything. Personal matters could come later."

We see here how Juliet's womanhood has been de-sexualized and how her personal needs came second to the cause of her struggle. It is precisely this relegating of emotional and sexual needs as personal and therefore not a priority within the ideologies and strategies of the militant group that is telling in terms of its gender control. The female combatant's needs as a woman are never considered *political* needs, as the rights of an individual to a fulfilling relationship, but a personal one which could be allowed to find its full expression only after the struggle is complete. In that interregnum she has to subsume whatever desires she may have in the service of her role within the movement. Operating here is a discourse that tranforms the sacrifice paid on the personal terrain into a sense of *duty* towards the cause, and the woman combatant accepts this as part and parcel of her struggle. This reflects, in part, her ideological commitment to the struggle, her understanding that life in existing society offers no real freedom for the individual. But also at play here is an internalization of those existing social standards. None of the JVP women who suffered sexual abuse while in police custody or prison ever talked about those violations for instance, and the JVP male leaders were at pains to deny such charges.This silence was in the service of preserving notions of the woman's sexual chastity and virginity.[28] It is possible to see JVP or LTTE ideology itself, then, as a complex construct, encompassing at times contradiction and inconsistency.

Vestiges of feudalism also remain in the highly centralised leadership of today's LTTE as it was for the JVP of the past.[29] At the matrix of the LTTE is a personality cult of Prabhakaran that produces, in turn, a pervasive male discourse. Large cut-outs of the LTTE leader dominated Jaffna until the recent Operation Riviräsa in which the government forces gained control of the town in December 1995. In the volume of inspirational Tamil Eelam songs entitled "Songs from the Red Blossomed Garden" released by the LTTE and repeatedly played in public places so that they took the place of the once popular Hindi cinema music, Prabhakaran is invested with the aura of a deity.[30] In this of course, Prabhakaran is not inventing history. Many guerrilla movements have been dependent for their success on highly centralised organizational structures and leadership cults. That women cadres have to negotiate this reality is implicit in the tension we confront in Adele Ann's *Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers*. On the one hand, its avowed intent is to present the

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importance of women within the LTTE. But, on the other, there is an explicit (and politic) need to valorize Prabhakaran. Thus this book on the women LTTE cadres begins with a full page photograph of Prabhakaran with the caption "Mr. Veluppilai Piribakaran, leader of the LTTE who founded the Women's Military Unit of the Liberation Tigers." Homage is paid throughout in these terms:

> He was confident that women had the potential for military training and combat. Unlike many of his fellow cadres caught up in male chauvinistic conceptions of women and their place in society, Mr. Piribakaran was determined that women should have equal opportunity for participation in all aspects of the armed struggle. Even he admits, however, that women have exceeded his expectations of them (p.7).

Here is the male who ushers in and creates a space for women within his organization. He is thus the midwife of their agency. That this in itself reinforces gender hierarchies which keep women in reliance on men is never problematized in the book. Since Adele Ann's project is directed towards revealing how Prabhakaran himself has broken out of the rigidity of patriarchal Tamil society, she endorses the construction of LTTE women as a site on which *Prabhakaran's* foresight is inscribed. And such is the acceptance of this that when members of the "Birds of Freedom," as the LTTE women's wing is known, were asked about feminist concerns, they confessed to much confusion within the movement regarding them, but "ultimately ended their argument with an expression of faith in their leader's ability to solve all problems."[31]

Such a reliance on the male leader, the elder brother (Prabhakaran is often referred to as 'Anna') immediately begs the question as to whether the 4th clause of the LTTE Women's manifesto for instance -- "Ensure that Tamil women control their own lives" -- can become reality. For even as the manifesto is anticipatory, with promises and aspirations of the future, patriarchy has already put into place in the interregnum strictures that will define/confine women in this future. Meanwhile, the woman combatant internalises her containment, be it within the terrain of sexuality, rank, or division of labour. It is not surprising then that following this, Juliet the JVP veteran for instance, is now firmly within the ambit of traditional family values, married, a mother of three children.[32]

It must be borne in mind, however, that even as the LTTE tightened its grip on the Tamil population, there were women of Jaffna who resisted its culture of violence. There have been LTTE women combatants who have left the movement with the blessings of the LTTE leadership. However, in the absence of a LTTE policy statement on the subject, it is

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difficult to ascertain how independent these women really are of the LTTE. There have been reports that some women LTTE members who have been allowed to leave the armed struggle have had to continue to support the movement from the outside, by harbouring other combatants, sharing intelligence information and/or securing funds for the LTTE. They have had the freedom to end their role as militant, but not their ideological and practical support for the LTTE cause.[33] At least their lives have been spared. Other women have not been as lucky. Two women poets who challenged the LTTE's authoritarianism and its cult of violence and so, can be heard in argument with the LTTE's Captain Vanati, immediately come to mind. They are Thiyagarajah Selvanity (known as Selvy) an internationally acclaimed poet, and Sivaramani, a young woman who was born and grew up in Jaffna. Selvy's condemnation of the lust for war and power is harsh:

In Search of Sun

My soul, full of despair
yearns for life
where ever I turn
I see
primitive humans
yellow toothed, ugly mouthed
thirsting blood, slit flesh
saliva adribble
cruel nails and horrifying eyes

Bragging and jubilating
over victories are not new
legs lost from long walks for
miles and miles
in search of a throne
days wasted waiting for full
moons
only boredom lingers...

(Jaffna 1988)

Sivaramani's tone is gentler, but she too shares the despair and anger that pervades Selvi's verse. In a poem which is untitled Sivaramani wrote:

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I have no words
that give hope
and solutions
like a leaflet
in bold print.

Dreams
their meaning
is lost to me.
who is uncertain
that the sun will rise
tomorrow.

While a gun
aims at society's
umbilical cord,
the dreams of a butterfly
resting delicately
on the tip
of a fragile flower
are merely
an occurrence.

In my attempts
to be humane
I would rather leave
the flowers
on the trees.

Now,
the beautiful night
shaped by the day
is only a dream. (Jaffna, 1989)

But what happened to these women? Selvy was taken into LTTE custody on 30th August 1991 and is believed to have been killed.[34] Sivaramani, at the age of 24, burnt all her poems she could get hold of one night, and setting her room on fire, committed suicide.[35] As Sitralega Maunaguru commented, Sivaramani's tragedy went largely unnoticed, for not dying by biting on a cyanide capsule in the honoured tradition of the LTTE, she was not praised as a martyr.[36] The ultimate tragedy then is of a society trapped in its own epistemic violence. Rajini Thiranagama stated:

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"If in a society like this, the dominant ideology under which the struggle is organised is itself an even more narrow, revivalistic and romantic one, well sprinkled with images of male heroes and male valour, and if nationalism is a type of aggressive patriotism, then a concept of women's liberation would be working against the inner core of such a struggle."[37] And the grip of a patriarchal LTTE leadership is such that in making such statements Rajini too signed her death warrant: she was shot dead on 21st September 1989, undoubtedly by the LTTE, as she cycled home in Jaffna town.

REFERENCES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference on "Violence Against Women: Victims and Ideologies" (SSRC, Colombo, March 1996). I am grateful to the participants at this conference for their comments, and to Michael Roberts, Manisha Gunasekera, Arjuna Parakrama and Femi Osofisan for their suggestions.
2. This has its parallel in the south. A team of journalists who reported on the woman cadres of the Sri Lanka Air Force repeatedly stressed the "arduous" and "grueling" training they undergo in Diyatalawa which they accomplished with "dedication" and "stamina." *The Sunday Leader*, 5 March 1995, pp.18-9.
3. Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sritharan, Rajani Thiranagama, *The broken palmyrah: the Tamil crisis in Sri Lanka -- an inside account*, Claremont: The Sri Lanka Studies Institute 1990, p.325.
4. Captain Vanati, quoted in Peter Schalk, "Birds of independence: on the participation of Tamil women in armed struggle," *Studies in Lankan Culture* Dec. 1992, 7:92-96.
5. Adele Ann, *Women fighters of Liberation Tigers*, Jaffna: LTTE, 1993, pp. 8-9.
6. The 1991 manifesto of the Women's Front of the LTTE makes this explicit in the priority given to "Secure the right of self-determination of the people of Tamililam and establish an independent democratic state of Tamililam" as its first clause, after which is listed the specific demands of the women which include the dismantling of caste and dowry systems, equal opportunities in employment, the dispensation to control their own lives and legal protection against sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence. See Peter Schalk, "Woman fighters of the Liberation Tigers in Tamililam: the martial feminism of Atel Palacinkam," *South Asia Research* Autumn 1994, 14:163-83.
7. For studies of the JVP movement in Sri Lanka see A.C.Alles, *Insurgency 1971* Colombo: Apothecaries' Co. Ltd., 1990; C.A.Chandraprema, *The years of terror: the JVP insurrection 1987-89* Colombo: Lake House, 1991; and Rohan Gunaratne, *Sri Lanka: A lost revolution? The inside story of the JVP*, Kandy: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1990. None of these studies show any interest, however, in providing a gender sensitive reading of the JVP. A recent article by .Kelly Senanayake on "Women, revolution and the JVP" in *Aya* March-April 1996 Colombo: Women & Media Collective, 2: 18-20, is an exception.

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8. In fact C.A.Chandraprema draws attention to the divisions and dissent that occurred within the JVP over the issue of its armed militancy. See Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 31-32, 34-35.
9. This is also mirrored in the relative lack of material on JVP women when compared to that available -- whether propaganda or not -- on the LTTE women cadres, and the reluctance on the part of ex-JVP woman activists who have now rejoined the cultural mainstream and have families of their own to talk about their agency in violence. Juliet, for instance, insisted that her real name not be divulged.
10. Kelly Senanayake, "Women, revolution and the JVP" in *Aya* no. 2 March-April 1996, Colombo: Women & Media Collective, pp.18-19.
11. This paper is work in progress, and many more JVP women's voices have to be recorded and analyzed for a definitive feminist study of the movement. I offer here only notes towards such a reading.
12. Alles, *Insurgency 1971*, p.131.
13. Juliet's testimony contradicts Alles's implication that when the JVP set off on its strike of Balapattuwa, the seven girls (*sic*) in the party went along merely to cook (Alles, p.124). As the Stree Shakti Sanghatana state, recording the experiences of the women in the Telangana People's Struggle, this type of "contributory" historiography in which the participation of women in militant groups is "analysed and judged not according to their value or importance for women, but according to their "use" for the movement in question" devalues the complex issues surrounding the woman militant. Stree Shakti Sanghatana, *We were making history...life stories of women in the Telangana people's struggle*, New Delhi: Kali for Women 1989, p.20.
14. *We were making history*... p.263.
15. See. for instance. C.S.Lakshmi, "Mother, mother-community and mother-polities in Tamil Nadu," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20-9 October 1990, pp. 72-83; Sara S. Mitter, *Dharma's daughters: contemporary Indian women and Hindu culture*, New Delhi: Penguin 1992, chapter 6.
16. Partha Chatterjee, "The nationalist resolution of the women's question," in *Recasting women* ed. Kunkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid, New Delhi: Kali for Women 1989, pp.238-9.
17. A similar construction of Sinhala womanhood is to be found in the novels of Piyadasa Sirisena, a nationalist writer of the time.
18. Such selflessness is carefully constructed in the propaganda put out by the government to buttress its war effort. *Rana gi*, or war songs, were produced extolling the virtues of mothers whose sons fight for the motherland and lovers who demand of their men that they write home of their bravery on the battlefield rather than "tales of innocent love." See Serena Tenekoon, "'Macho' sons and 'man-made' mothers," in *The Lanka Guardian*, 15 June 1986. It must be noted however that this is not only a woman's preserve. Male politicians too have constructed and exploited this notion of selflessness very successfully. See M.S.S.Pandian, *The image trap: M.G.Ramachandran in film and politics* (New Delhi: Sage) 1992.

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19. Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil nationalism: the construction of "woman" in projects of protest and control," in *Unmaking the nation: the politics of identity and history in modern Sri Lanka* ed. Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995, p.164.
20. Quoted in Sitralega Maunaguru, p.169.
21. The Jaffna Mothers' Front was formed in July 1984 after an incident in which the Sri Lankan army rounded up between 700-800 males ranging from 12-30 years, and forcibly transported them to the Palaly and later, Boosa camps. In July 1984 the army had begun a new tactic of surrounding a village in force with armoured tanks and guns in order to comb it for LTTE militants. A plea was then issued by the army to the mothers of Jaffna to bring their children with their identity cards for voluntary checking. The mothers did so, and were rewarded at the end of that day with the detention of their male children and their removal to the army camps. Frustrated at the acquiescence of their husbands and male relatives and friends to the government, the mothers took it upon themselves to organize and formed the Jaffna Mothers' Front. A very successful rally was held with 10-15 thousand people attending, which ended in a march to the Government Agent's office demanding the release of their sons. (Sarvam Kailasapathy, personal communication, Colombo, 18th March 1995.)
22. Sarvam Kailasapathy, personal communication.
23. See David D. Shulman, "Battle as metaphor in Tamil folk and classical traditions," in *Another harmony*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp.105-30. I am indebted to Shulman's reading of this text from which I elicit my main points.
24. Shulman, pp.108-9.
25. The JVP leadership had in fact ordered that no JVPer should marry or have romantic links with anyone until the revolution was won. Kelly Senanayake, pp.19-20.
26. *We were making history...* p. 269.
27. Juliet's second brother Justin Wijesinghe was also killed in JVP activity.
28. Kelly Senanayake, p.20.
29. This was so when Rohana Wijeweera was the leader of the JVP although he was never able to control or exterminate the many factions within the party as successfully as Prabakharan has done for the LTTE. Wijeweera was killed when captured by government forces in 1989. The present JVP is under the leadership of Somawansa Amarasinghe, but it is not yet clear whether the party structure remains as centralized or not.
30. *Counterpoint*, November 1993, Vol. 1 no. 8, p.11.
31. *Broken palmyrah*, p.328.
32. Work in progress by Manisha Gunasekera shows that the women of the 1987-89 JVP too are now married, have children and are reluctant to talk about their JVP connections, partly because of the need to distance themselves from its violence and partly because they are very much within the cultural and social mainstream of Sri Lankan life.
33. The difficulty at present in accessing information on the LTTE and analyzing its role, particularly for scholars from the south, makes for a reliance on personal communications which are often disparate accounts of the LTTE's

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policies and activities. Just as there are reports of ex-LTTE women who are obliged to continue working for the struggle, there are other accounts that contest this, insisting that within the LTTE there is complete freedom of movement to and from the group.

34. Selvy was awarded the "Freedom to Write" award by International PEN in 1992. The award honours poets who suffer imprisonment or other infringements of their human rights on account of their beliefs.
35. There are about 23 of Sivaramani's poems that have survived simply because they were with others at the time of her death.
36. Sitralega Maunaguru, Introduction to "Two Poems of Sivaramani," *South Asia Bulletin* 1991, 9:147.
37. *Broken Palmyrah*, p.327.

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ALL THE LORD'S MEN?
Recollecting a Riot in an Urban Sri Lankan Community

Pradeep Jeganathan

On the 4th of June, 1992, nearly nine years after the riots of 1983, heavy rains lashed the city of Colombo.[1] The rains were more intense than any recorded before and much of Colombo was flooded -- a few inches in some neighbourhoods, many feet in others. Patupâra, my neighbourhood, where I had moved to practice anthropology, was severely affected. The flood was a temporary disturbance in our lives; the waters were gone in two days, and the highland was quite dry in a week. Yet the moment of the flood, both temporal and social, was peculiar. It created an unusual, powerful eddy in the currents of power in Patupâra, so much so that it illuminated for me that massive event of violence that had shaken the community nearly nine years before: '1983.' Within the social dislocations of the flood I saw for the first time, a set of practices that I shall attempt to anthropologize in this essay -- those of the recollection of that event. These practices, enmeshed as they are in other fields of structure and meaning, of identity and inequality, will allow me to read violence without treating it as self-evident, and find its emergent location without assuming its place. By examining these moments of recollection, it is my intent not only to produce an anthropological object that can grapple with the 'violence' of '1983,' but also to read how 'Sinhalaness' is constitutive of, and constituted by, those recollections.

More, then, about the flood. That long hard rains would affect part of Patupâra itself was not unusual, given that the locality was at the edge of a low-lying, vast and uninhabited marshy plain. The marsh which defined the edge of livable land, could always be filled with dry earth in little patches, or vast swaths, so that new, humanly-habitable land could be produced. Yet all those who knew those patches of dry land that had once been marsh, knew also that water was never far away. What was unusual about the floods of 1992, was their indiscriminating sweep. Not only was land at the edge of the marsh inundated with water, but the rains were so heavy in the neighbourhood and the city generally, that houses and land that had never been flooded also went under.

To understand the significance of the flood, we will have to delve deeper into the webs of property and power in the community. Patupâra, is

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both the name of a road and a neighbourhood. This little lane that bisects and defines its community leads up from a small valley through twists and turns, to a major road, which falls on to the long, busy south western highway that defines Colombo's western boundary: Galle road.[2] Up until the 1950s Patupâra was a foot path cutting across the farms of the Pereras, a Sinhala Christian family that had bought land in the area in the early part of this century. While the Pereras had capitalized their grass fields, with coconut trees and a coconut processing mill, and sheds of cattle that stood on the highland surrounding Patupâra, the lower reaches of the fields, especially where the path trailed off into the great marsh, were, in the rainy season, small lakes of water. It was here that the now middle aged Perera brothers had come down from their exclusive public school, "to do a spot of fishing," during the holidays. But old Mr. Perera passed on, Colombo expanded south and country, slowly but surely, became city. The farm ceased to function, and the value of the land was transformed into urban real estate. Property, which had existed in an abstract, jural sense since the seventeenth century, began to take on the yet newer inflection of the urban: a new kind of social space simultaneously defined both by proximity and privatization. Land began to be measured in perches, not acres. The new plots of land became the grounds of new family homes: the bungalow, self-contained with a defined boundary marked by a wall or fence, had come into being.[3] In such a dwelling, the distance between the front door and the gate, and the height of that gate together with the walls that surround it, reflects the social power of it inhabitants. Some of the Perera children built bungalows like this on their shares of land and others sold their parcels to other bourgeois families. Even as these transformations were made Patupâra changed from a footpath into a 'real' road. The chief quality of a 'real' road, in my use here, is its representability on the maps of the Municipal Council, where Patupâra (the road) emerges uncertainly in the late 1960s. The road was then tarred, its drains measured, municipal taxes levied, and crucially, bourgeois families who lived down the road got 'real' addresses: numbers and street names, marking the privatization of space. A road is a vector of capital.[4] The road challenged, but did not completely displace, the claim of the *valauvva*[5] -- the manor house of the Pereras, to be the symbolic center of the community. The road is where the grocery stores and the public taps are: one cannot, therefore, avoid the road if one lives in Patupâra -- it defines the center of my ethnographic community.

Yet, this transformation of the value of land was inevitably uneven. In the days of the farm, the workers had lived where they worked. These

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old, retired workers -- their children now factory workers, in the main -- were gifted small pieces of low-lying land in inconvenient spots: on the banks of storm water drains, or near garbage dumps nearer than not to the edge of the great marsh. Their always small shacks, which in contemporary Sri Lankan urban planning discourse are called shanties,[6] are now crowded together, sandwiched in between the bungalows. Since many of the gifts had been informal in the naturalized relationship between the *hâmu* or lord and his servants, the time consuming and expensive survey plans and deeds of gift were not drawn up for the workers. The land parcels of the workers, a product of modernity, lacked the complete realization of commodification: exchangeability. In fact, a worker lived on a small plot at the overarching sufferance of his/her lord with whom lay the ultimate possibility of denying the gift and declaring the workers 'squatters.'

While such a denial would be ultimate, and therefore rare, the possession of property that does not reach full legal cognizance leads to a series of everyday hierarchical negotiations for the working classes of Patupâra. Getting a housing loan depends on the availability of 'clear title': a deed. This is not very esoteric since one of the major redistribution programs of the 1977-1993 United National Party (UNP) regime turned on "self-help improvement" schemes for shanties. In this program a small, low cost loan is available in installments over a period of years. Often, paper work had to be resubmitted for each new installment; if a deed was not available a letter from the relevant Perera *hâmu* often suffices. As such, obtaining updated copies of these letters of authority reproduces relationships of hierarchy which are, in turn, solidly bound to the land.

Having obtained such a letter, a shanty dweller would then make his or her way to the *grâmasêvaka*, who is a low ranking, civilian state official. It is this administrator's responsibility to give the inhabitants an additional form-letter, which certifies that they meet other criteria of residence and income that make them eligible for assistance. Now this position could well be a powerful one, and undoubtedly in some social configurations it is so, but Patupâra's *grâmasêvaka* was not of the community, and had no interest or desire to translate his symbolic capital into anything else.[7] He sat in his office, three days a week, shuffling the meticulous records he kept of the community from one pile to the other. He would sign pretty much whatever was put before him, well knowing that it would take a lot of walking about to query very much. Having been through his records backwards and forwards several times, I announced to him one day, in a fit of social scientific energy, that I thought them quite wrong, and

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full of error. People, I told him, seemed to have made things up in response to his questionnaires. "Ahh" he retorted perkily, "don't anthropologists say the Sinhala never tell the truth?" I replied that I had missed this insight in the literature, but he insisted on his point, and was never troubled by me again.

The Pereras on the other hand not only knew about things and people in Patupâra, but also knew important people outside the community. They knew the principals of neighbouring schools, managers of surrounding factories, the Mayor and the members of the his Council. There was a lot the Pereras could do for you, if they wanted to. And as such, they were always deferred to respectfully.

The rains of June 1992 are important, because in their wake, for a brief moment, these power relationships were inverted. The flooding, as I have already remarked, was so widespread that not only shanties built on low lying lands were inundated -- a fairly common occurrence -- but many walled off bungalows too had several inches of water right inside their living spaces. Because of this, property, as jurally defined, disappeared for hours: it was worthless. As such, the moment of the flood became extraordinary, for it enabled a remarkable series of social contestations.

Carolis, a carter and neighbourhood cynic, was in fits of laughter, on the morning of the flood, as he pointed to the 'company land' at the end of Patupâra, now a lake of water. Several years ago, this land -- about 0.75 acres in extent -- had been part of the great marsh. Michael Perera who owned it, wanting to raise cash, sold the entire plot, to a real estate development company -- a subsidiary of an enormous conglomerate of intersecting, publicly-quoted holding companies. Earth filled trucks, bulldozers and power rollers transformed that piece of marsh into "buildable land" in a matter of weeks. The company proceeded to build a high, white wall around the entire plot -- so that the shanties around its edges could not be seen -- blocked it out with coloured markers into 8 perch plots and settled down to sell it off at 10, yes, 10 times what they paid for it. The snag, however, was Carolis' family. They occupied 7.5 perch at the eastern end of the plot, steadfastly maintaining that John *hâmu*, had given them the land, before he died. John *hâmu*, one of the Perera brothers who had been both an alcoholic and a Leftist, might have indeed given them the land except it wasn't ever his to give: it was his brother's. Neither Perera persuasion over the years, nor company offers of money (well below selling price) worked, and Carolis' family didn't move. So the white wall zig zags at the east end of the land.

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But this issue of Carolis' land had soured relationships with the Pereras considerably. All the Perera children now thought of the family as those who were "squatting on Michael's land," and Carolis, in turn had stopped visiting the Pereras at Sinhala *avurudhu* (New Year week). So, as Carolis stood thigh deep in water carrying one of his grandchildren to high land, and saw me through a window, looking helplessly and hopelessly at the water in my house, he seized the moment. "50,000 a perch," he cackled, pointing to the vast expanse of water and then bent over in two, unable to contain his mirth. Knowing that I knew the Pereras well -- I met them often for meals and lived, most importantly, in a house owned by one of the brothers -- his comments had special significance. High prices, and clear title hadn't kept the water out; it was a sort of marsh again, just as it had been before.

The dissolution of property also led to the renegotiation of space usually framed by relations of power. Working class people in Patupâra rarely enter a bungalow unless they are employed as domestic aides in that household. In the case of a bungalow with a high wall, an immense gate and guard dog, this is physically difficult anyway. Even in their absence, as in our house, explicit cajoling was usually required to authorize entry, and even so not more than a few feet of space is transgressed. On the day of the flood things were different. Ratnasiri, a working class neighbour came right up to our front door, as Malathi and I waded through the water in the yard on the morning of the flood. We had been stuck all night at a friend's house, due to the rains, and we were just making it back. As I opened the door and waded in, heavy hearted, Ratnasiri didn't wait for an invitation. He came right in.

Ratnasiri, I knew, was the father of Gunadasa, who was one of the more important toughs of area. But he didn't go about as Gunadasa did, half dressed. Ratnasiri always wore a white vest and white shirt on top of that, together with a white sarong. Yet his clothes always seemed to have been washed a long time ago, and there was stubble on his cheeks and chin, not enough to be called beard, but lot more than a days worth, enough to make him look disheveled. I had been told that his wife Maggie, who had cooked for the Pereras *valauvva* when the old man was alive, had gone blind, and that Ratnasiri who was devoted to her had been depressed ever since. Ratnasiri was old and he wore his age with difficulty. He stooped even when he was standing upright, and his legs seemed to be bowed. His walk was slow, so slow that at the rare times when I saw him on the road, attempting to walk, he seemed, often, to be standing still. But he seemed

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quite well in other respects, and we had greeted each other, and chatted several times before.

I was struck, however, that he was walking about in the flood waters -- in fact he seemed quite animated. He paused, having walked through the front door into our house, and looked around our living room with interest. The large coir rug which covered nearly the entire 100 square foot area, which we had been very proud of when we had got it two months before, was now floating gently in six inches of dirty brown water. Never having seen a flood like this before, I was flabbergasted, and began to worry immediately about our books, nearly five hundred of them in the next room. Several classics, including Dumont's *South Indian Sub Caste*, and Marriott's *Village India*, were on the bottom shelf.

Ratnasiri, still animated but unperturbed, toed the rug as if to see what it was made of."Water has come into the house" he said, in a matter of fact way.

I agreed that things looked pretty grim, and walked off into the bedroom, to see our mattress floating as well. Moving into the next room, I picked up the TV which had fallen screen first in the murk, set it on a chair, and began, with an urgency that masked my despair to remove the half soaked books from the bottom-shelf. Malathi was doing the same. Ratnasiri, who had walked into the bedroom with me, now walked into the study. He was looking around at the TV, the computer and the enormous number of books, but also, it seemed the lay-out of the room. He did not offer to help with the mess.

"So there are only two rooms?" he asked.

Now this seemed a rhetorical question, since the lay-out of house must have been clear to him.

"And the kitchen," I said.

He went off to find it, and presumably having finished his tour, sloshed back.

He smiled wistfully: "I remember the house being built" he said, "but I never got to see inside."

The house had been built by Albert Perera in 1973, nearly twenty years ago. This Perera had built three houses, one beside the other, one for each of his daughters. The other two had been built in the late sixties. Albert Perera's eldest daughter, and her husband Jayatunga, occupied the first house and the second had been rented out for some time. We occupied

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the third house. I was startled by Ratnasiri's revelation: he had been waiting twenty years just to see the inside of this house.

But he said more.
"The other house also had a toilet like this one does."
"What other house ?" I asked.
"Where the Josephs were" he said.
"Is that so?" I said.
With that remark Ratnasiri waddled off through the water.

The (Perera)-Jayatungas lived where the Josephs once had, so I knew what house the man had referred to -- yet I did not see why Ratnasiri had called it 'where the Josephs were' since they had left nearly a decade ago. Anyway, he seemed to have seen the inside of that house, I thought puzzled, as I went back to our books.

Having done what we could with the books, we then waded back up the road, our floppy disks wrapped in cellophane. As we did so raised voices could be heard from the back of the Jayatungas' bungalow, a 'nice' one complete with wall and garden. Nimal was shouting: "It is your water that's flooded us out." And Jayatunga was retorting back, "it's not my water or your water, the rains fall from the sky." "But you've dug holes in your wall so that the water pours into our home" cried Nimal. The Jayatungas' backyard had been filled recently; thus raising its level above that of the land behind it. Rain water, then, drained freely out of the yard, through the holes at the bottom of the wall, right into the small plots of Nimal and others. "Drain your land, man," Jayatunga replied, "then you won't have a problem." But that would require the land to be filled, drains cut and cemented: quite an expensive undertaking. Nimal knew all this. "When it rains, it rains on all of us," he went on, "birth and status have nothing to do with this." But, of course, birth and status, class and gender have a great deal to do with everything. Nevertheless, the possibility of the remark -- its gist being: "we all should be equal" -- must be marked. What Nimal's remarks suggest is the possibility of contesting everyday inequality. And it is in the space of disruption caused by the flood, that this extraordinary contest is possible.

I am suggesting that there is a comparison to be made, between two events: '1983' and the floods of '92. The comparison must proceed cautiously, with several asides and qualifications. First of all, I am only drawing an analogy between an aspect of the experiential quality of the two

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events, not, of course, between the making or production of the two events. The latter would be impossible to do, since the flood is a 'natural' event, and a riot is not. I am not, therefore, using the flood as a naturalized metaphor for agency. Furthermore, I am not concerned in this analogy, or in this argument in general, with riots as such. I am not producing here a general account of Sri Lankan riots; rather I am but concerned with one such event: '1983.' My effort is to produce an anthropological object that can apprehend the 'violence' produced by that particular riot.

Given these qualifications there *is* a comparison to be made between the two events, which turns, as I have said, on experiential qualities. Both events are experienced as extraordinary, as opposed, of course, to the ordinary. This 'extraordinariness' has an added quality, 'suddenness.' It is this suddenness of the extraordinary that structures the collective recognizability of both the flood of 1992 and the riot of 1983 for all concerned. It is, in other words, the quality that defines the 'collective' nature of both events. I am not, however, suggesting more generally that violence in Sinhala society is experienced as 'sudden.' This would take me to a received position in the literature that have been at pains to argue against: the supposedly explosive or eruptive quality of Sinhala violence. Rather, the "suddenness" of '1983' was not related to the micro events of violence that was associated with it, but on the contrary that "suddenness" was related to simultaneity of such events throughout the city, that arose within the space of a day. The flood and the riot both produce a space of unexpected extraordinariness, not an unknown or unknowable space, or a fundamentally unanticipatable space -- but a space that is chronologically, in the ordinariness of time, in the everydayness of life -- unexpected. For most everyone in Patupâra, when '1983' happened, it came upon them suddenly, quickly, like a flood of water.

The other aspect of this comparison is more straightforward. During both moments, property, one of the most important constituents of social power in Patupâra, stood seriously challenged. In July '83, as in the flood, this naturalized, everyday category became rather tenuous. Like the company's land, the privacy of our house and the Jayatunga's backyard, the boundaries between us and them, cracked and broke, with sharp, jagged edges cutting back at "us." It is not the same "us" that brings these events together either, but the extraordinariness of the contestations. It is given those contestations of everyday relations of power that the differential comparison of the flood and the riot can take place. The flood becomes, then, a minor event, the riot a major one. The flood, I suggest, is a tracing

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of the riot. It pre-figures, in my chronologically inverted narrative, the reconfigurations of power produced in the riot. In the chronology of events, the flood can be thought of as a tracing of the riot that preceded it by nine years. Softly replayed during the flood were extraordinary contests of the riot.

Yet, everyday life in Patupâra, as anywhere else, is made up of these exchanges of power, where received inequality confronts the averted face of the promise of modernity: equality. The possibility of violence pulsates in these confrontations; in the looks, the stares, the words, the taunts and screams. The hint of violence, like power, is everywhere. Not always of the same texture, style or quality, not produced by everyone; it is, most often, the preserve of the specialist. The flow of violence is not distributed equally in all times and all places, it is often diffuse, rarely concentrated, but when it is, its authority is remembered. '1983' -- known as the times of the disturbances of '83 (*asutunê kolahâlakâlê* or *asutunê kalabalakâlê*) was such a moment in Patupâra, a moment that could well be recalled. There is a time, place and style to these 'moments of recollection,' and densities emerge around them even as they are produced. Recollections are histories of the present, and like all such histories they straddle fact and fiction, what might have been, and what is.

Early on, during my stay I started asking people in Patupâra about the '83 violence. The most general response was that nothing much had happened in the area. Yes, elsewhere there had been trouble: but it was people from outside who had come in: burning and looting. Some even suggested that these people from outside were not Sinhala people at all; the outsiders were Tigers, Tamil Tigers bent on creating trouble.

I knew, however, that there was more to be said. The Pereras had told me about the Josephs, the Tamil family who had lived where the (Perera) Jayatungas now lived; Rajan Joseph had been a clerk, his wife Kamala a school teacher. Their house, I had been told in a matter of fact way, was attacked in '1983' -- and they had immigrated to Australia soon after. After awhile, as I got to know people better, I was told, quietly, a little bit about the Josephs; how they had left, after some "trouble happened to them" (*karadharayak velâ*). When asked about the status of other Tamils in Patupâra -- and there were several others -- Sinhala people would say laughingly, "they had nothing to be frightened about." Because, they, unlike the Josephs were not different (*venas*). The Josephs were constructed in 1992 as being "different" -- aloof, haughty, not mixing with people -- as the grocer said, "not sharing salt from the same coconut-shell." So, in these

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recollections here, produced by both men and women, '1983' -- as it is inflected locally -- becomes an event of very minor significance with the Josephs being the agents of their own misfortunes. Note that in these recollections the "Tamilness" of the Josephs is not addressed as such; it is not their "Tamilness" that in any explicit way made them different. The critique of the Josephs presented in these recollections is a social critique that might be directed at any one, but in particular at those who live in "bungalows" with a garden and a wall.

As time went on I directed conversations to "do you remember the Josephs," without positioning them in the context of '1983.' This I thought might be a way-out of the impasse into another field of recollections. I was right; different stories began to emerge in this context. The Josephs, it turned out, had bought a TV set in the early '80, when TV was quite new in the country and neighbourhood. It was a small black and white model, nothing like the fancy, remote controlled colour sets that other bourgeois families had bought. But, this TV was different, it wasn't quite a private commodity. In fact, it was the site of much communal viewing; many working class people remember sitting in the Josephs' living room until quite late at night watching TV. So much for the 'aloofness' of the Josephs; there was, I began to realize, something radically contradictory about the different stories I had heard.

An answer to this puzzle was narrated to me over time. It turned on a small electronic clock, that had lain on the coffee table in the Josephs' living room. This had disappeared one day, and Kamala Joseph had accused Kapila, Nimal's son, then eight, of stealing it. He had denied this, but Kamala had insisted that he had taken it and had slapped him in anger. Nimal had protested in person but the woman had not been moved, "if you don't know how to raise your children, I will teach them right from wrong" she had said. The news of the confrontation got around and the TV viewers stopped coming by.

Clearly, this is the history of the supposed haughtiness of the Josephs that produces, even ten years later, a legitimization of the violence they experienced. Central to this recollection are the commodities in question: the TV and the clock. The commodity form, Marx argued, is a "very queer...mysterious thing."[8] Not only is labour and the possibility of exchange distilled in the commodity, it also represents the "fantastic form" of the "fetish" which is productive of social meanings. In particular the luxury commodities in question here are such a productive sites; goods "whose principle use [can be] rhetorical and social..., [goods that have]

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semiotic virtuosity."[9] This "virtuosity" was re-figured anew in the Colombo of the early '80s: the UNP regime's new economic polices had transformed the economy from a condition of luxury commodity scarcity, to one of apparent, yet unreachable plenty.[10] Here, as in the arcades of Paris, Walter Benjamin grappled with "[e]verything desirable... [that] could be transformed into commodities as fetishes-on-display that held the crowd enthralled even when personal possessions were far beyond their reach."[11] The re-internationalization of the luxury commodity market, after 1978, intensified these conditions in Colombo. The explosion of advertising on billboards and in newspapers, on radio and in television (for the first time), produced a spectacle that signaled the message: "Look, but don't touch."[12] The practice of watching television marks this movement in a double way: the gaze confronts not only the surface of the commodified object, but also images of other commodities that appear within the TV. Communal TV viewing in the Joseph's living room must be contrasted with the dominant practice of working class TV viewing in the city at the time: dozens gathering on sidewalks to view TV through the plate glass windows of a store. In these practices the subordinate relationship of the viewer to the TV is clear, overt and public: the impossibility of possessing the commodity in one's private space is undeniable. In the Joseph's living room the practice is similar, yet different. The public and the private become a bit blurred here: the fantasy of possession is a believable fiction. "...[I]f the social value of...commodities is their price, this does not prevent them from being appropriated by consumers as wish images within the emblem books of their private dreamworlds."[13]

I also must not forget the importance of the 'living room,' which is a special site of such "wish images." When working class children from Patupâra came in to paint on Saturday mornings in my livingroom,[14] a recurring image often wrought in great detail, was 'the living room.' It was not my living room, or their living room that was drawn, but an ideal one; ordered and neat with carefully positioned TVs and stereos, sofas and clocks, coffee tables and display cabinets. The Josephs' living room, I gathered, looked something like this; the theft of the clock, then, transgressed its commodified space to re-enforce simultaneously the possibility and impossibility of the "wish image" of that space. The clock and TV are doubles, one negating the partial promise of the other. If the sharing of the use value of the TV located it in a space that blurred the distinctions of the public and the private, one that questioned the atomization of commodification, the incident of the clock demonstrates the

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incompleteness of that questioning. The clock was private property. There, in those exchanges, in a world of commodities and spaces, power and inequality, one community died, another was made. The Josephs, once at the center, were now outside: different. They were Tamil. It was this Tamilness, even though unacknowledged that made that difference stick; that made it matter. In another year the Josephs would be gone, forcefully driven from their home.

I didn't hear this tale in a seamless recollection; I pieced it together from different conversations, in different contexts. Discontinuous and diffuse, it took a great deal of work, of shifting and sifting, to get at them: they are the work of the anthropologist looking for material in a particular way. I asked Nimal about this event once, he muttered something I didn't catch, and edged away. Nimal's silence, and the general repression which surrounds these recollections, makes them doubly important. These are not easily told tales; nor are they told with pride. They represent a local instance of a common occurrence: the unwillingness or inability of many Sinhala people to acknowledge the atrocities of collective violence. As such, these recollections lack what might be at their center. These narratives -- while being tales of community, commodity, space, power -- are not tales about collective violence; they are not explicitly about what happened in July 1983.

There is another, more general, less localized way of recalling the event of '1983,' that also avoids violence. These recollections can be produced both by 'respectable' people or even perpetrators of the violence, as long as the intricacies of local micro politics are left out of them.[15] Such retellings are, then, about '1983' writ large. One such recounting took place when Mitchell, Newton and I were together. Mitchell and Newton both worked as labourers during the day and kept the company of that renowned tough, Gunadasa, by evening. We were, at the time of this recollection, deep in the marsh, walking quietly, stepping carefully in the mud, going beyond the company land and its northern white wall, with the marsh spreading, overflowing for miles ahead. Soon the mud up to our thighs. We were there to find a medicinal herb that was, supposedly, going to cure a deep cut on Newton's leg; one he had acquired in a recent knifing at the top of the road. Other well known remedies like Nescafe coffee, applied externally, and a piece of bread baked with *ämericung piti* (American; ie. wheat flour) tied around the wound, hadn't produced results. The trip to the marsh, always a site of hidden value and unexpected opportunity, was a last resort.

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We had been talking about the war in the north east on our way to the marsh, a topic I had brought up. Now, as everybody knew in the Sinhala south of the early nineties, the war was not going well. There was no victory in sight, and everyday brought reports of more army casualties, who sometimes were relatives of local people. Even given the relative high pay offered by the all volunteer army, young men from the neighbourhood were not clamouring to sign up: in fact, the state found recruitment positively difficult. There were, of course, regardless of whether one thought it worth volunteering or not, hawks and doves on the issues. Those who thought that the army had one hand tied behind its back by the politicians and others who thought that negotiations with the Tigers were in order.

When I brought the subject up, Mitchell, surprising me, turned out to be a dove of sorts. I thought this odd, since I had already surmised that he had been a perpetrator during '1983.' But Mitchell had changed his views since 1983, now he said that the "Tamil problem" was due to Sinhala mistreatment of Tamils. This isn't the dominant discourse in Patupâra, but it is an available one. I found out in time that Mitchell, who isn't a reading man, got these ideas from his son, an unemployed playwright who read a widely circulating anti-racist Sinhala weekly. The war, Mitchell said, was foolish, a product of Sinhala foolishness. Before I could probe further, Newton's leg hit something hard deep in the mud and he grunted.

"Must be something you hid there" said Mitchell, grinning.

Newton looked sheepish.

Mitchell, continuing his speech on Sinhala foolishness, said -- nodding towards Newton -- "these fools hid their loot here during the disturbance."

I turned to Newton not wanting him to be silent. "Yes, we were foolish" he acknowledged, as I think he had to, given the context of our conversation.

"We brought all the stuff here, from this road, and the other boys from the other roads, and hid it here. Wrapped every thing in polythene, and buried it. Then the *mudalâlis* (petty merchants) came here and got it from us giving us a pittance for it. What is to be done, it is not as if we could open a store."

"And then the police came and got their cut too," added Mitchell, "but the thing is this: these fools couldn't find half the stuff they hid."

Newton gave Mitchell a dirty look.

"Such beautiful things," said Mitchell, "all wasted now."

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"That is true," agreed Newton," we don't have them and they don't have them. It was a waste of beautiful things."

The luxury commodity returns to these recollections, in its abstract form. Gone now are references to clocks and TVs or the property of the Josephs. The appreciation of the overarching "regime of value" of the luxury commodity signals a regret over its destruction, for the authority of such a regime of value transcends 'Sinhalaness' or 'Tamilness.' Not accidentally coupled with an incipient questioning of Sinhala racism, the commodity form enables a moment of recollections that produces '1983' as an abstract but acknowledgeable event.

But not as an event of violence. There are other recollections that do, however. Such stories are also shifting and unstable, but yet they are differently positioned, and differently told. They are about '1983' as an event of violence. '1983' is not recalled in this way by any and everybody -- such recollections hint of violence even as they are produced, and are themselves practices of masculinity or practices of fearlessness. Rather, for '1983' to be recalled as violent, that very retelling had to enable the possibility of violence.[16]

It was late one evening, when Gunadasa, Carolis, Nimal, Newton and Mitchell were sitting around smoking with me, that I heard again about '1983.' Since it was late the men had started drinking something strong; now usually when the drinking started I would leave, since I felt it made the men uncomfortable. Or, if the men were drinking and I came by, the group would melt away. Drinking after all, was about sharing equality, and what ever else I might have been thought to be, I was not thought to be an equal. I was, in fact, by this time, for a set of reasons I shall not recount here, widely thought to be a relative of the Pereras. But, of course, a curious scion of the manor born, for at home and on the street Malathi and I did not keep to the rules of our class. Visitors to our house were invited to sit on chairs the same height as we did, were served tea in the same cups as we drank in, and were at perfect liberty to use the toilet or wash room as they pleased. This did not, of course, mean that there was a great rush of visitors to our living room, or that in the usual run of things working class people felt comfortable in that space. Yet we taught English and mathematics for free, to all the children who cared to come by, and they, spurred on perhaps by the bananas that accompanied the lessons, and the painting sessions on Saturdays, were frequent visitors. And through the children, I believe, word had got around that we were just a little to the left of things.

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So when I turned to Nimal and asked him if his problems with the Jayatungas, with regard to flooding had been sorted out, he was, I think, more open than he might have been with another *hâmu*. His eyes blazed.

"No," he said loudly, "even if it rains for half an hour, I get flooded out." "The *hâmu-mahathayâ* has filled his land too high" went on Nimal, "that's the problem."

"Look at the way they treat us," added Newton.

"And this, after we got them their house back," said Gunadasa, filling his glass once more.

We were on a roll. "What do you mean ... how did you do that ?" I asked.

"Why, don't you know ... it happened in the time of the disturbance," said Gunadasa.

"What happened?" I asked.

It was Mitchell who began. "In that time there were *vali* (brawls) everywhere. Houses being burnt, people being killed. But we were quiet," (*api silence ekê hitiyâ).*

Gunadasa picked up the thread. "I got my boys together and went up the hill to the *valauvva.*"

In the old days, and ten years is a long time in the life of a thug, Gunadasa was, indisputably and unquestionably, in charge of the boys. He had been born in Patupâra in a large family -- his mother Maggie had been a cook at the *valauvva*, and his father, Ratnasiri, who looked over our house during the flood, a labourer at the Perera's copra mill. Gunadasa worked at a large cotton mill in his youth, taking part in key, militant strikes in sixties and seventies.[17] He was eventually thrown out the mill for 'indiscipline,' and began to keep the company of a group of toughs, from different adjoining neighbourhoods who extracted 'protection money' (*kappañ*) from the owners of a strip of stores near the highway. He then killed a rival over protection money, but had only served about five years for it, since he had not fired his gun first. But Gunadasa made important contacts in jail, before he was released in 1982. As he puts it, he fell in with a new group, "*aluth bajaar ekata vätunâ.*" This was a powerful group of toughs, from communities in different parts of the city. So when there was a "vali" in Colombo, it was Gunadasa, more than anyone else, who "knew" what was going on.

"And I asked Wilson *hâmu*, 'what shall we do ?'"

There is an echo here of the hierarchical practice of going to the *hâmu* for a favour -- like a letter about land. The relations of hierarchy here

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aren't the same though; the situation is somewhat inverted here. The men are not asking for a favour from the *hâmu*, they are offering a favour. It is then a favour done, an unwritten but remembered IOU. But relations are not quite inverted all the way. The *hâmu* doesn't come down the hill to the men.[18]

Gunadasa went on, "I explained the 'scene' to the *hâmu*...the police are quiet and boys everywhere are showing what they can do."

"The police are quiet..." -- that line, for Gunadasa, must have been quite a mouthful. Gunadasa, who had encountered the police on many occasions, knew something of their practice. If, as he said, "the police were quiet," it meant that the old rules, of order and authority did not hold. Suddenly -- and this is the contingent suddenness I noted earlier -- suddenly, like the flood waters, the quietness of the police dissolved property. And just as during the flood, fresh categories are open to contest. It is almost superfluous to then say, as Gunadasa did to the *hâmu*, "the boys are showing what they can do."

Then, Gunadasa went on, recalling his conversation with the *hâmu*, "If there is trouble with the house, we can settle it I told him."

There had indeed been trouble about the house. That house, the one owned by Wilson Perera's brother Albert, now occupied by the Jayatungas -- had been rented out to the Josephs, who despite repeated requests had refused to leave. The nature of national rental laws are such that there was little hope of regaining possession of the house in a timely manner.

"Then the *hâmu* told me," Gunadasa went on, "I have known you since you were a child; do what you can." Then, turning to me he said, "my mother cooked in the *valauvva*." With that Gunadasa asked me for tobacco, and I, recalling Evans-Pritchard in Nuer country, handed him his well earned cigarette. So that was that, I thought. Gunadasa, Nimal, Newton, Mitchell and Carolis; they asked the *hâmu*; the *hâmu* nodded his head. They were all the lord's men. There, in that moment, status and birth, class and authority, that separated us were overdetermined, and our "Sinhalaness" emerged. The lord was Sinhala, and so were his men; they were united against the usurper Tamil. I, the lord's relative, who was willing to sit and listen to their recollections as if I was one of them, was their witness. The story recounted an alliance made years ago between the lord and his men, but as it did so it also constituted another alliance between them and me; not as equals, but as another, albeit reluctant, implicitly Sinhala *hâmu*.

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But not for long.

"So then what happened?," I asked, but the conversation had gone too far.

"It is getting late," said Carolis, who had been silent up until then. He got up and the group melted away.

After I had heard this story, I asked Wilson Perera, this time over good scotch whiskey, what had happened to the Josephs. "Smashed the whole place up, those buggers," he said, "good for nothing rascals, it was old Peter who saved the place from being burnt down."

"What was smashed ?"

"Everything. The light fittings...and the bathroom, yes that was completely gone, they smashed the commode and washbasin to bits," he said. "They were good quality English fittings, Twyfords...smashed, completely smashed."

"And the Josephs ?"

"They went to a camp, and then had the cheek to complain that we had got it done."

For the Pereras, then, the destruction of the bathroom remains at the center of the narrative; the incontrovertible fact that the Josephs left the coveted house, now worth at least a million, first for a camp, and then to Australia, lies uneasily at the margins of their stories; shielded by defiant denials. Not, of course, because the house is not important. At other times, when the topic of difficult tenants comes up, the Pereras point to this house as the exception that proves the rule: "we only got it back because of '83." But to admit agency, here, "wouldn't look nice," and it is damn important for the Pereras to look nice, especially as they always sing the old school song with gusto.

One cannot help but notice, here, in each recollection a displacement of agency from one class to another; each group pointing a finger at the other. It is this finger pointing, this splitting of agency that lies the heart of the matter: the alliance between the lord and his men. This splitting of agency, tells us, something about this alliance: it is not stable or settled, rather, it is shifting and uncertain at all times; it often breaks down, rupturing itself from within.

Months later I met Carolis, on the road, stretching his legs. The night was quiet. The end of road, that led to the company land, was deserted.

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"Gunadasa comes by often, doesn't he?" asked Carolis.

I agreed that he did. Gunadasa, who had no steady job, and now less *kappaṅ* (protection) money because, other younger thugs from other neighbouring communities had displaced him in his world, had taken to coming by in the evenings to see me, drunk, requesting money for more drink. I would try to talk to him about this and that, push his buttons and stretch his memory, delaying, until when it couldn't be put off any longer, I would give him some money, and he would leave.

It was during one of these almost interminable conversations, that I had, foolishly and irresponsibly, complained to Gunadasa about Carolis. Being a carter by profession, Carolis was hired by all sorts of people to move all manner of things -- one lucrative contract was garbage clearance from the factories a few miles away. Carolis was paid not just to move garbage, but also to get rid of it. So, despite repeated requests to desist, he kept dumping this garbage in our backyard, which was large, disused and unfenced. In fact, I think he had been doing this for a few years, on the assumption that the land he was using belonged not the Pereras, but to the municipal council, who was to build yet another road there. He was wrong, but legalities apart, the mound of garbage seemed to get bigger by the day, and it had begun to bother us.

"Perhaps you could talk to him about it" I had told Gunadasa hoping that this would be a more successful intervention than my own had been.

The next thing I knew was that Gunadasa had set fire to the roof of Carolis' shack, threatening him with even more dire consequence if the garbage dumping didn't stop. The fire, however, had been put out just as it had began, and since Gunadasa had been acting alone, no more harm had been done. I was shocked at what had happened, but Gunadasa who listed with bowed head to the fiercest scolding I could muster, did not seem very contrite or perturbed. All he had done, he was at pains to point out, was to act on my words. I realized then, that I had become, irrevocably and fundamentally, despite my best efforts at gestures of equality, a lord. I had done so, not through a trivial comment or a chance insult, but seriously, through the assertion of my property rights.

"Be careful with him," said Carolis, "he is a wild dog."

"Yes, I know," I said.

I thought Carolis was referring to the incident with Gunadasa, and prepared again to apologize to him, for I knew he was angry at me for what had happened.

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"No," said Carolis, holding up his hand to silence me "you don't know; it is for your own good that I'm telling you."

I listened.

"He smashed up the *hâmu*'s house," Carolis went on, "in the time of the disturbances." Carolis paused, and began again. This time he spat out his words, as if by their very force he could push me away from him, and dislodge me from my place.

"When Gunadasa got there with the boys the Josephs were hiding; I think they were hiding in the marsh at the back. But he wasn't looking for them. No he wanted to smash up the house, everything; the others had got iron rods, but he had an axe, a huge axe. He kept hitting everything; the walls, the floor, he wanted to break the lights, but he couldn't reach them because they were above his head, so he stood on a table; but the light was swinging; so he pulled it down with his bear hands. The others, Nimal, Newton were gathering the things of the house; beautiful stuff; the radio, the TV, the cooker, little porcelain figures...but that dog headed for the bathroom.

There was huge noise when his axe struck the basin, then the commode, everything, he smashed it up in to little pieces, and then smashed those too, everything, then they all joined in, smashing and crushing, and then they started pissing into the smashed pieces...Gunadasa was laughing saying that the Wilson *hâmu* would have to piss like this now.

Then they were going to burn the house down, but Peter, you know Peter Aiyyâ, he was with the crowd outside, there was a big crowd watching, he came inside and screamed and screamed, 'This is a Sinhala man's house you devil, a Sinhala man, leave it alone,' and then they stopped and went away."

In a flash, I remembered Ratnasiri's remark about the 'Josephs house' during the flood. How he had looked over our house, and commented in particular on the toilet. Now it was charged with new meaning. He had been, during that time he walked around our house during the flood, recalling with a deliberateness that gave me pause now, what had had happened to the Joseph's house and toilet. No, the Pereras' toilet. As Gunadasa had said, "Wilson *hâmu* would have to piss like this now." A sign of inequality for generations; years of using the servants' toilet in the *valauvva*, and then when Maggie didn't work there anymore, living without bathrooms or toilets, without running water at all. That day in July, ten years ago, that unequal alliance had ruptured; it was crushed and smashed,

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with Gunadasa's pickaxe. They had been going to burn the house down, but Peter had said, "it is a Sinhala man's house," so they had stopped.

The enormity of that statement still startles me. Yes, they are all Sinhala, the lord and his men. But these were not the President's men, who roamed the streets in the state's trucks, with electoral lists, to tell Sinhala households apart from Tamil ones. Those men might not have known. But, here in Patupâra, these were the lord's men; they knew the lord, the lord knew them. For two generations. Yet, they had to be told: "He is a Sinhala man." The invocation of "Sinhalaness" here is important, not idiosyncratic, because not only does it mark a crisis in Carolis' account, but since it has the same function in other accounts of what happened that day; notably Peter's. From where does this Sinhalaness come? It intrudes here in my narrative of the local; local identities and local quarrels, histories and violence. Sinhala here is an abstract category, one that exceeds the local. It must, for if not its intrusion is superfluous. To grasp its appearance in the recollection of '1983' in Patupâra, we will have to traverse the entire field of recollections I have sketched out in this essay, arriving again, finally at that extraordinary moment.

I have attempted in this essay to produce recollections of an event -- '1983' -- as an anthropological object. I have not assumed that such recollections must be about violence, not assumed in other words, that they must tell the story of that event as I would. And as we have seen, entire strands of recollections, have skirted the issue of violence, foreclosed its appearance, leaving it unacknowledged.

When respectable Sinhala people told me that 'nothing happened' in Patupâra in '1983', and that disturbances in other areas were the work of outsiders, possibly even Tamil Tigers from the north, they were not, it seems to me, recalling an event of violence at all. In these recollections, '1983' barely happened, and even if it did it was easily explained in coherent categories. There is a particular Sinhalaness that is simultaneous with these recollections. It is, in fact, both constitutive of, and constituted by, those moments. This is a respectable Sinhalaness, an identity, in other words, that is a must for a community of good people, who can do no wrong. This idea of blamelessness can be fractured, however -- the persistent, unsuccessful war in the north, and the tireless activism of anti-racist organizations, have made available a different recollection of '1983': that of foolishness. Taken together with the overarching power of the commodity form in a regime of value that transcends Sinhalaness in its

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seductive power, '1983' becomes an aberration, one big mistake made in an unrepeatable and eminently forgettable, but not forgotten, moment.

But closer home, enmeshed in the intricacies of local social life of Patupâra, was another set of recollections. These moments of recollection, were not straightforward narratives, collecting and analyzing them required a journey through the twists and turns of the exchanges of power in the community, that allowed for a crucial history to be told. This, as it turned out, was the history of the 'Tamilness' of the Josephs, or in other words, the process by which, they became 'Tamil.' In these partial accounts about 'little' commodities such as the clock and TV, the Josephs, once at the center of a community, where their Tamilness was not vilified, are pushed, slowly but surely at first, and then with great force, outside it. But here too, these recollections, are not about violence, rather they tell again, in new and fascinating categories, the old story of respectable people who have now made '1983' a legitimate event, something, that even if it did happen was quite justified.

Other recollections that navigate the complexities of that field, to take Ratnasiri's journey through our house during the flood as an example, did not become explicit in speech. I find such moments remarkable, for it produced startling evidence of the presence of '1983' as a social upheaval just below the level of explicit discourse. If violence lies only at the implicit edges of those moments, other conditions and practices bring it back into the very centre of things, so that the possibility of violence emerges visibly in spaces made by a particular masculinity. That space, a product of particular practices of masculinity -- fearlessness -- is a condition of possibility of violence.[19] In recollections of '1983' it is from within this space, transgressive, anti-respectable and extraordinary that 'violence' emerges. This emergence, when the 'disturbances' were located firmly in the social life of Patupâra itself, is simultaneous with uncertainties as to the meaning of those events, and an instability of their place.

As men tell stories that celebrate a particular masculinity, what is also constituted is a Sinhalaness, which operates with the hierarchies of authority. To be Sinhala in this way, is to be Sinhala inspite of other inequalities: it constitutes an alliance between classes. Yet, the recollection of this alliance, between the lord and his men, is unstable, and can, and does break down even as it is retold. Another kind of Sinhalaness is produced as the story of transgression is recalled here; hierarchies of class and status are effaced by a believable fiction of (gendered) equality, which is also abstract and national, "we are all Sinhala men." This profound claim

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of Sinhalaness as the mark of a community of equals, parallels the other claims of social equality that were echoed during the flood: we, all the children of modernity, are forever equal.

In the stories the lord's men tell of '1983' there is a repeated negotiation of this terrain of promised social equality, and its possibile realization in an abstract Sinhala community of equals. But the story of the riot is not one of equality, but its stark impossibility. Recollection of that impossibility is a recollection of a world where the idea of abstract Sinhalaness -- 'we are all Sinhala men' -- interrupted the possibility of abstract equality -- destruction of the Pereras' house. Those are recollections of a sudden, extraordinary moment, recollections of a world that was made only to fall apart through its own instability. It is a place where inequality battled against Sinhalaness, a space within which violence -- in all its incomprehensibility -- can be recalled.

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the International Workshop: July '83 -- Ten Years After, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 1993; the Advanced Research Colloquium on Violence, Suffering & Healing in South Asia, Delhi School of Economics, Department of Sociology, Delhi, August 1993; and the South Asia Workshop, Foster Commons, University of Chicago in Jan. 1995. I am grateful to Janaki Abraham, Valentine Daniel, Veena Das, Malathi de Alwis, Nelun Gunasekera, Qadri Ismail, Kumari Jayawardena, Mckim Marriott, Deepak Mehta, Gyan Pandey, Michael Roberts, Darini Rajasingham, David Scott and Stanley Tambiah for their critical comments on these earlier versions.
2. Colombo is a colonial port city that takes shape in relation to European power during and after the sixteenth century. For key accounts of its spatial organization, demographics and historical location, see Roberts 1989, Dharmadasa 1989, and Panditharatne 1961.
3. The 'bungalow' is, of course, a quintessentially colonial built form that is both pervasive and central throughout the empire. Anthony King's account (1989) has no peer in the Sri Lankanist literature.
4. For a sensitive, fictional description of capitalization catalyzed by a new road in a Sinhala rural community in southern Sri Lanka, see Gunadasa Amarasekere's novel *Karumakkârayo*, 1953.
5. In this context the *valauvva* [*walauwa*] or 'manor house' signifies the appearance of an 'invented tradition' of 'pre-colonial' nobility. The key accounts of the practices associated with this built form are Pieris 1956, pp. 54-64, Yalman 1967, p. 142, and Obeyesekere 1967, pp. 211-245. In relation to Patupâra, Michael Roberts' observation (1982: 223) that the *hâmu* or lord "furthered westernization..[while] injecting traditional ingredients into ...practices" is quite apt. But he seems to recant in a more recent essay

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suggesting, (1994: 106) that the *hâmu* is a manifestation of a pan-Indian, transhistorical, 'Asokan Persona.' I disagree. For a contrary discussion of dazzling dexterity that theorizes such "reactivated archaic forms" in the Lankan ethnographic landscape, see Gunasinghe, 1990, pp. 195-216.

6. The 'shanty' is a category of far more recent origin than either the *valauvva* or the bungalow, arising only in postcolonial discourses of development and planning. It supplements the older colonial category of the 'tenement/slum' that arises simultaneosly with colonial knowledge on 'poverty' in Colombo in the 1920s. Briefly, a shanty is a 'temporary' structure, that is not 'authorized' by a municipality. A 'tenement/slum' is an authorized structure that defines the limit of human habitability. While the former, was invisible/impossible under conditions of colonial command politics, it is now visible/possible under conditions of postcolonial democratic politics. A rich example of this colonial discourse is Turner, 1926. A similar postcolonial discursive field can be found in the "Population & Housing Schedule (sample)" in the *Sri Lanka Census of Population and Housing 1981*, 1985, pp. 55-6. I am grateful to assistant director (planning) G.S.T. Bandara of the Urban Development Authority, Colombo, for discussing the complexities of these categories with me.
7. For a recent ethnographic account of a *grâmasêvaka* which rather different from mine; see Tamara Gunesekere 1994, pp. 108-9.
8. Marx, 1867/1967 pp. 71-2.
9. Arjun Appadurai 1986, p. 38.
10. For a comprehensive account for these macro-economic changes, see Howard Nicholas 1987.
11. I have used Susan Buck-Morss' (1989) reconstruction of Benjamin's work in general. The quotation is from 1989, pp. 81-2.
12. Benjamin, quoted in Buck-Morss 1989, p. 85.
13. Buck-Morss 1989, p. 181.
14. These unstructured sessions where paper and paint were freely provided would regularly draw 15-20 children, of ages ranging from 7-14 years.
15. My use of the category respectability is indebted to the work of Malathi de Alwis, 1995 & 1997.
16. I draw here on a more general argument about the intersection of 'violence' and 'Sinhala masculinity' that I have made elsewhere. See Jeganathan, forthcoming.
17. I am grateful to the manager of the mill during this period for a lengthy discussion of the texture of working class protest during these times with me. See for a general introduction to working class politics of the period Robert Kearney, 1971.
18. I am especially grateful to Qadri Ismail for his reading of this section.
19. See Jeganathan, "A Space for Violence...".

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Chapter 9

LEARNING POLITICS FROM TARAKI: A Biographical Fragment

Mark P. Whitaker

Introduction

What follows is an excerpt from an intellectual biography I have been writing about Taraki.[1] He is a man of many names who has been well known, under his various pseudonyms, as a Tamil separatist guerilla, sailor, jungle guide, party theorist, and as an export businessman (briefly, but complete with fancy clothes and Benson and Hedges cigarettes), and as a published historian, philosopher, and, most recently, journalist. Taraki, before beginning his long stretch as a columnist for the *Island* newspaper group (and, now, the *Sunday Times*), was once, before "retiring," a high-ranking member of PLOTE (the Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam). His duties in PLOTE during Eelam War I (roughly, 1983-87) were both intellectual and military, and it is this rather unusual combination of experiences that gives his current writing about Tamil separatism and the civil war, as well as his philosophical and historical work on war and politics, its unique perspective and insider perspicuity.

When I first met Taraki, however, during my fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 1981-83, I knew none of this about him. He was, like myself, a young man in his twenties. Because he spoke English well and had read, in addition to much of the classic Tamil canon, an astounding amount of Western philosophy (more than I had, frankly), and because philosophy was also a hobby of mine, we became friends. Yet, to be accurate, I must say that it was at first a friendship that was warped by its ethnographic context. I liked him, deeply enjoyed our conversations about philosophy, but still half regarded him as some kind of "informant," and he tolerated my ignorance. There is no getting round that ignorance. I did not understand, then, quite how deep his thinking ran with regard to the Sri Lankan crises and the role of intellectuals within it, nor that he was a truly original thinker rather than someone whom I could interview for exemplary purposes (if anyone ever is, indeed, merely that). More concretely, I did not realize that he was already a member of PLOTE when we first met in 1982. And ultimately, of course, I could not guess that the impoverished young man

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that I knew would eventually become an important figure in Sri Lanka as a whole, nor that I would become, in a sense, his "Boswell." I really understood almost nothing about him or our relationship. Well, I was young.

All this began to change, in the conversation I relate below, one long, tense night in 1984, on the eve of my returning to America. In this conversation Taraki attacked my assertions of professional neutrality by claiming that the current political situation demanded engaged action just where my professionalism proscribed disengaged commentary, indicating a deep flaw in the epistemological underpinnings of that professionalism. Pressing his argument hard, Taraki shattered the ethnographic framework within which I was the "anthropologist" and he the "informant," and made me argue with him rather than over him. (How ironic, of course, that this should even be necessary) Moreover, as an astute reader of academic social science as well as of the local political and intellectual scene, he was able to mix together local and translocal discourses into a devastatingly corrosive critique of Western, university-based epistemological pretension. His critique was effective and, to me, overwhelming. And although I was never convinced by the whole of his argument, I have been forced to struggle with its implications in my work ever since. It was only years later,in subsequent conversations, that I realized the extent to which he was arguing as much with himself and his local intellectual community as with me -- a peculiar reverse of the normal process of anthropological recognition, which generally moves from the local to the comparative, that itself reveals how effectively Taraki had destroyed for us the stale asymmetry of anthropological "rapport."

In any case, I offer this account of our conversation here for two reasons. First, Taraki's critique of university intellectualism is well worth considering in its own right. Here, no doubt about it, the subaltern was speaking, and demanding to be listened to. That Taraki is no longer so "subaltern" only makes his demolition of university intellectualism more interesting. Second, our conversation was historically illustrative. That is, it is important to an understanding of the Eastern Province Tamil intellectual scene in 1984, and to the tensions effecting young Tamil men and woman in general then, to watch how Taraki understood, worked out, and defended his role in the crisis. Although the solution he arrived at was unique -- indeed, was bitterly contested by many of his peers -- the cruel necessity, the feeling of paradox he faced as the war began to pick up in the early eighties, was common. It was a horrific choice, as he saw it, between

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engaging in a thoughtless, potentially counter-productive, anti-intellectual, nationalist activism or an actless, often (he argued) epistemologically self-defeating, terminologically fetishistic, academic commentary. Obviously, Taraki is not the first intellectual to find himself standing between the horns of this particular dilemma. Rather, by proxie, he is all intellectuals trying to act and think well in troubled times.

One final note. I have left this text pretty much as I composed it in 1987. I do this to retain something of the gradually dispersing naivete with which I wrote it. Taraki has read and corrected some of my errors, and clarified some of his own words. These changes I have made whenever he has requested that I do so.

East Coast Sri Lanka, 1984 (As Written in 1987)

> EMPEDOCLES, a philosopher of Agrigentum, in Sicily, flourished about B.C. 444. He was learned and eloquent; and, on account of his success in curing diseases, was reckoned a magician. His death is said to have been as miraculous as his life. One tradition related that he threw himself into the flames of Mount Aetna, that by his sudden disappearance he might be believed to be a god; but it was added that the volcano threw up one of his sandals, and thus revealed the manner of his death...
> -- A Smaller Classical Dictionary, p. 206

It was the summer of 1984. Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority had, by then, arrived at a point where each seemed to believe that only violence against the other made any sense. Indeed, as we talked, the Sinhalese army was occupying Batticaloa town, the provincial capital of the district where I was living, while, all about the Tamil areas, signs of an increasing guerrilla and political mobilization were taking place. As an anthropologist, with friends on both sides, the nationalist rhetoric of each group -- the historicist fantasies and "racial" stereotypes -- seemed abhorrent, surreal. Yet the burned-out houses and dazed refugees that I had seen the year before, the sheer ferocity of the island-wide anti-Tamil rioting of 1983, made it obvious, even to me, that, at least for the Tamils of the east coast, the time for words had passed.

Yet I was determined to remain, somehow, neutral. And an official stance of tolerant but firm neutrality was exactly what I attempted to effect. I had good reason on my side. It was not my country, and not, therefore,

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my fight. I could see, of course, why Tamil people no longer felt that a regular political solution to their problems was possible. Thirty years of such attempts had merely spawned ever more vitriolic forms of Sinhalese nationalism. At the same time, I could also understand the queer sense of mingled inferiority and chauvinism that seemed to animate Sinhalese politics, the sense of frustration that close to 300 years of colonial domination had engendered. Still, when I confronted Sinhalese claims, to me disturbing, that their command over all Sri Lanka was mandated by the Buddha, as laid down in their 6th century historical chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa* (1934); or Tamil claims, to me equally strange, that freedom from the Sinhalese would allow a return to the glories of a sixteenth century Tamil kingdom, I wanted to be able to place both in a bin marked "other," for analysis later. For neither seemed to me politics of a sort with which I could, or should, get involved. It was all real; I knew people were dying from it; but it could never be real, as ideology or as politics, to me.

Of course, Sri Lanka's political groups and parties were hardly so unitary as the above would make them seem. There were many forms of Tamil and Sinhalese nationalism to choose from; within each camp, in fact, the ideologies, however all nationalist, spanned the gamut from utopian left to practically fascist right.[2] My feeling, however, was that even this range seemed to turn on an axis alien to my ability to judge. Hence, while I could, like a good liberal intellectual, deplore the actions of the UNP government then in power, and denounce, in my way, all the atrocities being committed on both sides, I felt that it was not only impossible for me to take sides, but even improper to get involved. As an anthropologist -- no, even as a human being -- I felt my only hope of seeing the situation clearly was to remain, as it were, poised between perspectives, taking little peeks through all offered views, but declining to ultimately accept the clarifying and limiting lens of any. And I fancied that this, somehow, was in itself a kind of contribution: the preservation of a vantage point above the fray, so that either side, in a cooler moment, might have available an alternative, more "balanced," vision of the conflict.[3]

So I was thinking, anyway, when Taraki came to visit.

***

It was late July, roughly 12 months after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983. Like the rest of east coast, the Tamil village where I had spent two years doing fieldwork was in the hot and sleepy time before the harvest. All the land

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around the village not directly fed by canals was burned brown, even yellow, and the hot winds off the central highlands spiraled dustdevils high up into the sky. For a month, the large, black buffalo, for lack of their wallows, had roved the streets of the village complaining. Everyone else, all the people, had abandoned the streets to them by ten, withdrawing into the shade. On this particular day, I had withdrawn as well, into the verandah of the little dowry-house that my host, Mr. M., had loaned me, his daughters as yet being young; and there I was alternatively reading, or typing, or playing with Mr. M's children.

Indeed, as I remember, Parvati and Sita, Mr. M's ten-year-old twin daughters, were giggling together over one of my field notebooks. They had acquired a pen from my desk, and my Tamil-English dictionary from the shelf, and were busy copying out a list of words, in Tamil and then in English, ostensibly to practice writing English letters. They wrote: "Lecturer, enemies, mad-man, law-breakers, nurse, rioters ..." and then, further on "... politician, thugs, class-mates, soldiers, clever boy, rich man, my pet, neighbours, tourists, headwaters, poor farmers, own lorry." A history, so it seemed to me, of Sri Lanka. After a while, ever the anthropologist, I got them to draw a picture of a *kumpam*, a little pot with a coconut resting on its fluted top, which is a representation of deity. I had never received an adequate account of how the thing was actually made, and their playful drawing exactly fit the bill. They had just finished this when Muttusvami, their mother's younger brother, looking rather worried, stepped up onto the veranda.

"Uncle," he said, "you have a visitor."[4]

"Who is it? Do you know?"

"I think it is that *paticca āl* from Batticaloa. That Taraki."

Taraki was right behind him, dressed, oddly for him, in trousers and a new shirt. Perhaps all of 25, then, he looked older, as he always did, though whether because he possessed an older man's experience, or despair, it was hard to say. Muttusvami gave a worried look, of which I knew the meaning.

"Is Mr. M. around?"

"*Attaṉ* is not happy. He went to the fields." Mr. M. was Muttusvami's *attaṉ*, his eldest sister's husband, and, to put it shortly, the butter on his bread. Mr. M. did not like Taraki, who was standing somewhat sunblind just inside my door, because he thought him a radical, and perhaps because Mr. M. felt them to be from competing castes [*kulam*]. It was going to be Muttusvami's sad task to calm Mr. M. down, something

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I was only going to be able to help him with later. So we exchanged a look of pained resignation, and then, after muttering a comical "Uncle!," he swept out the door, hitching up his sarong as he did so, for the long walk to the fields.

Taraki chuckled as we watched him go.[5]

"Your Mr. M. is upset with me, and that poor cousin has to take the burden, eh? By the way, how about a cigarette?"

I gave him one, took one myself, and while we were lighting up, said, "You always despise Mr. M. Are you really surprised he returns your contempt? And anyway, where have you been for the last six months? I tried to find out, but nobody seemed to know. I thought you might be, well, in prison."

"Or dead?"

"Or dead. What's going on?"

He smiled his wry smile, and settled himself on a bench, smoking in his careful way, looking at the cigarette after each considered puff.[6]

"I've been all over -- up to Jaffna, over to Peradeniya, to Colombo, across to Trincomalee. Things are heating up. Even here, things are happening."[7]

"Yes, I know," I said, "many of the village boys have gone off -- some say to India, some say to the jungle to fight. I hear there are lots of groups now, not just the Tigers. It seems crazy to me, just crazy."

"That's why I came to see you. I may not get the chance again. As I said, things are happening."

"I'm sure I don't want to know. I will say, however, I think you'd be out of your mind to get involved in all this. I mean, look, you know as well as I do how absurd the movements are. Do they really think the proper response to loony Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism is loony Tamil Hindu nationalism? It reminds me of a movie I saw in Colombo, a Monty Python movie called the Life of Brian. Ever see it?"

"No. I was a little short of rupees that month."

"Well, it was a satire about the passion of Christ, with Brian being mistakenly taken for the son of God. Anyway, one of the clever things in it was that Brian, the inadvertent messiah, was surrounded by all these wacky little revolutionary groups, each with its own precisely defined ideological axe to grind. They were all, of course, ostensively fighting the Romans; but they were really far more interested in fighting each other. Well that's what's happening here, I think. If there was some sort of sane,

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coherent, response to the Sinhalese, that would be one thing. But the Tigers, and a lot of the other groups, are just cowboys, more interested in carving out ideological territory than in doing anything about the real situation. Hell, you know this as well as I do. It's just crazy." Taraki, appearing completely nonplussed, rolled his eyes, and said, pointedly,

"Maybe it seems so crazy only to people like you, who like to remain neutral? Perhaps if you got involved, it would seem a little more sane?"

"Oh no," I said, waving my hand at an imaginary enemy, "I've got my work to do. Besides, I just hope, somehow, that by remaining above the fray, I can spy out something that might eventually, I don't know, transcend all this craziness. And it seems to me that is what you ought to be doing too. I mean, frankly, if you get too involved with "the boys," you're going to get yourself killed, which would be a terrible waste." Taraki shook his head, looking, for the first time, somewhat angry.

"You talk about the Life of Brian to illustrate the absurdity of little revolutionary groups going round shooting each other. So let me advance a Marxist notion, that the ethical discourse in which you are caught is really an ideology derogatory of revolutionaries. And let me ask that you think about the equal madness of fellows like the U.S. government, who would destroy everyone in a nuclear war to preserve their own ideology. Surely that is madness too?"

"I am aware of that other madness," I said. "If my 'technical discourse' were really so obscuring, I wouldn't be.[8] So you're wrong about that. More to the point, if I took a side as an anthropologist, either about this mess in Sri Lanka, or about the 'other madness,' I wouldn't be doing anthropology. I might be doing something else, and I'm not saying that it's bad to be doing something political, but it's not anthropology. So you are wrong about that too."

"No I'm not. Look," he said, gesturing at the two of us, "we intellectuals tend to locate these two madnesses in disconnected spheres, all the time remaining in a sort of ironic isolation from within which we can, uninvolvedly, simply, judge. But if these two spheres were seen to be organically linked, or even simply juxtaposed, the intellectual would have to make a choice in the actual world -- would, that is, have to provide a new course of action."

"I'm thinking, here, of Gramsci's notion of an organic intellectual.[9] For me, the social scientist has become an organic intellectual in the sense, and the way, he has become domesticated by the ideology he has followed

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about in his role as social scientist. That is, by the notion that each field of study is separate from all the rest, and that a social scientist's function should be limited to his own intellectual specialty, lest he be perceived as 'unprofessional.'

"Lets take an example. You once said, when we were arguing about this before, that one must write one kind of thing in a paper on religion in [this village] and another kind of thing on the ethics of a particular system of power. You separated political rhetoric -- or even your opinions and your values about what specifically should be changed -- from so-called social scientific analysis. This is precisely the ideological block which keeps you harmless. In this way, you become organic -- in the sense of a vegetable growing quietly in the garden. In fact, you remind me of the low-caste *paṟaiyar* (drummer) man who once explained to me that it was quite natural, since it was god-given, for him to be low caste.[10] That this was simply the way things should be. This fellow, by the way, asked permission to come near me! Now you, like him, are a low caste fellow. That is, just as the low-caste man is organically included within a particular, exploitative social formation by what he believes -- I use this word because I don't want to be called an Althussarian -- so you also are a harmless part of a social organization which wants you to keep quiet. This kind of domination -- like that of the low-caste man and of the social scientist -- is one and the same, which is perfectly natural since each system requires this kind of self-suppression in order to maintain its existence -- that is, to preserve its own social equilibrium. Now since a fellow like me -- a revolutionary -- is possible, we have to believe that such balances are not inevitable."

"But let me use an example from your own culture: Noam Chomsky. Now I have accused you, sarcastically, of being a low caste man, and that you never realized that you were low caste while you were engaged in all your bombastic social scientific 'descriptions.' You never realized your functional equivalence to this low caste fellow -- your ethical and moral similarity. Here I use the word "low caste" the way a *Veḷḷālar*[11] fellow would -- pejoratively. Now if Noam Chomsky had simply accepted this ideology, and quietly been a linguist, he would never have written books like *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*."[12]

I pointed out that just as Chomsky was often dismissed by professional political scientists in the United States as a linguist who had strayed from his field, so he was often dismissed by Americans in general as just another intellectual. As I would be, should I attempt to write

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ideological polemics. Moreover, it seemed to me, Taraki was, as a "revolutionary," dismissing me and my work in the same way.

Taraki looked pained.

"You mistake my position. I'm saying this ideology has a double function. First, the individual believes it and domesticates himself. Secondly, when there is questioning on the part of the individual, be that individual a low-caste fellow or a social scientist, people could dismiss him as irrelevant on the basis of the same ideology. That is, just as the low-caste man can be dismissed by the ideology of hierarchy, so the intellectual may be disregarded by the ideology of atomization of intellectual activity -- stranded, as I like to put it, on his own magic carpet of discourse -- and by his institutionalization as a social scientist."

By this time, it was late in the afternoon. I could tell Mr. M. was back from the field, for I could hear his somewhat reedy voice through the gate that linked our compounds. Fairly soon, it would be necessary for me to ask Taraki to leave. And yet I knew he wanted to talk more, and somehow it did not seem that we had reached the core of what he wanted to say. His attacks on my attempts at anthropological neutrality were, between us, old hat. He had been haranguing me about my "objectivity," my claim that only by remaining neutral to all sides could I render a sensible account of what was going on in Sri Lanka, for as long as I had known him. But he had never called himself a "revolutionary" before, especially since he knew, as I did, that the ideology of the powerful groups in both the Sinhalese and Tamil camps were, for the most part, straight-forwardly nationalist and only rhetorically "revolutionary." Nor had he been, nor was he so far as I knew, now, a member of any of the groups. Indeed, actually becoming a member of a group of almost any kind was something [I thought] he had hitherto avoided. It seemed to me that he had crossed some great divide, and that possibly much of his argument against me was also argument with himself. I wanted to hear more.

As if reading my thoughts, Taraki suggested I give him a ride back into Batticaloa and spend the night at his mother's house. I agreed, and after explaining what we were going to do to a disapproving Mr. M., we set off on my Honda motorcycle. While riding along, enveloped in the noise of the road, I thought about how odd it was that I'd come thousands of miles to be called an organic intellectual by this strange man.

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By the time we reached his mother's old house outside of Batticaloa, it was growing dark. As we got off the bike, I could see, framed against the candlelight inside -- for obviously there had been another power failure -- several young men, *paticca āl* friends of Taraki's, waiting for him on the verandah.

While they spoke with Taraki about some books they had borrowed, I went inside and said hello to his mother, a nervous, hard-used woman, who nevertheless carried herself like the aristocrat she had once been. She was glad to see me -- someone, after all, with whom she could practice her beautifully accented, though now rather antique, English. But listening to her old-fashioned speech, I was reminded, by the contrast between her manner and her threadbare sari, of what she had told me of their family's fortunes. I remembered that Taraki's great-grandfather and grandfather had been powerful *Vanniyars*, one of the small number of large landowners that had once owned an overwhelming percentage of the land in the Eastern Province.[13] His great-grandfather indeed, had been one of the first native elected officials, under the British colonial reforms of the 1920s. Taraki's own father, like Taraki an intellectual, had taken an economics tripos at Cambridge, where he had also attended Bertrand Russel's lectures and read a lot of the works of the early Wittgenstein. Tariki's uncle (his Mother's brother) had a law degree from the Inns of Court, London, and had gone on to become a Judge in Fiji. Other relations had been lawyers, high bureaucrats and parliamentarians. But the land reforms of the 60s and 70s, and the decline of the absentee landlord system in Batticaloa and the Amparai district, had reduced their power and increased their enemies. When Taraki was thirteen, and a private school boy, his father had died, an embittered man, leaving the family almost destitute. Their remaining land and money tied up in an endless lawsuit -- a lawsuit Taraki's mother had been pursuing, alone, for eight years -- the final blow had been delivered by the cyclone that had blown through Batticaloa in 1978, leaving their once-proud home a gutted shell. "The large Dutch period verandah was blown off. Tile roof. Grecian Pillars." All gone.

Despite their new poverty, however, Taraki's mother would have left him in school had he not, himself, began to act up. "I failed my 'O' level, mainly due to chasing a girl and being a general truant. So she packed me off to Colombo to go to a Tutory to sit for O levels again. That is where I discovered the beginnings of my intellectual adventures -- in the Colombo Public Library. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Das Gupta's *History of Indian Philosophy*. And things like that. Then I passed my O level."

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As if all this were not, as Taraki once put it, Dickensian enough, it was on a bus ride home from Colombo, where he had continued to study on his own for his 'A' levels, that he had to face not only his family's shattered home and fortunes but his own internal cyclone. He told me that while the bus rolled along, he had kept remembering having once gone with his maternal uncle, the old *Pōtiyār*, to perform *kai vicēsam* (also called *kai mulutam*) at one of the remaining family estates in a large paddy town a number of miles down the coast. *Kai vicēsam*, or "distinction by hand," was the ceremony in which landless labourers and their *pōtiyār* employers gave gifts to one another as a mark of their mutual bond. On this occasion, as one very old, very thin, labourer had obsequiously advanced toward his uncle's verandah to ask permission to bestow his gift, Taraki's uncle, according to local legend a man both massive and intimidating, had leaned over Taraki, then a boy of six, and said, "This is power, boy. Power. Don't you forget it. If you ever do, you'll be the one asking permission to come up on the verandah."[14]

Taraki didn't. He arrived home thoughtful. Thought, very carefully, for several years. And then, buying a cheap sarong, he laid his trousers aside, put his postal savings account pass book in his shirt pocket -- it had about 500 rupees in it -- and set off on a bus to see, as he put it to me, what being an "average" Sri Lankan might be like.[15] Somewhere along the line, he decided to become a *paticca āl*.[16]

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After leaving Taraki's mother, I retreated into what Taraki called his study. It once may have actually been his father's study, although now, with the old roof gone, replaced by thatch, it was hard to say. Inside was a clutter of books and papers: philosophy and literature in Tamil and English, cheap magazines from Jaffna, the remains of an article Taraki was trying to write on Althusser. I settled in a chair by the one table with an oil lamp, pushed aside a copy of the *Mattakalappu mānmiyam*, the Eastern Province's historical chronicle (McGilvray 1982: 59; Nadaraja 1966), and started leafing through Taraki's photocopy of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), which was heavily annotated in Taraki's somewhat spidery hand. On a piece of paper, jammed in the book, was a list that looked to be notes for something Taraki was writing, or thinking about. It read: "Four Things: (1) Observations on French Perspectivism; (2) Intellectuals and power/ Foucault; (3) Gramsci's writings on the intellectual; (4) Derrida's idea of

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strategy and stratagems."[17] While I was holding this up to the light, Taraki entered with another lamp, a bottle of VSOA (arrack), and two glasses.

He poured me a glass.

"As I've been insulting you all day, the least I can do is get you drunk."

Contemplating my glass, I said, "I take it you have arrived at some sort of decision. You're jumping in."

He stopped pouring his own glass, and looked at me. Then he smiled his wry smile, "I'm already 'in' a little. Enough so that I can't back out. That's the thing."

He finished pouring his glass, took a long draught, and looked about with a grimace of momentary satisfaction. His mother bustled in, complaining that she had no proper food, and set down a tray with dinner. After setting the plates out and serving the rice, she looked from him to me.

"Perhaps you can talk to him," she said, disgusted. "Tell the little genius he can't argue with a bullet."

"She knows?," I asked, after she left.

"She's frightened. She's my *Amma*.[18] And she would like things to be the way they were."

We ate quickly, and in silence. I realized, only then, that Taraki had missed his lunch by coming to speak with me, and that I, in being so engrossed in our conversation, had offered him nothing to eat in the village. When we were finished, Taraki picked up the Foucault I had been leafing through, and staring at it, said,

"It is only when you try to do things within actual conditions that you feel the real texture of those formerly intangible things which you had been debating."

Then he put the book down.

"Why am I going off tomorrow to get my hands dirty, when a normal anthropologist, equally (or assumed to be equally) a repository of knowledge about, for example, the ideology of caste or about the ins and outs of various forms of ethnic chauvinism, would simply go back to his desk and write articles for university press publication? I think it is all a question of the ethics of intellectual production."

And so Taraki began his lecture. Let me say, before I go on, that my notes from here on are rather sketchy. I was tired, the bottle of arrack was there, and I had stopped doing fieldwork -- it seemed, really, the wrong time to even try. What survives are my memories and a number of quick notes, some in his hand, some in mine, of conclusions or points of

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importance touched on in the course of the argument. Nevertheless, Taraki had his views clearly thought out; and the notes provided a pretty good frame for holding his argument. I have, therefore, tried to summarize his argument as best I can.

Taraki saw himself as trying to answer three big questions. First, what were the ethics of, as he called it, "intellectual production"? Then, why was his tradition -- the tradition of being a *paticca āl* -- driving him to "get his hands dirty," while the tradition of being a university intellectual drove one to keep "clean"? Finally, what were the dangers of getting involved or of remaining uninvolved?

Taraki saw the first question -- that of the ethics of intellectual production -- as revealed in the kind of intellectual production that "University Intellectuals" as opposed to *paticca āls* engage in. University Intellectuals, for Taraki, resembled the philosopher, in the famous example from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1969: 61e), who, engaged in a philosophical conversation with a fellow thinker, shocks a passerby by asking, repeatedly, while gesturing at a tree plainly there for all eyes, "But how do I know this tree is here?" The epistemological conversation between the two philosophers is so at odds with normal discourse, so much a cog turning without reference to the rest of the machine, that the passerby must be assured that the philosopher is not mad. This, according the Taraki, is the sort of "magic carpet discourse" that University Intellectuals not only most often engage in, but which their place in the (by now) almost universal social formation of late capitalism makes necessary.[19]

Two very sad examples of classic university intellectualism typified his case, as far as Taraki was concerned: that of the so-called "critical" theorist, and that of the Anthropologist. According to Taraki, cultural critics, such as Habermas and Derrida, had taken essentially sound insights, in Habermas's case about political legitimization, in Derrida's case about the impossibility of using discourse to investigate itself, and turned them into intellectual products.[20] "When intellectual production becomes merely the construction of locally marketable, because marketably obscure, jargon," Taraki had me write, "then we can say that the writing, and the circumstances it aims to service, have usurped the initial motivation for engaging in intellectual production. In short, intellectual production becomes the manufacturing of products that sell because they package what is common in a false uniqueness." In other words -- for, I must say, Taraki was not himself adverse to obscurely packaging a common insight -- such University critics, driven by the need to keep coming out with something

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new to secure tenure or reputation, often pushed their work beyond a legitimate insight or, more often, the reiteration of an old insight, to a new jargon, even a whole new technical vocabulary.

But herein lay a very special danger. For while it is bad enough when their jargons are needlessly obscure, it is even worse when such jargons, as it were, transcend their authors, perhaps actually becoming new forms of what Taraki called "social pathology;" that is, discourses, unmoored from intention, invented for no real reason, but now taken up to generate new hierarchies, new forms of power-knowledge, which "assume their own power-generating independence. This is when Satan loses control over Satanism, and becomes its creature, consolidated by it, and, as it were, bewitched."

I shall come back to Taraki's use of the figure of Satan -- for he was thinking of Milton's Satan here, not, say, Billy Graham's. Nonetheless, it is well to mention that what Taraki called "bewitchment," can happen, according to him, to the *paticca āl* as well, and so the issue of the Satan being swept away in his own out of control Satanism is actually part of a larger question. More normally, however, the "critical" University Intellectual simply markets his falsely unique product, and thereby becomes a symptom of the very pathology his writing was often started in order to address -- hence Taraki's view of Habermas's work on communicative competence as, itself, in his opinion, an example of a distortion in communication.

This is also the normal fate of the University Anthropologist, who, in Taraki's eyes, is special only in how close he or she comes to escaping University Intellectual production only to be drawn back into it, willy-nilly, by the writing of ethnography. For Taraki, anthropologists come to the field, and, if they are smart, discover that culture and society do not really exist there. What exists, according to him, are "knowledges" (he was partial to Foucault's terms) held by certain people, whom Taraki called "repositories." Just who these local repositories of knowledge are is not mysterious, for almost everyone anywhere is one -- they are old mothers well aware of who belongs to what caste, old politicians wryly cognizant of who belongs to what group, or anybody who decided, or was forced, or who just happened to take up magic, or astrology, or Marxism, or, well, anything. Repositories of knowledge, then, are simply the people to whom others go when they are unsure of how to proceed in a given thing, or when they just want to learn about it. Eventually, anthropologists, for lack of anything better to do, go to them too. And if they and the anthropologist are

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industrious enough, they can become themselves repositories of these local knowledges. At this point, the anthropologist is very close to the *paticca āl*, whose task it is, in Taraki's eyes, to become a repository for as many different kinds of knowledge, local and otherwise, as there are available to get to know.

But anthropologists, unlike *paticca āl*s, must write ethnographies; and ethnographies, like all intellectual products, must at least make some pretense of uniqueness, or at least of knowledge production. Otherwise the anthropologist will not get hired. In other words, the knowledges the anthropologist acquired in the field cannot simply be passed on -- even assuming this were possible given the problem of translation. Rather they must be worked on, made more of (or, as likely, less of). As an example, Taraki picked up a copy of a well known ethnography and read me a "description" of the town of Akkaraipattu. It was all "true." What the anthropologist said about the town was, indeed, the case. But, according to Taraki, its technical descriptions of matrilineality, hypergamy, and matriclans captured the town of Akuraipattu, or, for that matter, even its caste realities, about as well as a report on its chemical composition might have done.[21] "You know what this says to me," said Taraki, gesturing at the page, "it says, 'how do I know this is a tree?' Its just another magic carpet ride; that's the thing. When I translate it to my friends, I have to assure them the man who wrote it was not mad. Just doing -- anthropology!"

Hence, in Taraki's view, both the critical University Intellectual and the University Anthropologist are forced by their need to get hired into specialized discourses, or magic carpets, that carry them away from everyday knowledges and activities, rendering them harmless or worse. The *paticca āl* stands in contrast to all this.

Taraki recounted to me a story, told to him by a boatman, to illustrate the difference between a *paticca āl* and Sri Lanka's own home-grown University Intellectuals -- whom the boatman called *longs pōtta ākkal*, or 'trousered scholars.' One day, at Akkaraippattu, some tourists got on a bus in which Taraki's boatman friend was travelling. There was a small boy on the bus who was trying to sell peanuts. Because the tourists did not understand his Tamil sales pitch, and because the boy understood no English, he filled a bag with the peanuts and gestured to the tourists that they should take them, believing, no doubt, that no one could be silly enough not to know what this meant. Either because they actually thought it was a gift, or because, as the boatman believed, they wanted to punish the child for his hard sell, the tourists took the peanuts and ate them, and

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then went on chatting merrily among themselves, quite oblivious to the politely irate demand of the little boy that they owed him money. Now on the bus, as well, was a *longs pōtta ākkal*, a university lecturer from Peradeniya, whom the boatman knew to be fluent in English, and whom he thought would interfere. Instead of intervening, perhaps by explaining to the tourists that the boy had meant to sell the peanuts rather than give them away, he had said nothing. And the boy had had to get down from the bus without his money. The boatman had finished the story, angrily according to Taraki, by quoting a well known Batticaloa folk saying: "If the learned men sit quietly by, who then will ask?"[22] For Taraki, this story illustrated precisely the difference between the traditional expectation of how a learned man should act -- as contained in the saying -- and what University Intellectuals had become. What was missing, first of all, was a kind of elemental moral indignation. But this lack was consequent, Taraki thought, upon the role played by knowledge in the University. With his knowledge of English locked into its classroom role, it was even possible it never occurred to the *longs pōtta ākkal* to use it on a bus to save a boy's two rupees. His English, rather, was part of his magic carpet, circling in a parking orbit high over head. He might have been able to ask if the peanuts were a tree; he could not ask for the boy's money back.

In the same way, Taraki argued, since the arrival of "The Troubles" -- which was what people in Sri Lanka then called the civil war - the University Intellectuals, even when attempting to comment on the crisis, have circled high above events, while the *paticca āls* have felt constrained to get in among them, to "get their hands dirty." And that, to make a long story short, was why Taraki now felt it imperative to get involved, even if not convinced that any of the groups were completely "right."

To my objection that, however right his argument might be, it did not necessarily imply participating in what might well end up being gratuitous violence, Taraki pointed out that things had now gone much too far for peace to be very likely, whatever he might think about it.

"The situation is such that a peaceful kind of solution has become impossible," he said. "Things on the Tamil side have taken a course or logic of their own. There are now about eighteen groups. Each is running to outdistance the others toward the goal of separation. If any group attempts to negotiate a solution, they can be accused of opportunism -- just in the way the TULF [the Tamil United Liberation Front -- once the only legal Tamil separatist party] was accused -- and the others will simply run

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faster to maintain their legitimacy. It is, as Habermas might say, a legitimization crisis." As a *paticca āl*, Taraki concluded, he had to deal with what was, not with what he would like things to be. His duty was plainly to put his knowledge into play where it could be used, whether he personally liked the consequences or not, and be damned.

By this time in the conversation it was three or three-thirty in the morning. One of the oil lamps had burned out, and the other was wavering, and the room was thick with the smell of kerosene fumes, cigarette smoke, congealed dinner and the two of us. We lumbered about, numb, trying to find kerosene for the lamps and my spare pack of Bristol cigarettes. When we finally got the lamp burning, and rescued the cigarettes from under a copy of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Taraki suggested we move out to the verandah and look for the dawn.

Outside, we set the lamp on a crumbling pediment and sat down on what had once been the houses outer wall. Everything was dark, and the stars still blazed with dazzling clarity, but I heard a cock crow, and, high over head, I could see busy little black bodies hurrying through the sky -- giant fruitbats bustling back sated from grazing the paddy fields for insects, looking now for their own special place under a palm to sleep for the day. I was beginning to glaze over when I was jerked back by Taraki's voice.

"Sado-masochism," he said.

"What?"

"Sadomasochism. You said, inside, that throwing yourself into a cause knowing that there is no fundamental sense in which it can be true is intellectual sado-masochism."

"I did. Golly, how clever of me. I don't remember."

"You're falling asleep. So am I, that's the thing. But it is an interesting idea. It is sado-masochistic. I have read the French Perspectivists, read Nietzsche. I don't believe in the will to power, but I believe I have to do something within what is going on. Still, it is sado-masochistic."

Taraki sat quietly for a time, watching the darkness turn by imperceptible degrees toward the inclarity of light. Finally, after passing his hand tiredly over his face, he asked me if I had ever read Milton. I said I had, and quoted the line "he for god, she for god in him," which I said I thought was the most eloquent and blatant male chauvinism in English. Milton is not one of my favourites. Taraki laughed, openly for once, like the young man he was. And then he closed his eyes and quoted Satan's address to Pandemonium:

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"Hail Horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be changed by Place or Time
The mind is its own Place, and in its self
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven
And what I should be, all but less than hee
Whom Thunder both made greater? Here at least
We shall be free."[23]

"Note especially that last line: 'Here at least we shall be free'," said Taraki, somewhat tensely. Taraki said he had never very much believed in Blake's theory that Milton wrote better about Hell than Heaven because he identified with the evil in Satan, or even those that merely had it that Hell made for a better story than bland Paradise. He believed that Milton wrote better about Hell because Hell was life, we were all in Pandemonium; and *paticca ālṣ* and especially University Intellectuals sometimes knew this, and therefore could only choose between unthinking action, to do something for something, even if you knew it was just another dream; or the epistemological arrogance, the Empedoclean folly, of Satan's freedom.[24]

He said that was the final delusion of the intellectual. "The fellow might think, satanically," he said, slowly, "that he actually can subsist in a region between paradigms, manipulating and creating them, but not being swallowed up by any position. This is Feyerabend's thesis in his *On Method*.[25] In it lies the danger of the re-introduction of the transcendental self, the *sub specie aeterni* self, which, independent of space and time, watches the watching. It's like Derrida thinking you can have strategy and stratagems without a strategician. He doesn't realize he just becomes pathological, captured by his own escape. But we are all, all the time, ontologically confined and escaping, only to be confined by our next escape. And like Satan, we are always thinking we are free."

I do not remember anything else. I fell asleep in the coolness of the dawn and awoke, hours later, in the hot sun. Taraki was up already, putting his things in order to leave. I put my notebook, which I had found under my head on the veranda, in my pack, said goodby to Taraki with a handshake, and went out to my motorbike. Taraki's mother, looking older than I'd ever seen her, was waiting for me.

"You couldn't convince him?" It was only formed as a question.

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"No," I said. Then, knowing it was small comfort. "If things turn really bad, and you need my help to get him out..."

"No. He'll never leave. I know that all too well."

And she watched while I climbed on my bike, and on my plane, and on my magic carpet.

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1. I would like to thank Ann Kingsolver, Mary Hubar, Jonathan Spencer and Michael Roberts for their comments on this paper. They, of course, are not responsible for any errors it may contain.
2. At the time, I hardly understood just how complex this distribution of ideologies was, especially among the Tamil separatist groups. Just to give some idea of the contrast there, the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) espouses a form of revolutionary Marxism in which separatism, per se, is officially secondary to socialist liberation; on the other hand, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), though sometimes utilizing Marxist rhetoric, especially in their English language publications, more often envision and justify separatism in terms of a heroic, classical, past. Indeed, their very name alludes to the royal emblem of the ninth to thirteenth century Chola kings. It is, perhaps, no accident that this group has had the most enduring popular support among the Tamil population of the North and East. See Dagmar-Hellmann Rajanayagam 1994: 54-84; 169-207, and my subsequent discussion of Taraki's views on this issue.
3. For a more detailed picture of what was happening in Sri Lanka in 1983-4, the period of this account, see Tambiah (1986), Kapferer (1988, pp. 29-120), and Obeyesekere (1984).
4. This scene between Muttusvami, Taraki, and myself is recreated from memory and fieldnotes rather than from a verbatim record. Our conversation was initially in Tamil, although I took notes in English when I wrote down this part of the encounter later. Taraki and I switched to English, in which Taraki is fluent, as soon as Muttusvami left. I had no tape recorder with me at the time, and was not initially regarding this as an "ethnographic" encounter. Taraki has gone over this section of the paper several times since I wrote it, and claims that I did a good job of capturing the gist of both how he spoke and what he said.
5. Taraki disputes my interpretation here. His note on this statement was simple: "cut this out!" I cannot quite bring myself to do so. In one way, of course, Taraki is right. Taraki was using discourses -- of which, as we shall see, he (more than I) was fully aware -- that either disregarded caste (Dravidian nationalism), saw it as an object of study (social science), or actively objected to it as a structure of oppression (neo-Marxist, Foucaultian discourses). Moreover, Taraki was using even these discourses *as discourses*, with all the ironic, postmodern distance that implies. But Mr. M. was not. Although fully aware of older style DMK nationalism and its disregard not only for caste but for religion as well, Mr. M., as the nephew (ZS) of one of Mandur's Sri

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Kantisvami key temple board members, was very much involved in the caste-honour based politics that swirled about that temple. Taraki, who just happened to be from the same caste as one of the three that, as caste groups, vied for power in the temple, was naturally viewed with suspicion by Mr. M. This was not, as I have explained at length elsewhere, some sign of Mr. M.'s "traditionalism." Temple politics are contemporary politics that simply happen to be based on principles that appear opaque to those using other, more self-consciously modern discourses to appraise them (see Whitaker, forthcoming; Whitaker 1986). In any case, I have altered the account here to make it clear that it was Mr. M. who viewed the situation in this way -- as I know he did from having asked him why he so objected to Taraki's visits.

6. From this point on in the 1984 conversation, all of Taraki's comments were recorded either verbatim or as amended by him that night or later, in 1992, when he reviewed this section. My own comments were only put down by me in sketchy notes the next day, or in even briefer notes written in the time available between Taraki's comments, and it is this inadequate record I have used to recreate my side of the dialogue. I am sure I have, inadvertently, rendered myself far more clever than I actually was.
7. Colombo, on the south west shore of the island, is the capital of Sri Lanka. Peradeniya, a small town just outside of Kandy in the central highlands, is the site of one of the universities in Sri Lanka. Both the south west and the center of Sri Lanka are areas dominated by ethnic Sinhalese, although there is also a large population of "stateless" Tamil workers employed on tea estates in the central highlands whose status has troubled both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists (de Silva 1981: 274, 552, 560). Jaffna, at the extreme north of the island, is a Tamil enclave, and the historical point of origin for much of the separatist sentiment of Sri Lankan, Tamil-speaking people (Russell 1982). Trincomalee, a deep water port on the northeast coast, was, until the late 1960s, a predominantly Tamil town. Now, however, due to years of government sponsored Sinhalese colonization, it is very much a mixed Tamil and Sinhalese community, and has been the scene of much inter-ethnic violence.
8. Taraki has pointed out that I here transformed his phrase, "ethical discourse," into the more neutral "technical discourse" -- a bit of rhetorical sleight of hand by which I obviously hoped to avoid the critical claim he was making about my professional intellectual practices.
9. Taraki is referring here to the section on "Intellectuals" in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (see 1971: 1-23). Taraki had access to many such texts through bookstores in Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital city, and through the library of the university of which he was a nominal student. Most of his copies of these texts were photocopies. The importance of the photocopy machine in the spread of information among intellectuals in Sri Lanka should be noted.
10. For a summary description of the complex and unusual caste system found in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka see McGilvray's article "Mukkuvar vannimai: Tamil caste and matriclan ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka" (1982: 34-97). Taraki's view of caste is not representative. As a *paticcāl*, of course, Taṛaki's view would not be. I have described elsewhere the complex range of east coast views of caste and related concepts of history, merit and status

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(Whitaker 1990; 1986: 147-240).

11. The *Vellālars* are an agricultural caste, often associated on the east coast with the executive end of temple control. As McGilvray notes, in east coast traditional history, the *Vellālars* are often seen as vying for "social preeminence" with another caste, the *Mukkuvars*, the latter being celebrated in the provinces historical chronicle, the *Mattakkalappu mānmiyam* (1982: 58-67). The relationship between these castes is complex, but both would be considered "high" caste in the opinion of most east coast people.
12. Taraki is referring here to Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's *The Washington connection and Third World fascism* (1979), a book we had discussed numerous times in the past.
13. Taraki's great-grandfather was his father's mother's father. East coast Tamils are matrilineal.
14. This ritual is similar to the *däkum* or "respects" ceremony that took place between landlords and tenants in Sinhalese villages during the Kandyan period. In that ritual, tenants presented their "lord" (*gamladda*) with betel leaves and worshiped him. In Kandyan ideology, this asymmetrical prestation tied such tenants, as the lord's retinue (*pirivara*), into a larger system of royal service (*rājakāriya*) from which both tenants and lords ultimately derived their limited rights in land and each other. Such rights were granted to landlords by superior landlords and, finally, the king, who, in theory, alone owned all land and all rights in people under a warrant bestowed on him by the Buddha. As Obeyesekere points out, this is a Kandyan working out of the more generally South Asian *cakravarti* or "world ruler" ideal (see Obeyesekere 1956: 213-223). The temple-centered landlord-tenant ideologies of the east coast apparently drew upon both this Kandyan ideology and the *cakravartin* ideal in forging their own systems.
15. Taraki says that, at that time, this was a fairly large amount of money. A teacher then was paid about 700 rupees a month.
16. Taraki also says that at that time he was more of an existentialist than anything else, as diary entries from that time reveal. Beyond this, it is important to note that this was not the end of Taraki's formal schooling. He studied successfully at home for his "O" and "A" levels, exams necessary to university entrance, and began to attend university as an arts student, majoring in English. He was only there part of one semester, however, before anti-Tamil rioting, and his own growing involvement in nationalist politics, forced him to leave. The schools were shut down shortly thereafter. Taraki was not a success as a student. His mother told me -- and Taraki himself confirmed this -- that his wide reading and *paticcāl* contempt for narrow gauge academia made it difficult for him to accept instruction, especially in the rigidly hierarchical setting of a Sri Lankan university.
17. Taraki had a complete photocopy of Vincent Descombes' *Modern French philosophy* (1980), from which he drew a lot of his thinking about French philosophy.
18. i.e., "Mother."

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19. This example, from Wittgenstein, was brought to Taraki's attention by me. He had not read much Wittgenstein until then, being familiar only with the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ([1921] 1971), rather than with that philosopher's later work. He did read my copy of *On certainty* (1969) while I was there.
20. Taraki had been reading Thomas McCarthy's *The critical theory of Jurgen Habermas* (1981). He also had read Habermas's *Legitimation crisis* (1975). His comments about Derrida derive chiefly, I believe, from Descombes (1980).
21. Since the town in question was Akkaraipattu, Taraki must have been reading from some work of that town's very able ethnographer, Dennis McGilvray (see 1973; 1974). I must honestly report that I did not note down the precise text from which he was reading. It does not matter. Taraki's criticism here is generic, and he had made similar comments in the past about Yalman's work on Panama, a town south of Akkaraipattu (1967, pp. 310-324), and about my own work, all of which he had read.
22. *Paticca ākkal ninka ellām cumma irukka, āru kekkira?*
23. Interestingly, Taraki misquoted Milton here. In his recitation from *Paradise lost*, lines 250 to 259, he dropped line 256, "And what matter where, if I be still the same,"(Hughes 1957: 217-18).
24. Taraki's view of Milton was influenced by E.M.W. Tillyard (1966), whose book he read in Colombo before entering university.
25. Taraki is referring here to my copy of Feyerabend (1975), which he had borrowed and read.

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GRIEF ON THE BODY:
The Work of Oracles in Eastern Sri Lanka[1]

Patricia Lawrence

> In the genre of lamentation, women have control both through their bodies and through their language -- grief is articulated through the body, for instance, by infliction of grievous hurt on oneself, 'objectifying' and making present the inner state, and is finally given a home in language. Thus the transactions between body and language lead to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss. This is one path towards healing -- women call such healing simply the power to endure (Veena Das 1996:68-69).

Unlike the American cultural assumption that there is nothing that needs to be endured,[2] in eastern Sri Lanka, human suffering (*manita tunpam, kastam*) is understood as an inevitable part of human experience. An implication of these different cultural orientations to suffering is that prolonged suffering is often concealed in American life, whereas it is more easily and openly shared through interpersonal relationships in eastern Sri Lanka. Tragically, however, one of the consequences of protracted political violence in Sri Lanka's eastern coastal plain is that mourning is now often hidden, for in the climate of collective trauma, fear and broken trust which prevails there, local Tamil people often say the best thing is to "keep quiet" (*maunamâka irukkavum*, or *amaityâka irukkavum*) about "disappearances" and death in the closest circle of human relationships.

This paper attempts to examine how the consequences of war are mourned in Batticaloa District, where a culture of fear has developed in the recent course of devastating political violence. As Nadia Seremetakis (1991) and Veena Das (1986,1996) have pointed out, the ritual work of mourning death in families in Greece and the Punjab, as in Sri Lanka, lies in the sphere of womens' expressiveness. The intense emotion of funerals for those who died "normal" deaths was woven into experiences of living with Tamil families during my ethnographic research in the eastern district

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of Batticaloa (1991-1994) -- the emotion of lamenting women who exhausted themselves of inner grief, of rage and anguish, falling unconscious only to arise and begin anew, giving voice to their pain at separation with hair untied and sarees dishevelled. However, during the course of this field research, there were also other deaths of which mention was ordinarily not permitted, and these were more characteristic of local experience, as there were so many more "silent deaths." Abductions, arrests and "disappearances," suicides and summary executions were the common forms of "silent death" in Batticaloa's altered and diminished world. How, then, does the grief at loss of spouses, children, parents and siblings who died under these circumstances find articulation and make its way into collective experience?

The prolonged struggle between the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for the establishment of a separate state, and government security forces drawn from the Sinhalese majority population have forced ordinary Tamil minority families trapped in Batticaloa's eastern coastal plain to face violence and death as a part of their everyday existence. No single militarized group has been able to maintain stable control of the eastern war zone,[3] so families cannot simply work out a *modus vivendi* with the multiple forces of oppression. Instead, noncombatants find themselves in an impossible position, facing life-threatening events in their day-to-day lives. Caught between the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE, shattered families of the Tamil minority have increasingly turned to local religious life in order to bear the anxiety and social suffering of lost connections. This shift in social concentration upon religious expressiveness is evident in the following commentary from a discussion with a group of men and women in Palugamam, a vulnerable paddy-cultivating village in Batticaloa District's interior that has lost approximately two thirds of its population in the last decade. As in other villages in this area, the rice-farming economy has been severely disrupted by the war. The speakers, elderly men and women, express intense devotion to their local goddess, *Tirôpataiyamman* (Draupadi):

> Every day gunshots and other sounds are heard. For a long time we're having all these problems. Still it's continuing. Problems are still going on. Who knows whether we would always be like this? Somehow our life goes on with anxiety. When a gunshot is heard over there, here we worry in our hearts, and then again when there is a gunshot here we are worrying -- in this manner we're always living with anxiety. This is our work. When we go

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to her [the village goddess *Tirôpataiyamman*], we tell her the suffering that is happening. [Gesturing as though pleading before the goddess:] "Why, Mother, have you closed your eyes to these? Are you not going to open a way out for us?"

This question, "Are you not going to open a way out for us?" still contains the tissue of the possibility of hope, but it is very sheer, and relies upon the agency of their territorial goddess *Tirôpataiyamman*, for they express the belief that only the deities are empowered to stop the war. Middle-aged people in families I lived with generally expected the violence to continue for the rest of their lifetime. They often remarked that they held the hope that their youngest children would not live in conditions of war. The waves of violence in which the coastal plain is awash have left irrevocable changes in Palugamam's lifeworld, as Tamil cadres have been replaced by other Tamil cadres, the Indian Army has established a presence and then withdrawn, Sri Lankan army and police camps have been constructed, deserted and reconstructed, while paramilitary forces and counter-subversive units were also active in the village. At the point when I write this essay (late 1995), the region where the village of Palugamam is situated is again defined by the government security forces as an "uncleared area," in other words an area under the control of the LTTE, which will once again be targeted for "clearing operations" (cf. Thangarajah 1995:214).

After tens of thousands of deaths and "disappearances," ordinary people perceive their lives as inextricably bound in relations of power over which they have no control. They speak of the futility of political involvement and of pervasive demoralization: *Ippô, inke oru perumatiyum illai. Ippô ûr makkalukkellam kal neñcam.* "Now, there is no value for life here. Now all our people have stone hearts." Lawrence Langer describes anguished survivors as "people who have no agency in their fate." Langer's insight resonates with the experiences of my Batticaloa interlocutors, some of whom remarked that the only crime they had committed was "to be born Tamil." Life choices structured by racism mesh with grinding poverty and severed access to educational opportunity in the interior of the eastern war zone (cf. Paul Farmer 1996; Sasanka Perera 1993). When the Jaffna-based LTTE in the north published its first booklet presenting the issues of university admission, state employment and language discrimination as grievances, 48 percent of the Tamil people living in the east were illiterate, while an average of 65 -70 percent of the Tamil population outside Jaffna had not received primary education (Taraki

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1992:15). The heritage of hardship and socio-economic peripheralization of the majority of the eastern Tamils was not represented by leaders of mainstream Tamil nationalist politics, yet the large impoverished sector of the Batticaloa Tamil population has served as the central LTTE recruiting ground during the last 15 years of war. In the interior of the eastern war zone, as in the north, the government has not offered incentives to replace the shortage of rural Tamil teachers, while schools have been damaged by shelling and teachers have been displaced. One of the consequences of the violent conflict has been increased peripheralization and alienation of the impoverished majority of Tamil people in the rural east.

Batticaloa has become a region of vulnerability to annihilation where the psychological effects of political oppression are manifested in "silencing," sometimes in denial, and in learning to know what not to know, all of which are common coping practices reported elsewhere around the world where there have been large numbers of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions (Kordon 1988; Suarez-Orozco 1992; Taussig 1992: chapter 2). Jacobo Timerman writes of political silencing as "the great silence, which appears in every civilized country that passively accepts the inevitability of violence, and then the fear that suddenly befalls it" (1982).

This is the silence of chronic fear which is so audible in Batticaloa, concentrated on certain cultural surfaces like the ash on the foreheads of women in mid-life; on the lips of the one opening the gate for yet another house-to-house search in the night; in the repeated hush that falls upon the collectivity of bus passengers each time they arrive at another place of scrutiny along roads which are now strings of military checkpoints; and wrapped around the tongues of the elderly when they are not at the household shrine -- for the elderly are able to remember a time in their life before the war (*piraccanaikkumun*), before fear and anguish altered the world. One of the ultimate effects of political silencing is the erasure of histories.[4] In public, ordinary people silently tolerate the impunity of the government security forces.

There is an island in this sea of silence: the emotional outpourings at local temples. In Batticaloa there is a particular cultural response to violation which reverses social withdrawal and silencing -- the practices of local Amman cults which overcome political silencing. Amman "oracles" (*teyvam âtumâkkal* or *kattâtikal*) embody, interpret and acknowledge the injury of war. The work of oracles came into increasing prominence during the 1980s and early 1990s, rather than collapsing along with the health care infrastructure and the judiciary during the prolonged

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war.[5] The resurgence of oracular revelation stems from experiences of ordinary families caught in the war zone and from the intractable dilemmas created by suffering. In the aftermath of occupation by Sri Lankan government security forces and thousands of "disappearances," people could not take their problems to government authorities. Many Batticaloa residents who remained behind during the exodus from the region have turned instead to a different form of agency within local Amman cults.[6]

Revitalization of Goddess Cults

In Batticaloa it is understood that "every goddess is very powerful" (*ovvoru ammanum mikavum vallamai utaiyavarkal).* Local territorial Hindu goddesses are believed to ensure the well-being of devotees and their families, and to protect the boundaries of household compounds, neighbourhoods and villages from negative influences -- including the intrusiveness of army, Special Task Force, counter-subversive units and other militarized groups. The identity of each local Tamil goddess, or Amman (a divine epithet meaning "Mother"), is defined in terms of place; and people articulate the belief that neglect of any goddess may arouse her furious "face," a response which may result in withdrawal of her protection. Discourse on Amman worship in Batticaloa today stresses the protective capacity of village goddesses. The construction of shrines for Amman cult guardian deities near house-compound gates and elaborate night-long rituals (*valavu kâval*), during which sacralized objects are buried in the ground at the gate and in each of the four corners of the house compound, have been urged back into practice again.

An increase in many forms of vows can also be cited as part of the revitalization of local goddess cults. In Batticaloa today, the vow of *mullukâvati* is frequently promised to the goddess during experiences of arrest and interrogation. Piercing the body in the vow of *mullukâvati* is believed to instill courage and ensure protection; it marks a relationship with a particular local goddess and a place, unlike the wounds of torture inflicted in detention camps, which mark the boundary between violator and victim (Scarry 1985). When annual rituals of propitiation are held at Amman temples, thousands of devotees engage in firewalking, and hundreds of young men enact the vow of *mullukâvati*. On the final day of rituals of propitiation at the Punnaccolai Pattirakaliyamman temple in June 1992, I counted 560 devotees crossing the fire. In June 1993 and 1994 the numbers of devotees who enacted firewalking vows rose to 1,300 and then

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to more than 2,000 during the hours designated for this extreme act of devotion.

The resurgence in crossing the fire at this temple is linked to local oracles' stories about Punnaccolai Kali's *saktivalimai* (empowerment of *sakti*, the hot, unlimited female energy of the Hindu cosmos) and her capacity of immediate intervention and "quick protection" (*utannivâranam*). In local Hindu cosmology, the male principle of the universe is linked to coolness and form, while the female principle is understood, on the most abstract level, as energy in continuous motion or action (cf. McGilvray 1982 b:31). When objects embued with *sakti* are temporarily removed from the Amman temples' innermost shrines during the annual circumambulation of the Amman's territory, individuals entrusted with carrying the carefully covered sacred objects appear to have difficulty restraining them from flying out of their grasp. *Sakti,* often translated as "sacred female energy or power," is also a synonym for the Amman. In Batticaloa, the summoning of *sakti* is central to some local forms of healing ritual. The protective powers attributèd to the Amman at the Punnaccolai Kali temple are affirmed by local knowledge that not even one person has died within the sacred temple grounds of this Amman temple, although in the history of the eastern war brutal events of violence have taken place in the general vicinity, including the LTTE decimation of youths forcibly conscripted into the Tamil National Army at Punnaccolai in December 1989, and the Sri Lankan Army's summary execution of 184 noncombatants on September 9, 1990 at Saturukondan.

The Work of Oracles

Batticaloa's goddesses, earlier described in ethnographic literature as being called upon to bestow health and prosperity, remove disease, increase the paddy harvest and bring the cooling rains which close the dry season, are now urgently asked to intercede in violent events and to provide information about "disappearances." Oracular revelation persisted in Batticaloa during colonial rule and the post-independence period. During colonial rule, individual Tamils privileged with university education often underwent Christian conversion. The Christian churches frowned upon trance possession and other local religious practices. However, trance possession and oracular revelation continued to be enacted by Batticaloa's Hindu Tamil population, particularly at temples for local, territorial goddesses. In the last two decades, as violence intensified and the dispersion of university-

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educated members of the Tamil minority abroad increased, oracular revelation became one of the most significant aspects of revitalized religious life found throughout the eastern coastal plain. In a context of chronic fear, anxiety and bereavement, "uttering oracles" does not provide a panacea, yet, in the aftermath of trauma, the oracles' interpretation of suffering helps alleviate survivors' guilt by pointing to actions of volatile deities, to fate ("forehead writing," *talai eluttu*, Keyes and Daniel 1983), or to the contingency of events that only the gods comprehend (cf. Das 1994). [7]

Oracles receive empowerment of *sakti* in a close relationship with a particular local goddess.[8] The moment of commingling of the oracle's body and the presence of the Amman is referred to in Tamil as *uruvarutal* ("assuming form"). Oracles describe the experience of possession by the local goddess as a painful sacrifice of the body. They report feelings of unbearable heat and pain, and describe their trembling (*sannatam*) as resembling the "shivering when one suffers from fever." During *sakti* possession the person is sacralized and accorded respect as a living presence of the divine. The speech and gestures of oracles is not considered their own, and they are therefore not held responsible for their words and actions. Oracles say they cannot remember what transpires during possession experiences. They explain that when the hot energy of *sakti*, travelling upward through their trembling bodies reaches the level of the throat, they lose the ability to speak in their individual human voices. After that, "only the deity speaks" (*teyvamtânêccollura*). Their "active forgetting," to use Michael Taussig's phrase (1993:xviii), was often foregrounded in their descriptions of *sakti* possession. They state that it is the will of the goddess which compels them to engage in "telling oracles" (*vâkku solluratu*) -- an engagement which may be understood as a different form of remembering.

One of the most dramatic scenes I witnessed in an Amman temple was entirely lost to the memory of the oracle who performed it. At the Kallady Kali temple in 1992, several thousand local people had gathered to witness firewalking on the seventh evening of the annual propitiation. It was dark, and the crowds were kept clear of the wide sacred area around the firepit by the constant patrolling of the temple *vannakkar*-s (trustees). The firepit was prepared for hundreds of devotees to walk over the fire in a few minutes. The oracle who would lead the firewalk was wearing a red sari with white plumes of *kamukampû* at his waist. At this heightened moment of ritual, three tall Army officers from the nearby camp strode boldly into the cleared circular space surrounding the long hot bed of coals

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as if to position themselves there for the event. There were rumours that arrests were imminent. Suddenly, the oracle rushed from the shrine, tore furiously across the space and, growling angrily at them in the unbearable rage of Kali, chased them out. And the officers did move quickly out. My youngest son and I have come to know this oracle and his family well, and he truly seems not to remember this event.

The lives of the oracles I met in Batticaloa have touched death in some personalized way -- they have lost children, husbands or wives, or have received the "grace" of the goddess in the course of surviving near-death illness. They are women and men of both high and low castes. In many instances a close member of the oracles' same kin group, often one deceased, had also experienced oracular possession. In Batticaloa, men form the majority of *teyvam âtumâkkal* ("oracles") at most, but not all, local temples. The popularity of particular female oracles who are well-known today for revealing the fate of the "disappeared" may resonate with women's work in lamenting death. The oracles themselves, ordinary people living in extraordinary historical circumstance of violence, experience the additional trauma of bearing witness and affirming the terror of annihilation.[9]

The following condensed case is a typical interaction between a devotee and an oracle concerning a "disappearance." Daily gatherings of as many as 90 people seek the help of this particular oracle. Here, the interpersonal experience resonates with the opening quotation from Veena Das, for in the oracle's work, "the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again" (Das 1996:68-69).

> An elderly mother with white hair, a faded blue cotton sari, and a striking air of grace rose from the crowd and took the place in front of the oracle for *vettilai vaiccu kêkkiratu* ('putting betel and asking'). Her natal home is beyond Kovilporativu, where people say the helicopters are strafing. This mother has lost eight members of her family, including her husband. Her surviving daughter and grandchildren have moved in with her. The army is occupying her home now -- a common practice in the area -- so they have moved to an abandoned house. The most recently 'disappeared' family member is a son who went to sell paddy and never returned. She has come to ask if he is alive. The female oracle confirms his death by singing lines of a popular Tamil film song while looking into the mother's eyes:

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pônâl pokattum pôtara
itta pûmiyil tilaiyay vâlntalar yâratâ
Let things gone be gone,
Who in this world is living eternally?

Then the oracle advises the mother, 'Now you are with your daughter and three grandchildren. It 's your responsibility to take care of them now. Live for them.' She placed the offering of betel leaves, areca nut, flower, and a ten rupee note back into the mother's hands. Her practice is to return the *vettelaipâkku* offering when the person asked about is dead. She may return as many as ten offerings a day.

Others who have gathered, bringing their own problems, then ask the elderly mother questions about the area where she has come from and about how she is managing, showing their concern. They also talk with her about rice rations which she is eligible to obtain.

Before they depart, the mother is reminded by the oracle that earlier, before the problems, they had annually worshiped Kali and Virapatiran in the house compound. In a commanding voice, the oracle tells her that this must be done where she is now living.

This oracle frequently closes her oracular utterances with insistence that the devotee enact a propitiatory ritual, or a vow such as crossing the fire for a local Amman. As was usually the case, the interaction broadened into questions and support from other members of the gathering. In most oracular events advice is given and participation in household or temple ritual is encouraged. However, before advice was offered in a large number of the cases concerning "disappearances," suffering experienced by lost family members was embodied and "objectified" through gesture by the oracle. One is reminded here of Elaine Scarry's point (1985) that the body and voice are the most elemental categories we have, properties which invariably come into play at moments of creativity or extreme emotion.

To lose speech, therefore, is a sign of death, of the unspeakable. Torture, as both Valentine Daniel (1994) and Elaine Scarry have so well described, destroys the capacity of speech. Moreover, the language-destroying pain of torture disintegrates the content of one's world and self. Torture has been the dominant weapon employed in the prolonged ethnic conflict in the eastern region. In the following interaction the pain of oracular possession stands in opposition to violence inscribed upon the body

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through torture -- while the oracle brings into knowledge the most inaccessible Other-ness of the tortured body of the "disappeared." Likewise, the summary of this event reveals that a large part of the work of oracles today is acknowledgement of unspeakable injury -- of trauma that is beyond language -- forms of injury which are further covered in a second veil of their political unspeakability. In the inner world of the region named the "Eastern Theatre of Operations" by military strategists, those who are compelled by the local Ammans to engage in "telling oracles" are entrusted with the task of bearing witness.

A father whose son was one of 158 persons arrested by the security forces at the Vantharumulai refugee camp on 5 September 1990, positions himself before the oracle. In this instance of mass arrests and "disappearances," the entire refugee camp witnessed the arrests and those who shouldered responsibility of organization in the camp compiled a detailed list of the individuals who were arrested. The list was submitted on the floor of the Parliament and to the Ministry of Defence; however, not even one of the individuals arrested has been found. This father has come to the oracle after receiving an official letter from the Ministry of Defence informing him that a thorough check of their detention records has been completed, according to which his son had neither been arrested nor imprisoned. He holds the letter of the so-called final report on his son in his hand, which in effect denies his son's existence as a still-living prisoner, or as dead.

He has come to the oracle to ask the fate of his son, who has now been missing for almost three years. In response, the oracle uses both body and voice as an instrument for re-enacting the son's experience of torture, experiencing his pain, calling out incoherently for approximately fifteen minutes, sometimes voicing the word *erivu* ("burning"), then vomiting. She returns his *vettilaipakku* offering, and lapses into an unconscious state lying on the sand. She then stands half bent as though being beaten, and vomits again. She holds her head, arms, neck, back, and legs -- saying that she feels pain all over. She complains that it is too difficult for her. The oracle crawls to the shrine room. We hear her retching. By the time she eventually returns, those gathered expect her pronouncement of the death of his son. She does not attribute his son's death to the army. She reveals that he was incarcerated in Boosa (a large prison where thousands of Tamil

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people were incarcerated in 1987 and following years) and survived to be released. She tells the father that his son is living in the south near Galle, and he has changed his identity by becoming a Muslim. The father is crying. He asks helplessly, "Now how am I going to find him there?"

Voicing the incoherent sounds of the tortured, representing injury on behalf of those silenced, oracles transform absence into presence, giving pain a place in the world. It often seems that oracles are not attempting to make sense of unacceptable social suffering -- but rather are trying to find language for the expression of pain. Grief on their bodies presents the impossible testimony of the "disappeared" or the intimidated witness, interrupting militarily imposed muteness. In a context in which dissent is impossible, the systematic use of trauma to impose silencing and intimidate witnesses (Kleinman 1996:175) is transcended during oracular revelation, providing acknowledgement of the unspeakable and creating an opening for a healing process. However, as Lawrence Langer's insights into the unredeemable trauma of atrocity have taught us, durational time replaces chronological time in the lives of those who survive as death becomes unforgotten and unforgettable (1991, 1996).[10]

The local moral world created during oracular ritual has also become the trusted space for treatment of physical and emotional wounds of torture in a region where little of the larger world is allowed to enter. In the following cases the oracle does not express horror at torture, that is, she does not differentiate herself from the suffering. The first is a summary of a harvest season case:

On this morning we can hear the Air Force bombing Paduvankarai (the western shore of the Batticaloa lagoon). There was irritable disagreement among the members of the gathering about whether we were hearing thunder or bombing, even though we could feel vibrations of the impact through the straw mats on the sand. (Similarly, people sometimes perceived black smoke on the horizon as cloud formation.)

Accompanied by her mother, a woman with many cigarette burns from interrogation practices at a temporary army camp set up for paddy harvest in the interior, is treated in a shrine room for Kali. She has a three-month-old child. The oracle gives total presence as listener with the impression that she understands everything. As the listener, her eyes are steady and penetrating, cringing for a brief moment with pain. The oracle applies sacred

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ash and turmeric paste on her forehead. She gives the victim's mother instructions on the use of *ilanîr* (young green coconut). Turmeric paste and *ilanîr* are important substances in *tanittal* ritual ('cooling, calming' ritual, also referred to as *cântappatuttal,* a word meaning 'soothing.') Medicinal inhalation, or in Tamil, *naciyam*, may be administered to those who are severely disoriented.

The next case, observed on the same day, is another example of arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Rule.[11]

An agricultural labourer from paddy fields in the interior, accompanied by his wife, was brought in front of the oracle shaking uncontrollably: he had just been released from his third arrest. His home is Ayttiyamalai. He has four children, and he is *not* an LTTE fighter. He has lost the sight of one eye, and there are deep wounds in the top of his feet where he says his army interrogators ground and gouged wounds with their boots.

The female oracle looked steadily at him. There was no alteration in his uncontrollable tremors. Still looking hard at him, she stated, "This will happen to you again." She told them to go and bring three *ilanîr* (young green coconuts) to the shrine. Someone went off with the wife to get the coconuts. When they returned the oracle placed the three coconuts in front of the statue of Kali and called *sakti* into them. He drank one *ilanîr* in the shrine room, and she explained that this would heal the wounds.

One especially notable comment made during the collective discussion of his experience among the people gathered on the verandah was, "For his problem he needs money" (to bribe soldiers to allow him to pass because he must cross through many military checkpoints). The oracle then added her own comment: "The people who are involved (those who are carrying guns) go out of Batticaloa with stolen money and leave the innocent to suffer here."

It is difficult to know how to assess the immediate interpersonal experience in this case. It disturbed me that he was told just after his release that it would happen again. The labourer seemed to benefit simply from contact and connection with the oracle, whom he believed had Kali in her. I described this particular interaction, involving as it did, a female oracle, to another oracle, a man known to speak as the *talateyvam* ("temple deity") of a nearby Amman temple with whom I had many long conversations. I asked for his reaction. He simply said, "Sometimes Kali

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will speak out like that."[12] The oracles' religious imagination incorporates and reflects the world of chaos in which both they and those who seek their help live -- a world in which people do not enjoy a sense of control over events. The local orientation toward suffering views pain as an inevitable part of experience and their work is directed toward its acknowledgement -- "seeing" the sources of pain, feeling it in their own bodies and guiding people through its experience. As this oracle knew well, in Batticaloa Tamil people are often re-arrested. In this case, it was his third arrest.

A young person who wishes to begin a new life outside the war zone brings his question before an oracle, and during *vâkku solluratu*, violence inscribed upon the body through torture is again made familiar to those gathered through the oracle's embodiment of the pain of another:

> A young Tamil man in his early twenties sat in front of the oracle and said only '*ninaittakâriyam*' (thoughts). His fearfulness was evident. He then stated that he wanted to know about the possibility of "going out," (leaving the war area by joining the Tamil diaspora). The oracle collapsed into the sand, and for about six minutes moaned and writhed in pain. She also covered her genital area with her hands. She took a pen and drew on the skin of her arms and legs, encircling large areas, and asked him if this was where the pain was most intense when he was detained. He struggled with his response. She asked when he was arrested. He mumbled an answer and she immediately told him where he was incarcerated. He agreed that this was correct. He also complained of feeling stomach pain (*vayirruvali*). The oracle then took the pen and wrote or drew what appeared to be part of a *yantiram* (sacred symbolic design) on the surface of the skin of his abdomen, and then uttered inaudible words with her forehead pressed against her inscription. They discussed his education, and she predicted a "computer course" in his future. She ended this interaction by stating that she would prepare a copper *yantiram* which would bring him protection and success abroad.

By "objectifying" and expressively rendering 'present,' vivifying, the experience of unspeakable pain, oracles allow the articulation of grief that has been held in inner silence to make its way into individual and collective experiences and memories in Batticaloa. Therefore, their work is part of a moral and political process -- they are creative participants in the remaking of the local world.

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In Batticaloa, oracular revelation is a cultural confluence where many possibilities meet -- where suffering and death are acknowledged, where courage can be instilled, where information about the future and protection may be given. To speak of unspeakable violation, there must be a safe witness (Felman and Laub 1992). Through their presencing of the local goddess, oracles embody this witness. They are also reframing a world which has been altered by the state's configuration of military checkpoints, bunkers and detention camps. During *sakti* possession, this world is ritually reconstituted under the authority of the territorial Amman.

Wives whose husbands have just been arrested come to ask in which of the many places of detention they are being held and to participate in rituals for their release. In the immediate aftermath of arrests and abductions, Amman oracles calm family members, and during *sakti* ritual, through the mimetic courage of oracles, local histories of violent events are expressed. Oracular revelation may answer questions about safety during movement when arbitrary arrests at road checkpoints increase. Tamil people who have lost their national identity cards, or who have been ordered by soldiers to tear them up, chew them and spit the pieces onto the side of the road, may bring their difficulty to an oracle. Parents consult oracles to ask whether they should send children they have not yet lost in the fighting abroad, knowing they may not see them again in this lifetime. Oracles have now begun to speak with the voices of family members who have fled and are living in the vast Tamil diaspora.

Concluding Comments

This paper has taken seriously the work of local oracles in eastern Sri Lanka, oracles who now embody, interpret and acknowledge the injury of war. It has become their work to address agonizing doubts about lost connections, memory which cannot be erased and wounds which cannot heal. Many of the people still living in Batticaloa reject all sides of the protracted political conflict, and focus their attention upon the interpersonal and devotional experiences of local territorial Amman cults.[13] During my field research in Batticaloa District, I met a bilingual government soldier from a large impoverished Sinhalese family, who in the course of his difficult military service at the insular Vellaveli camp in the interior of Batticaloa had become an oracle for Pattini Amman (the Sinhala name for a goddess found in both Sinhalese and Tamil areas of the island -- in Batticaloa she is known by the Tamil name *Kannakiyamman*).[14] Tamil

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people appreciated his respectful presence at Amman temples in Batticaloa, where I often saw him during days and nights of annual temple rituals to please the goddess. Certainly in this case, devotion to the Amman mediated interpersonal experience and crossed ethnic barriers of Sinhalese and Tamil identity, because local Tamil people actually sought his assistance through his gift of *vâkku solluratu* ("telling oracles").

> On the fourth night during the propitiation of the goddess Pecciyamman I sat on the sand in a semicircle with a young Sinhalese man and several Tamil *teyvam âtumâkkal* ("oracles") -- whom I knew well and with whose families I had lived -- discussing the ritual we had just witnessed by a military camp at the seaside, a place perceived as milling with demons *(pêykal)*, malevolent spirits *(picâcukal)*, and the roaming ghosts *(âvikal)* of those who have been executed. The ritual had involved, among other things, cutting an ash pumpkin as a symbolic sacrifice of life itself -- its severed halves smeared with vermillion powder. Saktidasan was explaining that the ritual of sacrifice to a particular *mukakkalai* ("face" or "aspect") of the goddess was also a sacrifice of the world and the whole universe. I pressed my fingers into the sand where they had been tracing patterns to keep them still and to concentrate on what he was saying. He was explaining that this was a ritual for worshipping the female energy of the entire cosmos -- *sakti* -- and this ritual for keeping unwanted things (including executions), out of the place where we were, could simultaneously reduce deaths in Zaire (and anywhere else in the world).
>
> Later, when the discussion lagged, for it was by now the end of a long night -- dawn was upon us and we were tired -- I asked the young Sinhalese ex-soldier-turned-*teyvam âtumâl* for his thoughts on the continuing war. I did not take field notes, as is often the case when what I view as the most important learning in "the field" happens. In his thinking, he made a clear distinction between ordinary people and combatants. In reference to suffering he expressed the understanding, which ordinary people had shared with me before in Sinhalese areas of the island, that whatever one's ethnicity happens to be or whatever shade one's skin is, "blood is red." He described being at ease with the local people. Finally, he admitted that he had tried to go home to his family in the south several times, but the Amman called him back to Batticaloa each time. As a soldier he had become quite ill. Saktidasan, who was

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sitting next to him, is no longer living, but I still remember his expression of appreciation as the ex-soldier then described for us his personal experience surrounding embodiment of the Amman and "telling oracles."

There are many responses to violence. The work of oracles as innovators of culture, and as agents for protective Ammans, provides a resource for coping with violence in protracted civil war. In this response, the territoriality of the Amman is not the same as the territoriality of the government security forces, nor of the LTTE, but constitutes instead the inner ground of a social body of sufferers.

The resurgence of identification with Amman cult practices provides us with insights into the local orientations towards suffering and relations of power. Ordinary Tamil families living in Batticaloa say they have no control over the activity of the government, its paramilitary groups and security forces, or the LTTE, and distance themselves from connection with political activity. Yet, the elaboration of the dangerous aspects of the divine in the form of the Amman often presented her power as greater than any other power, including the government and the immediate military forces pressing upon local families. In relation to the impunity of the security forces, I did not discover practices which specifically sought revenge.[15] I found instead increased devotionalism to local deities in which survivors sought to appease the dangerous divine, and to procure the benefit of the Amman's healing and protective powers, for destruction and the protection of life are said to be finally in the Amman's hands. In this ritual context, the peripheralized survivors of the eastern war zone are not passive victims. They are clearly capable of remaking their local moral world -- though it is a lifeworld where the irredeemable effect of atrocity and loss must be endured. In focusing their attention upon local, territorial goddesses, Tamil people accomplish this without recognizing any center outside the coastal plain.

Perception, imagination and memory are absorbed in concentration on the Amman, perceived as imbued with power to protect homes vulnerable to military intrusiveness, to compel children who have fled into the diaspora to maintain connections through writing letters, to proclaim the correct response to extortion demands and to ensure the release of family members in prisons and detention camps. During possession by the Amman, oracles now "see" and experience what is happening in places of incarceration where family members are held, and these include immigration prisons abroad.[16]

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The intensity of emotion motivating oracular telling of *vâkku* ("truth," "oracular speech") is centered around the felt experience of pain in loss and separation. The words of an Amman oracle may employ familial tropes of benevolence and authority. An oracle may address the devotee as a child with the term *kuñcan* ("little one"), a form of address which provides reassurance amidst shattered connections: "*Kuñcan*, she (Amman) will not let go of her hold on you; she will not take her hand away." The term *kuñcan* is frequently used in the ritual vocabulary of oracular language to address devotees as protected dependents during *vâkku solluratu* -- even if the devotee is a locally respected elderly man and the *teyvam âtumâl* ("oracle") is a woman.

By entering a protected form of expressiveness which necessitates dissolution of a previous sense of self and identification with the painful experience of others, oracles participate in one of the most extreme forms of human engagement. They often cannot remember their powerful words and acts. The prowess of their gestures and voices in acknowledging the consequences of political violence require that they "objectify" the pain of others. In part, this prowess arises from their own previous individual experiences of suffering. Profound identification with the Amman permits their bearing of witness. Thus, their work overcomes the political erasure of violent events and the denial of the pain of others. Their individual subjectivity thereby expresses the individual and collective subjectivity of others in a community of suffering. Against the war's regime of systematic trauma, people bring before Amman oracles unspeakable anxieties and fears which must ordinarily be concealed. A place is thus made in Batticaloa's local world for lamenting "silent deaths." Through the local Amman oracles' embodiment and witnessing of the injury of war, unshielded truth is expressed, pain is acknowledged and the relationship with death is restored into its process.

REFERENCES

1. This paper is based on research made possible by a fellowship from the SSRC-MacArthur Foundation Program on Peace and Security in a Changing World. I bear sole responsibility for any shortcomings in the presentation of these ethnographic materials and their analysis. For helpful criticism, comments and moral resonance I am indebted to: Darshan Ambalavanar, R. Cheran, Val Daniel, Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Michael Lambek, Ingrid Massage, Chitraleka Maunaguru, Dennis McGilvray, Michael Roberts, Margaret Trawick, D.P. Sivaram, Jonathan Spencer, Sally Susnowitz, Stanley Tambiah and Mark Whitaker.

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2. See Arthur Kleinman's *Writing at the margin: discourse between anthropology and medicine*, chapter 8, "Violence, culture, and the polities of trauma" (1996:180).
3. The (notably, English) term for the eastern region preferred by the Sri Lankan Security Forces is "Eastern Theatre of Operations," or more commonly, "ETO." To my mind this term evokes the controlled precision in a surgical theatre, so I have chosen the phrase "eastern war zone" which reflects the continuing injury of war to families still living in the eastern coastal plain of the island. The Tamil name for Batticaloa District is *Mattakkalappu*.
4. For an excellent discussion of the historicity of history itself in Sri Lanka, see E. Valentine Daniel's *Charred lullabies* (forthcoming).
5. The LTTE articulate their thirst for a separate state of Tamil Eelam in political and linguistic, but not religious terms, clearly separating the secular Tamil community from religion. The reconstitution of Tamil identity in the context of war is not without religious components, yet the LTTE are careful to avoid dividing the Catholic, Protestant and Hindu segments of the Tamil minority which would weaken the struggle for Tamil Eelam.
6. In the fertile eastern plain, a system of matrilineal, matrilocal kinship organization is a distinctive feature of Tamil society (McGilvray 1982 a, 1989); however, matrilocal marriage patterns are now undergoing change in the wake of massive displacement, the loss of a generation of men, the recent increases of young women LTTE recruits and desperate economic paralysis. Throughout the region matrielan organization is still linked to local goddess cults. Under the prevailing conditions of war, the re-working of ritual in goddess cults on the east coast has differed from religious change in those areas of Sri Lanka which are said to have experienced a disintegration of kinship society as a result of rapid urbanization. For a discussion of religious change in urbanized areas, see Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere's *Buddhism transformed* (1988).
7. Surviving is not always sufferable, as is tragically proven by the increased numbers of suicides committed by youth, or by despairing parents whose children are caught in the political struggle, and as my field notes document, sometimes even by entire families after repeated experiences of abuse and assault inside their homes.
8. Complaints of individuals suffering inner trauma following rape, torture or attempted suicide in Batticaloa often include *saktiyinmai* ("lifelessness"), a term that evokes the inverse of the empowerment of *sakti*.
9. I have related a female oracle's description of how she became engaged in a close relationship with the local goddess *Pattirakâliyamman*, and in *vâkku solluratu*, in a paper entitled, "Violence, suffering, Amman: questions of agency in Sri Lanka's eastern war zone" presented at a conference on "Violence against women: ideologies and victimization" sponsored by the Joint Committee on South Asia of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, March 28-31, 1996, Colombo, Sri Lanka. A version of this paper is to appear in *Violence, agency and the self*, edited by Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds (forthcoming).

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10. During investigative sittings before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal and Disappearances, surviving family members of the mass summary executions of noncombatants at the Saturukondan army camp, Batticaloa, on September 9, 1990, while weeping, recalled the "voices of distress and pain, cries for help, pleading for mercy," and "indescribable voices of agony," five years after the reprisal killings. Surviving family members have considered placing a memorial to those whose lives were lost at a nearby temple and lotus tank, but this remains only a wish because they fear the public commemoration of these deaths would incite further retaliatory action on the part of the security forces. Reprisal killings by the security forces have been permitted with impunity in the eastern war zone for years -- some cases have been investigated by commissions of inquiry or bodies with lesser powers, but investigations have not produced prosecutions of those responsible.
11. Under the Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) prisoners can be detained for an unlimited period (Amnesty International December 1995). The PTA, which provides no safeguards on conditions of detention, permits renewable administrative orders for detention without judicial review which can be retroactively applied. People are reported to have been incarcerated under the PTA, which defines "terrorism" very broadly, for more than five years without having a court order or even a charge filed against them (INFORM 1995). In *Sri Lanka: a bitter harvest*, Elizabeth Nissan points out: "Despite maintaining a democratic parliamentary system since independence, Sri Lanka has in practice been ruled under a declared state of emergency for well over 26 of the past 42 years, with emergency law operative in all or part of the country.... the PTA and emergency powers have contributed to the ability of the security forces and the government to commit serious violations of human rights with impunity. They dispense with the normal safeguards against arbitrary detention, disappearance and torture that are found in the ordinary law, and thus facilitate abuse" (1996:33). Imposition of strict limits on the extent of emergency powers requires revision of the constitution and judicial review of existing legislation.
12. Well-known local forms of the goddess who speak through Batticaloa's oracles include *Kaliyamman, Pattirakâliyamman, Mariyamman, Pecciyamman, Tirôpataiyamman, Katalacciyamman*, and *Kannakiyamman*. The god *Murukan* and the goddesses' male guardian deities, most commonly *Virapattîran*, *Vairavar* and *Kattavarayan* also speak during possession trance.
13. Arthur and Joan Kleinman have written: "Studies of dissociation show that when individuals and small groups are under great pressure of traumatizing occurrence or other deeply disturbing events, there is a focusing of attention and narrowing of the field of awareness away from what is menacing toward absorption in a safer place. That place may be one's imaginings, an alternative self, or concentration of a highly focused part of the social field. Perception, imagination, and memory are absorbed into that particular focus" (1994:717).
14. See Gananath Obeyesekere's *The cult of the goddess Pattini* (1984). Moreover, the creativity of those who are profoundly engaged in work with ritual and collective/personal symbols in Sri Lanka is explored in the pre-war

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writings of Gananath Obeyesekere (1977, 1978, 1981) as well as in *The work of culture* (1990).

15. Rituals of "cursing" and retribution have been reported in the urbanized south of the island. See Gananath Obeyesekere (1978) and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988). "Sorcery" (*sûniyam, seykai)* practices in Batticaloa are contained within Tamil interpersonal relationships, and are not extended to include the occupying security forces, who are viewed in the interior of the district as "people from outside."

16. My fieldnotes contain the following case, which is condensed here: parents from a small Tamil village near Eravur visited an oracle about their son who had travelled to Sweden through an illegal travel agency for two lakhs -- approximately $4,000. U.S. This is the minimum fee; the "better" illegal travel agencies ask $10,000 U.S. The son was languishing in a Swedish immigration prison. He hadn't written for a long time, and the parents were deeply concerned. During the interaction, the oracle lay flat in the sand, and then cocked one leg over the other, jiggling the raised foot in a thoughtful rhythm, with one arm bent behind her neck (Assuming a European body position is but one example of her transgressive creativity.) The oracle complained, in the son's voice, about the food in the prison and about not having a job. As she portrayed him, the son seemed to be feeling miserable. Then the oracle sat up and told the parents to write a letter that would calm him and not upset him. There are dozens of letters placed on the shrine, where *mantirams* will be uttered over them before they are mailed to family members who have joined the vast Tamil diaspora. She ordered them to bring *muntiriyamparuppu* (cashews) to be blessed on the shrine before sending them to him by post. When he eats these cashews, according to the oracle, he will be compelled to write.

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NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA AND THE TAMILS*

S. Arasaratnam

Of all the stress and strains on national integrity in the new states of Asia and Africa, none are more persistent or fissiparious as the conflicting loyalties to a language-culture unit. Certainly in South Asia, in the past two and a half decades of the history of these independent states, this has emerged as the single most cohesive factor in human group relationship. Its significance has consistently been underestimated by well-meaning imperialist policy-makers and by nationalist partisans of integration as well as by champions of dominant language groups within a state. Nehru was so struck by his work on the Linguistic Provinces Committee to utter in sheer exasperation: "The inquiry has been in some ways an eye opener for us... Some of the ablest men in the country came before us and confidently and emphatically stated the language in this country stood for and represented culture, race, history, individuality, and finally a sub-nation."[1] In retrospect, it seems a pity that the eyes of some of India's neighbours, particularly Pakistan and Sri Lanka, were not opened in a similar manner. For, in succeeding years, such sentiments were to be voiced in many countries by a countless number of people in more violent language and much blood was shed in efforts to achieve these ideas in reality. The anthropologist Edmund Leach describes the role of language in social relations very succinctly when, speaking of the language-culture units of Upper Burma, he says:

> For a man to speak one language rather than another is a ritual act, it is a statement about one's personal status; to speak the same language as one's neighbours expresses solidarity with those neighbours, to speak a different language from one's neighbours expresses social distance or even hostility.[2]

These sentiments are of wide application to many of the plural societies of southern Asia.

This article is a reprint of chapter 16 in the 1979 edition of *Collective identities*, Colombo: Marga. Minor editorial adjustments have been made.

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In India, the overweaning presence of the religious problem, the Hindu-Muslim confrontation, seemed to take people's minds away from the potentially more dynamic linguistic pull. To Indian nationalists, and subsequently to many commentators on the Indian 'problem,' communalism meant the religious variety. Dazzled by the success of the Islamic separatist movement, it was possible to continue to define communalism as "the affirmation of the religious community as a political group"[3] and as "that ideology which emphasizes as the social, political and economic unit, the group adherents of each religion, and emphasizes the distinctions, even the antagonism, between such groups."[4] In Sri Lanka, there was no religious group antagonism powerful enough to distract attention from the potentially stronger language-culture loyalty. In fact, elements of the situation that made Islamic separatism a political force to contend with India were already there, though not so visible on the surface. In the pre-colonial period, particularly in the 1930s, when the religious communalism of India was gathering momentum, colonial officials did not realise the significance of multi-linguistic culture in these countries. Language and linguistic culture as totem poles of loyalty to its adherents were not obvious in the colonial period, as all such were at best sub-cultures living under the shadow of the dominant British culture, represented by the pre-eminence of English education and those proficient in it. There was no necessity to mobilise forces of language-culture over an extended period as there were as yet no long-term prises to be fought for and no danger of aggression by a neighbouring and rival culture. All were equal in their subordination and equal in their isolation.

In Sri Lanka, though there were early signs of competition and even conflict among the two major groups, it was assumed that this was a competition among the elites of these two groups and did not involve any basic conflict of interest between members in the mass. Thus, it was common among perceptive observers of politics to talk of communalism as a "middle class" phenomenon, meaning thereby a jockeying for positions between English-educated professionals among the communities.[5] This view was reinforced by the nature and issues of the controversy between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The prominent Tamil leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were in the forefront of the movement to create a Ceylonese nation-consciousness and to use this consciousness to wrest constitutional concessions from a reluctant colonial administration.[6] In this respect they were no different from their Indian counterparts, the early liberal leaders of the Indian National Congress. But

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the Tamil identity was soon evidenced in the first fissions in the incipient nationalist movement over allocation of seats in the Legislative Council. When the newly formed Ceylon National Congress sat down to draw up a scheme of constitutional reform, they could not agree on the proportion of seats as between Sinhalese and Tamils.[7] This agreement led to the almost complete withdrawal of Tamil support from the Congress, who then began to form their own political parties -- a pattern that was to be repeated to the present day. This is a significant step in that it begins the first attempt to mobilise the community for a political purpose, though admittedly the early political parties were by no means instruments for the successful mobilisation of the whole community, but only organised pressure groups of the educated classes.

The Tamil leadership at this time had not yet seen Tamil interests threatened to such a point as to be impelled to collaborate with the British and to thwart the country's progress towards self rule. For much of this period, in fact right up to the traumatic years in communal relations, 1956-1961, Tamil elites have been pulled between an all-island territorial nationalism and the necessity of safeguarding the interests of the community. In many aspects they were the pioneers of Ceylonese nationalism and were self-conscious of their ability to bury linguistic and ethnic loyalties into a modern secular, territorial nationalism of the Indian model. It was partly because of this early weakness of the Tamil identity that colonial officials were able to ignore demands for communal weightage in representation and to hope that the imposition of a territorial representative system would reduce the edge of communal loyalties and contribute to welding the many communities into one nation.

It is interesting to note that, at the very time that the Simon Commission and the Round Table Conference were deliberating on schemes for electoral and constitutional safeguards for minorities in India, the Donoughmore Commissioners were rejecting this solution and pinning their faith on the progress of national integration through increased political participation of all sections of the population. Consequently, the Donoughmore Constitution rejected all communal representation, conceded manhood suffrage and recommended a territorially-based electoral system.[8] This left the relative the Sinhalese and Tamil representative at a ratio of 5 to 1, in place of the 2 to 1 formula on which the representation of the Legislative Council of 1924 was based, and which had been tentatively agreed to between the Tamil leaders and a segment of the Sinhalese leadership, though the agreement was not confirmed by the Congress.[9] The

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Tamils reacted forcefully to this and undertook their first boycott of the constitution and four Tamil constituencies in the Northern Province did not return members to the first State Council elected under the Donoughmore constitution in 1931.

The studied risk taken by the Donoughmore Commissioners to open the floodgates of the political participation with a view to elevating political conflict and competition to ideological and national levels was an utter failure. Its members did not have the later experience of newly independent Afro-Asian states to guide them and infact the politicisation of the masses had the opposite effect of strengthening particularism and communalism. For a long time the Tamils were effectively shut out of political power and the feeling of non-belonging may be said to date from this period. The British government was gradually yielding power to a Sinhalese government. The conservatism of the Sinhalese leaders, as contrasted with the contemporary Indian nationalist leadership, and their contentment with the pace of political progress removed the need on the part of the British official to cultivate balancing elements in the country. If the British had encouraged, as they had done in India, the Tamil movement in Sri Lanka in the 1930s it is very likely that this movement would have grown into a formidable element long before it did and thus may have altered the nature of the constitutional settlement of 1947. The lack of British recognition, the relative moderation of the Sinhalese leadership of this time, and, most important of all, the persistence of the nationalist integrative factors, helped in holding the communal problem within its bounds at a time when the constitution was not one which safeguarded minority rights in a multi-communal state. Despite the overwhelming Sinhalese majority in the legislature, nothing was done to shut out the Tamils from the growing nation-consciousness. Indeed, there were a number of alleged administrative acts of discrimination, but none of these affected the Tamils as a community. In 1944, when the State Council passed a resolution on the official language of the country, it was decided that both Sinhalese and Tamil should have such status. In 1945, a Select Committee appointed by the State Council reported on the implementation of the proposal to make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages.[10]

When the reform of the constitution and the progress to fully self-governing status was being considered in 1943-46, the Tamils had the last chance to influence the making of a constitution which they could accept and participate in without detriment to their essential community interests. The Tamil leadership was somewhat late in waking up to this opportunity,

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having been lulled into inactivity by the relative quiescence of political activity during the war and the relative reasonableness of the Sinhalese leadership with which a section of the Tamils were actively collaborating. When some Tamil leaders bestirred themselves and formed a political party, the Tamil Congress, in 1944 to articulate their position and present a united front on the constitution, it was not too great a success and did not have much pull with the colonial authorities or with the Commission appointed to recommend a new constitution.

The Tamil Congress, under its leader G.G. Ponnambalam, took off from the old controversy on which the Ceylon National Congress had split up and over which the Tamils had unsuccessfully boycotted the Donoughmore Constitution. It took as its central issue the question of numbers in the it popularly came to be known. Under this scheme the Sinhalese, as legislature and asked for a balanced representation or 'fifty-fifty' as the majority community, would not hold more than 50% of the seats in the legislature and the other communities would, in sum, share the remaining 50% of seats. This balance would be reflected in the executive and there would be a series of checking clauses against discriminating legislation. Despite a prolonged ten-hours session of presentation to the Soulbury Commission, Ponnambalam was unable to present a convincing case, on the basis of existing governmental and administrative actions, or on the basis of a genuine desire and fear on the part of all minority groups, that such drastic checks were necessary against Sinhalese dominance.[12] Far from presenting themselves as a communal colossus waiting to crush under their feet the numerous other minorities, the Sinhalese appeared to an impartial observer to be an unorganised, disadvantaged people, relatively backward in education and with large pockets of rural poverty and indebtedness. That is to say, the large Sinhalese majority had not yet been misused to rouse fears and suspicions among minorities.

Even more than was the case with the Tamils, Sinhalese nationalist leaders belonged to an elite group of English-educated and propertied social classes, largely operating from the urban centres. Regional and class division were deep in Sinhalese society, with a major division between low-country and up-country Sinhalese with diverse and even hostile interests. In all the censuses of the pre-independence period, the Sinhalese were categorised into these two broad divisions and it was not conceivable that there was an ethnic unity of the Sinhalese people to be mobilised for purposes of political power or political domination.

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At the time the constitution was being framed the concern was with numbers in the legislature and not so much with the entrenchment of anti-discriminatory provisions in the legislature. The influence of the British constitution, relying more on unwritten provisions, conventions and precedents, was great. The Indian constitution, with its extended provisions protecting individual and group rights, was yet to be enacted. The Sinhalese Board of Ministers was conscious of the advantage of carrying the minorities along and giving the impression of an united front for self-government. Without being able to concede the extravagant demand for a perfect balance in representation between the Sinhalese and the minorities, as put forward by G.G Ponnambalam, they conceded a relationship of 57% to 43% as between Sinhalese and others in legislature.[13] It was, as it appears now, a tactical error that the Tamil leaders did not grasp this offer at that time, but stuck to their extreme demands. Consequently, the Soulbury commissioners, who shared the view of the Donoughmore commissioners on communalism, did not accept any communal ratios in representation, but devised a territorial scheme which gave the Sinhalese, in the first election of 1947, a total of 67% of the seats in the legislature. Even this numerical relationship was not written into the constitution, but was the result of a territorial delimitation which was open to any subsequent government to jerrymander.[14]

What happened subsequently to this numerical relationship is a pathetic story -- at least as far as the minorities are concerned. In 1949, the disfranchisement of about 900,000 Tamils of immediate Indian origin gave the Sinhalese 73% of legislative seats in the 1952 elections. With the increase of the number of electorates in the island at the 1959 delimitation, the Sinhalese increased their representation to 78% and now they control 80% of the seats in the legislature. This political ascendancy gave Sinhalese leaders the ability to alter the constitution, which they have done, and to hold minorities at their mercy in respect of fundamental rights.

The Soulbury constitution, under which Sri Lanka was governed till 1872, attempted to go some way towards providing protection to minorities against discriminatory legislation. Article 29, Section 2 of the Constitution had clauses which restricted the rights of Parliament to legislate on matters affecting particular communities or religious groups. Subsequent history shows that these provisions were not very effective, as they have not prevented two major acts, in the teeth of protests from the minorities, on citizenship and on language. In the constitution of 1972 even these safeguards have been removed and a Parliament which has an 80%

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Sinhalese representation has been made absolutely sovereign and its laws are not challengeable in the ordinary courts of law. Thus, the minorities, and especially the Tamils, who, at the beginning of the constitutional process, had an influence and presence in the legislature enabling them to shape the course of political change, now are reduced to a non-entity, dependent on the mercies of the majority community. To emphasise this process, the Buddhist faction of the Sinhalese leadership has succeeded in writing into the constitution a clause that says: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly its shall be the duty of the State to foster and protect Buddhism, while assuring to all religions the rights granted..."[15] Chapter VI of the constitution establishes certain "Fundamental Rights and Freedoms" of a restricted nature, but even these are qualified by a subsection which stipulates that the exercise of these fundamental rights and freedoms shall be subject to such restriction as the law prescribes.[16] In a recent case brought by the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, where the strength of the guarantee of these rights was put to test, the Constitutional Court ruled that the fundamental rights of citizens were subject to such restrictions as the laws passed by the National State Assembly may prescribe.[17]

The coalescence of Tamil political opinion after independence and the growth of separatist sentiments must be seen parallel with the rising tide of Sinhalese nationalism at the same time. Among both communities, before independence, there had been no sustained attempt to mobilise public opinion by the use of traditional, or what are sometimes known as primordial, loyalties. There was some attempt at this among the Tamils in the 1947 elections, but there was no atmosphere of communal tensions or an actual or imminent threat to communal interests. The thrust of contemporary election propaganda was to unite the voter behind the banner of the Tamil Congress with a view to giving this party maximum manoeuvreability in Parliament. The use of cultural factors of cohesion or other aspects of tradition that strike an emotive response assumed a political potent form among the Sinhalese in the early 1950s. Solomon Bandaranaike, who had encouraged ethnic-based nationalism with the formation of his Sinhala Maha Sabha around 1934, broke away from the United National Party to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in 1951, a thinly disguised bigger brother of the Sabha, attempting to socially broaden the base of nationalism and its appeal. Neither the Sinhalese nor Tamils responded readily to the first manipulation of communal factors at the hustings in 1952. In the following elections of 1956, however, the response

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was overwhelming. The political climate had changed fundamentally in the intervening years.

It was not inevitable, however, that Sinhalese communalism should come to conflict with its Tamil counterpart. A Buddhist renaissance has nothing in it that would be damaging to Hindu interests. Nor would a recognition of the Sinhala language necessarily hurt the functioning of the Tamil language. There were enough precedents in pre-European history to suggest the co-existence of the two cultures. But the nature of Sinhalese revivalism in the way it developed from 1954 made such co-existence impossible and conflict a necessity. Inherent in the movement to make Sinhala *only* the official language was a new assertion of an exclusive right in the island and an implied tolerance of others only as subordinate and secondary. Though not expressly stated, one sees here the first assertion of a desire to assimilate and reduce to oneness the other cultural traditions of the island. This was emphasised by the direction of the Buddhist renaissance which, in its turn, asserted the religious version of the exclusivist doctrine, Sri Lanka was the island of the *Dhamma*, the *Dhammadipa*, the 2500 years old home of the Buddha *Dhamma* and all its institutions. A total equation of the history of the island of Sri Lanka with the home of the Sinhalese race and the Buddhist faith brings, in the eyes of the extreme partisans, interchangeability between Ceylonese nationalism above, or even side by side with, its Sinhalese component. By this definition all other cultural components become alien and therefore need not be recognised in the nation-state.[18]

This redefinition of nationalism strengthened by a Sinhalese electoral pre-ponderance enabling its enthronement as state policy, produced predicatable reactions among the strongest minority. The Tamil community in Sri Lanka has elements equally susceptible to mobilisation and manipulation by traditional and parochial appeals. It has embryonic elements for the whipping up of nationalist emotions. It had an authentic memory of shared historical experience. Even from the evidence of the Sinhalese chronicles the Tamils connections with the island were almost as old as the early Sinhalese settlements. Tamil rulers had usurped power periodically and ruled the island and pockets of Tamil settlements made their appearance from the early centuries of the Christian era. The Tamil language-culture unit has distinctive characteristics and continuity in cultural elements which were firmly implanted in Sri Lanka over centuries. Perhaps the most powerful identifying factor was the fact of independent political power that the Tamils were able to wield in north and northeast Sri Lanka

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from the thirteenth century till its deprivation at the hands of the Portuguese in 1621. During these years, the Tamils of Sri Lanka acquired their single most treasured possession, a territorial homeland which thus served to underline their attribute of nationality and distinctiveness from, and non-assimilability by, the Sinhalese. This is further underlined by the fact that other old Tamil settlements in the western seaboard and the north central districts have been assimilated by the Sinhalese. The Northern and Eastern Provinces remained areas of overwhelming Tamil concentration. The possession of independent political power and of a clear demarcated geographic area are the twin props of Tamil identity which have enabled them to put up a plausible resistance to the advance of Sinhalese nationalism over the last two decades.

Predictably, the aims of Sinhalese hegemony has been to break down this geographic barrier. For many centuries the frontier between Sinhalese and Tamil territories had been a no-man's land of jungle and malarial swamps. In the twentieth century, and more rapidly after independence, a policy of jungle clearing, irrigation and systematic colonisation was followed. Before the rise of inter-communal tensions, this was looked upon as national agricultural policy, intended to draw the population away from the dense concentrations of the west and south west. Latterly, however, it had been drawn in to the vortex of communal politics and the Tamils saw in it a slow penetration of an alien Sinhalese people into their traditional homelands. It has undoubtedly had this effect. Over the past twenty-five years, overwhelmingly Tamil districts, such as Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Batticaloa, have recorded drastic increases in the Sinhalese content of the population, enabling the creation of new electorates with majority Sinhalese representation in traditionally Tamil areas.[19]

The practical advantages of this division of the island into two ethno-linguistic areas was poignantly demonstrated in the communal riots of 1958. The safest and most peaceful areas were those with unmixed populations, while the place of the worst excesses were those racially mixed cities like Colombo and the newly colonised lands of north central and eastern Sri Lanka. A massive shift of population, almost like an exchange of hostages and prisoners in a regular war, took place, with each racial group gratefully returning to the bosom of its own patrimony.[20] This is a phenomenon that contrasts with the Chinese and Indian problem in Malaysia. With a far better population ratio, 40% and 10% respectively of the total population, the Chinese and Indians are unable to take a firm stand

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for language and other ethnic rights against the Malays, largely because they do not hold a part of the country where they can establish their own cultural institutions. The Tamils of Sri Lanka demonstrated in the course of their agitation over the years 1956-1964 that, whatever the Language Act throughout the country, this writ cannot be enforced in their parts. The belated recognition of Tamil as a regional language is as much a result of the consciousness of this practical difficulty as an attempt at political appeasement.

The most recent tactic of the government is to try and penetrate the very heartland of the Tamil country by utilising fissions in Tamil society. The caste system came readily to hand and some minority depressed caste leaders among Hindus offered themselves as agents and supporters of the Sinhalese. A movement is on foot to convert them to Buddhism, educate them in Sinhalese, and thus draw them away from the mainstream Tamil life. These attempts are similar to what happen among the untouchables in India, where they had longer history, with no lasting or substantial success. In Sri Lanka, the Tamils will be very vulnerable if this is even marginally successful, for it will break up the Tamil identity that may well bring in a general process of assimilation. Already a numerically small minority, their further fragmentation will reduce whatever political leverage they have and, more important, break up the territorial solidarity they have so far enjoyed in the northern third of the island. This is a another example of the assimilationist ambitions of Sinhalese nationalism, an aim attempted also with the Tamils in the plantations where efforts were made to abolish Tamil schools and educate them in Sinhalese. This was a disastrous failure because the plantation Tamils, being recent immigrants, were deeply attached to their language, cultural and social and religious institutions and were even more distinct culturally from the Sinhalese, making assimilation a well-nigh impossible task.

'Tamil ethnic nationalism, therefore, has developed as a phenomenon to be taken into account in Ceylonese politics and national integration. It has two sources of fertilisation and enrichment. It is founded, on the one hand, in the undisputed antiquity of the Tamil cultural tradition which has always been a source of pride to Tamils even when they have migrated for centuries from their South Indian homeland. The extant artifacts of the cultural achievements of history are constantly paraded before the public eye, in a scarcely concealed feeling of membership of a superior culture. This is an attitude all Dravidian people have cultivated because of the necessity to defend the integrity and autonomy of their

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culture in the face of Indo-Aryan claims of the Aryanisation of all India. A second source of Ceylon Tamil nationalism is the emphatic assertion of Sri Lanka as a legitimate and ancient home of the Tamils and of Tamil institutions. Nothing annoys the Tamils of Sri Lanka more than the argument, used by Sinhalese to placate Tamil opinion, that their culture and that language are preserved adequately and are flourishing in South India and there was, therefore, no need to make a special provision in Sri Lanka. The Tamils react to this by emphasising their separateness from India, the longevity of the Tamil tradition in Sri Lanka and by asserting, with dubious historical arguments, their contemporaneity with Sinhalese settlements in Sri Lanka. Much to the annoyance of the Sinhalese, they claim that many elements of contemporary Sinhalese culture are of Tamil origin. They also exaggerate some established facts concerning the influence exerted by the Tamils on the development of Sinhalese language and institutions. There is, thus, a dualism in current Tamil attitudes, one facet of which encouraged the identity with Tamils across the Palk Straits, the other emphasising the naturalisation of the Tamils in the island and demanding equality with the Sinhalese as co-settlers and co-founders of its civilisation.

A conscious and deliberate policy of assimilation generally brings about an opposite reaction. From 1956 there has taken place a drawing together of ranks among all segments of Tamil society. Politically this led to the ascendency of the Federal Party from the general elections of 1956, since when it has emerged as the most popular representative of Tamil opinion. It sought a solution to the problem of the resurgence of Sinhala nationalism in altering the constitution from a unitary to a federal structure. The Tamil areas would form a state in the federation and would then have considerable autonomy. The centre would have power over a given list of subjects and all residuary authority would accrue to the states. In their submission to the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly that sat in 1971-72, they presented their proposals for a model constitution. Needless to say this was rejected by the Committee so that the Federal Party, together with other Tamil representatives, boycotted the formal inauguration of the Republic of Sri Lanka in May 1972.

Even more significant than the political movement is the cultural revivalism and the steps towards economic re-orientation. Culturally, when the status of the language was threatened by the Official Language Act and by subsequent legislation, there was an upsurge of emotion that united all classes of the population. The lead was taken in this by the English-educated intelligentsia which continues to direct the cultural and the political

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movement. The English-educated intellectuals were active from the 1950s, writing on the history and cultural of the Tamils and unearthing evidence demonstrating the longevity of the Tamil presence in the island. They have been responsible for marshaling a valid body of evidence for the integrity and permanence of Tamil culture in Sri Lanka. This evidence had been utilised not only to prop up the sagging morale of the Tamils, but also to propagate the Tamil cause internationally, in petitions to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the International Commission of Jurists, Queen Elizabeth II as head of the Commonwealth and other forums of more propagandist than practical value.

Within the Tamil regions there has been a resurgence of cultural and linguistic activity. The change in the medium of education from English to Tamil went a great way to help in this development. Then there was the irresistible impact of the Sinhalese cultural renaissance, which benefitted immensely by state subvention. There was also the significant influence of the more dynamic cultural revival in South India. Jaffna and Batticaloa emerged during these years as the cultural capitals of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The cultural links with Tamil Nadu in South India were significant. They were not pronounced before the 1950s because of the insularity of the Ceylon Tamils and the concern with English education and acquisition of learning in that language. Indeed there was a conscious effort to cut themselves away from South India, a factor that hindered co-operation with the recently migrated Tamils in the plantations. The forging of cultural links with Tamil Nadu strengthened the roots of Tamil culture in Sri Lanka. It also had the effect of further exciting the latent fears of the Sinhalese.[22]

The Tamil cultural revival contributed more than anything else to forging unity on the basis of a language-cultural unit. Thus, we find a Hindu majority working hand-in-hand with Muslim and Christian minorities. These minority groups, particularly Christians, are most vociferous in identifying with Tamil linguistic nationalism and have provided organisational leadership and vocal propagandist talent. It is on this basis that a growing link is forged with the Tamils in the plantations of central Sri Lanka, between whom and the Tamils of the north and east there has been a long history of isolation and even suspicion. The plantation Tamils, who have no direct interests in the official language controversy, have begun to support the others on this and other issues. And the Tamils of the north and east, who had collaborated in the deprivation of citizenship of the

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plantation Tamils, have now taken up their case for citizenship and political rights.

The economic changes have also been far-reaching. During the period of British rule, the Tamils came to be dependent on government employment, through their proficiency in English and their acquisition of professional skills. They exhibited a knack for particular professions involving mathematical and scientific skills and were concentrated disproportionately in certain types of employment. Such concentration was one of the factors of propaganda raised against them by Sinhalese extremist nationalists. After 1956, this imbalance was redressed by government action and a number of avenues of employment were closed to the Tamils. This employment pattern had also caused a migration to Colombo and the south, thus drawing the Tamil intelligentsia away from their homelands and creating conditions for an island-wide identification. Now this drift has been arrested and even a movement of return has begun. The spread of Sinhalese in education and administration in a large part of the country has in any case made several Tamils unemployable. It has created an economic problem for the Tamils. The chief motivating factor behind the search for government employment was the increasing pressure on the land in the densely populated villages of the Jaffna Peninsula. This land became one of the most intensely cultivated areas, though lacking in surface irrigation facilities. Through a long process of sub-division, it was tilled in small plots barely sufficient to support to families that depended on them. So, when, during the nineteenth century, the opportunity to leave the land offered itself, many seized it.

Now the Tamils are thrown back to the land, willy-nilly, and the old conservatism that dissuaded migration from the ancestral village for permanent agricultural settlements elsewhere is dying down. Especially among the youth, if only for the sheer necessity of earning a living, there is a move to go south of the Peninsula into that broad, wooded but fertile area up to the frontiers of the Sinhalese villages. Professional men, employed in Colombo or elsewhere, began to invest in land in this area after 1956 and a "back to the land movement," encouraging independence from government favours, has seized the population. The crisis in food supplies after 1970, caused by a serious shortage of foreign exchange to pay for imported foods, has given an opportunity which the Tamil is taking advantage of. This has staved off what might otherwise have been a severe unemployment problem among Tamil educated youth and what might well have become the nucleus for political discontent. One long-term effect has

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been to encourage the separation from the Sinhalese, to entrench the demographic division of the island, and to make stronger the particularist loyalties and the feeling for defence of their own homelands.

Till 1970, Tamil political opinion was contained within bounds by the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress. Tamils sought solutions to their problems within the framework of the united nation-state. They were thinking along the lines of the Indian experience where cultural diversity was recognised and protected in the constitution. In India no regional culture felt itself threatened because it had its own political entity within which it was supreme. Though there were considerable cultural links with Tamil revivalism across the Park Straits, there was no hint of extra-national political links with South Indian Dravidian groups. The Sinhalese fear of such were always there, but these were unrealistic -- being founded on ancient historical memories rather than hard contemporaneous data. After 1970, this is no longer true. The absence of a political settlement of the Tamil problem, growing unemployment and the rise of political adventuresomeness of the style of the Guevarist insurrection of April 1971 have contributed to the rise of political extremism among the Tamils. Groups have appeared which are more extremist than the Federal Party, deny the commitment to a united Sri Lanka, and are not reluctant to seek support across the Straits. Secret terrorist groups have made their appearance among the Tamil youths with an utopian dream of independence and the establishment of a separate state in the north and east.

The argument used is that economically the Tamil areas are very viable units, independent of the rest of the country, self-sufficient in their food requirements and with plenty of land for further development. Culturally it will mean the enthronement of the Tamil language and Tamil culture to the position of pre-eminence in the state. The Bangladesh crisis stirred up these ambitions further and there is also the lingering hope of assistance from India in the event of a similar movement in Sri Lanka. A view that is canvassed is that, in the event of a successful extreme left wing putsch in southern Sri Lanka, the Tamils would declare their independence with India's help. India's help, in such an event, is assumed because the left wing groups in the south are known to be Maoist. Trincomalee, a prize which major powers of the Indian Ocean would covet, could be traded by the Tamils in return for support and economic assistance. Thus Tamil independence would be won in the wake of great power rivalry. These and other such arguments, crazy and unrealistic a short while back, are now being bandied about as possibilities. Without subscribing to such alarmist

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notions, one must concede that a prolonged political crisis, a situation of armed insurrection or even a grave economic dislocation may find the country without a resilient national consciousness necessary to overcome these challenges.[23]

The notion of a separate state has moved away from the wild imagination of the lunatic fringes in Tamil politics into the centre of Tamil political calculations from September 1973. The Tamil United Front, formed early in 1972 as a coalition of the major political parties and public opinion among the Tamils, has moved to a new activism in support of Tamil demands for language and citizenship rights and devolution of power. A civil disobedience campaign was inaugurated on 2nd October 1973, with the public contravention of some elected laws of the country. The Federal Party, the major constituent unit of the Tamil United Front, has at its annual convention held in September 1973 resolved that the "Tamils are in every way fully equipped to be regarded as a separate nation and to live as a separate nation and that the only path for them to follow is the establishment of their rights to self-rule in their traditional homelands based on the internationally recognised principle of the right to self-determination of every nation."[24] The stage is set for what will prove to be an uphill struggle for the Tamils, if they choose to follow their leaders and make the enormous sacrifice necessary for the realisation of their aim. In the context of a growing food crisis and threatening national bankruptcy, the effect of such a conflict on the country as a whole may be imagined.

It took a long time for the Tamils of Sri Lanka to move towards this position of postulating a separate Tamil nationalism in the island of Sri Lanka. The above review of the political evolution of the Tamil community has shown that, right till the very last phase of the island's politics, the Tamils had conceived of their political future within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. They had recognised their position as a national minority and sought to press for rights and safeguards that minority peoples all over the world strive for. The most extreme demand of that earlier era, that of balanced representation, was itself symbolic of the desire to participate fully in a unitary polity. When the concept of federation was tentatively put forward for the first time in 1947, it was looked on with suspicion by the vast majority of Tamil intellectuals and did not catch on immediately with the masses either. It was the political campaign of 1955-56 which served to swing opinion behind federalism, not so such as a well-thought plan for Tamil salvation, but as a counter to the developments in the south, a show of unity to meet effectively the challenge from that direction.

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It is interesting to contrast the separatist sentiments and the growth of particularist movements in India and Sri Lanka. One basic difference is that no language-culture group feels itself a minority in relation to the totality of the Indian polity. Each group feels it has an equal share, even if indeed it does not do so in reality because of the numerical preponderance of the Hindi-speaking block, and in any case it feels safe in the autonomy and inviolability of its own distinctly demarcated territory and its interests within that territory. This is the reason why Tamil nationalism, which upsurged in the 1960s and resulted in the enthronement of a party (DMK) which represented this nationalism, could achieve its ends and yet coexist within the umbrella of Indian nationalism and Indian unity. The extravagance of Tamil nationalist sentiment and propaganda in India was not matched by extremism in action. Subsequently, other language-culture nationalisms have erupted -- Punjab, Marathi, Telugu more significantly -- and have been able to achieve their aims without the destruction of national unity.

The kind of sentiments and propaganda that aroused Tamil nationalism in South India in the 1950s and early 1960s is beginning to make its appearance increasingly in Sri Lanka in the 1970s. Part of the explanation for this is that the social and economic climate is now more receptive to such ideas. The Western-educated, unity conscious elite of the earlier era are gradually disappearing. The king-pins of the administrative, and professional bureaucracy, the Tamil civil servants, legal officials, medical specialists, engineers and university professors are now being displaced by the new Sinhalese elite. Certain classes of occupation, by virtue of the language qualification, are barred to Tamils. Because of recruitment from the two language media -- Sinhala and Tamil -- it is possible to maintain unwritten communal quotas in employment. Of most of telling effect are the regulations adopted since 1970 to impose quotas on university admissions. This has served to shut out from tertiary education a number of Tamil youths with qualifications which in most countries would have readily earned them university places. There is created a group of youths employed at levels below their ability, denied promotions because of the language barrier or denied further education because of the restricted admissions policy. To this must be added the large army of school leavers who now find it far more difficult than their Sinhalese counterparts to secure jobs. There is, thus, substantial fodder for communal discontent. It could be remembered that college and high school youths were important agents of the Tamil nationalism of South India and continue to be guardians

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of Tamil language and cultural interests today. It is left to be seen whether the Tamil youth of Sri Lanka develop such roles in that society.

The foundations of a Ceylonese nation are yet to be laid. The secular, territorial nationalism was obviously a Western model and hence was discarded as elitist and reactionary. What has taken its place is fissiparous though populist, is restrictive horizontally, though penetrating vertically. The Tamils possess many of the characteristics that contribute to modern nationhood. They have a shared historical experience, a continuous linguistic and cultural tradition, a common way of life, the result of a traditional system of beliefs and values dominated by Saivism and, most important of all, a defined territory as homeland. Far from breaking down sectional loyalties, recent Ceylonese history has strengthened them and correspondingly weakened the all-island identity. Sinhala nationalism which seeks to pose as Ceylonese nationalism incorporates nothing of the Tamil tradition and is even seen to be in conflict with it. A graduated scale of nationalism, with concentric circles of loyalties, the larger subsuming the smaller without being in conflict with it, is yet to evolve in Sri Lanka.

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DIVERGENT NARRATIVES:
Dravidian and Eelamist Tamil Nationalisms[1]

Sankaran Krishna

> Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for the principle of nationality ... *Ernest Renan*

Introduction

In a speech delivered to the United Services Institute of India in New Delhi on March 10, 1989, the former Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, Jyotindra Nath Dixit, outlined three main clusters of reasons for India's high-profile diplomatic and military intervention into Sri Lanka's ethnic struggle during the 1980s. His first and third reasons had to do with the issue of Tamil nationalism, both in Sri Lanka and in India. (The second dealt with India's geopolitical "compulsions" and need not detain us here). Dixit's first and third reasons merit a close analysis:

> [1] -- in 1978, the politically aware Tamils had come to the conclusion that their future lies only in the creation of a separate State, which can be carved out of Sri Lanka, where they can have Tamil as a language and Hinduism as a religion ... we went through the trauma of the same doctrine being applied to our country in 1945-46, as a result of which we were partitioned. Since then, our effort and experiment has been to build a society which rejected the theory that the territorial nation-state does always have to depend on language and religion ... So, the first reason we went to Sri Lanka was the interest to preserve our own unity; to ensure the success of a very difficult experiment that we have been carrying out ourselves ... And what the Tamils in Sri Lanka were being compelled to follow, in terms of their life, which would have affected our polity. Because let us not forget that the first voice of secessionism in the Indian Republic was raised in Tamil Nadu in the mid-sixties. This was exactly the same principle of Tamil ethnicity, Tamil language. So, in a manner, our interest in the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka, Tamil aspirations in Sri Lanka was based

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on maintaining our own unity, our own integrity, our own identity in the manner in which we have been trying to build our society (Dixit 1989:249).

[3] -- They [Tamilians in India] felt that that if we did not rise in support of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka, we are not standing by our own Tamils; and if that is so, then in the Tamil psyche, Tamil subconscious, the question arose: is there any relevance or validity of our being part of a larger Indian political identity, if our deeply felt sentiments are not respected? So, it was a compulsion ... which could not be avoided by any elected Government in this country (Dixit 1989:250-51).

A number of crucial insights, assumptions and contradictions are contained in these two quoted passages. For example, the first reason avers that India had to intervene in Sri Lanka *against* Eelam because of its negative implications for India's unity and sovereignty, while the third reason contains the idea that India had to intervene *on behalf* of Sri Lankan Tamils in order to convince Tamil Nadu that it mattered in the Indian "experiment" to respect their "deeply felt sentiments." At a certain level, these two compulsions run in opposed directions, an opposition that goes unrecognized by Dixit. (It is also, incidentally, one of the important sources of the inchoate and thoroughly confused character of Indian intervention into Sri Lanka. Until the very end, the Indians were never sure what it is they wanted to accomplish in Sri Lanka and where, on some continuum spanning the snuffing out of the movement for Eelam altogether and promoting full autonomy for the Tamil regions, they desired a rendezvous with the Sri Lankan government).

Secondly, if Dixit is correct in his contention that independent India represented an experiment based on "rational" and "secular" precepts, what was the necessity to convince a minority within its boundaries of the validity of this experiment by pandering to instincts that Dixit himself characterises as based on narrow principles of ethnicity, language or religion?

There are many such contradictions and much fuzziness in Dixit's logic. What ultimately ties it all together, and superficially endows it with a semblance of coherence, are the phrases that putatively assert the commonalities of Tamil ethnic nationalisms in Sri Lanka and India, and inscribe that within a discourse of danger: "let us not forget that the first voice of secessionism in the Indian Republic was raised in Tamil Nadu in the mid-sixties;" "exactly the same principle of Tamil ethnicity, Tamil language;" "the Tamil psyche, Tamil subconscious;" "if we did not rise in

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support of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka, we are not standing by our own Tamils."

By arguing that the movement for Eelam by Sri Lankan Tamils could promote instability and (possibly) secessionism in Tamil Nadu, Dixit makes an explicit linkage between the nationalism of the Sri Lankan Tamils and the supposedly latent, secessionist aspects of Tamil nationalism in Tamil Nadu. In doing so, Dixit was representing the mainstream view of both Indian and Sri Lankan politicians, policy makers, media and a number of academic authors who have written on the subject. As with Dixit's case, in most of these representations the linkages are poorly articulated, while the argument is riddled with inaccuracies, and based on little more than unsupported assertions.

In a typical passage, P.R.Chari makes the following observation:

> Later the introduction of Tamil plantation labor from Tamil Nadu during the British colonial period led to a displacement of the local Sinhalas and the establishment of a majority Tamil population in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, raising the specter of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and the Sri Lankan Tamils jointly dominating the island's polity (1994:3).

Anyone remotely familiar with Sri Lankan history and the differences between the Indian Tamils and the Sri Lankan Tamils (not to speak of differences between northern and eastern Tamils in Sri Lanka, or between Tamils and Muslims) would find the above passage baffling. In the same article, Chari further notes that

> No doubt, these sentiments were strengthened by the historical cultural, linguistic, familial, and similar linkages existing between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils. The commercial links cementing this relationship are of special importance. They stretch back into antiquity, but more recently have been based on fishing and smuggling activities. Significantly, the LTTE leadership belongs to the fisherman caste and, consequently, has strong ties with their counterpart community in Tamil Nadu. It is, therefore, quite explicable that a vociferous section of the Tamil Nadu leadership began pressing the Union leadership to intervene vigorously in Sri Lankan affairs and secure the rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils, despite the Union government's initial reluctance to enlarge its extra-territorial responsibilities (1994: 3).

Why the Karayâr-caste dominated LTTE in Jaffna should have any more affinity with a putative (and unnamed) "counterpart community" in

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Tamil Nadu than any others is not elaborated upon, nor does Chari enlighten us as to why "therefore" it becomes explicable that this gets translated into vociferous support from Tamil Nadu for central intervention in Sri Lanka. The "historical linkages" between the two communities are, as always, merely asserted and not examined.

The eminent Sri Lankan historian, K.M. de Silva, is sometimes meticulous in presenting the weak linkages between Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism and Dravidianism in Tamil Nadu (see, for example, de Silva 1980: 551; de Silva 1986: 220-221 and 362); but, more generally echoes the view that the two nationalisms were intertwined and that, together, they represented a serious threat to Sri Lankan unity. Thus, regarding the state of affairs in the 1970s, he notes that "... the increasingly turbulent politics of the Jaffna peninsula began to be treated as an integral part of the internal politics of Tamilnadu. The DMK, effectively checked from pursuing its separatist goal in India, took vicarious pleasure in giving encouragement and support to separatist tendencies among the Tamils of Sri Lanka" (1986:272).

Later in the same book, de Silva states his case more strongly when he notes that the generation of separatist sentiments in Sri Lanka has been greatly augmented by

> ... the existence of a great reservoir of Tamil separatist sentiment and a powerful sense of Tamil ethnic identity just across the narrow and shallow seas that separate Jaffna from Tamilnadu on the Indian sub-continent. Once a separatist movement emerged among the Tamils of Sri Lanka it was fostered, nurtured and protected in Tamilnadu... (1986:324).

Mick Moore (1993: 600) avers, again without any substantiation, that "Indian support for the Tamil separatists reflected in part Delhi's persistent concerns about separatist sentiment among the Tamils of Tamil Nadu. To have failed to become involved would have risked the creation of independent strong linkages between Tamils on both sides of the Palks Straits." Among others who uncritically accept arguments regarding the close linkages between Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu are S.D. Muni (1993:65) and Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1994: 131-32).

Much of this literature begins by taking for granted what needs to be established or argued for in the first place: that Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism and Tamil Nadu's "Dravidian" nationalism were in dialogue; that they either had common origins or moved along trajectories that were similar or overlapping; that the development of one had serious implications

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for the other; and, most importantly, that Dravidianism in Tamil Nadu represented a forceful threat of secession and for the creation of a Tamil homeland.

Yet, the historical record lends itself to a very different interpretation. I argue that the origins and provocations of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism were very different from that of Dravidian Tamil nationalism in South India; indeed, one could argue that the trajectories of these two movements run almost in precisely opposite directions. For the most part, until the early 1980s, these two movements were hardly cognizant of or responsive to developments across the Palk Straits. In Sri Lanka, it was the repeated failure of accommodative politics that pushed the Tamils there into an intransigent secessionist stance. In India, on the other hand, whatever secessionist potential the Dravidian movement contained was completely snuffed out by the late 1950s itself, in large part on account of central government accommodation on issues concerning the Tamil language and because of the linguistic reorganization of states in the Indian Union, but also because the threat of secession from the Dravidian movement was never very strong in the first place.

Further, I suggest that the movement for Eelam by Sri Lankan Tamils gets a real fillip because of the events leading up to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In India, 1971 created a penchant for an aggressive regional foreign policy and a style of decision-making that combined overt diplomatic pressure on recalcitrant regimes with covert destabilisation, often using dissident minorities in such regions. After 1971, Sri Lankan Tamils began to re-evaluate the role that the central government in New Delhi, rather than Tamil Nadu, might play in a struggle for Eelam. In other words, I argue that there was nothing about the "Tamil-ness" of these two political movements that drew them together. On the contrary, it was the way in which the events of 1971 were interpreted to serve as a model that informed the actions of all four of the critical groups of actors involved (the Sri Lankan Tamil leadership, the regimes in Colombo and New Delhi, and the state government of Tamil Nadu) that creates a situation in the 1980s in which Dixit could, with a good deal of plausibility, suggest that Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism had serious implications for Indian security and integrity.

Acting on the basis of narrow and short-term political expediency, both Sinhalese regimes and those of Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi in India found it worthwhile to exaggerate the linkages between these two nationalisms which had been, in the main, unconcerned with each other until the early 1980s. Emphasising the roots of Sri Lankan Tamil

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nationalism in Tamil Nadu served Jayewardene and the Sinhalese well because they could now diminish the movement as being externally-inspired terrorism. It served the Indian governments very well in the short-run in that it offered the perfect alibi to intervene in Sri Lanka's domestic affairs. In doing so, both regimes embarked on what could well become a self-fulfilling prophecy: the disintegration of the South Asian states system on account of ethnic, linguistic and religious affinities that transcend national boundaries. This ought to embellish my point that there is nothing essentialist or teleologically predestined about such identities. Ironically, the structure of opportunity that postcolonial democratic politics inaugurates pushes matters in a direction that could yet realize the worst fears of state elites.

My effort in this essay is organised along the following lines. In the first part, I tersely summarize a Tamil narrative of the emergence of Eelamist nationalism; in the second, I draw a broad-brush history of Dravidian nationalism in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu; I next examine the degree to which these two movements may be said to share a history or have any convergence. I then assess, briefly, the impact of the events of 1971 on Sri Lankan Tamil politics and suggest that we might find an answer there as to why the two nationalisms are spoken of as being cut from the same cloth in the 1980s, rather than in some putative ethnic essentialism that straddles the Palk Straits.

Reactive Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka: a Very Brief Account

I see the main purpose of this essay as being its interpretation of the history of the Dravidian movement and the degree to which this movement remained insulated from events in Sri Lanka until the early 1980s. Accordingly, I have greatly abbreviated my discussion of the emergence of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism and its Sinhalese provocations. The brief narrative that follows is not meant to be an objective reconstruction of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism; I do, however, claim that one can abstract such a narrative out of the central texts that describe the politics of postcolonial Sri Lanka since independence. (See note 2 for references to such central texts in the narrative of Tamil nationalism).

Sri Lankan Tamils see their nationalism as the story of a reluctant transition from a politics of accommodation and desired compromise to one of violent secessionism. In large part, this has occurred on account of the Sinhalese majority's view of Sri Lanka as primarily the abode of the

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Buddhists, with the other ethnic and religious communities (mainly the Tamils) playing, at best, a supporting role. This exclusionary vision has been translated into reality in the decades since independence by the steady political, economic and socio-cultural marginalization of the Tamils.

According to this narrative, during the British colonial regime, for a variety of reasons, the Sri Lankan Tamils came to occupy a large share of the civil service bureaucracy, the middle-class professions and acquired a considerable degree of economic clout. A long-standing tradition of education, added to the fact that Christian missionary activity often centered in the northern region, gave these Tamils an early lead over their Sinhalese countrymen. Whatever the origins or reality of such Tamil "disproportionate" success, the decades since independence has seen a sharp swing in their fortunes in the opposite direction. Moreover, this marginalization has been punctuated by bouts of annihilatory violence directed against Tamils in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983.[2]

The narrative of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism is marked by a series of milestones, widely regarded by the Tamils themselves as either instances of opportunities missed or (more often) as instances of Sinhalese inability to compromise and accept Tamils as legitimate and equal citizens of the country. In a rough-and-ready chronological summarization from 1947 to 1977, these milestones in the path from desired accommodation to intransigent secession would be the following: the failure of the fifty-fifty demand articulated by G.G.Ponnambalam and the All Ceylon Tamil Conference; the disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamils of the plantations in 1948-49; the passage of Sinhala Only in 1956; the back-tracking of Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike in 1958 from the Pact he had signed with the Tamil leader S.J.V.Chelvanayagam the previous year; a similar "betrayal" by the Sinhalese of the Chelvanayagam-Senanayake Pact of a decade later; the Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1965 that created a large number of "stateless" Tamils caught in a limbo between India and Sri Lanka; the re-writing of the Soulbury Constitution by Mrs Bandaranaike's regime in the early 1970s, renaming the country Sri Lanka and according the "foremost place" to Buddhism; and the policy of "standardisation" in admissions to universities and colleges.

Consequently, in 1972 the Sri Lankan Tamil parties coalesced into the Tamil United Front in 1972, and in 1975, this party renamed itself the Tamil United Liberation Front and in its Vaddukoddai resolution of 14th May, 1976, pledged to fight for the creation of a separate Tamil nation based in the northern and eastern provinces. Despite its explicit claim for

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secession, the formation of the TULF can be seen as the last gasp of the era of moderate Tamil politics. The years after 1977, in the narrative of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism, have seen the failure of devolution under the District Development Councils scheme to get off the ground and the enactment of the Sixth Amendment in August, 1983 that effectively outlawed and excluded the Tamil political parties from any participation in Parliament. All these legislative efforts at marginalization were accompanied, in the Tamil perspective, by periodic pogroms of Sinhalese violence against Tamils, notably that in 1983 which was especially annihilatory and marked a point of no-return in demands for a separate nation.

One of the striking aspects of the narration of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, in contrast to a Sinhala nationalism that is largely undergirded by reference to the *Mahâvamsa* as the central legitimating document, is the markedly lesser degree to which it is underwritten by mythographic claims. It is mainly secular in that, notwithstanding the production of historic evidence to demonstrate their antiquity in Sri Lanka, the Tamil narrative runs along a linear track from desired accommodation in the postcolonial order, through repeated betrayals, to a final and irrevocable desire for secession. In this, the justificatory sub-text is that of majoritarian discrimination rather than any predestined tryst with nationhood.[3]

The Dravidian Movement: from "Secession" to Populism

Repeated references to the secessionist potential of Tamil Nadu in India are based upon an inadequate and empirically unsupportable interpretation of twentieth century Tamil politics. A close look at the Dravidian movement will reveal why this is so. There have been a number of works that have examined the rise of a form of Tamil nationalism from the late nineteenth century onwards in India. After an initial focus on the renaissance of Tamil literature at the turn of the last century, they examine the emergence of the Justice Party and the non-Brahmin movement from 1917, on to the Self-Respect Movement of "Periyar" E.V. Ramaswami Naicker in 1930s, to the emergence of the Dravida Kazhagam in the mid-1940s and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) under C.N.Annadurai in the 1950s. The victory of DMK in elections to the state legislature in 1967 brought to an end two decades of Congress party rule in Tamil Nadu. Since then, state politics have seen the total dominance of DMK and its splinter party AIADMK (formed in 1972), especially in elections to the state legislature.

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One of the striking aspects about the literature on the Tamil renaissance and the emergence of the Dravidian ideology is the ecumene of this movement. While the Tamil cultural renaissance and a resurgence of interest in Tamil literature had some resonance across the Palk Straits, the most overtly political aspect of the Dravidian movement, as a movement for the establishment of a separate state of Tamil speaking people, literally stops at the borders of Tamil Nadu. Even in regard to cultural resonances across the straits, there were critical differences. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the movement for the "purification" of the Tamil language was explicitly directed against Northern Indian, specifically Sanskritic, accretions. In Jaffna, the "purity" of Tamil was not as much a concern. Similarly, aspects of the Tamil cultural renaissance in Tamil Nadu that emphasised the "Dravidian" roots of this ideology against the "Aryan" roots of Sanskritic Northern culture did not find much empathy in Jaffna where Hinduism, after the advent of colonial rule, had evolved along a different trajectory, developing a closer relationship with Christianity.

In the important works on the Dravidian movement and on politics of the Madras Presidency, one searches in vain for references to Sri Lanka, Ceylon, to Tamil society in Jaffna or Batticaloa, or the impact of the Dravidian movement on Sri Lankan Tamils.[4] While there are occasional references to individuals who straddled these two worlds, most prominently Thamotharam Pillai (a Jaffna Tamil who was, incidentally, the first graduate of Madras University in 1858) and Arumuka Navalar, these references are confined to the resurgence of the Tamil language and its literary style, or to the strengthening of the Saiva Siddhantha religious movement, and not to separatist politics of any hue. Often, a superficial reading of the literature can be misleading. For instance, Eugene Irschick's chapter on "The Intellectual Background of Tamil Separatism" does not refer to "separatism" in the political sense of secession at all, but rather in its cultural connotation of a distinctive and "separate" Tamil identity that was non-Sanskritic and Dravidian.[5] This would appear to be a somewhat remarkable silence, given later claims regarding the implications of Eelamist Tamil nationalism for Tamil Nadu. A closer investigation ought to reveal why the silence is hardly remarkable.

It is by now evident that the first explicitly secessionist demand that emerged in the politics of Tamil nationalism in India, made by the Justice Party (the official name of the Party, one hardly ever used in referring to it, was South Indian Liberal Federation) in June 1940, had little or no socio-economic basis in Tamil society at large. The Justice-ites were a

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political party of the elite, in fact of the petty royalty that had been the backbone of native support for the Raj.[6] Formed in 1916, they were a product of the very limited electoral franchise of the time. Moreover, the Justice Party was equally an artifact of the expansion of employment opportunities in the civil service. Administrative changes made in the early years of the twentieth century concentrated these in Madras and away from more remote provinces and mofussil towns. The Justice Party was a creation of the drawing-room political rivalries of Madras in the 1910s.

In this regard, the following comment by Christopher Baker is instructive:

> ... the non-Brahman movement appeared in part at least because it gratified British expectations. In one sense the quarrel between Brahman and non-Brahman arose from the brief concentration of political interest on the affairs of the public services and of the provincial capital, where rivalries could with advantage be squeezed into the communal mode .... Political parties were not built around their ideologies. In the case of the Justice Party, it was its functions that attracted support not its attributes .... (Baker 1976: 322).

Baker's point is substantiated by Washbrook who notes that "Its [the non-Brahmin movement's] origins need not be sought deeply in cultural history of South India; they lie much more in the very novel types of government and politics which developed under the British rule in the very early years of the present century" (1976: 286).

The ostensibly radical aspect of the Justice's political program, and its anti-Brahmin or non-Brahmin ideology, reflected not so much a commitment to a progressive anti-casteist or anti-elitist critique of Tamil society, or wider Sanskritic culture, as it did intra-elite competition for the spoils of colonial office. In that competition, the bandwagon of non-Brahmanism served leaders of the Justice Party in good stead, given the tremendous over-representation of Brahmins in civil service, law, educational institutions and related middle-class professions in turn-of-century Madras. That non-Brahmin upper castes represented by the Justice Party itself were similarly (if not equally) over-represented in comparison to the vast majority of the populace of Madras Presidency was a matter left delicately alone.[7]

When the Justice Party first made its demand for secession in 1940, the party was on its last legs. The structure of political and economic opportunity that underwrote its rise had disappeared. The electoral franchise

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had greatly expanded beyond the limited realm of the 1910s, with the Government of India Act of 1935. The Congress, by now a mass-based political party, had made tremendous inroads in the Madras Presidency in the 1920s and 1930s and had come to power with a large majority in the elections to the provincial government of Madras Presidency in 1937. The rise of E.V.Ramaswami Naicker's (Periyar) Self-Respect Movement in the 1930s had out-flanked the non-Brahmin platform of the Justicites. Not only had Periyar's movement expanded anti-Brahminism into a much wider anti-casteist and rationalist ideology, it brought into mass politics castes and classes of the people the Justicites were neither capable nor desirous of associating with. It was in this context of being literally rendered irrelevant that the Justice Party, which had always been collaborationist with the colonial regime, made a last ditch effort to throw a spanner in the wheels of Congress and curry favour with the colonial regime by its demand for a separate and, remember, loyalist state of Dravidanad.[8]

Simply put, I am arguing that the first demand for a separate state of Dravidanad came from an elitist political party with a narrow social base in Madras Presidency. It did not reflect any popular sentiment for secession; rather it stemmed from loyalty to a declining British Raj. At this moment, Periyar threw in his lot, and that of the Self Respect movement, with the Justice Party and joined in the demand for Dravidanad. (Periyar had been elected President of Justice Party in 1939, when he was in jail over his actions in the anti-Hindi language agitations of the preceding year.) He did this not out of any programmatic attraction to their policies and platform (such as they were), but rather out of a petulant anti-Congress stance that began to inform his politics from the late 1920s.

Periyar had himself cut his political teeth in Congress, but had left it because of principled objections to its functioning at the level of social reform.[9] In Madras, Congress was dominated by Brahmins, many of whom, for all their equalitarian, democratic and nationalist rhetoric, remained incurably bigoted and casteist in their personal lives. Having left Congress and created a social movement that, at its peak, had made a determined assault on caste, Sanskritic culture, the imposition of the Hindi language and the North Indian domination of Indian culture, Periyar now embarked on a policy of collaboration with the British Raj when the nationalist movement was about to reach a crescendo with the Quit India Movement of 1942. Periyar and Justicites found few, if any, takers for Dravidanad in Madras Presidency or elsewhere. In supporting the Raj at the height of nationalist fervour, Periyar was ensuring a marginal position for himself in the

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narrative of the most important political struggle of his time. His disaffection for many in the Congress, however, was so great that he saw this as a small price to pay (Barnett 1976: 80-81).

The Dravidanad Separation Conference was held in June, 1940, in Kanchipuram (Chingleput district) about a hundred miles out of Madras. A map of the proposed "Dravidanadu" displayed at the conference revealed, to put it mildly, a rather expansive cartographic imagination. It included the entirety of peninsular India, all of the eastern coastline, and (incredibly) parts of Bengal. The striking aspect of this representation of desired space is that at no time did Periyar or the Justice Party ever consider including Jaffna or any portion of Tamil-majority provinces in Sri Lanka, which were as little as 20 miles away, even as they repeatedly included those who have never shown any affinity for the political causes of the Tamils: namely the other so-called Dravidian peoples of Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra.[10]

In 1944, at its annual conference, the by-now spent Justice Party dissolved into the newly formed Dravida Kazhagam.This dissolution was made easy only because the Justice Party had by now virtually disappeared. In terms of their ideologies and their social base, the Justice Party and Periyar's Self Respect Movement "... were as different as chalk and cheese."[11] The Dravida Kazhagam, led by Periyar, was a social organization somewhat vaguely and eclectically committed to anti-casteism, rationalism, atheism, anti-North Indian hegemony, non-Sanskritic culture, socialism and opposition to the imposition of the Hindi language. These were all combined into an overarching ideology of "Dravidianism" that became the main rhetorical trope in Tamil politics in the decades to follow.

The concern that the collaborationist history of Justice would delegitimate Dravida Kazhagam was revealed at the very outset. In fact, one of the reasons for renaming the new organization Dravida Kazhagam was to distance itself from this history. As early as mid-1947 a faction within DK, led by C.N.Annadurai, was already arguing for a revision of the party line on national independence. A public split soon occurred with Periyar declaring August 15, 1947, the date of India's independence from Britain, to be a day of mourning, while Annadurai and others in DK celebrated it as a day of freedom and rejoicing. In October 1947, significantly, Annadurai and his followers boycotted the Dravida Kazhagam conference on separation of Dravidanadu. Matters between Periyar and Annadurai came to a head quite rapidly, and on September 17, 1949, the DK split into two parties, and the newly formed Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), led by Anna, left the fold with over 75% of its total membership.

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Ostensibly, the reasons for the split-up of the DK was Periyar's decision (he was by now in his early 70s) to marry a woman of 29. But an examination of the politics of this period reveals at least two other important factors: one was the desire of many in the DK, led by Annadurai, to convert the social movement into a political party and gain a share in the loaves and fishes of office in the postcolonial order. The mass-base of the Self Respect movement and the anti-Hindi agitations of the late 1930s, and the possibility of translating the ideology of Dravidianism into a politics of Tamil identity, were alluring. The second reason, as seen above, involved a desire on part of the DMK to disown its (weakly) secessionist and (strongly) collaborationist heritage and plunge into the political process as a regional party, one untainted by notions of secessionism.[12]

In brief, my point is this: if the much-vaunted "secessionist" history of the Tamils had little or no mass basis to begin with, even this weak idea of secession was rapidly disowned by the bulk of the Dravidian movement, as witnessed in the formation and ideology of DMK as early as 1949.[13] As Washbrook argues, the DMK, especially after it gained power in 1967 in Tamil Nadu, went about the task of revising its collaborationist history with a vengeance:

> There is, however, no clearer example of the extreme flexibility of history, culture and identity in Tamil consciousness than the amazing *volte face* performed by the Tamil nationalist movement after 1967. Having gained state power in Tamil Nadu and developed new relationships of clientage with the Congress government in New Delhi, the Dravidian ideology promptly began to re-write the history books ... Dravidian ideologues "discovered" that Tamil Nadu, rather than being a backwater of the anti-colonial freedom struggle which had created the Indian nation, had been its leading sector ... Tamil Nadu could parade a contingent of heroes and martyrs to the national cause who ... being more ancient than the heroes of 'the North,' were regarded as being venerable. In the matter of a few years, the changed context of relationship with New Delhi had managed to produce a fundamental re-interpretation of the meaning of modern Tamil history and of the values which that history expressed. A sub-nationalist movement originally created for separatist ends began to see itself as having 'liberated' the very nation from which it had wanted to separate (Washbrook 1989: 229-230).

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Although I am substantially in agreement with Washbrook that the DMK revised its history of collaboration once it came into power, I think he overstates, at least in the quoted paragraph, the degree to which it rewrote Tamil history into the mainstream nationalist narrative. He is less sensitive to the nuances that separate the Tamilnadu Congress' rewriting of Tamil history into the nationalist narrative from that of the DMK (Ramaswamy 1994), but yet his main point still holds.

The next (mis)conception regarding the history of the Dravidian movement is the importance of the Sino-Indian war of 1962 in curbing its secessionist aims. According to this line of argument, the Dravidian movement remained a secessionist threat until this event. In a surge of national patriotism following the invasion, the DMK is supposed to have discovered the error of its ways and disavowed secession thereafter.[14] The passage of the 16th Amendment to the Indian Constitution (in October of 1963), which required all candidates for political office to take an oath reaffirming the sovereignty of the nation, was an additional factor that supposedly spurred the DMK to give up on Dravidanad (de Silva, 1986:272). A closer examination reveals that the DMK had given up on secession even before the Chinese invasion or the 16th Amendment to the Constitution.

Between 1958 and 1960, in a series of meetings held at the residence of a DMK leader (a Brahmin at that!) the issue of secession was discussed threadbare and by November, 1960, there emerged a "consensus" that "... the Dravida Nadu demand should be publicly abandoned" (Barnett 1976: 109-110). Barnett notes that although the entire top leadership of the DMK acquiesced in this, Annadurai was notably absent from these meetings. However, when apprised of the consensus immediately after it had been arrived at, he pointed out that " ... since the party cadres had been developed on the separation demand, the party could not simple (*sic*) drop this demand and maintain credibility in the eyes of the lower-echelon leadership. But he vowed gradually to prepare the party for dropping the Dravida Nadu demand" (Barnett 1976: 110). Seen in this light, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 merely provided the DMK with an opportunity to jettison an element of its platform, namely secession, that had already been deemed dispensable.

By the mid-1960s, the DMK had greatly moderated its tone in politics. The violent anti-Hindi protests which marked this period in Tamil Nadu's history were not so much led or abetted by the DMK as they were instances of its leadership's inability to check student radicalism. In fact,

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in regard to the anti-Hindi language riots Barnett notes that "By 1965, the DMK had become 'responsible' and predictable, and their activities could be calculated and anticipated. Had the DMK remained in control, the agitation would no doubt have remained nonviolent, limited and largely symbolic" (1976: 133).

Barnett also makes a very important point in regard to the anti-Hindi agitations of the DMK. While, superficially, the anti-Hindi movement was couched in anti-North Indian and pro-Dravidian rhetoric, it did not reflect any overwhelming desire for Tamil as the only language of instruction. Indeed, at one point in the mid-1960s when DMK's top leadership attempted to imbue the anti-Hindi movement with anti-English and pro-Tamil content, they were met with violent opposition from the students. This ought to indicate that the anti-Hindi agitations were not primarily about pro-Dravidian sentiment: if that were the case, one has to address the question why the anti-English movement did not gain any currency. Faced with already difficult employment prospects, the students spearheading the anti-Hindi agitations wished to retain Tamil as a regional language and English as a link-language to the rest of the country. The decision to make Hindi the sole official language by 1965 (as per the Constitution) was seen as a threat not so much to Dravidian culture or ideology as it was seen as yet another potential obstacle in the way of economic mobility for such students. Needless to add, this is hardly the stuff of which a militant secessionist party is made.

The growing moderation of DMK was completed once it came to power in State Assembly Elections of 1967. It is worth remembering that in this election, which brought the first non-Congress regime for Tamil Nadu, DMK secured a smaller share of the popular vote in comparison to Congress: 40.5% to 41.35%. It was the alliances cut by the DMK which allowed it to grab the lion's share of Assembly seats despite this smaller share of the popular vote.[15] Thereafter, the DMK (and AIADMK which emerged in 1972 as a break-away group) have been loyal to central governments almost to a fault. In Washbrook's trenchant summary of the entire period since the first electoral victory of DMK until the late 1980s, it is aptly said that " ... as soon as the DMK came to power in 1967, it immediately reversed its militant anti-New Delhi stance. Since then, ruling groups in the national government (whatever their party complexions) have enjoyed loyal support from the ruling house in DMK Tamil Nadu (whatever their leadership complexions) and the principal problems have come only when, as in the Emergency, the Centre has been inclined to spurn the

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sycophantic accommodations offered it by the States" (Washbrook 1989: 216). (He refers to both DMK and AIADMK as the "DMK parties" to indicate that they are cut, in his extremely critical view, from the same vacuous, populist cloth and are no different from each other on any significant register).

The idea that DMK and AIADMK have been ultra-loyalist to the Centre is supported by the changing pattern of electoral alignments in the state. After coming to power in 1967, the DMK supported the ruling Mrs Gandhi regime in Parliament. In fact, for two years (1969-71), Mrs Gandhi's regime survived because of the support extended to her party by the 25 M.P.s of the DMK. In 1971, the DMK and Congress (I) agreed to an adjustment of seats in elections to both the Parliament and the Legislature against the rump Congress (O) that remained after the Congress' split of 1967. In 1972, the emergence of the AIADMK, and the virtual disappearance of Congress (O), made politics more of a "menage a trois" in Tamil Nadu. Nothwithstanding the shifting patterns of electoral understandings between DMK, AIADMK, Congress (I) and the Janatâ Party (in its various avatars) in the elections of 1977, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991 and 1996, some patterns emerge clearly.[16]

Firstly, neither the DMK nor the AIADMK have shown the slightest reluctance to enter into such understandings with the ruling party in New Delhi. Even though Congress under Mrs Gandhi proved to be excessively centralized and very loathe to conceding any autonomy to States, the DMK and AIADMK have competed with each other to curry its favour. Second, while the DMK has at least retained faint echoes of its secessionist tradition by its consistent and well-articulated demands for greater state autonomy and federalism, the AIADMK, as early as October, 1973, explicitly disavowed any demand for state autonomy in its Party Manifesto and preferred to state blandly that it wanted "... neither dependence nor independence but inter-dependence." At least one work, by an author who was very close to M.G.R. (the cinema actor turned founder of the AIADMK), suggests that the formation of the break-away party had a lot to do with the machinations of Mrs Gandhi and Congress, which wished to counter the popularity of the DMK and find some way of returning to power in Tamil Nadu.[17] Thirdly, in terms of seat adjustments, a division of labour has emerged since 1980. Congress (I) has been given the lion's share of Parliamentary seats (two-thirds usually), while the regional party gets the dominant share of Assembly seats (again, usually two-thirds). More than anything else, this pattern of adjustments reveals that

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the two DMKs have become comfortably ensconced as regional parties within a larger nation, as decidedly "junior partners" to the Centre, quite content to consolidate their hold on the levers of patronage and power at the level of state government.

Ultimately, whatever else may be said about the Dravidian movement and the idea of secession it once weakly espoused, by the early 1970s it was undeniable that the two political parties it spawned, DMK and AIADMK, did not even make a pretense of being secessionist. The trajectory of the Dravidian movement was, in this sense, precisely opposite that of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. As one observer notes in a concise summary of the evolution of DMK: "Normally in any movement, the demand of a separate, sovereign independent state could be placed before the national government only after having exhausted all the possibilities of coexistence with the national government and repeated failures of all their attempts to get their due share in the national authoritative allocation of values. It is peculiar in the case of Tamil Nadu that the Tamil ethnic groups posed this demand rather prematurely but this helped mobilize the masses .... DMK won the election [of 1967] and formed the Ministry and reassured the Central government that it would not demand separate Dravidasthan and it earnestly looked forward to cooperation from the Centre" (Palanithurai 1993: 78-79).

In the following section, I demonstrate the degree to which Dravidian Tamil nationalism remained indifferent to the seductions of emerging Tamil nationalism in Jaffna due to important socio-historical reasons. Moreover, I show that the DMK and AIADMK were, if anything, scrupulously correct (from the perspective of state governments within a larger union) in their dealings with the nationalist movement in Jaffna.

Divergent Nationalisms

One of the most noticeable aspects of the Dravidian movement, and its ideology in general, was anti-Brahminism. Although it has been argued that anti-Brahminism originated as a rather convenient factional strategy for the leaders of the Justice Party, the ideology gained a momentum of its own, especially during Periyar's Self-Respect Movement, and became a dominant part of the politics of Tamil Nadu in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s. This was in large part on account of the attack against Brahminism and the caste system in general launched by the Self-Respect Movement. Brahmins constituted about 4% of the population of the Tamil-speaking

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areas of the Madras Presidency, but occupied a disproportionately large share of the colonial rewards system. Without elaborating a complex history, it should be noted that the Raj fundamentally changed the prevailing caste hierarchies in Tamil society and Brahmins had seen a rapid rise in their socio-economic and political fortunes. Anti-Brahminism, whatever its elitist origins in the Justice Party, was an ideology that acquired a mass base in Tamil society in the middle of this century because of the material foundations that supported it. It, moreover, gave the Dravidian movement programmatic content and coherence.

In contrast, Brahmins not only constituted less than 1% of Sri Lankan Tamils, they were nowhere near as important as their counterparts in Tamil Nadu. The impact of colonial rule had led to a different political economy, one in which the Brahmin still stayed predominantly within the religious fold while Vellâlars came to dominate both the professional, educated classes and the agrarian sector. The impact of Christianity was far greater in Tamil society in Sri Lanka and the Vellâlar variety of Hinduism was one that was considerably inter-mixed with Christianity, unlike Tamil society in Tamil Nadu. For example, consider R.Perinbanayagam's forceful rebuttal of the claim that Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism had close cultural and political ties to the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. In a summarization of his argument, Little notes that "... the Jaffna Tamil leaders of the early twentieth century did not typically dwell on their Dravidian roots. Many of them may have gone back and forth between Jaffna and South India, participating in political life in both places, but their two-way access was a result more of colonial ties between South India and Sri Lanka than of a common culture. Moreover, the early founders of separatist ideology were not Hindus at all, but good Jaffna Christians" (Little 1994: 45).

In Tamil Nadu, the attack against "local" Brahminism could be coupled with a powerful critique of Sanskritic culture and Northern Indian "hegemony," a critique which gave a powerful fillip to a regional or separatist ideology. In the narrative of Dravidian ideology, the caste system was a North Indian invention imposed on a once-egalitarian Dravidian society. It supposedly came with the southward immigration and conquest of the "Aryans" and was locally represented by Brahmins who were of northern origin and alien to Tamil society. This linkage is crucial to understand why, in the Dravidian movement, anti-Brahminism is connected to a wider attack on the institution of caste, North Indian hegemony, Sanskritic culture and the imposition of the Hindi language.

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None of these factors were germane to the Sri Lankan case. This meant that one of the most important aspects of Dravidian ideology in Tamil Nadu, anti-Brahminism, had no resonance across the Palk Straits. Beginning with non-Brahminism, the Dravidian movement at its apex expanded into a full-scale critique of caste society. While Barnett and Washbrook, among many others are, in my view, correct in their contention that the Dravidian movement was often long on anti-casteist rhetoric and failed to ameliorate the conditions of those at the bottom, it is a fact that some of the most egregious and overt aspects of caste discrimination had largely disappeared from Tamil society in India by the 1960s. For example, the exclusion of lower castes from entering temples had been virtually eliminated by that time. Yet, in Sri Lankan Tamil society, the domination of Vellâlars was not only overwhelming, most such overt exclusionary aspects remained intact. This has led Bryan Pfaffenberger to comment that Jaffna was "... the most conservative of Tamil societies anywhere"(1983: 33) in the matter of caste. Long after the issue had been settled in Tamil Nadu, the ban on lower castes entering temples remained in place in Sri Lankan Tamil society into the 1970s. Even as late as that, a renowned Vellâlar Tamil nationalist leader, one time Cabinet Minister and Professor of Mathematics (no less!), C.Suntheralingam found it politically feasible to lead a movement against temple entry for lower caste Tamils in Sri Lanka. (In later years, ironically, Suntheralingam would become a prominent proponent of Eelam). Indeed, after 1956, the pressure to present a united front against the Sinhalese ought to have given great impetus to Tamils to unite across such caste barriers, but this was not so. It was mainly the Marxists among Tamils who initiated such moves and the Federal Party "... joined in this enterprise especially after 1956 but as the mainstream political party of the Tamil minority and dependent on vellala votes it was much more circumspect in dealing with these isues ..." (de Silva 1986: 219).

It would be 1977 before a harijan would be elected from Sri Lankan Tamil society to Parliament, in the fifth general elections of independent Sri Lanka. In Tamil Nadu, not only had the Nadar leader, K.Kamaraj, served a stint as Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister (in the 1950s itself), he had "brokered" the succession of two Prime Ministers and acquired the sobriquet of a national "kingmaker" by then. The deferential and conservative Tamil society of Jaffna must have regarded the rhetorical excesses of the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidian ideology with some degree of alarm, and certainly with considerable distaste. This was further reflected in the superior and aloof attitude they adopted towards the Indian

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Tamils of the plantations, largely on account of the lower caste and class position they occupied in their view.

There were important political reasons for the two Tamil movements to stay aloof. In the decades immediately before and after independence the Sri Lankan Tamil elites focussed their attention on Colombo, attempting to secure redress as a minority. There was little or nothing to be gained, and a lot to be lost, by making common cause with Tamils in Madras at this time. In an effort to assert their claims to the Sinhalese majority, it was logical for them to prove their antiquity in Sri Lanka and their distance from the Tamils of India. As Arasaratnam notes in this context:

> A second source of Ceylon Tamil nationalism is the emphatic assertion of Sri Lanka as the legitimate and ancient home of the Tamils and of Tamil institutions. Nothing annoys the Tamils of Sri Lanka more than the argument, used by Sinhalese to placate Tamil opinion, that their culture and language are preserved adequately and are flourishing in South India and there was, therefore, no need to make a special provision in Sri Lanka. The Tamils react to this by emphasising their separateness from India, the longevity of the Tamil tradition in Sri Lanka, and by asserting, with dubious historical arguments, their contemporaneity with Sinhalese settlements in Sri Lanka (1979: 511).

Similarly, for members of the DMK interested in revising its genealogy of collaboration and distancing itself from separatist ideology, there seemed little point in cultivating the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils. This is perhaps best reflected in the relatively mild protests, and often silence, that emanated from Tamil Nadu during the critical turning points in the narrative of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. The enactment of Sinhala Only in 1956, the anti-Tamil riots of 1958, the unilateral abrogations of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact and the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact, the re-writing of the Constitution, standardisation, the anti-Tamil riots of 1977, and the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in 1981 were not occasions of any frenetic political activity in Tamil Nadu. On such occasions, the DMK and AIADMK carefully expressed concern for the lives and livelihood of the Indian Tamils and for people of "Indian extraction" in legislative forums, as did the central government. Significantly, a recent examination of the impact of Tamil Nadu politics on ethnicity in Sri Lanka focuses almost entirely on connections with the Indian Tamils there, and has

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little to say about the impact on the Sri Lankan Tamils (Palanithurai and Mohanasundaram 1993).

This point is further buttressed by Arasaratnam when he notes that in the period from independence to about 1970, "(T)hough there was considerable cultural links with Tamil revivalism across the Palk Straits, there was no hint of extra-national political links with South Indian Dravidian groups. The Sinhalese fears of such links were always there, but these were unrealistic -- being founded on ancient historical memories rather than hard contemporaneous data" (Arasaratnam 1979: 515).[18]

This relative lack of explicit concern for Sri Lankan Tamils was in sharp contrast to the keen interest and reactions of DMK politicians to the fate of Indian Tamils on plantations in Sri Lanka. Since these people were both recent Tamil emigrants and still classified as "stateless" or potential Indian citizens, the DMK often essayed stinging criticism of state-level Congress regimes (1947-67) and Congress in Parliament. Issues concerning Indian Tamils, such as their disfranchisement in 1948-49, the limited impact of Nehru's talks with Senanayake and Kotelawala and their virtual sell out in the Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1965 elicited vociferous protests from the DMK in parliamentary and legislative forums, and in official protests to Sri Lankan diplomatic representatives in Madras.

This sharply contrasting attitude of the DMK to Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils is important. One cannot substantiate a charge of secessionism on the basis of the DMK's support for the latter. Given their ambiguous citizenship and the fact that the envisaged repatriation of nearly half a million of them (under the Sirima-Shastri Pact) would have a deep impact on Tamil Nadu, such concern was both legitimate and proper. Any secessionist charge would have to be substantiated by evidence of collusion between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Dravidian movement. For the period from independence to the early 1980s, such evidence is not forthcoming.

In the years immediately following independence, Sri Lankan Tamil leaders occasionally made references to the desirability of joining in a federation with India. Such references were, in fact, made not only by Tamil politicians in Sri Lanka, but by a number of parties and individuals at this time all across South Asia. The nation-states created in 1947-48 had not yet begun to exercise a complete thrall over the imaginations of everyone in the region. But, even at this time, leaders of Sri Lankan Tamils like Chelvanayagam found their overtures to Tamil politicians across the Straits unwelcome. Referring to this period (1947-48), Wilson notes that "Given the nearness of the South Indian mainland, it was to be expected

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that when Chelvanayagam conceived of the idea of federalism, he would think of a relationship with Tamil Nad in India, and of the Tamil areas of Ceylon forming a unit of the Union Republic of the Indian federation. However, he withdrew from this position as soon as politicians from Tamil Nad, when questioned on the subject by the pro-government press, expressed disapproval" (1994: 3).

As I have already suggested, in the intervening decades of the 1950s and 1960s, Tamil Nadu politicians made references to the treatment of Indian Tamils, but stayed, by and large, clear of commenting on the affairs of Sri Lankan Tamils. In the 1970s, a series of significant events demonstrate the "correctness" of DMK regimes in this regard. In 1973, when Karunanidhi of the DMK was Chief Minister, a Sri Lankan Tamil militant, Kuttimani, was captured in Tamil Nadu. He was wanted by Colombo for attempting to smuggle dynamite into Sri Lanka. Karunanidhi promptly had Kuttimani arrested and deported to Sri Lanka to serve his prison term (Swamy 1994:28).[19] In November of 1973, the same DMK regime arrested three Sri Lankan Tamils for violating the Indian Passport Act and they were, once again, handed over to the Sri Lankan government (Palanithurai and Mohanasundaram 1993:74). It was around this time (1972), that the leader of the Sri Lankan Tamils, Chelvanayagam visited Tamil Nadu and New Delhi in an effort to rouse support for the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka. While he received a warm welcome in Madras, "... he did not get the expected response. Despite the expression of sympathy it had been made clear to him by the DMK leaders, that Federal Party's cause was an internal matter of Sri Lanka" (Palanithurai and Mohanasundaram 1993: 73). Efforts by other Sri Lankan Tamil leaders in New Delhi proved similarly fruitless. Given the extremely close friendship that existed at this time between Sirima Bandaranaike and Indira Gandhi, this was not unexpected.

Later in the same decade, in 1977, when anti-Tamil riots of unprecedented severity rocked Sri Lanka, the response from Tamil Nadu was more vociferous, but still nowhere near as strong or outraged as befitting a party and a state supposedly sympathetic to the idea of Tamil pan-nationalism. The opposition DMK took out processions against the riots and organized a general strike in support of Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Indian government (led at this time by Morarji Desai of the Janatâ Party who had excellent rapport with Jayewardene, his counterpart in Sri Lanka) and the Tamil Nadu government (led by AIADMK at this time) both expressed their concern regarding the safety of "Indian nationals" in Sri

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Lanka and stayed clear of commenting on Sri Lankan Tamils. Overall, the response to these riots have been described as being "mild" in Tamil Nadu (Palanithurai and Mohanasundaram 1993: 52).

In January of 1981, during the Fifth International Tamil Research Conference held in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, the leader of the TULF, Appapillai Amirthalingam (successor to Chelvanayagam) in the course of his address spoke about the problems of Sri Lankan Tamils and the discrimination and violence of the Sinhalese. Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran of AIADMK responded that the Tamil conference was an inappropriate place to advocate the political ideologies of individuals or movements. He further noted Tamil Nadu wished to retain a cordial relationship with neighbouring countries and governments. The timing of this event merits attention: January of 1981 would be the last time any Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu could take such a diplomatically "correct" stance on Sri Lankan affairs for some time to come. Within months after this, there would be a sharp change in policy on Sri Lanka at the level of the central government in New Delhi. From then, Tamil Nadu would be plunged into the increasingly violent vortex of Sri Lankan politics and Tamil militancy there. But, until January of 1981, both the DMK and AIADMK, for all their professed concerns about Tamils and rhetorical excesses as self-anointed leaders of a world-wide "Thâmilâkam," stayed scrupulously clear of commenting on, or getting involved in, the growing nationalism of Sri Lankan Tamils.

Interpreting 1971

The Indian "success" in Bangladesh had a crucial impact on the working of Indian foreign policy, on the self-fashioning of India and its role in the South Asian subcontinent, and in Indian attitudes towards "kindred" ethnic minorities in neighbouring countries. Prior to 1971, the Indian record in terms of regional foreign policy was, at best, patchy. The 1948 and 1965 wars with Pakistan were, essentially, "draws;" and the 1962 war with China was a major defeat. Whatever the complex realities of the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 out of the Indo-Pakistan war, among state elites within India that event came to be narrated as one that conclusively demonstrated the extraordinary realpolitik and finesse of Mrs Gandhi. It was, moreover, seen as containing a "lesson" that smaller neighbours ought to learn regarding India's hegemony and capabilities in the region.

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I argue that what is critical is not only the fact that India now aggressively sought to dominate the region, but that a certain model of conducting both regional and domestic policy was crafted and came to inform both Indian interactions with neighbours and the central government's dealings with states within India. Within the country, the central government pressured opposition-party led state governments by promoting unrest and turmoil in these states through state-level Congress parties as well as central intelligence agencies. This often went to the extent of aiding and assisting extremist social forces including ethno-national or other religious and linguistic groups (the most prominent example being Bhindranwale's in Punjab).

Externally, in the region of South Asia, a similar pattern of brinkmanship emerged after 1971. Regimes perceived as acting in ways inimical to India's geopolitical interests were, on the one hand, destabilized by covert intelligence agencies, often in tandem with ethnic and other minorities opposed to the regime in that country, and, on the other, were subject to intense diplomatic pressure at the governmental level to change policies in line with Indian interests. Here, too, the available evidence supports the view that the intelligence agencies maintained contacts with and tried to influence the actions of such dissident groups in neighbouring countries as a means of "fine-tuning" the pressure which the Indian government could leverage on neighbours. (Mrs Gandhi's assassination by Sikhs and Rajiv Gandhi's at the hands of LTTE are the legacies of such "fine tuning").

I argue that this twin-track policy of diplomatic pressure plus covert pressure through intelligence agencies and dissident groups became the crucial legacy of the Bangladesh events in Indian statecraft. This backdrop is critical to understanding Indo-Lankan relations in the decade of the 1980s. In saying this, I am not suggesting that Indian actions in Sri Lanka in the 1980s were directed towards creating a separate state of Eelam (as had happened in 1971 in Bangladesh). I am, however, suggesting that a certain model of "ideal" decision-making came to be abstracted from the experience of 1971 and became very influential. From 1977 this twin-track policy was regarded as the way to bring Jayewardene's regime around to the Indian "line." The question of where and how the two tracks would meet, with the creation of Eelam or a devolution of power to Tamil provinces that fell considerably short of it, was never resolved with any clarity on the Indian side.

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Viewed against this backdrop, let me turn in the final section of this essay to how the events of 1971 were interpreted by one set of actors, Sri Lankan Tamils. India's intervention in the civil war in East Pakistan was seen by Tamils as containing a lesson for their own situation in Sri Lanka. At one level, the emergence of Bangladesh pushed Sri Lankan Tamils further along the road to Eelam. And, at another, it exaggerated their expectations regarding the possible role that the central government in India might play in achieving it.

The actions of Sirima Bandaranaike and the SLFP in their second spell in power (1970-77) indicated that the Sinhalese were hell-bent on diminishing Tamils to a subservient minority. This, coupled with the history of betrayals and unfulfilled promises, had pushed the Tamil parties to a position of extremism. The biographer of Chelvanayagam dwells at some length on the deep impact 1971 made on the Tamil leader:

> When Bangladesh became an independent state in the spring of 1971,[20] the repercussions were certain to be felt in the Tamil movement. Chelvanayagam was not a man to play to the gallery or toy facetiously with new ideas, yet he pondered the questions which the emergence of Bangladesh inevitably raised, namely that they should give up the federal demand and declare a Tamil state. If they did so, it meant separation. He added that this question would be submitted to the forthcoming Annual Convention [of the Federal Party: SK], for it demanded 'very deep and serious thinking'. More critical and significant was his journey to Madras, the capital city of Tamil Nad, on 20 Feburary 1972, an event which marked a turning away from Colombo (Wilson 1994: 117-118).

Later that same year, in October, Chelvanayagam would resign his seat in Parliament and deem his re-election to be a referendum in the Tamil community on the question of separation. I would hardly go as far as to suggest that Bangladesh was the decisive, or even a very important, reason for the Tamils to decide on secession (the intransigence of the Sinhalese majority deserves overwhelming credit for that). I am suggesting that the emergence of Bangladesh may well have been the proverbial last straw: it pushed the moderate Tamil parties over the brink in explicitly declaring Eelam to be their goal.

Later that year, the newly formed TUF, i.e. Tamil United Front, came up with a Six Point Demands list that echoed the Six Point formula demanded by Mujibur Rahman and Awami League in the months leading up to the secession of Bangladesh.[21] This list was presented to Mrs

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Bandaranaike's self-proclaimed "Constituent Assembly" only to be ignored. In the last years of his life, Chelvanayagam (and TULF) increasingly turned to India and Tamil Nadu for help in regard to Sri Lankan Tamil affairs. We have already seen that the Tamil political parties there played it by the book at this time in responding to such overtures. When TULF emissaries contacted Mrs Gandhi at this time, her excellent relations with Mrs Bandaranaike, and the fact that Sri Lankan foreign and regional policy were more or less in tune with India's, resulted in her not lending them any more than a politely sympathetic ear.

Yet, Bangladesh and its legacy of twin-track policy making had laid the grounds for something different to emerge a decade later. For Sri Lankan Tamils, it whetted hopes for Indian help and intervention on their side against the Sinhalese. From the abortive initial contacts between the TULF and the Indian government in 1972 till the year 1977, both Mrs Bandaranaike and Mrs Gandhi were in power and Indo-Lankan relations remained unchanged on the Tamil issue. Both leaders were ousted in 1977, but Mrs Gandhi returned to power in January 1980 and picked up the threads of her policy towards Sri Lanka and South Asia once again.

And this time around, in a strange sort of way, one could say that conditions were "right" for Sri Lankan Tamil hopes on Indian intervention to materialize. Jayewardene's regime seemed to go out of its way to antagonize India and certainly did not kow-tow to her pretensions as regional hegemon. Soon, the Tamil issue would appear as the perfect theatre for Mrs Gandhi to activate the twin-track policies and bring Jayewardene's recalcitrant regime around. It was in this context that the conflation of Eelamist nationalism and the so-called secessionist potential of Dravidian nationalism would acquire a powerful material and political basis. Quite simply, it would serve as the alibi for India's paramount interest in Sri Lanka's domestic affairs.

Understandably, certain Tamil groups in both India and Sri Lanka developed exaggerated expectations regarding such interest. (The one group that realized early on that if India intervened it would be to further its foreign policy goals and regional hegemonic status and not necessarily to further Tamil interests was the LTTE). By the end of the 1980s, claims regarding the intimate relationship between these two nationalisms would rapidly approach "common sense." After all, such connections had been reiterated *ad nauseam* in literatures emanating from politicians, governments, academics and media alike. Moreover, it was precisely because of such putative connections that the Indian army fought its longest

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war. I have tried to suggest here that the expedient twinning of the two Tamil nationalisms flies in the face of historical evidence.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have presented two narratives of Tamil nationalism, Sri Lankan and Dravidian. Contrary to the received wisdom, which has exaggerated the connections and linkages between the two, I have argued that they were motivated by different concerns and moved on different trajectories. Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism was primarily reactive. It was the nationalism of a people who had tried in every way to seek accommodation and a fair deal from the Sinhalese majority. It was after the repeated failures of such attempts, and the growing violence of the Sinhalese, that they turned to Eelam as the only alternative.

In Tamil Nadu, after a brief and un-serious flirtation with secession, the Dravidian movement developed along lines that reinforced its connections to the Indian union. By the 1970s, the two political parties of the Dravidian movement were, if anything, remarkable for the pliancy they exhibited to the Centre rather than any secessionist ideology. For important socio-historical reasons, these two narratives remained, in the main, unconnected to each other. From independence till 1981, DMK and AIADMK were scrupulously correct in their dealings with the Tamil nationalists of Sri Lanka and confined their comments to the fate of the Indian Tamils in that country, if they commented at all.

I suggest that the way in which events of 1971 came to be interpreted in India and in Sri Lanka would have crucial implications in the 1980s. In India, Bangladesh was interpreted as indicating the tremendous foreign policy success that could accrue from intervention in neighbouring countries by utilizing beleagured minorities to further regional hegemony. For many Sri Lankan Tamils, the emergence of Bangladesh indicated that Eelam was a possibility, and that Indian help might be forthcoming in that regard. Various parties saw in the events of 1971 what they wanted to see. While conditions in the 1970s were not propitious for anything to emerge by way of Indian interest in the Sri Lankan Tamil movement, in the 1980s, in a curious reversal, conditions were ideal. This led to a situation in which all parties concerned found it expedient to emphasise the so-called historical and social convergences of the two Tamil movements.

At a certain level, the problem with lying is that after a while one begins to believe in the veracity of one's lies. Or, as the Italian semiotician

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Umberto Eco would have it, "I believe that you can reach the point where there is no longer any difference between developing the habit of pretending to believe and developing the habit of believing" (Eco 1990:467). From the time of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination until today (mid-1996), Tamil Nadu has remained virtually deaf to events in Sri Lanka and the vagaries of the ethnic struggle there. Followers of the slain leader would aver that Tamil Nadu's fealty to the Centre was ensured by his supreme sacrifice. While efforts to endow the murder of Rajiv Gandhi within an ennobling narrative are understandable, the real tragedy perhaps lies in the fact that such fealty never need have been in doubt in the first place.

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2. For works detailing the history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and their fate in postcolonial society see, among many others, especially Arasaratnam (1986); Tambiah (1986); Manogaran and Pfaffenberger (eds.) 1994; Wilson (1988); Wilson (1994); Amirthalingam (1988) and Balasingham (1983).
3. A work that substantiates this claim is Sivathamby (1985). In recent years, Tamil nationalism, too, has found it expedient to move further in the direction of enlisting mythography in its cause, something that had always been part of its emergence, but present to a far lesser degree in comparison to the Sinhalese. For a critical review of such a tendency, see Coomaraswamy (1987). She points out especially the role of expatriate Sri Lankan Tamils in facilitating such mythographic excess.
4. I will be using these works extensively in the argument that follows: Irschick (1969); Irschick (1986); Baker and Washbrook (1975); Baker (1976); Washbrook (1976); K. Nambi Arooran (1980); Marguerite Ross Barnett (1976); Hardgrave Jr. (1965); and Washbrook (1989).
5. See Irschick 1969: 275-310. On the complex relationship between Saiva Siddhanta and the Self-Respect movement, see Venkatachalapathy (1995).
6. The leader of the DMK, Annadurai, would often sarcastically refer to the Justicites as a "party of laced 'veshties' and silk 'jibbas.'" Cited in Sivathamby 1993: 13-47.
7. For a recent work that superbly delineates the history of communal representation under the Raj that created the climate for the emergence of the categories of Brahmin and non-Brahmin in late colonial Tamil Nadu, see Radhakrishnan (1993).

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8. An indication of the Justice Party's vacillating attitude towards the Congress can be found in the fact that during their annual convention in 1926, they had a banner proclaiming "Long Live Mahatma Gandhi" as well as an exhibit favouring the use of hand-spun cotton or "khaddar." In the 1920s to 1940s, the Justice Party was never quite able to reconcile its attitudes towards Indian nationalism, alternating between collaboration with the colonial regime and supporting their electoral rivals, Congress. In the final analysis, the chosen path of the moment usually reflected expediency rather than ideology. For details, see Irschick 1969: 311-350.
9. On Periyar and his politics, see Visswanathan (1983).
10. For a brief report on the conference and the map, see Nambi Arooran 1980: 245.
11. Washbrook 1976: 278. For another work that emphasises the differences between the Justice Party and Periyar's Self Respect Movement, despite their eventual merging, see K. Sivathamby 1993:13-47.
12. Much of the details around this period can be gleaned from Barnett 1976: 56-86.
13. At least one recent work has also argued that in its very formation the DMK indicated a strong desire to free itself of the secessionist demand and gave up on it long before 1962. See Manivannan (1992).
14. While this argument has become a staple of recent histories of Indian politics, its clearest exposition can be found in Akbar (1986).
15. See Palanithurai 1993: 162.
16. A useful summarization of the electoral data for Tamil Nadu, charting the shifting alliances and percentages of votes and seats, can be found in Palanithurai (1993a) and Thandavan (1993).
17. See Mohandas 1992: 6-7. When formed, the party was called Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK). Fairly soon after, when it was rumoured that the central government might ban regional political parties, ADMK changed to All-India Anna DMK. Of course, notwithstanding this pretentious name, AIADMK would find it difficult to win any constituency outside Tamil Nadu.
18. Even on the question of cultural links between the two nationalisms, the strength of such linkages may well have been overstated. See, for example, Cheran 1992.
19. This incident is important in indicating the shift in attitude that emerges in the early 1980s, when a similar request for extradition of two Tamil militants, V.Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran (alias Mukundan) in Madras is turned down by the Indian government. Kuttimani, widely regarded as one of the founders of the Tamil militant movement, met a brutal death in the Welikade Prison massacre of July, 1983.
20. Wilson's timing is off here. The full-blown civil war between West Pakistani forces and the East Pakistani people began in the spring of 1971 and it would be the last weeks of 1971 before the liberation of Bangladesh became a reality.
21. The six demands were: official status for Tamil language; Sri Lanka be made a secular state; decentralisation of administrative structures; fundamental rights of minorities be written into the Constitution; aboliton of the caste system; and, citizenship for all those who seek it.

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THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY AND ETHNO-NATIONALISMS IN SOUTH ASIA*

A. Jeyaratnam Wilson

In the post-World War phase, ethno-nationalisms and their less pervasive self-conscious forms, which may be referred to as ethnicity, have become increasingly prevalent. The trend has been more common in the decolonized states which European conquerors had held together as outright land acquisitions. These conquerors failed to pay attention to the fact that different ethnic groups, their languages, religions, customs and traditions straddled the territories they ruled. Consequently they bequeathed independence to artificial geographical expressions -- warring ethnic nations bound together in the bosom of a single state. This phenomenon has in the recent past overtaken even the states of Eastern Europe and the republics of the ex-Soviet Union.

We will, therefore, examine firstly the stages that lead ethnic nationalities within the decolonized sovereign state to launch separatist movements. Secondly, we will examine political designs which could possibly prevent the actual partitioning of existing sovereign states so that their territorial integrity might be preserved. Thirdly, we will assess the attempt by unfriendly neighbouring states to encourage if not promote separatist and secessionist struggles in the adjoining states with a view to destabilizing the latter so as to reduce their power in the regional system of sovereign states. Finally, we will analyse the effect that ethnic secessionist movements and new states arising therefrom have on the international system.

There are four stages that ethnic nationalities pass through to attain their objectives. There is firstly agitation and protest within the constitutional framework. Usually this takes the form of an ethnic-based party that receives the confidence of the ethnic community at elections to

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This paper is based on a presentation at the First Nordic Conference for South Asian Studies, Soro, 11-13 October 1991. It was originally printed in *Contemporary South Asia*, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 327-33 and we acknowledge the courtesy extended to us by its Editors in allowing us to reprint it.

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the legislature. The outstanding examples are the All-India Muslim League in pre-partition India and the Akali Dal in the Punjab; the DMK and its variants in Tamil Nad and the Kashmiri and Assamese movements, all in post-partition India; the Awami League in undivided Pakistan as well as the movements for an independent Pushtanistan, Baluchistan and Sind in Pakistan; and finally the Tamil Federal Party in Sri Lanka.

Invariably there is failure to contain minority discontent due to what might be called 'the time lag effect.' The time lag implies that the majority ethnic group comes to a point when it is willing to effect a meagre and often meaningless compromise order to meet the demands of the minority ethnic group but then in the interim an escalation in the latter's demands has emerged. The constitutional political movements resort to extra-parliamentary forms of protests which bear little or no results. Then invariably they are taken over by militant groups. The results are always accompanied with bloodshed, with governments attempting to crush the movements using armed force for the purpose. The confrontation between the state and extra-parliamentary or extra-constitutional liberation movements is then the second stage of the ethnic majority-minority confrontation.

The third phase is when the majority ethnic leadership decides to make some realistic concessions to the minority nationality, but these usually fall far short of the latter's aspirations. They are not actually compromises, but measly attempts to pacify the dwindling ranks of the moderates in the minority elite. This is the 'too little too late syndrome.' Demands have escalated and there is a yawning gap between the majority ethnic-dominated state's promises and their implementation. The latter's leadership could indeed be willing to deliver on the compromises, but are obstructed by oppositional forces competing within the ruling as well as from oppositional parties and from single-issue oriented protest movements such as those led by Buddhist monks, Hindu chauvinists and Muslim mullahs.

We are then set for the fourth stage. Political agitation among the disaffected minority nationality or nationalities is taken over completely by armed militant groups. The latter refuse to accept concessions or compromises, all of which have been offered too late. The state is now faced with 'the armed struggle' and 'protracted civil war' accompanied by brutal violations of human rights by the state's security apparatus, This is followed by retaliatory violations by the armed resistance. The conflict is brutalized, followed by the most dreadful of consequences, such as civilian

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casualties, fleeing of refugees to foreign countries and the erosion of democratic processes within the state. An immediate consequence is the refugee problem in Western Europe and North America.

The armed resistance now refuses compromises within the framework of the decolonized state. The territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state is challenged. The demand is no longer for decentralization, autonomy and devolution, or even federalism, but there has been a qualitative leap in demands due to the time lag and the credibility gap created by the too little too late syndrome.

What is now asked for is based on what might be termed 'the demonstration effect.' The militants among the minority nationalities have become conscious of the independence won by such states as those in the Baltic, the disintegration that followed in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet and Yugoslav systems, of Eastern Europe, of the German Democratic Republic and the demand by Quebec for sovereignty association and independence and so on. The demand now, because of the examples of all that are taking place in the world, is that the minority nationality be given the right to self-determination and if necessary the right to secede from the original decolonized state, the artificial geographical expression. In effect the demand is for a separate sovereign state.

The last stage is tantamount to 'systems destabilization.' Not only is the territorial sovereignty of the decolonized state challenged: the civil war within the state causes a reverberating effect on the international system and in particular on the regional subsystem. The bloody civil war in Sri Lanka, for instance, has had it repercussions in both India and Pakistan as well as in the states of Europe and North America. The West European and North American states provide aid for development purposes to these 'fluid states.' They take note of the dismal human rights record of their governments. At the same time there is also the constant flow of refugees and asylum-seekers. Providing extra-aid and refugee status to fleeing peoples are loads on the international system.

The four stages that lead to ethno-nationalistic demands for self-determination and secession are not the result of fanciful ideals or of romantic dreams of young militants who take to the gun against their sea of troubles. No group of peoples, not even if it constitutes a nation within a heterogeneous state, will imperil its existence and future when it resorts to armed resistance. This has never been the first weapon. That is why most liberation movements pass through several stages: parliamentary and extra-parliamentary protest and non-violent civil disobedience; and only when all

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these forms of pressure fail to have any effect on the majority ethnic leadership does violence becomes the last resort. In effect, violence, that is 'the armed struggle,' is not an immediate transition after independence. It is the uncompromising intransigence of the majority ethnic leadership that brings about the qualitative leap from civil protest to the protracted civil war.

The question arises as to why the majority ethnic leadership remains unresponsive till conditions reach the point of no-return. There are two answers. First there are rival ethnic political parties within the ethnic majority competing with each other on how to outbid the other in providing their commitment to the demands of the majority community. Arising from this is the fact that most of the ex-colonial states opted for copies of Western constitutional models -- at least to begin with. Western models envisage for the rule of the political majority. The decolonized state is a patchwork and therefore provides for the rule of a religious, linguistic, tribal or ethnic numerocracy, not a political majority. It is such a numerocratic state, the demotic state (the rule of the populist ethnic majority) that leads to ethnic confrontation and the disintegration of the state system. Numerocracy is confused with the parliamentary majority in Western models.

There are ways and means of preventing the partitioning of existing states. We have to take into account the fact that the more powerful states, as for example, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as leagues of states such as the Organization of African Unity (the OAU) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have as an article of their creed the willingness to respect and guarantee the frontiers of states in their subsystems just as they were at the time of the departure of the colonizing power. The phrase in the vocabulary is 'respect for each other's sovereign territorial integrity.' Consequently most, if not all, minority ethnic resistance groups are obliged to consider political designs that give them the substance of their goals without their actually having to start from the ground after a bloody civil war. Bangladesh, some of the original states of Eastern Europe and of the CIS are exceptions. They wanted sovereign status straight away. An example is Czechoslovakia which became hyphenated to Czecho-Slovakia with Slovakia now seeking independent status.

Arend Lijphart, the grand theorist of consociationalism, in a pathbreaking article, 'Conception and federation: conceptual and empirical

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links' advocated federalism and consociational democracy as solutions to the problems of multiethnic societies.[1] He defined consociational democracy in terms of four principles, all of which, he insisted, deviate from the Westminster model of cabinet and parliamentary government with its concomitant of rule by the majority. But as a precondition to his solution, he emphasized that the political elites of the rival parties must cooperate and not compete. Thus Hindu and Sikh or Hindu and Muslim in India or Sinhalese and Tamil political elites and parties in Sri Lanka will, in terms of Lijphart's formula, have to observe a self-denying ordinance, so to speak, and consciously avoid the temptation of making primordial questions such as religion, language and caste, issues in elections, for these can rouse the basic instincts of peoples and once unleashed, there is no guessing to what lengths these will go and in the process place at risk the foundations of the sovereign state.

Lijphart's principles were, firstly, the grand coalition of all ethnic groups in the establishment of the government of the state. This was attempted in a circumscribed fashion by the Congress Party in India, the United National Party in Sri Lanka and the Alliance Party and National Front in Malaysia. The problem, however, was that the representatives of the minority elites who entered these parties were condemned by their fellow people. They were stigmatized as co-optees of the ruling group, if not collaborators. And sometimes even more virulent epithets were hurled -- that they were traitors and quislings. The latter for their part claimed to cooperate in order to seek solutions. Both states (India and Sri Lanka) failed. Malaysia, however, proved a qualified success. The Malays, Chinese and Indians in that new state forged ties at the elite level. But even in Malaysia there are complaints that the benefits of collaboration between elites have not trickled down to the masses.

Secondly, Lijphart suggested the mutual veto, that is , the right of each elite to refuse to endorse a legislative proposal if there was contrary to the interests of the group they represented.[2] Such a provision is not included in any of the constitutions of new states; but there are often informal discussions and formal debates at the level of cabinets and subcommittees of cabinet before proposals are presented to the legislature. In this way the spirit of Lijphart's advocacy that confrontation and conflict should be avoided is adhered to. Differences are smoothed over before the lower levels of legislators are brought into the debate. Lijphart's is thus an elitist approach to politics which seeks desperately to avoid the seepage of controversy from an understanding elite to catch-all populist political

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parties.

Thirdly, Lijphart advocated proportional representation to ensure a proper participation of ethnic minorities in the business of government. If proportionally represented, the chances are that, given the possible political divisions and rivalries in the ranks of the ethnic majority, one or other of their competing political parties will seek the support of the ethnic minority. This happened with Congress (I). It established a support based in south India; and it has been so in Sri Lanka on quite a few occasions, In this way problems that adversely affect the ethnic minority stand a better chance of peaceful resolution.

Finally, Lijphart used the password 'segmental autonomy,' which is another term for federalism. In today's terminology it means a loose federation, or even a confederation, as a way of avoiding confrontation and the inevitable consequence of civil war and the possible break-up of the ethnic majority dominated sovereign state. Federalism is in its many meanings utilized to satisfy minority discontent in most of the states of South Asia. Those opposed to this concept -- as in Sri Lanka -- have stated that federalism is the first step to separation, disintegration and secession. This need not happen. The design can indeed contain within its framework formulas for resolving fissiparous and centrifugal tendencies.

No state, however, would normally adopt a federal constitution if it could avoid doing so, for federalism gives rise to delays in administration when there will be litigation between disputing parties. It is also expensive, for it makes for several levels of government which involves paying more salaries and maintaining more governments and elites. Nevertheless the price is worth paying if the alternative is civil war and secession.

Lijphart, it must be noted, did not enunciate a cast-iron straitjacket for the containment of ethnic dissent. He had earlier (1969) advocated other flexible approaches. His objective was the formulation of 'deliberate efforts to counteract the immobilizing and unstabilizing effects of cultural fragmentation activated by competing subcultural elities.' The latter must observe a self-denying ordinance and thus overcome divisiveness. There must, therefore, be mutual accommodation, a commitment to maintain the system and an understanding of 'the perils of political fragmentation.'[3]

Hard on the heels of Lijphart came Hans Daalder's confirming thesis in 1971 of Lijphart's broader view, when in relation to the Netherlands and Switzerland, he propounded that the term 'consociation' has been 'increasingly used to characterize a certain pattern of political life in which the political elites of distinct social groups succeed in establishing

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a viable, pluralistic state by a process of mutual forbearance and accommodation.'[4]

Lijphart and Daalder, Noel and others of their school of thought presupposed politically mature societies with liberal traditions. They had expected that the societies they wrote about had mature and responsible elites; however, on the contrary, there have been murmurs of discontent even in these states as witnessed in Belgium, Quebec and Canada, and nationalism in Scotland. And the fact is that the lines between subcultures are more heavily marked in the new states of the Third World. Transcending interests do not always prevail for the reasons we stated in the preceding paragraphs and in the ones that follow.

At the regional and international level, secessionist liberation movements have serious implications. Not in South Asia as yet, but in other parts of the world, separatist movements have become non-state actors after a metamorphosis out of a stage where they practiced horrendous acts of terror and/or violence. The instances are those of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the African National Congress. In South Asia, liberation movements have obtained support from neighbouring states hostile to the state against whom the secessionist struggle is directed. The most striking is the success of Bangladesh with the backing of India against the state of Pakistan, and support from India for the Tamil resistance groups against an unfriendly (to India) Colombo government. Pakistan in turn assists the freedom fighters of Khalistan and Kashmir, while Afghanistan and the ex-Soviet Union at various times provided facilities to rebel groups agitating for Pushtinistan and Baluchistan in the sovereign state of Pakistan. Thus the ethnic factor is one of immediate relevance in the life of the decolonized sovereign state. From the actions of neighbouring hostile states, it can also cause disturbances in the international and regional systems.

As distinct from Lijphart's theories for the preservation of the sovereign integrity of the state, there is another school of thought of which Lee C. Buchheit, Walker Connor and Dov Ronen are exponents. They are all keenly aware of the death, destruction and costliness generated by ethnic wars and the disturbances these can cause to the international system. They wrote long before the tragedies of the Kurds of Iraq and the violence that has overtaken Yugoslavia.

In 1978, Buchheit wrote that an attempt must be made to explore the status within international law of claims to secessionist self-determination.[5] There must be utilized, he emphasized, a method of

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ascertaining legitimate, as distinct from specious, claims. If legitimacy is proven and established, the international community must design a device for collective decision making to enable the ethnic group in question to secede.

In 1973, Connor opined that ethnic awakening had to be recognized as a human right and a basic human category. Connor consequently foresaw a proliferation of political states.[6]

For Ronen the political state is not the terminal entity. Writing in 1979, he stated that the pressures of ethnic self-determination will possibly result in an enormous proliferation of political entitles, perhaps in the hundreds, with implications for the international system. Ronen's solution, however, was 'a new type of federation in which the wider economic entity provides a framework for sociopolitically independent entitles.'[7] In effect, Ronen envisaged a European Economic Community type of association. Another way would have been the galactic polities of ancient empires where the emperors ruled from their central capitals permitting nearly independent politics in the peripheral areas which would pay nominal tribute to them and (the emperors) acknowledge their supremacy, but reserve for themselves all the other attributes of sovereignty.

This exposition of the politics of ethnicity and ethno-nationalism in the South Asian subcontinent hopefully brings into clear relief the dangers of the artificially stitched and ethnically diverse patchwork misnamed the nation state. There is an ever present danger of disequilibrium. There are alternatives which can preserve the existing political state in the way advocated by Arend Lijphart, Lee Buchheit, Walker Cornor and Dov Ronen. But this presupposes highly rational elitist thought and action. The grave danger lies in inter-ethnic wars between tribal, religious and linguistic groups. This could distort the basic rights of individuals in an ethno-numerocratic democracy when preferences are exercised via the ballot box. As an easy way to power, chauvinistic political thinking and action tend to take over.

We need, then, a plan of political re-education. Greater political participation at the lowest levels could help, such as the panchayats and community development schemes in India. There is increasing involvement in local government in Sri Lanka. President Ayub Khan experimented with some 80,000 units of what he called basic democracies but these could have helped in re-education had they not functioned in a dictatorial and authoritarian framework. The answer, therefore, is more democracy and better forms of democracy from the basic levels upwards so that people will

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develop a vested interest in exercising the individual privilege to vote. Improved constitutional designs as advocated by Arend Lijphart and other thinkers of this genre can accelerate the process of re-education.

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APPOINTMENT WITH RAJIV GANDHI*

Charles Sarvan

The day has come but it's night. A few minutes after mid-night, according to the watch given me. It's Swiss and, I'm told, very reliable. Am I reliable? Precision is important and everything must go according to the time-table so carefully made that it can meet unexpected changes in his programme. Handsome and known all over the world. One of the most important of human beings; smiling like Gorbachev and at ease with rulers and royalty. And me, a nobody from an unknown village where time had stood still for so long, going to meet him. I must be good; punctual, and do everything correctly. Punctuality. It didn't matter when we were children. But then, neither did I think I would meet a leader; a leader of a foreign land; the famous leader of a large country; son of India's great daughter. I must behave properly. Punctuality did not matter, though time and work did. The stubborn brown soil which needed so much patient coaxing. Father pulling on the rope, and the bucket coming up from the well -- brimful, slopping, pure -- to be poured out into the channel which branched off into smaller ones, in turn leading to still smaller ones. All meticulously and laboriously made, reaching the furthest points of our vegetable plot. Sister and I would follow the vanguard of the advancing army of water. Sometimes we would drop a leaf on its inquisitive, pushing nose, freeing it, if it got stuck; excitedly running beside it as it flowed further and further and further. All so very far away -- and not only in time. That would have made it easier. Didn't know either that other armies, real, very real in their cruelty, would come. I wish I could fall asleep; wish I could switch off this video. The small, four-poster shed to which mother tethered the goats. And I helped her move it about during the day so that their droppings would be spread more widely. Father had a spade in our cart to pick up droppings from the bull: not to keep the narrow lanes between palmyrah-leaf fences clean, but to take them home as fertilizer. I remember the glow on her chest as she leaned to blow the embers of our open fire, the ash swirling. Unfailing in love and duty. I

This essay must, repeat must, be read slowly.

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wonder where she is at this moment? Asleep on the mat, on the floor. The last to sleep and the first to rise. I'm glad she doesn't know. She worried so much over me; anxious I grow up modest and pure; safe and good into what a Hindu, Tamil woman should be. Poor father too. (Sometimes we grow fond of people we cannot like.) Soon I'll be safe, beyond all dangers, and mother won't have to live in uncertainty and perplexity; will not have to worry herself sick. But am I good? Too late to debate down that road. As for purity, can anything be more pure than death? Unadulterated. Didn't think I'd leave the little house for ever; cross the sea (and what a crossing that proved to be, avoiding the government patrol boats!); end in India. Does it make a difference where one ends? It's not that I considered these possibilities and rejected them: they didn't even occur to me. Not given to fantasizing. Perhaps, I'm unimaginative? I wish I could fall asleep. Murderess sounds worse than murderer. Or does it? Wonder why? To die here, in India. Odd. These Indians are also Tamils; the few in the house with me now are from home; so are you, fast asleep beside me. And yet I am conscious only of my being, terribly separate and isolated which will soon fragment and cease to exist. I think of the past -- not of the futureless present. I do not feel brave; nor frightened, nor fiercely patriotic. Why should I hold onto this life, like petty cash and coins clutched in a fist? If the landscape of life consists of nondescript plains; painful valleys and wonderful, energising peaks, I've encountered little of the third these many years. Seeing what happens all over the world, I've felt at times that, by some mischance, I've landed on an alien planet, surrounded by a totally foreign species. And now, ironically, I add to the destruction and sorrow. I try to think of his children, children who take wealth and privilege as much for granted as the air we breathe and the sun which now seems to pause in its rising. I hope he had the energy and inclination to go to his wife tonight, after all that exhausting electioneering. Death catches most of us unprepared. Except poor privileged me. Truly, if I could warn him, I would, so that he could speak words of love and gratitude to his wife, and advice to his children; embrace, give kisses of goodbye, like a king before his execution. No, I don't feel powerful, a maker of History. Rather, I'm one of its victims. It was my fate; my destiny. He already is, and will remain, in history though when recording his death, they'll have to use the passive voice. I'll be unknown, as I've always been. Even you, am I known by you? Can we know ourselves, let alone others? A few hours ago we made love. As a child, and even later, I used to keep the tastiest bit of food for the last, as if that would constitute

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the memory of the meal, become the meal itself. Did you think our moments of passion would stretch into the beyond?; that the state of pleasure would determine my condition in the hereafter?; that we took the last taste of life with us into eternity? Truly, a wonderful present then. Of grandfather they said with satisfaction, "He died peacefully," as if he would, therefore, be for ever at peace. You pretended to reach happiness, and I pretended to be convinced. Did I, in turn, succeed in deceiving you or did you deceive me in pretending to believe...? I wish I could fall asleep. Did you find it macabre entering me, as if I were already dead? Making love to a still-warm corpse? Is that why you couldn't? But I didn't behave like a corpse, did I? You will be there to ensure that I am finally safe. You will personally see to it: my love, guide and, if need be, liberator. And then I will continue in the cycle of life and death in which we are trapped. Will the act I am going to perform win me a happier existence in my rebirth? I would like to be born into a peaceful country. Are there such places? Can't imagine me being born a European woman. What a laugh. I wish I could fall asleep. I need the rest. But I am not tired. I will be, if I don't fall asleep. From the Christians at College, I heard something about Christ's last supper. He ate bread and drank wine. In America, a prisoner condemned to death can order anything and everything he wishes to eat for the last meal. What if he asks for something very expensive? Or not available in the country? Will they postpone the execution till the food is flown down and prepared? I must not slip into silliness. I'll wake you up with my giggles, if I'm not careful. Did Christ have only bread and wine, or was there also meat? And vegetables? Christians eat meat, including beef. I didn't have even wine. Wonder what wine tastes like? Not that it matters. Come to think of it, what did we have for supper? Never mind. I wish I could fall asleep. Soon they will come to dress me. Mother and others were so serious and self-important when they dressed a bride for her wedding. Seemed to take hours, but the result was fabulous; took your breath away, it did, the transformation. Like a new creation. No reference to the wedding night, no jokes before us, children. Much time and care and love; perhaps a little sadness too at the parting to come; a beginning marking an end. The bridal lamb to be pierced on the marriage bed. I too will be dressed with care, but by the hands of men. The wiring; the detonator -- strange corset. They will be even more careful than mother and aunts. I don't think I'll fee shy, be ashamed; won't even be embarrassed. Strange, for I am very modest, was brought up to be. It will be like undressing before the doctor. Their

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professionalism will make it all impersonal; will anaesthetize any sense of shame. We girls were taught not to laugh in public and if I did, I quickly hid my face or modestly put my hand before my mouth. In this arranged marriage, it's the groom who doesn't know; hasn't given his consent. Makes a change. A marriage that will not and yet will be consummated. I am sure he's had a much, much happier life. Am I trying to excuse myself? Do I need excuses? I shouldn't try to open such doors now. I wish I could fall asleep; fall into the deep, deep depths of sleep, never to break surface again. My great grandmother's funeral, the earliest I can recall. Waves of lamentation subsiding into half-taken breaths, sobs, murmurs and then surging again. The climax was when the men, till then in the background, came to take charge, close up and carry the coffin away. Climax because we were not allowed to accompany the body to the cremation grounds. Our uncontrolled weeping, even hysteria, must not be allowed to spoil the dignity of the last rites; get in the way of the proceedings. Death must have its solemnity. So, for us, the moment of farewell came with that closing of the coffin; the full realization of death and its finality. But I, I will be allowed to walk, to attend my funeral to its very end though, at least here following tradition, no women will accompany my walking body. The world will think me ugly in what it'll call my fanaticism. Wild, lunatic-eyed and with dishevelled hair or frightening in my cold control, my cruel composure. Dressed up for a wedding or festival, with flowers in my hair, I have pretended not to notice male eyes looking at me, but have felt warm in my womanhood; felt happy, felt even a touch of pride and power. I may not be a beauty but I was, have been, a woman. My heart and pulse; my breasts and full thighs have told me so unmistakably. But now I feel neither fear nor courage. I no longer know or care whether I am beautiful or ugly; good or evil. On this morning of marriage and death, I can't seem to make them matter; am unable to concentrate. Perhaps I am falling asleep. That would be welcome. I wish I could seize the hands of this watch and swing it round and round, a little girl with plaited hair flying in the wind. Mother wasn't often demonstrative (there was no time for such things,) but sometimes I would embrace her, and try to make my hands meet behind her so that the circle would be complete; that I would have a sense of safety and possession. I didn't succeed and, by the time I had grown a little more and could have, was discouraged. Now I lie here, in this somewhat familiar foreign land, trying to get my fingers to meet; to understand; at least to feel. I am alone, beyond crying; alone that I am separate even

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from myself. Can one get lonelier than that? I wish I could fall asleep. Faint light outside, and faint sounds of stirring in the house. Should I get up or should I wait for them to come and wake me with hushed, apologetic voices? If I get up, will they think I was afraid and couldn't sleep? Or that I am calmly courageous, even impatient? Either way, they'd be wrong. It doesn't matter. Nothing does anymore, except those last dreadful steps I must walk, naturally, and with perfect calmness. To be punctual; to behave properly -- not what mother meant when she used that word to me as a child, to child me. But the worst too will be soon over and, set free, I will run down the sand dunes, a little child, the smile on my mouth and the light of my eyes merging with the ever-growing brightness of this belated sun.

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Chapter 15

THE IDEOLOGIES AND REALITIES OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT - A POSTFACE

Godfrey Gunatilleke

Introduction

Ideologies often play a critical role in mobilising people for conflict whether it be between groups within one sovereign state or between states. The way in which ideologies emerge, get articulated and change character during a conflict indicates how they redefine the causes of the conflict and alter its parameters. They do so by producing new perceptions of existing realities. They thereby create new "realities" which acquire an independent force of their own in driving the conflict. In this process each party to the conflict tends to recreate and relive the past, for it is in the past that each re-discovers both the deeply laid foundations of the conflict as well as the self-esteem and rationale for their envisioned future. The way in which the ideologies of the Tamils and the Sinhalese evolved and took shape after independence indicates how the ethnic conflict itself rapidly escalated over time and how specific problems and grievances soon became inextricably linked with larger ethnocentric goals and objectives.

In July 1995, the government of the People's Alliance which had been elected in 1994 announced in broad outline its proposals for devolving power to the regions that were aimed at providing a political solution to the ethnic conflict.[1] At the same time, in an unprecedented initiative the government invited and promoted a countrywide public debate and discussion on these proposals. The debate was able to engage a broad and representative cross section of the population and took place at all levels national, regional, district and the local communities. The main purpose of the debate was to sound public opinion among the Sinhala majority and to mobilise popular support for the government's proposals. The past efforts of Sinhala leaders to find durable solutions to the ethnic conflict had been aborted by various groups who were strongly opposed to any form of sharing power with the Tamils. The government was keen to ensure that its own proposals did not meet with a similar fate. The Tamil parties in Parliament while expressing their reservations on some features of the proposals supported them in principle. Consequently the participation in the

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public debate that ensued came mainly from the Sinhalese.

The debate has given expression to widely divergent points of view among the Sinhalese. It is significant for the way in which it reflected the shifts that had taken place in the dominant ideological positions and attitudes of the Sinhala majority, particularly those of the main Sinhala political parties -- the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party. It was the first time that a ruling Sinhala party was campaigning for a system of substantial devolution that went even further than the Indian constitution and doing so openly, challenging its opponents. It was also the first time that the main Sinhala opposition party was refraining from opposing the government's proposals through popular demonstrations and protests. Although the controversy often became sharp and acrimonious, the debate on the whole was also unusual for the peaceful and orderly manner in which it was conducted throughout the country and the manner in which it avoided any violence in the heat of controversy. All these elements which characterised the public debate seemed to indicate a visible change both in the political dynamics of the conflict as well as the popular mood and the psyche of the Sinhalese concerning it.

This debate on devolution became the occasion to recount and re-examine the history of the conflict.[2] This part of the exercise focused on the causes of the conflict and represented a wide range of divergent interpretations. The debate helped to define three levels at which the disagreements and conflicts had developed. At one level the issues related to the nature of the constitution and the arrangements to enable minorities to participate in government in the areas in which they were a majority. At another they related to specific policies such as the language of administration, the new agricultural settlements in the North and East or the scheme of recruitment to Universities. At a third and more fundamental level it related to the conditions governing the safety and security of life and property and the incidence of ethnic violence. The language of discourse on each of these tended to shift from the specific and practical issues as they affected the daily lives of Tamils and Sinhalese to larger ideological issues of ethno-cultural identities and their relative positions in the country.

Some of those who opposed devolution questioned its rationale in the Sri Lankan context.[3] They argued that the Tamils had no real grievances. They claimed that the Tamils living outside the North and the East had no discernible problems, that they were participating fully in the social and economic life of the country and many of them were holding high positions in government. They saw the conflict as originating in the Tamil

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opposition to the action taken by the Sinhalese after independence to redress the grievances of the Sinhalese. They blamed the Tamil political ideology which in their perception prompted Tamils to make excessive demands, promote ideas of separation and an independent Tamil national identity and finally undertake an armed struggle to divide the country.

The spokesmen in support of devolution and Tamils who participated in the debate argued differently.[4] In their interpretation, the ideology of the Sinhala majority defined Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist country in which minorities should find reasonable accommodation under a regime which is decided on by the Sinhala majority. They argued that it is this ideology that led to the abrogation of agreements between Sinhala and Tamil leaders and the brutal violence directed at the Tamils in 1958, 1977 and 1983.

The debate on devolution revealed how the two ideologies Sinhala and Tamil re-inforced the ethnocentric character in each other. The mutual fear and distrust that this process generated continuously distorted the perception of the existing problems and prevented pragmatic and timely solutions to them. Any system of devolution, for example, became unacceptable from the time of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact, mainly on the ground that the Tamil parties would use such a system in a manner that would eventually lead to the division of the country. Colonisation was seen by the Tamils as an expression of the "Sinhala Only" ideology and the expansionist designs of the Sinhala majority. To some Sinhalese it was a safeguard against separation. In this debate, colonisation as a means of alleviating the problems of the landless poor became a matter of secondary importance. Most of the important issues relating to the ethnic problem came to be seen through this ideological lens. Problems which could have found pragmatic compromises and solutions that would have been normally acceptable to both parties, became inextricably linked with ideological issues of cultural and racial survival for each. Therefore removing the ideological accretions which overlaid the substantive problems and "deconstructing" ideology to its due proportions is one exercise that is useful in charting the path towards a resolution of the conflict.

The Role of Ideology in the Ethnic Conflict: Some General Issues

The interpretation of the role of ideology in any conflict, or for that matter, any social process depends on certain fundamental assumptions that are made concerning the nature of social reality. The main elements of an

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ideology comprise the system of ideas which seek to order and interpret a selected field of human experience, define a set of goals and a programme of action relating to it and recruit adherents for the achievements of those goals. The role of ideology raises two sets of questions -- one relates to the nature of ideology itself how it is produced and what independent power it wields in influencing events and actions. The other concerns the relative importance that is given to the different elements of the social reality -- the economic system, religion, culture, ethnicity -- around which the ideology grows. Both are closely interrelated. The analysis of the role of ideology in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka would depend on the answers that are given to both sets of questions.

In the history of philosophy the two extremes in the interpretation of ideology is best represented by the two opposing schools of thought -- the Hegelian and the Marxist; the former sees ideology as the prime mover and projects history as the product of the conflict of ideas; while for the latter history is the conflict of material interests and ideology itself is a secondary or epiphenomenal outcome of it. In the analytical approach which is positivistic or derived from historical materialism and Marxism, the ideological content of a conflict is essentially a derivative phenomenon or an artifact of the conflict and not a prime mover of it. This interpretation of ideology is itself linked to the overarching ideology in which all aspects of human life such as the religious and the ethno-cultural are reduced to and interpreted in terms of the system of production and the relationships arising out of it. Ideology then reflects the material causes which lie in the problems of sharing available resources and exercising power and control over them. The conflict is embedded in the gains and losses that accrue to one party through actions of another in a given situation. The ethnocentric ideological constructions themselves that grow out of these situations whether they be the re-affirmation of a historical identity, the mission of "liberation," a new state of freedom and autonomy, a concept of "homeland," a form of international brotherhood, will all lose their rationale if the real problems which gave rise to the ideology in the first instance are resolutely addressed and solved effectively.

One somewhat extreme expression of this approach is the analysis of ethnic conflicts primarily in terms of economic causes such as slow growth of the economy and competition for increasingly scarce resources. An example which is commonly cited is that of Malaysia. Malaysia, it is argued, had the potential for acute ethnic conflict but was able to deal with it because it achieved and sustained high economic growth over a long

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period.[5] The rapidly expanding economy was able to satisfy the growing demands of all groups and thereby cope successfully with its ethnic problems. It provided enough economic space for all ethnic groups. By the same argument, in Sri Lanka the relatively slow growth of the economy was unable to enlarge the existing economic space to accommodate the growing population with their rising expectations. The slow growth created the conditions in which the competition for scarce resources and economic opportunities promoted rivalries and conflicts that developed on ethnic lines. Such arguments imply that if the problems of economic growth and distribution had been dealt with successfully, the primary causes of conflict would have been removed and the rationale for an ideology of conflict on ethnic lines would have been non-existent. The British constitution makers took a similar point of view when they argued that "communalism" - the expression of ethnicity as they perceived it -- would disappear with democratisation and socio-economic development.

In contrast to such an interpretation is that which gives the ethnocentric or ethno-cultural ideology a role which is of a more primary nature. It does this by arguing that the ethno-cultural identities have an independent reality which cannot be reduced to and explained in terms of other socio-economic phenomena and therefore ethno-cultural ideologies which spring from them become powerful driving forces. The problems themselves arise from cultural and historical realities which are more powerful than the problems of the existing socio-economic relationships.[6] These realities have already produced collective identities of an ethno-cultural nature in which race, religion and language become the key determinants. Within each of these identities, people organise themselves to act together to protect their common interests and promote them. These ethno-cultural realities play a major role in the distribution of power and the enjoyment of freedom -- social, cultural, economic and political at any given time in most societies. They create the grievances, the distrust, the hate and the anger which generate the conflict. The ideologies that emerge from these realities form the basic attitudes and values which govern the relationships of the parties in conflict and provide the intellectual and emotional base which sustains and heightens the conflicts. This situation allows little room for a fractional or "problem by problem" approach without regard to ethnicity, as the problems themselves are perceived as being rooted in a more fundamental conflict of ethno-cultural interests.

In such a situation these ideologies take different paths depending on how the ethno-cultural identities find their place in the larger national

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entity. The ethno-cultural identity can begin with an ideology which is one of accommodation within the national identity. Such an ideology tends to be pragmatic, focusing on specific grievances that have to be redressed and substantive problems that have to be solved. It stays close to the socio-political realities by seeking adjustments within the existing system. If the prevailing system does not make space for such adjustments, the ideology of the group begins to undergo a change; it seeks to re-interpret both the conflict and the problems that have risen. The ideology tends to move beyond the problems which had earlier pre-occupied the ethno-cultural group. It seeks a new identity, whether regional or national. The ideology of this new identity and its affirmation begins to function in ways which elevate these present problems to issues of historical importance relating them to the past and future destiny of the group.

At that stage the problems of the present are not easily amenable to pragmatic and fractional solutions, problem by problem, as they arise. The ideology succeeds in diverting attention from the specific problems to the grand design and the goals set by it. The option for "the grand design" and the radical solutions emerges as the inexorable logic of the situation. Ideology then seems to undergo a critical metamorphosis. The ideological content of the conflict then takes precedence over the "material" content and begins to set the "rules" and direct the praxis of the conflict. The ideology acquires characteristics of a system of belief or faith. It inspires passionate loyalties and evokes the dedication and tenacity of purpose necessary for a struggle to achieve its goals. It also develops negative attributes, engages in advocacy that tends to be fanatical, closes itself to critical reasoning and dissent, slips into a language of discourse which deals with dissidents within its ranks as "traitors;" treats its opponents as "enemies" and begins to "demonise" them. It considers violence a necessary instrument to gain its ends.

This concluding chapter uses the foregoing generalisations on the role of ideology as a frame for examining the evolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Ideology in the context of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict shares many of the characteristics that have been described. It has exerted a pervasive influence on the evolution and direction of the conflict and provided the emotional bases which have aggravated and sustained it. Therefore, it would be useful to examine the various ideological elements which have gone into this process and consider them in relation to the overarching role they have played in fomenting the conflict as well as in eventually transforming it, if at all, in ways which will aid the resolution of

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the conflict. The discussion that follows surveys the process whereby the ideological content of the conflict gets defined independently of the "material" or substantive content and moves beyond the specific problems and concerns which, originally, were the focus of the conflict. It examines how the ethnocentric ideologies of both the Sinhala and Tamil leadership drafted from the political and economic realities that had emerged with the end of the colonial era. These realities were taking Sri Lanka in the direction of a society with some of the essential features of a modern democratic society that was envisaged by the British constitution makers. They demanded an ideology with the capacity for nation-building in a multi-ethnic society. The incipient efforts in this direction were overtaken by the ethnocentric ideologies of both communities. Redirecting the ideologies to a path which once again relate themselves more realistically to the "substantive" content of the conflict becomes an essential pre-condition for the resolution of the conflict. An exercise that would be helpful for achieving this is to retrace the sequence in which the ideology progressively underwent changes and escalated the conflict.

The chapter goes on to discuss how the dominant ideology in the Tamil community shifted from power sharing in the centre to the federal concept and then to separation, Tamil homeland and Tamil nationhood. The term "dominant" here is used to describe the ideologies which were explicitly articulated and reflected in the actions and pronouncements of parties and groups who had power to influence the political developments. The evolution of the Tamil political ideology is the opposite of what is described by Sankaran Krishna in his analysis of the political movements in Tamilnadu. What were the dynamics which drove Sri Lanka in the opposite direction? The chapter goes on to discuss the dominant ideology of the Sinhala community and its self-perception of its history and the centrality of Sinhala Buddhist culture in Sri Lankan society. It examines the way in which the Sinhala ideology influenced the shifts in Tamil ideology on the one hand and interpreted and responded to them, on the other. Many analysts have argued that the shifts in Tamil ideology were responses to the intransigence of the dominant Sinhala ideology. The protagonists of the latter have argued that the Sinhala ideology was asserting itself only to remove the impediments which were the legacy of the colonial regime. They see the growth of Tamil separatism as internally driven by the aspirations and goals which have always been present in Tamil politics and would have surfaced inevitably in the course of time. These two entrenched positions have left little room for any movement towards an ideological

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middle ground for the resolution of the conflict.

The intrinsic character of the ideologies of conflict is that they are both unifying and divisive. One facet of the ideology helps to unify each party to the conflict, subsuming the divisions and differences within it.[7] But this very same unifying force which unifies the ethno-cultural group, divides it from and places it in conflict with the other party. Distinctiveness and separateness become essential for the affirmation of the independent existence and self-realisation of each. But in the search for a distinct and unifying identity, the ideology of each group will usually have its own vision of the social and cultural order that they are striving to achieve for themselves. Except in the extremist fundamentalist ideologies, this vision will usually contain a core of norms and values that are derived from a more universal ideology and value system about human rights, equality and social justice, democratic institutions and the desired social and political order -- a value system pertaining to good governance that has gained ascendancy at a global level. In the first instance the conflict itself often arises from the violation of this core of norms by one party or at least it is perceived as arising from such violation. Both parties to the conflict tend to invoke these norms and value systems as a frame of reference to obtain redress for the violations committed by the other party or vindicate their own actions. This core of norms and values and the affirmation and restoration of it then become a basis for resolving the conflict. This process has been demonstrated very effectively in the case of South Africa and Zimbabwe in which the norms of democratic governance where the majority assumes power have finally triumphed.

The Sri Lankan conflict which is about sharing power with a minority and which produced a strong separatist ideology is not fully comparable with these two cases. However, in tracing the evolution of the Sri Lankan conflict it is necessary to examine how this ideological strand of a modern democratic polity and social justice figure in the conflict and what mediatory role it has already played and can play in resolving the conflict. The ideologies which define the Sinhala and Tamil identities have grown and been nurtured alongside the other major ideological changes that have transformed Sri Lankan society both during the colonial period and after independence. These include the political ideologies and value systems that came with democratic institutions, the Marxist movements and other global changes. They upheld goals and norms for the management of societies that co-exist uneasily with the ethno-cultural ideologies and are often at variance with them. Yet, the democratic institutions themselves

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have shown unusual resilience in a troubled political environment and survived violent insurrections. If the ethno-cultural ideologies that have driven the conflict are seen within this context, the way they relate to the contemporary ideological setting of "the good society" becomes critical for the resolution of the conflict.

There were several groups other than the Marxist parties both in the Sinhala and Tamil communities who from the inception approached the ethnic conflict through this liberal ideological framework. In the period preceding independence, leading political figures both among the Sinhalese and the Tamils spoke for a Ceylonese national identity which transcended communal identities.[8] As the conflict escalated, there were multi-ethnic groups who argued for a society which recognised and gave value to ethnicity within a multi-ethnic ideology and sought a solution through a more democratic polity with greater devolution of power at the sub-national level[9]. They gave expression to this ideology in writings and public discussions. However, during the period when the ethnocentric ideologies were in the ascendancy, the national media were not ready to give these more liberal ideologies the public exposure that would have enhanced their influence. They were marginalised and were constantly attacked as being anti-national in character and being promoted by foreign interests. In the more recent period, with the changes and shifts in the ideological positions of the major political parties in the 1990s, the concepts and values of the multi-ethnic ideology have entered the mainstream ideologies which are taking shape.

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This chapter does not deal with the politics of the Muslim minority or the role it played in the conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Muslim politics took a very different path from that of the Tamils. For a variety of reasons both historical and demographic, the leadership of the Muslim community decided to enter into the main political parties led by the Sinhala majority and seek accommodation and adjustment within the prevailing arrangements. K.M. Silva in his *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies,* describes it as the "politics of pragmatic adaptation".[10] An inquiry into the conditions which produced this response from the Muslim community and its impact on the Sinhala-Tamil conflict would no doubt yield illuminating insights into the nature of ethnic relations and the way it can range from adaptive co-existence to sharp conflict. Such

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an inquiry is however beyond the scope of the present chapter which has a more limited focus in its attempt to chart the course of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict.

The Political Ideology under the Colonial Regime

In the four decades preceding independence the politics of Sri Lanka was governed primarily by the political ideology of the rulers. The desirable system for Sri Lanka was defined in terms of the values and institutions of British democracy and the Sri Lankan politicians were tutored by this ideology and worked within it. However, they assessed the possible outcomes of these institutions from the perspective of their own community. During this period, relations between the Sinhala and Tamil communities were governed only by one principal issue -- the sharing of the power and responsibility granted through the representative institutions that were established. This story is well recounted by the Soulbury Commission in its report, at the time they drafted the Constitution for an independent Ceylon.[11] The main issue of contention on all the major elements in the constitutional reforms proposed during this period, whether it was universal franchise, the Executive Committee system and territorial representation, was the impact they would have on the relative positions of the Sinhala community and the other communities. The arithmetic of representation in the proposed systems was clear from the inception. It seemed inevitable that a representative system based on universal adult franchise and electorates that were primarily determined in relation to population would produce a large majority of Sinhala representatives in any elected assembly. Its political consequences for the minorities unfolded as the democratic institutions began functioning.

The Phase of Communal Representation

The efforts of the colonial rulers to manage the problems of ethnicity and pluralism in their colony fall roughly into two phases. In the first phase they were influenced by their own objectives as the imperial power ruling the country. In this phase the governing institutions that were established beginning with the Legislative Council in 1833 following the Colebrooke Commission cautiously provided for the participation of the Ceylonese in stages and in a very limited form. The government nominated Ceylonese members to represent their communities. Among other officials and

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representatives of the European and Burgher community, the first Legislative Council contained three Ceylonese members one from each of the three communities Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim who were nominated by government to represent their "communities." In 1889 with the increase in the number of members in the Legislative Council, there were three Europeans, a "Low country" Sinhalese a "Kandyan" Sinhalese, a Tamil a Muslim and a Burgher.

This regime of governance therefore recognised the principle which came to be described as "communal representation.[12]" But for whatever motive the rulers may have had, this form of communal representation paid little regard to the size of each community. This regime of equal or near equal representation did not emerge as a major issue among the communities as these representatives did not enjoy any effective decision-making power and performed only the limited function of debating official policies and actions, agitating for reforms and in the process speaking for their communities. But this regime of communal representation created its own political environment. In the political institutions at the apex of the system the rulers were defining the roles for the different communities in a manner that gave them a sense of equality in their relations with each other. There are various interpretations that could be given to this aspect of British colonial rule. The least charitable interpretation is that this regime was part of the imperial strategy of "divide and rule." The rulers found it expedient to promote a regime in which the minorities in the country enjoyed a position and role out of proportion to their size and consequently developed strong loyalties to the rulers; this was useful to the rulers in managing and if need be suppressing the majority. The other more positive interpretation would be that the rulers considered that protection of the minorities in the countries they ruled was an integral part of good government and acted accordingly. Both considerations would have played a part. The issues and dilemmas concerning the minorities began to emerge more clearly as Sri Lanka moved towards greater responsible government and democratization in the 1930s.

The Triumph of Democratic Orthodoxy

The ideological approach which the rulers took to these problems is reflected in the terminology that was current at the time. The terms that were in general use in the discussion were "minorities" and "communal." "Minorities" implied that the Tamils, Muslims and other ethnic groups were

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smaller parts of a larger socio-political entity in which the Sinhalese were the majority. This perception contributed to the approach that was taken later in drafting the Donoughmore constitution (1928) and the Soulbury constitution (1945). It was an approach which favoured a unitary state. Such a definition also meant that these smaller groups were the weaker and less powerful elements and consequently an obligation fell on the government to protect their interests. "Communal" on the other hand was linked easily with communalism, with tendencies which were at variance with a more enlightened national consciousness and a modern democracy; the attitude of the rulers to the persistence of communal groupings was therefore strongly critical; it was perceived as an impediment to progress. When confronted with the task of transferring power to the subject people, the British ideologues moved away from communal representation. The Donoughmore Commission argued resolutely against communal representation and took the position that there should be no political arrangements which perpetuated these communal divisions in society. They were of the view that a secular modern democracy would speedily remove the rationale for these divisions and make them irrelevant. They summed up the problem of communal representation in this cogently phrased paragraph:

> It was generally admitted, even by many communal representatives themselves that the communal form of representation .... was a necessary evil and should only continue until conditions of friendliness and acknowledgement of common aims were developed among the different communities. It is our opinion ,however, that the very existence of communal representation tends to prevent the development of these relations and that only by its abolition will it be possible for the various diverse communities to develop together a true national unity.[13]

The concept of national unity underlying these observation was akin to that of national integration or assimilation into a single nation in which ethnic divisions will disappear. It left little or no room for the protection and sustenance of ethno-cultural identities and the political dimension of that process. It refused to recognize that a political process that gave a place to ethno-cultural identity might have positive features and might in fact be an essential condition of national unity. Both constitutions designed by the British constitution makers -- the Donoughmore and Soulbury constitutions

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-- placed their faith in the "orthodox" forms of democratic, territorial representation with universal adult franchise and hoped that this would produce the social and economic changes that will achieve the desired outcomes. Meanwhile some weightage to the minorities in the demarcation of electorates and the Executive Committee system were expected to ensure adequate participation by the "minorities" in the tasks of government.

The political discourse and the search for constitutional solutions in the period 1923-1945 took place within this ideological framework. The debate was how "minorities" could gain a fair share of political power in a state which from the beginning was conceived in unitary terms. The arrangements had to accommodate the demands of the minorities without violating the basic principle of democracy -- that of majority rule. The framework of a unitary state and majority rule in a democratic polity narrowed the options that were available. The mainstream political ideologies focused on these options. The language and concepts that were used in the debate kept within these bounds. For the minorities, the language of federalism, separatism, nationhood and liberation were still quite some distance away. The only exception to this were the representatives from among the Kandyan Sinhalese who advocated a federal type of government as the answer to their problems and made proposals to the Donoughmore Commission in 1928. The party which proposed a federal solution, although an influential group, was not the sole representative of the Kandyans. There were many Kandyans who were in the mainstream of politics with the "Low country" Sinhalese who did not subscribe to these proposals. The protagonists of the federal idea proposed three self-governing regions -- the Kandyan, the low country and the Tamil speaking North and East. They based their claim for self-government on the Kandyan Convention of 1815 which ceded the Kandyan territories to the British who had in turn undertaken to treat the Kandyan territory as a special entity, protecting the Buddhist religion and the customs and institutions of the Kandyans. The Kandyan federalists referred to the Kandyan people as the Kandyan nation introducing the concept of nationhood in place of "minority" -- a new self-definition in the political discourse at the time and one which assumed major ideological significance as the ethnic conflict evolved. The Donoughmore Commission rejected their proposal on the assumption that territorial representation would give the Kandyans a role in the democratic unitary system adequate to safeguard and promote their interests. Over a brief period of time the Kandyan federalist phenomenon disappeared from the political scene even as the Tamils moved in the

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opposite direction to federalism. For a variety of reasons among which the chief were common ethnicity, religion and language, the system was working for the Kandyan Sinhalese. At the same time as the Sinhala ethno-cultural identity was beginning to assert itself from the 1930s onwards, the system was failing to work for the Tamils.

Ethnicity and Democracy in the Unitary State

The experience under the Donoughmore Constitution during the period preceding independence, provided lessons which went unheeded. It demonstrated in no uncertain terms that any constitutional arrangement within a system which combined democratic representation with a unitary state would not suffice to prevent a Sinhala majority from emerging and acting unilaterally without reference to the minorities. The Executive Committee system was designed to provide the opportunity to minorities to participate effectively in the tasks of government. The Board of Ministers was expected to have a few representatives from the minorities. The eventual outcome however was an all-Sinhala Board of Ministers in 1936. The majority that the Sinhalese commanded would have always enabled them to have such a Board. Sir Baron Jayatilaka later explained that this was done deliberately to prove to the minorities that the Executive Committee system would not guarantee the representation of minorities in the Board of Ministers.[14] The first decisive action however by the Sinhalese seemed to be an expression of the "Sinhala Only" ideology which was taking shape.

Notwithstanding the lessons of the Donoughmore Constitution the Tamils continued to place reliance on constitutional arrangements that would increase their representation such as the fifty-fifty formula and on devices such as the Executive Committee system. The fifty-fifty formula proposed by the Tamil Congress to the Soulbury Commission in 1945, sought to increase representation in a manner which prevented the Sinhalese from being in a clear majority in the democratically elected legislature.[15] This demand was seen by the British constitution-makers as an unacceptable perversion of democracy. The Executive System was rejected by the Soulbury Commission on the ground that it had proved to be too cumbersome and impractical for efficient government. They were inclined to leave the future to the statesmanship of the politicians of the majority community and their political will "... to rise above differences of community and caste and look to the well-being of Ceylon as a whole.[16]"

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Eventually there was to be no compromise on the basic tenets of the British ideology of parliamentary democracy and the concept of a secular nation state which should rise above community and creed. The constitution recommended by the Soulbury Commission embodied these principles while providing one fundamental safeguard for the minorities -- the section which denied Parliament the power to make any laws "rendering persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities are not liable or confer upon any persons of any community or religion any privileges or advantages which are not conferred on persons of other communities or religions."[17]

During this entire period preceding independence, the agitations of the Tamils and the responses of the Sinhala majority were essentially contained within this ideology of British democracy and that too within one part of it. It was not considered necessary or relevant to draw on the wider experience of the Commonwealth which had gone beyond the unitary to federal systems to provide for a more viable sharing of power. The mainstream Tamil ideology also regarded this as irrelevant to their predicament. They were content as yet to adopt a pragmatic approach to the problems they faced and to eschew any new ideological positions which went beyond the political paradigm which had evolved during colonial rule. The few voices that spoke of the federal system as appropriate to the Sri Lankan situation, such as that of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike during the early part of his political career in the 1920s, were too far outside the mainstream to carry any serious weight.[18] The Tamils themselves were critical of the federal idea.[19]

What then were the forces that made them abandon their pragmatic position and what led to the rise of the new Tamil ideologies which replaced it ? How deep-seated were these Tamil ideologies that eventually emerged and to what extent were they the expression of tendencies that were inherent in the Tamil consciousness and their approach to their situation ? These questions take us to certain overriding issues which have been at the heart of the conflict as it developed. To answer them we need to examine some of the turning points in the relations between the political leadership of the two communities -- turning points which drove them apart and hardened the ethnocentric ideologies of each.

One such early turning point came with the constitutional reforms of 1923. The reforms enlarged the elected representation in the Legislative Council. The main political disagreements between the Sinhalese and Tamils centered on the issue of sharing this representation. The system of territorial

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representation in the city and district of Colombo failed to elect a single Tamil representative although there was a significant and very influential Tamil community in the city and District. The Tamils demanded an arrangement whereby one Tamil representative would be elected for the Western Province, a demand that was opposed by the Sinhala politicians. The absence of representation in the developed centre of the country where a Tamil elite of significant size lived and participated in the professional field and the political life of the country was deeply felt by the Tamil community and was perceived as being symptomatic of a process of exclusion. Upto this time, the Ceylon National Congress had been the organisation in which both Tamil and Sinhala politicians acted together in campaigning for constitutional reforms. It was a partnership in which the Tamils participated as one of the two major communities in the country These developments following the 1923, reforms led to the split in the Ceylon National Congress and the formation of a separate political organisation to represent the Tamils.[20] Thereafter with the introduction of universal adult franchise and the experience of the Donuoghmore Constitution, the Tamil position became more clearly articulated. The Tamil leaders continued to be pre-occupied with the problem of finding means of sharing power in a unitary system in which the Sinhalese inevitably emerge as the predominant majority.

In the minds of the Sinhalese the democratic system was incontrovertibly linked to the rule of the majority. In 1924 they went about demonstrating this very clearly. In the Central Province and the Colombo District all the members returned were Sinhala. The All-Sinhala Board of Ministers under the Donoughmore Constitution was another clear signal that the Sinhala majority and its politicians could govern without giving Tamils a share of government and that the participation of Tamils virtually depended on their good behaviour. All the Tamil options were seen by the Sinhalese as a demand for an unreasonable share of power and a denial of the legitimate rights of the majority. The Sinhala politicians had agreed to a proportion of 2 Sinhala electorates to 1 Tamil for the Legislative Council of 1923 but the Tamils had later asked for a Tamil electorate in the Western Province when they saw that the existing system failed to elect a single Tamil in the Western Province. The Sinhalese leaders were strengthened in their moral position by the verdict of the Soulbury Commission on the fifty-fifty formula as "not only inequitable but doomed to failure."[21]

During the period before independence when power and responsibility were being transferred in stages, the Sinhalese and Tamil

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leaders seemed to have shown an appalling immaturity and lack of statesmanship in handling the problems and managing their relations. Later in the discussions of constitutional reform with the then Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott, Sir Baron Jayatilaka had deplored what he described as the necessity to form an All Sinhala Board[22] and the Governor had felt assured that in a Cabinet system of government the minorities would find representation. But the damage had been done, the majority had flexed its muscle and demonstrated the power it wielded in the conventional democratic system. The response of the Tamil party was to suggest the fifty-fifty formula -- a remedy that was worse than the disease and only served to outrage the majority. Nevertheless, as the tensions between the two communities grew, the inequities of untrammelled majority rule in a society which contained a mix of ethnic groups, some of whom were small minorities were slowly becoming evident. The term "tyranny of the majority" was freely used by the Tamil spokesmen to pinpoint this flaw which was inherent in the system.[23] But the problems of "majoritarian" democracy were not clearly conceptualised and the options that were available, such as a federal solution or extensive regional autonomy that would not vitiate the basic principle of majority rule, had not yet been identified and clearly articulated.

However, at the time Sri Lanka became independent, a somewhat fragile and uneasy compromise had been reached within the framework of the constitution that had been inspired by the ideology of British type democracy. The "Sinhala Only" ideology and Tamil federalism had still not entered the political arena in its uncompromising form. Parliament did not have the power to bring legislation which would discriminate against minorities.[24] There appeared to be consensus among the Sinhala and Tamil parties that Sinhala and Tamil would be the official languages.[25] These gave some assurance to the minorities that they would enjoy full equality of citizenship with the majority community. The term "equality of citizenship" had been used by the Donoughmore Commission in their report indicating that the democratic system could not ensure equality of status as among ethnic groups in their collective identities, but that the citizens of all religions and races will enjoy equal rights as citizens individually.[26] Article 29 of the Soulbury Constitution appeared to provide such a guarantee. The Tamil Congress agreed to join the government formed by the UNP and the Cabinet during the first years after independence contained 2 Tamils and one Muslim.

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Maintaining this fragile balance and building on it was a formidable challenge to both the Sinhala and Tamil leadership.

At the centre of this relationship was the Sinhala resolve to demonstrate that it was the de facto majority in the country and must wield effective power as such. Given the acceptance of this by the minorities the Sinhala majority was ready to share power in a manner which seemed reasonable in their perception, within a regime which would guarantee equality of citizenship to all communities and religious groups. It had arrived at that position in the Soulbury Constitution. Thereafter it had been assumed that the sharing of power between the majority and the minorities would depend on conventions which would evolve and be acceptable to both. For such a process to work, the majority had to act with statesmanship and the minorities had to be "reasonable" in their demands. But at the time this fragile balance had been reached at the time of independence, the actions of both the Sinhala and Tamil parties leading upto it had already caused serious apprehensions in each other regarding the future. They were certainly not calculated to build the right environment of confidence for such goodwill and conventions. The elections of 1923 and the Sinhala Only Board of Ministers had sent a message which was humiliating to the minorities -- it told them in no uncertain terms that they could expect a reasonable share of power only if they "behaved" themselves. The Tamil politicians for their part responded by efforts which gave the impression to the Sinhalese that Tamils were seeking a highly disproportionate share of power in governing the country in which the Sinhalese were in an overwhelming majority. This impression grew over time and became entrenched in Sinhala Buddhist ideology as an insatiable Tamil demand for more than is their right and therefore became a threat to the survival of the Sinhala Buddhist culture and the Sinhala people. Beneath these actions there lay a more fundamental issue. Simply stated the Tamil politicians were seeking modifications in a unitary system that would give the minorities the constitutional power to safeguard their interests and not have to depend on the goodwill of the majority and on conventions and practices developed over time.

The Emergence of the Sinhala-Buddhist Political Ideology

The Sinhala political leadership under Sir Baron Jayatilaka in the period of the Donoughmore Constitution and the leadership at the time of independence with D.S. Senanayake as the Prime Minister worked

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essentially within a political culture which was relatively secular. Sir Baron Jayatilaka was respected for his Buddhist scholarship and values, but these attributes were part of the spiritual revival of Buddhism and did not obtrude discernibly into the processes of government and political activity. During his leadership of the UNP and as Prime Minister of the first government after independence, D.S. Senanayake was able to maintain the balance between the secular and religious -- a balance that was essential both for stability in the political realm as well as for the integrity of religion. The struggles in the political domain had remained political both in the language of discourse and the forces that were mobilised on either side at that stage. The "Sinhala Only" Board of Ministers had been a precursor of what was to take place, but was still short of being the hard expression of a "Sinhala Only" policy or ideology. This was to undergo rapid and dramatic change in the span of a few years.

The strands which went into the Sinhala Buddhist political ideology were many and had a long history. The same could not be said of the federal ideology of the Tamils. The Sinhala Buddhist political ideology could be approached and understood as an outgrowth of the movement for the revival of Sinhala Buddhist culture which emerged under Buddhist leadership in the late 19th and early 20th century.[27] The focus of this movement itself was religio-cultural. It shared characteristics which are common to most revivalist movements. It lamented the erosion and decline of Sinhala Buddhist culture and value systems under the colonial regime and the growing pressure from Western values and life styles. It engaged in debate and controversy on the philosophical fundamentals and although some of the Buddhist and Christian protagonists attacked each other in unseemly fashion there was an effort to keep the discourse at a philosophical and doctrinal level and emulate the religious controversies that took place in the past such as those between Sankaracharya and his opponents.[28]

There was some degree of ambivalence and indeterminacy about the true nature of the revival and the way in which the Sinhala Buddhist culture and the Sinhala people should move into the future. This can be observed in some of the writings of Anagarika Dhammapala who is regarded as one of the main protagonists of the revival; he bemoans the failure of the Sinhala people to keep pace with the modern world but in doing so calls on them to draw on their own cultural heritage and reaffirm the Buddhist way of life.[29]

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The movement for revival as it evolved began increasingly to draw attention to the processes that led to the decline. It argued that under colonial rule Sinhala Buddhist culture and its value system had not been given its rightful place and that the other ethnic groups and the Christian religion in particular had enjoyed undue privilege, status and power.[30] This emphasis shifted the focus from the intellectual and spiritual process of self-appraisal and internal renewal to the external issues relating to social and political grievances and the redress of historical wrongs. The former would have kept the movement on a religio-cultural and spiritual path -- the latter diverted it to politics and power relationships. If the spiritual leadership for the former had emerged, the impact of the movement on Sri Lankan politics would have been very different; it would have acquired some of the attributes of the ideology of Gandhi or Martin Luther King or Bishop Tutu and imparted to Sri Lankan politics the moral values, the lack of which was so tragically displayed in the years to come.

Although many leaders at the early stages of the revival emphasised the need for a profound internal transformation and the recovery of self-reliance within Sinhala Buddhist society, the movement increasingly directed its attention outwards to the politics and the structure of power in the country. The Sinhala Maha Jana Sabha was established in the mid 1930s after some controversy about the naming of the party and the communal connotations it might carry.[31] With this development, the revival of the Sinhala Buddhist culture became overtly linked to political action. This process accelerated immediately before and after independence when the transfer of power opened new opportunities for groups who had wielded little power in the earlier dispensation. The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress became active on these issues immediately before and shortly after independence. It appointed an unofficial Committee of Inquiry in 1953.[32] It held public hearings and achieved high visibility. The report it published in 1956 detailed the grievances of the Sinhala Buddhist majority. The political fall-out from these activities was far-reaching. The movement which began largely as a movement for cultural revival of Sinhalese had become highly politicised and this had taken place very rapidly. The Buddhist clergy began to take a more active part in the political life of the country on an agenda which centered on culture, education and language. These concerns gave the Sangha a rightful entry into the world of secular power. This resulted in the formation of the Eksat Bhikku Peramuna which openly canvassed for the Mahajana Eksat Peramuna in 1956. Members of the Buddhist Sangha became powerful actors on the political stage, worked closely with the

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leaders and appeared on public platforms.[33] Some of them were public speakers who could move mass audiences in a political language that could at times be inflammatory and rouse emotions in the manner of demagogues. One outcome of this process was the political involvement of Buddharakhita, a highly placed Buddhist dignitary. He was the leader of the Eksat Bhikku Perumuna and a powerful campaigner for the Mahajana Eksat Peramuna at the 1956 elections. On the strength of these actions, he is alleged to have exerted his influence for personal gain in businesses in which he had an interest as well as sought high office in government. When he was frustrated in his efforts he masterminded the assassination of S.W.R.D. Banadaranaike in September 1959.[34]

The Message to the Minorities

The message that the Sinhala Buddhist ideologues sent to the non-Buddhist Sri Lankans was that Sri Lanka was a Sinhala Buddhist country in which the Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion were pre-eminent. As a result of colonial policy, other religions and ethnic groups had gained an unfair advantage over the Sinhala Buddhists. It was argued that this discrimination was evident in the recruitment to the public service, in the role played by the denominational schools which were largely controlled by the Christians and the position that the English language continued to occupy in the public administration of the country. The conditions that prevailed during the colonial period had also produced an English-educated elite which contained a disproportionate share of Tamils and non-Buddhist Sinhalese, giving it attitudes and orientations which were not sympathetic to the mainstream Sinhala Buddhist culture. The Sinhala Buddhists argued that the groups that had gained unfair advantage must be ready to accept the shift in the distribution of power and resources that must inevitably follow with independence. Adjustment to this process would understandably be difficult for the ethnic and religious groups, but considerations of equity and the socio-political realities would demand it.

Undoubtedly these arguments had a great deal of substance. The demographic and cultural reality was incontrovertible. The Sinhala Buddhists comprised about two third of the population, and the Sinhalese of all religions about 72%. By the sheer size of their numbers their cultural presence in terms of their language and religion will outweigh by far the other groups. That they should affirm and assume that presence in society and act accordingly was both inevitable and right. The Sinhala Buddhist

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ideologues argued that their weight and presence in Sri Lanka was their natural attribute and must be accepted as such by the minorities. Stated in the abstract these elements in the Sinhala Buddhist ideology cannot be contested. What was at issue was how that ideology would find expression in the existing social and political reality when historical wrongs are righted and imbalances are corrected; how could this be done within a regime which ensures equity and social justice. Every step of the way that was charted in the Sinhala Buddhist ideology was fraught with conflict. This was inevitable. The acceptance of a new balance required continuous attention and adjustment on the part of both Sinhalese and Tamils to each other's sensitivities -- sensitivities that had developed over a long history of co-existence and conflict and that could re-act sharply to the latent implications of words and actions.[35]

The Emergence of Tamil Federalism

There were two ideological responses to this situation. The Sinhala Buddhist ideology became increasingly exclusive and began to attack the pluralistic elements in the Sri Lankan society that had developed during the colonial period. It perceived these elements as obstructions on the path of the Sinhala Buddhist revival. It veered more explicitly towards a Sinhala only position. The second was the Tamil response. Tamil politicians who broke away from the Tamil Congress made a decisive break with the mainstream Tamil politics that had prevailed upto that time. The breakaway group established the Federal Party which sought a federal solution to the problem with regional autonomy for the Tamil speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces. These two ideological developments, the "Sinhala Only" and the Federal idea were independent of each other. The "Sinhala Only" stance was not a reaction at this stage to the formation of the Federal party nor was the establishment of the Federal Party a response specifically to the rising tide of Sinhala Buddhist ideology. The Federal Party came in the wake of disagreements within the Tamil Congress on the policy of collaboration with the government. The breakaway was precipitated by the disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamils. The three objectives of the FP were regional autonomy for the Northern and Eastern provinces, restoration of the franchise for the Indian Tamils and action to stop colonisation in the North and East.[36] It was taken for granted that Tamil and Sinhala were the official languages of the country. The immediate objectives in the Sinhala Buddhist agenda were action to make Sinhala the only official language; the

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take over of denominational schools; and employment in the public service on the basis of religion and race and key appointments in the public service to be reserved for Sinhala Buddhists. These measures were considered necessary to redress the historical imbalances and remove the disadvantages suffered by the Buddhists in the prevailing system.[37]

The debate on the ethnic conflict as it has developed has interpreted the formation of the FP from different angles. In the current debate on the constitutional reforms proposed by the People's Alliance, the Sinhala ideologues who are against any substantial devolution of power to the Tamils argue that the FP from its very inception has confirmed their worst fears that the federal solution is only the gateway to the independent nation state that the Tamils desire. They point out that the party's name is federal party in English, but that the name given in Tamil, the "Tamil State party", has more ominous implications. In rebuttal of this it has to be said that there was no equivalent for the term federal in Tamil which would have been easily understood by the people and that the term Tamil state or government appears to have been selected to draw a ready parallel between the linguistic states of India under the quasi federal constitution of India and the state of autonomy desired for the Tamil regions. The name of the party in fact became an issue between the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party during the 1952 elections.[38] The Tamil Congress charged the Federal Party with deceiving the Tamil people and leading them to believe that what was being proposed was an independent Tamil state while using the term federal for the English name. The Federal Party reply to the charge makes it unmistakably clear that they were talking of a federal system. There was always the reservation that if the Sinhala politicians did not yield to their demands they would have to look for other alternatives such as appealing to the international community. There is isolated reference to the right of Tamils to secede if need be by Chelvanayagam in one of his speeches in Parliament in 1947.[39] But these statements made in different contexts, sometimes for the sake of scoring points over an adversary in a debate with the public as the audience, do not add upto a clearly articulated ideology. The Sinhala ideologues have also pointed out that FP in their initial pronouncements already make references to the Tamil "nation" and "self government." The terms "nation" and "self government" had already been used by the Kandyan party who proposed a federal system; these terms were used and contained within the federal context and within the overarching concept of a united nation state. It could be fairly concluded that the ideology of the FP at the time was definitely federal and the use of

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the term "state" was in the sense of a state within the federal system and did not signify a nation state. In his evidence given in Court during the hearing of his election petition on the 1952 election Chelvanayagam confirmed the FP position in unambiguous terms. He declared that the objective of his party was to achieve an autonomous state within the framework of a federal Ceylon, thereby ending the controversy regarding the ambiguities of the word "state."[40]

The later developments and strategies adopted by the Federal Party to find some form of accommodation with the Sinhala majority, from the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact to the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam pact and the District Councils under the Jayewardene government, are also fully consistent with the interpretation that they were seeking some form of regional autonomy.[41] The federal system itself was envisaged by the FP in broad terms of a division of powers between the federal centre and the regional state. There was no attempt to elaborate on the specifics of the alternative system. The issues relating to the sharing of power in the centre was left vague and undefined, the focus being on regional autonomy.[42] The federal response however is evidence of one firm conclusion which the FP politicians were drawing - the conclusion that there was no purpose for concentrating on the issues of sharing power in the centre within the present constitution.

It is also clear that the formation of the FP did not provoke any major sustained agitational responses from the main Sinhala parties or the public.[43] Neither did it gain enthusiastic support from the Tamil people in the first years following nomination. The federal idea originated with the political elite who were seeking a share of the political power. It did not come from a popular upsurge for Tamil autonomy in the same way that the Sinhala Buddhist ideology had gathered momentum with the agitation and advocacy of the Buddhist laity, the Buddhist Sangha and the Sinhala-educated intelligentsia. The Sinhala political leadership to some extent became captive to these agitational groups as was seen later in Bandaranaike's abrogation of his pact with Chelvanayagam. The Tamil situation was very different. The FP had to "sell" the idea to the Tamil electorate and they themselves realised that the idea did not find fertile ground. The FP suffered a sweeping defeat by the Tamil Congress and other parties in the 1952 election when it first sought its mandate from the Tamil people. The FP was able to put up only 7 candidates for the 15 seats in the North and East. The Eastern Province had been the least receptive to the federal idea. It was able to win only 2 of the seats it contested, winning

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only 30% of the votes polled in these 7 seats. The leader of the FP, S.J.V Chelvanayagam had been returned by a large majority when he contested the Kankasanturai seat under the Tamil Congress in 1947. When he came on the F.P. agenda in 1952 he was defeated by a candidate from the U.N.P. who won by a comfortable majority.[44]

It became clear that the FP agenda was not acceptable to the large majority of the Tamil people in 1952. This response has to be seen in relation to the choices which the Tamil community had made over a long period in search of economic and social opportunities. The mobility which the Tamil people had enjoyed during the colonial period by migrating to the urbanised South of the island and to professional and middle level employment in other parts of the British Empire, notably Malaysia, had brought them high economic and social rewards. The example of these elites would have shaped the goals and ambitions of the Tamil people who enjoyed comparative advantages due to a well developed secondary education system and other attributes of hard work and discipline. A federal system would have appeared to them to deny this mobility and confine them in the North East corner of the island with its limited resources, cutting them off from the mainstream of Sri Lanka's development. The FP's attempts to project an economically viable and self reliant Tamil region in their election propaganda did not seem to be convincing to the large majority of Tamils.[45]

What has been discussed so far indicate that the Tamil-Sinhala political relations were focused on institutional arrangements, safeguards and other issues of practical concern to the Tamil people. The ideological dimension of the debate generated by these relationships was minimal and even where it existed did not capture the centre of the stage. Tamil politics was governed by a pragmatism which focused on the protection and promotion of Tamil interests. Even in the lengthy argument with which G.G. Ponnambalam expounded the rationale of fifty-fifty the emphasis was on finding a practical solution to contain the adverse impact that a permanent Sinhala majority would have on the Tamil community. It was a lawyer's argument not a thinker's inquiry into the limitations of a majoritarian type democracy. Therefore, in this political setting and the disturbances in it, there is little to suggest the ideological ferment and the stirrings of a liberation movement that evolved later.

The ideas of federalism and regional autonomy that Tamil parties began to put forward more explicitly in the second half of the 1940s have been linked by some Sinhala ideologues to the grander aspirations of the

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Pan Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu. But this movement itself had lost its edge in Tamilnadu which had settled comfortably to its future within the Indian polity.[46] The Pan Dravidian idea, or a possible federation of the Tamil state in Sri Lanka with an independent Tamilnadu found occasional expression, but this remained very much at the political fringe without an explicit agenda or influential following.[47] Fringe movements of this type can emerge and find niches for themselves in any multi-party democracy. The vision of an independent Tamil nation with the accompanying apparatus of power and political rewards may have been an inviting prospect for some who were espousing the federal idea. But this remains only speculation. What was evident is that the main Tamil parties were not mobilising the Tamil people on such an agenda.

The Enforcement of the Sinhala Only Policy

What dramatically transformed this situation were the actions of the Sinhala majority in the 1953-1956 period and the ideology which inspired these actions. The shift of Tamil support from the Tamil Congress to the Federal Party occurred swiftly within this time span and coincides clearly with the events during that period. The critical decision was that made by the main Sinhala political parties to go back on the position that had been agreed upon in the early 1940s that Sinhala and Tamil would be the official languages of the country and to declare Sinhala the sole official language. This has been identified by most analysts of the ethnic conflict as the breaking point.[48] Making Sinhala the only language of administration for the whole country was a plain and clear statement by the Sinhala majority that Sri Lanka was a Sinhala country and that minorities could prosper by accepting this situation and learning to live within it. This would mean learning the official language along with other efforts at adapting to Sinhala majority rule.

The impact of this decision on the Tamil people was two fold. First there were the economic implications for government employment and for any form of participation in government and transactions with it. Making Sinhala the official language meant that the Sinhala people would now cross the barrier that English language and the English educated elite had erected; they would have freer access to their government and to government employment and now be better placed to enjoy the fruits of independence. The effect on the Tamil people was just the opposite. Their elites were English educated and their access to government was through English. By

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substituting Sinhala for English their situation was certainly worse than what had prevailed upto then. It seemed to deprive the Tamil people of the meaning of independence from British rule and place them virtually under another set of rulers. It was this second aspect of the decision on language -- the sense of subordination that came with Tamil not being given a place in the Sri Lankan state -- this affront to Tamil self esteem -- that had even more damaging consequences than the practical economic outcomes.[49] This provided the main impetus to affirm the Tamil identity and its separateness from the Sinhalese in clearer terms.

On the other hand the Sinhalese were acting from an innate sense of the justice of their own position. This accounts for their visceral anger at Tamil opposition to the "Sinhala Only" policy. They seemed to be saying "How dare the Tamils object to our making our language the official language in our country ?" The Tamil politicians and people for their part closed ranks behind the federal agenda and went on to stage their protest against the Sinhala only language policy through non-violent demonstrations. The agitations and protests from Sinhala parties and sections of the people expressed a sense of outrage at both. The federal demand was seen as an unconscionable attempt to divide a country all -- of which the Sinhalese claimed was historically their domain.

This sense of outrage burst out in widespread violence in 1958 against the Tamils who were residing outside the North and East This was the way in which the Sinhala extremists were going about "teaching a lesson to the Tamils" who in their view were making excessive demands far out of proportion to their position as a small minority in Sri Lanka. The violence was ethnic in its most virulent form, directed against anyone who was Tamil -- rich or poor, man, woman or child, Christian or Hindu. The inhuman acts that were perpetrated against Tamil citizens during the violence were barbaric and violated the essential norms and values of a civilised society. One of the methods used was to douse persons with petrol and burn them alive. There were several such incidents. Houses and property were destroyed. In the early stages of the violence the state failed to give protection to the Tamils. Large numbers had to leave their homes and find refuge in hastily organized refugee camps. Later the army was called in to quell the riots and this they did effectively. But enough occurred before that, to burn the experience of 1958 into the Tamil consciousness.[50] The state and the law had not acted speedily enough to protect them against the mob violence of the Sinhalese. There was no effective state action to inquire into the violence or to bring the perpetrators to justice in a

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systematic way. The nature and the extent of violence was such that it may not have been possible to apply the normal processes of the law. But the state could have acted in a way that made it evident to the Tamils that the atrocities and criminal acts committed against the Tamils in 1958 would not be ignored or forgotten, that they would not be tolerated in the future and that every effort would be made to ensure that the law was enforced.

The lesson that the Tamils did learn from the violence of 1958 was that the Sri Lankan state essentially functioned as a Sinhala state and did not or could not act impartially to protect the life and property of the Tamils in areas where the Sinhalese were in a majority. These events and their implications did more to take the Tamils along the path that led to the ideology of separatism than any other action of the Sinhalese. Given the exclusion of Tamil as a language of administration and the message of the 1958 violence, the North and the East was automatically perceived as their safe homeland and the region where they would have to live and work. No further political propaganda or ideological indoctrination was needed. The task at which the FP had failed during the 1949-52 period had been accomplished quickly and successfully by the actions of the Sinhalese. The ideological artifacts would come later, and for that many other factors had to combine.

The Reconstruction of History

The ideology of the conflict thereafter begins to take shape in the classical mould in which each party is convinced of the justice of its own claims and begins to construct an elaborate case to support it.[51] The Sinhalese had already begun to look back to their historical heritage in dealing with their relations with the Tamils. The agitation for Sinhala as the sole language had produced groups naming themselves after Dutugemunu -- the Sinhala hero who liberated the country from Tamil rule. The federal demand was linked to the history of Tamil invasions and seen as an attempt to challenge the natural rights of the Sinhalese over the entire country. The Sinhala ideologues and scholars argued that while Tamils may have established kingdoms in the North at certain times during the country's long history, they had done so through invasion and by force and their settlement of the North and East was at a later stage. The Tamils replied with their own interpretation of Sri Lanka's history. The FP claimed the North and the East as their historic homeland. This controversy was not new. The Tamils had always disputed the claim that the Sinhalese were the original settlers

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and some of them even argued that they were descended from the people ruled by the mythical Ravana before the Sinhalese migrated to Sri Lanka.52

The ideologies of both the Sinhalese and Tamils became thereby trapped each in their own history. The Sinhalese took positions that reflected a sense of insecurity and fear in relation to the Tamils, borne out of the evidence of past history and the presence of the populous state of Tamilnadu as its neighbor in South India. Hence their inveterate opposition to the federal idea. This opposition was not to a federal constitution per se. For the Sinhala ideologues the federal constitution was not acceptable because it was a foregone conclusion that the Tamil state in a federal constitution would inevitably seek to become separate and independent, with frightening prospects of South Indian dominance and threats to the survival of the Sinhala people and their culture. In this context, the actions and pronouncements of the Tamils were not seen as responses that came in sequence to the intransigent positions taken on the Tamil issue by the Sinhalese themselves, but as proof of the ulterior design they had entertained from the beginning to establish an independent state.

Ideological Responses and Counter Responses - the Sequence

An approach of this type left little room for a rational process of negotiation aimed at resolving the conflict; it was a "Heads I win, tails you lose" strategy. This is demonstrated in the sequence of events from 1958-1976. The abrogation of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact and the use of the Sinhala letter Sri for "number" plates of motor cars produced a satyagraha campaign in the whole of the North and East; this was not accepted as a legitimate form of democratic protest but as a breach of law and order. The UNP government which came to power in 1965 entered into a coalition with the FP and agreed on legislation to establish District Councils. The agitation of the opposition and influential members of the Sangha induced Dudley Senanayake to drop the proposal.[53]

The Constitution in 1972 provided the Sinhalese parties with yet another opportunity to re-examine the issue of District Councils and regional autonomy but the requests of the Tamils went unheeded. The Tamil parties which had formed a Tamil United Front comprising the FP and the Tamil Congress withdrew from the Constituent Assembly and took no part in the making of the Constitution. In its turn this step act was seen as an obstruction to the process of enacting a republican constitution and removing the remaining vestiges of colonial rule. In this process the last

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strong safeguard for the rights of minorities and equality of citizenship which had been embodied in Article 29 (1) was also removed. The Constitution of 1972 was therefore another critical turning point in Sinhala-Tamil relations. The Tamil parties then went on to form the Tamil United Liberation Front and in 1976 passed the Vaddukoddai resolution which declared the objective of a separate independent state.[54] This was the culmination of a whole sequence of actions, but to the protagonists of the "Sinhala only" ideology this proved their point that the federalists had always been after a separate state.

The Demise of the Multi-Ethnic Approach

The dominant Tamil political ideology in the period immediately following independence envisaged a Sri Lanka in which Tamils would live in amity with the majority, have a fair share of participation in decision-making at the national level through their elected representatives and enjoy the economic and other opportunities in Sri Lanka as equal citizens. The Tamil Congress and its chief spokesman, G.G. Ponnambalam, constantly used a language which emphasised these aspects.[55] Such an approach was also consistent with the expectations that the British constitution makers entertained that the processes of modernisation and democratization would eventually reduce the rationale for ethnocentric and other socially and politically divisive tendencies.

In the case of the Tamils, therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that the federal option with its ethnocentric bias would not have gained support among the majority of the Tamils if not for the events which followed. The ethnocentric ideologies which were becoming dominant among both the Sinhalese and the Tamils were virtually shutting out from their vision the developments and changes that had taken place over a long period prior to independence and were turning away from its potential. A sizeable proportion of the Tamil community, approximately 30%, had been living outside the North and East, mainly in Colombo and its environs. They were making a significant contribution to the Sri Lankan economy and society. They were an important part of the English-educated segment of the population which was providing the human resources for development and modernisation. The North and the East were part of the large programme of irrigated agriculture. Welfare services -- free health care and education -- were being provided to all parts of the country. Sri Lanka had entered the international community in the post war world and new concepts governing

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the political and social order within countries had emerged. To have been able to realise the full potential of these developments, the political leadership of both the Sinhalese and Tamils would have had to move in the direction of an ideology which envisioned a pluralistic, multi-ethnic society. They would have had to focus together on the social and economic agenda for the future Sri Lanka.

The only parties which had some of the elements of such a vision were the Leftist parties, but the Marxist ideology and the way in which they applied it to Sri Lankan conditions alienated them from the mainstream of religion and culture in the country and made it difficult for them to have an impact on the rising tide of ethnocentric ideologies both with the Sinhalese as well as the Tamils. In 1956, the Leftist parties had strongly opposed the legislation to make Sinhala the sole official language and argued strongly that both Sinhala and Tamil should be official languages But the Left parties later formed coalition governments with the SLFP and went on to mastermind the Constitution of 1972 which ignored the demands of the Tamil parties and by the removal of article 29 worsened their situation. The Tamils saw this as the disappearance of the feeble but last hope of a sympathetic response from the Sinhala majority.

The Ideology of Land and Language

At this point it would be useful take this narrative back to examine how the ethnocentric ideologies took shape around specific issues that were capable of pragmatic solutions. Some of the elements that made up the modern and forward looking part of Sri Lanka themselves became the issues which hardened the ethnocentric ideologies on both sides. The expansion of the irrigated agriculture is a striking illustration of this.

Curiously enough the main complaint of the Tamil and Muslim MPs who made representations to the Soulbury Commission in 1945 was that the agricultural policy of government was neglecting the Northern and Eastern Provinces and concentrating on the Sinhala provinces. The Tamil and Muslim MPs were arguing for equitable distribution of resources for development; the settlement of Sinhalese peasants in the Northern and Eastern Provinces did not emerge as a critical issue. On the issue of discrimination on the allocation of resources itself the Commission, after a careful evaluation of the facts, considered it "wrong to condemn (government's actions) as discriminatory."[56] They commented that the North and East had received one third of the funds spent on irrigation during the

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period 1905-1943, and the decline in the share of expenditure on the North and the East after 1931 was the result "of the endeavour of the government to make good the neglect of past generations and to base public expenditure on the needs of the locality."[57]

The agenda which the FP put forward in 1949 gave prominence to the issue of colonisation.[58] In the context of an autonomous region the entry of new settlers and the use of land belonging to the proposed region assumed new dimensions and a new urgency. Colonisation was opposed by the FP as a strategy of the government to transfer population to the region from outside, change the demographic balance, and weaken the position of the Tamils in their own traditional habitat. The issues concerning the settlement of Sinhala peasants in the North and the East soon roused passions on both sides. The Sinhalese saw the Tamil opposition to the settlements as an attempt to exclude the Sinhalese from one part of the country and to deprive the Sinhalese of their legitimate right to move and settle in available state land. Among the Tamils the colonisation issue helped to promote the ideology of the Tamil homeland and give substance to it. Many of the issues around colonisation were practical economic ones in which there was a recognisable conflict of interests between migrant settlers and the inhabitants in the locality and the region. These conflicts lent themselves to an amicable resolution and a regime of settlement that might have been acceptable to all parties if the issue had not been drawn into the ethnocentric ideologies of both parties. The Sinhalese saw any concession on colonisation as the acceptance of the Tamil ideology of the homeland which would lead to the next step of total exclusion of Sinhalese from the North and East, and further down this road to separation. The Tamils saw colonisation as the expansion of Sinhala power into their regions. The reality was that the new agricultural settlements were one of the means for alleviating poverty and providing livelihoods for landless peasants in regions in which the pressure of population on land was very high. In the process of colonisation Sinhala peasants were being settled in the uninhabited areas which fell within the dry zone and some of these settlements fell into the Northern and Eastern region. The number of such settlers had increased with time and was slowly changing the ethnic balance in these regions. There was a possibility of settling these problems in a manner which would have allayed the fears of the Tamils and at the same time served the purposes of relieving landlessness in the country as a whole. The agreements that were reached between Dudley Senanayake and Chelvanayagam on the alienation of state land to peasants went a long way

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to provide a regime acceptable to both parties, but by then the ideological issues had gathered momentum.[59] Land remains an unresolved issue even in the most recent proposals for devolution of power. Later, after the LTTE killings in the border villages of the eastern Province, the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) -- a group of Tamil human rights activists commented critically on the position taken by the Tamil politicians in these words: "the dominant Tamil politics, pre-dating the militant movement has looked upon ordinary Sinhalese as non-persons. There has been no attempt to look upon Sinhalese settlers themselves as victims of the system. Killing them has led to a costly moral isolation of the Tamils."[60]

The language issue again is an example of the triumph of ideology over moderation and commonsense. The campaign of "Sinhala only" was also a campaign against the predominant place that was occupied by the English language and the English educated elite. The changes in the education system and the media of instruction, however have served to deny the large majority of the students the opportunity of learning the English language and have divided the new generations of Sinhala and Tamils into two language streams with little interaction and communication with each other. The ideology that grew round the Sinhala only campaign led to a further devaluation of English and a great deal that went with English education. The multi-ethnic multi-religious English educated segment of the population, small though it was, had been a "melting pot;" it was in this segment the skills, knowledge and values needed for entry into the modern world had been taking shape. The "Sinhala only" ideologues saw this elite as promoting Western values and lifes tyles which were a threat to genuine Sinhala Buddhist values and culture.[61] In such an approach there was no attempt to face and resolve the dilemmas of change and modernisation on the one hand and the preservation of tradition and culture on the other. However, despite these ideological assaults on English, the knowledge of English became essential for the country's development and its integration into the world economy. It was only when the damage caused by the Sinhala only policies became evident that policy makers overcame the ideological constraints and took a more pragmatic approach. It was only then that they began to emphasise the vital importance of English and give high priority to teaching it.[62] Meanwhile four generations who had gone through the education system had been denied adequate access to the English language. This had far-reaching consequences on youth ideologies and on ethnic relations in general, as would be discussed later in this chapter.

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The Vaddukoddai resolution was a watershed in Tamil politics. It had adopted an agenda for separation and an independent Tamil state. However, the means by which this goal was to be achieved was left open. The FP formed the TULF with the objective of unifying all Tamil political parties on one political platform. For the first time the term "liberation" was used. The word "party" was dropped as the TULF was a coalition of parties and "front" used in its place. The term "front" was also consonant with the aims implicit in "liberation." "Front" connoted readiness to engage in a struggle, to confront the existing system. The Tamil parties did not perceive themselves as a willing participant in what they considered a Sinhala polity. Nevertheless the TULF seemed for the time being to be adopting a strategy of working within the Parliamentary system. After the 1977 election, they became the largest single party in the opposition and the leader of the Parliamentary group Amirthalingam became the Leader of the Opposition. The demand for the separate state was not given a high profile.

There were several factors which contributed to this restraint. Until the Vaddukoddai resolution was passed the FP had consistently rejected the separatist agenda. The major part of the Vaddukoddai resolution is a long recital of the pledges broken by the Sinhala governments and the continued efforts made by the Tamil parties at co-operation and accommodation. The tone of the document communicates the impression that the separate state was not the preferred impressions but that the Tamils had been driven to it. The FP had unequivocally opposed Suntheralingam when in the 1960s he had contested the Parliamentary seat of Vavuniya campaigning for an independent Tamil state.[63] Therefore for the FP, the separate state was very much the option in the last resort. Such a history did not lend itself to the elan and emotional upsurge of a spontaneous liberation movement. This is reflected to some extent in the outcome of the 1977 elections. In 1977, the TULF, had sought a mandate in 1977 for the Vaddukoddai resolution from the Tamil people of the North and the East. The North with the exception of Mannar came out solidly in support of the TULF although a few still voted for the UNP, the SLFP and independent candidates. The results in the Eastern Province were mixed and even disappointing. Of the eight TULF candidates who contested 4 were returned. In Padirippu a predominantly Tamil constituency, although the TULF candidate won, more than 50% of the vote went to other parties and independents. In Batticaloa where the Tamils had 65% of the vote, the TULF won 45% of the vote.[64] Nearly two

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decades had passed since the outbreak of communal violence against the Tamils. The Tamil community outside the North and East, in the Colombo and its suburbs in particular were living in conditions of normal law and order. The present and future of this community continued to pose a dilemma for the separatist agenda and had its own moderating influence. The concept of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka had also to come to terms with the much larger Tamil community in Tamilnadu which was part of India. What was the rationale of a Tamil nation which was only about 4% of the Tamil population of India? Would the Sri Lankan identity merge with the larger Tamil identity in India and if so would it lead to separatism in India or would it eventually become an unimportant appendage of the Tamilnadu state? The viability of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism was therefore fragile and suspect from the outset. The FP's outright rejection of the Eelam cry raised in the 1960s by Suntheralingam demonstrated a pragmatic awareness of these weaknesses. Again, there were several influential moderate Tamils who questioned the wisdom of the Vaddukoddai resolution.[65] In their relations with the new government the TULF leaders indicated that they were willing to consider an alternative which was less than separation and within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

These positions were confirmed by later events when the TULF supported the establishment of Development Councils in 1980 and initially participated in the system. One section of the Sinhalese, however, were not ready to accept that these actions of the Tamils were sincere or that they were abandoning their goal of an independent state and expressed the view that the TULF's acceptance of the Development Councils or the show of readiness to settle for less than an independent state was a pretence and part of a strategy to establish its first phase through negotiations in order to prepare better for separation. This view, based as it is on deep-seated suspicion and distrust, is not one that can either be substantiated or disproved beyond all doubt. The sequence of actions however upto the present time is consistent with the assumption that the TULF position on the separate state was not one which was intransigent or non-negotiable.

The New Generation and the Growth of Tamil Nationalism

However, by the beginning of the 1970s new and powerful forces were entering the political process. Within the scenario of an evolving conflict four elements stand out. First, the generation born in the time when the Sinhala only ideology had gained ascendancy among the Sinhala parties and

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who were children during the violent communal eruption in 1958 had come of age. The conceptual world they inhabited and the value systems that governed were formed by an education system which was conducted in Tamil and had little or no access to English. This was similar to what was happening in the Sinhala regions. In the case of the Tamil youth the links with the larger Tamil heritage in South India its literature and culture became more natural and therefore closer. They did not become natural heirs to the political values and ideologies of the English-educated Tamil elite. The perspectives which the Tamil youth brought to the contemplation of their situation was therefore very different from those of their older leaders.

Second, the opportunities for higher education in Sri Lanka were becoming increasingly restricted. The government had introduced a scheme of standardisation for entrance to universities which worked to the disadvantage of the Jaffna students who were high achievers.[66] The Sinhala only policy had shut out the large numbers of Tamils who had been able to secure employment at middle and higher levels in the government administration. The Tamils had adjusted partly to these developments by concentrating on higher education in the sciences and the professions. With the new scheme even these adjustments were not going to yield the results they had expected. This became one of the major grievances of Tamils and Tamil youth in particular. The group moving to the higher education stream became part of the new political leadership among the youth.[67]

Third, the youth were indicating that they were ready to resort to violence. They directed their violence first against the Tamils whom they considered collaborators. The continued presence of the army in the North, and the incidents which led to the death of several civilians at the Tamil cultural conference held in Jaffna in January 1974 were creating conditions that were able to trigger violence at any time. The first political assassination was that of the SLFP mayor of Jaffna, Duraiyappah. Later came the killing of the Tamil police officer, Bastianpillai, who was in charge of the investigations into subversive activity in the North. The youth wing of the TULF was getting ready to use violence for political ends more explicitly and on a scale not witnessed before in Tamil politics.

Fourth, the global environment had also changed. The governments of Western democracies and non-governmental agencies in these countries were more supportive of minorities who were oppressed or subject to discrimination in their countries. The ideologies of national integration which ignored ethnic and cultural identity were being questioned. Violations

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of human rights were getting more attention. The Tamil expatriate community was getting more actively involved in the fate of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. All of this helped to give a new dimension to the ideology of the FP. The youth were better disposed to espouse the cause of an independent Tamil nation and talked more openly the language of liberation and nationalism. The names that they would eventually give to their parties used the terms "revolutionary" and "liberation" combined with the name of the new independent state they were going to create - "Eelam." In the case of the FP and the traditional leadership of the TULF the ideological powerhouse was the English educated elite located in Colombo, the language was that of lawyers and constitution makers with the values of British democracy and Gandhian non-violence. The new ideology of the youth was indigenous, its leadership was coming clearly from the Tamil educated Jaffna youth and its scene of action was firmly set in the North. The discontinuity in ideology between these youth movements and the democratic politicians of the TULF bear some parallels to the discontinuity between the JVP and the traditional left. Many of these Tamil youth movements had strong Marxist leanings, but even the Marxist strand in the political ideology of the Tamil youth did not have the links with the older Left movements that would have given it greater ideological continuity and political maturity.[68]

One factor that would influence the future course of events was the relationship between the TULF leadership and the new youth movements. In the early phase the political participation of the youth took shape as a youth wing of the TULF. The TULF leadership did not seem to be ready to take a clear stand on the increasing militancy of the youth and the acts of violence committed by them during this period. While the leadership did not openly espouse or condone the violence they were inclined to explain it as the inevitable reaction of the youth to the oppressive security regime in Jaffna and the violations of the human rights of the Tamils.[69] Chelvanayagam had been reputed for his Gandhian non-violent approach. Time and again he had stressed that the Tamil struggle for liberation would be a non-violent one.[70] But there is no evidence to indicate that he publicly condemned the violence of the Tamil militants or took firm action to control it. For a long period the affectionate and indulgent term "the boys" was used to refer to the politically active youth. During the period in which the assassination of Duraiyappah and the killing of Bastianpillai had taken place the youth groups were evidently acting on their own and the TULF was already losing control over them. If the TULF had hoped that they could be

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used to bring pressure on the Sinhala dominated government and then reined in after they had served their purpose, they were to be quickly disillusioned. The youth were demonstrating in unmistakable terms that they wanted to be in control of the situation and were not prepared to play a secondary role. The militant youth ideology was ready to take over.

The Impact of Violence on the Tamil Ideologies

The sequence of events that led to the "take over" followed in quick succession. The elections of 1977 had been followed by a wave of communal violence, further strengthening the resolve of the Tamil youth for militant action.[71] The enactment of the District Development Council Bill provided a brief respite. The UNP contested the District Development Council elections and blatantly attempted to rig them. The Jaffna library was burnt by a group of UNP Sinhala supporters who had gone to Jaffna for the elections. The TULF which convincingly won the elections for the District Development Councils in the North in 1981 took office and began work. After the prolonged opposition of the Sinhala majority to any form of devolution, the establishment of District Councils was seen as a minor victory by the Tamil parties.[72] They were able to persuade the militant youth groups to await the outcome of this experiment. But soon it became clear that the government was not willing to give adequate resources and authority to enable the Development Councils to function effectively. The TULF strategies for seeking accommodation with the Sinhalese parties were being seriously discredited in the eyes of the more militant youth groups. They turned to violence more resolutely than before. In July explosives were used to blast an Army vehicle and 13 soldiers travelling in it were killed. This resulted in widespread violence against the Tamils in the Colombo District and other areas outside the North and East. The houses of Tamils were burnt down along with their moveable property, leaving thousands of families homeless; many Tamils were killed in brutal fashion. Meanwhile army reprisals in the North had caused many deaths of civilians. Approximately 200,000 persons took refuge in India immediately following these incidents and smaller numbers sought political asylum in Western countries.[73]

The devastation and the human suffering caused by the violence was immense.[74] What is of significance for the issues discussed in this chapter is that it added new dimensions to the ethnic conflict and transformed it to one which attracted attention and support from India as

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well as the larger international community. The Tamils were identified unquestionably as the victims of Sinhala oppression. The Tamil political struggle gained the sympathy and support of the Western democracies as a liberation movement and it was able to mobilise substantial resources and develop an effective propaganda machine abroad. India became involved in the conflict and decided to arm and train the Tamil youths to wage an armed struggle against the Sri Lanka government.[75] Foreign non-governmental organisation which had global programmes for the protection of human rights provided the movement with ideological and material support.[76] Consequently, the national liberation movement took full shape and gained the ideological validity and the military and financial strength to enter into a prolonged struggle.

These developments had another major outcome. The Government passed legislation requiring members of Parliament to take an oath of loyalty to the Constitution. This the TULF members refused to do and as a result the TULF lost their seats in Parliament.[77] The Parliamentary dialogue ended. Meanwhile, at this point India's decision to deal directly with the youth without reference to the older politicians in the TULF further marginalised the TULF. The youth who were armed were at the scene of action; the TULF had to move to Madras and were unable to operate in the North. With the transformation of the conflict into an armed struggle, power speedily passed into the hands of the youth groups.

The ideology of the movement was now virtually outside the control of the TULF and was becoming increasingly distant from the values and ideas of parliamentary democracy and its institutions. In 1985 India mediated to arrange a ceasefire and organise negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil representatives for a political settlement. The four militant youth groups which were fighting the security forces in the North and East organized themselves into a separate united front -- the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) and assumed the virtual leadership in the negotiations.[78] The Tamil national ideology was unambiguously articulated by them in four cardinal principles - the recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a distinct national entity, an identified Tamil homeland, the inalienable right of self determination of the Tamil nation; recognition of the right of full citizenship and other fundamental rights of the Tamils who look upon the island as their country. Even at this point there was an intentional ambiguity in the way in which the first three principles were juxtaposed with the fourth. The Tamil parties went on to make clear that though their struggle was for an independent Tamil state,

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they were prepared to give consideration to any set of proposals in keeping with the above mentioned principles that the Sri Lankan Government may place before us. They were in effect indicating that they would "settle for less" than an independent state if the substance of power and security which was defined in the four principles was conceded by the Sinhala majority. In a later section of this chapter this substance is redefined in language which is shorn of the nationalist ideology.

Unfortunately, the Sri Lankan delegation which was led by an eminent lawyer, the brother of the then president, responded to the language of the first three principle within a strict legal frame of reference and rejected them outright. This was a classic example of the adversarial legal approach and was the very negation of the exploratory search that was needed for conflict resolution. A recent analysis of the Thimpu talks by one of the principal Tamil participants states that the strategy charted out by the ENLF was to adhere firmly to the four principles which they declared were non-negotiable and that they were "relieved when the Thimpu talks collapsed."[79] This would suggest that they preferred a situation in which the Sri Lankan government remained intransigent and they could justify their pursuit of their goal of an independent state. Clearly, they were indicating their first option was Eelam.

The Alternatives to the Separatist Agenda

The Indo-Lanka Accord which followed India's renewed efforts at mediation offered a system of devolution within a unitary state.[80] This was accepted by all the Tamil parties albeit with Indian persuasion and assurances. Initially these parties were ready to place reliance on India as the mediator who would be capable of protecting their interests and resolving any problems that may arise in the implementation of the Accord. The TULF however made their reservations concerning the settlement clear in a communication to the Indian Prime Minister.[81] These included issues relating to the control that Parliament would continue to exercise over the Provinces, the list of subjects on which the Centre and the province have concurrent powers, the all inclusive subject of national policy in all matters which would be retained by the Centre, the failure to give the Tamil language official status, issues relating to the control over state land. The TULF in their negotiations had discreetly avoided using the language of the four Thimpu principles and had focused on the substantive issues.

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In the period after the Indo-Lanka Accord when the Indian Peace Keeping Force was operating in the North and East the EPRLF contested the Provincial elections and took office in the newly created North East Province. The EPRLF showed readiness to enter the democratic system and work within it. Their election campaign in the Eastern Province was conducted on the slogan "Peace, Democracy and Unity."[82] The elections, however, were not held under normal conditions and the EPRLF enjoyed the protection and support of the IPKF. For these reasons the EPRLF did not enjoy the legitimacy of a freely elected Provincial government. The EPRLF's election and their exercise of power during the very short time they were in office does not provide much evidence to draw conclusions regarding the quality of the EPRLF leadership or its understanding and allegiance to a multi-party democracy. They were not given time to demonstrate their capacity or quality. First the very uncertain and limited nature of the power devolved to the Provincial Councils became evident as soon as they started working. From the outset, they began making representations to the central government to get their powers enhanced. Next, the Government were suspicious of the EPRLF and regarded them as being too close to India and acting on their advice. At this stage the government had virtually ignored the EPRLF and were negotiating with the LTTE.[83] With the departure of the IPKF in 1990 the EPRLF were in grave danger of being eliminated by the LTTE. In a desperate bid to retain power the EPRLF made a unilateral declaration of independence, but this remained a futile gesture and the leaders and the cadres had to leave the North-East hastily and take refuge in India. The EPRLF's brief interlude with the Provincial Council system ending in a unilateral declaration of independence cannot be taken as their rejection of the political solution offered under the Indo Lanka Accord as this happened under the unusual compulsions of a changing situation.

Since 1985, therefore, the positions taken by the Tamil parties, with the exception of the LTTE, have moved away from the goal of an independent Eelam.[84] In the most recent proposals for devolution of power made by the government, specific controversial issues have arisen over the nature of the constitution, the vesting of state land in the regions, control over the maintenance of law and order, and the territorial unit covering the North and East which would be the Tamil majority region in the new system. These are precisely the which the Sinhala opponents of devolution have focused on, arguing that the proposed system goes too far in transferring powers to the region. These Tamil parties, despite their

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reservations, indicate a willingness in principle to work within the proposed system. The proposed system is based on two political fundamentals - devolution within a united Sri Lanka and a polity governed under a multi-party democracy. These parties therefore would seem to be returning to options within the mainstream of democratic politics, options which will restructure the unitary democracy which the British sponsored and will provide the necessary space for regional autonomy. This is consistent with the position taken by the Tamil parties throughout the period after independence until 1983 and even after the Vaddukoddai resolution when they were willing to work out a settlement less than the separate state which was aimed at in the resolution. The hard ideological core with its proclamation of nationhood, homeland and a separate sovereign state would then emerge as the rhetoric of a struggle. It was intended to communicate the message to the majority that the Tamils may have to take the extreme step of separation if there is no genuine devolution of power. The discourse throughout the conflict therefore made it possible to separate the ideological demands from the substantive issues relating to the sharing of power and seek solutions for the latter.

The Changes in the Dominant Sinhala Ideology

Meanwhile far-reaching changes had taken place in the approaches adopted by the main political parties in which the Sinhalese predominate. In preparing for the 1977 election the UNP had issued a manifesto which promised to address the grievances of the Tamils and summon an All party Conference for the purpose if it was elected to power. Despite the sharpening of the conflict between the two communities, the Sinhala political parties and the UNP in particular was keenly conscious of the importance of winning the Tamil vote in a national parliamentary election. The gap between the shares of the total national vote gained by the two major Sinhala parties (or coalitions of parties) has always been relatively narrow. In such a situation, the Tamil minority could play a significant role in the outcome of a national election. The UNP's proposal to introduce proportional representation was going to enhance this role. The FP has been aware of this political calculus in a Parliamentary democracy and has used this to gain the support of one or other of the two parties to achieve some of its objectives. This parliamentary track was therefore kept open and introduced an element of restraint which reined in the extremes of separatist politics. Before 1983, this parliamentary process of dialogue and exchange

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was constantly functioning. In his speech to Parliament in February 1986 the then President, J.R.Jayewardene, stated that the proposals relating to the ethnic issue that were included in the UNP election manifesto of 1977 had "been prepared in consultation with some of the TULF members of Parliament at the time."[85] By 1977, the UNP had agreed to some form of devolution. What was at issue was the extent of devolution.

After the breakdown of the Thimpu talks it was becoming evident to the Sri Lankan government that it would have to go much further than the District Council system to resolve the conflict. India as a mediator was making this quite clear and also by implication indicating that India's sympathies would be with the Tamil militants if the Sri Lanka refused to offer a more substantial form of devolution and thereby prolonged the conflict. The consequences of such a situation would have been unpredictable for Sri Lanka's security. On the other hand there was a fairly reasonable prospect of a settlement of the conflict with India's mediation. This was itself an important factor in Sri Lanka's willingness to implement the system of devolution as agreed to in the Indo-Lanka Accord. The governments decision therefore reflects a mix of elements in which compulsion, political realism and a genuine desire to find a viable solution were all combined.

With the constitutional reforms of 1987 and the establishment of the Provincial Councils, the United National Party committed itself to a system of devolution which was more substantial than what had been contemplated previously under the draft District Council Bill in the Dudley Senanayake government or the District Development Councils under the Jayewardene government. What was significant was that these changes were for the first time entrenched in the Constitution and the powers of the Provincial Councils could not be diminished or revoked without the consent of the Provincial Councils themselves and a two third majority of Parliament. These changes were carried through despite widespread opposition organized by the SLFP and the JVP. Elections to the Provincial Councils as well as the by-elections to the Parliament indicated that the Sinhala majority did not reject the proposed system and that the UNP continued to enjoy sufficient popular support to retain power for another term both in Parliament as well as the Presidency. These developments indicated that there was no single hardened Sinhala-centric ideology which held sway over the Sinhala people and that the highly vocal elements opposing devolution or advocating an assertive Sinhala Buddhist ideology did not reflect the majority of the Sinhala people.

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The parties in the opposition themselves underwent decisive changes. The smaller parties that had campaigned against devolution on an agenda that attempted to win Sinhala Buddhist support were routed.[86] The Sri Lanka Mahajana Party had been formed by a faction which left the SLFP and was led by Vijaya Kumaratunga, the husband of the present President. The party had advocated a negotiated political solution to the conflict which supported substantial devolution of power and adopted an ideological position which was different from that of the SLFP. Under its popular and charismatic leader, the SLMP was gathering support when he was assassinated in 1988. The SLFP which had opposed the Indo-Lanka Accord was itself gradually moderating its position. It was demonstrating its willingness to enter into a dialogue for the solution of the conflict. One of its members, Mangala Moonesinghe presented a motion in Parliament in August 1991 to appoint a Parliamentary Select Committee to "recommend ways and means of achieving peace."[87] This was accepted. Moonesinghe chaired the Committee and the SLFP participated actively in the proceedings and agreed with the UNP on some of the principal recommendations. For the first time in Sri Lanka's political history the two major Sinhala parties agreed on a system of devolution that was close to that of the Indian Constitution. It would govern the way in which the party in opposition would act in the future when it had to respond to issues relating to devolution of power to the regions.[88]

The Moonesinghe Committee was therefore a turning point in the ideology of the Sinhala majority in relation to the ethnic conflict; it became the point of entry for developing a consensus within the Sinhala majority on the solution that the Sinhala majority could offer the Tamils. It created the framework which could be built upon to guarantee the durability of the solution regardless of changes of government. Meanwhile the SLFP was sharply divided by factional struggles over the leadership of the party. A faction within it was working hard for a reconciliation between the SLMP and the SLFP and was seeking to re-organise the party under the leadership of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge, the daughter of the present leader and widow of the assassinated leader of the SLMP. In 1993 the SLMP merged with the SLFP. Chandrika Bandaranaike led the campaign in the Provincial elections and became the leader of the People's Alliance which was formed with the SLFP as its main partner to fight the Presidential and Parliamentary elections of 1994. Under Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge's leadership the ideology of the party has undergone a significant transformation. There has been a reappraisal of the party's

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position on the solution of the ethnic conflict and the need for devolution of power. In the Moonesinghe Committee, there was unanimity that the system must go significantly beyond the devolution provided in the Indo-Lanka Accord and the Provincial Council system established under it. The People's Alliance government takes it further by explicitly proposing to change the unitary character of the constitution.

There were other developments which reflected the significant ideological changes that were taking place. Over the last two decades partly as a result of the ethnic conflict, civil society had become more active through a large number of civic organizations working in the field of human rights and addressing the issues of the ethnic conflict. From a relatively marginalised position to which they had been pushed, they began to play a more relevant role in support of the devolution of power and the recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities. Many of these actors were receiving a hearing from the decision-makers and contributing to the ideological changes of mainstream politics.[89] Their links with international civil society which had been criticised as anti-national had emerged as part of the global advocacy for good governance. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict had become internationalised during the 1980s and 1990s and the norms and values of good governance in democratic societies were being applied to the management of the ethnic conflict both by the donor countries and human rights groups the world over. The governments that came into power were having to respond to these global pressures both for reasons which were practical such as the need for foreign assistance and foreign investment, as well as for pursuing the goals of good governance per se and gaining a respected place for Sri Lanka in the international community.[90]

There was another factor which had a critical impact on the political ideology of the Tamils. This had been the violence directed against them and the lack of political will on the part of the Sinhala leadership to prevent and control it. This situation had visibly changed. After 1983 there had been no major outbreak of communal violence directed at the Tamils living outside the North and East. The atrocities committed by the Tamil militants, mainly the LTTE, horrendous though they were, failed to provoke a backlash.[91] This does not imply that there were no killings of non-combatant Tamils and harsh reprisals against civilians after 1983. Many such acts did occur in the North and East for which the security forces have been held responsible. What is significant however is that communal violence directed against Tamils in the manner of the riots in 1958, 1977 or worst of all 1983 has not recurred, despite the acts of Tamil militants

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which in the past would have easily triggered such violence.

Many factors contributed to this situation. Some have argued that the ferocity and efficiency with which these terrorist acts were carried out by Tamil militants did themselves have a deterrent effect on the extreme elements among the Sinhalese who had been responsible for instigating mob violence. The state was more determined to prevent a repetition of 1983. It also took measures to protect the human rights of Tamil citizens in the use of emergency regulations. It responded to some of the recommendations of human rights organisations such as International Amnesty and the Civil Rights Movement. The state had also shown readiness to investigate the violations and take action against them. This has become increasingly evident with the government which came to power in 1994. But apart from these actions of the government, there was a more broadbased popular realisation of both the inhumanity and the futility of violence directed against Tamil civilians on the ground of their ethnicity. The mob violence of 1958 and 1983 had a catalytic effect on directing Tamil ideology towards separatism and a violent struggle. The control and prevention of such violence by the state and the Sinhala leadership had therefore some mitigating impact on Tamil ideology and helped to direct it towards the path that offered a democratic non-violent solution to the conflict.

The Ideology of Devolution and its Dilemmas

The ideology of devolution produced its own problems, grounded as it was in the concept of a single sovereign and united country. The principal issue on which the Sinhala majority has not yet found consensus is the terminology to define the nature of the republic. The government has proposed that the article in the present constitution which defines Sri Lanka as a unitary state be omitted. This they have done on the ground that a constitution which is declared unitary does not permit a system which devolves power to regions on an irrevocable basis and gives them exclusive jurisdiction on the powers that are devolved. Protagonists of devolution as well as the Tamil leaders have indicated that the Provincial Council system installed under the Indo-Lanka Accord was inherently flawed as it gave the Centre the right to limit and even nullify powers given to the provinces through devices such as the list of concurrent powers and the Centre's control over national policy.[92] In the new proposals both these elements have been removed - the concurrent list is dropped and national policy is not left as an open-ended area of discretionary power for the Centre, but

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defined in specific and unambiguous terms.[93] The constitution that emerges is of such a nature as to be able to provide each region with the substance of power that is needed to manage the affairs of a region without interference from the Centre.

The government has chosen to avoid altogether the controversial terminology of "unitary" and "federal" in describing the nature of the state. While it avoids the terms "unitary" and "federal," the proposed constitution describes Sri Lanka as "an indissoluble union of regions." This formulation is an effort to include both the concerns of the Tamils regarding the equality of the relationship as well as give the assurance needed by the Sinhalese that from the outset there would be no room for separation. This description "union of regions," which is similar to that adopted in the Indian constitution "union of states," has not found acceptance with the UNP.[94] In their argument describing Sri Lanka as a union of regions might imply that the larger entity, Sri Lanka has come into existence through the union of the regions and would give the unions an existence prior to or simultaneous with the larger entity. However the substantive articles of the proposed constitution unequivocally deny the regions the right of secession and at the same time vest them with irrevocable powers. These substantive articles look after the concerns of both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Consequently further efforts to include the main import of these articles in terms which identified and described Sri Lanka would have been unnecessary if there was agreement on the substance. Nevertheless, it would appear that the substance of the articles alone does not fully satisfy all the key players in either of the two communities.

This attention to the key words both by the Sinhalese and the Tamils is indicative of the deeper ideological preoccupations that have a bearing on the relationship between the two communities. Each attempts to place the substantive disposition of power within an ideological framework which affirms the nature of the relationship that should prevail between them. In the case of the Tamil parties "union of regions" implies that there is a partnership of equals, a parity of status within the larger entity; they would have this made explicit in the opening articles of the constitution. The Sinhalese constitution-makers on the other hand need to affirm that Sri Lanka is one indivisible sovereign country and the devolution of power and the union of regions is within that indivisible sovereignty. Thus confronted by contrary pulls they have been unable to find the right language which expresses both concepts in an internally consistent manner.

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Another set of issues that have surfaced underscores these dilemmas. From the inception the Sinhalese leaders had always proposed devolution as a system which would be adopted for the country as a whole. They were careful to maintain the position that the Tamil problems could be solved within a system which is appropriate for the entire country.[95] The Bandaranaike Chelvanayagam pact takes off from the draft Regional Council Bill. The Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayagam agreement undertook to establish District Councils for the whole country. The leaders thereby persuaded themselves that they were not giving the Tamil areas any more power than what was given to other regions. This was part of the strategy to make devolution to the Tamil areas acceptable to the Sinhala majority. There were critics of this symmetrical system of devolution to all regions, both among the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The critics among the Sinhalese pointed out that the Sinhala people had not demanded devolution and the system was being foisted on them because devolution was considered essential for the solution of the Tamil problem.[96] They argued that a realistic approach would be to recognise that the problems of the Tamils required a system of devolution specific to their situation. The UNP has veered to a similar position which advocates asymmetrical devolution that gives the Tamil areas more than what is given to the other areas. The Tamil parties who have supported the devolution package in principle have not explicitly advocated asymmetrical devolution, but have at all times indicated that what concerned them was devolution in relation to their own demands and that the Sinhalese must recognise the special nature of their problem.

The proponents of devolution regard the Tamil problem as part of the larger problem of democratisation and empowerment of the people.[97] While they would recognise that the problems of the ethnic conflict exist on their own, they would argue that a substantial system of devolution is needed for the entire country and that the need for such a system has its origins in the recommendations made the Donoughmore Commission for a system which would enhance responsibilities and powers at the provincial level and the ensuing proposals for Provincial Councils.[98] This had arisen from the discussion of the Kandyan demand for a federal system. The draft bill that had been prepared to establish provincial councils in the early 1940s had not been enacted largely due to apathy and inaction.[99] In the 1970s, policymakers continued to give attention to the need for decentralisation of political authority and decision making power to the district level through instruments such as the district budget, the budgetary allocation to the Members of Parliament for work in their constituencies and

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the post of District Minister.

The process of devolving power would have taken its due course had not two factors intervened. One was the tendency of the central government and politicians who controlled it to concentrate power at the Centre; the other was the rise of the Tamil Federal Party and the fear of Tamil separatism. The proponents also argue that symmetrical devolution for the entire country would create a system in which the ethnic divisions would not stand out and the Tamil region while enjoying the necessary power to manage its own affairs will be doing so as an equal partner with other regions. Devolution for the entire country could therefore be a unifying force, whereas asymmetrical devolution would accentuate the ethnic divide. Within a symmetrical system of devolution there is still space for considerable variation arising from the specific characteristics of each region. Doubtless the Tamil region will aim at enjoying the devolution of power in its fullest measure and set the pace in regional self-reliance and development.

In these arguments for both symmetrical and asymmetrical devolution the cardinal issue is whether the process of empowerment at the regional level will promote a beneticial democratic order in Sri Lanka for the people as a whole and whether such an order will adequately address the problems of the Tamils. If it does both, it offers a democratic ideology that can promote national unity.

The LTTE Ideology and the Barriers to Peace

In one part of the political arena of the ethnic conflict some of the principal players appear to have been able to struggle out of the ideological constraints and concentrate their effort to resolve the substantive issues underlying the conflict. In another part, the LTTE has remained outside this process and continued the armed struggle. From the statements that have been made at different times reportedly by the leader Prabhakaran and his spokesmen it is difficult to come to firm conclusions on the ideology of the LTTE and the goals to which it is firmly committed. The LTTE's acceptance of the Indo-Lanka Accord appears to have been equivocal. In a speech at a public meeting after the Accord he is reported to have unambiguously declared his commitment to Eelam and his determination to continue fighting for Eelam.[100] In a message on the LTTE Martyrs' Day in 1995 after the breakdown of negotiations with the Chandrika Bandaranaike government he spoke of the heroes who have died for the "cause of

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liberating this land from the shackles of alien domination and transforming it into an independent sovereign state."[101] On the other hand statements purported to be expressing the LTTE point of view have proposed solutions within a confederation in which the Tamil state is an equal partner. In an interview given by the LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham in 1995, Balasingham indicates that the federal alternative is acceptable to the LTTE. He talks of two alternatives - "either creating a state or by reaching a solution by political negotiation. If Sri Lanka rejects the peace process or the negotiating process and continues to fight we have no alternative but continue to fight until we establish an independent state... What we say is that we want a radical fundamental change in the constitution to make the constitution into a federal constitution."[102] However the statements made at various times by spokesmen for the LTTE cannot be taken as firm negotiating positions. The statements made by Prabhakaran himself do not show an unequivocal readiness to consider any solution which is less than Eelam.

The LTTE continues to insist on the four principles enunciated at Thimpu as a non-negotiable precondition for a settlement. The most recent effort (January 1998) to deal with this hard ideological core of nationhood, homeland and self-determination is the reformulation that has been suggested by the leader of the Tamil Congress in collaboration with a Sri Lankan academic.[103] The reformulation attempts to divest the Thimpu principles of its hard ideological content, and retain its essential elements in a form which bring them within a system of devolution in a single sovereign country. The term "distinct nationality" is replaced with "a people with a distinct language, culture, tradition and identity;" Tamil homeland with "certain areas in which the Tamil people have for centuries lived and constituted the majority population;" "the inalienable right to self determination with a "substantial constitutionally guaranteed devolution of power and the right to determine their own affairs." The re-wording illustrates how attention can be directed beyond the ideological issues which could endlessly generate conflict and the ideology itself re-formulated to focus on the substantive issues beneath the ideological cover. According to the information that has reached the public through the media the LTTE has expressed readiness to consider the reformulation. Acceptance of the new wording could define the general principles of a solution to the ethnic conflict in a manner that clears an ideological obstacle that has hitherto been insurmountable.

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The LTTE ideology, however, has to be related to its actions and the means it has used in its armed struggle. These actions have taken a course of violence and terrorism which has increasingly isolated it from other all the other Tamil political movements as well as from the international community which initially sympathised with and supported its struggle. All the actions of the LTTE have consistently demonstrated a single-minded pursuit of military objectives. The regimentation of the civilian population in areas they controlled have reflected a strong authoritarian ideology. The ruthless way they dealt with their political rivals, physically eliminating the leaders and large number of rival cadres, showed that they did not tolerate the slightest dissent and were not willing to share power with any other party.[104] Hence their claim that they are the sole representatives of the Tamil people. Some observers argue that these are the compulsions of a liberation movement which is engaged in a desperate struggle. But they appear to come from an ideology which sees no room for compromise. The use of cyanide among its cadres to enable them to commit suicide rather than surrender to the enemy or the role of the suicide killers are elements of an ideology in which the choice is death if they cannot achieve the objective they have set themselves which is the state of Eelam.[105] Within this passionate concentrated drive, there is no room for the rational inquiry into political systems or the constraints of democratic values and respect for human rights.

The violence of the LTTE has dimensions which take it beyond most other forms of violence that have erupted in mob violence or as reprisals by the security forces for the killing of their members. These eruptions of mob violence and reprisals although they have been barbaric in their ferocity, are generally time-bound and unpremeditated. They are followed by some degree of guilt and condemnation of the perpetrators by the rest of the society or the establishment to which those who act violently belong. The LTTE acts of indiscriminate violence and terrorism which kill non-combatant men, women and children and attack civilian targets and even sites of religious veneration have been part of a more purposive pre-meditated strategy; it derives from an ideology which has glorified violence and suicidal killing, an ideology which has freed itself from all moral restraints. This has been demonstrated time and again in the massacres of Sinhala men, women and children in the border villages; the ethnic cleansing and expulsion of Muslims in Mannar, the massacre of Muslim worshippers in the mosque at Kattankudi, the terrorist acts in Colombo causing the deaths of large numbers of civilians, the assassinations of

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political leaders, the bombing of the Dalada Maligawa, the conscription of children for armed combat.[106] All these acts seem to be carefully designed to communicate the message that the LTTE are always ready to die, they have nothing to lose and will resort to any means. Several Tamil ideologues who have banded themselves together in the organisation called the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) have condemned the LTTE ideology and actions for the way in which they have attempted to destroy the moral foundations and the value system that had sustained Sri Lankan Tamil society. In one of its reports it says: "It is easy to yield to the temptation of looking upon present actions as a behavioural response of a beleaguered community where considerations of morality and human rights are irrelevant. Such a view leads to acquiescence in a process of destruction and tragedy.... we have to look at how the dominant ideology divided the Tamils ... wasted the community's potential and submerged its creativity beneath an exaltation of militarism."[107]

The part which suicide killing plays in the LTTE strategy and the readiness to die, symbolised in the cyanide capsule which all the LTTE cadres in combat carry with them, are unique for the scale and systematic use to which they have been put. Some analysts have traced these practices to the ritualistic mass scale self-immolation practiced in ancient Dravidian kingdoms in the face of defeat. The LTTE ideology is therefore not without an element of the negation and despair of a group which has persuaded itself there is little to live for without Eelam and at the same time is beleaguered by all the dilemmas and contradictions that beset the concept of Eelam, dilemmas that have been discussed earlier. Within an ideology of this type, no socio-political ideology which projects the nature of the future society which the LTTE envisions for the Tamils is discernible. It is difficult to see what place multi-party democracy or the protection of fundamental rights will have in such a society. While in the case of all other Tamil political parties the discourse relating to the solution of the ethnic conflict is ostensibly within a framework of values in which multi-party democracy and fundamental rights are at the centre, the ideology of the LTTE does not appear to provide such common ground. Peace in Sri Lanka seems to depend a great deal in finding such common ground. Failure to do so would mean the prolongation of a conflict with a highly disciplined militant group which would become increasingly desperate with increasing isolation.

In this context it is relevant to examine the international responses, particularly those of foreign non-governmental organizations and groups

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which have been closest to the LTTE and who have supported them in the past. The liberation struggle of the LTTE grew and gained support in an international environment which was strongly supportive of the resistance of minorities in situations in which they were oppressed. That support was based on a framework of political and human values that upheld human rights and democratic institutions. In the course of the struggle, those supportive of the LTTE have been faced with the dilemma of assisting a group which has used and continued to use means which are blatantly in violation of those values. Some of these supporters have long remained silent in the face of the dilemma, focusing on issues such as the need for the cessation of hostilities and ignoring the nature of LTTE violence and terrorism. The violations of the Sri Lankan state came under scrutiny and an elaborate process of monitoring such violations was operative under the UN system. The countries providing aid to Sri Lanka used their leverage to bring pressure on the state to institute action for the elimination of such violations. In contrast the groups supportive of the LTTE did not categorically condemn the excesses and terrorist acts of the LTTE nor did they attempt to impose any moral conditionality for their support of the LTTE. Had they done so, they would have used their leverage to good purpose and may have been able to contain the LTTE within norms which would have facilitated the eventual efforts to reach the common ideological ground that was necessary for peace. At a late stage, the Amnesty International began to monitor the violations of human rights committed by the LTTE; recently, some foreign governments, the USA, Canada and Malaysia, which became alert to the threat posed by the LTTE to security and civic liberties in their own societies declared the LTTE a terrorist organisation. By then, however, the long support the LTTE had enjoyed had enabled them to create for themselves a formidable military machine with a far flung network of financial support. This gave them the freedom to pursue their own ideology and goals in defiance of all those whom they saw as their opponents. But even at this late stage the international community and foreign and expatriate groups who have been supportive of the LTTE may be able to use their leverage in the cause of peace for Sri Lanka.

Conclusion - Equality, Proportionality and Equity in a Multi-ethnic Society

One of the most important criteria of good governance is the capacity of the ruling organs of a society, mainly the state, to guarantee equality of

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citizenship to all the members of that society. The task of creating and sustaining conditions which ensure equality of citizenship is a difficult and challenging one in any society, but it becomes exceedingly so in societies which are highly plural or heterogeneous in their composition. The term plural is used here to signify societies which are composed of many collective identities, identities formed by ethnicity, religion, language, caste and class. In these societies the task of governance involves the task of mediating between the big and the small, between the majority and the minorities, between different communities, each giving high value to its own identity.[108]

One of the major goals of governance is to achieve the essential unity in this diversity in which the various diverse elements can co-exist harmoniously. This means that each promotes its own well-being and at the same time promotes the well-being of society as a whole. Achieving this unity in diversity seems to be inextricably linked to another process -- that of achieving equality in that unity. Most of the problems of a plural society arise from the irrepressible drive for equality. The issues of equality and inequality that emerge in a society which is highly plural and contains diverse, ethnic, cultural and social elements often contain their own special dilemmas of equality and equity which tend to become intractable. The democratic system and the expectations that it generates give a new political definition and articulation to the issues of equity and equality in these societies. The relationships between the big and the small, the strong and the weak in whatever form they exist begin to produce new tensions and conflicts which were latent in them and had been controlled by previous non-democratic systems. This propensity is greatly heightened in societies where these relationships are between different communities based on ethno-cultural identities as in the case of Sri Lanka.

The term "equality" however has different meanings in different contexts and its uses can often be very misleading and confusing. Take for example, the ringing affirmation at the beginning of the American Declaration of Independence -- "all men are created equal" -- do we read it as an incontestible statement of fact? Or are we to read it as a declaration of faith that God has made human beings equal to one another in their essential nature? The statement seems to be basing itself on what was a self-evident truth to the authors of this declaration- the equality of human beings in relation to God; and drawing on this truth as perceived by them, they were affirming values that ought to prevail in man's relation to man. The reality of course is that human beings are born with different natural

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endowments as well as in different social circumstances and that both of these are the cause of innumerable inequalities of various types among them.

The morality of human relationships often lies in compensating for these inequalities and mitigating them. The collective action of societies is also directed at this type of compensatory action when it assumes public responsibility for the physically disabled and the socially disadvantaged who are in their condition for reasons beyond their control. In these conditions meting out equal treatment becomes inequitable; such equal treatment in a condition of initial inequality only perpetuates existing inequalities; then equality will not be equity. What is needed is treatment that lessens inequality and moves society from its existing state of inequality to lesser inequality, to greater equality. Extrapolate this on to a society with ethnic, linguistic and religion-cultural communities of varying size and the problems of inequality emerge in all their complexity. How does a system of governance with these inequalities create a set of relationships between them which do not lead to dominance and subordination but to relationships of partnership and equality?

In real life we find that all human relationships whether they be person to person, group to group or nation to nation are situated in a continuum where at one end there is domination and subordination, the naked imposition of the will of one on the other, and at the other end there is a recognition that each has a right to its own existence and the fulfillment of its own material and spiritual needs, and where the relationship among each other is one of partnership. We can sum up the task of governance in plural societies as one of moving the relationships at all levels from the "domination" end to that of partnership.

One of the clearest examples of these fundamental issues of equality and equity in recent times has been Sri Lanka's political history from the time the democratic process began in the 1930s. The minorities struggled hard to find constitutional remedies which would deny the Sinhalese the absolute majority that they would command as the inevitable outcome of the democratic process. One such remedy was to give the minorities representation in Parliament which when taken together would be more or less equal to that of the Sinhalese. By this means, the minorities, particularly the Tamils were seeking a position in the polity in which they could have relationships with the ethnic majority which were those of equality, that do not subordinate them to the majority. These remedies that were suggested were quite understandably rejected by the British

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constitution makers who expressed the view that "any attempt by artificial means to convert a majority to a minority is ... inequitable."[109]

What the minorities were seeking was not only a share of political power. They were seeking a total relationship which would give them a sense of partnership in the new society, which would enable them to enjoy equality of citizenship in its fullest sense. But this could not come from manipulating the numerical representation in Parliament. It had to come from the recognition by the majority that the minorities were active partners in the new society and the relationship was one of co-operation and partnership and not subordination. This may also have required a reciprocal recognition by the minorities - the recognition that the ethnic majority by virtue of its demographic weight would necessarily have a larger political and cultural presence in the new society, in comparison to minorities. Equality of citizenship means that if each citizen got his due share, the communities to which they belong will receive their proportional share. The share of the minority community taken as a collective share would then not be equal to the share of the whole ethnic majority. Therefore in the view of the Sinhala majority the concept of the equality of individuals was integrally linked to the concept of proportionality in relation to the ethnic communities of varying size.[110] Equity is measured both by the equality of individuals and the proportional shares of groups whether they be social, ethnic or regional. These concepts of equality and proportionality became a source of continuing conflict between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority. The Sinhalese often argued that the Tamils were enjoying more than their proportional share collectively and demanding more for the future.[111] The Tamils saw the relationship which the majority was trying to impose on them as one in which the individual Tamil citizen would not enjoy the same quality of citizenship as the Sinhala citizen. There was a strong element of equity in each position, but each perceived the other as inequitable. As it happened, Sri Lanka moved further and further away from the process of accommodation and reciprocity and eventually drifted into the conflict of ideologies - the Sinhala ideology of a dominant majority in a single nation and the Tamil ideology of a separate nation which would no longer be in the position of a minority. The former appealed to the principle of proportionality, while the latter held uncompromisingly to the principle of equality.

Over a long period of conflict the two ideologies are struggling to reach an adjustment that would better define the full equality of citizenship for majority and minority alike. This includes a system of devolution in

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which the minority becomes the majority in the areas in which they are mainly concentrated and thereby enjoy the democratic rights to manage their affairs. Along with this, the constitution will guarantee the fundamental rights that will ensure equality of citizenship, irrespective of ethnicity and religion, and will affirm the parity of esteem and civic worth which the Tamil minority felt had been denied to them in the Sinhala political ideology.

The issues of proportionality and equality which drove the two communities apart have to be equitably resolved within this framework. These issues of equality among cultural identities become further complicated by the way in which a society has to come to terms with the processes of globalisation and modernisation. In that process it has to respond from its own religion-cultural heritage and spiritual values. One major element in the Sinhala Buddhist cultural revival was addressing this problem. This cultural adjustment raises issues which cannot be fully explored in this chapter. But two questions need to be flagged before concluding this discussion. How is the secular state which is a necessary condition for the open modern society to be defined without making it co-terminus with a secular society, a society which is non-religious or irreligious? In a multi-ethnic society how do the different cultural identities relate to each other in their cultural adjustment to external forces? How do we arrive at the multi-ethnic compact that provides the right answers to both these questions?

In developing societies, these cultural adjustments can often lapse into the defensive and fundamentalist responses and be manifested in forms of exclusiveness and dominance that was characteristic of most religion-cultural systems of the past. The resolution will not be easy and smooth. In the modern Sri Lankan context the conditions have to be such that each ethnic and cultural identity will find its proportional weight and presence in our society. Each will need to recognize and accept this configuration. But this co-existence of cultures and ethnic identities does not and should not imply any diminution of the culture of the preponderant Sinhala Buddhist majority. Multi-ethnic co-existence should signify a partnership in which the majority culture assumes its role of leadership, fully sensitive to and protective of the identities of the other partners. The modus vivendi that is implied here redefines equality within a framework which recognises the reality of collective identities and the difference in the relative weight and presence of these identities when they enter into any partnership. It accommodates proportionality in a way which Western individualistic

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models with their concept of equality do not readily allow. In recognising the reality of existing inequalities and unequal relationships it also poses a different set of challenges to society. The modus vivendi becomes one in which equality of citizenship and equal esteem for the intrinsic worth of each identity is constantly a part of the equitable sharing of the cultural and socio-economic space.

FOOTNOTES

1. These proposals were discussed by a Parliamentary Select Committee for a period of over two years and based on these deliberations, the draft of a new Constitution was made public by the government in August 1997.
2. All aspects of the devolution proposals have been closely analysed and extensively debated in the daily press, television and radio as well as through seminars and conferences.
3. The views critical of devolution are contained in the statements issued by a group calling themselves the National Joint Committee with a former Supreme Court Judge - R.S. Wanasundere as its Chairman. Their detailed critique of the devolution proposals is given in the report of the Sinhala Commission which was appointed by the Committee "to inquire into and report on the injustices caused to the Sinhala people .." Sinhala Commission (1997:1)
4 *The Devolution Debate*, published in 1996 by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies presents the views of academics and intellectuals who support the devolution proposals. The Movement for Interracial Justice has published a reply to the Sinhala Commission's report. The Marga Institute has published a series of "fact sheets" arguing the case for devolution. These have been widely disseminated and used at seminars and meetings by both government and NGOs.
5. Some of these issues are examined critically by V. Selvaratnam in "Intercommunal Relations Problems Socio-Economic Development - the Malaysian Dilemma" in *Ethical Dilemmas of Development in Asia*, 1983. The "gentlemen's agreement between the Malays and non Malays ... when Chinese were given citizenship ... that the Malays should retain and safeguard their special position and maintain the Malay-Muslim character of the country..." Economic expansion may have been a necessary condition for ethnic accommodation, but it was clearly not a sufficient condition. The ethnic relationships had to be addressed specifically.
6. Joseph Rothschild refers to this re-ification of ideological elements in his "*Ethno-politics: A conceptual framework.*" The literature on ethnicity however does not deal adequately with this process of re-ification, whereby the ideology abstracts itself from the specific problems that caused the conflict in the first instance and acquires an independent force which begins to drive the conflict.
7. Nonetheless, within each ethno-cultural group itself sharp internal conflicts and struggles for power will exist, but the ethno-cultural ideology tends to bring it together in its antagonistic relationship with other ethno-cultural

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groups. Moreover, the championship of the ethnocentric ideology becomes a decisive factor in these power struggles -- crowding out the social and economic ideologies.

8. In the early phase, Ponnambalam Arunachalam was a clear-sighted and eloquent exponent of Ceylonese nationhood in ways which transcended sectional interests. The Jaffna Youth Congress displayed a similar national outlook in the 1920s and 1930s and were openly critical of the communalist politics of some of the Tamil leaders. Among the Sinhala politicians, Sir Baron Jayatilaka, D.S. Senanayake and Francis Zoysa spoke consistently of the need to build a Ceylonese nation with respect for the rights of all communities. Statements from two public speeches illustrate this nationalist approach. "I am proud to be a Sinhalese but if the Sinhalese try to monopolise the rights of the country it would be a danger to Ceylon" - D.S. Senanayake in a public speech delivered in Matara in July 1940. "The first plank must be nationalism against communalism. If I join the Sinhala Maha Sabha and raised the communal cry, I might stand to score in the State Council elections but one has a greater duty - to work for the welfare of the country" Francis Zoysa in 1939 (see Jane Russell 1982 p. 260).

9. From the 1970s onwards, several non-governmental organisations became active. The Citizens Committee for National Harmony, the Civil Rights Movement, the Marga Institute, the Centre for Society and Religion, the Movement for Interracial Justice, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies were some of the main NGOs who addressed the issues of the ethnic conflict with an ideology which was multi-ethnic.

10. K.M. de Silva, 1986, pp. 227-231. The Sri Lanka Muslim Party which was formed recently is the only Muslim political party to be organised. It has its electoral base mainly in the Eastern Province and has emerged essentially as a defensive response to Tamil separatism. Its policies have not deviated from the traditional pragmatism of Muslim politics.

11. The chapter on Historical Background in the Soulbury Commission Report pp. 5-32, *Ceylon, Report of the Commission on Constitutional Reforms*, London 1945.

12. The Report of the Donoughmore Commission devotes a section to "Communal Representation," pp. 90-100.

13 *Ibid*: 99.

14. Page 19 of the *Soulbury Commission Report*. The report quotes from the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott's despatch: "The Governor had been so much impressed by the fact that the Sinhalese leaders had in conversation deplored the necessity which as they had alleged had drawn them to form the Pan-Sinhalese Ministry that he was convinced that under a Cabinet system places would be found for representatives of the minorities."

15. Pages 68-70 of the Soulbury Commission report give a detailed account of the fifty-fifty proposal and its variants. Jane Russell in her *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution* refers to a secret conference in June 1937 at which the fifty-fifty scheme was first proposed and delivered to Governor Caldecott. The outcry against the demand was "not only from the Sinhalese but from a large and influential section of the Ceylon Tamils and Muslims ..." p. 252.

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16. *Soulbury Commission Report*, p. 52.
17. *Ibid*: 96. this became Article 29 of the Ceylon (Constitution) Order-in-Council 1946.
18. Speech reported in the newspaper, *The Morning Leader*, July 17 1926. In this speech S.W.R.D. Banadaranaike states that "..In Ceylon each province should have complete autonomy... some form of federal government would be the only solution."
19. The Jaffna Youth Congress in particular was critical of the federal idea.
20. *Report of the Donoughmore Commission*, pp. 14, 15, 92 and 93. The Tamil Maha Jana Sabhai was formed in 1922 and later the All Ceylon Tamil Association. "The situation changed fundamentally after 1922; instead of two majority communities and the minority, there was now just one majority community the Sinhalese with the Tamils beginning to think of themselves - and being thought of as - a minority community." K.M. de Silva, 1986 p. 60.
21. *Soulbury Commission Report*, p. 70.
22. *Ibid*: 19-22.
23 In proposing the fifty-fifty formula Ponnambalam argued that the system of territorial representation makes the Sinhalese "a permanent majority" and spoke of the need to limit "the despotic action of the majority."
24. Article 29 gave protection only to citizens. It did not prevent the enactment of the Ceylon Citizenship Act in 1948 denying citizenship to the Indian Tamils and rendering them stateless.
25. The State Council then passed a resolution on 25th May 1944 which affirmed "the objective of making Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of Ceylon within a reasonable number of years" and decided on several measures such as making Sinhalese and Tamil the media of instruction in schools. See in K.M. de Silva, 1986: 77-82 for a detailed account. In 1955 the U.N.P. Prime Minister, Sir John Kotalawela in a speech in Parliament re-iterated: "I can assure you - and I have said it not once but many times - that the United National Party, of which I am the head have accepted the principle that both Sinhalese and Tamil will be the languages of this country.... and will have parity, equal status..." *Ceylon and Kotalawela* ed. by G.E.P. de S. Wickremaratne, p. 291.
26. Dr Colvin R de Silva, the architect of the 1972 Constitution, seemed to place the same reliance on "Fundamental Rights and Principles of Policy" within a unitary constitution "to safeguard the religious and racial minorities against the misuse of power by members of the majority religion or the majority community," *Safeguards for the Minorities in the 1972 Constitution - Lecture delivered at the Marga Institute* on 20th November 1986 and cited by Loganathan in his *Sri Lanka Lost Opportunities*.
27. Gananath Obeyesekere, 1997 and Ananda Guruge *Anagarika Dharmapala 1967*.
28. Gananath Obeyesekere and Ananda Guruge ibid. The Panadura and Baddegama debates during the 1860s and 1870s were major events in their day. The nature of the intellectual contest can be gauged by this comment from the Christian protagonists in the Baddegama debate: "It was not however until we were somewhat advanced in the controversy that we could fairly estimate the difficulty of our position and day by day we had to commend

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ourselves to God and confide in Him for wisdom and direction step by step" (quoted by Guruge, 1965, p. 12).

29. Gananath Obeyesekere 1997 and Ananda Guruge 1965. While deploring the Westernised life styles and the neglect of Buddhist culture and tradition, Dharmapala also advocated rapid industrial progress and advancement of science and technology. These two strands in his ideas did not emerge as a coherent and internally consistent vision of the future Sri Lanka. This contradiction persists in the ideologies that have had their origins in Dharmapala's thinking such as that of the national cultural movement which goes under the title Jatika Chintanaya.

30. The Sinhala Buddhist ideology finds forceful expression in *The Revolt in the Temple* published to commemorate the Buddha Jayanthi. The plight of Buddhism under colonial rule is described in the Chapter entitled "Under the British Yoke." The *Mahavamsa* claims that the passing away of the Buddha and the landing of Vijaya took place on the same day. The Buddha Jayanthi, therefore, had special meaning for Buddhists as it combined the celebration of "2500 years of Buddhism with the founding of the Sinhalese race," (*ibid*: 3).

31. S.W.R.D. Banadaranaike first proposed that the Sabha should be named Swadeshiya Maha Sabha. The name Sinhala Sabha was proposed by those who were in the forefront of the cultural revival, Piyadasa Sirisena and Munidasa Cumaratunga (M. Roberts Ceylon Studies Seminar Series No. 11).

32. The Buddhist Committee of Inquiry appointed by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1953 produced its report in 1955 under the title *Betrayal of Buddhism*.

33. K.M. de Silva's chapter on Religion and the State in *Problems of Governance* describes the activism of the Sangha from the 1930s. The Pancha Maha Balavegaya a coalition of Buddhist monks, Sinhalese school teachers and ayurvedic physicians were the pressure group campaigning for Sinhala only. The faction in the UNP naming itself after Dutugemunu began to demand that the UNP policy be changed from parity for the two languages to Sinhala only. The following pronouncement is made by the chief monk of the Malwatte Vihara in his foreword to the *Revolt in the Temple*: "The claim of the Sangha today to be heard in relation to social political and economic problems and to guide the people is no new demand but a reassertion of a right universally exercised and equally widely acknowledged upto the British occupation of the country."

34. Lucian Weeramantry's "*Assassination of a Prime Minister*" contains an authoritative account of the trial.

35. In the political discourse during the 1923-1948 period both Sinhalese and Tamil politicians used language which was provocative and fomented antagonistic relationships. The rhetoric of the Sinhala Maha Sabha implied that Ceylon was for the Sinhalese. The Soulbury Commission was of the view that "some of the speeches emphasising the solidarity of the Sinhalese and threatening the suppression of the Ceylon Tamils were singularly ill-advised." Ponnambalam referred disparagingly to the Sinhalese as "a nation of hybrids without a history" in a public meeting in Nawalapitiya in 1939, thereby provoking strong public reactions. Some Tamil politicians claimed that Tamils

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were the original settlers and made the major contribution to the country's development (Karthigesu 1939).

36. For an account of the genesis of the FP and its early years; see A.J. Wilson's *S.J.V. Chelvanayagam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Nationalism* 1994, pp. 23-60.
37. The MEP election Manifesto 1956.
38. A.J. Wilson 1994, pp. 42,43.
39. Chelvanayagam's speech in Parliament on 26th November 1947 proposing an amendment to the Address of Thanks.
40. A.J. Wilson, 1994 p. 52.
41. Michael Roberts describes this as "sectional nationalism." *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Sri Lanka* pp. 38-39. Alongside these developments the Communist Party, adopting the orthodox Stalinist position, had defined the status of the Tamils as a "nationality."
42. Loganathan, 1996 pp. 20-26. and K.M. de Silva *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies* pp. 186-190.
43. Neither Loganathan nor K.M. de Silva document any major public agitation on the part of the Sinhalese at the formation of the FP. It was still seen as an agenda of a small coterie of Tamil politicians without support from a significant section of the Tamil people.
44. This analysis is based on the election data in G.P.S.H. de Silva *A Statistical Survey of Elections to the Legislatures of Sri Lanka*, 1911-1977 published in 1979.
45. K.M. de Silva, 1986 p. 46 "Emigration to Colombo had been for a long time an established feature of life in Jaffna ... Now a brain drain began .. to what is now Malaysia, Singapore ... and the British colonies in East Africa."
46. See Krishnan's article in present volume.
47. The idea of uniting with India was current among both Tamil and Sinhala politicians in the early 1920s. In a speech made in January 1920 addressing Manning, the then Governor of Ceylon, Ponnambalam Arunachalam speaks "of a growing desire for union with India which needs to be carefully considered," but to which he "with many others are opposed." At that time, it was not identified specifically with Tamil polities. After the formation of the FP, one comes across the occasional statement which talks of separation. Vanniasingham, for example, stated that "if the Tamil demands went unheeded ... it might create another Pakistan in Ceylon" and Chelvanayagam replied to Ponnambalam's taunt that FP was asking for a provincial council which was a little bigger than any urban Council or Municipality by explaining that Tamil Arasu meant a Tamil state "sovereign or autonomous." These cannot be taken out of their context and interpreted to mean that the FP was aiming at an independent state from the inception.
48. In his speech in Parliament opposing the official language bill in 1956, Colvin R de Silva made the oft-quoted prophetic statement "Two languages one nation. One language two nations."
49. Loganathan, 1996 p. 10.
50. *Emergency '58* by T. Vittachi contains an account of the violence and the government's response to it. The leaders who performed satyagraha on the Galle Face Green were manhandled by a Sinhala crowd who also attacked

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Tamil passers by. The police were passive observers for a considerable time and did not intervene to protect the Tamils. It as alleged that they were under orders to allow the crowd to vent their anger. This incident was described in full by the Left politicians in Parliament.

51. C.R. de Silva's G.C. Mendis Memorial lecture on *Ethnic Conflict and the Writing of History* contains a critical account of some of the protracted controversies between the Sinhala and Tamil scholars on historical issues pertaining to the ethnic conflict.

52 The writings by the British, including the Soulbury Commission Report, had also commented on this controversy. The Soulbury Commission had expressed the view that the question "who were first established in the island - the Sinhalese or Tamils - is a matter of controversy," but added that the "history of Sri Lanka between the 3rd century BC and 17th century AD were largely the history of Tamil invasions and of conflicts between Sinhala and Tamil kings."

53. Loganathan, 1996 pp.23-28.

54. The resolution was passed at a convention of the TULF held at Pannakam, Vaddukoddai 14th May 1976.

55. Loganathan, 1996 p. 3. G.G. Ponnambalam in advocating his policy of "responsive co-operation" calls on the Tamil people "to carry on .. with the Sinhalese as one people heirs to a common heritage." Even when opposing the Sinhala Only bill in Parliament, he speaks of the "need for the Tamils to live in perfect amity but such amity and co-operation being based on absolute equality and strength ..." quoted by A.J. Wilson ibid p.

56. Soulbury Commission Report, pp. 41-50.

57. Soulbury Commission Report.

58. From the inception, the FP made colonisation a major issue. One of the four demands in the resolution passed at the annual conference of the FP in August 1956 was the immediate cessation of colonising the traditionally Tamil speaking areas with Sinhala people (Loganathan, 1996, p. 18). The boundaries of the traditionally Tamil speaking areas have been consistently disputed by the Sinhalese. Gerald Peiris and Pat Gunasinghe among others have shown that the original Tamil settlements in the Eastern Province were confined to the littoral belt.

59. The Dudley Senanayake - Chelvanayagam pact came to such a settlement on the alienation of crown land and current efforts to resolve this problem go back to many of the provisions in this agreement.

60. University Teachers for Human Rights, The War of June 1990, mimeographed, p. 70.

61. There was also the perception that the English-educated elite was intentionally delaying the process of changing to the national languages and that two official languages will delay it further. During the debate in the State Council on the resolution G.G. Ponnambalam argued for the retention of English as the official language and argued persuasively that this would not only be unifying nationally but would also be essential for the process of modernisation. A.J. Wilson states that when the Sinhala Only campaign was gathering momentum "he went on an experimental path and tried to revive the idea of English as a common language." But the trends were against him. See

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K.M. de Silva, 1986, pp.170-174 and A.J. Wilson p. 56.

62. The recent educational reforms has made the learning of English compulsory from the primary stage.

63 Loganathan, 1996, p. 22. Suntheralingam, who opposed the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam pact, had to be rescued from an angry crowd in the Batticoloa esplanade when he addressed a public meeting. Loganathan states that "the enthusiasm for the BC pact by broad sections of the Tamil people was evidently real."

64. G.P.S.H. de Silva, 1979. The conclusions are based on the analysis of the election data in Silva's book.

65. M. Thiruchelvam a senior member of the TULF, did not attend the Vaddukoddai Convention. S. Nadesan was unequivocally against the secessionist goal and at a meeting of the Citizen's Committee for National Harmony in 1977 after the communal riots said that a party seeking secession should be banned.

66. These issues have been discussed at length in several publications: Marga Institute *Interracial Justice and National Unity* and the Committee for Rational Development's *The Ethnic Conflict. Myth and Reality* are two publications which appeared in 1983 when the question of discrimination against Tamils was arousing heated controversy.

67. K.M. de Silva analyses the rise of youth militancy in chap. 17 of his 1986 book, pp. 261-75. He focuses on problems of the educated unemployed and policies in higher education, the impact of the security operations in the North and the Tamilnadu factor.

68. The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) were both influenced by Marxist ideology. This, however, did not find expression in any clearly defined Marxist interpretation of the ethnic conflict which would have suggested links with the working class movement of the Sinhalese. In any case the ground realities would have made such links seem unrealistic to all Tamil groups.

69. Amnesty International and the Civil Rights Movement have documented the allegations of torture of Tamil civilians by the police and the security forces in several of their reports issued during this period.

70. In a speech in Parliament on 19th November 1976 after the Vaddukoddai resolution Chelvanayagam declared "our movement will be all non-violent..."

71. Retired Supreme Court Judge, Sansoni was appointed as a one man Commission to investigate the communal violence which followed immediately after the elections of 1977. The Commission commented that the police had often been passive spectators of the violence against Tamils. But it also concluded that "the cry for Eelam was the main cause of the disturbances." *Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Incidents which took place between 13th August and 15th September 1997*, p. 280.

72. The Commission which was appointed to report on the feasibility of establishing District Councils recommended a limited form of decentralisation. The Tamil member Neelan Thiruchelvam submitted a dissenting report recommending a scheme which gave more power to elected bodies. The

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Development Council Act incorporated many of the recommendations in the dissenting report.

73. During the early stages following the 1983 riots, the Western countries were liberal in providing asylum to Tamils. It is estimated that approximately 90,000 persons have sought asylum or legally migrated after 1983.

74. T.S.A. Dissanayake's *The Agony of Sri Lanka* provides a detailed account of the 1983 violence. K.M. de Silva has a section on the riots of July 1983 (1986, pp. 337-340). Many other writings include brief accounts - e.g. the report of the Amnesty International, Amirthalingam's account in the *Tamil Times* on anti-Tamil violence.

75. The military support given by India to Tamil militant groups has been extensively documented by Indian writers. The latest authoritative admission of India's role is in J.N. Dixit's (former High Commissioner for Sri Lanka) *Assignment Colombo*, pp.15-20.

76. A large network of International NGOs supported the Tamils - the more prominent of these were the Peace Research Institute of Oslo and NOVIB an NGO based in Netherlands. International Amnesty and to some extent, the World Council of Churches maintained a continuing watch over the violation of human rights of Tamils.

77. The Sixth Amendment was enacted in August 1983 banning political parties advocating separatism and requiring MPs to take an oath abjuring separatism.

78. Loganathan, 1996, pp. 97-108.

79. Loganathan, 1996.

80. The Indo-Lanka Accord in its pre-amble defined the ideology underlying the accord and affirmed that Sri Lanka "is a multi-ethnic and multi lingual plural society, and that each ethnic group has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which has to be carefully nurtured."

81. The TULF's reservations were explained in detail in a letter to the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Loganathan, 1996, pp. 134-35).

82. Loganathan, 1996, p.141.

83. The details of the government's negotiations with the LTTE in 1990 have not been made public.

84. The action of the LTTE in evicting its rivals and attempting to assume sole leadership may have left these militant parties with very little choice. One can speculate what might have happened if they had been allowed to collaborate with the LTTE. On the other hand if the TULF had retained leadership the parliamentary democratic solution would have been easier.

85. Address to Parliament by the President on 20th February 1986.

86. The Mahajana Eksath Peramuna which campaigned openly against any solution which offered substantial devolution of power to the Tamils did not win a single seat in the 1994 Parliamentary elections. Their total share of the vote was less than one percent. Election Statistics *Island* 19th August 1994.

87. Loganathan (ibid chapter 6 and appendices 8 and 9) gives a comprehensive review and analysis of the Committee's deliberations and the majority decision.

88. The Provincial Council system has created its own constituency for devolution. UNP dominated councils such as the North Western Provincial Council showed considerable initiative to assume responsibility and authority

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in their regions.

89. After 1989 government had regular consultations with local human rights groups, some of the recommendations of these groups regarding procedures under the Emergency were implemented.

90. The Government appeared regularly before the UN Commission on Human Rights. NGOs were invited to serve on government Commissions such as the Youth Commission. The Government also permitted International Amnesty to send missions and worked with the UNHCR and the International Red Cross.

91. Sinhala leaders continuously exhorted the people to be calm in the face of LTTE terrorism by emphasising that one of the main objectives of the LTTE was to provoke a backlash and win international sympathy.

92. The deficiencies of the 13th Amendment were recognised by both the SLFP and the UNP in the decisions taken by them in the Mangala Moonesinghe Committee.

93. An example of this is the way in which the specific items of national policy in education such as the public examinations, imposition of minimum standards for examinations, curriculum and teacher qualifications, educational training etc are spelt out in the draft.

94. The Constitution of India "1. Name and territory of the Union-India that is Bharat shall be a union of states."

95. The language of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact makes it clear that the arrangement of devolution must apply equally to the whole country. "Regional areas to be defined in the bill ... the Northern Province is to form a regional area whilst the Eastern Province is to be divided into two or more regions ..."

96. The criticism of symmetrical devolution and the argument for asymmetrical devolution have been presented at various seminars and in several articles in the press e.g. Charles Abeysekera in *Pravada* and Neville Jayaweera in the *Island*. The recent reports on the UNP position on devolution appearing in the press indicate that the desirability of some form of asymmetrical devolution is being considered by the party.

97. Marga Institute *Fact Sheet on Devolution and Development.*

98. The Donoughmore Commission recommended the establishment of Provincial Councils which they envisaged as co-ordinating bodies to which certain administrative functions should be delegated (see p.118). They argued that "such a scheme might result in a large part of the administrative work now carried out in the Legislative Council coming into the hands of persons permanently resident in the country districts and thus more directly in contact with their needs ... relieving the Central government of much detail work setting them free to consider and advise on the larger affairs of the country..."

99. Although it has been generally assumed that a draft bill would have been prepared there is no definite evidence that such a bill had been drafted in response to the State Council resolution on the subject.

100. Loganathan, 1996, p.132.

101. Issued on Internet http//uts.cc.utexas.edu.janahan/eelam/news/english/speech.html 12.06.95.

102. Taken from the text of an interview given by A.Balasingham to a group in March 1995. The transcript has been prepared by the Centre for Integral Studies in Sri Lanka.

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103. *The Sunday Times* January 18 1998.
104. The violence of the LTTE against Tamil political parties and their cadres was ruthless. They systematically eliminated both leaders and their frontline cadres. The more recent killings are described in Loganathan, 1996, p. 153.
105. The most well-known of these is the mass suicide of 17 LTTE members in October 1987 and the suicides of the majority of the accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Michael Roberts examines the nature of the suicide cult of the LTTE in his article on "Filial devotion" (1996).
106. The various acts of terrorism committed by the state and militant Tamil groups from 1983 have been documented in the International Amnesty reports and reports prepared by the Marga Institute, among others.
107. University Teachers for Human Rights, Report No.5 p. 70.
108. These ideas have been elaborated in my Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lecture on *Pluralism and Governance - the Challenges in South Asia.*
109. Soulbury Commission Report.
110. Eventually the principle of ethnic ratios for recruitment to the public service gained the acceptance of all parties. This principle has however been strongly criticised on the ground that it ignores merit and undermines efficiency.
111. The example which is often cited by some Sinhalese ideologues to illustrate the inequity of Tamil demands is the demand for the Tamil homeland. They argue that the Tamils comprising about 12.5% of the population are laying claim to 28.7% of the total land area of Sri Lanka.

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ISBN NO : 955-582-003-1

Printed by Unie Arts (Pvt) Ltd. Colombo 13.

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