



## A QUESTION OF GOVERNANCE

While we prepare this issue of *Polity*, a major battle between the government and the LTTE has erupted in Muttur in the Trincomalee district, resulting in many civilian deaths and displacement of thousands of mostly Muslim families. This also raises the risk of spreading hostilities to other areas in the North and East. With this round of military confrontation, the cease-fire agreement has received another fatal blow.

The Muttur battle is a totally unnecessary step in the wrong direction for which both the government and the LTTE are equally responsible. It all began with a dispute over the distribution of water in Mavil Aru in the Trincomalee district. For years, there has been a dispute between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities over the sharing water of the Mavil Aru river, particularly during the period of severe drought in July-September. In the on-going dispute, the Tamil community in the area under the LTTE's control has prevented the water from being distributed to the Sinhalese communities in the downstream. Reportedly, the LTTE has also backed this move by the Tamil villagers, ostensibly to highlight another grievance. Their grievance was about the government's refusal to erect a water tank for their community, with ADB financial assistance.

When some political forces in Colombo linked to the government took the Mavil Aru dispute into their hands for obviously narrow political objectives, there were attempts made to resolve the dispute peacefully through negotiations. Leading Buddhist monks in the area were

in the forefront of these peaceful attempts. When for some strange reason the government's Air Force began aerial strikes against the LTTE positions in Mavil Aru, the Head of the SLMM was reportedly discussing the proposals for a solution with the local LTTE leadership.

It appears that the government has failed to pursue adequately the non-military option that was available to resolve this water dispute. Perhaps, some leading sections of the government do not think it necessary or even useful to explore such options. There is a process of militarism developing within the government, despite President Mahinda Rajapakse's repeated insistence that war is not in his agenda of priorities. The JVP, a leading partner of the present coalition regime, has begun to call for the abrogation of the CFA. The JHU, another coalition partner, has been calling upon the government to begin the final war against the LTTE. The escalation of militaristic violence by the LTTE has certainly reinforced these arguments for all-out war.

These developments have brought Sri Lanka to a new phase of insecurity. The spreading mass hysteria about extra-terrestrial aliens landing and the colourful Buddha statues emitting blue rays is just symptomatic of a spreading social disorder in the midst of both insecurity and uncertainty. Actually, there is now an overwhelming sense of uncertainty, generated by a lack of clear direction in governance under the new regime. The problem with the present regime is perhaps not the absence of a direction as such, but the presence of

many directions as mapped out by various power centres of the regime. A multi-directional coalition government seems to be seriously failing in governance. The recent spate of strikes in key and strategic sectors of the economy, launched by unions linked to the government's coalition partners, only reinforce the feeling that the regime, or those who run it, need to mature a little bit.

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### POLITY

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# SRI LANKA: DIMENSIONS OF THE CRISIS

Jayadeva Uyangoda

Sri Lanka's peace process and Sri Lanka itself is in serious trouble. The escalating violence between the government and the LTTE has pushed the country into a major crisis. And the crisis is deepening, with an undeclared war intensifying. Its latest victim is the third highest-ranking officer in the Sri Lankan army. Neither the two main protagonists to the conflict, nor the international community, not even Sri Lanka's powerful neighbour appear to possess the capacity to arrest this sliding back to a major conflagration.

## Violence

There are three aspects to the escalating violence between the government and the LTTE in Sri Lanka at present. Firstly, civilians have been targeted for attack. Each side would deny responsibility and then blame the other side. Secondly, violence, whether it is perpetrated against civilians or combatants, has a retaliatory dimension. Thirdly, each side has been targeting high value military assets, or personnel. It started in 2003 as a shadow war between the intelligence wings of the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE. Now the targets are senior cadres and officers.

Looking at the way in which civilians have been targeted for violence during the past few months, one can even say that the dirty war phase of the conflict has earnestly re-surfaced in Sri Lanka. In this backdrop, the challenge in Sri Lanka today is not about settling the ethnic conflict, but about breaking up of the vicious cycle of retaliatory violence.

Has the war really begun in Sri Lanka? This is the question that baffles not only the ordinary citizens, but also professional civil war-watchers. It is probably the case that this time, the war between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE has new dimensions. It unfolds while the two sides remain technically committed to the cease-fire agreement of 2002. It has a low-to-middle intensity character, focussing on limited military operations, brief retaliatory attacks, targeted assassinations and the attacks on civilian communities. Major military campaigns as in the period of 1996-2000 do not seem to be in the immediate agenda of either side. But the logic of

spiralling violence ~~might change~~ sooner or later, the entire complexion of the war. What appears certain at present is the impossibility for the government and the LTTE to return to substantial political engagement.

## Failed Peace Process

Why did Sri Lanka's peace process of 2002 fail? In the political debate, there are many answers to this question and they, despite where they originate from, provide useful insights. Sinhalese nationalists as well as critics of the LTTE make the point that the LTTE was never interested in a negotiated settlement and that they were merely trying to gain unilateral advantage through the cease-fire and negotiations. The LTTE turns this argument around to accuse the governments in Colombo of not being seriously interested in a political settlement. Those who view Sri Lanka's world of conflict from a non-partisan perspective see another lost opportunity for peace through compromise.

Compromise has been the most difficult outcome in all negotiations in Sri Lanka to resolve the ethnic conflict. Assessing it from the perspective of the potential for compromise, the peace process of 2002 had a truly promising beginning. The CFA, facilitated by the Norwegians, was a major compromise that froze the military ground conditions between the two sides. But that also was the compromise which irked almost all political forces in Sri Lanka except the two signatories to the cease-fire document. In the absence of a political agreement, the CFA could not sustain itself. With no will to making dramatic political compromises, the negotiations could not produce a settlement agreement.

Interestingly, negotiations ran into crisis at two crucial points that required parties to work together for historic political compromises. The first was immediately after December 2002 when in Oslo two delegations agreed to explore a federalist option within a 'united Sri Lanka.' The second was in October 2003 when both sides had put on table their proposals for an interim administration for the North and East. Even the historic opportunity offered by the Tsunami disaster was not utilized by the political forces in Sri Lanka

to move towards a sustainable framework of cooperation. It may be the case that Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, even after twenty-years of civil war and a huge humanitarian disaster is not yet ripe for settlement.

## Nationalist Projects

**A**t the heart of the failure for compromise is the enduring incompatibility of the Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist projects. The dominant Sinhalese nationalist argument, which has regained ascendancy during the past few years, refuses to acknowledge the presence of an ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It views the entire conflict as a terrorist problem, or even a minority conspiracy, that requires a military solution. In the vision of Sinhalese nationalist ideologues who are quite influential now in shaping the thinking of the polity, a limited measure of power-sharing may be possible after a military-administrative unification of the 'nation.' Some argue that the Indian model, without its federal features, is best suited for a post-conflict Sri Lanka.

This limited vision of Sinhalese nationalism is matched by the secessionist objectives of Tamil nationalism as spearheaded by the LTTE. The LTTE's compromise framework is one that approximates on confederalism, a fairly advanced form of regional autonomy. The conceptual foundations of the proposal for an interim self-governing authority which the LTTE presented to the government in October 2003 was indeed confederalism, which had greater emphasis on self-rule and little on shared-rule. The negotiations begun in 2002 did not lead to a negotiation between these two qualitatively different ethno-nationalist imaginations. Quite interestingly, when the talks entered a phase of crisis, the differences between the two projects came to be re-sharpened. Now they stand their paths crossed, with no possibility of finding a meeting point in the near future. The unstated assumption shared presently in both camps seems to be a troubling one: a drastic alteration in the military balance of forces might create new conditions for a new phase of political engagement.

## Geneva Talks

**M**eanwhile, the re-escalation of violence has been occurring in the backdrop of the recent failure of the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to re-start the stalled peace process. The first such attempt under the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse was made in February this year in Geneva. Facilitated by the Norwegian peace brokers,

the two sides met there after an absence of direct talks for three years. The immediate context for the Geneva meeting was the increasing violations of the CFA and the threat of the resumption of full scale-war in consequent to such violations.

In Geneva the two sides agreed to renew their commitment to honour the CFA fully and take immediate steps to prevent future violations. But that was a pledge that remained valid only on paper. Within two weeks of the Geneva Accord, killings returned on a larger scale, each side blaming the other for re-escalating violence.

Meanwhile the May 29 listing of the LTTE as a terrorist entity by the European Union occurred in the backdrop of an increasing risk of full-scale hostilities breaking out. The EU statement on the listing said that this decision 'should not surprise anybody' because the LTTE had systematically ignored prior warnings. The EU seems to have been quite concerned with what they saw as the LTTE's disregard of the EU's repeated insistence that the parties in Sri Lanka 'show commitment and responsibility towards the peace process and refrain from actions that could endanger a peaceful resolution and political settlement of the conflict.'

## Co-Chairs

**T**he meeting of the Co-Chairs – the EU, USA, Norway and Japan – which took place a few days later blamed the Sri Lankan government as well as the LTTE for the crisis and insisted that both parties should take immediate steps to 'reverse the deteriorating situation and put the country back on the road to peace.' The Co-Chair statement demanded from the LTTE that it re-enter the negotiating process, renounce terrorism and violence and 'be willing to make the political compromises necessary for a political solution within a united Sri Lanka.' From the government, the Co-Chairs demanded that it must address the legitimate grievances of the Tamils, take steps to prevent acts of terrorism by armed groups and protect Tamil civilians throughout the country.

More importantly, the Co-Chairs insisted that the Sri Lankan government 'show that it is ready to make the dramatic political changes to bring about a new system of governance which will enhance the rights of all Sri Lankans.' The formulation 'dramatic political changes' meant federalist state reforms. There is an international consensus that federalism is the only alternative to Tamil separatism and Sinhalese unitarism.

If the Co-Chairs thought that by being 'tough' on both sides, they could pressurise them back to the negotiation table, it was only a short-lived hope. Responding to intense international pressure, the LTTE agreed to meet with the government delegation in Oslo on June 08. The two delegations did go to Oslo. The most unexpected happened in the morning of June 08 when the LTTE delegation, led by its head of the Political Wing, refused to meet the government delegation. The LTTE's explanation was that since the government had sent a junior official delegation, its Head of the Political Wing would not meet them.

The government responded to this unexpected move by the LTTE by recalling its team back to Colombo. Most embarrassed, the Norwegian facilitators fired a letter to the government and LTTE leaders demanding them to re-commit themselves to the CFA and ensure the security of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). As things stand now, the international actors are realizing that they have a small or no role to play in re-convening Sri Lanka's peace process. It may be the case that the internationals are looking for an honourable exit strategy.

## Oslo Talks

**W**hy did the LTTE go back on their word in Oslo by not taking part in negotiations with the Sri Lankan government delegation, when they had promised the Norwegians that their intention of coming to Oslo was to resume talks with the government?

Excuses given by the LTTE apart, it appears that the LTTE had implemented in Oslo a major political decision to terminate in their terms the peace process that began in 2002. Actually, this peace process has been in crisis for about three years and the crisis intensified particularly during the past six months in a context of regime change. Both the government and the LTTE have repeatedly expressed deep dissatisfaction with the peace process, for their own specific reasons. The present Sri Lankan government came to power six months ago on a Sinhalese nationalist platform promising the electorate that it would amend the CFA and start a new peace process. The thinking of the present government has been that the peace process, initiated in 2002 by the then United National Front government, accorded unnecessary legitimacy to the LTTE and gave them many concessions placing national security and sovereignty at risk. The LTTE's negative assessment of the peace process is based on the view that it did not produce any political outcome favourable to them.

The EU ban appears to have provided the context for the LTTE to bring the 2002 peace process to a political end, without saying it in writing or officially announcing it. The Oslo Communiqué which S. P. Thamilselvam, the LTTE's Political Head, announced on June 10 was a further step in the direction of a unilateral path that the LTTE leadership seems to explore. The LTTE's unilateralism is also a response to the EU ban. It seems to entail either separating the EU from Sri Lanka's peace process. It is now becoming clear that the LTTE is experimenting a strategy of re-internationalizing the conflict and peace processes in Sri Lanka. Normalization of relations with India would be one of its key components.

## Dilemmas

**I**t appears that in the context of the current crisis of 2002 peace process, which has now approached what may be seen as its final phase, the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE and the international community are facing three sets of dilemmas.

For the Sri Lankan government, the dilemma is to prevent a major war breaking out while succeeding in weakening the LTTE militarily and politically. The government does not want to be seen by the international community as taking any direct initiative to bring the 2002 peace process to a formal end. Meanwhile, there are groups within the government that continue to argue that the opportune time has come to defeat the LTTE militarily. The radical Sinhalese *JVP*, a key member of the ruling coalition with 39 parliamentary seats, has launched a campaign saying that 'enough is enough' and telling the government to move in the direction of defeating 'LTTE terrorism' once and for all. They and sections of the military have been making the point that war with the LTTE is necessary and winnable. But President Rajapakse appears to be cautious about a large-scale war. Politicians know that a big war will give an opportunity for the LTTE to launch massively destructive attacks on economic and infrastructure installations. Maintaining the low intensity war leading to the outcome of weakening the LTTE's offensive capacity seems to be the government's preferred option for the moment.

The LTTE's calculations seem to be quite interesting too. Although not officially stated, they have bid farewell to the 2002 peace process. The LTTE's dilemma is essentially "what next. The LTTE too does not want to be blamed for unilaterally initiating the next phase of war. But at the same time, the government's low intensity offensive has hurt the

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LTTE militarily. With the defection of Karuna, the LTTE's military commander in the Eastern Province to the side of the government military in 2004, the LTTE's military strength and control of the Eastern province has suffered a considerable setback. With the assistance of the Karuna group and other armed groups, a number of LTTE's local military commanders as well as key civilian supporters have been assassinated in recent months. The LTTE's claim that it can protect the Tamil civilians is also coming under serious doubt, particularly in the context of continuing abduction and killing of pro-LTTE civilians by anti-LTTE armed groups. The government has also begun a policy of launching retaliatory air and artillery strikes against the LTTE in response to the LTTE's offensive actions.

Thus, from the LTTE's perspective too, a major war seems to be a necessity. But, as LTTE's recent official statements clearly suggest, at the centre of the LTTE's strategic preoccupations at present is the project of militarily consolidating what they view as the regional sub-state, with their own notions of shared sovereignty that include the claim to air and sea space. If war-making has been a process of state-making, the coming phase of the conflict would be seen by the LTTE as one of consolidating the state-making process. That would, if one may hazard a risky prediction, logically preclude a full-scale war.

The LTTE's new attitude towards the international community is worth studying. After the EU ban, the LTTE seems to be exploring possibilities of re-defining the role of the international community in Sri Lanka. The LTTE has also realized the limited nature of the role of Norway as peace facilitator. From the LTTE's perspective, Norway has not been able to ensure that the Sri Lankan government implemented promises made at negotiations. The LTTE might look for a bigger power, with the capacity for power mediation. Yet, there are probably no volunteers to take up this responsibility, particularly in view of the international community's frustration and disappointment with both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

## Verification

In this backdrop, the international custodians of Sri Lanka's peace process do not seem to have many options. In banning the LTTE and in the Tokyo statement, the international community re-asserted its role in Sri Lanka. But there are limits to what the externals can do especially when the domestic actors in Sri Lanka are not in a mood to work together for peace. The UN might be the next in line to get involved, though reluctantly, in the Sri Lankan conflict.

Meanwhile, the escalating dirty war in Sri Lanka has opened up space for a new kind of role for the international community. It entails the setting up of an international verification commission to investigate incidents of violence against civilians. Although there have been many incidents of gruesome violence against Sinhalese as well as Tamil civilians in recent months and weeks, including the recent massacre of Sinhalese bus passengers in the remote village Kebithigollewa, the SLMM does not have power or capacity to conduct thorough investigations, and positively identify the perpetrators. While the government and LTTE exchange charges and counter-charges about responsibility for such war crimes, the presence of other armed groups in the Northern and Eastern provinces has made such violence against civilians a crime with impunity. It is time now to think about an international verification commission for Sri Lanka with powers of investigation and compliance. That would be a small, but necessary step towards humanizing a conflict that looks truly intractable.

Finally, Sri Lanka's crisis tells us three fundamental lessons about settling the country's ethno-political armed conflict. Every failed peace attempt only re-defines the conflict in new terms. A protracted civil war requires a protracted peace process for its termination. A political engagement between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE can produce a settlement process only when it is backed by a dialogue among the island's many ethno-nationalist projects. ■

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# TAKING THE DEVOLUTION DISCOURSE FORWARD

N. Sathiya Moorthy

Combined with Constitutional Affairs Minister D E W Gunasekara's reiteration of President Mahinda Rajapakse's oft-repeated promise to enforce the 'two-language formula' for government appointments, LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham's recent call for renewed efforts for a political settlement to the 'Sri Lankan issue' may have lent a new dimension to the national/international debate on power devolution in the country. If enforced as the polity and society exist, the 'two-language policy' mentioned by Minister Gunasekara, could highlight existing realities that also need to be addressed, if fresh troubles were not to brew up when permanent peace returns to the troubled nation.

All debates on 'power devolution' thus far have centred on political issues, even when it has involved the claims to a separate identity for the Muslims, and maybe even of the 'Eastern Tamils'. Such debates have also stopped at the political model of a federal or confederate state, as the panacea for all ills afflicting the larger Sri Lankan society, caused by the 'twin-evils' of the fifties. These evils related to the proclamation of Sinhala as the sole official language of the Sri Lankan State, and the 'standardisation policy' in education. In turn, these two issues were at the bottom of the Tamil resentment, which has since spiralled into LTTE militancy and terrorism.

Unfortunately, however, no discourse on power devolution in Sri Lanka has addressed either of these issues. For even in the none-too-distant past, the failure to enforce the 'Two-Language Policy', guaranteed through a constitutional amendment after it was promised under the India-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, has been used only as a 'talking point' by the LTTE and the larger Tamil community, to 'expose' the 'insincerity' of the Sri Lankan State and the Sinhala polity. None talks any more about a more equitable distribution of government jobs or education opportunities. The high cost of professional and other university education, coupled with the inadequate number of institutions imparting the same, have affected not just the Tamils, but the Sinhalas, Muslims and Burghers as well.

Going beyond Minister Gunasekara's offer of financial incentives for Government staff willing to learn the language that is not their mother-tongue – Sinhala or Tamil – the existing scheme may benefit not the 'fighting Tamils' from the North and the East, but only the 'Plantation Tamils' of Indian origin, and also the Tamil-speaking Muslims. It is only these communities that have encouraged their younger generation to pick up all three languages – Tamil, Sinhala and English. The Sinhalas, out of laxity caused by numerical majority, and the 'Sri Lankan Tamils' from the North and the East, as a political statement, have let full five decades pass by, without bothering to learn the 'other language'.

So politicised has the issue become that the Tamils from the North and the East, who have migrated to the national capital of Colombo after obtaining a private sector job, have failed/refused to learn Sinhala in the 'Sinhala heartland'. For the Sinhala majority of the present-day generation, Tamil is what the 'Tigers' speak. They fear the Tigers, but do not respect Tamil as an ancient language – worthy of learning.

Unfortunately at present, the Sinhalas, and also the Tamils from the North and the East, spend their time getting equipped for Government jobs. For the Government to be taken seriously on the promised proposal, it will have to facilitate language-learning at all levels and corners of the small nation. This again can be handled only by 'language teachers' from among the 'Plantation Tamils' and the Tamil-speaking Muslims. Until such time as the Tamils of the North and the East, and also the Sinhalas pick up the 'other language; they could also end up resenting the 'Plantation Tamils' and the Tamil-speaking Muslims at the same time, if the issue is not addressed before too late. In another era, they were together in it to deny citizenship to the Tamils of Indian origin, citizenship.

It is not as if jobs and other social issues are just community-based, or even community-centric. Permanent peace and a political solution are sure to rake up 'dead issues', or 'non-existent issues' which have now been consumed by the civil war. Within the Sinhala community, the 'JVP insurgencies' in the past were symptoms of a deep-rooted malaise that the

system and the State sought to wish away. Likewise, the distinctions, and not just the differences, between the 'Sri Lankan Tamils' in the North and the East, are too real to be dismissed as only a miniscule part of the militant nuisance that 'Karuna rebellion' is to the LTTE.

What is the way out? One is the constitutionally-mandated 'job quotas' for individual ethnic communities, based on updated decennial Census figures, with both the figures reviewed periodically. These quotas could be extended to the education sector as well. For those who think that a federal or confederate state could take care of such issues, Central Government jobs would still remain outside the purview of the provincial governments. For those who resent reservations as a policy and wonder about the methodology, the 'Indian experience' in the immediate neighbourhood will be of great relevance. Job and educational quotas have helped

in spreading education and enlightenment in India, and also improve employee-profile in the case of non-mainstream segments – together ensuring 'social justice' in a big way.

What is also unique about the 'Indian experience' is the Supreme Court judgment in the mid-nineties, fixing a 50-per cent upper-limit for all quotas, and enunciating the 'creamy layer' theory for denying reservations to the economically well-off from socially-backward sections, through the 'Mandal case' verdict. Yet to be enforced, this has ensured that merit too gets its due. It is also because of this that the 'quota question' is already back in the national centre-stage in India, and the Supreme Court has once again taken notice of the same. This is again something that an emerging Sri Lanka can learn from the Indian neighbour before evaluating the same and evolving a 'Sri Lankan model' to address Sri Lankan concerns. ■

N. Sathya Moorthy, is from the Observer Research Foundation Chennai.

### Carters' Strike

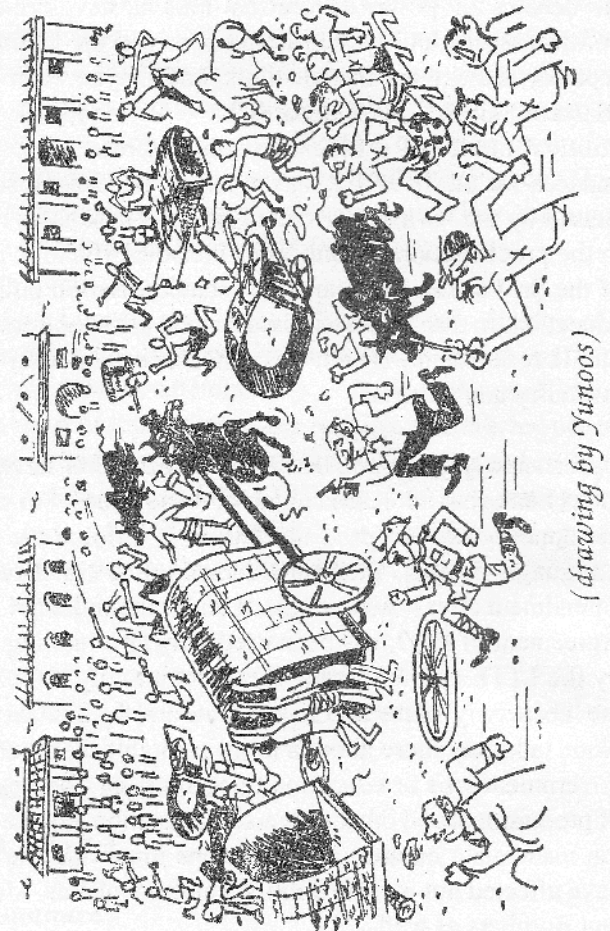
On August 13th 1906, 5000 carters in Colombo struck work against a Municipal Ordinance prohibiting them from sitting on the cart or yoke while driving through the streets. The carters resisted as it meant walking long distances. The strike paralysed the commercial life of Colombo which depended on bullock carts for the transport of goods. The three-day strike was supported in militant ways by other Colombo workers, and the Pettah was reported to be under siege of crowds. When the Ordinance was withdrawn the carters celebrated the first victory of the working class of Colombo. A letter in the *Ceylon Independent* on August 18th 1906 said:

*The carters' strike has supplied a splendid lesson to all communities on the value of unity. The carters are men of various castes and creeds... but they left all religious and racial differences aside and combined most effectively.*

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# ENTER THE NEW RULING CLASS

Ajit Samaranayake

Sri Lanka's post-colonial state, says 'Polity,' the publication of the Social Scientists' Association has a new ruling bloc at present. It has new ideologues too, it adds. Such a statement emanating from so eminent a think tank deserves grave attention. How different is the present ruling bloc from the old? What constitutes this difference? Is it only the shift in power within the ruling party from the Bandaranaiques to Mahinda Rajapakse?

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, founder and patriarch of the SLFP, was a westernized Oxford-educated liberal democrat who nevertheless identified himself with the teeming rural masses. On the political plane the SLFP was populist socialist and on the cultural plane Sinhala nationalist. During the Chandrika Kumaratunge years, however, she moved the party towards a more cosmopolitan centre eschewing the more strident nationalist rhetoric and emphasizing multiculturalism.

To her critics of the Jathika Chinthanaya persuasion this was a deracinating influence. Under Mahinda Rajapaksa however the party can be expected to return to its populist-nationalistic roots.

However when 'Polity' speaks of a new ruling bloc one feels that it means a wider change. It also points to the incorporation of the nationalist ideology embodied by the JVP and the JHU in the world outlook of the new ruling bloc. Majority nationalism has been given political legitimacy.

The Buddhist monk is restored to his position in the councils of the state. The insistence on the unitary state, hostility to foreign intervention and a near cultural xenophobia are the articles of faith of this new creed.

And what of the new ideologues? In varying degrees the thinking and rhetoric of personalities as varied as Gunadasa Amarasekera, Ven. Athureliye Ratana and Dr. Nalin de Silva resonate through the regime. And there are Young Turks such as Malinda Seneviratne ever willing to proffer advice to the President (solicited or not) through newspaper columns.

The new ruling bloc is manifested also in the legal advisors to the Sri Lanka delegation for the Geneva talks with the LTTE. H. L. de Silva PC and Gomin Dayasiri, a son of former Permanent Secretary N.Q. Dias, a now forgotten Sinhala Buddhist stalwart of the 1960s, gave a pronounced nationalist outlook to the outwardly dispassionate posture expected of a legal team.

The point is how this new ruling bloc can come to grips with such a volatile and emotional issue as the National Question. Is unalloyed majoritarian nationalism the answer to unadulterated Tamil nationalism? Can these two nationalisms be reconciled? 'Polity' says that the members of this new ruling bloc are yet to demonstrate that they belong to a mature ruling class.

That may be too premature a judgement. But there is no doubt that having arrived on centre stage, the new class will have to vindicate itself or go down in jocosity. ■

Courtesy *Friday*, 21 July 2006

Ajit Samaranayake is the editor of *Friday*

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# PROTECTION UNDER THE NEW LAW ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Shyamala Gomez

As of August 2005 Sri Lanka has a new law on domestic violence. A few women survivors of violence have begun to use the law to go to court to get relief. They have been assisted by Women In Need (WIN), the Legal Aid Commission and a few other organizations. How is the Act being played out? What are the practical difficulties that have arisen during the process of using the law? What measures can be taken to overcome these difficulties? We look below at some of these issues.

## Applications under the New Law

The first case under the Act that WIN helped file in court involved long term physical violence. The woman in this case had been physically assaulted by her husband with a rod taken from a baby cot. The woman applied to the Magistrate's Court asking for an Interim Protection Order (IPO). At the inquiry, the husband had asked for access to the children. The court in this instance had granted an access order where the husband could see the children outside the home once a fortnight. In this case, the Magistrate had ordered that both parties attend family counseling. Another case involved an older woman who had undergone over eighteen years of mental, physical and sexual abuse by her husband. In this instance too, although the Magistrate was hesitant to give an Interim Protection Order under the Act, he finally gave the order. WIN has filed eight cases so far.

The Balapitiya regional office of the Legal Aid Commission (LAC) has filed three cases under the new law. One case involved the husband coercing his wife to have sexual relations with his friends. In two other cases, the parties had reconciled after the issuing of the interim protection order and no final protection order was necessary. A few other organizations such as the Centre for Victims of Crime have also filed applications in court.

## Lack of Awareness in the Judiciary

The cases cited above have some positive features. In one case, the Magistrate had requested that the lawyer

do some research on the internet regarding the Act before he gave the IPO. The lawyer representing WIN had handed over copies of the Act to the Magistrates handling the cases. The Legal Aid Commission's application for a protection order was handled by a female Magistrate who was aware of the Act, whereas in another case, a recently appointed male Magistrate was unaware of the existence of the Act.

The reality is that the majority of Magistrates are unaware of the new law on domestic violence. The state has an obligation to create awareness in the judiciary on the law, so that the judiciary is able to act accordingly when cases of domestic violence come before them.

## Practical Difficulties in Implementing the Act

Numerous practical difficulties have been encountered by the lawyers filing applications for protection orders under the new law.

The law specifies that the court may order a social worker or family counselor to counsel the parties. It also states that the court may require the services of a social worker, family counselor, probation officer, family health worker or child rights promotion officer to monitor compliance with the Protection Order. The Magistrates have referred cases to the family counselors in many of the cases. Every court must have access to these officers. However, this is not the case. For example, the Gangodawila Court has no family counselor.

Another difficulty arises in the giving of protection orders where shelters are concerned. Currently, women's organizations such as Welcome House, Women's Development Centre in Kandy, Women In Need and the Salvation Army run shelters for abused women and children. The state has not set up any shelters and this is a major gap. Magistrates are reluctant to refer abused women and their children to privately run shelters. The judiciary would more easily refer women to state run shelters as they feel that the state would be more accountable than the NGO sector. The law stipulates that the court may order, if the aggrieved person

requests, that she be placed in a shelter or provided with temporary accommodation.

The law requires the court to hold an inquiry into the alleged violation within fourteen days of the application filed in court. This is practically not possible in certain cases where the heavy workload of the court does not allow for cases to be heard within this time frame. The serving of notice by the fiscal or other authorized officer to the abuser within this time frame has also proved difficult in situations where the whereabouts of the respondent is unknown. Magistrates also insist on a probation officer's report before giving a protection order and this also may delay the holding of the inquiry.

The lawyers who have assisted in filing applications in court say that proceedings are rushed through in court due to time constraints. The atmosphere in court makes it difficult to explain the facts of the case in detail. These lawyers were also of the view that Magistrates tend to trivialize cases on domestic violence as they deal with cases of murder etc, which to them, are more serious than domestic violence cases. They are also not sensitive to the issue of domestic violence.

The lawyer at WIN was of the view that due to the existence of the new law, it is now much easier to file applications in court and obtain relief. However, she stressed the need to educate the legal profession and the judiciary on the new law and its implications. Her experiences indicate that in some instances, domestic violence is almost a non issue to Magistrates who have to deal with the day to day workload of criminal cases.

### Addressing the Difficulties

**T**he practical difficulties in implementing the law highlights the fact that laws do not operate in a vacuum. Support systems have to be in place. The state needs to set up shelters so that women have a place to go to. Alternate accommodation is another option that women should be able to resort to if they need to be protected from the abuser. Well trained personnel capable of providing services need to be appointed under the law so that court orders are carried out. The services of family counselors must be made available to every Magistrate's Court, as should the services of probation officers, child rights promotion officers, social workers and family health workers.

The fourteen day time limit for serving of notice and the holding of the inquiry needs to be addressed. New options need to be explored to enable Magistrates to deal with domestic violence cases. One option would be to assign a few Magistrates Courts to handle cases of domestic violence. Another option to explore would be to look at establishing a special court to deal with such cases. This would ease the burden on Magistrates who have to deal with day to day criminal cases too.

### Conclusion

**M**ore difficulties in implementing the law will come up with time. These problems need to be addressed by the state and NGO sector. The state needs to adopt a holistic approach to creating awareness on the law.

Awareness programmes that target grassroots level men and women and others who are needed to implement the Act is crucial if the Act is to be made use of. Awareness building must go hand in hand with training of state appointed officers such as probation officers, social workers, family counselors, family health workers and child rights promotion officers. The Department of Probation and Child Care Services, the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Development are the state entities involved in the appointment and training of these officers. Rigorous training programmes need to be commenced to provide information on the workings of the Act to these officers. The police also needs to be trained on the action they should take in cases of domestic violence.

Women's groups in this country fought long and hard for a law on domestic violence. We now have a law. The battle does not end with the passing of the Act. The battle continues to ensure that the state takes on its responsibilities seriously in implementing the Act. It is also up to civil society to assist the state in reaching out to abused women. We need to ensure that more and more persons who have suffered violence in the home make use of the law to obtain redress.

If you are a survivor of domestic violence and need assistance, please contact Women In Need (WIN), Hotline: 4718585

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# EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN DYNAMICS IN SRI LANKA

Sankajaya Nanayakkara

## Part -I

There are two major objectives in this paper. Firstly, I will discuss why people join and remain in evangelical Christian groups. Secondly, I will assess the impact of the evangelical Christian movement on the Sri Lankan society.

### Evangelical Christianity

**E**vangelical Christianity emerged as a reform movement within the Protestant denominations in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in America and England (Soper 1994:37). The three characteristic features of the evangelical belief are: the emphasis on the sacrificial nature of Christ's death, the foremost place accorded to the Bible as the infallible word of God, and the integration of religious convictions and social conduct (Soper 1994: 38). Evangelical Christianity also strongly emphasizes spreading the faith and conversion of 'sinners' to the faith of Christ. Words such as charismatic as well as Pentecostal have also been used to identify these groups (Ammerman 1994). Moreover, groups of the above kind are also referred to as fundamentalist in the popular as well as in the academic discourse (Perera 1998: 3).

Many of the evangelical groups active in Sri Lanka as well as in other parts of Asia have their roots in the Protestant fundamentalist movement in America (Perera 1998:4). The protestant fundamentalist movement emerged in North America in the 1920s as a conservative reaction against the liberal tendencies that were manifest in Protestant denominations and the American school system at the time (Ammerman 1994:14). After an initial set back, the so-called fundamentalists have made a forceful reappearance in the U.S public life beginning in the 1970s. Establishing missions internationally has been one sustained area of engagement of the fundamentalist movement in America from its inception (Ammerman 1994: 14).

### Evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka

**S**ri Lanka is a multi-religious society. About 70 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8

percent Christian and 7 percent is Muslim. Most members of the majority Sinhala community are Theravada Buddhists. The majority of the Hindus are considered Saivites. The overwhelming majority of the Muslim community tends to be Sunni with a small minority of Shi'a. The majority of the Christians are Roman Catholics while there is a significant presence of protestant denominations in the country.

The institutional setup of the evangelical movement in Sri Lanka consists of churches, para church organizations, literature distribution outlets and agencies concerned with social welfare (Perera 1998: 49). There are no reliable sources to get an idea about the exact number of evangelical groups operating in the country and their membership. Some researchers estimate 300 to 350 such churches and para church groups (Perera 1998: 52). The general perception is that their numbers are on the increase. It is since mid 1980s and early 1990s that the activities of evangelical groups have become more visible and aggressive (Perera 1998: 49). But some of these groups currently operating in Sri Lanka such as the Jehovah's Witness or the Assemblies of God have been working in the island for a long time. Funding for evangelical groups operating in South Asia, including Sri Lanka, mainly comes from countries such as, the USA, England, Australia, Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Japan and South Korea (Perera 1998: 22).

Some of these groups operating in Sri Lanka tend to project a very American image. From the building structures to the attire of the pastors and the kind of English used by them all is unmistakably American. Moreover, these churches get down evangelists from USA on a regular basis for talks. A good example for this type of church is the People's Church in Narahenpita, Colombo. The above local church is a good example to substantiate the thesis of Americanization of the collective evangelical movement, proposed by certain researchers (Ammerman: 1994 and Brouwer et al: 1996). Contrary to the above type, there are also groups who self-consciously project a more 'traditional' image. The pastors of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission in Nugegoda wear the traditional costume of the Sinhalese/Tamils during the

service. Moreover, their congregation is segregated on the basis of sex and is made to sit on mats during the service.

However, what is common to all kinds of groups in the evangelical movement is their sense of urgency to expand in terms of numbers. Many of them would faithfully interpret this as converting 'sinners' to the faith of Christ. This zeal for proselytizing is what distinguishes them from mainline churches.

### Poverty and its Impact

**S**ri Lanka is a country with a high level of poverty. Successive government policies since independence have miserably failed in addressing the issue of poverty. The free market policies since late 1970s have exacerbated the situation.

One major criticism of the villagers in Thanamalvila and other informants was the lack of interest shown by the Buddhist monks in matters relating to the welfare of the village or their lives. The Buddhist monks were seen as uncaring. Moreover, they were perceived as an economic burden on their already unbearable lives. Against this background of grinding poverty and misery, the activities of evangelical groups are seen with hope. Social welfare is one area in which these groups are very actively involved. They deal with issues such as poverty and malnutrition, education and vocational training, child abuse, disability, and health and counseling.

Thanamalvila is a socially and economically marginal area located in the Monaragala District. More than 50% of the families in Thanamalvila are *Samurdhi* welfare recipients. In other words, a large majority of inhabitants of Thanamalvila are living in poverty.

Against such a backdrop, it is not a surprise that Thanamalvila has attracted the attention of evangelical Christian groups. Over the last couple of years many evangelical Christian churches have come up in the area. Within a period of one year, nine such churches appeared. Against these figures, there are only twelve Buddhist temples in this area.

In areas where evangelical groups have been active, they have been directly involved in the welfare of the villages. Angunukolavawe is one such village in the Thanamalvila Divisional Secretariat where they were active. Apart from holding medical camps and providing educational facilities in this village, the church provided living allowances for

senior students until they sat for the GCE Advanced Level examination. Moreover, the church provided an allowance for the infirm. It also provided material assistance for the poorest of the poor. I came across villagers in Thanamalvila who openly said that they would change their religion if they receive anything that would improve their miserable living conditions.

### Collapse of the Pastoral Ministry

**I** was informed by a Christian belonging to a main line church that the main reason for the desertion of the mainline churches and increasing membership in evangelical groups is due to the collapse of the pastoral ministry. According to him, the pastors in the mainline churches are entangled in bureaucratic duties and they have neglected the well being of their congregations. On the other hand, the evangelical groups are at their best in performing the duties of pastoral ministry. Activists of these evangelical groups are aware of this situation. A pastor of a very recently established evangelical church told me that the mainline religious institutions "do not go out of their way to look into the needs of their members." On the contrary, evangelical groups reach out to people with an urgency, which distinguishes this particular strand of Christianity from others.

Dayawathi is a sixty-two year old who has earlier been a Buddhist. She is a resident of a village called Kitulkote in Thanamalvila. She has been suffering from a cancer and had been bed ridden for sometime. In her miserable plight, neither the village Buddhist monk nor her kinfolk extended concern or support towards her. She was conveniently forgotten. Amidst much obstacles and protests, she was approached by the pastor and the sisters of a newly established evangelical church in the area. They came to her house on a regular basis and prayed for her. This gave her much emotional comfort and hope in life. They also looked after her by providing material support. Now she is a member of this particular church. Still the pastor and the sisters come to her house regularly and pray for her and look after her material needs.

Raju is a former Hindu from Modera, who joined an evangelical group about five years back. He became a member of this group by participating in one of its healing crusades. What drove him to participate in this rally were his health problems such as, constant stomachaches and bouts of possession, for which he found no comfort from any specialist, including his traditional religious specialists. He claims he was healed in that particular healing crusade and ever since he has been with this particular group.

Jenny is from an upper middle class background in Colombo. She was falling apart due to marital problems. Her marriage was heading for a divorce. The church she belonged to seemed far removed and unconcerned about her crisis. Then she got the opportunity to participate in a deliverance rally organized by a particular evangelical church. In this rally, she came across caring pastors and members of a congregation who took a genuine interest in her problem. The church made a direct intervention on her behalf. The intervention was so successful that it led the couple to marry for the second time in this particular church. She and her husband remain devout members of this evangelical church to date.

### A Sense of Community

A sense of community is what is lacking in mainline religious institutions. They are large, impersonal and superficial. According to one convert of an evangelical group, in her old church, the members of the congregation hardly knew each other or cared about each other's problems. On the contrary, most evangelical churches maintain small congregations in order to be more responsive to the needs of their members. Usually, the pastor knows each member on a personal basis. In one particular evangelical church based in Colombo, the young members of the congregation met each other on a daily basis in the evening to discuss their problems and pray for each other. In most of these churches, during the regular service, through a system of chits, the members of the congregation pray for the problems of fellow members, thus creating a very communal atmosphere. According to Ajith, a convert to an evangelical church, "there is genuine brotherhood here (meaning, the church). We get together, pray together for our problems and help each other out."

For most members of these groups, the church is not a once a week affair. The church has a deep impact on their day-to-day lives. Small groups of the congregation may hold prayer meetings at each other's houses regularly or individual members of the congregation might read a section of the Bible everyday and try to interpret the 'correct' message. It is an intense form of religiosity. One main criticism of recent converts against traditional churches is that they do not teach the Bible properly. Nelum says, "the old church did not give me a sense of hope in my life. It was just a Sunday affair. After one Sunday, you forget everything until the next Sunday." The vibrant and very emotional form of worship

found in many evangelical churches may be an expression of this mindset of their members.

### The Failure of the Traditional Religious Institutions

The so-called success of the evangelical Christian movement has to be viewed against the relative failure of the traditional religious institutions to be more responsive to the needs and expectations of the contemporary society. Evangelical groups expand by getting directly involved in the problems of day-to-day life at grass roots level. The following prayer of a pastor attached to an evangelical church in Colombo captures the 'this-worldly' bent of the evangelical Christian movement. "I pray to Jesus, help these people solve their problems, the loans they cannot payback, family problems, health problems like cholesterol, diabetics, heart conditions. Heal in Jesus' name...help find life partners for the young people."

As Perera correctly says, many Buddhists who have joined these evangelical groups come from socially and emotionally depressed backgrounds (1998). The Buddhist institutional set up has not made any substantial intervention in addressing the concerns of these sections of the Buddhist laity. The chief incumbent of the Malwatta Chapter, Venerable Thibbotuvawe Sri Siddhartha Sumangala has been very critical of the former lay custodian of the Temple of the Tooth, which has in its possession enormous sums of wealth, for being only highly vocal against evangelical activities but not taking a genuine interest in the welfare of the poverty stricken lay Buddhists and monks who reside in impoverished temples (*Ravaya*, 2005 June 12). Unlike the Buddhist institutional setup, the mainline churches have traditionally been involved in social welfare programs to a certain extent (i.e. counseling for marital, drug and violence/trauma related problems and education). Yet their social intervention seems to be inadequate.

Under such circumstances, conversions have to be seen as a reaction against the long-term neglect of the marginal and vulnerable sections of the society and their longing for a better life. There have been some progressive measures - measures that would address the concerns of their estranged congregations - adopted by the established religious institutions in reaction to the activities of the evangelical movement. Unfortunately, we are also witnessing a violent backlash.

## Part -II

### Aggressive Evangelism

Conversion is the *modus operandi* of most evangelical groups functioning in Sri Lanka and there is intense competition among these groups to expand their flock. There are claims and counter claims as to the 'true church' among these groups. Even though some of the interviewed activists claimed that they are not interested in getting people to join their particular church, but only in spreading the good news, most of these evangelical activists make a persistent effort to expand the flock of their particular church. The primary objective of their healing crusades, deliverance rallies, house-to-house visits, literature distribution and social welfare work, is the expansion of their membership. Some of these groups go to the extent of even providing transport facilities for the public to attend events organized by their churches with the above intention.

From their perspective, all these are done with a noble intention, 'to save lost souls.' One characteristic feature of the evangelical Christian project is the sense of urgency with which it executes its mission. As Perera correctly observed, it is in this sense of urgency for rapid expansion one may locate the aggression of evangelism (1998: 79). Some members of the collective evangelical project tend to think that, "God has not given us a spirit of fear. As the times are short, we must proclaim the good news to the lost without fear or favor" (Perera 1998).

According to a Christian affiliated to a mainline church, most evangelical groups are "intolerant of others' views, lack humility, and are arrogant and invasive." Usually, many of these groups would not allow plurality. If one member of a family is converted to one of these churches, he or she may attempt to convert the rest of the family members and individuals who come under the sphere of his/her influence to that particular church. I know of a woman who attends regular gatherings of a particular evangelical group. So far she has not been baptized and hence not a full member of the group. She is advised by the group not to attend her church and not to send her children to the Sunday school of that church. Members of this group visit her house and take care of the religious education of her children. She is also pressurized to bring her husband as well as their servant, who belong to mainline churches, to the sessions of the group. She is also warned that after baptism, she may not attend any church other than the church of this particular group.

Certain individuals and groups have come to perceive aggressive and insensitive evangelical activity as a sign of one's faith and devotion to the mission. A charismatic pastor of an evangelical group uttered in a healing crusade in the late 1990s that their objective is to *subjugate* the entire island to the command of god. In an interview I recently had with a pastor of a newly established evangelical church, the pastor equated the future Buddha Maithree with the second coming of Jesus and advised Buddhists to worship Jesus because of this 'fact.' Perera discusses an evangelical group that was planning to distribute Bibles and Bible tracts during the celebrations in Mihintale that mark the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (1998:115). Mihintale is a sacred Buddhist site, the place where many Buddhists believe the discourse of Buddha was preached for the first time in Sri Lanka. Moreover, this very same evangelical group was attempting to convert the Buddhist monks in the area (Perera 1998: 115). This kind of aggressive and insensitive missionary activity on the part of certain evangelical groups in a multi-religious society with a volatile historical memory of colonial missionary aggression tends to invite trouble. Maybe the arrogance and insensitivity exhibited by some of these groups has to be understood against the background of vast amounts of resources and the powerful international political backing the collective evangelical movement has access to.

### The Conservative Backlash

Anti-Christian violence in Sri Lanka started all of a sudden from about mid 1980s. This does not deny the fact that there have been isolated incidents of Buddhist vs Christian violence in the past. But the recent campaign of violence seems to be organized, sustained and ideologically fuelled. Anti-Christian violence consists of such acts as, forced closure of churches, demolition and desecration of churches and religious symbols, arson, intimidation, threats, and physical attacks. According to the statistics of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), violence against church workers and institutions significantly increased from early 1990s (Perera 2004: 17). On most occasions, attacks have targeted small, defenseless and isolated groups. As in India, attacks against Christians increase when extremist forces perceive that they have the backing of the state (Puniyani 2003:167,168). According to the NCEASL, 80 incidents out of 91 reported for the year 2003 took place after the Minister of Buddha Sasana announced the government's plans to introduce anti-conversion laws due to the pressure of extremist forces (Perera 2004: 17). There have also been instances where violence against evangelical groups have been committed in

predominantly Tamil Hindu and Roman Catholic areas by Hindus as well as by Catholic mobs, sometimes led by sections of the Catholic clergy. The attack on the Heavenly Harvest Church in Kaluvenkerni in the East by Hindu mobs in 2003 and the attack in 2002 on Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall in Kadol Kale, Negambo, by mobs led by certain Catholic priests of the area, are two cases in point.

### An Ideology of Exclusion

Attacks against Christian activists and institutions do not take place in an ideological vacuum. The central theme of the ideology that is responsible for creating religious tensions is the assertion that Sri Lanka belongs to Sinhala Buddhists. They are thought to be the true inheritors of the soil. All other ethnic and religious minorities are considered outsiders. If the minority communities wish to live in Sri Lanka, they have to either assimilate to the Sinhala Buddhist culture or accept its hegemony and live at its mercy. Another prominent theme of this ideology is that the Sinhala Buddhist cultural identity is under siege by the agents of western imperialism like the ethnic minorities (especially, the Tamil political society), the church (especially, evangelical Christian groups), civil society organizations concerned with human rights and democracy, Marxists, etc. It concludes that the Sinhala Buddhist culture has to be defended by any means necessary, including violence (i.e. righteous war). I have discussed this ideology in great detail in another essay (Nanayakkara 2004). The aggressive and insensitive missionary work of some evangelical groups has also contributed to nourish this line of thinking in certain quarters of the Sinhala society.

The two major carriers of this ideology at the moment are, the *Deshahithishee Jathika Vyaparaya* (Patriotic National Movement) of which the *Janatha Vimukthi Peremuma* (JVP) is a major ally and the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU). Apart from these two dominant forces, there are a number of fringe groups who subscribe to the line of thinking I have discussed above. The social base of the above politics tends to concentrate in the urban and semi-urban Sinhala middle class. Certain elements of the Sinhala upper middle-class professional layer have become responsive to the above politics. These sections of the society view themselves as an endangered nation in the face of Christians, Tamils, and Muslims with global populations having access to vast amounts of resources and political backing. The attacks against Christian workers and institutions clearly arise from these forces.

There also seems to be a significant presence of Buddhist monks in anti-Christian violence, sometimes leading them and in other times functioning as members of fascist squads. Apart from their nationalist self-perception as 'guardians of the nation', more material considerations have motivated their increasing involvement with the politics of the extreme right. With the migration of youth from villages in search of employment, their base of sustenance has shrunk over the years. As a result, in many rural areas Buddhist temples have been shutdown. Moreover, the Buddhist institutional hierarchies have not shown much interest in their welfare either. On top of all this, through religious conversions, evangelical groups are threatening even the meager existence they have managed to sustain. The increasing involvement of Buddhist monks in anti-Christian violence has to be understood in this light.

Misinformation campaigns go hand in hand with campaigns of violence. Such misinformation campaigns justify anti-Christian violence. The Sinhala nationalist weekly, *Divaina Irida Sangrahaya*, has become one of the main carriers of hate literature against minorities, especially the evangelical Christian community. According to the spokesperson of the Jehovah's Witness, the series of articles which appeared in the *Divaina Irida Sangrahaya* linking the death of Reverend Gangodavila Soma, an outspoken critique of evangelical missionary activity, with an 'anti-Buddhist conspiracy' hatched by the Jehovah's Witness, led to the wrath and violence of extremist forces against them. The *Divaina* journalist, Manoj Abayadeera, who usually represents the *Chinthana Parshadaya*<sup>1</sup> line of thinking in his articles, wrote the particular series of articles. A monk who is a sort of a 'specialist' on evangelical groups writes features on this theme to *Divaina Irida Sangrahaya* regularly. He is also a project director of the NGO called SUCCESS, which is linked to the *Sihala Urumaya*. His articles are incendiary, to say the least. The following was taken from one of his articles to give you an idea of the flavor of his writing. "In 1993 Ratugala village became prey to a Christian religious group. Some in the village were baptized in the Rambakan Oya in the most barbaric way. They were given beef to eat saying its Buddha's meat and arrack to drink" (*Divaina Irida Sangrahaya*, 2005 April 24). Another regular contributor to this sort of hate literature is the *Divaina* journalist Chathura Pamunuwa, who in his articles does not hide the fact that his political sympathies lie with the JHU. What is common to this kind of propaganda is that it justifies violence against Christian activists and their institutions on the allegation that conversions are forced or induced. Mainline churches, especially the Catholic clergy, also entertain conspiracy



theories with respect to the evangelical Christian movement. For them, evangelical Christianity is a conspiracy hatched by the Americans to undermine the Pope's authority and to expand their sphere of influence.

The group that was responsible for a large number of attacks against Christian workers and institutions throughout the country was arrested in 2004 February. It was lead by an organizer of the *Sinhala Urumaya* in the Homagama area. This particular squad also included three Buddhist monks, who resided in a temple that is under the authority of the chief of an ultra-nationalist outfit known as the *Deshapremi Bikku Peramuna* (Patriotic Bikku Front) (*Ravaya*, 2004 December 26). In an interview with me in 2005 January, Ignatious Warnakulasingham, the priest in charge of the three-attacked St. Michael's Catholic Church in Homagama, accused Buddhist monk of leading the attacks against his church. The attack on the Christian Worship Centre at Nuwarawalthu, Hingurakgoda was orchestrated by a medical officer affiliated to the *Sinhala Urumaya* (*Daily News*, 2001 February 20). The attack on the World Vision office in Borella in 2004 was carried out by a group of monks calling themselves *Vediyabandara Bahukaya*. This particular squad was made up of members of the *Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya* of the JHU (*Hiru*, 2005 May 15).

In many attacks against Christian activists and places of worship, the instigators as well as the attackers have been outsiders and the relations between the residents in the vicinity and the churches have been cordial. Intelligence sources suspect the group led by the *Sinhala Urumaya* organizer as responsible for the vast majority of attacks in the country (*Ravaya*, 2004 December 26, International Religious Freedom Report 2004). Some institutions of Christian worship that have come under attack recently have existed in relative peace in these locations for very many years, until the political mobilization of the extreme right. There seems to be a correlation between intensifying anti-Christian violence towards the mid 1990s and the political mobilization of the extreme Sinhala right, primarily in reaction to the People's Alliance government's constitutional reform attempts.

Contrary to the interpretations of spontaneous violence of 'incensed local populations' as proposed by some researchers (Perera 2004: 16), the above examples emphasize two points. Firstly, anti-Christian violence has not taken place in an ideological void. Secondly, in some cases, we are able to establish a direct link between violence and the groups of the extreme right. If we have had effective and impartial

investigations the hand of sinister right-wing elements in these incidents of violence would have been revealed beyond a reasonable doubt. In comparison to the situation in Sri Lanka, many investigations in India have established the crucial role played by groups in the *Sangh Parivar* such as, the VHP and the *Bajrang Dal* in systematically inciting hatred and unleashing violence against Christians (Puniyani 2003).

*The remains of a destroyed church complex in Angonkolawewa, Thimamahvila. This particular church was established in this village in 1950. It was attacked and demolished in 2002 with the arrival of a Buddhist monk to the area.*



## A More Aggressive Evangelism

The outcome of the conservative backlash seems to be a more aggressive and more insensitive form of evangelical Christianity. Even though the leadership of the NCEASL has admitted the past mistakes of the 'church' of cultural insensitivity with respect to the activities of the mission (<http://www.cswusa.com/Reports%20Pages/Reports-Sri Lanka.htm>), the behavior of some of these groups does not show any signs of less aggressiveness or insensitivity. Two examples are given to illustrate this point.

The first incident took place in 2003. In this case, a particular evangelical group, implied in one of their newsletters, a cause and effect relationship between their prayer and fasting period and the passing away of a well-known Buddhist leader. The Buddhist leader implied is none other than the well-known nationalist monk, Madihe Pannasihe (Perera 2004: 16). The second incident concerns a poster campaign. The posters came up soon after the passing away of the incumbent of the Sunethradevi Pirivena in Pepiliyana in 2005. He also held the post of Chancellor of the Sri Jayawardenapura University. This monk is somewhat prominently associated with the Sinhala nationalist populism of the 1956. The poster which was in large lettering stated that Jesus is the salvation, the cure for sickness and peace. No particular organization took the responsibility for it. It was prominently displayed in the vicinity of the Sunethradevi Pirivene in Pepiliyana and the surrounding areas. The posters came up while the Buddhist residents in the area as well as in other parts of the country were in mourning for the monk and while arrangements were being made for his funeral.

Some of the activists of the evangelical movement seem to have a fatalistic attitude towards the inevitability of inter-religious conflict. One such activist says, "persecution and attack against us is something that we expect. Jesus said we would be hated in his name." Another activist told me that inter-religious conflicts were common even during the time of Jesus and is nothing new to them. Certain elements in the evangelical movement seem to think powerful international backing itself is sufficient to face the onslaught of conservative forces. With this in mind, some of these groups are engaged in serious lobbying at international level to pressurize the government to crackdown on extremist forces.

## Further Fragmentation of Society

The dialectical relationship between evangelical Christianity and extreme Sinhala nationalism has led

to the polarization of religious communities in Sri Lanka. The religious freedom of the evangelical Christian community in Sri Lanka is seriously threatened. Their religious activities are seriously hampered and the authorities seem to give a blind eye to their plight. The violence has not specifically targeted evangelical churches and workers as commonly believed. A number of mainline protestant as well as Catholic churches have come under attack. A good example for this is the thrice-attacked St. Michael's Catholic Church in Homagama. The police had been ineffective and partial in responding to many of these incidents. In many instances, they are dragging their feet in bringing the culprits to justice, especially when they are Buddhist monks with political backing. But the police have also made some arrests in this connection.

Against the background of the 'unethical' conversions hysteria, the state in Sri Lanka has taken steps that are clearly biased against faith minorities. It has been pursuing a policy for the last three decades to limit the number of temporary work permits issued to foreign Christian religious workers. Moreover, in 2003, the Supreme Court ruled against an incorporation petition by an order of Catholic nuns known as the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis. The court ruled that the order could not be incorporated if it were involved in proselytization and providing material benefit. According to the NCEASL, apart from this particular order, the Supreme Court has ruled against the incorporation of two other Christian ministries since 2002 (<http://www.cswusa.com/Reports%20Pages/Reports-Sri Lanka.htm>).

The draft bill of the JHU titled, 'Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion' of 2004 and the bill of the Minister of Buddhist Affairs, titled "Act of Safeguarding Religious Freedom" which is yet to be tabled, are attempts at further communalizing the Sri Lankan state. Basically, both of these bills intend to curb the freedom of choice with regard to religion. Therefore, both of these bills violate the basic principles of the constitution of Sri Lanka as well as the international conventions on human rights. All Christian denominations perceive the proposed anti-conversion legislation as a devastating attack on their religious freedom. Even the Muslim Theological Council viewed the tabled bill of the JHU as having serious implications on human rights (Perera 2004: 22).

Under these circumstances, religious minorities, especially the Christian community, is feeling alienated and insecure. A Christian belonging to a mainline church said that they

were seriously worried that something like the 1983 anti-Tamil violence would take place against the Christians during Reverend Gangodavila Soma's funeral. Against this background, there is talk of Christian political mobilization. There are plans to launch a Catholic party, one main objective of which is to face the onslaught of the Sinhala extremists (*Hiru*, 2005 March 20). A common consensus is emerging among most Christian members of parliament, sans party lines, to vote against anti-conversion laws, if tabled in the parliament. This situation is uniting the Christians across denominational lines and creating a rift with the Buddhist community. In this context, possibilities for dialogue and transformation are rapidly diminishing. Even certain leaders associated with the so called dialogue centers that emerged in the 1960s to promote better relations with Buddhists and other religious communities are becoming disillusioned with the whole idea. They feel that the majority Buddhist community has not shown any sincere interest in maintaining a dialogue.

According to a leader of a dialogue center, the possibilities to initiate a dialogue with the more militant sections of the Buddhist community are nil. He characterizes them as "not even a bit open, tolerant and flexible." "For these sections of the Buddhist society," he further said, "every Christian is a traitor and a subversive." On the other hand, the evangelical groups are getting more evasive and secretive, which seems like a reasonable defensive strategy in their predicament, but unfortunately, a strategy which will further fuel aggression against them. The dialectical relationship between evangelical Christianity and extreme Sinhala nationalism is contributing to further fragmentation of Sri Lankan society, adding another dimension of conflict to an already fissured society. Recently I visited the headquarters of an Evangelical Christian group. It was basically a high-tech fortress. Inside this fortress, they showed me a photograph with nostalgia, taken in the 1950s, of a smiling Buddhist monk flanked on either side by two missionaries of their group.

## Conclusion

The reasons for conversion have to do with concerns in this life rather than the life after. Many people who have joined evangelical groups have done so because their former religious institutions have not addressed their needs. The evangelical Christian groups operating in Sri Lanka have basically become networks of material and emotional support for marginal and vulnerable sections of the society. Their

activities are an attempt at re-creation of community amidst the increasing alienation felt in contemporary society. Spreading misinformation and hate, aiding or condoning violence, sponsoring legislation to curb religious freedom, are not the proper responses on the part of mainstream religious institutions. The proper response is to reform their own institutions to become more responsive to the needs of their members. Finally, responsible governments should give thought to measures that concern the welfare of the people and not promote reactionary tendencies that deny freedom and equality.

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## End Notes

- 1 The school that pioneered the Jathika Chinthanaya ideology.

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# CONCEPT OF THE UNIVERSE

Osmund Jayaratne

## Introduction

Most of the information included in this article has been culled from the audio version of the book: *A Short History of Nearly Everything* written by Bill Bryson. I am compelled to depend on the audio version of his celebrated book on account of my total blindness which prevents me from reading the original book itself. While listening to a part of Bill Byron's book on a CD player I have jotted down in a very complicated form brief facts, dimensions and figures which have impressed me. My repetition of this material was written down in what I hope is in a readable form by my wife. This in itself was an extremely difficult task, and I hope my readers will forgive me for any minor errors that may possibly arise in the printed version of my article.

Science is fast moving into an era where direct observation may not be sufficient in itself to grasp the essence of things. Deductions from other observations and perhaps the assumption of phenomena puzzling to our normal frail minds, may be essential to the understanding of things and particularly of the universe in which we live. From the days of the ancient Greeks and the eras that witnessed the brilliance of men like Galileo and Isaac Newton, we have proceeded by huge leaps and bounds to a time when the scientific method still remains valid, but discoveries may supersede what we in our humble way call "commonsense".

This article is a very brief description of our universe. Perhaps, in the long years to come, much of what I have written here may be replaced by new concepts derived from even more complex procedures than the ones science has utilized to this day. We have still only scratched a minute segment of our universe. Perhaps a complete knowledge of the universe may not be possible to Homo Sapiens or even perhaps to more intelligent forms of life that may evolve in the long years to come. However, in our long march forward, I hope that the great work of Bill Bryson may at least be a microscopic contribution to our knowledge of nature which may perhaps see no end.

Through the scientific method we constantly seek to discover what we call the *truth* about Nature. But will there ever be an end to this process? We shall seek the Truth as long as our

species or other species yet to come continue to survive. The truth we seek is about the entirety of Nature itself.

## The Origin of the Universe

In the last issue of *Polity*, in an article entitled "Investigating the Universe" I have described briefly the amazing discovery by Edwin Hubble in 1929 that our universe including every star and component of it is in a process of expansion. The rate of this expansion from the observer is proportional to the distance of the stars concerned from the observer himself. The further away the stars are, the faster they seem to be moving away from us. This data was obtained by Hubble by the use of two well known physical phenomena known respectively as spectroscopy and the Doppler Effect. This effect may be observed from any point within our universe. It is like the expansion of a mass of particles in a uniform sense. Each particle will observe the same phenomenon of expansion.

In an expanding universe of this kind there must inevitably be a starting point. Returning to our old concept of "commonsense", such a starting point must be a geometrical point. Such a point can have no *dimensions or mass*. Roughly 13.7 billion years ago this point - scientifically referred to as a Singularity - exploded, spewing forth in a brief time all that we know of the universe today. A geometrical point of this nature and its sudden explosion for reasons as yet unknown, constitute some of those mysteries which we have referred to in our introduction, but which perforce we have to accept even against our notions of "commonsense." This explosion is today referred to as the *Big Bang*. This term was first suggested in a rather facetious and cynical mood by another great astronomer, Fred Hoyle. Fred Hoyle is historically known for what are known today as colossal blunders. For instance, he believed that life arose on our earth through seeding from outer space. He also conjectured that most diseases on the earth such as influenza, the bubonic plague and many other illnesses were due to seeding from extra-terrestrial space. These suppositions today belong to the realm of fantasy, not accepted by any scientist of repute. However, his cynical nomenclature of the Big Bang still remains part of our scientific literature.

I now exhort my readers to prepare themselves for some mind-boggling data which is part of the science of astronomy. Within a period of  $10^{-43}$  of a second the first indications of radiation and some fundamental particles are said to have been emitted. Every  $10^{-34}$  second the size of our universe began to double. (For the benefit of my readers who are not familiar with elementary mathematics, I may state here that  $10^{-x}$  is  $10^{-x}$  is the same as  $1/10^x$ ).

Initially, the Big Bang created only very light elements of matter such as hydrogen, helium and lithium. How the heavier elements arose in later eons of time we will describe on a subsequent occasion. Present knowledge indicates that the Big Bang occurred 13.7 billion years ago.

### Our Solar System

Through a long history of physical developments, 4.8 billion years ago, a mass of particulate matter accumulated in a certain location of the universe. It must be noted here that all motion in the universe could be either linear or more likely rotational. The reasons for this consist of a fact of physics with which I do not wish to burden my readers. The mass of accumulated matter which we have referred to, rotated at an enormous speed. Ninety eight per cent of this matter conglomerated to form our present Sun. The balance 2%, whilst revolving around this central sun itself conglomerated to form first planetisimals which by further interaction created the planets of our solar system as we call the system today. We hope, and it is a great possibility, that similar processes occurred elsewhere in the universe. Some of the planets so created may have given rise to other forms of life. At least it is my own fervent hope, which is a statistical possibility that this may be so.

### Galaxies

To primitive man the shining stellar objects visible in the sky appeared to be randomly distributed. He assumed that they were embedded in a massive sphere concentric with our sun and far away from the planets of the solar system. Basing himself on objects familiar to him upon the earth and upon legends which he took for granted, primitive man isolated groups of stars which he labelled constellations. These Constellations constitute the fictitious belief, still rampant among sectors of our people and known to the naïve as Astrology.

Today, astronomy has established the fact, particularly by telescopic observation, that the stars exist in isolated clusters known as *Galaxies*. These galaxies may occur in different forms and shapes. For instance, the galaxy to which our own sun belongs is known as the *Milky Way*. There are also galaxies which are ellipsoidal in form. Our galaxy consists of between 100-400 billion stars. These stars appear to be arranged in a spiral form. Hence our own galaxy is referred to as a Spiral Galaxy. Another spiral galaxy close to the Milky Way and somewhat similar to it in formation and the number of stars it contains is the galaxy named ANDROMEDA. Every galaxy consists well over a 100 billion stars. What will now perhaps astound my readers is the fact, established by modern astronomy, that there are in the universe over 140 billion such galaxies. One can now imagine the amazing number of stars that exist in our universe, contrary to the view of early man. The universe is indeed vast and virtually beyond our simple imagination.

### Supernova and the Creation of New Elements

As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, the original Big-Bang from which our universe evolved in an inflationary manner, created enormous quantities of heat and light. In this environment certain elements of matter were also formed. But these were only the very light gaseous elements such as Hydrogen, Helium and Lithium. How then did the very heavy elements in the Periodic Table arise? This remained a puzzle until the last century when on rare occasions stars were observed to explode emitting enormous flares consisting of huge quantities of heat and light. It was an astronomer born in Bulgaria, and working in the U.S.A. who named such occurrences SUPER-NOVAE. The name of this astronomer was Zwicky. Zwicky studied further the nature of these flares and how they emerged from very massive stars in the universe. He discovered that such flares were due to the explosion of these massive stars. Such explosions resulted in the swift contraction of these stars. Protons were compressed against electrons to produce electrically neutral neutrons. The result of such explosions would be, according to Zwicky and his collaborator Bader, the formation of what are now known as *Neutron Stars*. Such stars continue to contract, forming eventually what we now refer to as *Black Holes*. These are so dense that due to their gravitational effect even light cannot escape through them. Zwicky and Bader went one stage further and postulated that in the heat generated within such flares, somewhat akin to the heat of the Big-Bang itself, heavier elements themselves would be formed. However, Zwicky was so unpleasant in

his manner that the papers written by himself and Bader were hardly noticed in the world of astronomy.

However, the ideas of Zwicky and Bader were ultimately proved to be correct. Through their suggestions we now know how the myriads of heavy elements exist in the universe today. Another conjecture, which would be accepted in later years, was the formation of Black Holes. In fact, it is surmised today that at the centre of our own Milky Way galaxy there exists a rather significant Black Hole.

## Dark Matter

In 1965 two astronomers – *Perzias* and *Wilson* were attempting to set up a communications antenna at an astronomical centre somewhere in New Jersey, U.S.A. However, they were faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem. Along with the communications they received and transmitted through their antenna a strong and continuous hiss was always present. They tried every method at their disposal to eliminate this hiss. However, nothing seemed to work.

Thirty miles away from New Jersey, at the Princeton University, a team of researchers led by a well known astronomer called *Bob Dicky* had been working for some time on the leftovers of the primitive Big-Bang. Meanwhile *George Gamow*, in the Soviet Union was also working on the leftovers of the Big-Bang. Apart from the material objects that resulted, Gamow surmised that most of these leftovers would consist of microwave radiation. Desperate in their attempts to isolate the hiss from their communication antenna, Penzias and Wilson, unaware of the work being done thirty miles away by Dicky, telephoned the latter hoping to receive some viable advice from him. Dicky immediately realized that Penzias and Wilson had in fact discovered what he and his collaborators had been working on. Hanging up his telephone receiver, Dicky announced to his colleagues: “Boys, we have been scooped.” For this work Penzias and Wilson received the Nobel Prize while, according to Bill Bryson, the Princeton workers only got sympathy. Today it is a well known and accepted fact that throughout our universe there swarm these remnants from the Big-Bang, now known as *Dark Matter*. It is known today that without the gravitational pull of this Dark Matter, these galaxies of the universe would disperse very rapidly, bringing an end to the universe itself.

## Home Sweet Home

**The Ninth Planet.** Proceeding outwards from our central sun, until the middle of the last century, the planets of the solar system known to us were as follows: (1) Mercury (2) Venus (3) Earth (4) Mars (5) Saturn (6) Jupiter (7) Uranus (8) Neptune. Around the middle of the last century Percival Lowell in the U.S.A. predicted the existence of a ninth planet, far outside the orbit of Neptune. However, no such planet had been hitherto discovered. Percival Lowell, in the meantime directed his attention to what he believed was a network of canals on the surface of Mars, built by industrious Martians. This of course, has been proved to be completely false today. Even unmanned spacecraft landing on Mars have reported no such canals.

In 1960 another astronomer, Tombaugh, searched the space beyond Neptune for the ninth planet predicted by Lowell. Around 1960 to his great surprise Tombaugh, discovered a small lump of matter which he surmised might be the planet predicted by Lowell. He named it PLUTO where the first two letters were a tribute to Percival and Lowell. Astronomy was agog with this discovery. Percival Lowell was heaped with honours for his prediction. Unfortunately the world of astronomy did not give the same honours to Tombaugh who had actually discovered the ninth planet. However, among planetary astronomers Tombaugh instantly became a hero.

Some years later, James Christie, scanning the planet Pluto made an equally amazing discovery. As I have said before, Pluto itself was vague in appearance. But at one point of he new planet James Christie discovered an equally vague cotton wooly projection on its surface. He surmised this projection to be a moon of Pluto.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all doubts of astronomers were set at rest by the authoritative decision of the International Astronomical Union that Pluto indeed was a planet and that the projection observed by Christie was definitely a moon of the ninth planet. It is an interesting fact that Tombaugh had discovered the new found ninth planet Pluto at Flagstaff in the U.S.A. James Christie’s findings of its moon also occurred at Flagstaff.

Today, our solar system consists definitely of at least nine planets. The distance of Pluto from Earth can be decided by the fact that any space vehicle projected from Earth to the ninth planet Pluto at the speed of light (which of course is impossible according to Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity) would take a minimum of 7 hours.

## Comets and Asteroids

Far away beyond the outskirts of our planetary system there appears to be an object bright and glowing which early astronomers thought was an unusual star. Today we know that it is a vast cluster of icy or snowy spheres, which is the home of what we now recognize to be comets. This vast cluster is known as the Dark Cloud. It contains well over 15 million such spheres.

Occasionally, due to gravitational effects such as the passage of a distant star, a few of these spheres may be pulled out of the Dark Cloud. Some are directed to outer space where they are lost to us forever. A very few may come under the gravitational pull of our sun. The latter travels in enormous elliptical orbits around the sun and eventually return to their starting point and when they are far away from the sun these spheres tend to be coated with cosmic dust. Hence astronomers refer to them at this stage as "dirty snowballs."

Travelling through one planetary system, at the further end of their trajectory, they are relatively close to the sun. Due to the enormous gravitational pull of the sun, they turn around and proceed in elliptical fashion to the vicinity of the Dark Cloud. These journey snowball to snowball. As they approach the sun, the intense light of the sun dislodges a few surface layers of the dirty snowball which stream for huge distances behind the snowball under the pressure of solar light. It might be worthwhile at this juncture to remind my readers that according to current Physics, streams of light themselves can exert pressure on minute particles in their work. The original snowball together with its light induced tail is now referred to us a comet. On its return journey, at a certain distance from the sun, these tails disappear and the comet acquires its pristine character as a "dirty snowball."

Periodically earth has witnessed many such comers in the night sky above. The most famous of these was witnessed in 1911. This bears the name Halley's Comet. The interesting fact is that Edmund Halley himself observed only the periodic appearance of this comet. It came to be known as Halley's Comet many years after Halley himself had passed away.

From comets I draw my reader's attention to what are known as ASTEROIDS. These are objects that revolve around our sun in an orbit between the planets Mars and Saturn. They may consist of particles as small as grains of sand or enormous objects even larger than some of the hills we see on earth. What their origin is we still do not know. Could they be the debris resulting from a planet that once existed and disintegrated for some reason eons ago? We still do not know.

On rare occasions such objects from what is known as the asteroid belt, may be deflected from its course and make a disastrous impact with our earth. A very few such impacts have in fact been recorded. The impact of comets on our earth is extremely rare indeed. Thus far apart from a few negligible consequences, our earth has been relatively free from cosmic debris. This itself is testimony to the vastness of our solar system and even more so of the universe itself.

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## WIZARD of ID



Courtesy International Herald Tribune, 9 June 2006.

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# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: FRIEND OR FOE?

Pradeep Peiris

The role of the international community in the resolution of the ethnic conflict continues to be a key factor in the Sri Lankan peace process, in the context of the listing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a terrorist organization by the European Union. The exercise of “soul searching” by the Co-chairs which Mr Akashi indicated would take place in Tokyo is over and the statement of the Co-chairs that came out of it has reinforced this. However, while the listing of the LTTE by the European Union was hailed by southern politicians as a remarkable victory, the message of the Co-chairs triggered criticism from some sections of the southern polity.

In an ideal democracy, it is assumed that the masses set the political agenda. However, in the imperfect world we live in politicians play a key role in doing so. Nevertheless, since politicians claim to act on behalf of the public and that in response to public opinion, understanding public opinion on crucial national issues is vital.

In this context, I believe it is important to review public perceptions of the role of the international community in Sri Lanka. The results of the Peace Confidence Index (PCI) of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) will be used to analyze public opinion on the international community. The Peace Confidence Index (PCI) is a quarterly island-wide survey that has been conducted since 2002 by the Social Indicator, the survey research unit of CPA. This paper focuses chiefly on Sinhala community perceptions of the international community and its changes over time.

## Who forms the International Community?

In the context of the Sri Lankan peace process, states such as India, US, Norway, and multilaterals like the United Nations, International NGOs, and the diaspora can be considered as the international community. Following the UNP’s departure from the policy of “non-alignment” in 1977 with the liberalization of the economy, Sri Lanka experienced growing donor assistance and foreign involvement. After the Indian Peace Keeping Force arrived in the Northern districts of Sri Lanka, foreign assistance peaked. In 2001, President Kumarathunge invited the

Norwegians to facilitate the peace process with the LTTE, at though no deal was struck. Having been elected as the Prime Minister in December 2001, Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe signed a ceasefire agreement with the LTTE in 2002 and began direct negotiations with the LTTE facilitated by the Norwegian government. He also set up an international “safety net” by inviting a broader international involvement in the peace process.

Theoretically, international involvement may include military forces (peace keeping or peace enforcement), economic incentives and deterrents (offering or withholding economic aid), and diplomatic tools (increase/decrease in relations, active involvement through mediation and facilitation). Using these tools the international community can encourage domestic actors to participate in the peace process and reach a negotiated settlement.

In the post 2002 Sri Lankan process, economic incentives or deterrents and diplomatic tools have been used and continue to be used as the principal instruments of external involvement.

Presently both parties are at the brink of war and it is primarily due to international pressure that they have not gone to full scale war as yet. The deterrent effect of international involvement aside, both the LTTE and sections of the southern polity have questioned the role and motives of the international community.

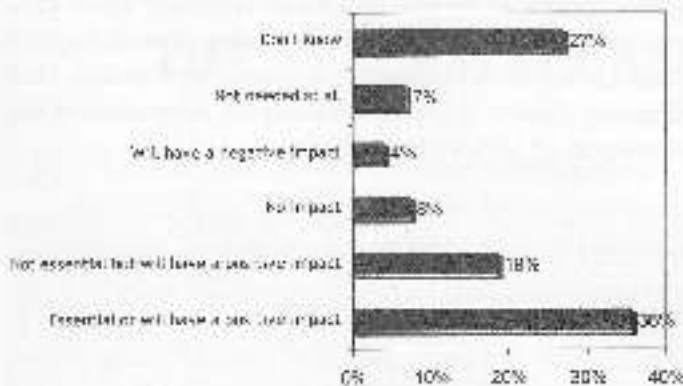
## Support for International third party facilitation in the peace process

In March 2002, 48% of the Sinhala community believed that international third party facilitation is necessary and will contribute positively towards the peace process. Support for international third party facilitation further increased to 55% by March 2005, in the context of the no-war, no-peace situation. However, survey results reveal this support steadily declining as political support for peace fades. In February 2006, support by the Sinhala community for third party facilitation was 52% while the latest survey results (PCI May 2006) reveal that only 36% believe international thir



party facilitation is necessary and will contribute positively towards the peace process. However, at present, only 4% of the Sinhala community believes that international third party facilitation will have a negative impact, while 27% remain unsure.

Sinhala Community Opinion May 2006: The need for an international third party as a facilitator in the peace negotiations



### Perception towards Norway

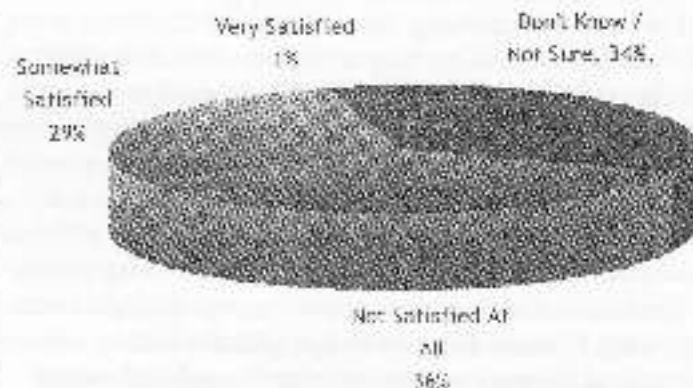
People tend to forget that it was the Sri Lankan Government that invited Norwegian assistance to the Sri Lankan peace process. Having been harshly critical of the opposition, within months of assuming power, the Rajapakse government stressed the need for Norwegian assistance in the peace process. However, ironically, the government allies, the JVP and the JHU have still not ended their “showcase picketing” in front of the Norwegian embassy.

As opinion polls reveal, from the start there has been a marked difference in the support for Norwegian facilitation between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. In March 2003, while 95% of the Tamil community approved of Norwegian facilitation in the peace process, only 32% of the Sinhala community approved the same. 37% of the Sinhala community expressed their satisfaction with the Norwegian facilitation in March 2005 while 35% expressed their dissatisfaction. Paradoxically, Norway’s role in the peace process was appreciated the most by the Sinhala community following the recommencement of talks held in February

2006 in Geneva. At that time, 47% of the Sinhala community expressed their satisfaction with the Norwegian facilitation. However, according to the latest May 2006 survey results, Sinhalese satisfaction has fallen to 30% in the context of the low intensity war between the Government and the LTTE.

Sinhala support of Norwegian facilitation is always lower than the support shown by the minority communities and fluctuates with the ups and downs of the peace process.

Sinhala Community Opinion May 2006: Satisfaction with Norway's Role as the Facilitator



### India: From Imperialist to Protector?

The role of India in the present peace process is an interesting one. India can be characterized as a “sleeping giant” in the current process. On the one hand, India continuously hesitates to play an active role despite numerous pleas by the anti-west SLFP-JVP coalition. On the other, India is vigilant and prefers to play a passive advisory role.

The attitudes of the Sri Lankan politicians toward India are much more interesting than the Indian attitudes towards Sri Lankan politics. A decade and half ago, the JVP attempted to provoke the masses against India and even launched a rebellion while Indian forces were fighting the LTTE. It was largely the JVP agitation against so called ‘Indian imperialism’ that turned the then Government against India and heightened violence in the South. However, interestingly, the very same political ideologists now seem to be leaning

towards India, arguing that India is better than the liberal west.

Support for and belief in the positive impact of Indian involvement in the peace process has always been high. During Government/LTTE negotiations facilitated by the Norwegians 53% of the Sinhala community was of the opinion that India's involvement in the peace process is essential and will have a positive impact. Interestingly this view was shared by other ethnic communities as well. Results of the opinion polls conducted in March 2005 and February 2006 show that the Sinhala community believes that India's involvement in the peace process is essential or will have a positive impact. This opinion steadily increased from 53% in March 2003 to 63% in March 2005 and 67% in February 2006.

However, this growing support started declining since February 2006 and by May 2006 only 49% believed that India's involvement is essential and has a positive impact on the peace process. Nevertheless 34% state that they are not sure. This growing uncertainty and the declining support amongst the Sinhala community with regard to India's involvement in the Sri Lankan peace process perhaps indicates that India too can be vulnerable for blame in the climate of collapsing peace process or else this may be the growing Sinhala displeasure towards the Indian silence despite of the numerous appeal of ruling political parties.

## United States of America

As a member of the Co-chairs, the US plays an active role in the Sri Lankan peace process. The influence of the US in the moves to take action against the LTTE, including the EU ban of the LTTE is undeniable. The US position is that the LTTE has a legitimate cause but unacceptable methods.

According to the results of the latest PCI survey conducted in May 2006, 35% of Sinhalese name the US as the most suitable country to take on the role of facilitator while 45% name India. However, since last September Sinhala support for the US as the facilitator has increased by 6 points. This increasing popularity perhaps reflects the stern stand of the US towards LTTE's violent politics.

As the polls reveal, Sinhalese do not show overwhelming support for international third party facilitation. Nevertheless, resistance to third party facilitation is very low and even lower than the JVP and the JHU voter base – the parties engaged in mobilization of public criticism against international facilitation. Further, it shows that the absence of tension and violence boosts Sinhala support for international facilitation. Likewise there is a drop in support when tension and violence increase and jeopardize the prospects for peace negotiations.

Appreciating the above is important in devising a coherent strategy for peace. It supports the conclusion that such a strategy can be devised at relatively low political costs. despite JVP and JHU criticism. ■

Pradeep Peiris is a pollster who heads the Social Indicator, the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives

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## DOCUMENTS

*The Social Scientists' Association in 2005 engaged in a major study on Sri Lanka's peace process of 2002, focusing on its potential, limitations and possibilities for way forward. This study was a part of a larger study on the peace process in five other countries --Afghanistan, Guatemala, Haiti, Mozambique, and the Palestine. The overall study entitled "What Kind of Peace is Possible in the Post-9/11 World" was coordinated by the North-South Institute, Ottawa, Canada. Published below are the "Conclusions and Recommendations" of the Sri Lanka case study.*

# SRI LANKA'S 2002 PEACE PROCESS THE STALEMATE AND POSSIBLE WAYS OUT

Sri Lanka's peace process has been deadlocked in a contradiction between possible, limited peace and desirable, long-term peace. The 'actually existing peace' has been fraught with instability and uncertainty. It did not enjoy the support of a strong domestic social coalition for peace. Its ardent supporters have been the international community. The policy options of the international community have been limited by two factors. Firstly, both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, the two principal parties to the peace process, have learned to ignore international pressure and persuasion whenever they made the judgment that their strategic interests were at risk. Secondly, the international community cannot impose peace from outside in a situation where the principal as well as secondary domestic actors are reluctant to take the peace process forward.

The experience during the past four years shows that peace building in Sri Lanka entails a process of re-building at a variety of fronts and levels. However, this study also shows the primacy of political rebuilding in peace building, in view of the fact that the politics of state power has penetrated all levels of the conflict and the peace processes.

In a broad sense, there are two types of major concerns in Sri Lanka's peace process. The first group relates to the immediate tasks of consolidating the cease-fire agreement and resumption of negotiations. We may call them 'peace-making' issues. The second type of concern is about long-term transformation of the conflict in the sense of 'peace-building.' The following is a summary of these immediate, process-related recommendations and long-term, substantial issues of peace-making and peace-building.

### Process Related Recommendations

- Sri Lanka at present represents a case study of difficult transition from civil war to peace. The negotiation deadlock in existence for more than three years contains some of the major complexities in this process of transition. The escalation of violence between the LTTE and their rival armed groups, between the intelligence wings of the state and the LTTE, and more recently between the LTTE and the government armed forces has repeatedly endangered the ceasefire. The future of the peace process will entirely depend on the stability of the ceasefire. Therefore, the protection of the cease-fire agreement from collapse is the most crucial responsibility at present in preserving Sri Lanka's fragile peace process.

- The 2002-2003 peace process made significant positive gains. Temporary cessation of war between the state and the LTTE continues to be its most important achievement. The declared willingness of the government and the LTTE to explore a federal solution to the ethnic conflict is also significant. Another achievement was the establishment of a sub committee on gender, composed of women representatives of the LTTE and the southern civil society. However, the peace process has failed to move the parties towards even an interim settlement agreement. The peace process also exposed the limitations of the Sri Lankan state, the LTTE, the international community and civil society in taking the process forward. It showed the Sri Lankan government's incapacity to take the peace process forward politically, beyond the ceasefire agreement.

As for the LTTE, its inability to move in the direction of democratic transformation became visible repeatedly. For its part, the international community could not break the negotiation deadlock after March 2003. Civil society too proved itself ineffective in building a social movement for peace. Learning necessary lessons from these and other failures is crucial to avoid setbacks in the next phase of Sri Lanka's peace process.

- Whenever the negotiations resume, moving forward from a somewhat unstable cease-fire to a stable settlement agreement is at the heart of a sustainable peace building process.

- Broadening the process while pluralizing the participation has emerged as a major aspect of re-designing Sri Lanka's current peace process. The two-party dialogue process between the government and the LTTE has exhausted its capacity to take the peace process forward. Inclusion of other parties, political and civil society actors, in the process is a necessary policy challenge. It is up to the international community to make a case repeatedly and tirelessly with the government and the LTTE for an inclusive, multi-party peace process.

- De-escalation of violence and peace within the Tamil polity has become a necessary pre-condition for advancing Sri Lanka's peace process. The restoration of democracy in the Tamil polity is also contingent on peace and reconciliation among Tamil politico-military movements. It is a policy priority that the Sri Lankan government and the international community should consider as being urgent. While strengthening the CFA as suggested above, constructive engagement with non-LTTE political-military groups by the government and the international community will help restore peace in the Tamil society.

### **Peace Building Recommendations:**

- The question of governance in Sri Lanka's conflict resolution process is fundamentally linked to an agenda of re-organizing the state in a political-constitutional framework of advanced federalism. In other words, federalization of the state is the key to effective civil war transition in Sri Lanka. This is a crucial aspect of 'peace building from above.'

- Sri Lanka is a thoroughly divided polity. For a substantial state reform program like federalization requires broad popular and political support. The only possible way to mobilize such support to back a program of peace through state reform will depend on the capacity of main political parties to forge a strategic consensus for peace and political reform.

- The mainstream policy discourse of federalist governance is essentially framed in a discourse of territorialized power sharing. The complexity of ethnic relations and the presence of regional and local minorities in the polity make it necessary for Sri Lanka to work towards an imaginative combination of territorial and non-territorial forms of federalist governance.

- Federalization of local governance is yet another issue that is closely linked to peace building from below. It should be aimed at ensuring democratic participation of local ethnic and cultural minorities in the governance process. It calls for a process of deepening the federal forms of regional governance.

- In relation to regional governance in the transition from civil war, the existing situation of dual power of the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE poses complex challenges even in an interim peace settlement. Unless there are creative strategies for the management of dual governance, the peace process will face serious setbacks. A flexible scheme of federalism will be necessary to integrate the institutions of a parallel state maintained by the LTTE, with the Sri Lankan state.

- The development question in Sri Lanka at present should be seen not as a post-conflict endeavour, but as one located in a preliminary phase of stabilizing a pre-settlement negotiation process. There is a manifest risk in conceptualizing the economic reconstruction process in post-conflict and liberal, free-market terms.

- The attempt made in 2002-2003 to experiment with a liberal, free-market, post-conflict reconstruction project has failed. The Sri Lankan electorate, particularly the voters in the low-income and poor segments of majority Sinhalese society, has also rejected it. However, in the existing policy debates in Sri Lanka, a critical discourse on the political economy of transition from civil war is yet to emerge.


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· Building social bases for peace, particularly among the low-income and poor social groups, is crucial for democratic sustainability of the peace process. This requires economic policy strategies that can democratize and broad-base the gains of the peace process; the so-called peace dividend. Continuation of free-market economic policies, with no strategies for redistribution, in conjunction with a political reform agenda, is very likely to jeopardize the stability of the peace process.

· There is a continuing gulf between the economic visions of the government and the donor community on one hand and the LTTE on the other. While the former is committed to a project of rapid economic reconstruction in the war-torn areas through the

intervention of private capital and market forces, the LTTE is quite cautious, for justifiable reasons, of such a development approach. A creative dialogue is needed between these two approaches for a viable development strategy to facilitate Sri Lanka's transition process to evolve.

· Finally, a narrow peace-deal approach can hardly promote peace-making and peace building goals, because its objectives do not go beyond achieving short-term strategic goals of the parties to the conflict. Sustainable peace building is a process spread over a period of transition because it is grounded in the transformation of politics in the country. Peace without transformation can best be limited, negative peace.



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## REPORT OF FACT-FINDING VISIT TO WELIKANDA

Participants: Ramani Muttetuwegama (Law and Society Trust); Kumudini Samuel (Women and Media Collective); Udaya Kalupathirana (Free Media Movement); Sunila Abeysekera (INFORM); Chandani Wijetunga (from Sinhapura, Welikanda); Jayasiri Jayasekera (*Ravaya*)

We reached Welikanda town at about 11 a.m. One group visited the Police Station, the other went to the office of the Mahaweli Development Agency.

We visited the villages of Dimbulana, Sinhapura, Maitrigama and Bo Atta.

### The context

Welikanda is an area that has traditionally been part of the so-called border area between the Eastern province and the North-Central Province. The Welikanda army camp is the last big security forces encampment until one reaches the outskirts of Batticaloa. The villages in these areas have been at the receiving end of a great deal of violence, brutality and displacement due to the conflict throughout the 1990s. The names of Karapola, Mutugala, Alanchipothana and Bo Atta are familiar to us because of the brutal killings of civilians of all ethnic and religious communities by the

security forces, the LTTE and in bitter inter-communal clashes in the early 1990s.

Welikanda is a predominantly agricultural area, with most villagers dependent on paddy cultivation for a living. It is very poorly served in terms of infrastructure. There are few tarred roads, very irregular public transport and few opportunities for people living in these areas to access higher education or advanced health care. Many of the villagers living in this area have been displaced at least once in the past ten years. In times of tension, they have often moved to safer shelter of the jungles surrounding their homes during the night time. Following the CFA, many of them experienced a period of stability in which they could cultivate their fields and live in their homes.

The area was originally populated by an indigenous Vanni population speaking a mixture of Tamil and Sinhala and with forms of worship and cultural expression that are very specific to the region. Many of the Mahaweli villages were established in already existing villages, 'purana gam' or 'traditional villages' as they are known, and given new names. The officers of the Mahaweli Development Agency play a critical role in the daily lives of the villagers in this area, providing transport to take sick persons to hospital and paying

allowances for pre-school teachers as well as providing a range of support services for farming.

Since the split in the LTTE and the emergence of the Karuna faction as a party in the ethnic conflict, Welikanda has been a centre of activities of the Karuna group and many stories have circulated regarding camps of the Karuna group being located in and around Welikanda. In the last two years quite a few attacks on civilians [IS THIS CORRECT?] and on LTTE personnel that took place in and around Welikanda have been attributed to the Karuna group. The issue of the 'paramilitaries' that has proved to be a sticking point in the peace negotiations between the LTTE and the government have their roots in the allegations made by the LTTE regarding the existence of armed cadre of the Karuna group in areas under the control of the SL army, in particular, in Welikanda.

### The background to the visit

On May 31, newspapers reported the killings of 12 Sinhala villagers in Omadiyamadu in the Welikanda area on May 29. Ten of them were labourers working on the construction of a canal that would take water to Omadiyamadu, a Tamil village, from Ransaratenna. Omadiyamadu is located on the border between the Valaichenai and Welikanda Police Divisions and is a part of the Vakara administrative area.

Of the 12 killed in this incident, 9 were from Maitrigama, also a Mahaweli village about 6 kilometers from Welikanda town. They were identified as D.M. Gunaratna (37), K.M. Sirisena (44), J. Ajith Ranaweera (32), D.T. Tilak Dhammika (31), B.M. Dharmadasa (49), D.V. Vasantha (22), K.W. Samaranayake (19), E.A. Sarath Kumara (45). One person, H.M. Sarath was from Monaratenna, another Mahaweli village. Kumara from Kuliypitiya, was also killed; he was the driver of the back-hoe tractor working at the site. The driver of the trailer G.W.G. Gunawardena (48) was also killed. The labour contractor, P.G.A. Abeysuriya (50), popularly known as 'Mahatun mudalali', who was killed in the incident was the owner of several small shops in the Welikanda town and the President of the Trader's Association.

The killings took place at the end of the day when the contractor had come to ensure that the work quota for the day had been completed. The entire group was led away from the construction site, had their hands tied behind their backs and then were shot at close range. It was an execution style

killing. Two persons escaped. Upali Rajakaruna (24) was unhurt while Priyadrashana Wijebandara (24) was wounded. Their statements indicate that the group of armed men who abducted them and killed their colleagues were familiar with the location, spoke in Sinhala and were young. The contractor's motorcycle and the trailer in which the workers were transported were set on fire.

In the days following the killing, many people had begun leaving their homes at night-time out of fear. The Welikanda town had been shut down on June 1, the day prior to our visit, because that was when the funerals of the persons killed in the incident were held. Although there had been an anti-terrorist demonstration in the town in the afternoon of the funerals, the Police had diffused the tensions. There was a great deal of anxiety and insecurity expressed by all the persons we met when we visited the various villages.

### Findings

#### About the killings

Many people we spoke to said that the killing of the labourers was a shock and could not be explained. The contractor had obtained the contract for building this canal from the Mahaweli Authority, a state institution, and had put teams to work on this project since August last year. The project was funded by a Saudi Arabian grant. Work had proceeded without any interference from the LTTE although many people felt that the canal was on the borders of LTTE-controlled territory. If one were to continue through Omadiyamadu, one would reach Vakara which has been contested terrain between the LTTE and the Karuna faction for over a year. Other labourers who had also worked on the site said that they would leave their tools and equipment in small huts at the site overnight and nothing would be stolen or damaged. Thus, there was a level of confidence with which the workers engaged in the construction work. What happened to destroy this confidence is as yet unclear. What emerged from different stories that we heard was the possibility that there had been a warning issued to the contractor by the LTTE to stop some of his business practices which were being perceived as 'helping the Karuna faction'.

The killings took place one evening. It took the Police until afternoon the next day to actually go out and retrieve the bodies. It was obvious that someone had been watching the location because as soon as the Police vehicle carrying the bodies had left, another group of persons removed the back-hoe trailer that was lying at the site.

The Police stated that the bodies should have been taken to the Valaichchenai Hospital for the post-mortem examinations since the area in which they were killed fell into the Valaichchenai Police Division. However they were able to have the whole process shifted to Polonnaruwa in order to facilitate the release of bodies to the families. People we spoke to including those at the Police said the Tamil woman doctor in Polonnaruwa was extremely supportive and carried out the examinations in the night itself so that the family members could claim their bodies within a short time.

We visited Maitrigama, the village from which eight of those killed had come. Many of those killed had left behind dependent families with young children, and their future was a matter of concern. Earlier, we had heard that among the promises made to the community by the politicians and officials who attended the burial on the previous day had been the handing over of the young children of fathers killed in this incident to the care of the probation authorities. There was no clarity regarding payment of compensation.

People there were extremely concerned about their own security, about their inability to sell their paddy at a fair price and at the lack of public transport to the village. One man told us that having a bus that would not break down coming regularly to the village would resolve many problems including that of sending children to school. At present, the lack of dependable transport creates a situation in which many children, especially younger ones, do not go to school since they are unable to walk the eight kilometers to the town and back.

### **Sinhala engagement with Tamil politics**

**I**n almost every single conversation, the level of engagement between the Sinhala villagers and contemporary Tamil politics was very clear. The Sinhala people in the Welikanda area are part and parcel of the dominant politics of the area that relate to the struggle between the LTTE and the Karuna faction. It is clear that their day to day lives are so entangled with the Tamil political battles being fought in their immediate vicinity that they have no choice but to choose the path of survival. In addition, there seemed to be some economic arrangements for example relating to the transport of food or other necessities from the town to the camps or doing clearing and building of bunkers, into which one could observe people being linked.

Critical among the issues that people raised were :

The lack of clarity regarding what constitutes 'cleared' and 'uncleared' areas in the Welikanda region.

Dimbulana is a Mahaweli village located on the road to Sinhapura. It has about 300 families, a Police Post, a Buddhist temple and a primary school. The village is located almost on the edge of Kasankulam where a big battle between the LTTE and the Karuna faction took place in early May. The people of Dimbulana told us that they were shocked to see that area being described as an uncleared area by media reports on the clash. Their comment was: 'When it suits them (the authorities) we are living in an 'uncleared' area (and therefore under LTTE control) and when it comes to something like elections, we belong to the cleared area.

With regard to the location of the canal that the labourers were constructing in Ransarathenna too there was lack of clarity, whether it was within or outside the LTTE- controlled area. In Vadumaran, people on the town and in the villages told us of a large LTTE camp in what is technically supposed to be government controlled territory.

### **Security issues cannot be resolved by distributing guns among villagers**

**A**ll the people we met in the villages we visited were extremely anxious about security. They said that they lived in constant fear of attack by either the LTTE or the Karuna faction, or of a clash taking place between the LTTE and the SL army in their own area.

However, they were clear that the distribution of guns among villagers, which was taking place when we visited, and had taken place earlier as well, was not the answer to their problems. In Sinhapura, for example, we were told that only 3 out of over 100 villagers accepted the guns. In Maitrigama, the village most affected by the killings of May 29, only 9 villagers had applied to receive guns. Other villages identified as being particularly vulnerable were Kurulugama; Mahasenpura, Ruwanpitiya and Monaratenna.

At several points during the day, in different situations, many people were asking the question as to why they should be responsible for their own security and why the government could not provide them with the security that they needed. They accepted that there were insufficient numbers of police in Welikanda to provide security to the villages in the area

which are allocated at fair distances from each other and from the town. Some people, especially in Bo Atta, referred to the fact that the conflict had to be resolved if they were to live securely. Others were scathing in their comments about the fact that the few policemen available were more often than not detailed to provide security for visiting politicians and officials along the main roads, completely ignoring the insecurity of villagers living off the road.

The villagers were extremely astute regarding the issue of guns. While some of them said they wanted the guns for hunting and for fighting off wild elephants from their fields, most felt that many issues in this regard were problematic. For example, they pointed out that there was confusion as to who was the decision-making authority when it came to determine who was eligible to receive guns and who was not. There was no clear criteria as to the issue of guns by the police except that the Bo Atta case showed preference for Sinhala persons over persons of other ethnicities. They also raised the issue as to which authority would monitor the use of the guns by the villagers.

### Home Guards

There has been a surge in the recruitment of Home Guards in this region, as in areas such as Gomarankadawela immediately after an attack has taken place. 325 home guards are returning from training on Monday June 5. While the poverty and unemployment in this area make this one of the few avenues of employment open to young men in particular, the villagers are well aware that it is the Home Guards who often face the brunt of attack by the LTTE. Also people raised the issue of whether the number of 325 persons was adequate to provide security for over 60 villages that are located at a fair distance from one another and that are often situated on the borders of LTTE-controlled territory.

Villagers also pointed out that Home Guards were mostly put on guard duty at night-time. Many of them were tired by then, after a day of working for a living in the fields or on a construction site, and did not have the discipline to stay awake. In addition, in the event of an attack being mounted during the day, there would be no protection for the village. A comment was made that the security cost of arming, training and maintaining a Home Guard outweighed the potential security gains.

### Bo Atta:

On June 2, during our visit, a split was emerging between the Tamil and Sinhala villagers of Bo Atta over the refusal of the Police to issue guns to the Tamils. The Village Defence Committee acknowledged that this could be an issue that divided the village on the basis of ethnicity. The members of the Committee went in a delegation led by its Chairman and including a Tamil youth, the Secretary of the village Kovil Committee, to submit a list of people to be issued with guns to the Police. The members of the committee, in a delegation led by its Chairman and including a Tamil youth—the secretary of the village civil committee—went to the police to submit a list of people to be issued with guns. After scrutiny, the Police officer had asked the Tamil member whether there was a guarantee that the gun given to him would not be turned against the army or police. The entire delegation found this an offensive comment and they left the Police Station after the Chairman handed over his letter of resignation to the Police over this issue.

However, this was not sufficient to allay the fears of the Tamil residents of Bo Atta that their Sinhala neighbours were being given arms that may be turned against them and that the mistrust displayed by the Police officer was also present in the village. The Police had asked the Grama Sevaka to certify the list submitted for issue of guns by the Bo Atta VDC. However, the villagers told us that a few nights previously, the Police had turned up at 2 a.m. and distributed guns to whoever was up and on the main road at the time, without any vetting.

Bo Atta is a 'traditional' village in which Mahaweli settlers have lived side by side with the indigenous Vanni people and is one of the few mixed (Sinhala/Tamil) villages in the Welikanda region. It has a terrible history of massacre and counter-massacre between the two communities. In October 1995, 37 persons including 12 women and 10 children were shot and hacked to death by unknown persons. Among the dead were 3 Tamils. Tamil people (returned to the village) after spending several years in transit camps and temporary shelters only in the period after the Ceasefire.

The people who spoke to us, from both communities, continually emphasized the fact that they were united, and that they had faced the massacre of 1995 and returned to live together because of their confidence in each other. Yet, it was also clear that there was a breakdown of that trust in the wake of recent events. The Tamils of Bo Atta who spoke to



us emphasized their vulnerability. Because they lived in an area known to be under the control of the Karuna faction, the LTTE regards them all as traitors and they cannot therefore seek refuge in the Vanni or in LTTE controlled areas. Yet at the same time the police and the army treat them as terrorists because they are Tamil.

## **Destruction of livelihoods**

**A**s much as they spoke to us about the conflict and their anxieties about the future with regard to peace, the people of Welikanda spoke to us about their anxieties regarding their livelihood and the lack of an economic future in Welikanda.

Because of the security situation the security forces have declared some areas of cultivated land out of bounds and farmers are unable to access them. This is reminiscent of the High Security Zones over which there has been so much controversy in the Jaffna peninsula. In other areas there have been shootings at people while in their fields and the farmers themselves fear to enter into those fields. As a consequence, more than half the arable land in the Welikanda area has not been cultivated in the past year. In some villages almost the entire stretch of paddy land lies fallow.

The inability of those farmers who did manage to work their fields and produce a harvest to sell their paddy at a reasonable rate was also a matter that everyone we spoke to reiterated. A few years ago there were reports of several farmers in this area committing suicide over their inability to pay off their debts through the sale of their harvest.

The proposal of the security forces to provide a circle of security (security 'valalla') within which people could go out to their fields and return is untenable, according to the farmers. On the one hand they feel that the presence of the security forces in the fields will make them even more vulnerable to attacks by the LTTE. On the other hand, the nature of their cultivation calls for their presence in the fields at night, for example, during the period in which the grain is ripening, in order to protect the seed from birds and elephants. Thus the provision of security for a certain period during day time does not meet their security needs.

In addition, the key issue remains the inability of the government to honour its commitments to purchase paddy

from these farmers and the cycle of exploitation the farmers are locked into because of this. According to the farmers, the criteria imposed by the government is too strict – certain levels of dryness, no stones, no black grains etc. – and they prefer to sell it at a much cheaper rate to outside traders because of the extra work involved in bringing their produce up to the standard required by the government purchasing agency. Some farmers still have paddy left over from the January/February harvest that they have been unable to sell. Mahaweli authorities had instituted a mobile purchasing scheme for buying 1000 kg of paddy directly from framers. However, this scheme too was criticized as being based on patronage.

In addition, many of them are trapped in a debt cycle arising out of the cultivation loans (wagaa naya) given by the state, some of which was written off but some of it which was not. The poverty-stricken state of the villagers makes them take on whatever employment is offered. Many of them work as contract labourers at sites very similar to the one in Ransarathenna where the recent massacre took place. The indebtedness also made it very difficult for people to obtain credit from banks for engaging in any other kind of business, such as animal husbandry or production of food items for sale.

Maitrigama, where many of those farmers who had been killed in the recent incident came from, is a good example of an impoverished Mahaweli village with over 300 families and a range of uncultivated fields. Only 18 of the families had been able to sell their paddy to the government. They said that outside traders were also not visiting their villages to purchase paddy as they did in the past because of the deteriorating security situation.

## **Political Patronage**

**F**armers were scathing in their comments about political patronage and the ways in which it acts to favour some among them who are allied to those political forces in power in this region. Purchasing of paddy, distributing of jobs and guns, cancellation of debts – everything that was the cause of grief to these communities was, according to many we spoke to, being done at the behest of politicians from the provincial capital with little regard for the fairness of the procedures and for the sufferings of the people living in these villages. ■

# LIQUIDATION OF THE PALESTINIAN NATION

## A LETTER FROM CHOMSKY AND OTHERS ON THE RECENT EVENTS IN WEST ASIA

The latest chapter of the conflict between Israel and Palestine began when Israeli forces abducted two civilians, a doctor and his brother from Gaza—an incident scarcely reported anywhere, except in the Turkish press. The following day the Palestinians took an Israeli soldier prisoner - and proposed a negotiated exchange against prisoners taken by the Israelis - there are approximately 10,000 in Israeli jails.

That this "kidnapping" was considered an outrage, whereas the illegal military occupation of the West Bank and the systematic appropriation of its natural resources - most particularly that of water - by the Israeli Defence Forces is considered a regrettable but realistic fact of life, is typical of the double standards repeatedly employed by the West in face of what has befallen the Palestinians, on the land allotted to them by international agreements, during the last seventy years.

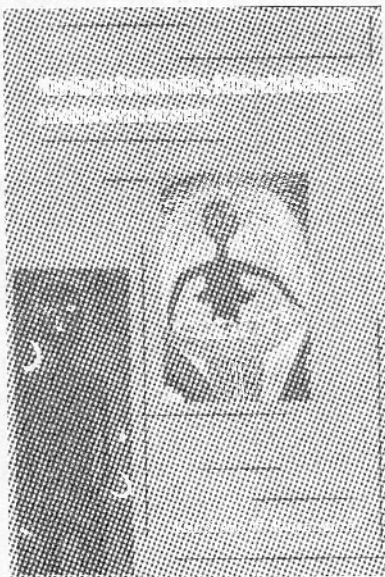
Today outrage follows outrage; makeshift missiles cross sophisticated ones. The latter usually find their target situated where the disinherited and crowded poor live, waiting for what was once called Justice. Both categories of missile rip bodies apart horribly - who but field commanders can forget this for a moment?

Each provocation and counter-provocation is contested and preached over. But the subsequent arguments, accusations and vows, all serve as a distraction in order to divert world attention from a long-term military, economic and geographic practice whose political aim is nothing less than the liquidation of the Palestinian nation.

This has to be said loud and clear for the practice, only half declared and often covert, is advancing fast these days, and, in our opinion, it must be unceasingly and eternally recognised for what it is and resisted.

Tariq Ali, John Berger, Noam Chomsky, Eduardo Galeano, Naomi Klein, Harold Pinter, Arundhati Roy, Jose Saramago, Giuliana Sgrena, Howard Zinn

### Available Soon from the Suriya Bookshop



“Kanchana Ruwanpura provides an astute analysis of patriarchal structures and resistance among female-headed households in Eastern Sri Lanka. Her work decisively debunks the conventional wisdom that Sri Lanka is a ‘feminist nirvana’, that war is the primary reason for growth of female-headed households, and that economists cannot do solid qualitative work. *Matrilineal Communities, Patriachal Realities* makes an important contribution to feminist economic analysis of household structures, development, and the importance of ethnic differences.”

Randy Albelda, Professor of Economics and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts-Boston

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# WOMEN SAY NO TO WAR

## CONDEMN THE ATTACK ON CIVILIANS AT KEBITHIGOLLEWA

**W**e strongly condemn the LTTE claymore attack on a passenger bus plying between Kanugahawewa and Kebithigollewa. This cruel and senseless attack has taken the lives of 64 men, women and children and injured dozens more – all civilians from poor and disadvantaged village communities. We express our grief and offer our condolences to the bereaved families.

This is the deadliest attack on civilians since the ceasefire agreement and follows on a number of claymore and other attacks which have affected civilians as indicated in our statement of 15 May 2006.

It has also been reported that in response to the Kebithigollewa massacre, the state launched air strikes into the Sampur, Mullaitivu and locations close to Kilinochchi. Air strikes too, however carefully targeted can and do affect civilians and both attack and counter attack of this nature make civilian life extremely insecure and make more vulnerable the situation of civilians caught in the cusp of violent conflict between the State and the LTTE.

The break-down in formal negotiations between the government and the LTTE with the non meeting at Oslo has precipitated military engagement with grave consequences, particularly for civilians, many of whom have suffered the ravages of war for over two decades. Further, the brief promise of peace and the search for a sustainable, negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict has again receded, pushing the country into yet another spiral of violence.

Today, we echo the hope of President Mahinda Rajapakse that the incident at Kebithigollewa will not sabotage the peace process and welcome his statement of commitment to the peace process. We call upon the LTTE to act responsibly and make a similar commitment to peace. We also wish to remind both the LTTE and the State that they must be committed to

the principles of International Humanitarian Law which prohibits attacks against civilians and requires all parties to the conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants at all times.

We would again like to reiterate, particularly to those who seek to resolve the conflict through war that in cases of protracted conflicts negotiation takes a considerable period of time and often suffers numerous set-backs before the issue is finally resolved.

We also call upon all parties to the conflict and civilians to remember the period of war Sri Lanka experienced and come to the realisation that a resumption of hostilities will bring about even greater destruction. From human casualties, damage to infrastructure and adverse impact on the economy, to more checkpoints and cordon and search operations, a return to war will result in the suspension of “normality” and adversely affect every facet of life of all citizens of Sri Lanka. Particularly vulnerable will be poor and marginalised communities of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim civilians living in the so-called ‘cleared’ and ‘uncleared’ areas and along the ‘border’ of the north and eastern provinces. All proposals and decisions that take the path towards a resumption or continuation of hostilities put their communities and their lives in deadly peril - a peril that those who propound a military solution to the conflict are rarely likely to experience.

Both the Government and the LTTE should desist from further action which further erodes the integrity of the ceasefire agreement and instead strive to find means of common ground and resume an engagement that seeks a negotiated resolution to the conflict. As civilians and as women we say again ‘No to War’, lets in this time of crisis continue our commitment to the peace process and a sustainable peace for all peoples of Sri Lanka. ■

SRI LANKAN WOMEN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

## DEVELOPMENT WITH DIGNITY

C. T. Kurien

*Development with Dignity: A case for full employment* by Amit Bhaduri, 2005; National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2005

The message of the book can easily be summarised in the words of the author: "Our unforgivable failure has been the persistence of mass poverty and destitution. It is a matter of utter shame that nearly six decades after Independence, we have anywhere between one-third and one fourth of our people desperately poor and denied of the minimum conditions for human existence - the largest number of illiterates, millions of children crippled or blinded due to malnourishment" (page 3). There is more on matters of utter shame in the next couple of pages. But it is not a tale of woe alone.

Fairly soon, on page 11, can be seen the following words of reassurance and hope: "The developmental process that we must strive for is not simply a higher growth rate; nor should it mean simply an elaborate bureaucratic mechanism for income transfer to improve the distribution of income in favour of the poor. It has to be viewed from a different perspective altogether in which *growth and distribution are integrated into the very same process*, while breaking systematically the social barriers of discrimination and prejudices based on gender, caste, language, religion or ethnicity. This is what *Development with Dignity* must mean for us in India" (emphasis added throughout). The author, one of our internationally recognized theoretical economists, adds with authority: "This is not a utopia. It is the only reasonable economics that this country can pursue with the support of the majority of its citizens who are poor to varying degrees" (page 11).

The claim from a theoretical economist that it is the only 'reasonable economics' may put off some readers who think that even elementary economics is beyond them. But there is no need for apprehension. The book is part of the commendable attempt by the National Book Trust to make

available 'Popular Social Science' and is written in simple non-technical language that any interested reader will be able to follow.

The first proposition that the author puts forward is that 'growth', which is celebrated by economists, politicians and the media, is *not* the proper route to development with dignity. Not that increase in production is not a necessary condition for poverty eradication. The problem is two-fold. First, it is not feasible to let growth take place and then to have it *redistributed* to the poor and needy. Second, each process of growth has a distributional pattern built into it, and hence 'growth' is not a socially neutral process. 'Growth', after all, is a summation of the wide-ranging production activity taking place in the economy. In an economy where production takes place in response to price signals that the market sends out, the goods produced will be determined largely by those who have high levels of purchasing power. "Nowadays in big cities, and even in small towns, bottled drinking water is available at a price, which at most only the top 10 per cent of the income earners can afford. And yet, while the market naturally has no compulsion to make a basic good like safe drinking water available to the poor, it might produce more of bottled water and this could step up our statistic of the rate of growth!" (page 14).

That being the case, a basic requirement for poverty eradication is to ensure that the poor have purchasing power. This is not to be achieved by distributing cash to those who need it, because what people need is not cash as such, but goods and services, and these need to be produced. The way out, therefore, is to provide employment to anyone who needs it at a reasonable wage rate, and to ensure that such employment generates goods and services that will come to be demanded by those who are employed newly. *Thus, in a basically market-driven economy, productive employment for the masses is the most reasonable and the surest way to lift everyone to a tolerable level of living.*

This is the crux of Bhaduri's proposal and he makes the claim that this process of development with dignity is feasible even within our existing socio-economic-political system. Indeed, it is a market-friendly solution; and since the vast majority of our people have such low purchasing power that leaves them in deficit in terms of goods such as food, clothes and houses and services such as education and health, it is also a democratic solution.

But is it too idealistic a solution, and will it really work? Bhaduri takes up some of the questions that can be raised about the feasibility of the solution and examines them in detail.

Consider first the possibility of a mismatch between the kind of employment that is most likely to be taken up under the mass full employment scheme and the goods (and services) that are likely to be demanded. Public works for infrastructure development (road construction, for instance) are the most natural and quite legitimate form of mass employment: the demand generated, again quite naturally, is for food, clothing and housing. At present this is no problem because India produces more grain than what is necessary (resulting in large stocks in the godowns not because people do not need food, but because those who need it do not have the purchasing power). The textile and cement industries have excess capacity that can be put to use if there is demand. If demand exceeds the existing excess capacity, the market will signal that additional capacity will have to be created through investment.

The explanation given clarifies two crucial aspects of the Bhaduri proposal. First, it is not a 'limits to growth' approach. Production will and must grow and thus the thrust on 'growth' will continue. But the composition of growth, the product mix, will change because the process mix has been altered. Second, in this age of globalization, the Bhaduri proposal is not against increased foreign trade, nor against opening up the economy to foreign capital. But conditions do apply. It will be insisted that foreign capital is not debt creating, nor primarily profit absorbing (portfolio investment). To the extent it is capacity-creating and employment-generating, foreign capital will be welcome. The bottom line, however, is that the Indian economy will be largely domestic-oriented, systematically generating an expanding domestic market and domestic capital formation.

SA question that can be raised legitimately is whether we can afford to go in for full employment, or in other words,

how the public finance for the proposal is to be managed. In financial terms, the cost of providing 300 days of employment a year at Rs.60 a day for an estimated 33.6 million currently unemployed members of the labour force is about Rs.65,000 crores. Does that appear too big a sum? If so, please be assured that it constitutes only less than 3 per cent of our gross domestic product (GDP) and in actual figures far less than the amount we spend every year on defence.

So, the issue is really not whether we can afford it, but how to go about doing it. In this context it is important to note that there is a fundamental difference between private finance and public finance. Without going into details it may be pointed out that as long as the employment scheme results in *productive activity* (this is crucial) it is immaterial whether the government finances it from tax receipts, through public borrowing, or even by printing currency.

That does not mean that anything goes. The scheme will have to be very carefully administered, taking into account the enormous diversity of the country in terms of physical features, economic activity and even social conditions. A strong case can be made for not entrusting the scheme to bureaucratic administration at the Central and State levels, but handing it over to panchayati raj institutions. Thereby both the economy and the polity will be strengthened at the local level, giving power to the people, making democracy - the rule of the *people*, by the *people*, and for the *people* - more effective.

The message is clear - development with dignity, a programme to enable *all* members of the labour force to earn a tolerable level of living, is possible straight away.

I fully endorse Bhaduri's recommendations. I would like to make some suggestions to strengthen his arguments, which can be taken up when he revises the book for its second and subsequent editions. First, the statement on page 13 that "economic growth rate is just a neutral number" is not correct as shown by the examples and explanations in the pages that follow immediately. Economic growth rate is a heavily loaded number reflecting the "voting according to purchasing power" (page 14) which, in turn, is a reflection of the way non-labour resource power is distributed in the system.

Secondly, Bhaduri will do well to devote a page to expose the illusory nature of the post-reform growth rate celebrated both by the National Democratic Alliance's "Indian Shining" election campaign and now repeated *ad nauseam* by the leaders of the United Progressive Alliance regime. Since the

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total output of the economy (and consequently its rate of growth too) depends on labour productivity and that, in turn, is measured by earnings, the post-reform growth rate substantially reflects the bloating of salaries of those in the organized sector, both public and, increasingly, private. The growth, therefore, is not only 'jobless' (as Bhaduri points out) but also one that is the experience of a minority.

And, thirdly, the plea for full employment for the masses must be reinforced by the need to re-skill those who are likely to be thrown out of their traditional skills. Development with dignity is a matter not only of being able to earn a living, but of being able to do that with a sense of self-esteem. A general upgradation of technology in the work that the masses will take up has also to be emphasized.

For the record, it must be pointed out that what has been designated "the Bhaduri proposal" is not altogether new. This reviewer recalls an article with the title: 'Strategy for Development' the opening statement of which was: "The development process in India has not yet become a mass movement. The development process cannot become effective until it becomes a movement" (*Seminar*, January 1972). It went on to say: "If development is for the people it has to be by the people also. Herein lies the connection between development and mass movement. Interestingly, the main policy recommendation of that piece was a public works programme by a district-level Land Army of those who were looking for work.

The piece was written in the context of the *Haribi Hatao* political slogan and in response to an economic model by the brilliant economists who were responsible for the 'poverty eradication' Fifth Five-Year Plan which claimed that a

stepping up of 'growth' and a *redistribution* of income from the top 30 per cent to the bottom 30 per cent of income earners were to be the strategy of the Plan.

The reference to the *Seminar* article is not meant as a futile exercise in "who said it first" for it must be said over and over again. As a matter of fact, one of the earliest statements championing the cause of the 'weaker sections' was written a couple of centuries ago. The writer asked: "Is this improvement in the circumstances of the lower ranks of the people to be regarded as an advantage or inconveniency for society?" and went on to say: "What improves the circumstances of the greater part can never be regarded as an inconveniency to the whole. No society can surely be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloth, and lodge the whole body of people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged."

This plea for a 'just growth' was not put forward by any cranky leftist or sentimental do-gooder; it was written some 230 years ago by a man named Adam Smith. He would have made no compromise on growth or the role of the market.

So the Bhaduri Proposal has the backing of the Master himself. It must immediately be translated into our major languages to constitute a large circle of those convinced about it and will canvass for it. It must also be made compulsory reading for those in authority and they would be obliged to respond, in simple language of the kind that Bhaduri has used, indicating why it cannot be implemented immediately. And if they have no valid arguments or objections, they should be forced to launch Development with Dignity, *right now*. ■

Courtesy *Frontline*, April 21, 2006  
Dr. C. T. Kurien is an Indian Economist,

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# DEALING WITH WOMEN'S MILITANCY

Sunila Abeysekera

*Dealing with Women's Militancy: An Analysis of Feminist Discourses from Sri Lanka* by Sarala Emmanuel, Social Policy and Research Centre (SPARC), University of Colombo, 2006.

The proliferation of long-term internal conflicts in many parts of the world has generated academic and activist interest in understanding and analyzing the range of political, social and economic consequences that arise out of these conflicts. A specific area of focus within these broad parameters has been on the implications of conflict on gender relations and on traditional perceptions of masculinity and femininity. There have been wide-ranging debates on whether the engagement of women in conflict, as direct combatants as well as indirect survivors, has in any way contributed to the transformation of existing patriarchal frameworks that position women as subordinate and secondary citizens. Explorations into women's 'agency' and 'empowerment' in conflict situations and in post-conflict societies have resulted in the examination and investigation of the roles and articulations of women's engagement in militant social movements in countries as diverse as Indonesia, Sudan, South Africa and Colombia. Sarala Emmanuel's work on women militants within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka is an extremely valuable contribution to this body of feminist scholarship.

Within the broad discourse on women and conflict, the debates on women, war and militarism and on women in militant movements has, as Emmanuel points out, for too long been framed by analysis of women within formal militaries in the US and in Western Europe, done by pioneers in this area such as Cynthia Enloe and Cynthia Cockburn in the late 1980s. One of the consequences of this field of study during the early period was the utilization of the analysis of the gendered and unequal sexual division of labour within militaries to call for broader inclusion of women in formal militaries. The establishment of a masculine military identity and militarized notions of masculinity and femininity helped perpetuate a binary understanding of men as perpetrators of violence and women as passive victims. Explorations of the intricate inter-relationship between nationalism, militarism

and patriarchy have emerged in the last ten years, as the complexities of these relationships and their deep and lasting impact on women, and on masculinities and femininities have moved to the foreground of conflict analysis.

Much of contemporary work on issues of women, violence and conflict is rooted in current discursive frameworks of masculinity and femininity, and of violence, especially in conflict situations. A consequence of this is the continued essentializing of male capacity for violence and female capacity for care and nurture. Such a process downplays the role played by women as perpetrators of violence, although the participation of women in acts of utter brutality during the genocide in Rwanda (1994), in Sierra Leone (1997-1999) or during the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, India (2002) have been well documented. In the same way, the use of sexualised violence against men, especially 'effeminate' men in conflict situations is rendered quite invisible by this analysis. Thus it becomes necessary not only to recognize the multiple and gendered experiences of violence by women, especially in conflict situations, but also to engage in critical theorizing of women as perpetrators of violence. This angle has the potential for deepening our understanding of the continuum between violence against women and gender-based violence in the family, the community and in the broader society.

Emmanuel's work points out several analytical problems that arise when one uses the same paradigm one uses to look at women in formal militaries to examine the role of women in militant movements. For one, it erases or blurs the differences between formal armies mandated with national security and armed and maintained by a tax-levying government on the one side and armed militant groups who are usually engaged in open confrontation with the state and its security machinery on the other side. Secondly it ignores the reality that these two groups have vastly divergent ideological and political positions and goals. Both seek to challenge the essentialist norm that women are unsuited for combat. Both seek to normalize the use of violence to achieve a legitimate objective. Yet when it comes to the issue of the struggle for power, there is a parting of the ways. Soldiers are

professionals entrusted with the defense of the nation-state that employs them, militants are most often ensconced within a deep belief in the moral 'rightness' of their struggle for political power. In her critical review of the existing discourse on this issue, Emmanuel points to the divergences between 'western' notions of looking at women's roles within militaries in Western countries and non-Western women looking at women's role in liberation movements, drawing on the work of Chandra Mohanty, for example.

In the work of many scholars on the roles played by women in militant movements, including their participation in armed combat, a key contention is that by joining these movements, by moving away from traditional reproductive roles, by bearing arms, these women challenge existing norms on masculinity and femininity in their society. The common argument is that the many changes in gender roles and gender identities that occur during a conflict have a lasting impact on the society as a whole and serve to transform women's lives. This leads us to the classic formulation that women's agency in conflict situations leads to their empowerment.

Emmanuel's work challenges this premise. In her analysis, she draws on the definitions set out by Kumkum Sangari with regard to the concept of women's agency from several different perspectives, from that of direct agency (participation in conscious and direct political action) to that of indirect agency (use of stereotyped gender identities such as motherhood for political and resistance activism). Through a rigorous and critical analysis of existing writing by feminists on issues of violence and agency, Emmanuel explores the emergence of a nuanced and complex understanding of women's agency and victimhood in the context of conflicts in the South Asian context, and goes on to focus on the existing body of work on women cadre of the LTTE.

She analyses the writings of Sri Lankan scholars such as Qadri Ismail, Neloufer de Mel, P.L. de Silva, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, Nandini Sornarajah, Rajini Thiraganama and Sitralaga Maunaguru from the point of view of their divergent perceptions of the women cadre of the LTTE. In particular she focuses on the issues raised by Radhika Coomaraswamy in her 1997 article titled 'Women of the LTTE: The Tigers and Women's Emancipation' and the response of Adele Balasingham in her book *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance*. Emmanuel uses the dialogue, which took place on the printed page, to focus on how different one's conclusions may be regarding the women cadre of the LTTE depending on whether one locates them within the larger political narrative that has

shaped the Tamil national struggle, or outside it. She casts this difference as being that between historically situated, contextualized, dynamic analyses and the more abstract and principle-oriented accounts of women's role within militant movements. Yet, in conclusion, her observation is that in this battle of representation, both Coomaraswamy and Balasingham essentialize the woman within the LTTE: Coomaraswamy through de-sexualising her, dwelling on her androgynous character and her espousal of the masculine norm of celebrating death not life, Balasingham by extolling the virtues of the LTTE woman cadre who embraces violence for the greater good and in whose person one also discerns creativity, love, compassion and strong bonds to the institution of the family.

In the main body of her text, Emmanuel unpacks the existing conceptualizations of women in militant and liberation movements, looking at a range of diverse political and sociological narratives that focus on the emancipatory potential of women's involvement in movements that enable them to confront and challenge existing gender-based ascriptions of what is appropriate for women. Although much of the available writing focuses on women's empowerment and agency through militancy, Emmanuel points out that there are diverse understandings of what would constitute 'emancipation'. This divergence to a great extent depends on the indicators one uses to measure emancipation. For example, as she points out, Nira Yuval Davis looks at data on women's increased economic independence, on women's access to political decision-making and their participation in direct combat as being indicators of emancipation while Christine Sylvester examines women's ability to dismantle patriarchal structures, to challenge and change the sexual division of labour and to influence mainstream political agendas.

The notion of activism that takes place in the public arena as being the only form of activism that could be 'empowering' in a way, as pointed out by Emmanuel, legitimises combat as the primary indicator of women's agency in a conflict situation. This in turn often leads to the romanticization of the woman militant, as manifest in the number of revolutionary propaganda posters depicting a woman with a gun in one hand and a baby in the other that have emerged from societies and cultures as diverse and separate as Vietnam and Nicaragua. This leads to a further arena of inquiry into whether conflict and the active engagement of women in direct and indirect conflict in fact leads to a politicization of women's traditional roles as mothers and as caretakers. Emmanuel refers to the work done by Maxine Molyneux in



Nicaragua and her development of the concept of 'combative motherhood', and to the work of Rita Manchanda on the roles played by women in militant movements in the north-eastern states of India, for example in Nagaland.

A history of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka that takes into account the gendered nature of Tamil militancy and the equally gendered and often sexualized expressions of this militancy has yet to be written. Basing herself on available material, Emmanuel reflects on the gendered structure of the LTTE as reflected in writings by the handful of scholars who have attempted to delve into this specific aspect of the Sri Lankan conflict. Among the various perceptions that prevail is that of the dichotomy of the woman martyr and woman goddess. On the one hand is the perception of militant women as 'acting out' as men, wearing male clothes, bearing guns, transgressing the 'natural' limitations of patriarchal sex and gender order. Coupled with this is the way in which women militants in fact de-sex themselves, and are de-sexualised by the puritanical codes of behaviour imposed by the organizations that demand abstinence from sex for the sake of 'purity', so that they may wield power without 'disturbing' discipline in the ranks. The use of classical Hindu mythology and symbolism, especially the image of the 'veera thai' (heroic mother) is referenced to the work of Sitralega Maunaguru and her concept of the 'social' mother. Both Maunaguru and De Mel are referred to by Emmanuel in terms of their analysis of the links between female sexuality and female martyrdom within the LTTE, the cyanide capsule worn by all LTTE cadre becoming both one's protection and one's declaration of defiance and resistance. Emmanuel also references her work in this area to the concept of 'martial feminism' expounded by Peter Schalk who glorifies the chastity of the woman militant.

Emmanuel traces the history of women's involvement in Tamil nationalism and militancy, from the 1970s, when the movement was influenced by the interactions between militant women and women from traditional Tamil society, to the late 1980s by which time one could witness the slow rupture of this relationship. Looking at the debates around the identities of women LTTE cadre, Emmanuel describes the various formulations through which both female and feminine identities have been selectively mobilized by the LTTE for propaganda use, discursively and politically. In doing so, she points to the lack of scholarly exploration into the sexual dimensions in the masculinised identity of the LTTE militant and asks the question as to why notions of chastity and purity are only used in reference to the gendered identity of the woman militant and not of the male. In the

literature drawn on by Emmanuel in her work, she identifies Nandini Sornarajah as being the only writer who has identified both masculine and feminine characteristics in the construction of the identity of the Tamil woman militant.

At the same time, Emmanuel refers to some recent examples of the involvement of women cadre of the LTTE in political activity, such as the establishment of woman-specific units within the LTTE mainstream and the inclusion of women in the highest decision-making structures of the LTTE, citing the work of Miranda Alison and Rajasingham-Senanayake as well as that of Balasingham. Emmanuel also cites the brutal suppression of the independent activism of Tamil women in the north and east by Tamil militant groups including the LTTE. The physical elimination of women and men who were critical of the movement as well as the imposition of moral codes on the female populace in general.

The conclusion that Emmanuel brings us to is located within the reality of the structural changes that have occurred in 'normal' life of the people of the north and east of Sri Lanka because of the conflict, and their significant impact on the lives and status of women. There has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of widows and of female-headed households. The mobility and the opening up of the space to acquire new skills and capacities that occurred as a consequence of displacement have also shifted many social and cultural restrictions on women. Much of the existing analyses differ widely on the actual impact of these changes on women in the long-term. Nevertheless, the common point of agreement is that the women of the north and east of Sri Lanka will never return to their pre-conflict status.

Examining the contemporary discourses on Tamil women militants in Sri Lanka against this reality, Emmanuel focuses on the diverse notions of victimhood and agency that prevail. According to her reading, some writers such as Ismail contend that the nationalist and patriarchal project can only be fulfilled through violence and that the nationalist subject is always male. Emmanuel herself points out that framing women cadre of the LTTE as being confined by a male/ patriarchal nationalist discourse in this way denies their capability of constructing an identity of their own. She would rather explore the potential for subversion within the militant discourse.

The critical question that Emmanuel asks at the end of her exposition on the role of women in the LTTE is whether one would better understand the nature of women's militancy if one moved away from the frameworks of empower and

agency and instead looked at the phenomenon from the point of the inter-relationships between violence and gendered identities. Her contention is that women's agency may in fact entail fluid movement between roles and identities that may conform to or challenge traditional gendered constructs. Although the LTTE constructs a dominant (ascribed) female identity of the armed virgin, the process of a developing political consciousness may lead the same women to also assume other identities.

Emmanuel's argument is borne out by the current reality. The process of transition of LTTE cadre from armed militants to those engaged with administrative responsibilities and interacting with the civilian population which commenced with the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 and which was sharpened by the tsunami of December 2004, has made more visible the roles played by women ex-combatants especially in the Vanni. Along with the notion of female martyrdom, the creation of a special women's unit within the Black Tiger suicide assassination squad, the celebration of the National Women's Day—declared by the LTTE in October each year, to mark the date of the first death in battle of a woman cadre, Malathi—all ways in which the LTTE signals the potential for women within its ranks to attain celebrity status, one can juxtapose the establishment of women's police desks and strict measures taken against men perpetrators of domestic violence that have most recently been recorded by Sophie Elek, in her work on conflict-related internal displacement in northern Sri Lanka, as well as by film-maker Anoma Rajakaruna in her film on 'Women in the Vanni: The Other Woman'.

In discussions that take place on the peace negotiations, this debate is reflected in the reality of women's participation in peace-building, reconstruction and rehabilitation processes. The question that re-emerges from Emmanuel's work is whether, when the sharing of political power was on the negotiating table, women will be pushed out of the political arena once more and forced to revert to playing supportive roles.

Feminist debates about the attitude of armed militant groups towards women and about the nexus between violence, sex and gender identity and militarization will continue to preoccupy all those who are committed to human rights, equality and the upholding of democratic principles, especially in post-conflict situations and in countries in transition. In November 2004, writing about women and the Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh, India, in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Kalpana Kannabiran, Volga

and Vasanth Kannabiran critiqued what they called the 'semi-feudal patriarchal revolutionary attitudes' present within the movements and called for the expunging of the words 'veeramatha' (heroic mother) and 'veerapathni' (heroic woman) from revolutionary vocabulary, calling them 'extremely sexist terms'. Their argument was that:

the glorification of motherhood masks the active denial of entitlements and equal citizenship in practice, while idealizing sacrifice, service and unquestioning surrender to sons. This glorification of motherhood is a mirror image of the simultaneous worship of the mother goddess and the debasement of women in reality. This mystification of reproductive labour serves to keep women in chains.

In March 2005, again writing to EPW, they said that 'to construct the other of the revolutionary in the image of the mother goddess speaks to the poverty of existing revolutionary paradigms with respect to women, but especially to mothers.'

In the same piece of March 2005, they have an equally strong critique of the violence tactics of silencing dissent employed by the Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh. According to them:

It is not merely in the bearing and use of arms that the Naxalite movement mirrors the state. Unfortunately there is a stark resemblance even in the indiscriminate and extremely moralistic identification of the enemy who must then be eliminated. The power of naming in this entire scenario vests with the police on the one side and the Naxalites on the other. Concerned citizens and institutions of justice are rendered voiceless. The defence and public recognition of human rights of political activists has been a slow and gradual struggle. Actions such as this destroy public confidence and increase the faith of the people in repressive measures and fascist solutions. The fear of terrorism is not easy to contain and when radical politics begins to use the weapon of terror that in our view signals the end of politics.

From around the world, feminists who observe and study women's participation in radical and militant movements have pointed to the fact that while these parties and movements are based on a political understanding of unequal power relationships between classes and castes and between these groups and the state, they rarely address the more

fundamental and ubiquitous power relationship between men and women. This not only obscures the power that men wield over women within the movements, and offers immunity to perpetrators of violence against women inside the movements and in the society outside.

Judy el Bushra, in a study of women in conflict-ridden societies in Africa points out that while the violence of warfare and its consequences displacement, impoverishment, demographic imbalance have given rise to changes in gender roles at the household level, including limited increases in women's decision-making power and political participation, the ideological bases underpinning gender relations appear to have remained unchanged or have even been reinforced. Citing several examples, el Bushra contends that changes in gender roles at the micro-level have not been accompanied by corresponding changes in political or organizational influence. She refers to interviews with women ex-combatants in Eritrea, for example, where in the post-war period, many of the women have become destitute and socially isolated as a result of their participation in the armed forces'.

Half way around the world, Maria Eugenia Vasquez, a former combatant of the M-19 movement in Colombia has testified to a similar marginalization of ex-combatant women and a lack of recognition for the role played by women when it

came to defining post-conflict political agendas.

In the societies in which she hases her work, el Bushra observes growing tensions between people's ideals of masculinity and femininity and the practical reality available to them. Her conclusion is that although gender roles have changed, they have done so in line with existing gender ideologies:

women's increased economic responsibilities result from rather than challenge existing notions of women as caretakers of the family; in turn, the gap between the roles men play and the roles they should be playing serve to underlie the ideal rather than transform it.

While conflict may in some cases redefine social relationships including those between men and women, el Bushra's voice joins the voices of many others who share her opinion that in so doing it seems to rearrange, adapt or reinforce patriarchal ideologies rather than fundamentally alter them.

It is in this context that the issues raised by Emmanuel on violence, women and the impact of the multiple gender identities borne by women militants within the LTTE in Sri Lanka on their potential empowerment becomes a critical and thought-provoking contribution to the work in this area.

Suriya Abeysakera, Director of ISPC/ICV

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# HOW MUCH LONGER?

Eduardo Galeano

One country bombed two countries. Such impunity might astound were it not business as usual. In response to the few timid protests from the international community, Israel said mistakes were made.

How much longer will horrors be called mistakes?

This slaughter of civilians began with the kidnapping of a soldier.

How much longer will the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier be allowed to justify the kidnapping of Palestinian sovereignty?

How much longer will the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers be allowed to justify the kidnapping of the entire nation of Lebanon?

For centuries the slaughter of Jews was the favorite sport of Europeans. Auschwitz was the natural culmination of an ancient river of terror, which had flowed across all of Europe

How much longer will Palestinians and other Arabs be made to pay for crimes they didn't commit?

Hezbollah didn't exist when Israel razed Lebanon in earlier invasions.

How much longer will we continue to believe the story of this attacked attacker, which practices terrorism because it has the right to defend itself from terrorism?

Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon: How much longer will Israel and the United States be allowed to exterminate countries with impunity?

The tortures of Abu Ghraib, which triggered a certain universal sickness, are nothing new to us in Latin America. Our militaries learned their interrogation techniques from the School of the Americas, which may no longer exist in name but lives on in effect.

How much longer will we continue to accept that torture can be legitimized?

Israel has ignored forty-six resolutions of the General Assembly and other U.N. bodies.

How much longer will Israel enjoy the privilege of selective deafness?

The United Nations makes recommendations but never decisions. When it does decide, the United States makes sure the decision is blocked. In the U.N. Security Council, the U.S has vetoed forty resolutions condemning actions of Israel.

How much longer will the United Nations act as if it were just another name for the United States?

Since the Palestinians had their homes confiscated and their land taken from them, much blood has flowed.

How much longer will blood flow so that force can justify what law denies?

History is repeated day after day, year after year, and ten Arabs die for everyone Israeli. How much longer will an Israeli life be measured as worth ten Arab lives?

In proportion to the overall population, the 50,000 civilians killed in Iraq-the majority of them women and children-are the equivalent of 800,000 Americans.

How much longer will we continue to accept, as if customary, the killing of Iraqis in a blind war that has forgotten all of its justifications?

Iran is developing nuclear energy, but the so-called international community is not concerned in the least by the fact that Israel already has 250 atomic bombs, despite the fact that the country lives permanently on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

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Who calibrates the universal dangerometer? Was Iran the country that dropped atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

In the age of globalization, the right to express is less powerful than the right to apply pressure. To justify the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, war is called peace. The Israelis are patriots, and the Palestinians are terrorists, and terrorists sow universal alarm.

How much longer will the media broadcast fear instead of news?

The slaughter happening today, which is not the first and I fear will not be the last, is happening in silence. Has the world gone deaf?

How much longer will the outcry of the outraged be sounded on a bell of straw?

The bombing is killing children, more than a third of the victims.

Those who dare denounce this murder are called anti-Semites. How much longer will the critics of state terrorism be considered anti-Semites?

How much longer will we accept this grotesque form of extortion?

Are the Jews who are horrified by what is being done in their name anti-Semites? Are there not Arab voices that defend a Palestinian homeland but condemn fundamentalist insanity?

Terrorists resemble one another: state terrorists, respectable members of government, and private terrorists, madmen acting alone or in those organized in groups hard at work since the Cold War battling communist totalitarianism. All act in the name of various Gods, whether God, Allah, or Jehovah.

How much longer will we ignore that fact that all terrorists scorn human life and feed off of one another?

Isn't it clear that in the war between Israel and Hezbollah, it is the civilians, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Israeli, who are dying?

And isn't it clear that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the invasion of Gaza and Lebanon are the incubators of hatred, producing fanatic after fanatic after fanatic?

We are the only species of animal that specializes in mutual extermination.

We devote \$2.5 billion per day to military spending. Misery and war are children of the same father.

How much longer will we accept that this world so in love with death is the only world possible? ■

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan writer and journalist, is author of *Open Veins of Latin America* and *Memory of Fire*.

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# NOTES FOR HARMONY

## REMEMBERING THISULA

**D**uring troubled times when too many have died or live in fear especially in the island's north and east in a situation of not war nor peace, and in a world with the blatantly unjust war continuing on Iraq, it is still no easier to come to terms with unexpected and senseless death. Such was last month's loss of Thisula Jayanetti Abeysekera.

We pay tribute to Thisula, truly an example of generous and compassionate humanity. She was indeed 'a rock of quiet strength,' whose home in central Colombo was for many decades a centre of alternative music, arts and culture. She was someone who unassumingly always offered a helping hand and brought together so many different people. Thisula was a gifted musician, singer, guitarist, drummer, who more recently began her own recording and composing, including for films, with her own small home studio. And right up to the week before she died, she gave active space and encouragement to countless musicians.

Sadly, a month ago on a sunny Sunday in Colombo, Thisula was hit on her bicycle by a speeding private bus. That Reid Avenue – Royal College junction where this tragedy took place is locally long infamous for fatal accidents. Urgent action is needed, for lights and warning signs at such danger spots, and to improve our public transport system and control private buses that race often for Rs5 fares with terrible consequences. And in a capital city jammed with pollution, to encourage and ensure safety for alternative healthier modes of transport, through bike lanes (in China women and men of all ages have been biking for decades along tree-lined separate lanes). Perhaps that junction's famous school that produces many leaders should make urban design a new subject and start by redoing their own environs.

The funeral on 10 May was attended by hundreds of grieving friends and family. At the house there was choked-up chorus of songs like "Where have all the flowers gone," followed by handfuls of white jasmine strewn, and ending with the clear, dear voice of Thisula, extending crystal notes floating through the air singing her evocative song for peace (written by her friend Nedra Vittachi) from an old cassette. Most memorable were the simple, now extra-poignant, lines: "lying on the roadside..., dying on such a sunny day."

### River That Never Sleeps

**T**hat song was Thisula's contribution to *Niddi Nethi Nadiye Naadaya* (The Sound of the Restless River), the Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) cassette of the late

1980s, an early call for an end to war through the creative and inspirational medium of music. The cassette was launched at a May Day concert at Royal College Hall Navarangahala (then open to public performances). Workers thronged the two performances, which also included Vijaya Kumaratunge. The songs on the cassette were innovative in both music and lyrics – peace songs with a strong political message (unlike the current slogans of 'peace' emptied of social justice). It was probably the first coming together of a group of artists to compose and sing on issues of national harmony, equality and a negotiated resolution to the conflict.

Thisula's house over the last decades was also home away from home for so many, from musicians to peace and women's activists, to artists and travellers from near and far. It was an open space used by people of all ages and backgrounds. It was also the site of an incredible range of activities, from regular jam sessions, poetry readings, drama and dance rehearsals, to enlightening workshops on nonviolent communication and engaged Buddhism. There were also delightful art, poetry and music camps for young children; and last year it became an organizing centre for youth to creatively support tsunami-affected children in the south and east. Thisula organized Tamil classes at home for the latter work. She was also instrumental in rebuilding preschools in Ahangama, Habaraduwa and Trincomalee after the tsunami.

### Raising Hope for the Future

**T**he diversely talented younger generation fostered by her, including her own children and many others, are now living shining tributes to Thisula. She was the multi-talented 'mother' (to so many of all ages) who created and sustained that alternative artistic space and open way of living. This new generation represents hope for the future of a country struggling to find new ways forward that yet do not forget the old.

Thisula Abeysekera still provides an enduring legacy that should inspire all of us, not to waste any more of the vast and deep experience, talent and knowledge remaining untapped especially among the women and youth of Sri Lanka, as elsewhere. Now remains the difficult but vital task to fill the still painful void left by tragic untimely demise of so many artists and others snatched and lost too early from a land still crying for their creative and compassionate healing. Another recent case is Nihal de Silva, as well as earlier losses of those such as Ranjini Thirangama, Richard de Zoysa, Sivaramani. In their memory let us continue their work to bring people together, toward real lasting peace and harmony.

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# POWER FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Shanie

## War or Peace

The past week has seen some of the worst fighting in recent years. And whether it is in Sri Lanka or in Lebanon or anywhere else in the world, it is the non-combatant civilians who find themselves displaced from their homes and having to lead a life of uncertainty and despair. This is not to say that the combatants on the ground are themselves caught in a situation over which they have little control. It is facile to dismiss opponents of violent conflict as peaceniks who are unrealistic dreamers. History has repeatedly shown that war particularly violent conflicts within a country, has only created more problems than solved any. There are no doubt times when war becomes necessary. But always, yes always, it has to be the last option. Take the example of our own country. From 1971, we have had armed conflicts at sporadic intervals. Have we as a country moved forwards or backwards as a result of these conflicts? Even in the long term, do we see any light at the end of this dark, long and uncertain tunnel?

Terrorism is a phenomenon with an ugly face. There are no pretty sides to this ugly face. And so, without doubt, terrorism must be defeated and wiped out. There are no short-cuts to defeating terrorism. It is not a simple clean operation. Whether in the North or South, terrorism is nurtured only by a felt grievance among the civilian population. When these grievances remain ignored and unattended, then the civilian population may tend to view the terrorists as liberators from their plight – economic, social and sometimes political. A few will silently applaud and give their tacit approval.

But terrorist leaders, like political leaders who remain in power for too long, soon corrupt themselves. Their militancy, which began with a cause, moves away and degenerates soon into a struggle for power, power for its own sake. That has been the story of militancy in Sri Lanka – whether that militancy came from Prabhakaran or Wijeweera. This move away from the original cause is in the very nature of terrorism. Terrorist organizations, whatever popular support they enjoy, are never nurtured as people's movements but are monolithic organizations built around one powerful leader. So if the power of that leader is in conflict with the organization's ideals, the choice is invariably in favour of the leader. Wijeweera's tragic death took that choice away from the JVP. But there is still no indication that the LTTE understands this. Must the Tamil people also be led on that path until an LTTE leadership change is forced upon them? By then, with their present political stance, the TNA would have become irrelevant.

## The Maavil Aru Water Conflict

The present conflict over the closing of the sluice gates over the Maavil Aru is plain and simple about ethnic cleansing. When the gates were closed, the LTTE was that a water tank be

constructed by the Government in an uncleared area. The Government readily agreed to this. Elilan, the local LTTE Commissar, then put forward four demands allegedly on behalf of the people. This was about rations to the IDPs, etc. This was also unexpectedly agreed to. But there was no indication that the gates were going to be opened. Water, when it was crucially needed in several villages downstream, was being cruelly denied for over a week. These were colonized areas and the obvious intention of the LTTE was ethnic cleansing – to drive the Sinhala colonists out of the area.

But military action obviously was not the answer. Over the years, military actions have proved to be failures unless they were undertaken after careful planning. That decision has to be left to professional soldiers. The defence establishment should not be pressurized by political adventurers. But could this be the answer to such adventurers that a military solution is preferred to a political solution to our conflict? Will it make them realize that unplanned military adventures is a no-win situation for all parties, as history has proved time and again.

## The Urgency of a Political Solution

And may we repeat what we stated last week, before the Maavil Aru conflict broke out. Those who think it possible to inflict a military solution to our ethnic problem must realize that military adventures do not solve political problems. They only cause massive destruction of the infrastructure and the loss of lives and property without solving anything. They will cause hatred, disgust and distrust not only among "the enemy" but equally or more among the non-combatant civilian population on both sides. Militarism only leads a country to economic and political ruin. The sooner the LTTE and the 'hawks' among the Sinhalese realize this, the better it will be for the people of all ethnic groups in our country. Maavil Aru has simply proved this. The conflict has caused enormous suffering among simple villagers of all communities. Their hardship is being cynically exploited by political adventurers who seek to provide leadership to these hapless communities. As has happened before, the Muslims get caught up in the maneuverings of these adventurers.

There is therefore an extreme urgency in taking firm steps towards a political settlement. The All Party Committee and the Panel of Experts must not only work towards a consensus but arrive at a consensus without delay. They need to rid themselves of pre-conceived notions. They will be doing the country the greatest service if they could come up with constitutional proposals that meets the more serious concerns of all communities and is accepted by the mature civil and political leadership of all communities. Given the composition of both committees, it is within their capabilities to do so. ■

Courtesy *The Island* 5 August 2006

## DEATH OF A POLITICIAN

What about the small man / woman?  
What about me?

Will anyone say she met with a tragic  
death if a bullet goes through me?

I see myself standing beside a pool  
but not with narcissistic thoughts,

or standing behind a glass window-  
pane, my body imaged in that mirror  
smashed to smithereens.

What will the populace say?  
“She was a writer.”  
“What did she write about?”  
“Oh, ethnicity, identity, inheritance,  
gender, politics, journeys, of reaching  
destinations, often, not.  
She wrote on everything under the sun.

We won't miss her really  
There'll be a million others  
to take her place.  
She's as dispensable as a paper napkin.

“Well, I know she used to write on  
them sometimes.”

“And make origamis of them?”  
“Perhaps.”  
Her life, fragile as tissue,  
Expendable.

Jean Arasanayagam